

Short technical glossary of drawing terms

This is in no way intended as an exhaustive glossary, and only relates to the techniques used in the drawings found in the collection.

Black chalk

Black chalk, which has been used like a pencil since the Italian Renaissance, is a type of clay-rich shale with a tight grain that produces a line varying from black to grey. In 18th century France, the raw material was cleaned of its impurities to create an artificial product with a blacker, more brilliant appearance. With its thick, smooth consistency, black chalk permits broad, vigorous strokes that can be used for rubbing or blended with a stump. Until the appearance of the graphite pencil, it remained the most popular medium for landscapes and also figures.

Charcoal

Artist's charcoal is an easily applied black medium produced by burning wood in a kiln without air. It is used in sticks and is popular for the variety of nuances that can be obtained according to the size of the stick and the angle at which it is used. Tones vary from pale grey to intense black. Surfaces can also be covered using a rubbing technique. In contrast to the sharp, clean lines of graphite, charcoal drawings are characterised by their velvety effect resulting from medium's friable and volatile nature. To avoid any loss of material and to preserve the drawing, however, a fixative must be used.

Gouache

Like watercolour, gouache is a variety of water-based paint containing ground pigments and gum arabic, but it is the presence of a white pigment that gives the medium greater density, producing a less translucent appearance. The result is an opaque paste that turns matt on

drying. In contrast to watercolours, gouache paintings do not use the transparency effect to achieve lighter tones, relying almost exclusively on the use of whites.

Graphite pencil

Graphite can either be mineral in origin – in which case it consists of mined flakes of pure graphite that are then ground – or artificial. The first experiments with artificial graphite, using natural graphite powder baked with clay, led to the creation of the “Conté crayon” (1795), named after its inventor Nicolas-Jacques Conté (1755 – 1805).

Graphite leads, encased between two half cylinders of cedar wood, were the favoured medium of the great nineteenth-century draughtsmen. The results are easy to recognise by their grey metallic sheen. The terms lead pencil and plumbago, a word deriving from the Latin for lead that is used for older graphite drawings, are actually misleading, as graphite contains no lead.

Ink

Two types of ink are commonly used: black carbon inks, composed of lampblack mixed with a binder and diluted in water, and iron gall inks, made of plant substances (oak galls) and iron sulphate. Between these two types, there are also a large number of inks of complex composition deriving from one type or the other. Carbon inks are black or brown (a shade sometimes known as *bistre*) but not all black inks are carbon inks. Iron gall ink is black when it is fresh but turns brown then fades as it ages, making its identification more complicated.

Indian ink

This black ink is made from lampblack (carbon), glue or gum and various

additives. It comes in the form of sticks that are ground with water on a stone containing a depression to hold the liquid. The ink has a brilliant blueish-black colour, and remains unaltered in light. It has been known since antiquity but was rarely used in Europe before the seventeenth century.

Pastel

Pastels consist of finely-ground coloured pigments mixed with a white filler (talc, kaolin, chalk or plaster), which are then added to a binder (glue, gum arabic) to form a paste (from which the term “pastel” ultimately derives) that is shaped into small sticks or crayons. By dosing the pigments, a large number of shades can be obtained. Pastel is a soft, friable and dusty medium. Its granular nature gives it an incomparable brilliance that means it can evoke both colour and light.

Wash

The wash technique consists of the use of a single colour of ink, diluted with water to obtain different intensities, which are then applied with a brush. The support used is almost always paper, or more rarely parchment. White is obtained from the white of the support, or sometimes using highlights in chalk or gouache. The wash can be applied over graphite lines, or combined with ink pen drawing to add shadows and shades.

Watercolour

This painting technique uses coloured pigments ground to a powder then made into a solution with water and a binder, generally gum arabic. The technique is characterised by its transparency and spontaneity, but it does not allow for revisions and requires rapid execution. It is often combined with other more

graphic techniques, whilst highlights can be added in gouache. In the 19th century, watercolour became the favoured medium amongst landscape artists who wanted to celebrate nature by painting en *plein air*.