



Utrecht Art Supplies

Studio Craft: Drying Oils and Combustion

Linseed and other vegetable oil paint vehicles (safflower, poppy, walnut) are environmentally benign, give off no fumes and carry no particular health risks, but rags and other materials saturated with oil or paint (and even cooking oil) can spontaneously combust if not handled and disposed of properly.



Oil paint on a canvas dries through oxidation. During this process, it generates heat which develops gradually and dissipates. Balled up rags act as insulators and provide considerably more surface area than a flat canvas, so oil on a rag oxidizes quickly as heat is stored. If enough oily rags are allowed to accumulate, heat may build to the point where the materials can self-ignite with no outside spark or flame.



One or two rags can be laid flat to dry and discarded once the paint has solidified. (Completely dry, solid oil paint does not present a risk of combustion- if it did, oil paintings wouldn't be safe to hang on the wall!)



In addition to cloth rags, oil-soaked steel wool and rubber gloves can present a similar risk. Larger amounts of soiled rags should be stored in a lidded metal trashcan with water which should be emptied daily. Rags from acrylic painting present no risk of combustion.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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