



## Utrecht Art Supplies

### History: Picasso and Non-Traditional Paint



**Ask the Expert: "I read online about Picasso using house paint with tube oil colors. Does that work? Also, do you know what brands he used and whether you can still buy them?"**

**A:** Historians and conservation scientists know from studio photos and first hand accounts that Picasso did use some house paints and utility coatings along with traditional artists' oils, possibly when materials were scarce or for the sheer sake of experimentation. What's not as well known is which paintings and which passages actually include house paint.

One reason it's difficult for conservation scientists to determine what kind of paint is on a given work is because both artists' colors and industrial paints in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had similar compositions. Both were based on linseed oil, and included many of the same pigments and some of the same natural resins.

While Pablo Picasso had a very traditional, formal early training, as a modern artist he deviated from the structured layering of classical methods in favor of an improvisational process, which he sometimes described as "destructive". Picasso is known to have

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intermixed house paint with artist's colors, and mixed linseed oil medium with both. Many of his earlier works were painted on re-used canvases, often without priming over the original image, further complicating the process of examining his art.

Picasso is believed to have used multiple brands of utility-grade paint in some works (some photos show boat enamel on the artist's taboret) but the brand most often cited is Ripolin, an oil-based enamel. "Ripolin" at one time became a generic term for all enamel paints in France. Modern artists were attracted to the new, inexpensive paint for its fast drying rate compared to traditional oils, unusual textural effects and brilliant colors.

The inclusion of non-traditional materials often presents a challenge for conservation professionals in maintaining art objects as they age, and the work of Picasso is no exception. Enamel paint sometimes tends to wrinkle, develop pitting or crack from age.

Painters today are generally quite knowledgeable about issues relating to durability and stability in art objects. While many still include non-traditional materials in the process, contemporary artists tend to investigate their materials more rigorously than earlier artists and are often averse to using products that might have a destructive effect.

Most of the older utility-grade paints have been phased out or replaced with more advanced products that don't look or handle the same as older materials. In fact, many of the acrylic and alkyd-based painting mediums introduced in recent decades were developed to produce some of the same effects earlier artists achieved with architectural, marine and automotive products, while delivering the reliable long-term performance of bona fide art materials.