

## Ten Ways to Start an Abstract Painting

By CJMiller, The Spiritual Artist

The more I teach, the more I realize that abstract painting doesn't just reveal elements of composition. It reveals elements of *you*.

Abstract work begins with discovery. And one of the most challenging things for many artists is facing a blank surface. Nothing is hard to build upon. But when you give yourself *something* to respond to, the painting begins to speak back.

Making art is a process of listening, acting and reacting. Then listening again. Most of you know that my own work often begins with **spiritual asemic writing**. Doodling. Expressive marks. Call it whatever you like. It's simply putting lines on the surface that reflect your inner voice. These marks aren't precious. They're starting points.

Below are ten ways to begin an abstract painting by working from an existing framework rather than a blank page.

### 1. Spiritual Asemic Writing

Of course this is my first choice. I wouldn't be *The Spiritual Artist* if it weren't. Scribble, doodle, or make fast, intuitive marks. Then slow down and notice what's there. Lines, shapes, rhythms. Build your painting by responding to what emerges.

### 2. Brayer Texture

Use a brayer to roll paint across your surface. Layer the marks over themselves and let areas peek through. Keep your palette limited so the surface stays clean. The textures you create will guide your next move.

### 3. Gravity and Fluid Paint

Dribble fluid acrylics or india ink and let gravity do the work. Viscosity creates line. Water-soluble inks will bloom and spread. You can seal them with acrylic glaze or let the movement remain part of the story.

### 4. Collaged Paper

Tear pages from magazines or books and glue them down randomly. Once dry, notice the accidental shapes and intersections. They will quietly tell you where to begin.

### 5. Extended Brush Marks

Attach a brush to the end of a long stick. Stand a few feet away and make loose, imperfect marks. Let them be awkward. It's often inside the mess that the painting reveals its entry point.

### 6. Powdered Pigments

This technique comes from my mentor, Virginia Cobb. Sprinkle powdered pigment on the surface, then throw water onto it. Let the pigment move, bleed, and form lines. From there, compositions naturally begin to organize themselves.

### **7. Layered Tissue Paper**

Work on two separate sheets of tissue paper. Make marks on both, then layer them on your substrate. Move them around until something clicks. Once it does, adhere them with matte medium. The layered lines create instant dialogue. Crys has also taught me ways to colorize the tissue for added depth.

### **8. Subtractive Beginnings**

Cover the surface with a single mid-tone color. Then remove paint with paper towels, plastic wrap, scrapers, or your hands. What remains becomes your map. This reversal often quiets the thinking mind.

### **9. Found Texture**

Start with texture that already exists. Cardboard, fabric, bubble wrap, mesh, or pressed leaves. Apply paint over it and lift away. The surface will offer structure without control.

### **10. Overpainting an Old Work**

Revisit an old painting. But don't cover it completely. Let fragments of the previous work peek through. The tension between old and new creates rich starting points and unexpected direction. Abstract painting isn't about deciding where to go.

It's about giving yourself something to *listen to*. Start somewhere. Respond honestly. And let the work guide you.

P.S. Do you have a favorite method that I didn't mention? Share it!

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