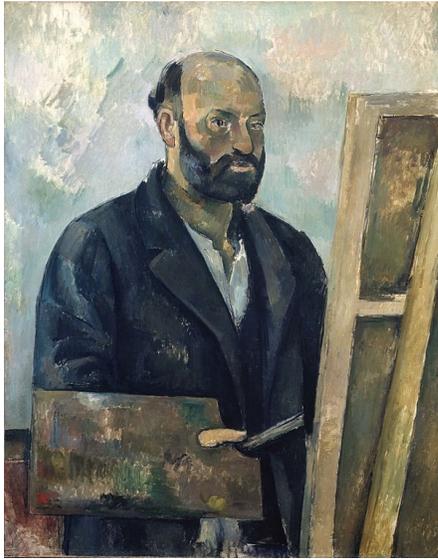


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ASK THE EXPERTS

Product Profiles: Fruit Stone Black Pigment



Paul Cézanne, Self Portrait with Palette, 1890

More recently, new black hues were introduced made from combinations of synthetic organic pigments; however, some contemporary artists still favor the subtle, unusual quality peach black imparts.



Retort kilns for converting peach pits into charcoal

Ask the Experts: “I was reading about Cezanne’s palette, and saw “peach black” was listed. Is this pigment related to actual peach somehow? I don’t think of the color black when I think of peaches.”

A: Peach Black pigment is a carbon (charcoal) made from peach pits. Fruit stones and seeds, nutshells, and other plant and animal materials have been used for centuries as the raw materials for production of carbon black pigments. As with Peach Black, the names of some of these products refer to their natural sources. For example, most artists are familiar with Vine and Willow Charcoal, whose names refer to the plants from which they are made.

Peach Black pigment has a cool appearance, compared to some neutrals with a warm brown undertone. This neutral color can be easily spotted in blue-black passages in the work of Cezanne and French contemporaries. Wood charcoal black pigment was much more common in the past, and has been identified in many historical works from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, as has fruit stone carbon. Today, the most commonly used black pigments in the artist’s palette are Ivory Black (from charred bone) and Lamp Black (from oil pitch, or in some cases, natural gas).

Originally, fruit pits, nutshells, vine and willow trimmings (materials used to produce carbon pigments) were considered to be waste. That changed abruptly during World War I with the use of poison gas as a weapon of war.



Barrel for public collection of peach pits

In developing masks and respirators capable of protecting against chemical weapons, it was discovered that fruit pits- particularly peach stones- yielded a

charcoal that was highly adsorbent (causing surface adhesion of other substances) due to millions of microscopic voids formed from plant cells during roasting. This property made activated peach charcoal the best available filter compound for gas masks, and for this reason, fruit stones became a valuable commodity, subject to mass collection and government stockpiling. While we were unable to verify, it would be hard to imagine that this increased demand for a critical resource wouldn't have affected the availability of peach black for artistic use.

Some manufacturers still offer charcoal-based black paints and inks, including peach and cherry stone charcoal. These products are worth trying, for their unique properties, historical significance, and as an alternative to animal-derived products.

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