



Utrecht Art Supplies Studio Craft: Oil on Paper

Ask the Expert: "Is oil on paper a sound technique?"



Most painters have used oil paints on paper at some time or another, but linseed oil can have a damaging effect on unprotected supports.

Oil paint initially looks and feels wonderful on paper, but the oil paint vehicle (linseed oil) causes paper to oxidize, weaken and turn brown.



Works in oil on paper in museum collections like this painting by Degas have had the benefit of extensive conservation care to ensure preservation.



When linseed oil is in direct contact with unprotected cellulose supports like paper and canvas, it induces oxidation, like a "slow burn". Over time, oil-saturated paper can become brittle and brown. Also, as paper absorbs the paint vehicle colors can become dull and waxy.



In order to protect supports like paper and canvas, it's necessary to apply a size or ground that can isolate the vulnerable material from the paint.



Acrylic Canvas Sizing is a ready-to-use polymer dispersion that can be applied according to package direction for a clear, colorless isolation layer for paper or canvas. Papers should be securely taped to a sealed board prior to sizing to prevent wrinkling.



Acrylic Sizing appears milky when wet but dries absolutely clear. The dry sizing can accept light oil paint applications; because sizing has less absorbency and tooth than most painting grounds, for best results keep paint thin and avoid broad impasto.



For heavier oil paint on paper, apply Acrylic Gesso instead of sizing



As with acrylic sizing, tape paper securely prior to priming with Acrylic Gesso.



As dry oil paint ages, it loses flexibility. Flexible supports like paper may not offer enough protection from movement under an aged paint film, resulting in cracking. For best results long-term, mount paper to a rigid panel like hardboard using an acrylic gel medium as adhesive.



Arches recently introduced Huile (oil) Paper designed for use with oil-based paints without in-studio treatment. Arches Oil Paper is prepared with a sizing that isolates paper fibers from contact with oil paint. This paper has the appearance of traditional cold-pressed paper and can also be used with watercolors.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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