



Utrecht Art Supplies

Product Profiles: What is "Megilp"?

Ask the Expert: "I've seen painting mediums with the name "Megilp". Is this an ingredient, a technique or something else?"



A: Megilps, "Macgelps" etc are historical oil painting mediums that are optically clear with a gel consistency, but which flow when agitated or brushed. Sometimes called "painting butters", Megilps were developed in the 19th and 20th centuries in pursuit of the lost secrets of the Old Masters. Formulas varied, but most involved a heat-bodied oil cooked with driers combined with a gum varnish like mastic. Some have the consistency of a loose jelly, while others have the stiffness of softened butter.

Conservation scientists and technical art historians no longer believe these 19th c formulas would have been used by artists like Rubens or Rembrandt, and believe the admirable effects achieved by the Old Masters are instead the result of sheer skill, craftsmanship and virtuoso handling of basic materials.

Artists experimenting with "painting jelly" found it did facilitate fluid brush work and quickly generated deep, clear glazes. Unfortunately, optical effects achieved with megilp can come at

the cost of durability. Pictures made with these mediums often exhibit defects like darkening, wrinkling and crazing.



Art materials manufacturers have developed a wide range of mediums that offer similar properties to historical megilps, without the associated disadvantages. Alkyd-based mediums like Neo-Megilp, Liquin Gel, Utrecht Alkyd Gel and others make it possible to develop deep glazes that dry rapidly to a stable film with great flexibility, neutral color and clarity. Modern mediums can be used to achieve a very authentic traditional effect, with a degree of permanence unmatched by earlier materials.