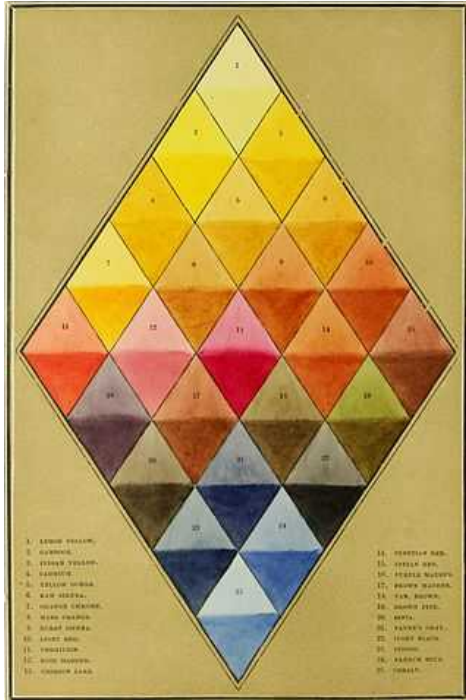




Utrecht Art Supplies Archival, Permanent and Lightfast



Ask the Expert: "We hear the terms 'Permanent', 'Lightfast' and 'Archival' all the time pertaining to art. Assuming they are not interchangeable, can you please give a clear explanation and distinguish between the three?"

A: You're right- these terms get thrown around kind of casually in the art materials field. It really shouldn't be so, because it's important for artists to understand the concepts behind the terminology so they can confidently create lasting works of art.

Permanent

For the purposes of art, "Permanent" means that a material is indefinitely durable under reasonable, ordinary display conditions. If a material doesn't meet this standard, we might describe it as "display grade" or "scholastic grade".

Permanence can be relative depending on the intended use and projected lifespan of the finished work. For instance, markers are often referred to as "permanent" because they use ink that can't easily be washed away or erased, but the colorants used in most markers will fade if displayed for a long time under normal lighting. This doesn't mean that markers are in any way defective, it just means that they are best used for their intended purpose (sketches and layouts) and are not a good substitute for bona fide artists' paints.

Lightfast

Lightfastness describes the ability of a pigment to endure normal light exposure for the reasonable lifespan of an art object without perceptible color change. Lightfastness is an aspect of overall durability, and an important factor in determining if a material is suitable for permanent art. In order to rate lightfastness of a color, samples are bombarded with artificial light to emulate natural exposure and compared against a neutral standard to determine any degree of color change.

The most lightfast colors can withstand long-term, outdoor display in full sunlight, while others may begin to show subtle fading over time. Artists should be familiar with the lightfastness ratings of their colors and choose what's appropriate for a given project, based on nature and duration of exposure. An outdoor mural displayed in full sunlight will require colors with the highest lightfastness rating in order to maintain original appearance long-term. Watercolors, on the other hand, are displayed indoors under controlled lighting, and are often only exhibited for planned intervals to reduce fading.

It's possible for skilled artists to achieve durable results using colors with lower lightfastness ratings (e.g. Alizarin Crimson) by avoiding light tints and very thin glazes applied over white.

Archival

Strictly speaking, "archival" refers to materials and techniques suitable for use with articles of a valuable collection, such as a museum or library. Some art supplies have proven suitable for archival applications, just as some archival supplies are commonly used in the artist's studio. This does not mean, however, that all permanent art materials can be described as "archival"- oil paints, for example, should not be used on paper or unprotected cloth. Alternately, the ink use in archival marking pens can last for years on items in storage, but may not last as long if applied to the surface of a painting.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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