



Utrecht Art Supplies

Drawing and Painting on Printmaking Paper



Ask the Expert: “I’d like to try some new papers for drawing and painting. Some of the papers sold for printmaking look absolutely beautiful, and the sheets are nice and large. How do these stand up to drawing media?”

A: Printmaking papers are attractive and affordable, and can be used for many applications besides the recommended purpose. Many are acid-free and 100% rag, ideal for permanent art. By testing and experimenting with a wide variety of papers, it’s possible to discover novel effects with your favorite media.

Some printmaking papers make terrific drawing surfaces, and many will accept wet media nicely. Since these types of paper are designed for printmaking, however, the surfaces will often behave differently from drawing or watercolor papers.

Drawing and watercolor papers are generally prepared with sizings, starches, glues and polymer coatings that stiffen the sheets and harden surfaces. Sizings can also make paper less absorbent, so many printmaking papers are unsized, or lightly sized, to ensure ink will

transfer easily and uniformly. Drawing papers may also be calendared, passed through rollers to compress the paper into a stiffer, more crisp sheet.

Soft, dry media like charcoal and pastel generally work well on printmaking paper. Because these types of paper have sensitive surfaces, however, it’s important to avoid overworking the surface, regardless of the medium. Printmaking papers made for letterpress and etching are soft to allow the printing process to crush marks deeply into the paper surface, but this means that a hard medium like graphite can deeply emboss papers like German Etching and Copperplate. A firmer, all-purpose paper like Stonehenge will stand up better to pencil.

Unsize printmaking papers have surfaces that are soft and receptive to printing inks. Papers for intaglio like Rives BFK are very sensitive, and will tend to pick up stains readily, so clean hands are a must when drawing on this velvety soft stock. Unsize papers may also be more easily damaged by erasing and blending with stumps. Dabbing instead of rubbing with the eraser can help prevent pilling and roughness.

Printmaking papers are often very nice for watercolors, but the paint appearance will be different compared to when using watercolor paper. Surface sizing on watercolor sheets partially isolates the paper from the paint, producing a luminous sparkle. Printmaking

papers like Stonehenge allow the paint to sink in, producing a softer look with less brightness.

Internal sizing in watercolor paper stiffens the sheet and helps resist wrinkling and buckling when wet. Unsized printmaking sheets may tend to ripple more when saturated, so it's important to stretch paper on an impermeable board before applying broad washes.

Bleeding with wet media may also be an issue when adapting printmaking paper for use with drawing inks or watercolors. Some traditional Asian-style printmaking papers like Japanese Mulberry, perform surprisingly well with fluid ink, however, and will resist feathering even with heavy applications.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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