

IKB

*With the Void, Full Powers*¹

Hugely precious and derived from lapis lazuli, ultramarine as a pigment embodied in colour symbolic site as well as spiritual and monetary value. The chemical composition of ultramarine was determined by Clément and Désormes in 1806 and it became widely available after J.B Guimet of Toulouse developed an economic method of synthetic manufacture in 1828.² Whether one considers him a mystic revolutionary or contradictory charlatan, Yves Klein's (1928–1962) IKB seemed to restore ultramarine's power by creating an unattainable³ surface which etches itself into memory and for many, provokes wonder.



In 1956 Klein enlisted the help of Edouard Adam and the chemical manufacturer Rhône-Poulenc to capture the essence of pure pigment as a paint. It turned out that a combination of a colourless polyvinyl acetate resin called Rhodopas M60A (originally a synthetic map waterproofing agent), a dash of alcohol and ultramarine pigment would result in the colour Klein sought - one which retained the 'extraordinary autonomous life' of the blue.

The resin, which is still manufactured (as le Medium Adam²⁵), was unavailable at the time of my research and I only became aware of it through the research, so I embarked on an approximation. Initially I was using various here-say techniques canvassed from as many sources as were willing including Edouard Adam's nephew Fabien in Paris. However,

¹ Albert Camus on Klein, 1958
<http://www.yvesklein.com/en/documents/view/86/with-the-void-full-powers-albert-camus/?of=5>

² *Ultramarine*, Paul Robinson, Turps Banana Magazine, Issue 8, 40-43

³ IKB, International Klein Blue as patented by Klein (Soleau envelope no. 63471 was registered in Paris on May 19, 1960)

⁴ Le Medium Adam²⁵ (as it is called for IKB copyright reasons) can still be purchased in Paris from ADAM Montmartre along with instructions: http://www.adam18.com/PDF/Fiche_medium_adam_25_english.pdf.

discovering a research paper by Christa Haiml on restoring a damaged Klein painting Blue Monochrome (IKB 42) (1960) proved invaluable.

IKB is as much about an ideal binding agent as it is about a specific pigment. In interviewing Edouard Adam, Haiml found that: 'There is no one true IKB pigment. The "pure ultramarine blue, reference 1311," which sounds so precise in Klein's formula, refers to a blue that Adam purchased from his pigment supplier at the time, but his suppliers changed over the course of the years and he cannot trace back exactly where 1311 came from.'⁵

Pigment

I used Kremer Ultramarine Blue Dark (K45010) as used, amongst others, by Haiml to create the most successful versions - however I found that the amount and type of pigment in the mixture and the quantities of each ingredient continually altered the effect.

Resin

Rhodopas M60A was a polyvinyl acetate used by Klein and Adam for its high adhesive strength, which allowed a low resin-solvent concentration. Unavailable when I was working on this project I initially replaced Rhodopas M60A with PVA wood glue which created a good pigmented surface however it wasn't quite perfect.

Secret ingredient

The key ingredient on the list still seemed to be alcohol however mixing alcohol with PVA made the pigment darken and plasticise - on one occasion creating pure slime. Once dry, a surface coating of pigment and alcohol could be applied to the PVA pigment mixture to obtain a pigmented effect. However, this surface, despite its beauty was not durable. My breakthrough was the miscibility of Lascaux Resoluble Medium 2035 in alcohol.

Combining the alcohol and resin seemed the technique closest to that described by all the accounts I had read and, looking at the results, the effect was also closest. The surface was also much more stable than the alcohol / pigment coating and the texture achieved also echoed the ability of the Klein surfaces to retain the textured peaks and troughs achieved by his use of a lambskin roller.

⁵ *Restoring the Immaterial: Study and Treatment of Yves Kleins's Blue Monochrome (IKB 42)* by Christa Haiml in *Modern Paints Uncovered*, Organized by the Getty Conservation Institute, Tate, and the National Gallery of Art, Tate Modern, London May 16-19, 2006, Edited by Thomas J. S. Learner, Patricia Smithen, Jay W. Krueger, and Michael R. Schilling, pp152

IKB will however always remain an unattainable proposition, not just because it is more process than colour, but also owing to copyright reasons. So, below, you will find a recipe to suspend pigment in a acrylic binder - you may just choose to use ultramarine.



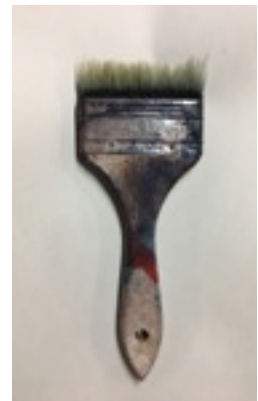
Ingredients

- Lascaux Water Resoluble Medium
- Kremer Ultramarine Blue Dark (K45010) or similar ultramarine pigment
- IPA (isopropyl alcohol)
- A brush you are happy to be forever blue...
- Mask
- Use best practice when working with pigment and alcohol



Method

- In a vessel mix a thick paste of pigment and resoluble solution, as thick as you can make it. (Basically 1:1 but I tend to work on texture)
- Keep mixing. You want to coat the maximum number of pigment particles with binder.
- Once you feel you have stirred the pigment thoroughly add some alcohol. This will initially loosen the mixture and create a viscous paint but the alcohol will evaporate leaving the pigment rich surface.



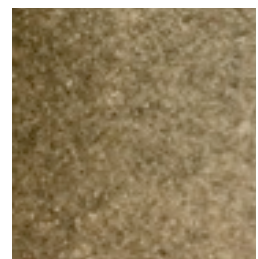
Tips and tricks

I advise painting the surface in one go.

It can take a couple of coats or just one depending on the surface you paint on and the paint consistency.

Paint an undercoat of the same solution but with a small amount of water in the mix. You may find adding water helpful for larger surfaces.

Preparing a textured surface can help the pigment to adhere and to enhance the pigmented effect.



It also likes an absorptive surface, Klein sometimes used casein, Adam recommend gesso.

Using a 'stippling' brush action is also helpful. (You will note a lot of the Klein IKB works are textured).

If it still isn't even try a coat of just water or alcohol. (Don't drag the brush you want to leave the pigment where it is so just dab or stipple)

Too many coats can clog your surface, especially a textured one.

The finished surface should not come off on your hands. But it is delicate and will absorb the oils in your hands - so wear gloves or use a cloth to handle works.

It might mark the wall if dragged across it etc.

Try other binders for different effects or pigments - I have also had some success with Plextol D498 and PVA (Polyvinyl Alcohol) (Kremer 67710) solutions using water and alcohol.

Read: *Restoring the Immaterial: Study and Treatment of Yves Kleins's Blue Monochrome (IKB 42)* by Christa Haiml in *Modern Paints Uncovered*



Sarah Pettitt

2016

The man who wants to shoot a cloud down with an arrow will exhaust all his arrows in vain

Air drying clay, ultramarine pigment in acrylic binder, wire, nails, gold leaf

32 x 32 cm

Keep experimenting and let me know your results or if you try le Adam25...

I'm really interested in recording how this effect works with different pigments and - as the story of IKB reflects - sometimes it takes an open source approach to crack a problem.

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