

TONED GROUND

In oil and acrylic painting, a toned ground serves exactly the same purpose as an *IMPRIMATURA*: it tones down the glaring white of the canvas or board, which can be somewhat intimidating, and it unifies the overall color scheme if small areas are allowed to show through the overpainting.

The only difference between the two methods is that an *imprimatura* is transparent, whereas a toned ground is made opaque by the addition of white pigment.

The advantage of a transparent ground is that it gives more sparkle to the overlaid colors, because of the light bouncing back off the white support. However, if you wish to leave small patches of the ground showing through the overpainting, the problem is that the color may fade eventually because it is so thin and diluted.

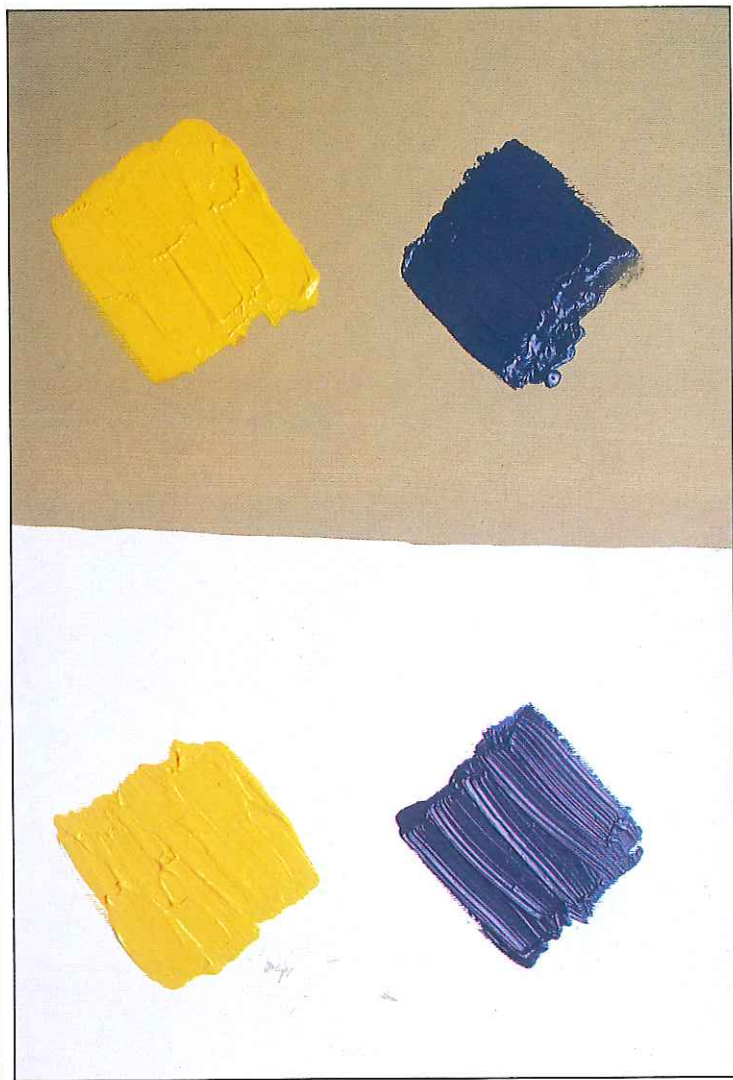
The advantage of having an opaque ground color is that large areas of this color can be left exposed because they will be quite permanent. The ground color then becomes an integral part of the painting, just as a tinted paper is in a pastel painting.

As with an *imprimatura*, a toned ground can be a neutral gray or earth color, or it can give a generalized idea of the overall color scheme of the subject — a pinkish tone under an evening sky, for example. It can also be a color which is near-complementary to the finished color scheme. For example, a warm undertone of burnt sienna will have a vitalizing effect on a cool green landscape.



Toned ground

After priming the canvas or board, apply an opaque ground of raw umber. The color should be softened with a little flake white and diluted with the standard amount of medium. Use a large bristle brush and apply the paint smoothly and unevenly. It is important for the toned ground to be thoroughly dry before you paint over it. This can take up to 48 hours — perhaps longer if a lot of white has been added to the color. For this reason it is a good idea to have a few canvases or boards in various colors prepared ready for painting at any one time. Alternatively, you can use acrylic paint to tone the canvas. This dries in minutes, making it possible to begin the overpainting in the same session, and can quite happily be overpainted in oils (though acrylics can *not* be painted on top of oils).



How a toned ground works

A toned canvas helps you to judge the relative intensity of your color mixtures more accurately than a white canvas can. This is because the toned canvas gives you an idea of how the colors will look when surrounded by other colors.

To demonstrate this, the illustration above shows a piece of canvas, of which half is painted with a toned ground of raw umber and

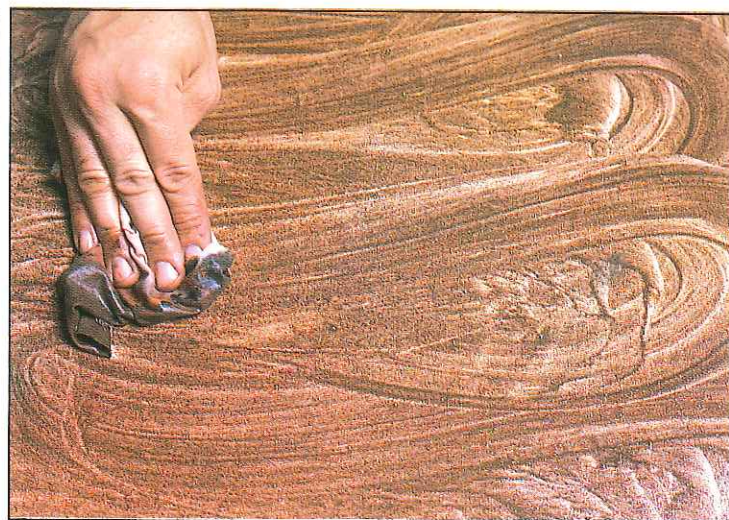
half is left white. Small squares of ultramarine and cadmium yellow are applied to each half: observe closely and you will see how much more intense the colors appear on the toned ground than they do on the white canvas.



Toned ground • Acrylic

Acrylic paint thinned down with water to a fairly fluid state is ideal for preparing a toned ground because it dries so quickly, allowing you to work on it soon afterwards.

But, because of the speed with which it dries, you have to apply it quickly.



Toned ground • Oil

Oil paints can also be used to tone a ground and, like acrylics, have to be thinned down so that they have a liquid consistency. Turpentine is one of the best diluents for this purpose. Here the artist has used a cloth to distribute the umber paint over the canvas. An oil ground usually takes a day to dry thoroughly.



Multicolored toned ground

More than one color can be used for the ground, particularly if you already know where you will want

warm and cool tones in the finished picture.