



Utrecht Art Supplies

Just for Fun: What does "Archival" Mean?



Image: [Wikimedia commons](#)

What does "Archival" mean?

The term "archival" has become one of the most frequently used buzz words in the art materials industry. The word is now firmly established in the studio artist's lexicon; hundreds of products from adhesives to albums are sold as such, and artists frequently inquire whether their materials are "archival". The issue of permanence in art materials is complex, however, and no single word is adequate to describe every application, combination or display environment.

Strictly speaking, the term "archival" means "of or pertaining to archives or valuable records". As it applies to materials and supplies, "archival" means something suitable for long-term contact with important objects, safe and stable to museum or library standards.

When artists say "archival", usually they really mean "durable to the standards of permanent art". Many products used in the treatment and storage of valuable documents have been adapted for use in studio art. Just because a paper, adhesive or other material is recommended for archival use, however, does not automatically mean it's suitable for making art. In selecting materials, it's important to understand what "archival" does (and does not) imply:

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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- Archival inks and pens are safe for contact with paper (won't contribute to deterioration), but may not necessarily be lightfast to the standards of permanent art. Ink which retains color in dark storage may not perform as well under gallery/interior display conditions.
- Archival adhesives will not stick to all surfaces nor in all conditions. Binders' adhesives are excellent for use on cloth, paper and board, but they may not work on semi-porous or non-porous surfaces. In addition, archival adhesives generally don't perform well outdoors.
<http://www.utrechtart.com/Lineco-White-Neutral-pH-Adhesive-Glue-for-Book-Binding--Collages-MP41492-i1015548.utrecht>
- Archival conservation supplies should be acid-free, but not all professional art materials are acid-free. The same process of oxidation that causes artists' oil paints to cure to a solid film makes them destructive to unprotected paper and canvas. This doesn't mean oil paints are defective or unsuitable for permanent art; it does mean that craftsmanship and proper use are required to achieve durable results.
- Not all plastics are equally stable. For long-term storage of original art, select sleeves that will not release decomposition residue as they age
- Craftsmanship, technical knowledge and display environment are at least as important as the materials themselves in achieving durable results. In other words, it's not just what you use but how you use it, and how you care for the results. When in doubt, [contact us](#) for advice.