



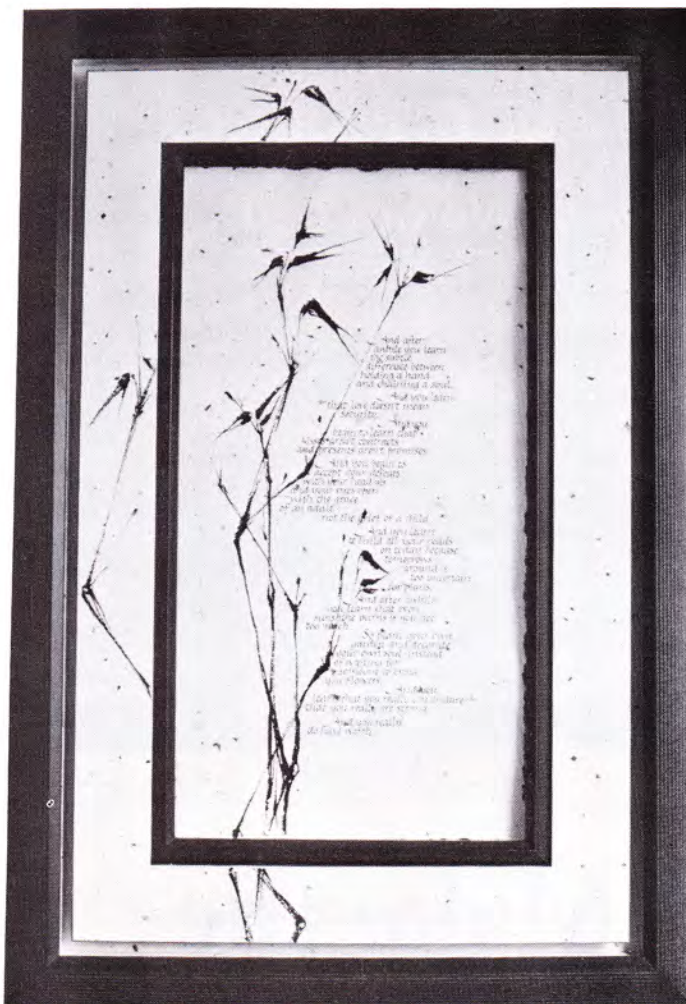
Gouache: An Untapped Resource

by Chris A. Paschke, CPF

While many artists, designers and framers are already familiar with transparent watercolors, relatively few people know much of anything about "gouache" (gwāsh). Although actually an opaque watercolor, it is a very misunderstood medium, often confused with inexpensive poster paints and casein. It has been accused of being difficult to work with and is often thought to be color "fugitive", meaning it is not permanent or lightfast. This is generally untrue. Gouache is a somewhat untapped resource for framers, excellent for use in ruling pens, panel designs, texturing mats, lettering and calligraphy on mats, bevel painting and more.

The word "gouache" is the French version of the Italian word "gouazzo", meaning dampness or puddle. Transparent watercolors may be described as pigmented, water-soluble paints which remain relatively transparent even after drying. Unlike transparent watercolors, gouache is an opaque watercolor with many of the same properties, plus a few advantages of its own. Although gum arabic is the traditional binder used in both watercolor and gouache, there is a greater amount of this binder used in the binder/pigment ratio in gouache than watercolor. That, in relation to the addition of chalk in the compound, can be attributed to its greater opacity and color brightness. Small amounts of glycerin and preservative are added to tube gouache to help retain moisture and prevent bacterial growth.

**Dry mounted
Larroke
Mouchette
hand made
paper contrasts
the art work
with the black
core board. Art
work is an
original by
artist/
calligrapher
Chris A.
Paschke.**



Colors And Permanence

Gouache is used primarily by commercial artists, designers and calligraphers because of its lightfastness, opacity and blendability. Since it comes in both half pans (or cakes) and tubes in regular artist pigments, colors may be tinted, shaded, and otherwise blended or intermixed as with any tube media. As a framer, consider the color palette you can maintain with only the basic primary (red, yellow, blue), secondary (orange, green, purple), black and white tubes.

There are a number of manufacturers who produce a quality line of "designer's" gouache, including Holbein, Winsor & Newton, Turner and Talens. In recent years there has been a trend by many manufacturers to expand their color lines with

metallics and pearlescent and fluorescent colors, in addition to the traditional palette. Often these colors are not considered lightfast and should be time-tested for fading (in a sunny window) prior to considering their use. Some brands have series ratings, right on the label of the tube, that designate lightfastness or permanence. I use Winsor & Newton a great deal because of its quality, smoothness and availability. I never use anything with a permanence rating other than AA or A.

Color Theories

Permanent White is the brightest, most opaque white, and should be used when pure white is required. Zinc White is the cleanest, most lightfast white when mixed with

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photo 1

A minimal amount of materials are needed for using gouache (left to right, back row): 6-well porcelain palette, 3-well water dish (or jar), gum arabic; (front row, left to right) Turner, Holbein, Grumbacher and Talens gouache, ruling pens, dip pen, watercolor brush and eyedropper.

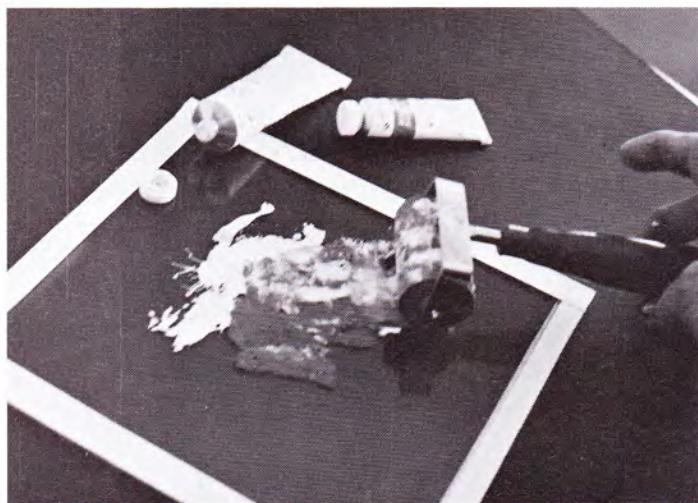


photo 2

Scrap glass, taped on all sides, may be used as a palette for thick texturing of tube gouache and rustic blending.

MAT DESIGN



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color, and should always be used for making tints. When attempting to mix a light pastel tint from a tube color, always add the color to the white to darken the tint. If you begin with the color you may end up with a pint of beautiful Dusty Rose before you reach the desired tint from that tube of Alizarin Crimson.

On the other hand, black is not always black. Simply adding white to black does not necessarily produce neutral middle grey. By adding Zinc White to the rich velvet black color of Jet Black the result will be a tinted blue-black; to the medium grey black of Lamp Black the tint will be a "cool" grey-black; while the Ivory Black tint becomes a "warm" brown-black. Think before you mix. Unlike creating a tint when adding color to the white, when adding black to a color to create a shade always begin with the color and add a little black at a time to slowly darken it into the desired shade.

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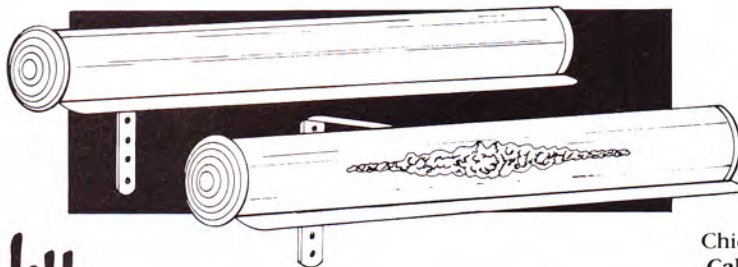
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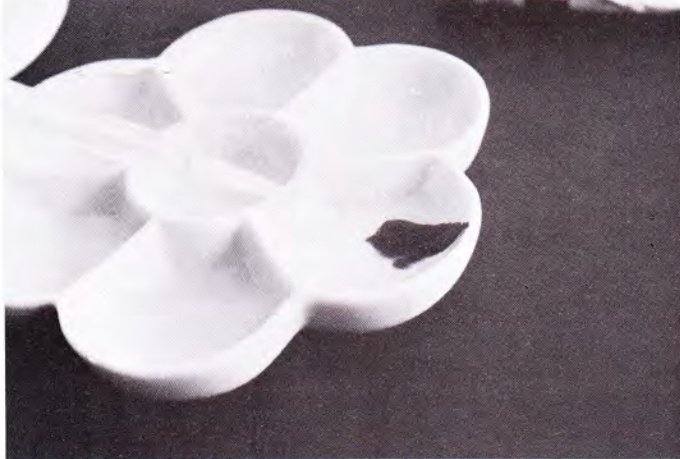


photo 3

Approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ " of tube gouache is dispensed. Add an equal amount of distilled water. Always use an eyedropper to control the volume added to the color and remember to add water to color to thin, not color to water.

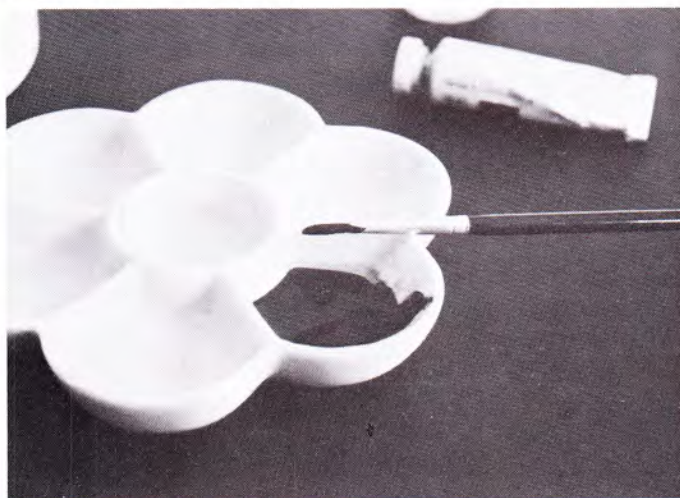


photo 4a

Blend water to gouache with the brush. Be sure to mix until smooth, or globs of color can interrupt the flow of pigment in the brush, pen or ruling pen.

MAT DESIGN



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Tools And Materials

The materials and tools required for mixing are fairly minimal, depending upon your desired use (photo 1). The relatively clear glycerin often found at the top of a newly opened tube should be squeezed out and discarded before dispensing pigment for use. If using gouache in panel designing it can be left relatively thick (as it comes from the tube). Use a piece of scrap glass as a palette, and tape on all sides (photo 2) so you can blend colors on the glass. Glass doesn't absorb into the surface and it cleans up easily with water.

Thick gouache may be applied to mats, fabrics and frames with brayers, stencil brushes, paper towels, etc. Use your imagination. Since gouache has more body than watercolor it can be built up and textured. However, too many layers, too thick, will cause cracking and peeling.

Although gouache is known for its

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SEE AD PAGES 5, 7.



opacity you can also achieve a general transparency by thinning it to the desired consistency using distilled water. Distilled water is recommended so as not to introduce any additional elements into the mixture which might alter the permanency rating.

If you plan to use the gouache with a brush, dip pen or ruling pen, it needs to be thinned prior to use in order to flow smoothly. Gum arabic should be added as a binder. This will help the gouache adhere to the paper, so if you need to erase pencil lines it will not smear or pale.

Gouache thinned for lettering should be approximately one part water to one part pigment. You might use a little less water than pigment, depending upon exact usage, then add approximately one drop of gum arabic per teaspoon of mixed color. Too much arabic will keep the gouache sticky to the touch; it stays very shiny and will never really dry. It takes a little practice for perfect results each time, but it is really quite simple.

Color Matching

When mixing a color to match the ink in the photo or graphic (perhaps for a painted bevel), remember gouache always looks darker when wet. Take a scrap of the mat board you intend to use, apply a patch of color and let dry to ensure the color match.

Mixed colors are difficult to match so always mix enough for the complete job (especially if blending a tint, shade or new color), yet don't get carried away with mixing; a little will go a long way. One teaspoon of mixed gouache will easily line a large French mat.

Step-By-Step

Dispense about $\frac{1}{2}$ " of tube gouache into a mixing palette or dish. Then, with an eyedropper, begin thinning by adding an equal volume of distilled water (photo 3). Blend together to the desired consistency, then add 1 drop of gum arabic (photos 4A&B). Test with a ruling pen or nib for desired consistency and flow by raking a brush filled with

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photo 4b

Add about 1 drop of gum arabic with eyedropper to 1 teaspoon-1 tablespoon of mixed color.



photo 5a

Rake brush across ruling pen to keep color from bleeding all over the tool. Fill until it is filled with pigment.

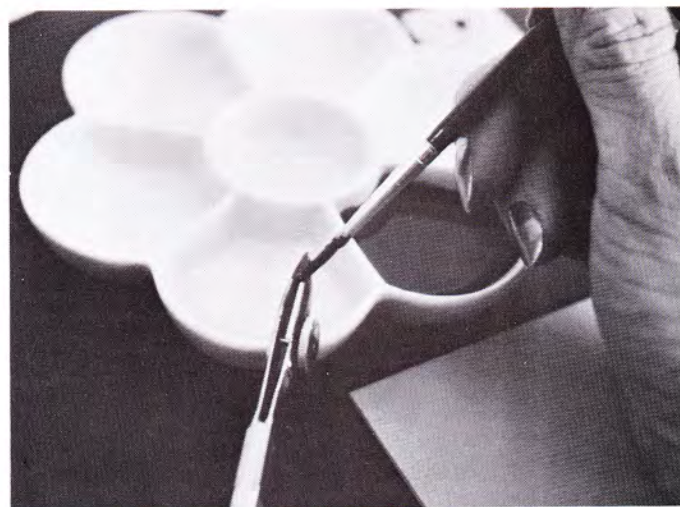


photo 5b

Fill a dip pen nib by raking the brush filled with color against the pen reservoir.



photo 6a

Test the flow (consistency) of mixed gouache in ruling pen by applying test lines for width and color onto the actual mat or paper surface to be used. Let dry to match colors.

