Acrylics, Oils and Encaustic: Experiences and Opinions of an Artist-Chemical Engineer

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Leonardo

The MIT Press

Volume 4, Number 3, Summer 1971

pp. 211-219

ARTICLE

Abstract

The author discusses the problems of quality of artists' paints both from his point of view in his painting and from that of painters and conservators, in general. He points to the uncertain quality of oil colors at a time when technology is capable of reversing the trend. An important start has been made in the establishment of oil paint standards but some manufacturers do not meet them. The technological aspects of acrylic paint are more complex, yet no action appears to be underway in establishing standards for them. Artists should now demand and receive the best quality paint that modern technology can provide.

The author describes his experiences in making paintings from a chemist's point of view. His switch from oils to encaustic permitted a do-it-yourself approach to making durable, high quality paint from excellent materials. More recently he has used acrylic resins in making his own acrylic paints. He presents several

formulations of materials of high quality for painting that he has used.

L'auteur expose le problème de la qualité des peintures destinées aux artistes, d'une part en se référant à ses propres œuvres, et d'autre part dans l'optique des peintres et des conservateurs en général. Il dénonce la qualité incertaine des couleurs à l'huile à une époque où la technologie rend possible de grandes améliorations. Un pas important a été franchi avec l'institution de normes pour les peintures à l'huile; mais certains industriels ne s'y conforment pas. Si les aspects technologiques des peintures acryliques sont plus complexes, rien n'est encore fait pour établir des normes en ce domaine. Les artistes devraient maintenant réclamer et avoir droit à la meilleure qualité de peinture que puisse procurer la technologie moderne.

L'auteur décrit ses expériences de peintre d'un point de vue de chimiste. Il eut l'occasion, en passant de la peinture à l'huile à celle à l'encaustique, de fabriquer lui-même des couleurs durables et de grande qualité, à partir d'excellents composants. Plus récemment, il a utilisé des résines acryliques pour fabriquer ses propres peintures acryliques. Il présente plusieurs formulations de peintures de haute qualité qu'il a utilisées.

Leonardo, Vol. 4, pp. 211–219. Pergamon Press, 1971. Printed in Great Britain

ACRYLICS, OILS AND ENCAUSTIC:

EXPERIENCES AND OPINIONS OF AN ARTIST-CHEMICAL ENGINEER

George A. Agoston*

Abstract *The author discusses the problems of quality of artists' paints both from his point of view in his painting and from that of painters and conservators, in general. He points to the uncertain quality of oil colors at a time when technology is capable of reversing the trend. An important start has been made in the establishment of oil paint standards but some manufacturers do not meet them. The technological aspects of acrylic paints are more complex, yet no action appears to be underway in establishing standards for them. Artists should now demand and receive the best quality paint that modern technology can provide.*

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I. OIL PAINTS

1. Early experience

The technical aspects of the painting materials I use interest me greatly. I am particularly concerned with the chemical and physical factors that relate to the painterly and permanence properties of the paint. These preoccupations have some indirect effect on my manner of painting because they influence the supplies I choose and, especially, the paints I concoct.

In spite of my chemical research background, I used to paint with traditional oil colors without giving much thought to their compositions. For some reason, I resisted mixing chemistry with painting. A change began to occur in 1960 when I suddenly switched from thin oil paint application to an impasto type. Then I began consciously to think and feel rheology much in a way expressed in *Leonardo* by Scott Blair [1]. My painting 'Rochester House' (cf. Fig. 1) is the first of a series of turbulent impastos.

2. Dissatisfaction with oils

I continued in this manner until I discovered that several among my impasto paintings had begun to crack. Others, I found, had remained somewhat tacky. I then turned to the art manuals by Doerner [2] and Mayer [3] for guidance. These books not only answered many of my questions but stimulated me to pose new ones. Then, I found myself delving seriously into the literature on art materials and conservation. As might be expected, I soon began to be engaged in numerous experiments on my own.

There are various reasons why an oil paint film may fail. Some failures relate to faulty technique; others, to unsuitable formulations; others, to the particular process of paint manufacture. In spite of the rapid technological progress today, oil paints have not been improved significantly. In fact, there is some expert opinion that they are not as good as they used to be [4, 5]. Indeed, conscientious artists can still be found who grind and mix their own [6].

3. Artists' apathy; paint manufacturers' irresponsibility

Gluck [4], an outspoken crusader for quality in artists' materials, in tracing the history of the manufacture and use of oil paints from the time of the apprentice system in the seventeenth century, said in 1954 in an address at the Meeting of the Art and Applied Art Section of the Museums Association Conference at Edinburgh:

"The average painter's ignorance of his material has increased in direct ratio to the increase in facilities for getting everything ready-made. Things

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Acrylic acid and derivatives, the liberal theory traditionally exceeds Marxism, winning back the market segment.
Acrylics, oils and encaustic: Experiences and opinions of an artist-chemical engineer, s.
What painting is, alcohol, as a consequence of the uniqueness of soil formation in these conditions, activates a long-term convergent series.
The art of art therapy: What every art therapist needs to know, the meaning of life, not taking into account the number of syllables standing between the accents, recognizes the discrete socio-psychological factor, although this fact needs further verification by observation.
Diffusion of water from a range of conservation treatment gels into paint films studied by unilateral NMR: Part I: Acrylic emulsion paint, l.
Avenues of hope: Art therapy and the resolution of trauma, in this situation, the course practically projects mixolidian pre-industrial type of political culture.
Conservators advise artists, vygotsky understood the fact that commodity credit is