

Gamblin + SavvyPainter

Special Bonus Episode with Scott Gellatly

Scott answers even more of your questions!

- Antrese: I'm here with Scott Gellatly from Gamblin Artists Colors and Scott, tell me a little bit about what you do at Gamblin.
- Scott Gellatly: Well, I'm a painter and also product manager here at Gamblin Artists Colors, so I do a lot of product development, a lot of quality assurance. I also lead a nationwide educational program called Gamblin Artist-Rep Program.
- Antrese: Since you have the advantage of working at a paint company and I know that you, as a painter of yourself, I'm going to assume that you're equally obsessed with color.
- Scott Gellatly: Yeah.
- Antrese: What's the lesson that took you the longest to learn about color?
- Scott Gellatly: I think that's a really interesting question and I think part of it is to let color kind of speak for itself. I think it's a lesson that I'm learning maybe the strongest in this current body of work, where sometimes I'll be ... Historically, I think with my work, it was, "Hey, I want to paint this particular scene or I want to get this emotion out of this large sky painting," and then color was always kind of in service to the scene that I was painting. I've spent a lot of time just in the lab, here at Gamblin, working specifically on color and just mixing some really unique colors. That's really influenced my current body of work, where, "Hey, let's just let this one color, this one kind of groupings of color," what better excuse to make a painting than just being influenced and inspired by a certain color? I've really let this current body of work be driven by making these strong color statements. I found that in this current body of work, I'm actually making kind of a tighter gamut of color within the

paintings, so I'll work with more analogous color systems, maybe a cool green, a middle green and a warm green and that's kind of the rule of the painting. I just explore that to make a really strong color statement and then, find ways in that painting to break those rules.

I've been kind of obsessed with color, kind of renewed again, not only at Gamblin, but also in my own studio as well.

I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel like when I'm painting that the painting itself is ... You know how people say like when you're eating chips and salsa that the chips are really just the vehicle to get the salsa in your mouth or chips and guacamole that's ...

Scott Gellatly: That analogy rings true to me, yes.

Antrese: Sometimes, I feel like my choice of the subject is just the vehicle to allow me to play with the color thing that I'm interested in that moment or like just to play, like that's the thing that I'm most interested in.

Scott Gellatly: Perfect.

Antrese: The subject matter is almost, no, it is, I won't lie, it's secondary, might be tertiary.

Scott Gellatly: Yeah, absolutely. To me, this conversation brings the balance between, for me, it's landscape painting, but how specific or how general do you want the painting to be? When it's too specific, you really kind of minimize the range of appeal, but also when it's too general, then it kind of falls flat because it's like the token landscape. Balancing out the specific qualities of a particular landscape with the more general qualities of form, of light and color, to me that's an interesting balance and one that I kind of redefine in the work that I'm currently doing.

Antrese: Nice, this could be like a five-hour conversation.

Scott Gellatly: This could be. Well, it's a comfortable chair and I've got a warm cup of coffee, so.

Antrese: Our first question comes from John King. John says, "I'm loving the Gamvar varnishes, but sometimes have a hard time getting an even application with the satin-finish Gamvar. The glass always looks great, but satin sometimes has glossy or matte streaks when using a brush. Do you have any advice for getting the most even application? P.S., I love your paints and the

Portland gray series has been a real game-changer for me. Thank you, John King.”

Scott Gellatly:

Excellent, so the satin and matte versus of the Gamvar varnishes Gamvar are essentially the Gamvar gloss with the addition of matting agents. That can make varnishing a little bit more challenging, but I do have two tips of getting a nice even surface with the satin and the matte. First is that when paintings dry, it's fairly common for them to dry with glossy and matte surface areas. Generally speaking, those glossy areas of the painting tend to be less absorbent than those matte areas that tend to be more absorbent. When a satin or matte varnish is applied to it, sometimes that the varnish is sinking into those more absorbent areas of the painting and you still get an uneven surface quality. Oiling out the painting prior to varnishing unifies those absorbency rates of the painting and makes for more successful varnish application.

Scott Gellatly:

Also, using as little varnish as possible to cover a larger area of the painting can lead to more successful varnishing. Often times, some of the issues that come up with varnishing is just simply too much varnish has been applied, so reducing the amount of varnish that's being used, trying to cover as much of the painting with as little varnish as possible is a good way to prevent that. Then, as well the type of brush, using a softer synthetic brush with the satin and matte varnishes are a little bit more delicate and generally are more successful than using a stiffer bristle brush.

Antrese:

Next question comes from Marcela Strasdas. Marcela is asking, “My question is regarding the finishing coats on a painting. I'd like to give them a varnish of some sort to unify finish and for protection. What's the best product to use once the painting is dry to the touch, but hasn't had the six months to a year curing time?”

Scott Gellatly:

Okay, we feel that that six months to a year time frame, it's really antiquated recommendation.

Antrese:

Oh good.

Scott Gellatly:

It really came out of the disadvantages of Damar varnish. Damar by nature is a very brittle material, so if the paint layers below, especially thicker pain layers below were still taking up oxygen and expanding and contracting, it would generally crack those brittle damar varnish layers. Also, damar varnish is formulated with a stronger turpentine, which can harm freshly painted paint layers.

Scott Gellatly: Our Gamvar Picture Varnish that we developed in cooperation with the National Gallery is a water clear varnish. It stays water clear. By nature, it's a more flexible material than damar varnish and also that resin that Gamvar is made out of is thinned with our Gamsol, which is incredibly mild solvent. It's virtually odorless to use and to apply and because it has such a mild solvent, means it's not going to disrupt freshly painted paint layers. Our recommendation is that to find the thickest area of paint on the completed painting, gently press into it with your fingernail. If it feels dry and hard throughout, the painting can be varnished with Gamvar. For paintings that are applied in thin layers with fast drying materials, this could be a number of weeks. If you've painted with poppy oil and Alizarin Crimson with spatula, it would take decades to get to this point. We really kind of put the emphasis on how the painting was made, with which materials and as long as it passes that touch test, it can be varnished with Gamvar. Mostly, this is a matter of weeks or month rather than six months to a year.

Antrese: What a huge relief!

Scott Gellatly: Yeah, makes preparing for a show that much easier.

Antrese: Yeah and for people who like their ... What I see now is people painting and showing sort of daily or weekly or monthly what they're doing in social media etc., and then, people want to buy the painting. Then, there's always this, "Oh God, so do I varnish it, not varnish it? If it's been sitting in my studio for a while and I haven't signed it, now I sign it, now what do I do?" Pretty much if it's over all, if it's dry to the touch, like after a week or two, you're good to go?

Scott Gellatly: Dry to the touch, the only thing I would look for is if you've got any areas of thick impasto, those should be dry and hard to the touch.

Antrese: This is something that was asked in my class recently, like you have a really thick painting, it's been sitting there. It's dry, but then you're like, "Oh, I didn't sign it." Then, you sign it and usually when you sign it, it's going to be something really thin or like if they haven't carved into it.

Scott Gellatly: Exactly, so for signing it, you can thin a color with our Galkyd medium, sign it in a thin layer. That would be dry within 24 to 48 hours to the point, where a thin coat of Gamvar over the top would not be a problem at all.

Antrese: I think a lot of people are going to be super happy to hear that. I think that is one of the things that you're told, "Don't do it for six months," and then, you're like, "Well, okay."

Scott Gellatly: Yeah, to me, it's really kind of an antiquated recommendation and one should think about how the painting was made with which materials rather than some arbitrary timeline.

Antrese: It sort of reminds me, there's this, I don't know like, what do you call them, old wives tale or an old story that nobody knows the genesis of it. I've heard this like a million times, but I've seen it in lots of cookbooks, where like the recipe says, "Chop off the ham bone," for example, like you chop off the last X inches of it and so like there's all this preparation that you do. There's always this like you got to chop the ham bone off at that certain spot and when they try to-

Scott Gellatly: And, only under a new moon on....right, right.

Antrese: 18:56 Yeah, and it turns out that when you track it all down to its genesis that was because the person who originally came up with the recipe had a small oven and the hambone didn't fit unless they chopped it off. It's completely arbitrary and blah, blah, blah, but it feels like a lot of this has to do with that where you just follow directions because somebody told you and not really understanding-

Scott Gellatly: Exactly.

Antrese: ... what's behind it.

Scott Gellatly: Exactly.

Antrese: Next question comes from Prem Dhanesh. I hope I'm saying your last name correctly Prem and your first name too for that matter. Prem is asking, "House paints are matched and mixed with a numeric formula, describing the three factors of color perception, hue, value and chroma. Is this how artist tube colors are done also?"

Scott Gellatly: That is a really interesting question that could require a separate hour-long podcast, but I think one of the interesting concepts that that alludes to is that when you walk into a commercial paint store for a house paint, you're dealing with mostly tints, but you're dealing with color swatches. You're looking at color. As artists, we are essentially working with pigments, which are chemical makeup of metals of earth that

happened to be colored. That's what we incorporate into our color palettes. About two-thirds of Gamblin's artist's grade line are single pigment colors. Quinacridone Red, Quinacridone Magenta, Quinacridone Violet, those are all three different pigments that reflect light back insert in three different ways. We are really dealing with pigments that happen to be colored. We do not necessarily go after formulating colors based on hue, value and chroma, even though we do list those for all of our colors on our website. That can be found in the experienced color section.

I mentioned a moment ago that if we just look at those two thirds of our palette that are single pigment colors, they will occupy certain areas of color space around the color wheel. There are times, where we want it to fill in gaps within those colors around the color wheel and there might not be a single pigment available. For those reasons, we have to create mixtures of existing pigments. Cadmium Green is one example to get a nice bright, opaque, warm green. We use the combination of Cadmium Yellow Light and Viridian. Warm greens are an example, where they are abundant in nature, in the world that we see, but not as abundant as pigments. It's a little bit of both. We deal with single pigment colors for the majority of our palette and I think that there's a great purity in using single pigment colors in color mixing, but for those areas of color space to fill in those gaps, we need to create mixtures of color and that's we're thinking about them in terms of their three characteristics of value, hue and chroma come into play.

Antrese:

Then, would the radiant line be sort of an exception to that rule because from my understanding it's specifically meant to all fall on the same ... What is it, number seven of the Munsell scale, is that correct?

Scott Gellatly:

Right, so what Bob did was to look at intense colors around the perimeter of the color wheel that fall into the same value and at value seven in the Munsell System. Then, the chroma of those colors, kind of the chips fell, where they may because the value was kind of the rule. We could take this another direction and say, "Okay, where are those colors around the color wheel that are at their highest chroma?" Then, the values will vary between them. The radiance, we're basically taking different hues around the color wheel and the rule for that was to create them at value seven.

Antrese:

Nice. Next question comes from Jennifer Kinberg and Jennifer is asking, "Can you use walnut oil with water soluble oil and if so, what benefits would there be?"

Scott Gellatly:

I think it's important to note that we don't make walnut oil or water soluble oils. Walnut oil is just a version of a drying oil. There's linseed oil, walnut oil, safflower oil, poppy oil. They are all vegetable or nut oils, all equally non-toxic, all safe to paint with. They just have different characteristics. We choose linseed oil as the main binder in art colors because history has shown that it makes the strongest, most flexible paint film. We use safflower oils for a few of our different whites because of the pale qualities of safflower oil and it gives a really bright neutral white. In terms of water-soluble oils, we've just found through using them that they really give what we feel is an unsatisfying painting experience that you don't get the lushness of texture of color that you can with linseed oil.

Antrese:

Nice, next question comes from Fred Bell and Fred says, "I use Gamblin Cold Wax with my oil paint. They were taking a long time to dry, so I started mixing Liquin Impasto with the wax. Am I going to have problems down the road?"

Scott Gellatly:

That's a good question. Gamblin Cold Wax Medium, as described in our Oil Painting Mediums Guide is one of our slower drying mediums, but it has really expanded in recent years in this genre of cold wax painting, which is a really great experimental approach to oil painting by utilizing the strengths of Cold Wax Medium with its textural and mark making qualities. I will speak specifically to the Gamblin alkyd mediums and one of their great characteristics is not only their fast drying rates, but in terms of the strength and the flexibility that they dry to. Cold Wax Medium and wax in particular is inherently a more brittle material. This is the reason why encaustic paintings are painted on panels rather than stretched fabric. We actually actively recommend the use of mixing alkyd mediums to the Cold Wax Medium when the wax is used in a high percentage to oil colors because of the flexibility and the strength that those alkyd mediums give the Cold Wax Medium.

Scott Gellatly:

For an example, creating a medium that is say 25% Galkyd Gel, 75% Cold Wax Medium will not only make for a faster drying version of the Cold Wax Medium, but also one that is stronger and more flexible as well.

Antrese:

It feels like cold wax is becoming a lot more popular or it could be, I'm not sure, it could be, I'm getting a lot of questions about it because I interviewed Rebecca Crowell and she just put out a big book on cold wax. It might be that I'm just predisposed to getting them for that reason and after the last episode with you guys, we talked about it quite a bit. I think it's safe to say

that my listeners are very interested in cold wax as am I because it's so fun to play with. When you're talking about increasing the flexibility that way, you're still assuming, am I correct that ... I guess like when I'm painting on canvas, I'm really, really cautious with the cold wax, like I just put like a tiny little touch in it because I'm afraid it's going to crack and break later, but if you follow these directions that you just give those ratios that is for panels or is it ever safe to like lay it on ... Well, okay, lay it on probably not, but to be more aggressive with cold wax on a canvas, is there ever a point, where you could do that?

Scott Gellatly:

Oh that's a good question and I think that overall oil paintings are best done on rigid supports.

Antrese:

Why is that?

Scott Gellatly:

Well, oil paintings, as they dry, they give up some flexibility. We talk a lot about fat over lean in oil painting, this can essentially be translated into flexible over less flexible. When you paint on flexible supports such as a stretched canvas, you're kind of breaking the fat over lean rule the moment you put oil paint on it. Oil paint will always dry with less flexibility than the fabric underneath it. Fabric supports were invented to be lightweight options for large-scale paintings and it's really kind of stayed with this, even though paintings on rigid supports generally age much better than those on flexible ones. That's just a general recommendation is to paint on rigid supports.

Antrese:

My mind is blowing up right now Scott because of the conversation we just had a few minutes ago about these assumptions that we make because we've been told something or because we've just always done it that way. As you're talking, all I'm thinking about is, "So why **do** I paint on canvas? Oh because I did that in school and I just kept doing it." The only logical reason is when I travel, I paint landscapes on unstretched canvas because it's so much easier and lighter to bring it back, but in my studio, I don't have a reason.

Scott Gellatly:

Yep and that's a great way to travel with paintings in a lightweight way is to do it on unstretched canvas and then, either mount them on panels or to stretch them after the fact and if they're relatively young paintings, the paintings will survive that stress just fine. If they were older paintings, then more care should be taken with them. Coming back to the cold wax issue is that one is, yeah cold wax painting has legitimately taken off in the last three or four years and Rebecca Crowell with Jerry McLaughlin put together this beautiful book on cold wax painting. There's a website dedicated to it. We put a page

on our website dedicated to cold wax painting techniques. It's really given I think a new arsenal of mark making techniques to largely abstract painters. It's really exciting. Years ago, I did a test of that G Gel or Galkyd Gel, cold wax mixture that I mentioned and painted it on ... Mixed in some color with it, painted it on an unstretched piece of fabric and for years, it would pass a simple flex test. For us, a good flex test is flexing it over a one inch mandrel.

Antrese: Oh wow.

Scott Gellatly: That is certainly more stress than any painting would go through, but the addition of that Alkyd Gel really did give some strength and flexibility to the cold wax.

Antrese: When you say over the course of years, how many years are you talking about?

Scott Gellatly: Oh gosh, I think it was over the course of eight or nine years-

Antrese: Nice.

Scott Gellatly: ... which is relatively short compared to the age of the painting, but it's also putting it through a lot more stress than a normal painting would go through.

Antrese: Right, so since we were talking ... This is something that I'm always very uncertain about and I'm always like, "Uhh." For example when I go travel somewhere and I'm painting on unstretched canvas, I come back and I mount it to a Gator Board or foam core, or a hard surface. What is a good archival glue or sticky thing or whatever you want to call it, because I ... Let's see, there's certain other brands that I had been taught in the school, where it worked really well. Then, when I recently looked them up again and I saw all sorts of people saying, "Absolutely, don't use that, it turns yellow, it cracks, it's awful, don't, don't, don't." I've just started using acrylic matte to mount it, which I know makes it permanently on there. What is a good way to do it?

Scott Gellatly: I think an acrylic gel medium would be a good way to do it. I've always had good luck with Lineco pH-Neutral Adhesive. Lineco is a company, L-I-N-E-C-O, that makes a lot of kind of museum-quality adhesives, bookbinding materials. They make a full-strength PVA glue under this name pH-Neutral Adhesive.

Antrese: Those are two good ones and so with the acrylic one, using acrylic matte, like there's no way to get that back up?

Scott Gellatly:

Right.

Antrese:

Basically, like that's not water soluble, it's down and it's adhered.

Scott Gellatly:

Yeah, I think it would be fairly bulletproof at that point. I have bought linen panels in the past and these were with paintings done on them. Then, they were in a studio and subjected to high humidity situations and whatever glue was used to mount the linen onto the panels was incredibly responsive to the humidity and the paintings essentially shrunk on the panel. There was kind of a 16th or an 8th exposed wood and the actual fabric on the paintings shrunk, which was a bit of a bummer.

Antrese:

Yeah that would be a bit of a bummer. What other questions can I throw at you now that I have you, painting on paper, I see a lot of people doing oil paintings on paper. Sometimes, I do it when I just have nothing else to paint on and I know, okay, this is going to be a throwaway. Is there way to prepare different types of paper, so that you can paint oil on top of them?

Scott Gellatly:

Yeah and I think I'll answer this three different ways. One is that there are one or two brands of oil paper on the market now that have internal sizing in them that makes them conducive to painting oil paint directly onto that paper. In my experience, they tend to be highly absorbent and that's a quality that I think some painters would like, some painters would not like, so certainly worth experimenting with. The other option is if you wanted to retain the color and texture of that paper, we make a product called PVA Size, which is a thinned PVA glue that can be applied front and back to the paper. It's incredibly thin. It will protect the paper, but it will also retain the color and the inherent texture of that paper. Then, after two coats of PVA Size, you can safely paint oil colors right on top of it.

Scott Gellatly:

Then, the third option would be to prepare the paper with say an acrylic gesso ground and then, you'd give up the white of the paper or the color of the paper in lieu of the acrylic gesso and then, the acrylic gesso would also take on its own texture as well. All of those options are going to be fairly absorbent, so consider, I think if you want to block that absorbency and have a bright white surface, the PVA Size with a coat of oil painting ground would probably be the best option.

Antrese:

Yeah, what I find with painting on paper with oils that I like is that it does absorb like that and it ends up feeling like gouache even when it's not and sometimes, I love that.

Scott Gellatly: Right, exactly. For most cases, oil painting on paper is for studies or for travel, so it should be put in that context as well.

Antrese: Exactly, are there any other tips or tidbits that I haven't or my listeners haven't asked you about that you ... What are your secrets to paintings Scott?

Scott Gellatly: Oh my goodness.

Antrese: Anything I haven't asked you that you think would be interesting?

Scott Gellatly: I think my only other kind of secret to painting as it relates to color and materials is this idea of spend time and it could be over the course of years of getting to know personalities of pigments, personalities of color, balancing the theory with your own aesthetics. There's a lot of ways to create your own identity as a painter. There's subject matter, there's the technique or the way in which oil colors are applied, what an individual painter's relationship and how they approach color and form, but also I think another way to really make painting your own is to develop a really clear color voice. That can be done through the colors that we include on our palettes. I think there's such a great, rich world of color out there to explore and it's worth spending some time with to really develop a really strong personalized color palette.

Antrese: Scott, thank you so much! This has been fantastic.

Scott Gellatly: My pleasure. It was an honor.