

Why I paint in Egg Tempera

Egg tempera is the most beautiful and sensitive painting medium that I have ever used. The paint is a simple mixture of fine artists pigments, egg yolk and distilled water. It can be used in extremely thin layers giving it wonderful glazing capabilities. The white gessoed panel, underneath the paint film, reflects light back through the painting giving it a beautiful glowing effect.

Egg tempera is one of the oldest painting media known to mankind, dating back to antiquity. Tempera painting was surpassed in popularity by the newly invented oil paint in the fourteenth century, which was more convenient for artists to work with. However, during the twentieth century egg tempera painting saw a revival, particularly with realist painters who enjoyed its natural earthy quality and its ability to render fine detail.

The medium is best painted on rigid panels that are first primed with numerous layers of traditional gesso. The dried gesso resembles plaster but is harder and can be smoothed to a degree similar to that of polished marble! It is this smooth surface that allows the artist to paint extremely thin layers of paint and delicate fine lines. The paint film dries in minutes but continues to cure and harden for years after the artist finishes the artwork. The surface of an egg tempera painting displays a natural slight sheen and the many layers of paint and the thousands (perhaps millions) of tiny brush strokes combine to give an egg tempera painting its distinctive finish.

Given minimal care, egg tempera is more permanent than other painting media and there are examples of tempera paintings many hundreds of years old in museums and art galleries. An occasional gentle dusting or polishing with a dry soft cloth is usually all the maintenance that is required.

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