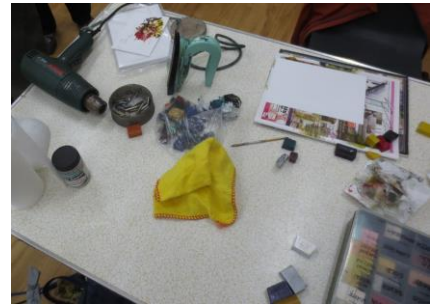




ODIHAM ART GROUP DEMONSTRATION REPORT

Demonstration of Encaustic Wax techniques by Phil Madley

Phil started by showing us the different kinds of equipment he used for encaustic wax work, most important of which is an iron – but *not* the sort you buy in John Lewis. This looks a little like a travelling iron and heats to a set, specific temperature that will melt but not burn the wax. He also uses a hot air gun (a little like a paint stripper gun) to move the wax around once it is on the support – he was asked if it was possible to use a hair dryer and he said no as it would not be hot enough and the air flow would not be powerful enough to move the wax. In addition he has a variety of electric heated stylus' in a range of shapes and sizes with which he cuts and shapes the wax, creating shapes and textures once it is on the support. The wax comes in small manageable blocks and there is currently a choice of up to 48 colours (each costing £1.10p for a block) plus gold, silver and bronze.



The wax is pressed against the surface of the iron to melt it and then either spread or dripped onto the support, which can be strong card with a shiny surface, prepped canvas, material or MDF. He was asked if you can use photographic paper but he advised against, saying that it can wrinkle up due to the heat of the process. For his first piece Phil melted a colour onto card then placed the iron flat onto the melted wax and moved it around to create ripples and abstract shapes, using the side of the iron to cut fine lines and definition into the image. The lighter the wax, the runnier it is. He showed great dexterity with quite a bulky bit of kit, using the tip of the iron to do delicate work.



The electric styluses are used to scratch back to lower layers. Phil stressed that the working surface must be flat and able to take heat (so don't use the dining room table) with a protective covering such as old newspapers which can be disposed of after each painting to stop the wax building up around the work surface.



Phil showed us a range of styles and subjects, including flowers, landscapes, a seascape and a figure painting. He dropped colours on top of each other then cut into them with a stylus or moved them around with the iron and hot air gun, lifting away layers of colour to reach the one he wanted. An ethereal landscape was done using white and shades of green, dark blue and black whilst for the seascape he started with white, then a pale blue followed by a darker blue at the bottom of the painting, then scraped back to the white through the blues to create waves and a shoreline. The flower was created with yellow, then red, then blue wax, all moved around with the air gun and the iron, followed by dropping silver onto the image. Silver, gold and bronze wax floats on top of other colours, giving a lovely effect.



Once the painting is completely cool and dry it is polished with kitchen roll or a soft dry cloth to bring the colours out even more. Polishing the wax makes the darks darker and light colour lighter, accentuating the image. He then coats the painting with a layer of varnish. Visitors to his exhibitions and open studio have been known to push their fingernails into the image in order to prove to themselves that it is wax, so Phil has taken to displaying his paintings behind glazed frames these days! He does use museum quality glass for his frames as regular glass has too much reflection, especially when the painting has so many shiny surfaces. All the wax colours are permanent but Phil advised that finished paintings should be treated as watercolours and hung away from direct sunlight.



Phil has mastered a technique that was new to most of his audience and his dry, funny presentation was much appreciated and enjoyed by us all – I don't think I can remember laughing quite so much during any other demonstration.