

SUSTAINABILITY OF WATERCOLOUR PAINTING MEDIUM IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

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ABSTRACT

Watercolour painting medium has been proven to be an effective and unique medium of painting. The medium is believed to have existed since the cave paintings era. Many renounce painters have used the medium to produce paintings that express their emotions or feelings. But in recent times only but few used the medium to produce paintings. Thus, encouraging more painters to use the medium to produce paintings and to guide against the medium going into extinction inspired the need to discuss watercolourist painting medium in this paper. The paper aims to enable artists and non-artists to understand that watercolour has been in use and to encourage painters who may desire watercolour as their preferred choice while producing paintings. However, due to the technicalities and manipulative ingenuity involved in using the medium not so many painters use the medium frequently, but for does that have consistently used the medium can attest to the fact that the medium is efficient and effective to produce paintings. Thus, to ensure that the medium is sustainable, the paper reviewed some cognate literature on watercolour that focuses on the meaning of watercolour, the historical origin of watercolour, and the significance of watercolour in the production of painting, sustainability of watercolour painting medium, among others. The paper concludes that watercolour painting is endowed with rich aesthetic potentials that need to be explored. The more paintings should be encouraged to use the medium to produce their paintings.

Keywords: Sustainability, watercolour, painting, contemporary

INTRODUCTION

Art appeared in the early stages of the development of mankind, and the desire of primitive man to depict the surrounding existence, to depict all the phenomena that occur daily in the constant struggle for their existence, has been observed since ancient times. Stone sculptures of idols, images on rocks, rock carvings, drawings on bones - all these are traces of a creative product created by the keen eye and skilful hands of a primitive artist. The value of art is incomparable in man's understanding of the reality of life and his mastery of it, as well as in the sense of his place in front of him, and nature and events played an important role in its emergence. From the world of nature and the animal world, man learned to draw from nature the beautiful plastic solution of the human structure, and nature became the main factor in awakening in man a sense of art.

All types of art reflect different aspects of life and embody the uniqueness of the world and the beauty of man. However, the art of painting occupies a special and important place among them. The picture can fully express all the diversity of the world in which we live, its infinite diversity, and gives the key to understanding other types of art and feeling their emotional power (Yonusalieu, 2023). Interestingly, in other to use of defined mediums to express the emotions of man gave rise to the innovation of different mediums, media and techniques as they may be. One very unique, simple and economically

manageable medium to produce artworks or paintings that was developed is the watercolour painting medium.

Watercolour is a water-based paint that is applied with a brush to paper, fabric, or other surfaces. It's made of finely ground pigment, gum arabic, and water. Watercolour has always attracted many artists with its purity, transparency and brightness of colours, and watercolour painting occupies a large place in the work of painters. In the technique of watercolour, even the subtlest nuances of colour can be significantly changed to another colour, using the moisture of the paints, gently and freely moving the brush while maintaining the spatial environment in a short period. Over the centuries, the methods of using watercolours have developed and changed in many ways, new possibilities and new research methods of creation have opened up (Yunusaliue, 2023).

According to Lomond (2021), watercolour is a painting method in which the paints are made of pigments suspended in a water-based solution. Watercolour refers to both the medium and the resulting artwork (Waterhouse, 2021). Viscarra (2020) states that the conventional and most common support or surface material to which the paint is applied for watercolour paintings is watercolour paper. Other supports or substrates include stone, ivory, silk, reed, papyrus, bark papers, plastics, vellum, leather, fabric, wood, and watercolour canvas (coated with a gesso that is specially formulated for use with watercolours). Watercolour paper is often made entirely or partially with cotton (Vloothuis, 2017). This gives the surface the appropriate texture and minimizes distortion when wet. Art is Fun (2015) explains that watercolour papers are usually cold-pressed papers that provide better texture and appearance. Transparency is the main characteristic of watercolours. "It consists of a mixture of pigments, binders such as gum arabic and humectants such as glycerin, which together with other components, allow the colour pigment to join and form the paint paste, which we know as watercolour. The colours, the quality of the pigments and their degree of concentration, it is what determines how good the watercolour is and also its price. A paint that has a high concentration of pigment, a professional type, allows us to use it with a large amount of water without losing the intensity of colour.

Watercolour painting according to Carter (2014) is a painting compound using water-soluble pigments that are either transparent or opaque. Carter adds that while watercolour may not rival oils for durability and longevity it is a medium that has a very durable and distinguished history and, clearly, a healthy future. Encyclopedia.com (2016) states that watercolour painting in its wider sense, refers to all pigments mixed with water rather than with oil and also to the paintings produced by this process, it includes fresco and tempera as well as aquarelle, the process now commonly meant by the generic term. Encyclopedia.com adds that it existed long before oil was used in the preparation of pigment; watercolour painting had achieved a high form of sophistication. Watercolour painting as mentioned earlier is very reliable, sophisticated and easy to use as a medium of painting. But, most importantly it gives one the desired aesthetic appeal when the work is being produced.

Watercolour Painting is a type of painting involving the use of water-based ink to create forms on paper. Parramon (1995:7) a watercolour painting must be a la prima at the moment, fast, and spontaneous. The secret is to understand the medium itself: its watery, translucent texture, its fluid rhythms, and its vivid, gem-like colours which render such irresistible results. The painting needs a clear understanding to be able to handle the medium effectively such as mixing the colours, choosing brushes, understanding paper

surfaces, and selecting a palette. Understanding the composition of objects and forms is a major task one should not do in a hurry when dealing with watercolour as well as how to compose, evaluate tone, execute perspective, translate lighting effects, and interpret a theme. In watercolour painting, one should also understand the process associated with it and the techniques of wet-on-wet painting, drybrush, sponge texturing, superimposition of translucent shapes and colours, use of the paper as white, and an examination of style. Watercolour painting has been perceived as a medium for beginners since its invention and has affected its usage in the painting profession. In this regard, watercolour as a painting medium should be seen as a very important medium which can be used for exploration in the painting profession. Thus, knowing the aesthetic appeal of watercolour paint in producing painting, this paper decided to take the task of discussing the watercolour medium of painting to express its effectiveness and viability as a medium of painting.

Wiziack (2024) while focusing on the need to sustain watercolour painting medium among other mediums emphasized the need to sustain watercolour medium of painting due to the role it plays in giving aesthetic appearance to people. The need to sustain watercolour painting medium can never be emphasized putting in mind the role it plays in the development of art. One very important thing to note about the watercolour medium of painting is that the materials used in producing the painting are very cheap and easy to get. This is one reason why it appears to be one medium beginner painting used to start their adventure in their painting career.

Understanding Watercolour

Watercolour paints are basically a mixture of water-soluble binders and pigments along with small quantities of solvents and additives. The pigments present in watercolour paints are responsible for providing the colour. Watercolour paint is a versatile art medium. You can use watercolour paints to apply to everything from fabrics and wood to stone, canvas, and paper.

However, most professional artists usually use watercolour paper to create paintings (Beebly, 2024). Beebly (2024) adds that there are multiple types of watercolour paint but the most common two forms are watercolour tubes and pans. Choosing between different watercolour types is a matter of your own personal preferences and painting style.

Watercolour, written as "watercolour" in British English, is a particular type of paint made from water and pigments. It also usually has a natural binding agent called "gum Arabic." Other binding agents can be used as well, along with substances that may change the viscosity of the paint, impacting the outcome of the artist's work (Study.com, 2024). Watercolour paintings, also referred to simply as watercolours (or "watercolours" in British English), are among the earliest visual art forms. Watercolour paintings can be found in prehistoric caves, and some examples of later works survive from the ancient Egyptian and Chinese civilizations. These early paintings were often made with a specific kind of watercolour called gouache, or body colour. Gouache is made with special additives; such as chalk so that it is opaque. In contrast, traditional watercolour paints are thinner and transparent.

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Historical Origin of Watercolour

Several historical backgrounds have been given to the advent of the watercolour painting medium. Interestingly, most of them express the fact that watercolour painting existed or began during the cave art era. Artloun (2020) states that watercolour art dates from Stone Age cave painting when early Paleolithic man first painted pictures of animals and humans in their caves using charcoal, ochre and other natural pigments. According to Prang (2024), various forms of watercolour painting have existed around the world since the Paleolithic period.

The actual makeup of these early “watercolours” could vary dramatically. Some involved vegetable pigments and others used ink or soot. But the common factor, as you might guess, was always the use of water for dilution and application of the paint. Watercolour paint that’s closer to what we would recognize today, and emerged in Europe during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. However, at that time it was mostly used for sketches and copies, or nature studies.

These works were often either in preparation for the “real” artwork or matters of scientific documentation. Later, in the 18th century, watercolour paints became popular with mapmakers and engineers who found them useful for depicting terrain and project plans. At the same time, it became a fashionable pastime for the well-to-do and was seen as an attractive skill indicative of a good education.

Teravarna (2020) similarly states that watercolour has been around for a long time. Its initial use can be traced back to the European-Paleolithic times, in the form of animal and human pictures in caves. However, it only gained recognition during the Renaissance era. Some of the first artists who used it for their art are Claude Lorrain, Van Dyck, and Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione among other Dutch and Flemish artists.

Watercolour painting in fine art also began around this time. The artists generally credited with establishing watercolour as a mature painting medium are Paul Sandby, Thomas Girtin, and Joseph Mallord William Turner. These artists (among others) developed and refined various techniques, creating several incredibly popular works, and infusing watercolour painting with new prestige. The watercolour paint that we’re most familiar with today, however, was developed in the early 19th century. This type of paint is primarily composed of a pigment, gum Arabic, a binder, and an additive (like glycerin) to fine-tune the consistency. This paint is then mixed with water when used – thus the

watercolour pallets we've come to know and love. Watercolour paint continues to be a popular medium for many artists today. Notable recent and current artists include Georgia O'Keeffe, Edward Hopper, and Andrew Wyeth, just to name a few... Not to mention the millions of students who express themselves through watercolour every year in art classes around the world.

According to the account of Whitenight (2024), watercolour (from French aquarelle, from Italian acquarello, from Latin aqua – water) is a paint made of vegetable glue, diluted with water, and it is also a style of painting with these paints. The first mention of the generally accepted modern term "watercolour" is found in Cennino Cennini's "Treatise of Painting" (1437), the main point in the described process was the dissolution of paint in water containing vegetable glue - gummi. However, watercolour-like techniques existed before and had different names and applications.

The history of water techniques goes back thousands of years. Ancient Egyptian papyri with colourful images and hieroglyphs were made in paints with water-soluble plant resins, and this is a clear sign of the watercolour technique. Ink painting on thin rice paper or silk has deep traditions in China and Japan. Initially, the Chinese style was borrowed by Japanese artists in the XIV century, and by the end of the XV century, it had become the main direction of painting in Japan. The ancient tradition was characterized by the use of dense, opaque gouache watercolour, which was developed in Byzantine book art, and reached its height in the XI century. With the adoption of Christianity, the book tradition of Byzantium spreads and develops in the culture of European nations.

Basic Characteristics of Watercolor Paints

Safe to Use: Watercolors are non-toxic, non-smelly, and water-soluble paints that are safe for both adults and children.

Multiple Painting Surfaces: Traditionally, they're painted on watercolour paper but you can buy a specially designed watercolour canvas for the same purpose.

Easy to Use and Clean: They're lightweight, which means you can easily carry your watercolour art supplies if you like to move around a lot. So, if you like Plein-air painting, this art medium will serve you well.

Great for Complex Drawings: Watercolour painting is great for quick sketches due to its portability and ease of cleanup and use but it doesn't mean you can't use them for complex drawings. Many artists use this art medium for still life, portrait, and landscape paintings.

Work with Other Art Supplies: Another great feature of watercolour paints is that they work well with ink, graphite, simple coloured pencils, and watercolour pencils. It means you can use them to create mixed-media pieces.

Watercolour paints are great for emotive and ethereal effects because of their translucent quality. You should pre-plan your painting because the translucency of this art medium makes it difficult to cover mistakes. Most watercolour artists use a soft graphite pencil to sketch their composition before starting the drawing process.

Reactivation Properties: The colour of the watercolour painting generally gets lighter when it dries out. This is something you should consider while painting. Watercolour paint dries quickly if you don't mix them with water. However, you can easily reactivate dried watercolour paint using water. Even if your watercolours get dried on your palette, all you need to do is add a few drops of water to re-wet the paint.

Several Painting Techniques: There are several watercolour painting techniques that you can use. These techniques include wet-on-dry where you use dry paper and wet brush and wet-on-wet which involves wet paper and wet brush. You can also use salt and splattering to make unique effects while painting with watercolour.

Preservation and Storage: There are several techniques to preserve and store your watercolour painting. You can apply varnish to provide your painting with a moisture-resistant coating or you can opt for archival framing techniques to frame your artwork without affecting its quality.

Significance of Watercolour in the Production of Painting

Watercolours are significant because they are versatile, portable, and can be used to create unique and ethereal artworks. They are also affordable, nontoxic, and easy to clean up. The advantages of watercolour include its vibrant and translucent nature, quick drying time, simple set up and clean up process, affordability, and versatility to be used in a mixed media artwork. Some of the significance is highlighted in Balogh (2021) and is stated below:

Creativity: Watercolours are a fluid medium that can be used to create unique artworks.

Ease of learning: Watercolours are relatively easy to learn, making them suitable for beginners and experienced artists.

Portability: Watercolours are portable and easy to clean up.

Nontoxic: Watercolours are non-toxic and odourless, making them safe for both kids and adults.

Affordable: Watercolours are relatively inexpensive to work with.

Quick drying time: Watercolours dry quickly as compared to other mediums.

Works well with mixed media: Watercolours work well with other media such as colour pencils, watercolour pencils, and ink.

Sustainability of Watercolour Painting Medium in Contemporary Times

Sustainable art is not a fixed set of rules, but rather an evolving and adaptable way of thinking about what it means to make art. It includes the use of materials, scavenged or salvaged materials, sustainable materials and processes, as well as works with a sustainability mission (Artterra.ca, 2034).

Sustainability is a social structural process that is the outcome of several acts performed by numerous people across time and geography (Karmakar, 2012). As a kind of creative practice, watercolour painting medium used to be a very popular art practice, but in today's world, the increase in the number of people who are interested in using the medium is very few. This is because a lot of painters and other art practitioners prefer to use digital technology like artificial intelligence in the production of their paintings. Thus, it becomes a big problem to encourage and sustain the use of watercolour to produce paintings. However, in a bit to inspire continuous practice and to make individuals feel, see, or appreciate aesthetically very appealing paintings that raise awareness of societal issues, cultural, and political, among others.

Watercolour no doubt is highly valued as a medium of painting production. It is also valued by business intermediaries, who recognize their potential as artistic investments. Many galleries and auction houses specialize in selling watercolours, and the market for these works continues to grow. Unfortunately, despite the contributions of watercolour

painting medium in producing painting it has not been given its proper place in contemporary times. Thus, its sustainability comes as a mirage. But the good news is that if more people use the medium to produce paintings it will make its usage more visible there making more people use the medium to produce paintings. Also, if the paintings produced by the painters are patronized, it will encourage the use of the medium to produce paintings. And that provides the opportunity to encourage the sustainability of the watercolour painting medium.

Watercolour paintings can be sustained by ensuring proper care and preservation techniques. Below are some tips to help you maintain the quality and longevity of your watercolour artwork:

1. Use high-quality materials: Choose archival-grade watercolour paper, paints, and brushes to ensure the longevity of your artwork.
2. Protect from sunlight: Watercolor paintings are susceptible to fading when exposed to direct sunlight. Display your artwork in a location away from direct sunlight or use UV-protective glass when framing.
3. Avoid humidity: High humidity levels can cause watercolour paintings to warp or develop mould. Store your artwork in a dry and well-ventilated area.
4. Frame properly: Use acid-free mats and backing boards when framing your watercolour paintings to prevent discolouration and deterioration over time.
5. Handle with care: Always handle your watercolour paintings with clean hands or wear gloves to prevent transferring oils or dirt onto the surface. Avoid touching the painted areas directly.
6. Avoid moisture: Keep your watercolour paintings away from areas prone to moisture, such as kitchens and bathrooms, to prevent damage.
7. Clean properly: If your watercolour painting gets dirty, use a soft brush or a gentle cloth to remove dust. Avoid using water or cleaning solutions unless necessary and consult a professional conservator if in doubt.

CONCLUSION

The practice of watercolour painting medium complex challenges, the commitment of painters to use the medium has become increasingly very low due to the neglect it suffers from painters not using the medium to produce watercolour paintings in recent times. The medium is quite a unique medium for producing paintings because of the colours it expresses. This is seemingly the easiest medium of producing painting. Watercolour pigment is not as expensive as other colours. When used to produce paintings the works command strong aesthetic appeal. Thus, its practice must be not only dynamic but be sustainable because of the role it plays. It is in the course of discussing the paper encouraged paintings, that artists and institutions have a unique opportunity to embrace sustainability of the use of watercolour in the production of paintings.

This is also hinged on the fact that the practice of using watercolour painting medium has helped in creating meaningful works that inspire positive change. This paper found out that watercolour paintings are highly valued by business intermediaries, who recognize their potential as investments. Many galleries and auction houses specialize in selling watercolours, and the market for these works continues to grow.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper have highlighted the need to sustain watercolour painting medium and the challenges that confront it in enjoying effective sustainability. The paper makes the following recommendations:

1. Contemporary painters should see it as a necessity to produce painting with the watercolour painting medium.
2. Institutions of learning where fine art is being practice or taught in the country should endeavour to teach their students or learners watercolour medium of producing painting.
3. Art collectors, gallery owners and the like should endeavour to patronize watercolour paintings.

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