Making and Extending Oil Painting Medium. Mircea Teleaga

What I want to draw attention upon is not literally a recipe but rather a way of working or a few tips that can help with saving time and introduce some discipline in the working process.

The main idea is to try to stick to the 'fat over lean' rule as much as possible to ensure that the painting lasts as much as possible. In this sense I have devised a way of working, in stages, which enables a lot of layers to be applied safely one on top of the other.

Therefore, I prepare different bottles or containers of medium before painting and I use them at different stages in painting. I start painting with the solution which has the lowest concentration of oil (see below) and as layers keep building up and drying, I shift to the next solution with a bit more oil in it and so on. This way I do not need to always keep track of how much oil is in my medium, as the quantity of oil will increase gradually.

I have seven 500ml bottles ready at all times with the ratios of oil and solvent which I use most, but everyone can adapt this to their own way of working. The mediums I usually have ready are:

1. 5% Linseed Oil in solvent – 25ml Linseed Oil in 475ml solvent.
2. 10% Linseed Oil in solvent – 50ml Linseed Oil in 450ml solvent.
3. 15% Linseed Oil in solvent – 75ml Linseed Oil in 425ml solvent.
4. 20% Linseed Oil in solvent – 100ml Linseed Oil in 400ml solvent.

*Safflower Oil can be used instead of the Linseed if required. Safflower Oil will yellow less in time but is more prone to cracking. Linseed Oil is more elastic but will yellow a lot more over time.

For the next three I use Stand Oil as the medium becomes stickier and the Linseed Oil fails to keep the medium and paint together for a big number of layers. Stand Oil can also be used from the beginning as well instead of Linseed Oil.

5. 25% Stand Oil in solvent – 125ml Stand Oil in 375ml solvent.
6. 30% Stand Oil in solvent – 150ml Stand Oil in 350ml solvent.
7. 40% Stand Oil in solvent – 175ml Stand Oil in 325ml solvent.

** To simplify everything one can use Stand Oil in all instances. Stand Oil is very flexible once dry and dos not yellow so much or time.

Note on solvents: I prefer to use Sansodor as it is a milder solvent than Turpentine. Very strong solvents are much more toxic and should be handled with more care. The most important thing to note here is to carefully read the label on the solvent container and respect the indications written there. The more red signs, exclamation marks, skulls and bones, dead trees and fish are on the label, the more toxic will it be. Strong solvents such as Turpentine will penetrate the skin and go into the blood stream. This is quite harmful beside the fact that they are very flammable and evaporate quite quickly. They may also influence how the colours look as well. For example, industrial strength white spirit may give the impression that a foggy white film has been applied to the painting. On the other hand Sansodor will not dissolve Dammar resin in order to make Dammar Varnish needed in a medium discussed below. In that case only Turpentine can be used and it is advisable to research the

properties of Turpentine then or those of any solvent used. In the case of Turpentine, all contact with skin should be avoided and it should be handled only in well ventilated areas. The use of a breathing mask is strongly recommended.

Up until now the layering of paint can be done quite safely but from now on certain risks can appear. What I mean by risks is the fact that by adding more things into the medium, the paint layers will be more prone to more dramatic changes. Also, by adding more elements into the mix, the fat over lean rule becomes more difficult to respect. The more layers a painting has, the more chances of things going wrong. As an example, Van Gogh's paintings are among the best preserved paintings as they were painted extremely quickly, the Oil paint drying almost in one solid layer.
In order to increase the number of the layers, and also their complexity and appearance, further elements can be added to the medium. Some of the most popular have been eggs, sand, beeswax, Dammar Varnish and many more.

Different kinds of sand or marble dusts have been added to paint in order to create different textures or to alter the look of the dried paint layer. Anything can be added into the paint mix, if one sees the paint and paint medium as a kind of glue that will keep everything together and make it adhere to the surface.

Beeswax

Beeswax can be used as a main ingredient for a Beeswax (Impasto) Medium in order to enable thick layers of paint to be applied. Its stiffness will preserve thick and heavy brush marks and it will also act as a cheap extender for the paint. Also, the beeswax will make the paint matt and give it a almost transparent look, similar to wax obviously. Add more Turpentine if too thick, or reduce Turpentine amount to create a gel. The Dammar Varnish will increase the glossiness, so more can be added to reduce the mattness of the wax, or less can be added to give the paint a more waxy feel.

In order to make this medium you need:

1 part Stand Oil

1 part Dammar Varnish

2 parts Beeswax

6 parts Turpentine

When used in excess, the wax can be harmful t the painting as it can crack or even become soft when exposed to higher temperatures. (the Dammar Varnish with the Turpentine prevent this from happening) Beeswax remains vulnerable to the solvent action of Turpentine or white spirit.

In order to make this medium, place the beeswax in a pan and cover with the Turpentine. Leave to soak (in a warm place) 2-3 days until dissolved. Stir the oil in the soft beeswax paste. Place the container in warm water to gain a homogeneous mixture. Stir in the Dammar Varnish.

Eggs

Adding eggs to the medium will eventually create what is called *tempera grassa.* Eggs are a great way to extend the medium as they will enable the oil to mix with water and this is very important if it is required to make the medium more fluid.

Please note that over time the paint film will become more brittle because of the eggs. This becomes less of a problem if painting on a hard surface such as wood or board.

Once the eggs are mixed in, and this medium created, it is very important to note that it has to be stored in a fridge or in a cold place as the eggs will eventually go bad and a new medium must be made.

In order to make this medium there are a number of recipes, based on *tempera grassa*, but they all seem to more or less follow this ratio:

1 part Stand Oil (the quantity of oil can be increased with every layer to ensure the top layers are always fatter)

1 part Dammar Varnish (note that Dammar will only melt in Turpentine, so this medium has to be Turpentine based*)

2 parts whole eggs (whole eggs seems to be better for the longevity of the painting)

4 parts water

* It is important to know that adding Dammar Varnish to the medium is controversial and can damage the painting in the future. It will make the painting film more brittle over time and it will also darken it, therefore if used, it should be used sparingly. This can be seen in the works of de Kooning and Diebenkorn.