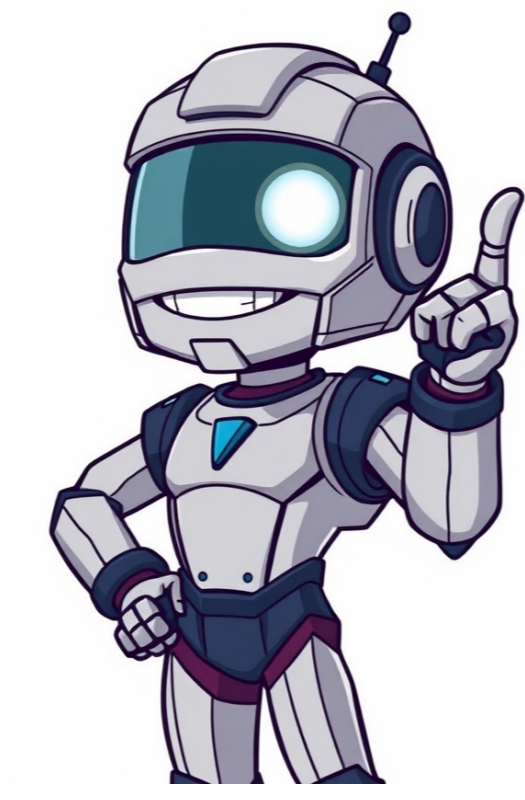


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Lightfastness and Permanency of Watercolors by David Lex Rollins You probably put a lot of yourself into your watercolor paintings: time, energy, concentration, anger, love, blood, sweat, & tears. So you sure don't want your creations to fade, discolor, or otherwise deteriorate. Here are some things to consider to prevent that from happening: • your paper • framing and mounting materials • properly displaying finished watercolors • and, of course, the pigments in your paints I'll concentrate on pigments in this article, but first I'll briefly touch on the other aspects. Paper In my opinion, this is pretty basic - simply use only 100% acid-free (sometimes referred to as pH-neutral) paper. Framing and mounting Make sure your framer uses 100% acid-free materials. Everything - the mats, backing, spacers, foam board, even the adhesives should all be acid-free. Although I actually had one framer tell me that it isn't necessary to go acid-free for watercolors (I refused to give him my business), most reputable framers will use acid-free materials as a matter of course. But certainly make a point of insisting on it just to be safe. Another practice is to use UV-filtering glass, although it seems that this isn't common, probably because of the additional expense. It might be worth considering if your painting will be displayed in direct sunlight (something I don't recommend). Displaying A couple of general tips: • Do not display your paintings in areas of high humidity. Pigments Some pigments react to a wide variety of environmental conditions - exposure to light is the main one, but acids (see above) and alkalis will damage many pigments, as will atmospheric impurities. However, the primary consideration is the light-fastness of the pigments used in producing the paint. Will it fade? Insisting on using only those paints whose pigments are rated good or excellent in light-fastness is the most important action you can take. Fortunately, most paint manufacturers now label their tubes with the necessary information. Unfortunately, it often takes a magnifying glass to read this, and some solid knowledge to interpret it. In my opinion, you should shun a manufacturer who does not label their tubes with all the information you need to make an informed purchasing decision. If they refuse to tell me what it is that they sell, I won't buy. What you want to look for are the actual pigments used in formulating the paint (expressed as both the common name and the Color Index Number), and the permanency rating of the paint. The commonly accepted light-fast rating system is the one from the American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM). Paints are rated: 1. Excellent light-fastness II. Very good light-fastness III. Colors can fade badly, especially the tints IV. Colors will fade rapidly V. Colors will bleach very quickly My strong recommendation is to use only those paints made from pigments in the top two ASTM light-fast categories (I and II). Until you are comfortable that you know beyond a doubt what pigments to avoid, I recommend that you rely on some good reference material. Two of the best ones are: Handprint.com handprint.com offers information on all aspects of watercolors, including the author's determination of the permanency ratings of many paints. My experience has been that handprint.com provides a lot of useful information, but there is so much there that it might be hard to sift through stuff you're not interested in and find just what you're looking for. I've also found several cases where the information was outdated - the manufacturer had changed the formulation of paints, but the website still presented the old information. Also keep in mind that the author is unabashedly opinionated. 2) The Wilcox Guide to the Best Watercolor Paints, by Michael Wilcox This excellent book provides lots of information on how you select the best paint for the edition you rely on. The book's library has only a 5-year-old edition. I have the 2001-2002 edition and I'll get the newest one as soon as I see that it's available. I prefer this book to the one that Michael Wilcox is so opinionated as the author of handprint.com. And just as with handprint.com, I've found some outdated information. Some random thoughts: • There are few cases where a manufacturer's Student Grade of a particular paint is considered almost as good as the Artists Quality paint, and you can get a fine paint at a lower cost. But these cases are rare, so I recommend that you usually stick with the Artists Quality range. • Don't rely on the name that the manufacturers give a particular color - they can call it anything they want, and you could end up wasting your money on an inferior paint. On the other hand, a paint could be marketed as Hooker's Green, yet be made using pigments that are more permanent than the fugitive one used in genuine Hooker's Green. Since trade names abound, you should rely on the actual pigments used to make your purchasing decisions. • Be cautious if the paint has "Hue" in the name. Many of these are artificial colors that use pigments different from what you would expect based on the name. For example, one noted manufacturer used to sell a color called Cadmium Yellow Pale Hue. True Cadmium Yellow is made from PY37, which is absolutely light-fast. This hue was made from PY1 (Arylide Yellow) which not only fades quickly, but it also can discolor and/or darken. On a side note, "hues" are often mixed from multiple pigments, and many artists agree that this could more likely lead to muddy colors as opposed to using "single-pigment" paints. Pigments to avoid (based on poor light-fastness) This list gives the Color Index Name (example - PY1), the Common Name (example - Arylide Yellow), and the lightfast rating (either from the ASTM or from Michael Wilcox; ratings range from I, which denotes excellent lightfastness, to V, which denotes that the colors will bleach out very quickly), followed in some cases by notes. The information in this section comes from The Wilcox Guide to the Best Watercolor Paints, 2001-2 edition, by Michael Wilcox. Yellows: Be very cautious when purchasing yellow paints. In my opinion, only the reds and violets exceed the yellows in the number of inferior pigments being marketed to the public. PY1 Arylide Yellow G not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Quickly faded as a wash, and darkened at full strength. PY11 Arylide yellow G ASTM rating of III Faded quickly, especially as a thin wash. Also called Hansa Yellow Medium. PY4 Arylide Yellow 13G not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of III PY12 Diarylide Yellow AAA not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of IV Will quickly fade. Pigment is also called Benzidine AAA.DI PY13 Diarylide Yellow AAMX not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of IV PY14 Diarylide Yellow OT not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of IV Pigment is also known as Benzidine Yellow AAO. PY17 Diarylide Yellow AO not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Thin wash faded rapidly, mass tone became duller. PY20 Benzidine Yellow B not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of IV NY24 Gamboge not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Washes bleach out rapidly. PY55 Diarylide Yellow PT not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of IV Faded rapidly, especially as a tint. PY74LF Arylide Yellow 5GX ASTM rating of III There are 2 versions - LF (oddly enough meaning Light Fast) and HS (meaning High Strength). Neither is lightfast. PY100 Tartrazine Lake not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V According to Wilcox, this is an utterly worthless substance for artistic use. PY110 Isoindolinone Yellow R not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of III Wilcox states that this pigment has appeared on the ASTM list as both III (not approved) and I (approved). His testing showed rapid fading. A few of the Arylide Yellows (PY3, PY65, PY97, and PY152) and the Diarylide Yellows (PY8-HR70 and PY152) are considered acceptable or better. Oranges: PO1 Hansa Orange not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V PO13 Pyrazolone Orange not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V PO34 Diarylide Orange not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Also called Benzidine Orange Reds: It seems that the reds and violets have the greatest number of inferior paints marketed to the unwary artist. PR2 Naphthol Red FRR ASTM rating of V PR3 Toluidine Red not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V PR4 Chlorinated Para Red not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Tints bleached rapidly, while mass tones became darker and duller. NR4 Carmine ASTM rating of V Fades rapidly as a tint, and becomes brownish in mass tone. PR5 Naphthol 1TR ASTM rating of III According to Wilcox, this pigment is marketed under many other names. So always look for the Color Index Number before spending your money. PR7 Naphthol AS-OL ASTM rating of III As with most fugitive pigments, this one faded as a tint and became duller in mass tone. PR9 Naphthol AS-OL ASTM rating of III This pigment is also called Naphthol Bright Red. NR9 Natural Rose Madder ASTM rating of IV Be suspicious of anything with "Madder" in the name; make sure you check the Color Index Number before buying. PR23 Naphthol Red not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V According to Wilcox, this pigment is also called Imperse Red. No matter what name you give it, it's highly unreliable. PR48-1 Permanent Red 2B (Barium) not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V PR48-2 Permanent Red 2B (Calcium) ASTM rating of IV Another name for this pigment is Calcium Red 2B. PR48-4 Permanent Red 2B (Manganese) not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of II to III Another name for this pigment is Manganese Red 2B. PR49-1 Lithol Red not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of IV PR53-1 Red Lake C (Barium) not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Also called Barium Red Lake C. PR57 Lithol Rubine (Sodium) not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Better suited as a food colorant than as an artist's paint. PR57-1 Lithol Rubine (Calcium) not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Also called Rubine 4G. PR60 Scarlet Lake (Sodium) not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V It seems that a paint with "Lake" in the name
should arouse your suspicions. PR81 Rhodamine Y not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Also called PTMA Pink. PR82 Rhodamine Yellow Shade not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V PR83 Rose Madder. Alizarin ASTM rating of IV If you get nothing else out of this article, please remember that PR83 should be avoided at all costs. PR83-1 Alizarin Crimson not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of IV I am appalled that even reputable manufacturers still offer Alizarin Crimson, knowing full well that it is very fugitive. Perhaps it's because many noted artists continue to recommend Alizarin Crimson in their books (which is as just as unethical as the paint companies selling it). PR90 Perylene Red not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Also called Eosine. PR105 Red Lead not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V "...unsuitable for artistic use..." PR17 Phthalocyanine Blue not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of II Note that most Phthalo Blues use better pigments (PB15 and PB6). But this pigment is best avoided. In other words, read the label carefully, because some manufacturers may sneak in PR17, making an unreliable sounding paint inferior. PB24 Fugitive Peacock Blue not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Wilcox says "this pigment, without any doubt, makes my vote as the most unsuitable substance for artistic use that I have ever come across." Nothing else needs to be said. Greens: Just as with the blues, most green paints are made with reliable pigments. There are a few to be wary of: PG1 Brilliant Green not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of V Thinner washes faded, mass tones darkened. Also poor alkali resistance. PG8 Hooker's Green ASTM rating of III I was surprised to find this popular pigment to be less than lightfast. PG12 Naphthol Green ASTM rating of IV It looks like anytime you see the word "Naphthol", you should proceed carefully. Browns: There are only a few brown pigments to watch out for. NR8 Van Dyke Brown not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of IV Especially fugitive in a thin wash. PB8 Manganese Brown not ASTM tested, Wilcox rating of IV Wilcox says that this is reported to be reliable, but he has not seen test results to verify it. His tests showed that it to be an inferior pigment, which faded quickly and discolored. Useful Threads I investigated many threads that included the terms "permanent", "lightfast", and "ASTM". Generally, they were all similar, and I didn't see any information that I have not already included above. Here are three representative threads: Aureolin Art lightfastness update Some of my paintings over the years We must leave our mark on this world Yorky ... the two links you posted are giving 400 Errors - I'm back to WC after a long absence and don't know if it is a function of my absence (admin had to reset my cookies) or the links are no longer valid. I know there is at least one other lengthy discussion on lightfastness (study by Anne?) that I was just reading. IP Lawyer/Materials Scientist/Artist Shore Lake Erie, Ohio You must be logged in to reply to this topic. Is it possible to paint over watercolor sketches? Or if you do a full range of watercolor pencils, do you use oil paint over that without any future problems? Thanks Stephanie. It's not very brilliant, but the paper, and make it very brittle, as the paint ages. Oil paint soaking in paper does not make for a very desirable condition. Now, we're going to paint over watercolor over an acrylic-primer paper, then I believe you could safely apply oil over it, without fear of the oil harming the paper in years to come. Others have had better suggestions. Bill wmartin. My Blog "Creative Realism" ... oh my sorry I should have mentioned that I would be doing this on gessoboard, the stuff I have says you can watercolor on it too. I should think that would be OK to do, although I'm not quite sure why you'd want to paint over a watercolor image with oil paint. Bill wmartin. My Blog "Creative Realism" ... when I pastel painted, I was used to having watercolor underpaintings, it was easier to erase if I made any mistakes. yes, i know i could do an oil underpainting, but im experimenting here lol. Thank you for your quick responses by the way i appreciate your advice and opinions Is it possible to paint over watercolor sketches? Or if you do a full rendering in watercolor pencils, can you use oil paint over that without any future problems? Hi Stephanie: If your support has a gesso ground, you could use india ink to lay in a tonal base, which is really all you need. You can thin it just like watercolor. This practice predates oil painting, when artists worked in egg tempera. However, even that's better done in oil - it's called grisailles. There wouldn't be any good reason to use colors because you must jump to oil anyway. Oil and watercolor techniques are very different, so the sooner you move to oil, the better. If you want - and it's a good idea - use your watercolor pencils to do a rough study sketch for reference. If you're still interested in trying out the watercolor-first approach, go for it, but on a test piece or two. Nothing - but nothing - beats hands-on experience. cheers! I say go for it. The special flow properties of watercolor could add an interesting look to your painting. You may not see the exact look on board that you would see on paper, however. Be sure all the water is completely gone. The oils themselves should not spread over your watercolor surface below, in fact it should help seal it, but if you mix in any solvent it might. David Blaine Clemens My Website My Blog I have been struggling to get my watercolor to not wray as I paint (an all too common problem). Even after upgrading to 100% cotton paper (Arches 140 lb), it still warps. 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Winsor & Newton calls PV19 Permanent Magenta, and they are both series 3, so they should both cost the same in stores, if that was even a factor worth considering. Maybe it just comes down to taste. I'd go for PV19. You know I pretty much only paint from little travel palettes, and PR122 keeps getting booted off of it! OTOH, I just contemplated a 5-color midget palette and PV19 was a no-brainer. PV19 makes great oranges "and" great purples, and a smidge of yellow and it's a warm red, it neutralizes some greens, powerful mixer but makes lovely tints, etc. etc. It's so basic, can't imagine not having it. ...my not-at-all humble opinion. CK =) I take great comfort in knowing that my genuine tints will probably be blamed on some device's autocorrect. DIY art supplies, sketches, and more: cynthia.com / @cynatda Thanks Virgil! I have not used it for a long time, so maybe I can get by with one or the other and mixing differently... 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