

## KNIFE PAINTING

A knife may be a less sensitive painting tool than a brush, but it is in fact an exciting and versatile way of applying paint, built up in thick *IMPASTOS* to produce expressive textural effects, or applied smoothly for soft, subtle passages.

The Fauve painter Maurice Vlaminck (1876-1958) often used knife strokes in his skies and foregrounds, achieving exquisite color effects by partially mixing the pigments on his palette and applying them with broad, sweeping strokes that contained infinite subtleties of tint.

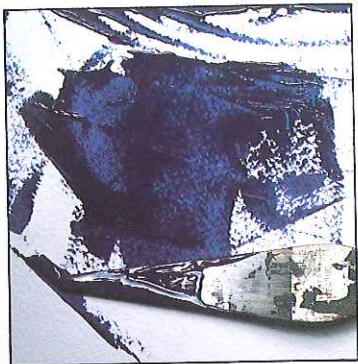
Normally associated with oil and acrylic painting, knives can also be used to create pattern and texture in watercolor, ink, and gouache. Even egg tempera can be applied with a knife, so long as the paint is not too thick, and the knife must not be metal — bone or plastic will do.

Painting knives (not to be confused with palette knives) come in many designs and sizes, but generally they are trowel-shaped, made of pliable steel, and often have a cranked handle which keeps the artist's fingers clear of the painting surface.

### Oil • Acrylic • Gouache

Oil paints and acrylics are perfectly suited to knife painting, because they have a soft, creamy texture and can be handled without trickling or running. This technique works best on stretched canvas, which has a "give" in it that responds well to the springy blade of the knife.

Knife painting demands a bold approach. Set the paint on the surface with a decisive movement, lifting the blade away cleanly at the end of the stroke. Avoid going back over the stroke, because this deadens the color and reduces

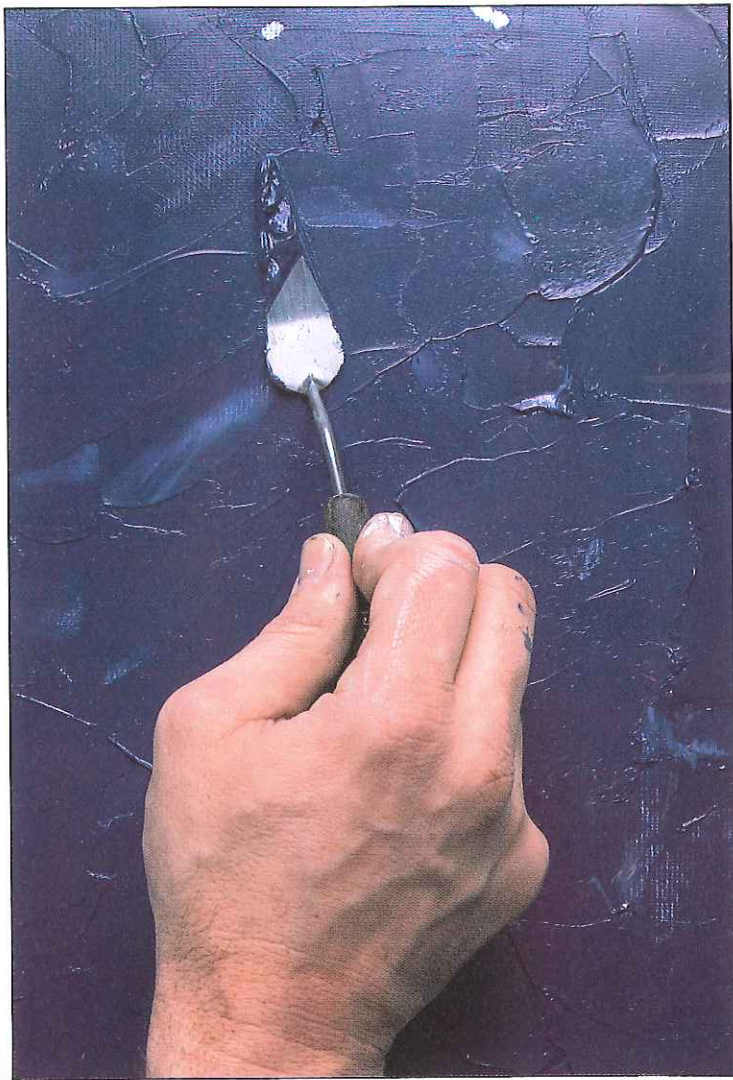


### Knife painting

**1** Apply the paint thickly to the support and spread it with a trowel-shaped painting knife to achieve a variety of interesting textures. One way of moving the paint is to rest the heel of the knife on the support and move it in an arc, spreading the paint with it.



**2** Here the artist is partially blending two colors wet-in-wet. Cadmium yellow is first squeezed onto a previously applied layer of ultramarine. Then the knife is used, as if spreading butter, to distribute the paint in different directions. If care is taken not to overblend the colors, attractive subtleties of tint can be achieved.

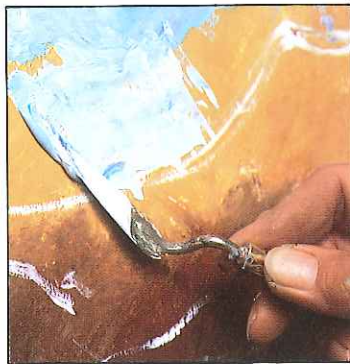


**3** A color painted with a knife often looks more brilliant than one painted with a brush, since the knife can leave an absolutely smooth stroke of color which reflects the maximum amount of light. To retain the purity of each color, always clean the blade of the knife between each application.



#### **Knife painting • Acrylic**

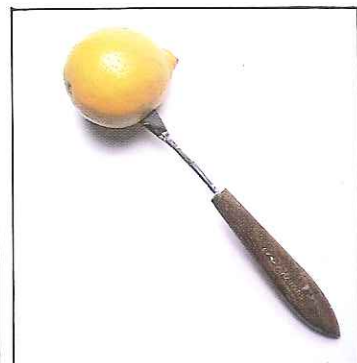
**1** Gel medium, a thickening agent, is mixed with acrylic paint on the palette before the paint is applied to the support. The added thickness means that greater texture can be created in the paint with the painting knife.



**2** The paint is then scraped onto the support with the knife. The marks of the knife will remain in the dried paint, but the thick white gel will become transparent as it dries, returning the paint to its original color.

#### **Watercolor**

It takes a little practice, but it is possible to paint with a knife in watercolor, using the edge of the blade to apply thin streaks of color or to scrape out light areas in a wet wash. Always use a knife with a rounded point, which won't dig into the paper, and a cranked handle to prevent your fingers from accidentally touching the paper.

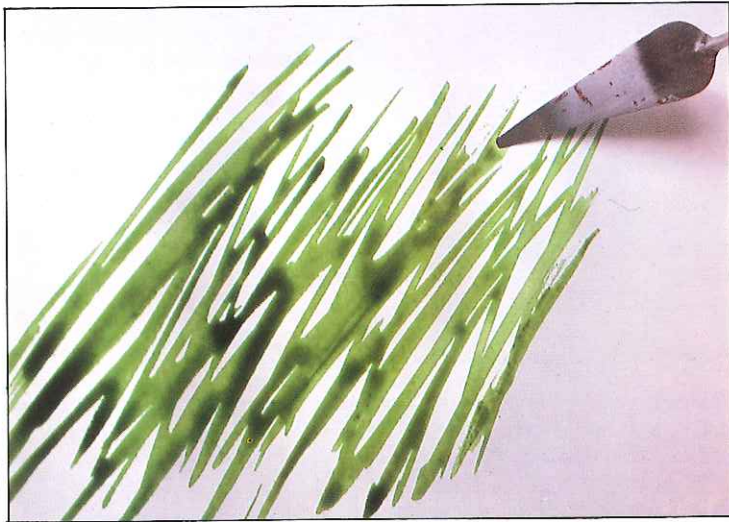


#### **Knife painting • Watercolor**

**1** If you are using a new knife you must first treat it so that it will accept water. New steel has a slightly greasy surface which repels water and causes it to bead and roll off, as do traces of paint or varnish. In both cases, clean the knife with scouring cleaning powder. If this doesn't do the trick, stab the knife into a lemon and leave it overnight. The acid will remove any remaining traces of grease.



## LIFTING OUT



**2** Knife painting in watercolor is an unusual technique, so practice knifestrokes on scrap paper first. You will need plenty of paint, but it should not be too watery. Here the artist uses the tip of the knife blade to create thin strokes that represent long grass. Move the knife quickly but with a light pressure so as not to damage the paper's surface. Allow the strokes to taper off naturally.

In watercolor, ink, and pastel painting, lifting out simply means removing small areas of color, using a soft brush, a sponge, or a tissue. The technique has several uses: to correct mistakes; to lighten a color; to create a soft, hazy form; to add highlights; and to breathe air into a too-solid area of the painting.

### Watercolor

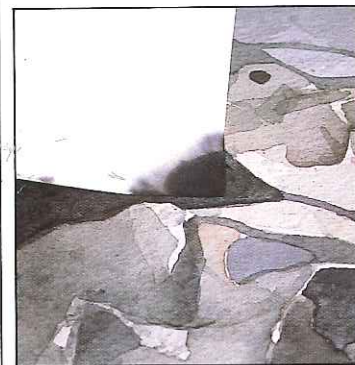
Damp paint can be lifted out quite easily, but dry paint may need to be coaxed off gently with a soft brush. Remember, too, that some watercolor pigments have more staining strength than others — alizarin crimson and sap green, for example, will always leave a residue of color. Bear this in mind if you wish to lift out color to regain the white of the paper.

Use the lifting out technique on good quality paper only; soft paper will “rough up,” and by lifting out you may make a hole in your picture.



### Tissue paper

When working with lots of wet washes, tissue is useful for wiping areas that have become too wet, and for controlling the flow of paint. Use a blot-and-lift motion with the tissue — rubbing may damage the surface of the paper. Tissue paper can be used to lift out amorphous shapes in a wet wash — when painting clouds, for example. Use this technique judiciously, however; when overdone it looks slick and unconvincing.



### Blotting paper

Blotting paper is thicker and more absorbent than tissue and, once dry, it can be re-used. If you wish to lift out a small, precise area, hold the corner of the blotting paper against the surface until the excess paint is absorbed.