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Gamblin Conservation Colors for the 21st century

Gamblin Conservation Colors are stable, reversible and suitable for use with a wide array of painting styles and techniques. Their innovative low molecular weight resin binder also makes Gamblin Conservation Colors safer to use.

Conservation scientists' criteria for a new kind of conservation color included stability, safety of use, quality of manufacture, optical and working properties. Robert Gamblin has formulated artists' materials for 20 years. In 1994, he joined the research team after conservation scientists observed that making paints by hand grinding resulted in a somewhat coarse, glossy paint which lacked the smooth paste consistency of commercially prepared paints. The collaborative goal was to develop a new kind of conservation color from lightfast, permanent materials with enhanced working and aging properties

Conservation colors made from a low molecular weight resin binder have better optical properties and better handling properties than paints based on polymeric resin. Aldehyde resins are a more appropriate binder than some other low molecular weight resins because they are slightly polar and wet pigments more easily. The accelerated age testing was done at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Once the binder was accepted, the team agreed that the new paints should be fairly lean and slightly matte. Viscosity and sheen can be easily altered by adding binder.

Gamblin Artists Colors Co. produced four trial batches of paint to establish correct pigment/ratio binder for smooth brushing and easy reducibility with medium. Conservators in North America and England participated in testing. During the initial test phase the new Gamblin paints were used for retouching on over one hundred treatments from Trecento Italian to 20th century paintings. Gamblin Conservation Colors have proven useful for all techniques of inpainting including glazing. The paints have good covering power and little change in color when dry.

We gratefully acknowledge the work of Rene de la Rie, Mark Leonard, and Jill Whitten for leading this project, the scientific department of the National Gallery in Washington for their technical work, and to the conservators in the US, Canada, and England for their experimentation and feedback.

Managing the Solvent in the Color Jars:
There is no perfect container for solvent borne color systems. Tubes and jars lose solvent during working sessions and in storage. Gamblin Conservation Colors are packaged to allow a conservator to manage the solvent loss or to revive paint that has hardened.

- Assume that each jar of Gamblin Conservation Color will slowly lose solvent.
- Add drops of solvent periodically to the color jars to replace what has been lost.
- If the paint skins over from solvent loss, add two or three drops of mineral spirits or isopropanol into jar, let sit for an hour or two then mix to re-wet the dried paint.
- If the whole jar has dried, add solvent and mix until the paint has re-wetted thoroughly.

Note: Some conservators store solvent borne paints in airtight containers to slow the evaporation rate.