**Painting with Egg Tempera**

Egg tempera, once the standard painting medium in Western Art, became less popular during and after the fifteen-century with the advent of oil paint. Oil paint seemed to have clear advantages over tempera – deeper intensity of colors and much slower drying times.

The slow drying time meant less waste. An artist could prepare paint and use it for several days. Egg tempera, on the other hand, must be mixed each day since the egg-based vehicle dries quickly. Middle-age and Renaissance artists had no way of preserving their tempera paint from day to day.

Of course, egg tempera paints were never abandoned all together. In fact, the paintings of famed artist, Andrew Wyeth, are a testament to the medium. In the hands of a skilled artist, egg-tempera can rival oil paint in terms of representational descriptiveness.

**What is Tempera Paint?**

Modern day tempera paint goes by different names. You may find it called “poster paint” or simply “tempera paint”. It’s very popular in art classes from elementary through high school since it’s inexpensive and easily cleaned up. But this type of paint is very different from true tempera paint.

True tempera paint is made from ground up pigments mixed with an egg binder. The yolk of the egg is used and the white of the egg is discarded. But since the yolk dries very quickly and is susceptible to cracking over time, other agents are added to the mixture.

True tempera paint is long lasting and many of the paintings created with egg tempera centuries ago still exist today. Modern day “tempera paint” or poster paint is not long lasting and is easily removed from the surface with water.

Most egg tempera paintings from centuries past were created on wood panel. Poplar wood was most commonly used. But since this wood warped over time, panels were constructed by combining several slats together. A high level of craftsmanship and skill was required just to prepare the surface. Fortunately today, we can simply purchase prepared masonite – also referred to as “Clayboard”.

But the artist could not simply paint directly on the wood panel since the paint would be absorbed into the wood. Instead, the surface had to be prepared by applying a layer of gesso. This layer of gesso not only provided a suitable foundation for the painting, but also removed any textural inconsistencies in the surface. The result was an ultra smooth surface, suitable for developing fine details.

**Techniques for Painting with Egg Tempera**

Understanding the characteristics of the medium that you use is very important and every medium is different. For example, we shouldn’t approach a watercolor painting in the same manner that we approach oil painting. Egg tempera is no different. We shouldn’t assume to use the same techniques for tempera painting that we use for oil painting. In fact, the process of painting with tempera is so different from painting with oils and acrylics that many artists consider it to be more closely related to drawing.

Egg tempera is best applied with thin, linear washes. The paint itself is somewhat transparent and should be layered to build up rich color. If tempera paint is applied too heavily and quickly, it can crack over time.

Instead, it’s best to apply the paint with layers. Cross-hatching your applications eventually leads to solid areas of color.

Thin marks made with egg tempera

Tempera paint doesn’t blend well like oils and acrylics do. Instead, complexity in the color and gradations are best created by layering the applications.

**Glazing with Tempera**

Because of the nature of tempera, it is suited for glazing. Glazing is the process of layering translucent applications of color over other areas of color. Each glaze slightly alters the color. This allows the artist to make subtle changes in the value, intensity, and hue. Glazing is also a poplar technique with oil painting, watercolor, and acrylics.

**Developing a Range of Value**

In every drawing or painting that we create, we should strive for a full range of value and tone. With tempera painting, developing this range of value is best approached through patient layering of the medium. We can gradually “push” the darker values by layering progressively darker tones of color where appropriate. This approach is not unlike watercolor painting.

For lighter values, the same approach is taken. By glazing progressively lighter values over areas, we can gradually create areas of lighter tone. We can’t take this same approach with watercolor, but you may compare it with the process of layering colored pencils or pastels in a drawing.

Now that we have a basic understanding of the history of tempera paint and its characteristics, you may be thinking about trying this medium out for yourself. You can purchase pre-made tubes of egg tempera if you prefer, or you can make your own. Pre-made tempera tubes are expensive, but save you the trouble of making your own paints each time you want you want to paint.

But if you’re up for an easy project and a little nostalgia, you may find mixing your own paints a pleasant adventure. But, it should be pointed out that you’ll need to mix the paint for each painting session. As the yolk dries, which happens fairly quickly, it gradually becomes unusable.

**Below we’ll cover:**

* How to make the egg tempera vehicle.
* How to make egg tempera paint.
* A description of the egg tempera painting process.
* A sample painting, photographed in stages, completed in egg tempera.
* Materials for Making Egg Tempera Paint

**The supplies needed to get started using egg tempera are:**

* Eggs
* Powdered pigments
* Distilled water
* Illustration board or another smooth surface on which to paint
* Watercolor brushes – a small round brush and a flat brush
* A palette, a few small containers, and paper towel

How to Make Egg Tempera Vehicle

A paint’s vehicle makes the paint move. It is or includes the binder, which makes the paint stick and holds the pigment together. The vehicle for egg tempera is a combination of egg yolk and distilled water. The egg yolk is the binder.

Fresh eggs are supposedly best but in the modern world, most people do not have access to a hen house. Using store bought eggs is fine.

Step 1 – Separate the yolk of an egg from the white (the clear part). Do so using a slotted spoon or by passing the yolk back-and-forth between the shell’s two halves until the white of the egg falls away. Try to remove as much of the white as possible since the white of the egg may hinder the adhesion qualities of the paint.

Step 2 – Now dry the egg’s yolk by rolling it on a paper towel or pass it between your hands until it is dry. Ideally, the egg yolk sack should be strong enough to lift between the thumb and forefinger.

Step 3 – Puncture the yolk sack and collect the contents in a small dish or jar. Some egg’s yolk sacks will rupture prematurely. If you can still collect the contents then do so.

Step 4 – Discard the yolk sack.

Step 5 – Add a teaspoon of distilled water to the yolk. Stir it in.

Congratulations – the vehicle is ready. Now we’re ready to make the actual paint.

How to Make Egg Tempera Paint

All paints are made by combining a binder with pigment. Most paints will also include some of the solvent to aid in the viscosity. Egg tempera paint is made by combining pigments with the vehicle described above. The solvent, in this case is distilled water while the binder is the egg yolk (as mentioned before). So now we just need to add the pigment.

Pigment is the color. Throughout the years, pigments have been acquired from various resources including plants, naturally occurring minerals, and even insects. But before we go looking for an insect to extract color from, we may just purchase powdered pigments. Pure pigments are available through most online art supply retailers. The pigments used in the example painting below are processed by Gamblin.

Reference: https://thevirtualinstructor.com/blog/painting-with-egg-tempera