



Utrecht Art Supplies

Ask the Experts: Mold on Canvas?



Ask the Expert: I dug out some old prestretched canvases from a damp corner of my studio the other day and noticed some spots on the back that look like they might be mold. How can I tell for sure? Can I use water or bleach to clean them?"

A: There aren't many non-destructive options in the studio for curing mold on fabric and paper. Water will just encourage further growth, and chlorine bleach should definitely not be used because it's very damaging to natural fibers.

A conservation specialist would probably look for spores under a microscope or take a culture if they weren't sure, but if the canvas has gotten wet and the spots look like mold, that's probably a reliable indicator.

On closer inspection, you might find that the stains are the result of thinned paint striking

through the ground to the reverse of the canvas. This isn't a desirable condition, but if not very much actual oil has crawled through, the picture should be OK.

If there's a chance the stain could be something else that's just settled on the canvas, it might be possible to "dry clean" the spots. Use wide masking tape to lift as much loose material as possible, then follow up with a stiff, dry brush and a vacuum cleaner. Loose, powdery stains can often be removed with this technique.

If the stain does turn out to be mold and you've caught it early, UV light exposure in the form of direct sunlight might help. Sunlight isn't likely to completely bleach out a stain but it can kill residual spores.

Large mold colonies that have penetrated deeply into fabric can't really be cured without professional treatment. In this case, the best course of action would probably be to remove the canvas from the stretchers, discard the fabric, and re-use the frame.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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