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The Importance of Aquatec Paint in and Beyond the Art Sphere

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Aquatec Paint: in and Beyond the Art Sphere

Presenter: CK Zaki Faculty Advisors: Prof. Pamela Smart, Prof. Andrea Kastner

Background:

Aquatec was a low-VOC water based acrylic paint created in the mid 20th century by Leonard Bocour and Sam Golden. Low-VOC pertains to a reduced amount of volatile organic compounds, usually <50 grams of VOC per liter, lowering the amount of harmful gasses emitted compared to traditional paint

Historical Context of Aquatec:

In the mid 20th century, Bocour Artist Colors had developed a highly pigmented but highly toxic resin based acrylic paint named Magna. This paint was provided to some of the most prolific color field painters of the time such as Mark Rothko, Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis amongst others. Golden sought to create a healthier waterborne version which led to the birth of Aquatec in 1960. Six years earlier the Liquitex company had created a similar product, which has remained more eponymously recognized to this day.



Bocour Colors Aquatec Color Swatch Chart c. 1949



Suite of vintage Bocour Colors products featuring box packaging and tubes of both Aquatec and Magna paints



Resources!



Aquatec & Industrial coatings:

In 1971, Golden and Bocour parted ways and with the dissolving of Bocour Artist Colors the Aquatec trademark was lost. Today, searches for Aquatec paint will lead to Sherwin-Williams VOC compliant Industrial Acrylic Enamel or Kynar® Aquatec, which supplies “premium weatherable water-based coatings.” Although no affiliation remains to Bocour or Golden Colors, the innovation of more environmentally responsible, non toxic options lives on with the name.

Legacy of Low VOC paint:

The concern that Golden had for his artist friends’ health in his pursuit of developing the best paints for the art world serves as a seed for how we currently think about paint in our everyday life. Increasingly, there is concern amongst not only artists but parents, teachers and recreational paint users about the content of the products they use. The research into Aquatec paint’s creation and its subsequent loss of visibility unearths its significance as a lost fossil of modern day paint chemistry.