

EGG TEMPERA

Brief history and thoughts on egg tempera.

Egg Tempera – Paint employing egg yolk as a binder for the pigment.

Origins of tempera are uncertain, but in Europe it seems to have supplanted earlier media, such as encaustic (hot wax) as a vehicle for panel paintings – easel works and alter-pieces by the tenth century AD.

The main difference between tempera and oils is that for best results the tempera painter must make his own paints from fresh eggs, water and dry pigment, but there is no mystery about it, and it is in fact simpler to make paints with tempera than with other media.

Tempera paint is made by mixing powder pigments with an egg solution in roughly equal parts. Paints can be bought ready mixed in tubes, but these do not seem to dry as quickly as hand-made paint; so if they are handled as rapidly during the course of working, they will tend to pick up undercoats and suffer from sinking, both of which are normally problems with oil paint rather than tempera.

The surface of egg tempera is soft, very fine, and does not darken with age like oil paint, though an egg-oil emulsion has more of a tendency to do so.

The way tempera flows from the brush has been likened to drawing with a soft pencil, which is not necessarily a disadvantage; once the artist has prepared his/her paints and started painting he/she must keep on at one's work, or the paint will dry up.