



Utrecht Art Supplies

Product Profiles: White Lead Paste



Ask the Expert: "I've heard older artists talk about going to the hardware store and buying lead white oil paint for preparing canvas. I understand that's strictly a thing of the past. Do you know what that paint was like, and what the ingredients and proportions were?"

A: In 1978 lead-based architectural paint was banned in the US (wisely so), ending the days of cheap, easily available lead white primer for canvas. Less risky titanium and zinc replaced lead carbonate in most architectural and artists' paints. By this time the majority of artists had already opted for the simplicity and convenience of acrylic dispersion painting ground (better known as Acrylic Gesso) which did not require a separate sizing layer or long curing period like the older material.

The original Dutch Boy Lead White was a heavy paste intended to be mixed in varying proportion with different vehicles, thinners and driers depending on the substrate to be painted. The original proportion was 89% white lead, 9% linseed oil, 2% turpentine; it was reformulated later to 88% white lead, 10% linseed oil, 2% mineral spirits. A ready-to-use house paint was also available, composed of 72% pigment dispersed in a linseed oil/mineral spirits vehicle with 5% drier added. (The latter was too "fat" for use as a primer.)

Artists favored lead white painting grounds for their attractive appearance and suave, "fast" surface that allowed brushes to glide along without bristles being abraded or strokes breaking. Oil-based primers are still available for artistic painting, including a few that are still lead-based. Utrecht Oil Priming White contains no lead, but is formulated to give similar performance, texture and leanness to historical lead-based grounds with a high ratio of solids to vehicle.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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