

## Encaustics - A Brief History

Encaustics is one of the oldest mediums used in the creation of art. First known use was by the ancient Greeks, hence the word encaustic comes from the Ancient Greek word Ēnkoustikos meaning to "burn in". Beeswax, melted and combined with oil paints and other mediums was used by the Ancient Greek artists to adorn their artworks, sculptures, murals, seal their boats and also even on their architecture. They also used the wax paint to highlight features of their marble statues surrounding the Acropolis.

It was during the Hellenistic period that Greek Art started to spread into other parts of the world, with Egypt adopting the encaustic method due in no small part to the quantity of ancient Greeks residing in Egypt. Greek trained Egyptian artists used encaustics in not only their art pieces but also in the mummification process. Fayum Mummy Portraits of Egypt are the most well-known and still to this day, the encaustic medium used has shown very little fading or cracking despite the millennium of time that has passed. Pausias, a Greek painter of the first half of the 4th century, is credited with inventing the encaustic painting method.

## Painted Greek Ships

The ancient Greeks used wax and resin to waterproof and decorate their ships. Homer, writing in 800 B.C., made note of painted warships sailing into Troy. Beeswax is impervious to moisture. Therefore wax is a durable material excellent for sealing and preserving. In his book *Naturalis Historia*, Roman Historian Pliny the Elder wrote of encaustic painting in the 1st century A.D.

*'Painting of this nature, applied to vessels, will never spoil from the action of the sun, winds, or salt water'*

The oldest surviving encaustic panel paintings are the Romano-Egyptian Fayum mummy portraits from Egypt, around 100–300 AD, but it was a very common technique in ancient Greek and Roman painting. It continued to be used in early Byzantine icons but was effectively abandoned in the Western Church.

## The Fayum Portraits

The oldest 'known' surviving encaustic panel paintings are the Romano-Egyptian Fayum mummy portraits from Egypt around 200–400 AD. The Fayum Portraits of ancient Egypt are realistic encaustic portraits on wooden boards that were used as mummy masks. They were painted by Greek painters who settled in Egypt and adopted the Egyptian custom of mummification.

Today, you can view Fayum Portraits at all important archaeological museums of the world. Approximately 900 mummy portraits are known at present. The majority were unearthed in the Necropoleis of Fayum (Faiyum), a region of ancient Egypt. The mummy portraits have immense historical importance. The longevity of these works speaks to the durability of this medium.

*"The Faiyum burial portraits in wax on wood panels...have survived brilliantly for more than fifteen centuries and attest to the permanence of the wax medium. Of course, it must be remembered that these works were entombed in an ideal environment of consistent temperature and humidity, which was absent of light."* (The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques. Fifth Edition. Ralph Mayer p. 359)

After the fall of the Roman empire and over the centuries since the Ancient Greeks began the encaustic use, the medium has come in and out of artistic fashion with a resurgence of interest in the medium starting all over again now. Encaustic, for the most part, became a lost art waiting to be rediscovered by future artists.

Diego Rivera's first government-commissioned mural, *Creation* 1922 - 1923, shown here, was created over the course of a year and covers over a thousand square feet. It is an allegorical composition with mythological and religious motifs. The figures in the mural are over twelve feet high, which were in proportion to the huge pipe organ which surrounded the wall. At the top a symbol, which could represent the Divine Trinity with blessing hands. It also follows old Egyptian iconography of Aton, the symbol of the creative sun. At the bottom Eva and Adam. Over them on both sides the nine Muses. And on the next level the Christian Virtues: From the left: Love, Hope and Faith and on the right side: Prudence, Justice and Strength. In the sky Wisdom and Science. Everything is in classical renaissance style, where similar allegories are common. The figures are based on life models. Note that the picture does not have any political, ideological tendency. The painting technique is encaustic, which means that the pigments were applied suspended in molten wax. A complicated technique which the old Egyptians already knew.



*Diego Rivera's first government-commissioned mural, Creation 1922 - 1923*

## Modern Resurgence

In the 20th century, electricity and modern tools made the encaustic process much more accessible. Mexican muralist Diego Rivera began using encaustic in the 1920s. Rivera's first government-commissioned mural, *Creation* (1922-23) was done in encaustic and gold leaf.

In 1938 Karl Zerbe, a chemist by training, began researching and experimenting with wax and pigment. Over the next 2 years, he worked to come up with an encaustic formula and he reinvented the technique. He was the head of the Department of Painting at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. In 1940, Zerbe taught an advanced seminar in materials including encaustic.

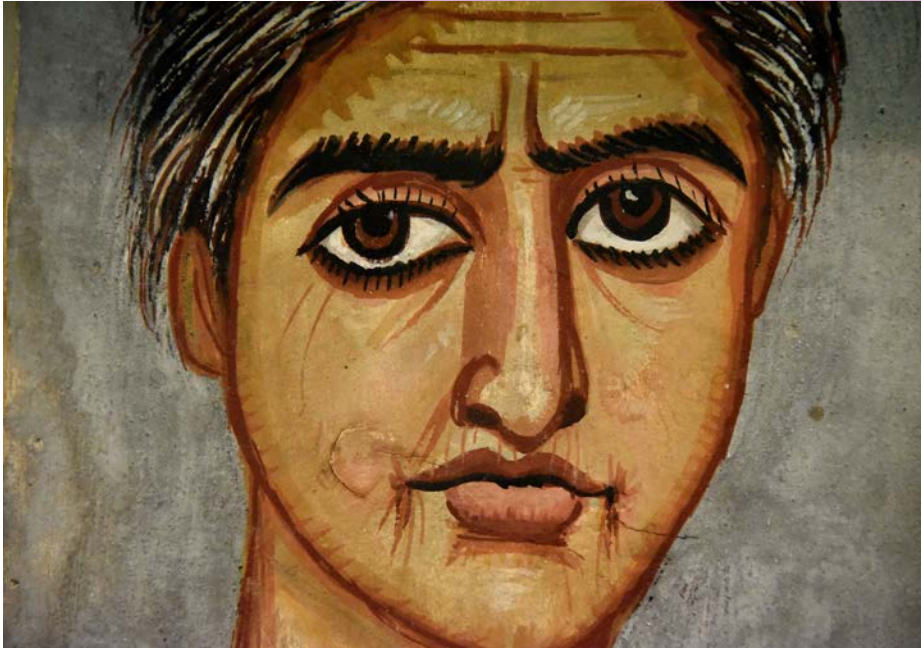
The pioneering modernist Arthur Dove used a wide range of media including wax emulsion and encaustic in the 1940s but the most famous encaustic painter is Jasper Johns. Johns forged a new path for contemporary encaustic painting in the 1950s with his flag paintings.

In 1988, Richard Frumess started R&F Handmade Paints making high-quality encaustic paints commercially available. R&F started offering workshops across the U.S. and many of their students soon became teachers. The *Art of Encaustic Painting: Contemporary Expression in the Ancient Medium of Pigmented Wax* by Joanne Mattera was published in 2001. This comprehensive guide made accurate information widely available. Since that time, the Internet has contributed to the growing popularity of encaustic painting. The R&F brand is my encaustic favourite and since the 1990s I use it extensively.

The richness of colour, the proven durability and colour fastness as well as the myriad of supports that encaustic can be used on has seen a rise in popularity again.

A complicated technique which the old Egyptians already knew. Other famous artists who had tried their hand in encaustic are Pablo Picasso, James Ensor, Robert Delaunay, Antoine Pevsner, Pedro Pruna and me!



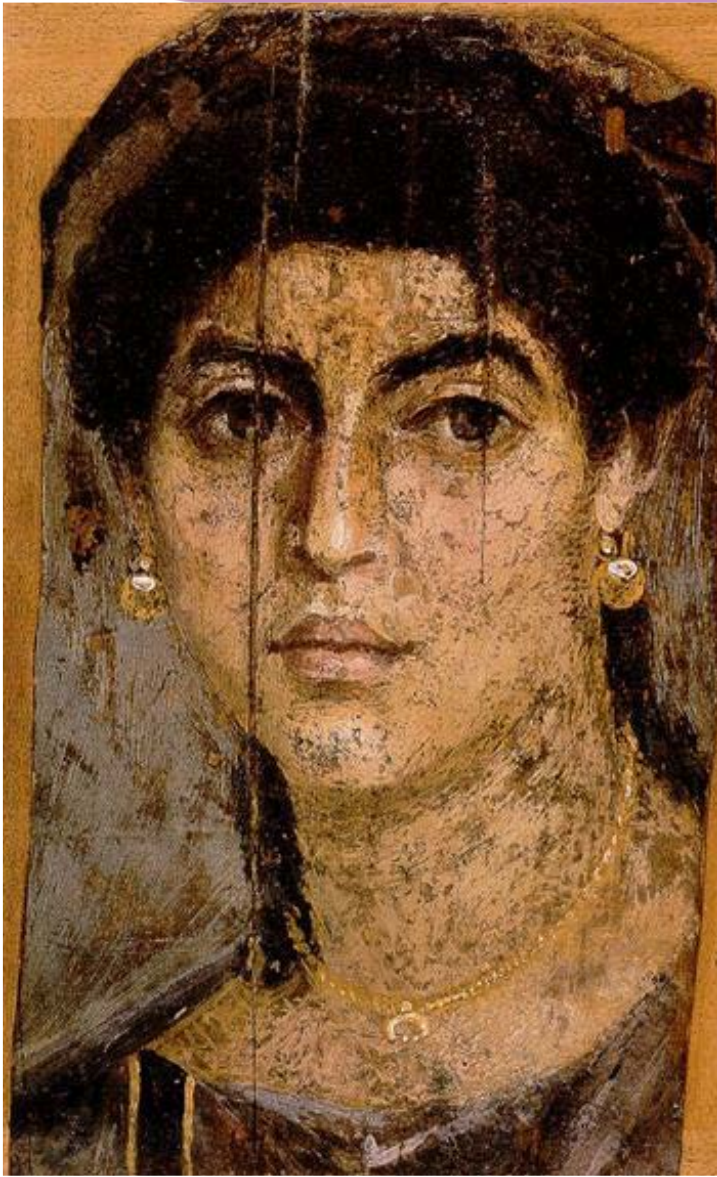


*Mummy portrait of a woman from Faiyum, Hawara, modern-day Egypt.  
Encaustic on wood, ACE 300–325. British Museum*

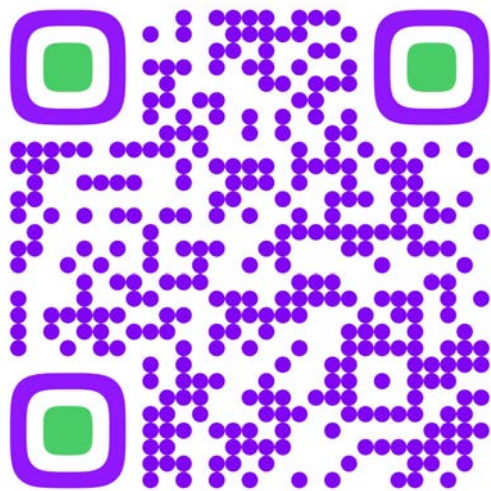


*Mummy with an Inserted  
Panel Portrait of a Youth-C.E.  
80 -100  
Faiyum, Hawara, modern-  
day Egypt. Encaustic on  
wood, British Museum*





*Mummy portrait of a woman from Faiyum, Hawara -  
Encaustic on wood, BCE 70 ?  
British Museum*



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information

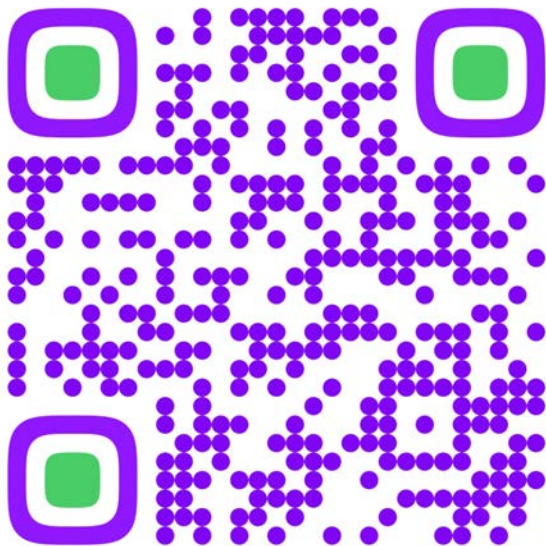


*Portrait of the Boy Eutyches- from Faiyum, Hawara,  
modern-day Egypt. Encaustic on wood, C.E 100 -  
150. British Museum*





*'Scared Blue'*  
40cm x 40cm Encaustic painting on wood panel  
DM Christie ©2018



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information



*'Best Friends'*  
30cm x 20cm Encaustic Painting with Acrylic Overpainting  
on wood panel  
DM Christie ©2017

D M Christie  
Artist/Designer

Dahut Creations by Waterwench© 1978 to Date



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Perth - Western Australia

## Tuition Price & Times

### Acrylics and Mixed Mediums - 3 Hours - One on One Tuition - Information

Day	Times	Cost	Information
Mondays To Fridays	1. 10am to 1pm Other days/times available on request	\$50-00 per person	All materials provided unless advised. i.e themed workshops advertised when occurring

### Sublimation Print & Print Making - 3 Hours - One on One Tuition - Information

Day	Times	Cost	Information
Mondays To Fridays	10am to 1pm Other days/times available on request	\$45-00 per person	All materials provided unless advised. i.e themed workshops advertised when occurring

### Crafting - 3 Hours - One on One Tuition - Information

Day	Times	Cost	Information
Mondays To Fridays	10am to 1pm Other days/times available on request	\$30-00 per person	All materials provided unless advised. i.e themed workshops advertised when occurring

### Crafting Machines & Vinyls - 3 Hour - One on One Tuition - Information

Day	Times	Cost	Information
Mondays To Fridays	10am to 1pm Other days/times available on request	\$45-00 per person	All materials provided unless advised. i.e themed workshops advertised when occurring

### Encaustics & Oils - 3 Hours- One on One Tuition - Information

Day	Times	Cost	Information
Mondays To Fridays	9.30am to 11.30am Other days/times available on request	\$55-00 per person	All materials provided unless advised. i.e themed workshops advertised when occurring

### Encaustics & Resin - 3 Hours- One on One Tuition - Information

Day	Times	Cost	Information
Mondays To Fridays	9.30am to 11.30am Other days/times available on request	\$55-00 per person	All materials provided unless advised. i.e themed workshops advertised when occurring