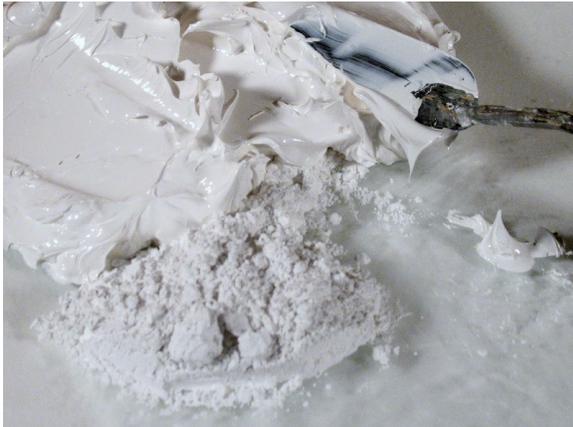




Utrecht Art Supplies

Studio Craft: Troubleshooting a Homemade Ground



Ask the Expert: “I prepared a canvas with an experimental chalk-based ground of my own invention, and now I'm seeing some flaking and cracking of the paint. The flaking seems to be worst where the paint is thinnest. I don't use any medium, just oil paint straight from the tube. Is this happening just because canvas is flexible, putting stress on the paint? Did I do something wrong with my painting ground?”

A: Normally oil paint is relatively flexible even after a few months' drying time, often still curing at this stage. Since you indicate the cracking and paint loss is developing where the paint is thinnest, we suspect it may be due to a high degree of absorbency in the ground, which is probably taking up too much of the paint vehicle.

A painting ground should offer some absorbency, but not so much that the paint becomes desiccated. Linseed oil (the paint vehicle) acts as an adhesive binder, holding pigment together into a film and fastening the film to the ground. If the ground has absorbed too much oil, the paint

layer may be left with too little binder, resulting in a weak film with poor adhesion.

If you have any other canvases prepared in this way you may want to try using some painting medium next time, maybe with a weak concentration of oil in the initial stages. Normally the objective is to have the leanest possible initial layer, but if the canvas is as thirsty as it sounds, you probably won't have a problem with "fatness". Alternately, you could lightly "oil out" the canvas before painting in order to reduce absorbency- use a cloth to rub in a mixture of low-odor mineral spirits with a small amount of linseed or safflower oil, just enough to achieve the desired results. Done properly, the surface should not feel oily.

Flexible supports can impose stress on the paint film through movement, but normally this doesn't manifest until the painting has aged a bit. Bierstadt used stretchers with panel inserts to support his large canvases from behind, reducing sagging. Today, many artists mount canvas to rigid panels in order to minimize dimensional changes. Going forward, this is something you might consider for your larger works, especially if you want to keep using your homemade ground.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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