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Tips on Making Watercolor Paint

Grinding vs. Mulling

When testing pigments, you will probably use small amounts (1 tsp., for example). When you mull this amount, you will also be grinding it. This might deceive you into thinking that the pigment is finely ground when it isn't! We learned the hard way that when we made a larger quantity of paint, the muller no longer ground the pigment, and what we thought was a fine grind was actually too rough.

We thought mulling was mixing and grinding. Nope. Mulling is mixing. If you want a finer grind, then wet-grind your pigment before mulling.

Wet-Grinding on the Slab

Put the pigment on the slab. Add only enough water so you can easily grind it with the muller (if you add too much water, don't worry – the water will evaporate, so no harm done). The water also prevents dust. We grind on the slab because a mortar doesn't give us an even grind. Wet grinding for 10 minutes gives a finer paint with better color and flow. Carbon (soot, charcoal) blacks do not seem to require as much grinding.

Cracking Paint

If you do not use glycerin in your binder, many paints will crack as they dry. Increasing the amount of honey can reduce cracking, but some pigments crack (many commercial paints without glycerin also crack, not just ours). Each pigment acts differently.

A Cheap Ball Mill

Commercial paints and inks are often ground in ball mills which grind the pigment with hard ceramic balls. You can do this yourself with amazing results. National Geographic sells a rock tumbler for under \$50 USD, and 4mm ceramic balls are available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or [Aliexpress.com](https://www.aliexpress.com) (4mm is the right size for the Nat Geo tumbler). David was able to get very fine, even pigment particle sizes using this cheap setup. Write to us for more information if you want to follow this path.

Ox Gall

Many paint makers use ox gall or a similar dispersant. This is the stuff that makes your colors explode and spread in water. We might try it someday in our paints, but we would have to get the ox gall from the slaughterhouse and process it ourselves. Yuck.

Questions

We love to talk about paint and pigment, so write to us any time with your questions and comments.