

Wax and Water Meet

An artist accustomed to working with (hot) encaustic tries Natural Pigments water-soluble (cool) wax paints, Ceracolors—and discovers something unexpected.

FOR THE PAST 10 YEARS, I've identified myself as a painter whose primary medium is encaustic, commonly defined as heated beeswax to which pigments have been added. I was therefore surprised and intrigued when an editor from *The Artist's Magazine* approached me about reviewing the water-soluble wax paint, Ceracolors from Natural Pigments. Why? Well, the combination sounded counter-intuitive. Cold wax medium is cut with damar resin and often with oil colors, and my favorite wax pigment sticks are tempered with linseed oil. Wax and oil go together but wax and water: how can this be?

I'm drawn to the medium of encaustic for a variety of reasons. Most important to me is that encaustic functions as both a paint and an adhesive, allowing me to add collage elements along with paint applications, all on the same surface. I've used encaustic to build transparent layers (see *A Long Cold Journey East*, page 61) and to enhance expressionist effects when I work with pigment sticks and ink (see *Paradrome, Aurora*, page 61). Given my history, I decided that the best approach to this review would be to conduct a series of experiments in order to explore Ceracolors' versatility.

Revisiting an Older Work

I began by gathering a variety of surfaces to work on: a plywood panel primed with a traditional gesso (calcium carbonate and hide glue); a smaller Masonite panel coated in an encaustic gesso and finally, an incomplete hot wax painting I've



ABOVE: *Andalucia* (Ceracolors on panel, 24x36)

been moving around my studio for about three years now.

My first experiment was to use the Ceracolors to glaze over the work I wanted to revisit. I diluted the Ceracolors with Ceracolors Fluid Medium then, using a soft brush and also a dry brush to blend, applied the paint over the existing image in what I hoped were sensitive layers. Next I added a heavy yet translucent layer of ultramarine blue in one corner and allowed it to dry overnight (1). The next day I worked subtractively, selectively removing areas of paint by scrubbing fairly aggressively with water and a bristle brush (2).

Trying a Collage

For my second experiment I wanted to use the Ceracolors Gel (Heavy Body) Medium in a collage and see if I could create the thick,

deep layers that are characteristic of my work. Prepping the surface with the gel medium, I pressed a fragment of a magazine page and a strip of modern paper (Staples Brand Laser printable vellum), which I ran through my Cannon laser printer to produce an image, onto a Masonite panel and applied pressure with a roller to diffuse the air bubbles (A, page 62).

After letting the piece dry for several days, I followed up with thick layers of gel medium applied to the surface with a spatula. The original application of the gel medium successfully adhered the magazine fragment to the surface. The multiple layers of medium on top of the magazine fragment distorted



ABOVE: *A Long Cold Journey East* (2010; encaustic, oil and paper collage on panel, 9x12)



ABOVE: *Paradrome, Aurora* (detail; 2014; encaustic, pigment stick and ink on panel, 24x36)



ABOVE: adding a layer of ultramarine blue Ceracolors to *Paradrome, Aroraha*



ABOVE: scrubbing away areas of paint with water and a bristle brush

the color somewhat, a result of the image on the opposite side's seeping through. This was a welcome effect and one I often encounter, mixing media as I do and utilizing both everyday and fine art materials. Due to what I suspect is the somewhat plastic nature of the vellum, the paper did not completely absorb the medium; thus, the poor adhesion. The vellum also wrinkled, an effect that was further exaggerated when I applied more gel medium over the top.

Trying a Painting

Realizing that my style of collage may not have been the best approach with Ceracolors, I switched my focus to a landscape painting and chose a vista from a recent trip to Andalucía, Spain (**B**, page 62 and page 60). The Ceracolors proved to be delightful on the brush! Particularly enjoyable was the range of viscosity. The colors could be diluted heavily with water, creating thin washes or they could be left alone; in that case, they had a but-

tery impasto consistency. The layers dried fairly quickly, which worked well for the pace of my work. That said, Natural Pigments Ceracolors also has a retarder gel that slows the drying time if an artist prefers a slower pace.

I found the paint slippery in a good way, and the optical and translucent properties (deriving from the wax) of the paint were rewarding. When dry, the surface had a sheen that was pleasantly semigloss.

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Surprising Attributes

The dry surface's semigloss sheen actually reminded me of another traditional painting medium, egg tempera. Ceracolors provide, however, a

A: After applying a layer of gel medium and pressing a fragment of a page of a magazine onto the Masonite panel, I then plied a roller over the surface to get rid of the air bubbles.



A

much less labor-intensive experience. (After reflecting, I think perhaps the semigloss sheen effect had a bit to do with the traditional chalk gesso ground I was using.) While I don't believe Ceracolor will ever replace traditional hot encaustic painting for me (I'm in love with too many aspects of it: the heat, the smell, the history), Ceracolors certainly are an asset to my practice, as they provided me with a vehicle to add subtle, toned glazes of color without the burden of working with less compatible oil colors.

What I enjoy most about Ceracolors are that the paints dry quickly and that the medium is truly clear (while even the most bleached encaustic has a yellow tint). I also love Ceracolors' rich, high-quality color and their ease of use since they're oil free. I am eager to continue using Ceracolors in my work. ■

KIM FLORA's paintings are in the collections of Baltimore County Schools, Tente International and the Cincinnati Art Museum. For more information visit kimflora.com.



B

B: Switching focus to landscape painting, I painted with Ceracolors and a brush, diluting the colors with water to create thin washes in some places and also using the paints straight from the tube.