SCHOOL OF VISUAL PHILOSOPHY

ENCAUSTIC BASICS STUDIO

INSTRUCTED
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ENCAUSTIC BASICS

MATERIALS

Setting up your Encaustic Area

Encaustic Medium is made from Bee's Wax and Damar Resin. Bee's wax is usually purified and/or bleached to remove impurities and the natural yellow color. Damar resin is crystallized tree sap from a particular tree family in southeast Asia and India. The resin hardens the wax and allow it to be polished and painted on with a certain amount of durability.

The components are mixed together in a ratio of 9 parts bee's wax to 1 part resin. Because the wax cools as soon as it is painted on, the palette for encaustic painting as well as the paint itself is kept warm.

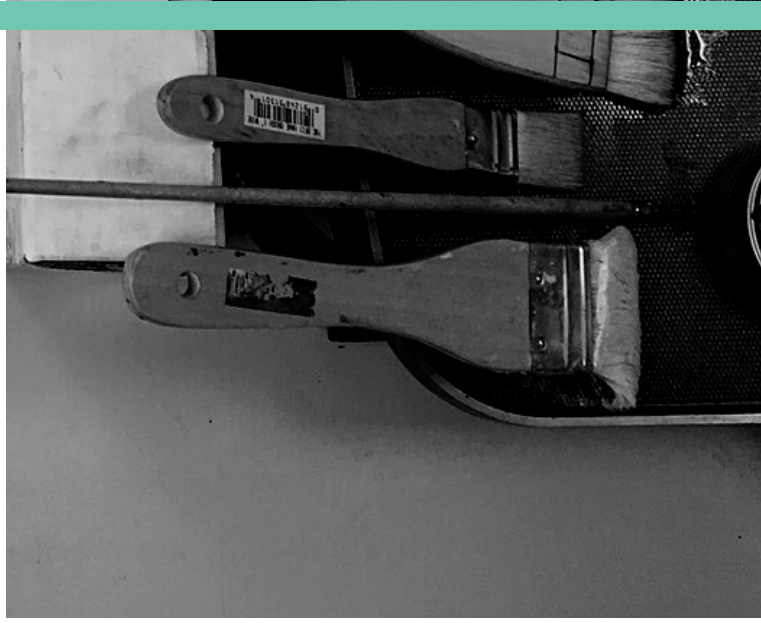
The wax ideally melts at 200 degrees Fahrenheit, which is what our palette or hot plate should be set to. Using a thermometer to keep this regulated is important during painting.

Hot Plate
Having a palette that can melt the paint in tins and mix directly on it while warm is an important element. A simple pancake griddle will suffice, and if you want a slightly better surface to mix paint on without it beading up, use an anodized aluminum plate over an electric burner.

Brushes
Brushes that can withstand the heat of the encaustic medium and not melt or singe are crucial to the process. I recommend **Hake** brushes in a variety of sizes. Once you use a brush for encaustic, there's no going back- you're stuck with it!

ENCAUSTIC BASICS

MATERIALS, CONT'D



More Materials

Fusing Tool
Because the encaustic paint goes on hot and cools very rapidly, it does not initially create a smooth, surface that is bonded to the substrate. In order to really get the wax and pigment absorbed into the panel, paper or wax layer underneath, you need to fuse the most recent encaustic layer before applying another.

We do this using a heating tool like a **propane torch, butane torch or heat gun**. The idea is that the wax is re-melted after being applied with the brush and brought back up to 200 degrees so that it smooths out and bonds completely to the layer below.

The torch you use should ideally be able to be adjusted for heat and air flow- allowing you to fuse lightly for delicate work, or heavily for flowy textures or a very smooth surface.

Substrate
Because encaustic is by nature an inflexible medium, meaning it doesn't like to bend after it's cooled or it will crack, you need to apply the paint to something rigid. The substrates I like to use are cradled panels, or just boards like plywood and masonite that I can mount and frame easily.

Brushes
Brushes that can withstand the heat of the encaustic medium and not melt or singe are crucial to the process. I recommend

PAINTING INSTRUCTIONS

ENCAUSTIC MEDIUM

YOUR FIRST PAINT LAYERS

1. Start by heating up your medium and paints on the hot plate. You can use the built in gauge on the hot plate to determine your temperature or you can use a meat thermometer to determine the proper melting temperature. Your brushes should also be warming either in the wax pots or on the hot plate itself.
2. Prepare the surface you will be painting on by taping the edges of the panel (if they are thicker than 1/4"). You can either leave the wood bare or paint a few layers of encaustic gesso for a white background
3. Take your transparent medium and appropriate brush and apply one complete layer on the panel, keeping the direction of your strokes consistent for the most even finish. Your panel should be sitting on a level surface for this.
4. Rotate the panel 90 degrees and then apply a second layer of medium.
5. Use your torch or heat gun to heavily fuse these layers to create a nice bond to the panel and to each other.
6. If you want a very smooth surface, apply 2 more layers in this way and fuse.
7. You can now start adding color and fusing each new layer either heavily for a smooth texture or lightly to retain the brush strokes.

CLEANING UP YOUR PALETTE

1. Heat your brushes on the hot plate and then wipe them carefully onto a rag or paper towel. Remember once wax comes into contact with material, it's nearly impossible to remove so use something disposable. Set your brushes aside to cool where they won't stick to each other or to a surface. (I set mine on a table edge with the bristles off the edge)
2. While your hot plate is still warm (you can turn it down from 200 degrees to 90 if you wish) remove your paint tins and set aside on a heat proof surface (not wood) to cool
3. Wipe down your hot plate with a bunched up paper towel or rag to pick up the excess wax.

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VOCABULARY

ENCAUSTIC PAINTING

Encaustic Medium
A material made from bee's wax and Damar resin.

Substrate
A rigid surface to which hot encaustic wax medium is applied.

Fusing
The process of melting each layer of encaustic paint to the one beneath it. This ensures the paint is completely adhered to the surface (substrate) and to each other.

Ground
A base paint or material that is applied first to prepare the substrate before painting with encaustic medium. This is most often encaustic gesso.

Glazing
The process of applying layers of translucent paint over each other to achieve rich depth. Encaustic is perfect for this because you can add as much or as little transparent encaustic medium to make the paint more or less see through.

Texture
Encaustic can produce either a smooth or a rough texture depending on how the wax is applied and/or fused

Inlay
The process of scratching into the wax surface and applying a color into the lines, then wiping off the excess to add color and drawing to the painting.

Accretion
The process of building up textures with wax without fusing to create a very dimensional work. This is often done with a "dry brush" or by letting the wax cool on the brush before applying.