

THE PRACTICE OF FRESCO PAINTING

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The practice of fresco painting by W. Winsor & H. C. Newton

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**THE PRACTICE OF
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THE CARTOON.

THE METHOD OF MAKING IT—ITS APPLICATION TO THE WALL
—THE IMPRACTICABILITY OF ALTERATIONS.

THE Cartoon is, as the term imports, a PAPER surface, whereon the proposed subject is carefully made out, as preparatory to being transferred by tracing, or pouncing, to the plaster.

The nature of fresco-painting is such as to preclude the possibility of retouching to any extent; hence the necessity of daily undertaking only so much of the work as can be perfected within the day; and thus it is shewn that the design must be, as a cartoon, matured to its ultimate nicety—change or correction being impracticable in the subsequent process. In the National Gallery, at the top of the staircase, may be seen cartoons by Agostino Carracci; also a fragment by Raffaele, for the Murder of the Innocents. In compositions of large size, it is usual, for the convenience of working, to divide the drawing upon two or more cartoons, every care of course being taken that these parts form a perfect whole, as emendations are not to be thought of in transferring to the plaster. The cartoon may be prepared in this manner:—

Stretch a strong cloth on a frame, as if for painting; to this, glue a covering of paper. When the first layer of paper is dry, cover it with a second, and as evenly as possible.

Where the edges of the paper meet and overlap, they may be scraped a little, in order to prevent inequalities in the work. The surface is then prepared for drawing with size and alum. The drawing is made with charcoal; and, when finished, is fixed by wetting the back (the cloth) with cold water, and then steaming the drawing in front. The effect of this last operation is to melt the size a little, thus fixing the charcoal.

A finished drawing of the full size being thus made, an outline tracing is taken from it on paper rendered transparent by means of oil; for this purpose the paper employed should be moderately thin, that a distinct outline be ensured, as this is the "working" drawing which is applied to the wall.

As much of this outline-drawing as can be finished at one painting is now nailed to the wet wall, and again traced with a point, so as to leave an indented outline on the lime surface.

Another method is also in use for transferring the design to the wall:—

The paper to be applied to the wall is placed behind, and in close contact with, the finished cartoon: the outlines of which are pricked through so as to leave a similarly pricked outline on the paper behind. The next process is, to apply the paper to the wall, and pounce the pricked outline with a bag of black or red dust; thus leaving the drawing on the wall in dotted outline. This method is sometimes preferred for small works, as it has the advantage of preserving the surface of the plaster undisturbed. The first mode, however, that of tracing on oiled paper, and thence again on the wall, is generally preferred, for two reasons; that the original cartoon may be preserved uninjured, and because the outline is more decided.

In tracing the outlines on the wet wall, the two methods have been variously adopted. Fra Bartolomeo, Luca Signorelli, Andrea del Sarto, and many others, used the point.

According to the Report of C. H. Wilson, Esq., Director of the Government School of Design, at Somerset House, who was during last year employed by Her Majesty's Commissioners on the Fine Arts to proceed to the Continent to collect information relating to the objects of the Commission—

“ Pietro Perugino pounced all his outlines, and so did his great pupil Raffaello; but his pupils again followed each his own fancy in this respect. The following facts as to the frescos in the Stanze, may be interesting, and when taken in conjunction with other differences in the colour and mode of painting, may not be without value in considering these pictures with reference to the different hands employed in painting them. The stylus, or point, is nowhere used in the Dispute of the Sacrament, nor in the School of Athens, except in the drapery of Hippias, where the artist has made an alteration in the folds. In the Parnassus there is no use of the stylus, save in the robes of Homer and Tasso, probably therefore painted by a pupil who followed his own system of outline. In the Heliodorus, Attila, Mass of Bolsena, and Peter delivered from Prison, the point is not used, except in putting in the moon in the last picture. The Incendio del Borgo has first been pounced, and then outlined with a very sharp point on the wet plaster; the picture of the Oath of Leo III., is outlined in the same way, and so carelessly, that the plaster is broken out in parts: these two pictures are in this respect a striking contrast to the others. Gialio Romano did not use the point in his Battle of Constantine with Maxentius.

“Raffaëlle did not use the point in his fine works in the Farnesina, and the advantage is obvious; those beautiful creations would have been injured by its use, for whilst its convenience makes it very proper to use it in works removed to a considerable distance from the spectator, it never should be seen in those which are nearer to the eye, especially if the light comes from the side.”

To consider the cartoon as briefly as possible in all its probable circumstances, it may here be observed, that in the fresco, as the final operation, no changes can be made; any improvement, therefore, that may suggest itself must be effected on the cartoon, or on additional pieces of paper fitted to it. Departures from the original design are chiefly additions. The most interesting example of this is shown in Raffaëlle's School of Athens; that is, in the difference between the finished fresco and the original cartoon. In the fresco, the figure of Epictetus, sitting in the foreground on the left, is not found in the cartoon, having been added to fill up a space. Another difference is seen in the head of Aspasia, which is covered with drapery in the fresco, but in the cartoon it appears with flowing tresses, a change which might have been made upon the wall, without reference to the preparatory drawing. This cartoon is preserved in the Ambrosian Library, at Milan, and contains the figures only, without the architecture; and that it is the same that served for the execution of the fresco, is proved by the exact conformity of every part with the painting, except the above-mentioned additions.

As it is equally impossible to effect changes in colour as in form, it will be desirable to prepare a sketch of the intended arrangement of colour.

THE SELECTION OF LIME.

THE ROMAN, GENOISE, FLORENTINE, AND BRITISH LIMES.

THE selection of the lime intended as a ground for fresco-painting is a matter of great importance. The qualities of the limes of this country have been questioned as to their fitness for fresco-painting; but it is satisfactorily shewn, that a material is obtained even superior to any other yet known to have been used in the preparation of grounds. It is not here intended to observe at any length on the qualities of foreign limes, but only to mention them comparatively, and, in such a manner, as at once to show that it is not necessary to seek at a distance from home a material for grounds, and to afford the experimentalist maximum and minimum qualities whence to deduce an average for himself.

A limestone consisting of as few foreign ingredients as possible is *generally* esteemed the fittest; although Carrara marble,* which is pure carbonate of lime, is, when required in quantity, disqualified for use from its peculiar structure, while even a much less pure lime has been employed without any pernicious result.

The limestone used by all the great artists who painted in Rome in the beginning of the 16th century was Travertine, of which St. Peter's, the Colosseum, and other ancient and modern edifices in Rome, are constructed. It is recommended by Vasari, and was probably used for this purpose by the ancients.

* Professor Mussent, of the Academy of Florence, employs, we believe, marble dust, which is said, by peculiar management, to communicate to the fresco the appearance of enamel.

This is almost a pure carbonate of lime, affording in a hundred parts—

Carbonate of lime,	99 . 4
Alumina, with a trace of oxide of iron,	. 6
	<hr/>
	100 .

During the best period of Italian art, the lime of Genoa was highly esteemed, and remarkable for its whiteness. Frescos in exterior walls in that city have resisted the effects of sea-air. In analysis this lime yields,

Carbonate of lime,	63
Carbonate of magnesia,	36
Earthy matter, oxide of iron, and bituminous matter,	1
	<hr/>
	100

The lime used by the Florentine painters is found to be almost pure carbonate of lime, and of that used at Munich the proportions are,

Carbonate of lime,	80
Carbonate of magnesia	20
	<hr/>
	100

Although the purest lime has always been sought and recommended, it is yet shown that impurity to a certain amount is not injurious to the work. A fresco was executed seventeen years ago at Bath, by Mr. Thomas Barker, which remains in