EASEL INSIGHT
PODCAST
"Easel Talk"
Show Notes

with
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HEALTH CONCERNS ABOUT PAINTING MATERIALS

Oil paints are made up of pigment and a drying oil, there is also a stabilizer added to keep the oil and paint from separating.

The oils used in artists paints are mainly safflower, linseed, poppy seed and walnut oil. We know these oils are safe because you can buy them in food gray quality at food stores (except for poppy seed oil)

Pigments can be broken down into 3 eras of paint making.

- First is the earth colors, they are basically dirt and oil mixed together, not toxic at all. These would be pigments found in dirt and rocks; yellow ochre, burnt sienna, raw umber, raw sienna.

- Next, is the impressionists area which gave use the metal colors of cobalt and cadmiums, where they discovered that if you burn the metals at a high temperature you could produce new colors. These are toxic and every precaution should be taken to not ingest them. So you're safe as long as you don't eat them.

- Lastly, you have the modern era of lab colors, pigments created in the lab like the thalos, dioxizines and the quinacridones. These are less expensive intense colors but not as intense as the cadmiums and non-toxic.

Lead is the only pigment that can be absorbed through the skin, I wouldn't use it at all. You can still get lead white from some paint companies, but it comes with too many risks. Lead builds up in your system and doesn't flush out. It used to be used as a primer for canvas, in the whites and other colors like yellows.

Pastels are the most toxic form of painting because of the strong chance of inhaling the dust. There is very little binder and a lot of dust. Inhaling the dust isn't a problem in oil painting unless you sand your work to create an effect or to paint on top of an old painting.

The other health risk is in the solvents we use. Turpentine used to be the best solvent to use with paint because of its strength and how quick it evaporated. But it has a high toxicity and very few artists use it anymore. All solvents are toxic, it's best to use art related solvents, not solvents from the hardware store. The best art related solvent is Gamsol from Gamblin.

Gamblin makes all their paints and solvents and mediums with the least health risk. They also make a safflower oil to use for cleaning brushes during and after you paint. Safflower oil is not a solvent and is totally safe. They also make mediums without solvents.

All paints are made with solvents (except those made with walnut oil) so keeping paint off you skin is important, don't wash your hands with solvent, use soap and water.