



## Utrecht Art Supplies

### Will we run out of pigments?



**Ask the Expert: "Will the world ever run out of pigments? Are there any that we don't have any more?"**

**A:** Yes, it is possible for a pigment to become extinct, and many have over the centuries. The history of art includes many examples of materials that have fallen nearly or completely out of use, like drafting linen, cellulose acetate film and Congo Copal Resin. When pigments become unavailable or fall out of common use, it's usually a permanent situation, because of the necessary scale of production, suitability for permanent art, physical scarcity, proprietary rights (patent protection) and other factors that stand in the way of return to availability.

#### Terrestrial Sources

Colors that are mined from the earth can become unavailable if all mines become played out and no replacement source can be found. The original Venetian Red, Caledonian Brown, Cappagh Brown, and some other ochres were mined until the source was exhausted.

#### Obsolescence

Certain colors have fallen out of use because alternatives are just a whole lot better. Pearl White, the proprietary blend known as Freeman's White, the ancient, fish-based Gallstone, Hypocastanum (made from horse chestnut), and Turner's Yellow are no longer in

use because more reliable materials replaced them.

#### Changes in Manufacturing

Some manufacturing processes have disappeared due to obsolescence or associated risks, and as a result certain pigments disappeared, like Green Vertider. In the modern palette, it may be possible for a color to become unavailable if there is a single manufacturer who discontinues or reformulates the pigment. Modern pigments are not necessarily made to be used in artist's paints (the art materials industry consumes a relatively small portion of total pigment production), so when a large manufacturer reformulates a pigment in a way that makes it perform poorly in artists' colors, paint makers may need to choose an alternative.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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