

ALLA PRIMA - IMPASTO

Block in color areas opaquely on the canvas and create volume and mass wet-in-wet. This process combines drawing, modeling and color all at once. The painting builds layers as they are adjusted and corrected, the process is not separated into distinct stages as with indirect painting. This technique is called "alla prima"(Italian for "at the first"). This is sometimes called direct painting. With this technique the painter will start with broad general strokes to get the general form. This is usually done with thin paint. Usually the darks are brought up first.

Next paint is applied directly over this wet paint in thicker, more opaque layers. It is very important to keep the colors clean and the strokes accurate and decisive. It is very easy to make a muddy mess. The actual variations on this style are limitless. It may not necessarily be done in one sitting. One of the great masters of this style was Peter Paul Rubens.

Wet-in-wet - or alla prima painting techniques, in which paintings are completed in one or two sessions without allowing layers to dry, do not require adherence to the "fat over lean" rule. Such paintings effectively form only one paint layer, so the rule does not apply.

Impasto - Term for paint that is thickly applied to a canvas or panel so that it stands in relief and retains the marks of the brush or palette knife. Early panel paintings show little impasto, but with the adoption of oil painting on canvas, painters such as Titian and Rembrandt explored the possibilities of the technique. Impressionist works may be heavily applied in many areas.

Other related terms:

Plein Air describes a direct technique of painting a landscape entirely out of doors.

Direct Painting – This method of painting is used to make paintings in a single application. This is an opaque painting technique used by the Impressionists in their early work, the Fauves and the Abstract Expressionists. (But consider a painting made with transparent colors all in one layer a direct painting, too.) Direct painting relies on more planning because artists must consider form (under drawing) and color simultaneously.

Most painters use a combination of direct and indirect painting. For example, a landscape painting may look better when a glaze is applied to certain areas, such as the sky.