

Egg Tempera Painting

Egg tempera is an ancient medium, dating back to the classical world and prevalent in medieval Europe until oil paints were developed. Egg tempera paint must be mixed fresh each day — dry pigments dispersed with water and bound with diluted egg yolk. I prepare my painting surface in the traditional way, making my own chalk gesso, applying numerous layers to a wood panel sealed with rabbit skin glue and then sanding it smooth. The actual painting process entails countless layers of paint. The technique I use has its roots in Byzantine icon painting, following transparent "petit lac" layers with the opaque layers typical of Italian panel painting. While for an oil painting I would typically mix my colors on the palette, for an egg tempera painting I employ "optical mixing": generally I use fully saturated colors, but because they are layered one over another, the colors you see are actually a vertical blend. One reason many of my paintings are dark is to sustain the intensity of the pigments, with minimal use of white.

No matter how many layers of paint, nothing ever fully disappears in an egg tempera painting, a characteristic that has strongly influenced the way I think about my paintings, which comprise not only layers of paint, but layers of images and layers of meaning. For me, the infinitude of layers makes an egg tempera painting essentially three-dimensional, extending *in* as well as across the two-dimensional panel.

Care

When carrying an egg tempera painting, *please be aware that the paint scratches and chips easily and handle it accordingly.* Before transporting it, you may protect it by slipping it carefully into a plastic bag and wrapping it with bubble wrap. In spite of the fragility of their surface, egg tempera paintings are traditionally framed without glass, like oil paintings. The egg yolk lends a natural sheen to the surface, so no varnish is necessary.

I recommend keeping egg tempera paintings in their protective covering until hung, especially in a house with pets. Dogs and cats may be attracted to the egg yolk in the paint and have been known to lick off an entire painting! After about a year the paint will have fully cured and hardened, at which time it may be less appealing to animals, though it may still be prone to scratching.

Nan Runde
www.nanrunde.com
art@nanrunde.com
on Facebook: Nan Runde Fine Art