

# **An analytical and applied study of Encaustic painting technique and its role in enriching the creative imagination of contemporary painting**

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## **Introduction to the History of Encaustic**

The word "Encaustic" is originated from the Greek "enkaustikos", which means heating or burning wax. Also pigmented wax is called encaustic. This type of painting is based on hot wax painting and dammar resin using beeswax. Encaustic allows the ability to create, install, carve, excavate, and to fuse with other materials.

The caskets found in Al Fayoum were an eminent epitome of encaustic painting. The faces drawn on these ancient caskets show the durability of the encaustic technique and method. This painting was a continuity to the funerary rituals, as it was believed that the soul Alba needs to know the Ka of the dead after burial.

The faces on the caskets were drawn to include the face and the bust only. The technique was so accurate which make the caskets look fresh as if they were drawn yesterday. The style of painting itself is more Greco-Roman than Ancient Egyptian. This is directly related to the period of Alexander the Great in Egypt which was a period of fusion between both cultures due all respect to each other rituals and beliefs. In addition, Pliny the Elder described how the Greek used the encaustic in exhibiting daily life scenes and important historical scenes. Although the encaustic is one of the ancient arts, it disappeared during the middle ages due to its complex procedures and preparations. However, it emerged again starting from the 9<sup>th</sup> century and along with the emergence of modern technology, it was preferred for contemporary artists nowadays.

## **The Encaustic in Modern and Contemporary Times**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the emergence and the rebirth of the encaustic painting on a very large scale. The main reason behind such rebirth is the fusion they set between an ancient technique and the modern technology by which encaustic can be implemented efficiently. To exemplify, the degree of fire, heat is now controlled without too much effort, and it also became time-saving without much concerns. Therefore, in the 50s and 60s of the last century, many artists were able to fuse the encaustic with contemporary styles and techniques. All appreciation and respect go to artists like Jasper Johns, Robin Cole Smith, JoséMaría Cano, Christopher Kier, Tony Scherman, Janise Yntema, James Ensor, and Diego Rivera. These contemporary artists were able to fuse the encaustic with other styles such as abstract art, realism, surrealism and expressionism.

## **The Encaustic Painting Application**

It is believed internationally that the encaustic is not easy to be implemented and applied due to its complex procedures and preparations of heating and firing wax. However, the modern and contemporary artists were able to find this as a challenge to be more innovative and expressive

using the encaustic. The challenging part of the encaustic painting paved the way to make it applicable if fused with other styles. Therefore, the painting, eventually, has several characters and impressions, though the topic is only one and applied within one context as well.

The artistic processing and rehearsals of converting the melting of wax from liquid to solid once more through painting is known as "Pareidolia". This artistic case is a result of melting wax with colors without losing any of the characteristics. This psychological and artistic case is so enthusiastic for the artist to alter any haphazard object, sound, or feeling to an encaustic painting filled with all imaginations and visualizations.

### **Encaustic Medium:**

The encaustic medium is formed from beeswax and other natural molds called dammar. The dammar is not like varnish as it is not flammable. The dammar resin is a fluid found in natural trees, and it is collected manually by hand. So, it has to be purified from any remnants or remains in the tree as it will affect the color of wax on the long run. In addition, the dammar is important because it raised the temperature of heating wax, and so when it dries it becomes more solid than raw beeswax. The raw beeswax melts at 145 F, but the dammar melts at 220 F when both are fused, the temperature of the medium becomes 168 F, which makes the work full of resistance and solidness after the finish. Also, the artist should be well aware of the correct amount percentages used in the medium between dammar and beeswax. The correct percentage of used dammar is 10% at least and 30% maximum as the solidness increases by time, so the final solidness is attained after 18 months.

### **Steps:**

- The electric mold should be heated at 245 F/118 C to melt the dammar to be like soft dough, this takes around 8 minutes.
- Adding small amount from beeswax to facilitate melting process.
- Decreasing the temperature to 200 F/93 C and adding the rest of beeswax while stirring till complete fusion.
- The fusion should be moved to silicon molds to form a residue that will be collected at the bottom, then it is scraped by a sharp round tool.
- The medium should be re-melted with the pigments in steel molds, each color on its own mold.
- The wax is cooled down and hardened as fast as it is put on the drawing, a heating tool is used to fuse all layers.
- The encaustic melts at 72F and above, and it remains solid in normal storing conditions, the paintings shouldn't be stored in hot conditions.
- Freezing conditions should be avoided as it will lead to wax crack.
- The colors of encaustic will remain brilliant by the time, but beeswax can make the colors yellowed when they are kept for a long time in the dark. The colors restore brilliance when they are subjected to the sunlight once more.
- When the dammar is added to the paste, it makes it more solid by the time.
- After finishing the painting, varnish is not needed because beeswax is highly water resistant, and it is considered a stable durable medium that can be varnished by soft piece of cloth to give a brilliant finish for the colors.

**Personal Experiment:**

My own personal experience in encaustic painting allowed me to use new styles on a larger scale. Also, I intended to keep the bases of transparency which reflects on natural topics. The effect of the historical angle of the encaustic was also clear. So, the idea of finding an ancient art and employing it to fit a contemporary painting is such a brilliant idea to be applied and experienced. I was amused by 16 wooden paintings with different sizes and colors to apply my own research on. The most amusing part about the encaustic art is the contradiction between changing the wax from solid to liquid to solid once more in creating contemporary paintings.

Research importance:

The importance of the research is due to the fact that the rediscovery of ancient methods and techniques leads to the creation of different and unique painting works that have cultural and artistic weight.

Shed light on an ancient technique belonging to ancient Egypt characterized by contemporary characteristics and the ability to be developed.

Research aims:

An applied experience in the art of painting in re-applying old materials and techniques in a modern, contemporary style.

Emphasizing that every work of art executed by Encaustic has its own personality and impression, despite the unification of the subject and the method of approach in the same context.

Technical treatments that are produced through the steps of converting wax from a solid substance to a liquid by heat and returning it to hardness again without losing any of its color properties.

**Research Methodology:**

Analytical with practical experience in painting

**Theoretical framework of the research:**

A general introduction to the art of encaustic;

- Presentation of the development of encaustic art, ancient and modern
- A complete explanation of tools, materials, surfaces and manufacturing methods for the medium and color.

Integrated practical experience on 16 graphic works.

**Analysis of the results:**

- Producing an integrated creative work with symmetrical is not an easy thing, because it is difficult to fully predict the results of technical treatments due to the difficulty of fully controlling a material based on a medium whose state moves very quickly between liquid and solid.

- Encaustic painting has the ability to liberate the creative process in a continuous cycle and stir the artist's imagination. It also stimulates discovery to reach the limits of the material and to reach a unique painting style and new special techniques.

- Encyclopedia is a suitable technique for collecting multiple styles that combine painting, drawing, printing, assembling and sculpting in one artwork.

Encaustic painting ensures the occurrence of the phenomenon of Pareidolia and the response of the artist's mind to a random stimulus that gives him the ability to perceive a familiar pattern of anything.

It is possible to come up with new technologies by practicing traditional methods.

- The applied experience in encaustic painting allowed the creation of new artistic methods by experimenting with materials and experimenting with rapid drawing on larger and faster touches, while maintaining the basic characteristics of transparency and abundance that make the rich and abundant surroundings a rich medium for subjects inspired by nature.

- Production of 16 palettes executed with encaustic with other raw materials such as inks, oil colors and other natural materials.

Finding solutions in using materials and methods, such as applying many layers, and combining them using fire or heat.

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