

COLOURED GROUNDS

For our Italian lesson for today the first thing to learn is *non abbiate paura* – don't be afraid! If the white of the canvas gives you a scare, help is on the way!

Since Renaissance times, coloured grounds or imprimaturas have been used by many masters, and may be something you'll want to try for your next series of paintings. For acrylic and oil painters, this can also be another way of recycling a canvas in addition to gessoing over it.

Imprimaturas provide an overall coloured background, which can substitute much of the mid-toned areas. The painting can be completed by addressing the lightest and darkest areas, in varying degrees of opacity, thus providing an economical and harmonious range of tones. Traditional colours for mid-toned glazes are raw sienna, burnt sienna, Terre Verte, yellow ochre, red, grey or a mixture of these colours. If you want try using the complimentary colour to your main subject, this can give a warmth or coolness to the painting, which is very time-consuming otherwise. Reubens' used a light yellow-brown combination of underpainting in Samson and Delilah. In Diego Velasquez's *The Toilet of Venus*, he used a deep red coloured ground in all areas except for under the figure. Rembrandt also used the technique of *Chiaroscuro* (light-dark) in combination with a coloured ground to achieve additional dramatic effect.

Glazes – a layer of oil paint thinned with turpentine can be applied with a large brush, left for a few moments and then wiped off with a rag.

A watered-down wash of acrylic paint can be applied by a sponge to your support.

Solid or opaque ground – this type of imprimatura can be applied with full-strength acrylic or oil paint, applied with a soft brush or paint roller.

When dry you can use a watercolour pencil or pencil crayon to sketch in your outline.

- if you are using a light-coloured ground, apply washes of dark paint in the shadowed areas.
- for dark-coloured grounds, apply a wash of titanium white (grisaille) and block in the lightest areas.



Allow washes to dry between coats.

Continue building the light or dark colours and leave some transparency where you wish the mid-tones to be visible.



I hope you have enjoyed expanding your Italian vocabulary with this painting tip and BUONA FORTUNA!