

## **Watercolor & Gouache**

At one time all paint was water based and a lot like gouache to use, the pigments chosen tended to make a relatively opaque paint and transparency was seen as a great fault. Paper did not exist and the papyrus used and the walls of buildings and tombs did not suit transparent paints. The colors tended to be limited and suited bold graphic styles then prevalent.

Ancient Egyptian art typified this use of relatively opaque waterbased paints. All the pigments used with the exception of Egyptian Blue Frit tended to naturally make opaque or semiopaque paints. Egyptian Blue Frit was dark so its natural translucency still covered well. Colors tended to be applied as pure colors with a minimum of mixing if any. This paint could cover well anyway but was often applied thinly over a layer of white.

It wasn't until after the widespread introduction of paper and changed art tastes that required the use of a wide range of colors, many of which were transparent that the modern materials of watercolor and gouache were born. The idea of adding gums to pigments to help them stick to surfaces is ancient, and the inks used by medieval illuminators in bibles was quite like watercolor in many ways, but it was Durer wanting to do some 'sketching' on his journey to Italy who was probably the first artist to use watercolor in a way that we would recognize in the form of transparent washes on paper for its own sake. His apprenticeship had been in a studio making woodcuts for the Nuremberg Chronicle and some of the woodcuts were tinted with transparent colors in gum and it seems this was the beginning of Durer's famous use of both media.

Gouache has an origin lost in time but we do know that the name may have originally been applied to Tempera by the Italians and that the idea of adding chalk to make watercolor opaque developed some time later. As the ancients knew, opacity is valuable for many ways of painting, but the new idea of adding chalk in carefully measured amounts to interact with and enhance the color meant that virtually any color could now be opaque. Gouache as we understand the term has been in existence for at least 200 years. During the late 19th and the 20th century the demand for 'designers colors' meant that gouache ceased to be regarded for a

time as serious art materials as bright pigments of dubious character became normal in most ranges of gouache color. Today as designers abandon paint for photoshop, gouache is returning to a focus on the needs of professional fine artist's. There are many that love the juicy qualities of these paints. I am sure the ancient Egyptians would totally agree.

**Watercolor Transparent paint, the delicate touch.**

Watercolor was once made as hard cakes, the pigment ground with water and gum then allowed to harden. it kept very well that way, but the colors tended to weak due to the difficulty of dissolving sufficient color when needed. The discovery that a small amount of glycerin and honey could make 'semi moist' cakes was a revelation and this is the form that most artists are familiar with as pan or half pan type watercolors. They are easy to make in this form and there are those that believe that it is the form that provides the best balance between the purity of the pigment and usability. The desire for strong 'hits' of color by many modern artist's however has lead to the increasing adoption of a watercolor that is more liquid and storable in a tube. It's viscosity is such that the paint when squeezed from the tube should not run and should not display excess gum solution when properly made this way. This tube paint requires more additives than the pan watercolor, but there are many creative benefits to watercolor of this type. it should be noted that the maker of paint in the studio is more likely to use their paint while fresh and so can maximize the pigment ratio in ways not available to a manufacturer who needs to assume that paint made today may not be touched for many weeks, months, or years.

**Gouache Strong, bold, and punchy,**

The addition of chalk to all but the most opaque pigments tends to lend a natural smoothness to this paint. The gums are similar to watercolor but the paint is made more liquid, a consistency like cream makes a very user friendly gouache. it is normal to store the made up paint in glass jars, and top up with water to make up for evaporation.