MDAG Alcohol Ink Demonstration

With Gretchen Rehfeld

What is Alcohol Ink?

Alcohol inks are a fluid medium made from high color-intensity dyes suspended in an alcohol-based solution. They are incredibly vibrant, water thin in consistency, transparent and re-wettable on the proper surfaces! Their high impact color, high fluidity, and versatility make them a fun medium to explore, with applications in:

* Collage
* Painting
* Resin casting
* Cardmaking
* Home décor
* Crafting

Inks to Use?

Ready-made inks: Jaquard, Ranger, Marabu

Alcohol Marker Refills: Copic, Spectrum Noir

DIY: Possible but not recommended for lack of stability/regulation

Mediums

Most manufacturers of alcohol inks also product a blending agent – this is usually a clear blend of their proprietary recipe of alcohol, glycerin, and stabilizers to help maintain film integrity once alcohol evaporates away.

Isopropyl alcohol is also commonly used, though you do need to use a minimum of a 90% strength solution. Lower runs the risks of having its own odd chemicals being left behind in the evaporation process that could corrupt the film integrity.

If using Isopropyl or blending solution in high concentration, please note: there are rumblings in the alcohol ink art community that some have experienced a higher rate of fading or slight discoloration over time on pieces where they used a higher ratio of alcohol.

Other Useful Tools:

* Rubber gloves
* Straws
* Can of compressed air
* Sponges
* Brushes
* Q-tips
* Paper towels
* Plastic table cloth
* Repositionable spray adhesive
* Spray bottle

Lightfastness

Alcohol inks are dye-based, NOT pigmented (except in rare instances). Many blogs and artists refer to them as high-pigment. This is incorrect terminology! Pigments are what is used in most acrylic and oil paints, and are inherently more lightfast than dyes. Dyes are often highly ‘fugitive’ – the identifying word for colorants that have poor lightfastness when exposed to environmental factors, especially UV light particularly in sunlight.

To display artwork made with alcohol ink, proper protection by the artist is tantamount to a long life for a piece of artwork! Not properly preparing and varnishing artwork is a common reason artwork discolors and fades over time. See FIXATIVE and VARNISH notes.

Substrates

Alcohol ink is at its best when used on non-porous surfaces. Popular options:

* Metal
* Yupo/Dura Lar
* Glass
* Plastics/Resins
* Coated Ceramic/Tile
* Clay board

Alcohol inks are incredibly bright and transparent. Much of their attraction lies in the fluidity and vibrancy working together in unexpected ways during the inking process. Experiment with picking up the substrate and tilting it, blowing through straws, using compressed air (prolonged sprays make the can cold – be aware and take rests), and mark making once dry with brushes or Q tips or even sponges. A spray bottle of alcohol can be an intense mark maker!

Work in a well-ventilated space!

Once the alcohol evaporates, it leaves the dye and stabilizing film on the surface of the substrate. Once fully dry the ink is naturally water resistant, but the film is delicate and can be scratched off – another reason fixatives and varnishes are a key part of the alcohol ink process!

Alcohol ink is also re-wettable, (or re-hydratable if you will), once dry but prior to fixing. Sheets or pieces prepared with ink can be touched years later and the ink film will reactivate and be manipulatable again.

Fixing and Varnishing

Finishing your alcohol ink artwork is always at minimum a 2-step process:

Step 1: FIXATIVE

Step 2+ VARNISHING and more!

Fixative

Fixing alcohol ink is incredibly important to protect the ink from reactivating and smearing around during the varnishing process and use if a handleable item. Most aerosols use alcohol in their blends, but Krylon Kamar Varnish is one of the very few sprays available that doesn’t and is heavily favored by artists. 2-3 coats! Allow to dry at least a few hours before moving on to the next step.Kamar is UV stable, meaning it as a film will not breakdown in sunlight, but it itself does not provide noticeable UV protection to the dyes.

Varnishing Alcohol Ink Work (and more!)

Varnishes are where you will be able to protect you work the most. Look for UV Lights Stabilizing (commonly UVLS), or UV Protectant. I HIGHLY RECOMMEND using at minimum one of the UVLS options listed below (or another well vetted by the art community) to help protect your work from fading. Some folks will use a UVLS as a second layer and go on to apply deeper/thicker varnishes to achieve the look they are striving for, and to change the finish from gloss to any degree of satin or matte.

Popular Options:

* Krylon Archival UVLS Varnish
* Golden Polymer UVLS Varnish
* Krylon UV Resist
* Art Resin – the brand is UVLS
* Krylon Triple Thick
* Modge Podge

**IF YOU USE FIRE ON TILE, PLEASE PRACTICE SMART AT-HOME FIRE SAFETY**