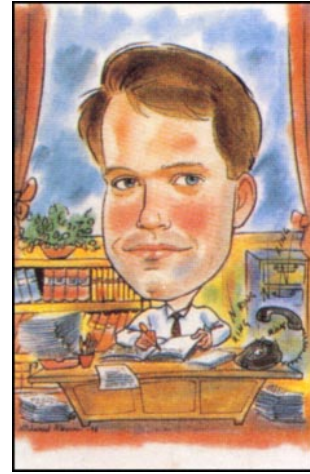

Wachuwannano

BY MICHAEL A. GARDNER,
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Q What is encaustic plaster, and how does it differ from fresco and Venetian plaster? B.C., Virginia.

A Encaustic finishing, fresco finishing and Venetian tinting are coloring techniques. While each technique produces a finish different in appearance from the other two, there is some commonality among the application processes. As a result, keeping the three procedures straight in your mind can be difficult.

Encaustic finishing and fresco finishing are substrate-surface painting processes. In both techniques, pigment or pigmented paste is applied to a substrate, and the substrate is naturally or artificially dried. Venetian plaster, on the other hand, is not a surface finishing technique. In Venetian plaster, pigment is integrated directly into the finish plaster mix, and the mix is applied to a suitable plaster base.

By definition, a fresco finish, or buon fresco finish as it is properly called, must incorporate the use of lime plaster. In contrast, encaustic finishing

techniques can be used on a variety of substrates. Wood, canvas, pottery or any porous substrate can have an encaustic finish applied to it. Venetian plaster obviously involves the use of plaster; however, Venetian methods do exist for the coloring of tile, china and other similar materials.

Encaustic finishing involves a technique in which hot wax, pigment and, occasionally, varnishing resin are mixed together to form a paste. The paste is then applied to a surface and heated. The wax melts as the paste warms, and the pigment begins to diffuse through the wax and into the substrate. If different colored pastes are applied side by side on a single substrate, the melting waxes will begin to intermingle and the lines and edges between colors will become very blurry and soft.

In fresco finishing, water-based colors are painted directly into fresh, wet lime plaster. The plaster is generally allowed to dry naturally, and the raw colors dry along with the finish-coat plaster.

Venetian plaster is a bit different. Most traditional definitions insist that Venetian plaster can be nothing other than a

completely mixed finish coat plaster mix with pigmented chips or powder added to it. The color-impregnated plaster is mixed just enough to encourage the blending of the pigment and the plaster, but not enough to completely meld the two substances together. Venetian plaster is not, according to traditionalists, colored finished plaster. The finish color cannot be uniform, and the pigment cannot be added during the plaster material mixing process.

A coat of wax is occasionally applied to Venetian finishes after the plaster has set. The wax can be rubbed or buffed to produce a very high sheen and give the finished surface a monolithic appearance.

All three procedures have been in use for many hundreds of years. There is evidence that ancient Egyptian cultures used a modified form of encaustic coloring to decorate precious vases and art objects. Frescos created in the 15th century still exist today.

About the Author

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