

Identifying Broad Types and Ranges of Materials Used



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• Introduction

Alasdair Gray (1934-2019) is an accomplished Scottish writer and artist. His unique position in the literary and visual arts is marked by his diverse use of materials in different media.

In literature, he is best known for *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981) and *Poor Things* (1992).

In the visual arts, he specialised in printmaking, painting, illustration and murals.

Image by Ben Cavanagh
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The purpose of this research is to categorise as well as comprehensively catalogue the various materials that Gray uses in his creative works.

Personally, I think that this catalogue I have produced is quite an interesting piece of information, especially for researchers of Gray artworks, Scottish art or scholars of art conservation. And it will also serve as a comprehensive resource to support and enrich art historical research. This approach ensures that the catalogue is not just a collection of data, but a tool that can provide insight into Gray's creative process, artistic choices, and the wider context of his work.

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Plan Chest drawers, Alasdair Gray Archive
Photo: research photographs, Priscilla Chan



• Methodology

1. Data Collection

Systematically examine each project to identify the materials used, including paint tubes, paper, ink, palettes and any other available materials, as well as systematically exploring archives, primary sources, whilst drawing on Gray's own biographical content.

2. Cataloguing

Record the types of materials and any other media that may have been used in his artwork and in the AGA by Excel. For art materials, columns might include specific information: format/type of material, common names, technical names, manufacturer, serial numbers, amount used/remaining, location, notes, etc.

Catalogue the different types of material items by giving them codes for easier searching, sorting, and filtering of the catalogue.

• Material Use Analysis and discussion

- The preference for a wide range of colours suggests Gray's preference for creating vibrant and varied work. The variety of paint types (from professional to student grade) suggests an openness to using a wide range of pigments and mediums. His choice of materials ultimately depends on cost.

- Gray's palette is dominated by secondary colors, with a notable preference for hues such as permanent green light and emerald green (two tubes), Viridian Hue (two tubes). In his acrylic collection, he showcases a penchant for purples, evident from his use of Pale Violet (two tubes), Deep Violet, and Silk Purple.

-Indian ink, pens, pencils and watercolours are also used.

• Limitation

It is challenging to research and uncover in-depth information such as the relevant dates of use, provenance (whether the item was purchased specifically or received as a gift), and any associated artwork.

• Results

Wide Range of Materials:

Oil Paints	Acrylic Paints	Acrylic Inks	Mediums
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viridian Hue Titanium White Cobalt Blue Turquoise Light Lamp Black 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Silk Purple Ultramarine Blue Gloss Glaze Medium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grecian Olive Pearlescent Ink Moon Violet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Canvas Primer Liquin White Spirit Varnishes PVA

Most of the pigments have more than 70% remaining.
Primary suppliers: Winsor & Newton and Daler- Rowney, each at 34%.

• Conclusion

The state of the tools and materials also provides clues to the artist's working habits. And the presence of a variety of tools and colours hints at Gray's wide-ranging style of exploration, which is not limited to a single genre or approach.

• References

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