

## **Best practice in the handling and disposal of waste Artists' Colours and their packaging**

Most users of artists' paints will be fully aware that for financial reasons alone, wasting paint is a bad idea. The painter will therefore want the majority of paint to leave the studio on canvas, wood or paper as a work of art, rather than via the dustbin!

By careful storage and use, the contents of the majority of tubes and tins will have been thoroughly exhausted. At the end the tubes or jars may be considered as emptied packaging, which can be processed through the usual (household) waste channels.

For remaining paint (whether remnants from the palette or residues out of tubes/jars) and the sludge that collects at the bottom of brush washing jars, the European Artists' Colours Association suggests that the following procedure be adopted as a good practice:

- Find an old, large paint pot from the garage/shed and affix a sticker saying 'Contains Artists' Paint Waste'.
- Collect in this pot all remnants of paint.
- Once full with your paint waste, reapply the lid securely and take it to your local hazardous waste collection point.

Concerning the cleaning of brushes/painting knives and palettes, remnants should never be simply flushed down the sink, even for water-miscible paints (e.g. acrylic, watercolours and gouache). Instead:

- First take a paper towel, wipe the item as clean as possible and throw the towel into the above mentioned pot with artists' paint waste.
- If you used an oil or alkyd paint, clean the brush with solvent stored in a sealable old paint pot/jar.
- In the case of water-miscible paints, first rinse the easily-flushable residues in a separate jar filled with water (and a little detergent) before a final wash under a running tap. The jar may be used multiple times. Paint residues will settle over time; once they have, pour off the water and collect the sludge in the above mentioned pot with artists' paint waste.

Having addressed the 'end of life' issues for artists' colours, it is equally important that wastage and spoiling of paint is minimised as much as possible during its working life. Key factors to consider are the suitability of the package size for the number and experience of the artists who are using it. Whilst a large 2.5 litre pot of Acrylic Titanium White may theoretically be the perfect 'cost effective' packaging type for a school or college, if inexperienced students routinely contaminate it with dirty spatulas and brushes the level of waste may suggest that smaller pack sizes should be considered.

All paint formulations will last longer if they are stored away from direct heat and light, and with the lid securely replaced after each use (don't forget to clean the screw thread before closing!). Some artists use cling-film or silver foil to provide a further barrier against drying in the tin or pot, but in every case reapplying the lid is essential. Certain paint types are harmed by excessive cold, and acrylic paints and primers should not be allowed to fall below 10°C to prevent crystallisation – a process which regrettably cannot be reversed.

EuACA Technical Committee  
September 2017