



Colour and Technique



Newsletter of the School of Colour - April 2014

YOUR SUGGESTIONS

Our aim is simple, we wish to encourage art and science to come together once again. The first time they did so led to the Renaissance, the second time to the Impressionists.



Renaissance painters absorbed the developments taking place in Northern Europe and applied the science of the day to them.

There was also a concentration on the development of suitable materials and techniques.

*Leonardo da Vinci.
Mona Lisa. Detail.
Oil on poplar*

The science of colour theory emerging at the time, plus advances in the understanding of light, played a vital part in the work of the Impressionists.



Claude Monet. Bathers at Grenouillere. Detail. 1869, National Gallery, London.

If, together, we can bring the two closer again who knows what could be achieved?

To this end I have asked for and received input from artists in almost every country in the world. Everything that we do is guided by you, members of the School of Colour.

Your suggestions have led to a range of books, courses, paints, brushes and specialist mixing palettes.

I now wish to concentrate on improving the information on our website. So, once again I am asking for input: Would you like us to offer a forum, making discussion between members possible? Or provide information on colour in other areas such as quilting or in the garden? Would you like to see our books also as ebooks? Would you find use for a range of Apps? If so, what topics would you find useful?

Whatever ideas you have please send them to me at michael@schoolofcolour.com

Your questions

I receive many questions on colour, painting technique and materials. I will reproduce a few here together with my answers. They might be of interest. Michael Wilcox

Q. A common question is to do with siccatives added to oil paints to speed drying. My response is as follows:

A. Painting in 'oils' is a slow process, so how can it be speeded up? Driers are often suggested as the answer.

Certain metallic compounds will speed the drying rate of oil paints but they can also speed the deterioration of the painting.



Driers will often harden the paint surface very quickly, making it dry to the touch. However, the paint under this skin will remain relatively soft for what can be a considerable time.



Due to changes in temperature and humidity this softer paint will tend to 'move around'. Such movement can crack the upper layer of paint, causing severe damage to the painting.

Manganese based driers, for example, will cause the surface of the paint to dry quite quickly into a hard film. Unfortunately, this film traps the still soft paint, preventing it drying for a considerable time.

To dry, oil paint absorbs certain gases from the atmosphere and releases others. When it cannot do so it remains soft.

The soft layer of paint under the hard skin, can expand and contract due to changes in temperature and humidity. This movement causes the hard surface layer to crack, even with thin layers,

Lead and Cobalt based driers tend to dry the entire film as one but I would suggest that their use can still cause problems as a surface film can develop.

Cobalt drier is said to be the 'least harmful' of the natural driers as an additive for oil glazes. Some recommendation.

As with most additives, if you can do without them, so much the better. Oil paints dry in a complex way as it is, without adding to the situation.

Driers, whether metallic or otherwise, are added to many paint ranges by manufacturers in order to bring the drying rates of the range closer together. But they are added in a very controlled way in order to avoid the potential damage outlined above.

Only experience of the paint range that you choose will inform you of this factor. An easy test is to apply a thin layer of each oil paint and check every day or so to see which dry the fastest. If you feel that you must add a drier it should be used in tiny amounts and never in a paint applied over a slower drying paint film.

Q. I have some kind of colour-blindness (red-green) and have because of that avoided colours ever since school 35 years ago. Still I felt attracted to colours and painting and recently started painting with acrylics.

Your book "Blue and Yellow Don't Make Green" helped me immensely to understand how things work and to get some structure to colour-mixing and I have followed the mixing exercises in the book.

Do you know of any resources (books or articles) that could be of help to me to understand, perhaps compensate, for my colour-blindness. I have decided that it will not stand in the way of my interest and curiosity. Many thanks. A.V. Sweden

A. Thank you for your letter. I am afraid that I do not know of reference books or other literature concerning colour blindness.

I get many letters from people who mainly confuse red with green. Several have said that the Blue and Yellow book gives them confidence in their use of colour and that they feel that it has helped them to recognise one colour from another. I am not sure if this is the case but if it helps with confidence than I am pleased.

I admire your determination to use and enjoy colour and wish you all the best in this regard.



I am investigating various types of colour correction spectacles and contact lens'. I will give the results in the next newsletter.

It would be much appreciated if our members could also look into and advise in this area as it would be a tremendous help for the many with colour blindness.

C I've heard of others using oils without solvents and I wonder if that is a hard and fast rule that can't be worked around and the whole fat over lean worked out by progressively using more oil as I go.

A. You can of course use oil paints without diluting them, it all depends on your technique. Fine detail might be a little tricky but you could develop ways around this. It would not be a good idea to use an excessive amount oil as a replacement (of sorts), because that can lead to darkening of the paint and wrinkling.

Q. It may be that the issue with gum Arabic regarding potential health hazards is in large scale manufacturing, and not the artists tube paint where it is bound in water and dries stuck to the paper. I read info on gum Arabic on a materials data sheet as I was searching for something about ammonia.

Do your water colours or gouache have anything other than gum Arabic in them? Do they have a strong odor?

A. Apart from Gum Arabic we use little else but pigment in our watercolours and gouache. Some Glycerine is added to help flow and a little preservative. I do not notice any odor but you might. If you wanted to try them I would suggest that you order a single tube to start with rather than jumping in.

As gum Arabic is also used as an adhesive on envelopes meant to be licked and as a food additive, it should be harmless to most people.

Q. I would like to know if linseed oil is use for most of your colours, and if safflower oil is used in your titanium. Also what is your opinion on Walnut Oil?



A. We use linseed in the hues and safflower in the white. It is often claimed that walnut oil yellows less than linseed. It does initially but not in the long run.

The earlier masters, who had both at their disposal invariably chose to use linseed. We would change to walnut oil if I thought that there would be any advantage.

The following is an extract from a book that we have just published on glazing. I hope that it helps.

A pale oil much favoured prior to the sixteenth century, particularly in Italy. It was gradually replaced by linseed oil during that century.

It was difficult to store as it quickly became rancid. Produced from nuts which had been aged for a time it was often used in the production

of paints, particularly for whites and blues as it resists yellowing initially. Linseed oil would often be used for the darker colours as it dried more quickly.

Care had to be taken in its use as it does not dry as well as linseed oil. If used too heavily, cracks and wrinkling can readily occur.

As with linseed oil, and any drying oil in fact, walnut oil can be heated to make it thicker, glossier and less liable to wrinkle. Once modified with heat it is known as 'heat bodied' or 'heat modified'.

To quote Aetius, a medical writer of the early sixth century; 'Walnut oil is prepared like that of almonds, either by pounding or pressing the nuts, or throwing them, after they have been bruised, into boiling water'. The resultant oil was probably thickened in the sun to the consistency of a varnish.

In those times, apart from medicinal use, walnut oil was employed to preserve gilding and encaustic (wax) paintings.

When used in conjunction with gilding a transparent yellow would be added and the yellow varnish applied over tin-foil to imitate gold leaf.

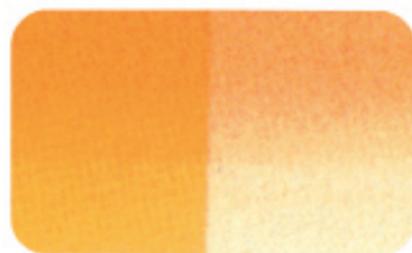
It was later adopted as a useful drying oil. Leonardo da Vinci was to warn; 'Walnuts are covered with a husk or rind; if you do not remove this when you extract oil from them, this skin becomes separated from the oil and rises to the surface of the picture, and this is what causes the alteration of pictures'.

He also gave instructions for the preparation of walnut oil:

'Select the finest walnuts; take them from their shell; soak them in a glass vessel, in clear water, changing the later as often as it becomes turbid, six, or even eight times.

After some time the nuts, on being stirred, separate, and become decomposed of themselves, forming a solution like milk. Expose this in plates in the open air; the oil will float on the surface. In order to separate it in a perfectly pure state, take cotton wicks then follow directions to use these as siphons, in the well known mode. All oils are themselves clear; it is in the mode of their extraction which alters them'.

Q. I appreciate your focus on using non-fugitive colours in your books. However, I've seen a few times in art magazines or books where a question is asked about this topic and the person who answers the question states that buying light-fast colours is not that important because all watercolour paints are fugitive when they are significantly diluted as is standard in watercolour paintings. Do you have any insight on if this is true, or any other input?



Genuine Gamboge.

Those pigments which are prone to fading in the light will do so. Those that are lightfast will live up to their description.

Yellow Ochre, as just one example, is lightfast and will not fade however thinly applied and however long it is exposed to the light.

A. This approach is a complete nonsense. We only have to look at earlier watercolour paintings to see that many pigments have stood up to the light whilst others have faded, darkened or deteriorated in some other way. Some fugitive transparent colours stand up to the light a little better when applied less diluted but then the colour is often dark due to the thickness. But even they will fade. The earth colours such as Yellow Ochre have remained unchanged for millions of years in the harsh sunlight of Australia, for example. It is a pity that so much inaccurate waffle is written on the subject.

The field of art materials and technique is so vast that nobody is an expert. I am certainly not as there is so much to learn. But people who do not know whether it is raining or Wednesday each morning should not be advising when the artist puts so much creative energy into her or his work.

No wonder so many paintings nowadays deteriorate very quickly.

Q. I was painting some swatches of paints and noticed that your Cad Red Light and WN Cad Red (both P.R. 108) have a different hue?

Yours looks more orange, and WN's more red. I was wondering if you could shed some light on how the same chemical pigment can look this much different from different companies.



A. When the pigment for PR 108 is being produced it can be taken through various stages from an orange red to a deep violet red.

At any stage the process can be stopped to give Cadmium Red Light, Medium or Deep. All are classified as PR108.

Therefore a range of colours are available to the paint manufacturer for each of the variations. I chose the particular version that we use as I considered it to be the most versatile in colour mixing and only wanted one orange-red to keep to a limited palette.

GLAZING MEDIA

I would like to make it clear that our new book on glazing, being based firmly on the methods and materials of the Old Masters, applies principally to the use of oil paint.

Egg Tempera can also be used and is described to a lesser extent. Acrylic paints are suitable for glazing but again are not given a great deal of coverage.

The principles are therefore applicable to oil paints, egg tempera and acrylics. Watercolour paints are not suitable for use in the glazing technique.

PATENTS

Several years ago I invented and patented a colour printing set. It was quickly infringed by one of the biggest names in desk top printers. I then discovered that in the UK 'patent protection' is a myth.

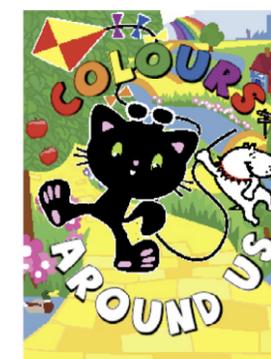
If you are interested in helping to bring about change please go to www.dontpatentit.co.uk or www.facebook.com/dontpatentit Thank you, Michael

Specials



Reduced by 50% whilst stock lasts. Please see website to order. www.schoolofcolour.com

Book and CD Rom both reduced by 50% whilst surplus stock lasts. Please see website to order. www.schoolofcolour.com



Both book/CD Rom sets reduced by 50% until end April 2014. Please see website to order. www.schoolofcolour.com

Seminars

I plan to give an extensive series of one day seminars this year. Starting in Copenhagen, moving on to various locations in the UK. Then over to the USA and Canada, the Middle East and finally Australia.

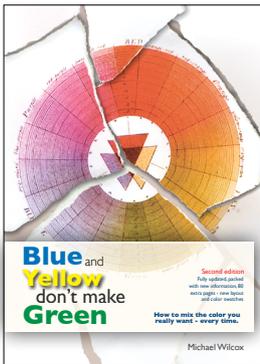
If your art club, art center, college or other institution is interested in becoming involved please drop me a line as we are still at the planning stage:

michael@schoolofcolour.com

A DAY OF COLOUR

One day Seminar with leading Colour Specialist

Michael Wilcox



Author of the book 'Blue & Yellow Don't Make Green', inventor of the *Split Primary System*, *Colour Bias Wheel* and *Head of the School of Colour* is visiting from England to present a seminar on colour mixing and use.



The aim of the event will be to impart a full understanding of all aspects of colour mixing. The basics of colour harmony & contrast will also be covered as will the selection of suitable materials and their use.

Topics will include the mixing of greens, the colours of shadows, mixing greys, employing the colours of nature and making full use of the complementaries.

Date:

For artists, craft-workers, designers, interior decorators and all who use colour in their work or leisure.

Location:

10am to 4pm with breaks for coffee and lunch



To book www.schoolofcolour.com



The technique of glazing

One day Seminar with leading Colour Specialist

Michael Wilcox

Author of the book '*Blue & Yellow Don't Make Green*', inventor of the *Split Primary System*, *Colour Bias Wheel* and *Head of the School of Colour* is visiting from England to present a seminar on the technique of glazing.



The methods of the Old Masters made available for today's artist

Early Masters such as Rembrandt applied multiple layers of transparent paint to produce the deep, glowing hues and darks which typified their work; darks which seethed with hidden colour.

The range of rich colours employed by these earlier painters gave a mysterious depth and intensity to their work, a richness and luminosity which only the glazing technique can give.

The aim of the seminar will be to equip today's artist with the technique of glazing developed by the Masters. Lessons from the past brought fully up to date.

DATE

Location:

Duration: 10.00am to 4.00pm with breaks for coffee and lunch



Please book early as seats will be limited

