

Koo Schadler  
**OIL PAINT OVER EGG TEMPERA**

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Water-based egg tempera paint does not adhere well to oil paint. However there is a successful tradition of applying oil on top of egg tempera. The majority of my work is composed of pure egg tempera, with hundreds of distinct layers in every painting. However I generally finish by isolating the tempera with a thin coat of shellac, then applying one to a dozen layers of oil paint. Although the oil layers comprise a small percentage of my paintings, they contribute certain visual effects that can't be achieved with tempera.

**1. Saturated surface.** The unique, matte finish of pure egg tempera paint is beautiful, but my preference is for a more saturated surface. Shellac and oil paint permeate the tempera layers, like wetting a dry rock. They deepen darks and intensify chroma to create a more dynamic range of values and colors, which I want in my images.

**2. Thicker paint.** Developing dense, opaque paint in lights and highlights enhances the illusion of luminosity and three-dimensional form, things I want to emphasize in my work. Egg tempera cracks if applied thickly, but oil can be applied densely, even three-dimensionally (impasto). I use a bit of opaque oil paint in the final layers to augment my lights and highlights.

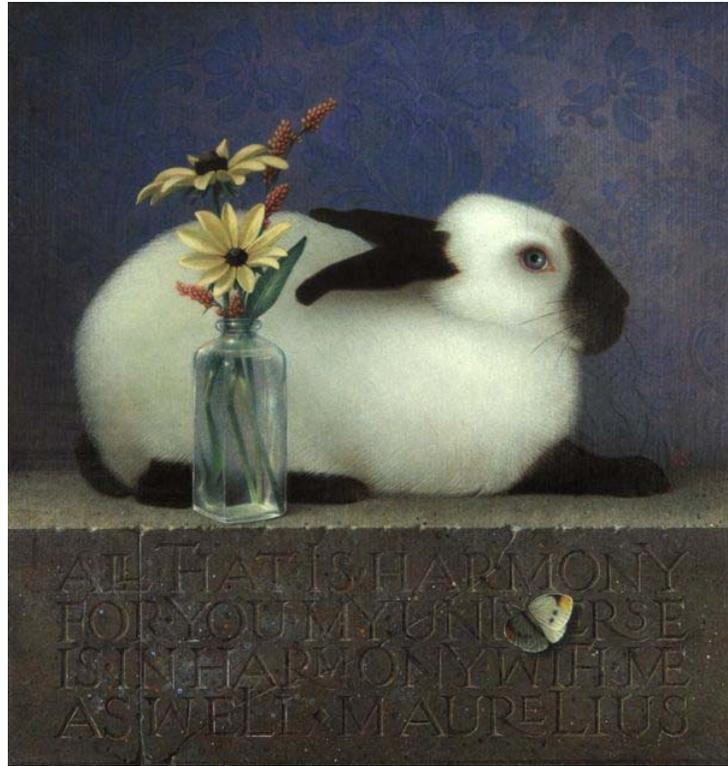
**3. Smooth, subtle glazing.** A glaze is a thin, transparent film of color applied evenly over previous layers. When fresh tempera paint is immediately re-worked it can dissolve and lift; this makes glazing in tempera (without lifting underlying layers) a challenge. With practice I've learned to glaze smoothly in tempera, and I do so often as I develop an image. In fact, I could probably achieve all the glazing effects I want with tempera alone. However glazing in oil is undoubtedly easier. Oil won't lift underlying tempera layers, which means an oil glaze can be brushed and reworked to perfection. I enjoy finishing a painting by applying a few, subtle oil glazes over certain parts of an image (for example, the deep shadows). These final glazes minutely modify value, chroma and temperature, and enhance the atmosphere of a painting.

When I explain my reasons for working with oil over tempera, people sometimes ask why I don't paint in oils alone. It is because there are many attributes of egg tempera that oil can't replicate. Tempera has a nearly unequalled capacity for fine and precise line work. It is excellent at depicting details. It dries to the touch within seconds, which allows dozens of layers to be applied in a single day – many more than in oil. Also due to its linearity and fast drying time, tempera is perfectly suited to rendering patterns, textures and faux surfaces. I value the requisite craftsmanship of tempera, which gives me greater knowledge and intimacy with my materials. The gradual, meditative process of building dozens of layers suits me, as does the thin, incorporeal nature of the paint. Finally, compared to the toxicity of oil solvents, tempera's solvent (water) is harmless. I love all these attributes of egg tempera.

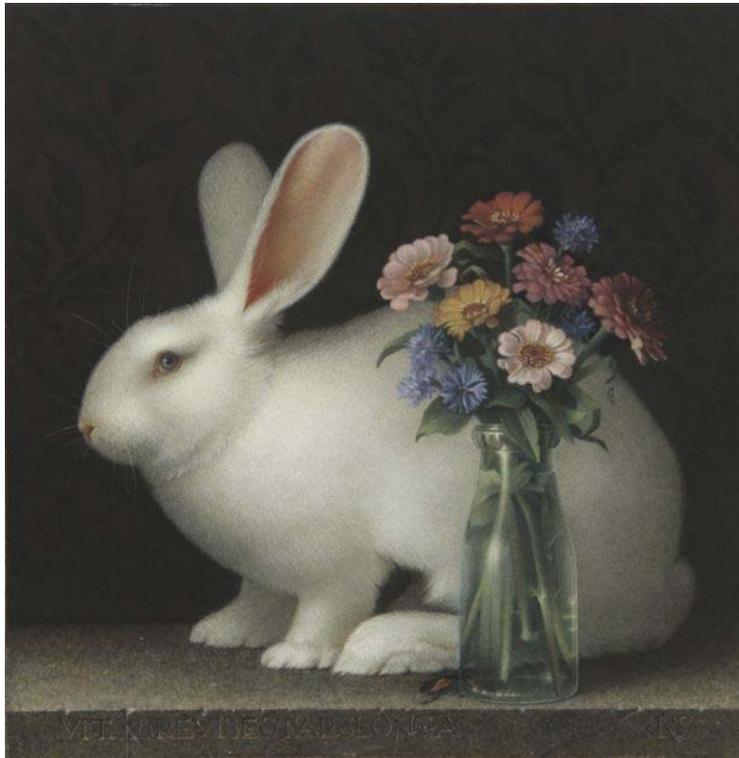
I describe my work as, “egg tempera, on true gesso panel, finished with oil”. It is an accurate but, unfortunately, sometimes misleading description. Because I work with tempera in some non-traditional ways and create a less characteristic egg tempera look and finish<sup>1</sup>, people may presume my effects are achieved principally with oil, not tempera. In fact my paintings, as stated, are composed primarily of pure egg tempera (see images below). After decades of experience tempera gives me nearly every visual effect I want. However there are a few things best achieved by the addition of a little oil - the icing on my tempera cake.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to the link “Egg Tempera Misconceptions” for more on the non-traditional ways I work with egg tempera.



**All that is Harmony**, 11 ½ x 10 ¾", egg tempera on true gesso panel (no oil).



**White Rabbit & Zinnias for Dorothy**, 11 ¼ x 10 ¾", egg tempera on true gesso panel (no oil).

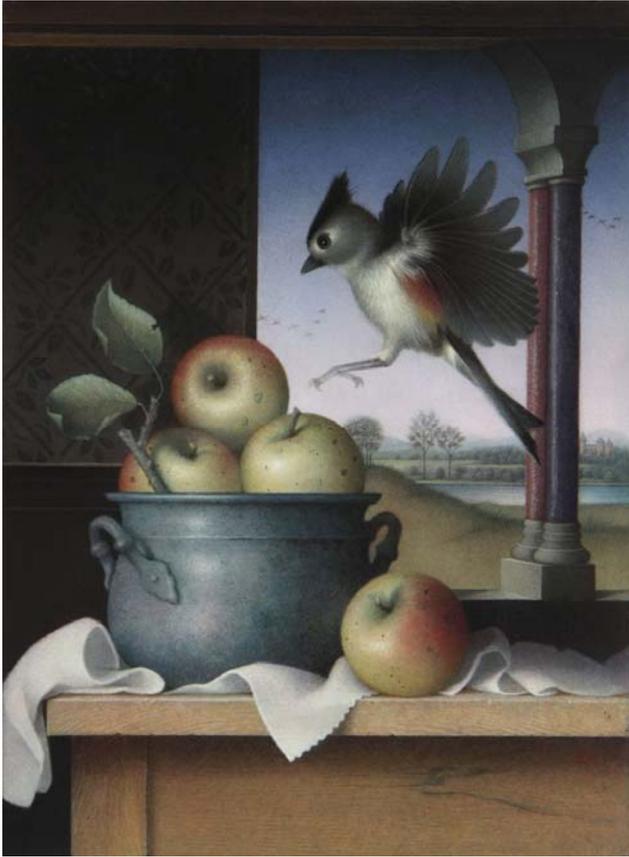


**Apples and Blackburnian Warblers**, (10 ¾ x 10 ¾”), egg tempera on true gesso panel (no oil).

In 2012 I painted several images – including the three above – using only egg tempera paint. No oil was applied to these pieces. I wanted to see if I could achieve my visual goals exclusively in tempera, and mostly I did. Nonetheless I missed the more opaque lights and atmospheric, deep shadows created by oils. So, for now, I have returned to finishing my egg tempera paintings with a few, final layers of oil.



**Black Crested Titmouse & Wild Apple**, still in the egg tempera stage



**Black Crested Titmouse & Wild Apples**, 12 3/8 x 9", egg tempera, on true gesso panel, finished with oil.

In the oil stage I increased the opacity of the lights and highlights (particularly on the apples and bird). Using various glazes, I deepened the shadows to create more value contrast and atmosphere. Over the course of one week I applied, in total, four to six, mostly thin layers of oil paint. I finished the piece with a retouch varnish to even out the shine.



**A Perfect Round - Snow Hare & Landscape Triptych**, 10 1/8 x 22 5/8 x 1", egg tempera on true gesso panel.

This is a painting I'm still working on – there are no oil layers yet, just egg tempera. After a few more sessions with tempera I'll switch to oil. I find it easier to paint diptychs or triptychs on a single panel (instead of juggling several individual panels on my easel). When the painting is complete I'll use a table saw to cut along the two scratched lines, converting a single panel into a triptych. Each panel will be framed individually, then hinged together as one piece.