

Drawing on Encaustic

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Reasons for drawing on encaustic

Some artists prefer to draw than paint.

Exploits the layered translucency of encaustic to create depth and enhances atmospheric perspective.

Drawing marks allow light to penetrate layers of wax creating luminosity.

Layering drawn marks separated by translucent wax creates a unique richness of color and texture unparalleled by any other surface bound medium.

Less expensive than painting with encaustic medium.

Less electricity used since one doesn't have to keep colors melted.

Easily reversible, "erasing" by scraping marks on surface without affecting lower drawing layers separated by medium.

Challenges

Fusing and layering wax over drawing has potential to smear and disrupt the integrity of drawn marks. Mastering drawing on encaustic requires learning the characteristics of different mediums and how they respond to the encaustic process in their application, fusing and layering. It takes practice to acquire the techniques to control the drawn marks during these processes. In some cases disruptions, spreading and movement of the drawn mediums may be appealing, but true mastery is the ability to control and choose the effects rather than accepting disruptions by default.

Categories of drawing techniques

Direct: using drawing medium to directly apply marks to the wax surface

Indirect: drawing on paper, then transferring the drawing to the wax surface

Semi-direct: coating paper with a medium, laying it medium side down on the wax surface, then drawing on the clean side to transfer medium to the wax.

Intaglio: drawing by scribing or incising the wax surface, then coating the wax with pigmented medium and wiping the surface clean, leaving pigment in the incised marks

Collaged drawing: drawing on paper and then imbedding the paper in the wax.

Negative drawing: scratching through pigmented areas with tool to remove pigment.

Prep and general concepts

Saturate the wood panel with medium, fuse well. Build up several (4-6) layers to a fairly smooth surface with as few bubbles as possible.

In general, allow the wax to cool between most steps (exceptions will be noted). Warmer wax is softer and drawing mediums tend to dig into the wax and not transfer pigment as well. In indirect methods, paper tends to stick to the wax.

DIRECT DRAWING MEDIUMS

Oil sticks

All oil based mediums tend to spread a bit with fusing which softens the marks. This may be a reason to choose these mediums for certain effects. Also useful with intaglio techniques. Wax can be a bit warmer in accepting the oilier pigment sticks and pastels.

Oil pastels

Similar to oil sticks but due to smaller size, easier to make finer marks.

R&F pigment stick: creamy, oily. Not suitable for fine lines but great for adding color fields, washes and stains, intaglio.

Kama oil stick: firmer and thinner lines possible. Again all oil sticks good for adding color in fields and broader marks, intaglio.

Windsor Newton oil bar

Sennelier oil stick

Sennelier oil pastels: Nice range of colors. Very smooth in application and can wipe and blend colors easily on the wax surface.

India ink

India ink seems to work better than other drawing inks, including sumi, for drawing on wax. It has less of a tendency to bead up when applied and thin out when fused. This allows better control of lines. Application with a brush or soft tool such as a stick, cotton swab or Fantastix brush. Metal pen tips tend to dig into the wax, though that can work too as the ink may fill in the groove (modified intaglio). Need to allow ink to complete drying and evaporation of water before fusing. Wider lines will wrinkle and pucker when dry acting like a film. Lines will break and float a bit with fusing but don't spread. Very marked distinction develops in layers as deeper ink becomes lighter gray contrasting with sharper blacks near the surface.

Wax crayons

NOT Crayolas. Artist quality wax based drawing crayons. Excellent for fine thin controllable colored lines most resistant to disruption. My favorites are also water soluble which adds the option of washes and painterly effects. One can go over the drawn marks with a wet brush or wet the wax surface and draw into the wet area.

Wax needs to be very cool for these firmer crayons so that they don't dig into the soft wax. When layered, fine lines appear as threads floating in the wax.

Caran d' Ache Neocolor II water soluble crayons

Caran d' Ache Neoart Aquarelle

Lyra Aquacolor water soluble artists crayons

Faber Castell Aquarelle stick

Markers

Pigment ink, light fast, archival markers. I have only tried ZIG pens but others probably work well too. Some colors tended to shrink, break up and fade when fused. Applies smoothly on wax surface. Wider tips better as fine tips dig into wax, though they may work with a gentle touch.

ZIG Calligraphy marker pens

Faber-Castell Pitt artist pens

Letraset Aqua ProMarkers: watersoluble

Prismacolor Premium Illustration markers

Charcoal

Great for gestural drawing and tonal smearing directly on the wax surface. Softer charcoal probably works best for direct drawing. As with india ink, deep blacks possible and distinct progression of tonal changes as each layer is added enhancing the sense of depth. Works well with oil mediums for combination of line and color.

Alphacolor Char-kole sticks

INDIRECT DRAWING MEDIUMS

Tracing paper

I find tracing paper best for drawing transfers. It is sturdy and tolerates burnishing well. Pigment sits on the surface rather than being trapped in the paper fibers. It allows visualization of the work on the panel for positioning. Burnishing progress is visible as the paper becomes more transparent where it is burnished to the wax, yet it does not stick to the wax and peels off easily without tearing. One can trace or mark the position of existing imagery onto the burnished side to position new marks on the drawing side. One can trace other imagery onto it then transfer the tracing onto wax. NOTE: drawings will be reversed when transferred.

Burnishing tools

Spoons work but small printmaking burnishing tools are best for following fine lines and marks.

Charcoal

Even more control of fine lines than with direct method. Transfers beautifully with every nuance of charcoal pigment reproduced.

Graphite

Transfers well like charcoal. All forms work well: graphite sticks and pencils of all hardnesses. Water soluble graphite also works and creates some very interesting washes and effects.

Colored Pencil

Works well but not as strongly transferred as graphite. Perhaps different brands would work differently. Worth exploring what you have. Fine lines possible with minimal disruption on fusing. Wide range of colors available.

Derwent Studio Rexel Cumberland colored pencils

Soft Pastel

Wider marks and granular texture. Like colored charcoal in effects. Smears for tone on wax surface with fingers.

Rembrandt soft pastels

Hard Pastel

Firmer, less powdering, tighter lines than soft pastel

Nouvel Carre' pastel

Yarka sauce, sanguine, and sepia

SEMI-DIRECT METHODS

Works with all indirect drawing mediums. Allows drawing without reversals. Some unintentional transfer may occur from finger pressure, but this may be cleaned if desired by scraping. Also useful for printed imagery, either traced or printed onto paper.

Coat back of paper with chosen medium. Lay coated side onto wax and draw on paper with pencil, ball point pen or other somewhat blunt tool.

Also works with carbon paper and other commercial transfer papers.

FUSING THE DRAWING

Wax should be cool. Oil mediums should be thin or fairly dry. Some oiliness will dry with the fusing. Ink or applied water should be dry. Inadequate fusing will allow smearing with wax application.

Goal is to fuse very shallowly, just allowing pigment to sink into wax surface. Deeper fusing can cause flowing of wax and movement of lines and marks.

If using a heat gun use low fan and high heat settings. Torch preferable, especially the Iwatani with low air flow setting.

Fuse with fairly quick but even passes across the wax, just melting the surface to glistening. Fuse across the panel, from the top down toward you, in horizontal bands. Hold the torch at a low angle, feathering the flame into the edge of the previous fusing pass.

If unsure of adequacy of fusing, allow surface to cool a bit and then repeat the fuse.

ALLOW TO COOL after fusing.

COATING THE DRAWING WITH MEDIUM

This is the trickiest step and where most smearing and disruption of drawing occurs. The goal is to add a thin, even layer of clean medium over the image without damaging the drawing. It takes practice but several things can help achieve success.

Use a good quality hake brush. It holds a lot of melted wax, applies it smoothly. Should be juicy and saturated with wax. Wax on panel should be cool so that added hot wax doesn't bring top layer to melting temperature. Hot medium should also be on the cooler side.

Brush strokes should be even, not overlapping, preferably parallel to main direction of marks. Allow medium to flow off of brush as it is drawn across panel with minimal brush pressure. Check brush for picked up pigment. Wipe it off on table paper so medium source not contaminated.

FUSING THE MEDIUM LAYER

Fuse right away without cooling. Want added wax to melt easily and just blend with thin amount of wax layer containing drawing. Again, hot, gentle, even, moderately quick passes with the torch. Start at the top and work toward yourself in horizontal passes, flame at low angle, feathered flame overlapping into previously fused area.

More layers of medium may be added right away for more separation of marks, enhancing depth and light penetration. Drawing now protected by wax layer, but still fuse carefully.