



# RESINS FOR OIL PAINTING

**Resins are hard, solid, transparent substances which are insoluble in water and are used for making varnishes or mediums for oil paintings. They are traditionally derived from living or fossilized trees but are also manufactured synthetically nowadays.**

## **DAMAR**

is the best of the natural resins for painting mediums, varnishes or as a sealant for absorbent grounds. It is also useful in helping to prevent wrinkling in oil films. The best grades are virtually colourless. The resin should be dissolved in turpentine (NOT white spirit or alcohol).

To make a pint of damar varnish, dissolve 6 1/4 ounces of damar resin in 10 fluid ounces of turpentine. This will make a solution of average strength which can then be adjusted with turpentine to achieve the required fluidity.

## **MASTIC**

is softer than damar, is more easily brushed and is soluble in both turpentine and alcohol, but it is inferior to damar as it turns yellow or brown with age and is no longer recommended for use in painting mediums. The traditional medium "megilp" consists of a mixture of mastic and linseed oil; it is prone to cracking, blistering and discolouration and it remains highly soluble even when aged.

## **SANDARAC**

is similar to mastic. It is soluble in alcohol, acetone and partially soluble in turpentine. It is quite hard, extremely brittle and it is inferior to mastic for yellowing. It can be replaced in recipes by damar to produce better results.

## **COPAL**

is a name applied to a variety of hard natural resins, thus it is impossible to determine its quality. It only dissolves in warm oil and when dry it cannot be removed by ordinary solvents and should not be used as a final varnish. Unless well acquainted with the properties of the various resins it is probably best to avoid their use. Copal varnishes involving mixtures with drying oils always turn dark and they are extremely prone to cracking.

## **MANILLA COPAL**

Soft copal or spirit soluble copal is inferior to the true copals for any artistic use. It can be used as a cheap substitute for shellac.

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(continued)

## SHELLAC

greatly thinned with alcohol, shellac is useful for sizing porous surfaces. Because it turns dark with age it is unsuitable for painting mediums or varnishes. It produces a hard, flexible film but it is not suitable for use with drying oils. It is insoluble in turpentine or white spirit.

## ALKYD RESINS

are a range of products based upon the special reaction between two classes of materials (particular types of alcohols and acids, hence "al - cid"). They can be produced to have particular characteristics, flexibility, fluidity, speed of drying etc. Those used in the manufacture of painting mediums are generally "oil-modified" alkyds, that is, an oil (linseed, safflower or tobacco seed) is added during manufacture which helps improve durability. Usually they are supplied ready for use as painting mediums. They are often quick drying so they should be used with care over lower layers of paint. It is possible that they may remain too flexible in relation to the traditional materials of painting and there is some question about whether they are prone to yellowing.

## ACRYLIC RESINS

those based on methyl methacrylate are the principle resins used in synthetic oil painting varnishes. They are considered to be highly stable, remain flexible and do not discolour. There is some question about their long term stability when mixed with drying oils. but used as a final varnish they would seem to be an excellent alternative to damar. Their short history means they have not proved themselves fully, traditionalists may prefer to stay with damar resin but acrylic resins would seem a better alternative to any of the other natural resins.

For further information about resins we recommend reading "The Artist's Handbook of Materials And Techniques" by Ralph Mayer. Recipes for painting mediums and resin based varnishes can be found in

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