

Dear Eric,

I was recently at a prominent artist's retrospective and the "works on paper" were under a low lighting ambience. It was explained that the paper will yellow and watercolor pigments will fade under a stronger lighting. Is this true, and doesn't this put a stigma on my watercolor paintings?

*Amy from Seattle*

Amy,

Today's professional watercolor products are extremely durable and long-lasting. Many of today's pigments have come out of the automotive (note how long the paint jobs on cars last these days) and plastics industry and are therefore very permanent. One watercolor representative told me that his supplier tested the permanence to last at least 100 years- I wonder if oil paint manufacturers can say the same! Personally, I have not seen any indication of fading of my paintings over the 36 years of my career, and some of my earlier paintings were quite exposed.

One does need to be careful to use professional quality pigments that have a lightfastness rating of permanent; inferior paints will not hold up. Also, it is important to use a good quality watercolor paper made of cotton, much like the canvas oil painters use. Cotton will not deteriorate or yellow as fast as acidic wood pulp. There are other types of paper made of products different than cotton, but as long as it is labeled archival, I think you would be fine for longevity.

Amy, unfortunately, the inferior watercolor products used in the past- some pigments were made of very fugitive elements such as camel urine and even mummies! - have set a tone of fragility and impermanence that permeates the uninformed art world to this day. Today I am still amazed to hear "knowledgeable" curators and gallery owners make ignorant comments such as "Well, you know, watercolors will fade."



I was at recently at a show of a prominent artist's watercolors that were under low light conditions because they "fade and turn yellow" I took a closer look at them and they appeared to consist of a very poor quality of wood pulp paper and the pigments did not look any better. I would expect nothing less! However, this is certainly not universal for today.

So, spread the word, we do have a permanent product!

Keep your brush wet!

Eric



*AWS Gold Medal of Honor Award*