

Painting - glossary



This technical note contains a glossary of common painting terms.

Acrylic water-borne (latex) paints

See Latex paints.

Alkyd

A modern synthetic resin widely used in the manufacture of paints and varnishes. Alkyd paints must be thinned and cleaned up with solvent or paint thinner. The terms, alkyd paint and oil-based paint, are generally used interchangeably.

Binder

Binders help bind the pigment particles together. The most common binder was, and still is, oil. Chalk was sometimes added to bind pigment particles together in water-based paints. Glue and gelatine were other common binders.

Black japan

Black japan, a black bitumen-based coating, was traditionally used for decorative painting of timber—particularly floor borders, furniture and ironwork. It may also be found in brown or red.

Casein

Casein, also known as milk paint, was traditionally made with hydrated (slaked) lime, milk and pigment. A strong emulsion paint could be made by adding oil to the casein. Additives increased durability.

Distemper

Distemper was traditionally used for interior applications. It consisted of water, glues (one or more different natural glues, gelatine or gum) with whiting as the basic pigment to which other tinting pigments were added.

Enamels

Traditionally a natural resin varnish was added to oil-based paints to provide a hard, more glossy and durable surface known as enamel. Enamels were used on exteriors and on surfaces that were required to be hard wearing such as doors, windows, architraves and skirtings.

Epoxies

Epoxies are extremely tough and durable synthetic resins used in some coatings. They are highly resistant to chemicals, abrasion, moisture and alcohols. Epoxies are often used in floor finishes, paints and sealers.

Fish eyes

'Fish eyes' refers to the presence of craters in a coating, each having a small particle of impurity in the centre.

Glazes

Glazes were traditionally made using oil or turpentine with a small amount of pigment and were often part of historic paint treatments.

Japan

See Black japan.

Kalsomine

A proprietary name for distemper (see distemper).

Latex paints

Modern, water-based paints made with a synthetic binder (latex), such as acrylic, vinyl acrylic or styrene acrylic latex. Advantages of latex paints include quick drying time, great strength and water clean-up. Latex paints often have very good colour retention with little fading and are available in a complete range of gloss levels.

Limewash

Limewash or whitewash was often used on interior plaster surfaces as a first finish. As plaster could take up to two years to dry properly the limewash allowed the plaster to 'breathe'. Limewash traditionally consisted of water, slaked lime, salt and a variety of other materials. Pigment was added to provide a tint or colour.

Oil-based paints

Traditional oil-based paints comprised a linseed oil binder, turpentine thinner or vehicle, colouring pigments and a hiding pigment such as white lead.

Pigment

Pigment provides the colour in paint and makes it opaque. This prevents ultraviolet light penetration and the deterioration of the substrate. In traditional paints, white lead (a whitish corrosion product of lead) was most often used to provide opacity. Pigments used in early paints were coarsely and unevenly ground and mixed by hand which provided a finish with subtle unevenness and texture.

Shellac

Shellac is a decorative/protective coating manufactured by melting seedlac by heating or dissolving in solvents. Seedlac is resin created by lac insects.

Solvent-borne paints (oil-based/alkyd)

A modern, solvent-borne paint comprising of non-volatile oils and resins with thinners. (Alkyds are synthetic, gelatinous resins compounded from acids and alcohol. Soy-based oils are often used in combination with linseed oil. Solvent-borne paints dry hard with a high sheen making them suited to areas of wear and tear.

Stains

Stains are shellacs or varnishes with colourants. The stain colours but does not obscure the grain of the surface.

Tempera

Tempera paints are prepared with pigment, egg yolk or white, and water. They are used almost exclusively for decorative treatments.

Urethanes

Urethane is a collective name for a group of resins or binders that form polyurethanes. They produce a tough and chemical-resistant finish.

Varnish

Traditionally, varnishes including oil, water and spirit types were a popular coating material which formed a solid transparent, protective and decorative film over the substrate.

Vehicle

The fluid that carries the pigment is called the vehicle or medium. Traditionally, turpentine was the vehicle in oil paints and water was used in water-based paints. Other vehicles include milk in casein paints.

Preparations of water-based paints consist of water, pigment and a binder such as hide glue, other natural glues or gums. Usually used on interior plaster surfaces.

Whitewash

See limewash.

References

- Evans, I 1988, Caring for old houses, The Flannel Flower Press, Mullumbimby, NSW.
- NSW Heritage Office 1998, The Maintenance of heritage assets: a practical guide, NSW Heritage Office, Sydney.
- Stapleton, I 1991, How to restore the old Aussie house, The Flannel Flower Press, Yeronga, Qld.

Further reading

For a comprehensive list of definitions see the following standards:

- Australian Standard AS2310: Glossary of paint and painting terms
- International Standard ISO4618 1-3: Paints and varnishes – terms and definitions for coating materials.

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