



Utrecht Art Supplies

Studio Craft: Managing Shrinkage when Mounting Canvas



Ask the Expert: “I need to mount several linen canvases to hardboard panels. They were painted on heavy-duty stretchers, removed and rolled for transport. I've been using water-based PVA adhesive but I'm seeing significant shrinkage in the paintings, enough that they don't fit the boards. Is there anything that can be done to prevent shrinking when mounting these pictures?”

A: We can't give advice on treating antique or valuable paintings, but if these are your own recently executed work, we can share a few tips.

Linen shrinks dramatically in reaction to humidity and moisture. When stretching over a frame, shrinkage later is desirable. For this reason we normally recommend that artists stretch linen canvas when humidity is low, because canvases stretched in a humid environment tend to "relax" and go slack later. When mounting fabric to panel, however, shrinkage is generally

undesirable, and measures must be taken to reduce shrinkage when mounting fabric to panel.

Shrinkage can be a big challenge in marouflage (mounting canvas murals to walls), so artists often leave an extra margin when installation as a mural is planned in advance, executing the painting "full bleed" and trimming to fit on-site. In most cases, however, the painting will probably have been executed for display as framed art without any extra margin. If shrinkage is anticipated, when possible panels should be cut slightly smaller so the image edges align correctly with the board.

Some artists apply a light coat of adhesive to the back of canvases in preparation for re-mounting, allowing this first coat to dry in order to seal the fabric and reduce the tendency to shrink further when heavier glue is applied. It can also help to perform the mounting procedure in a more humid environment so fibers will already be relatively short, reducing the chance that the painting will continue to shrink later.

Thermoplastic conservation adhesive may be an option if wet adhesives fail to yield desired results. Acrylic-based conservation adhesives can be applied to both surfaces and fused with gentle heat when dry, so no further shrinkage occurs during the mounting procedure.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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