

About Encaustic – by Ken Hunt

Encaustic is an extremely durable technique that has been dated to as early as the fourth century B.C. It is believed that this technique was originally developed by the Greeks to weatherproof their ships. Mention is even made by Homer of painted ships used by Greek warriors who fought at Troy. Many pieces have survived to modern times and their color has remained surprisingly fresh.

Encaustic painting is also known as hot wax painting. It involves using heated beeswax and a hardener, with or without colored pigments. While the wax material is molten, it is applied to a prepared surface. It can also be applied to photographs that have been specially prepared.

The melted wax is applied with brushes or other tools. Heated metal tools, including irons, are used to manipulate the wax after it has cooled on the surface. Torches, heat guns and other methods of applying heat extend the amount of time the material can be worked and are also used to fuse the layers together. Other materials and objects can be encased or collaged into the surface.

Photo encaustic is a process where the photographic image is used with the encaustic medium. First, a photograph is prepared and printed on special paper and then adhered to a wood surface. Sometimes drawing and painting techniques are added to the photo before the wax is applied. Colored, pigmented wax may be added over the clear wax surface. The final cooled wax surface is often marked or manipulated to enhance dimensionality, giving the image both depth and texture.

How to care for an encaustic piece of art:

Encaustics are extremely durable and have outlasted other paintings by 1000 years. But like any fine art, they need some special care.

They should not be covered by glass. Their only care is an occasional buffing, as noted below. Your encaustic is ready to hang on the wall when it leaves the gallery.

Although the wax surface is durable, there are several ways it can be damaged. It is unlikely that any problems will occur in a normal home or gallery environment. However, do not hang or leave an encaustic in direct sunlight or in a car that is left out on a hot sunny day. Also, do not leave them in freezing conditions as the wax can become brittle.

Although the wax surface is not fragile, a haze may develop over time and should be buffed as needed to restore its shine and texture. You do not need to be overly gentle. Use a soft cotton cloth, a tee shirt for example. I personally rub fairly firmly and briskly. A new encaustic photograph may need buffing every few weeks or so, or as needed.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions

