

Painting Substrates

Contributed

The choice of quality substrates available to artists in Australia is expansive. Take a look at what some of our most prominent art suppliers have to offer from their ranges of art surfaces.

APOLLO STRETCHED CANVASES AND CANVAS PANELS FROM ART BASICS

The traditional painting supports or surfaces for artists are stretched canvas and canvas panels. One has a 'trampoline like' response; the other has a gift of control.

Apollo Gold Label Premium Stretched Canvas is a heavy weight canvas for the professional and the discerning student. Its kiln dried, solid pine frame is high quality and constructed to be both strong and robust, with a thick gallery style profile. It provides the perfect support for the heavy duty 10 ounce natural duck pre-coated canvas, and is ideal for heavier paint applications. A tightly woven surface with a medium texture is the perfect all-rounder that ensures the best paint results. It is primed with acid-free acrylic titanium gesso which is a stable surface for a wide variety of painting media.

The staple-free edge (back-stapled) allows for painting on the sides and re-stretching. The fact that the staples are at the back, leaving the sides clean, can be a huge economic advantage to any artist wanting to exhibit – because the cost of framing can be avoided. But bear in mind that framing generally protect works of art.

A wide range of sizes and shapes are available including square, oblong and long rectangles; and the larger sizes are extremely strong and straight. Be pleasantly surprised at the pricing on a superior product.

Hard panels are a traditional painting surface. Appreciated for their rigidity, which lends itself to control; and for plein air painting, for their robustness.

Save yourself time in producing a quality painting surface by buying a highly durable premium quality art panel. Apollo hardboard panels are among the best panels available in Australia. Panels are made with eight ounce 100 per cent cotton (coated with superior Acrylic Titanium Compound) and stuck to 3mm hardboard – providing a strong and stable base for artists' paint. The surface texture provides a very definite paint-gripping 'tooth' with minimum vehicle absorption, providing a perfect support. An ideal solid surface for oil, casein, tempera,



acrylic and collage. Suitable for beginners, students and professionals.

Low cost lazy choices can be hard to resist. Cheap canvases on stretchers, which are now commonly available, are now found in many stores. But they can also end up being a disappointing choice. Incidents of improper surface priming and skewed stretcher frames are prevalent in poorly produced canvases.

Purchasing from a reputable art store (one with experience in art supplies) allows you to have confidence in a superior result.

Please contact Art Basics by telephone on 02 9807 2222; or email sales@artbasics.com.au for details of your nearest stockist.



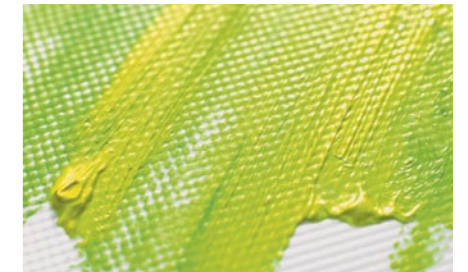
QUALITY FRANCHEVILLE COTTON CANVAS

Francheville's canvas is made from 100 per cent cotton canvas that has been triple primed with acid-free titanium gesso. To prevent warping, the material is carefully stretched around strong thick pine frames. Each canvas has a profile of 38mm and is stapled on the back of the frame to allow the entire canvas surface to be utilised.

Made from 100 per cent bleached cotton, each canvas is 380gsm; and is triple primed with acid-free acrylic gesso,

which provides protection against paint penetrating through the canvas material. The canvases are stretched to a taut finish allowing perfect tension throughout the solid pine frames, thus ensuring that precious works of art will not warp.

For more information about the quality Francheville range of artists' canvas, telephone BrandCorp on 02 8543 4300 or



03 9538 4200; email enquiries@francheville.com.au or visit the website: www.francheville.com.au

A PRIME DESTINATION FOR THE BEST IN SUBSTRATES

Oxlades is your one stop shop for quality substrates. For all your artistic needs they have a huge range of canvases – both pre-stretched and off the roll – and a variety of papers to inspire your next artwork. Of fundamental importance to your artistic work is choosing the right substrate to suit your creative vision and support the materials you wish to use.

For painters, Oxlades has an extensive range of canvas. Cotton Duck and Belgian Linen provide reliable support for the most ambitious painters. Oil or acrylic primed (as well as unprimed) surfaces are available by the metre or in full rolls. The durability of the 12 ounce and 14 ounce Cotton Duck and the superior structural fibre of linen provide ideal stability for large paintings; excellent archival credibility; and peace of mind that your work will have what it takes to stand the test of time.

If time is of the essence and the creative urge becomes immediate, Oxlades also stocks quality pre-stretched canvases – primed and ready to paint on. Brands include Art Spectrum, Westart and Coleman. These canvases boast heavy-weight heat treated pine frames and primed Cotton Duck canvas, while pre-stretched Chinese linen canvases are also available in the Artworks brand. Canvas and Fresco Boards are also available through Oxlades and they are a great choice for pieces that require a solid ground to work on.

If painting on paper is your dream, the canvas paper stocked at Oxlades comes highly recommended. Sheets are protected with a size and have a canvas-

like texture, wonderful for oils and acrylic paint and also fabulous with oil sticks.

For watercolour and ink work, Arches and Montval papers are long lasting and hand made in France, where the paper mill has been in operation for over 450 years with a solid reputation. Oxlades also has Saunders and Bockingford watercolour papers – like the Arches and Montval ranges these papers come in various textures, weights and sizes. From the smooth surface of the hot pressed papers to the rough textural feel of the cold pressed papers, the focus is always on quality. For bigger art works, there are rolls of specially sized watercolour paper; the largest comes in a width of 113cm and a length of 9.15 metres. In addition, pads and blocks of watercolour paper are available.

Print makers will be delighted with the range of printmaking papers on offer at Oxlades. The Velin Arches, Velin BFK Rives, Dutch Etching, Fabriano Tiegolo and Stonehenge are all popular as they are multi-purpose papers. The Stonehenge is very economical and comes in a lovely smooth texture and a variety of colours. The Arches 88 with its extremely smooth surface is ideal for screen printing. Moulin du Gue paper is specially recommended for etching and embossing – it is made of 80 per cent cotton and 15 per cent linen.

Oxlades has an array of handmade papers in many colours and unique surfaces. Rice papers such as the Chiri, Konzo and Shin Hosoo are sold by the sheet. Rolls of Sumi Rice Paper are also on offer – this product is said

to be the best type of paper for ink painting, retaining the brilliance of the ink as well as the transparency and nuances of its shades.

Oxlades boasts a great collection of sketch journals and mixed media pads. Artists can access a range of Moleskines, the legendary notebooks used by European artists and thinkers for the past two centuries. Picasso and Van Gogh are said to have used this product which currently provides options for sketchers, writers and watercolourists. The Daler Rowney sketchbooks series is also a popular choice for your creative needs. The hardcover books contain 62 slightly off-white sheets of acid free paper. If you require a surface that will take mixed media, the Art Spectrum draw and wash pad is ideal – this gummed pad comes with either a smooth or rough surface texture, specially sized for wet media.

Pastel painters cannot go past Oxlades for their range of substrates. Of great note is the Art Spectrum Colour Fix pastel paper and primer. The primer comes in several colours including a clear, and transforms most surfaces to make them ready for pastel and charcoal work.

Oxlades also has mending and restoration papers and tissue paper for protecting your work; low cost cartridge paper ideal for drawing classes; and university paper by the sheet (and in pads) which is ideal for mixed media.

Remember, when you are planning your next art project, to visit Oxlades Paint and Art Centre in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley. Discuss your substrate options with the experienced staff.

GREAT ADVICE FOR ARTISTS: CONSIDER YOUR SURFACE!



Considering the surface of an intended artwork is to recognise the importance of its foundation and to understand how each part of the painting process can affect the next.

Generally speaking, the surface of an artwork is made up of a support and a ground.

Simply, the support is the material which carries the ground and painting or drawing. The ground is a layer on the support which can vary in colour, absorbency or texture. The term 'primer' can also be used for ground.

The support is the most important structural element in a painting, because if it fails it probably will not survive. Artists have used a whole range of supports, over the centuries, and they can be broadly described as rigid or flexible supports.

Examples of rigid supports include: Cave walls; Egyptian coffins; solid panels; wooden laminated panels; plywood; laminated paperboards; museum boards; chipboards; porous boards; hardboards; cored boards; metal and glass. Examples of flexible supports include: Paper; canvas boards; textiles; Cotton Duck; linen; synthetic fabrics; jute; hemp; and pre-primed textiles.

Each of the support materials imparts a character to the

surface of the picture. If the support is smoothly finished, the picture will exhibit a smooth surface; if the support has a pronounced texture, the picture will show some of this texture.

Many supports can be purchased already prepared. In art stores you will see extreme variations in the quality and durability of some products – but artists should expect them to be better quality than the surfaces available at the local discount shop. If in doubt, ask the staff in the art store for the specifications of the products. If the information is not available, or if it is vague and unsatisfactory, don't use the products.

Ultimately, the decision about what surface is the most appropriate for your artwork is largely dependant on the medium you choose. We will look at the most popular choices for painting: Oil colours, acrylic colours and watercolours.

Canvas on open stretchers gives a sensitive, receptive woven support on which to paint with oil colours; and it provides a tooth for the primer and paint to grip.

When selecting a ready-made canvas, be fussy. There is so much inferior canvas on the market that initially

appears to be good value but (as is so often the case with art materials) you get what you pay for when it comes to quality and permanency. A good example of a cost effective pre-primed stretched canvas range that is suitable for artists is stretched cotton canvas like the Winsor & Newton product. It is artists' quality and is made of eight ounce natural Cotton Duck heavier weight superior quality cloth. It has a medium grain surface. It claims it is ideal for all techniques, including heavier applications of colour. It is triple coated with acid-free sizing and two coats of highly pigmented acrylic primer formulated by Winsor & Newton. Its balanced absorbency and tooth prevents 'sinking' of oil colours and improves adhesion. This range of canvas is available at Eckersley's stores nationally.

Boards can be used if a hard weaveless surface is preferred. Canvas mounted on board can be used for a hard surface which retains the texture of cloth. Paper oil paint can be acceptably applied to a heavy-weight rag paper (although it will be fragile), provided it is kept flat and supported in a portfolio or frame. Other supports include metals (aluminium, steel, or copper) and glass.

When it comes to acrylics, the paint film itself is not destructive to its support and movement of the support affects acrylic paints less than oils. Acrylic paints will adhere to any surface that is clean and non-greasy and has some sort of key (rough surface). As for oil paints, canvas is the most popular painting support for professional acrylic artists, as it provides a surface which the priming and painting can grip. The weave of the cloth and the spring of the stretched material are excellent features. Artists who paint with acrylics are able to avoid sizing or priming – staining raw canvas with strong bright colour instead.

Paper is popular with acrylic painters for its texture and drag.



It is also an economical support which can be less inhibiting than a stretched canvas. As acrylics are not prone to 'sinking' like oils, a wider variety of results can be more easily achieved on paper. Paper can be primed, using the brushwork for extra texture. When visiting your local art store, you will discover that you can add texture to your surface. Winsor & Newton has developed a range of Galeria acrylic texture mediums with natural textures like sand, Black Lava and mineral texture – these can create a unique range of effects. These textures are most suitable for acrylics; but read the label as some can be used as a textured surface under oils.

Plaster, brick, terracotta and leather are just some of the exciting and unusual surfaces upon which acrylics can also be used. When working on an unconventional surface, you will need to consider how it will receive the paint. It may require some sanding to create a key to the support; or may benefit from a coat of Winsor & Newton Acrylic Fluid Matt Medium which will ensure that the subsequent colour forms a secure paint film.

Some artists prefer to work with watercolours and gouache. In order to exploit the beauty of watercolours, and employ the widest range of techniques with long-term stability, most artists require good quality watercolour paper which performs as both the support and the ground. The paper fibre catches the pigment particles; and the character of the artwork is affected by the paper's surface texture, weight and colour.

A painting will appear brighter if executed on a rough (cold pressed/medium) sheet as opposed to a smooth (hot pressed) sheet. This is because the surface area is greater on the rough sheet, resulting in more pigment particles being deposited and colour being reflected back through them.

It is essential to understand the nature of the paper selected. Preparation of the paper by stretching it to a hardboard (if it is under 425gsm) will need to be considered, to avoid buckling.



Other supports are used by artists who work with watercolours – but they are often unsuitable as the paint cannot withstand the movement, or they are not absorbent enough.

Great advice for artists is to use a wide variety of supports and support/ground combinations. If you are just starting out, the cheapest supports (on which you will do your first paintings) are also the most unstable. The surface qualities of cheaper materials are often seductive and great for experiments ... but often you will end up doing some good work on them, then wondering whether they will survive for even ten years.

Whatever support you choose, whether ready-made or home-made, it should satisfy these minimum requirements: It should age without becoming so brittle or fragile that it will suffer from exhibition, handling, or proper storage; it should be able to withstand the effects of atmospheric changes – under reasonably variable conditions of relative humidity (RH) and temperature, the support should expand, contract, or warp as little as possible; and it should have enough absorbency and tooth to provide a good key for the kinds of paints and grounds applied to it.

Developing an intimacy and understanding of what makes paint

stay on the surface for longer than a week or two is essential. Be sure to make great choices about your materials; informed choices that will make your processes more successful.

The compiler of this piece, Natalie O'Connor, urges artists to: "Invest in good surfaces as well as good colours!"

For further information, check out a brilliant website at: www.winsornewton.com

Excellent reading material on this topic is also available, including the following books (some of which were referenced in compiling this material): Artists' Materials – The Complete Sourcebook of Methods and Media by Emma Pearce, published by Arcturus Pty Ltd; The Painter's Handbook by Mark David Gottsegen, published by Watson & Guphill; What Every Artists Needs to Know About Paints and Colours by David Pyle, published by Krause Publications; and The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques by Ralph Mayer, published by Viking Penguin.

Further information about quality artists' products can be obtained from JASCO – telephone 1800 676 155.



ART SURFACES FOR CREATIVE MINDS AT ECKERSLEY'S

All creative artworks begin with a blank surface. At Eckersley's, you will find a range of art surfaces to help realise your dream artwork – whether a painting or drawing.

With 24 retail stores across the country (including the recent acquisition of six art stores in the ACT), Eckersley's stocks a fantastic range of art surfaces. You will find stretched canvases; canvas rolls; pads; boards; cards; and a range of quality art papers to suit any type of artwork you are working on.

Consider the following tips when selecting art paper.

The qualities of a surface vary according to the intended use of the paper. Smooth papers are best for fine detail with pencil or ink and for printing. Lightly grained or toothed papers are good for coloured pencil, charcoal and light pastel work.

A paper with 'tooth' has small fibres standing up on the surface of the paper. For fine, detailed work

(such as pen and wash) tooth is not suitable as the colour travels along the loose fibres, giving a diffused edge.

Acid free paper is cotton-based and contains no acid. Paper made with high cotton content and/or wood pulp is often chemically treated with an alkali agent (usually calcium carbonate) to neutralise the acid.

The cheapest way of colouring paper is to print the colour directly onto the surface; however, the effect of fading is very pronounced as a result. For quality coloured paper, colour pigment is mixed into the liquid pulp before it is formed into paper sheets – ensuring that the colour is spread evenly throughout the paper. This also reduces the effect of fading.

To see a full range of art surfaces, visit your nearest Eckersley's store. For store details, telephone 1300 657 766 or visit the website at www.eckersleys.com.au

MOLESKINE NOTEBOOKS FROM OXFORD ART SUPPLIES & BOOKS

The Moleskine name is famous because 'Moleskines' were the legendary notebooks used by Van Gogh, Chatwin, Hemingway and Matisse. What would we do without these little guys? A new generation of writers and artists have now embraced these little black books to record priceless ideas and thoughts – ideas which will stand the test of time thanks to their quality paper and binding.

Features of the Moleskine brand include compact size, classic styling and practical design. These features make them perfect for keeping in your bag – ready for a quick sketch, or to write down a new idea before it escapes your memory!

The Pocket Sketch Book and the Large Ruled Notebook are very handy when travelling. The Pocket Sketch Book has heavy enough pages to use pen and ink ... it is handy for doing

quick sketches with pen and then adding a splash of watercolour. A few more favourites include the Pocket Squared Notebook (great graph style paper); and, for those with an ear for music, the Pocket Music Book.

Two great recent releases into the Moleskine collection are pocket size and large size Watercolour Notebooks. These notebooks contain

200gsm 25 per cent cotton cold pressed paper. The pocket size notebook contains 60 pages and the large size contains 72 pages.

The whole brilliant range of Moleskine Journals is available at Oxford Art Supplies and Books – telephone 02 9417 8572 for further information.



EXCELLENT ARTISTS' CANVAS PRODUCTS FROM S&S WHOLESALE

Oil Primed Linen was one of the first surfaces developed for 'modern day' painting. For hundreds of years, oil painters have recognised that traditionally prepared oil-primed Belgian linen is the ultimate support for their artwork.

With the advent of acrylics and watercolour paints along with the development of faster production methods for less expensive cotton fabric canvas, the use and popularity of traditional oil primed linen has steadily declined over the past 50 years. Now, with the introduction of cheap, poorly constructed, non-archival canvases, many oil painters are turning back to the original (and best) painting surface for oil painting.

The Phoenicians introduced flax to Europe, and the quality varies according to soil and weather conditions. Ireland, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Russia produce linen of varying qualities. However, Belgium is the leader in growing and producing the finest quality flax and artist grade linen.

The goal of harvesting and processing flax is to obtain flax seeds and fibres. The fibres are attached to the hollow woody core of each plant. Flax fibres are 36 inches in length, compared to one inch cotton fibres – which gives flax its superior strength. The fibres are round and uniform (rather than the flat ribbon-like cotton fibres) which gives linen a bold texture that can be seen and felt through layers of paint.

Linen is traditionally the preferred fabric of painters. It offers the artist the most permanency, strength and beauty of any canvas material. It is the most durable fabric to paint on. Its warp and weft threads are equal in weight and strength, making it less susceptible to expansion and contraction due to moisture. The irregular character of the weave can be seen through layers of paint – imparting a sense of depth to the finished painting. It retains its natural oils over time, preserving fabric flexibility.

Oil paint is a combination of pigment and linseed oil, which is derived from flax. Linen canvas is also made from flax, thus making oil paint and linen highly compatible. The pure Belgian

linen is prepared from start to finish entirely by hand, using century-old techniques. Each canvas is first stretched on large specially designed frames and thoroughly picked over by hand to remove irregularities. Then every square inch of the canvas is smoothed using volcanic pumice stone. The next step is the application of warm animal hide glue, carefully spread using long stainless steel spatulas to seal the linen. As the glue cools, the linen tightens; then it is pumiced smooth again.

Next, a fine preparation of old-world lead white is applied. Made from a carefully prepared mixture of lead whiting and linseed oil, this oil priming applied over the linen yields a surface prized by oil painters everywhere.

Artists who have painted on well made oil primed linen have experienced the highly receptive quality of its surface. The tactile, sensual feeling of painting on oil primed linen is unique. No other surface accepts paint quite like it. The oil paint and ground seem to 'know' each other like long-lost brothers, and the finished painting exudes a rich, luxurious quality prized by knowledgeable buyers and collectors.

Watercolour Canvas is an innovative material for watercolourists, who have been restricted for many years to painting on watercolour paper. While many great watercolour artworks have been produced on paper, artists had to work within the limitations of a flimsy substrate. Watercolour papers have a tendency to buckle when wet and require special care – such as stapling or taping to a firm surface. They can also tear quite easily when wet, and artists must be very careful when practising traditional watercolour techniques.

Previously, galleries have been reluctant to acquire and sell watercolour works because they were on paper and not of archival quality.

Watercolour canvas is made of 100 per cent cotton artist canvas covered with a specially formulated acid-free coating that performs similar to a cold press or rough watercolour paper while providing a distinctive look that can only be achieved on canvas. In addition, artists can use all



the techniques that are used with watercolour paper. Repairs and adjustments can be performed easily; and, when using pre-stretched canvas and boards, there is no buckling – even with the wettest of applications.

In the past, watercolourists have been restricted in the size of their paintings due to paper sizes. The fact that watercolour canvas is available in rolls means there is now little restriction on the size of watercolour paintings. Artists will also find that gallery acceptance of watercolours may increase as they can now be shown or hung in the same way as acrylic or oil paintings; and watercolour paintings will stand the test of time when painted on an archival surface.

Cotton Canvas Panels are now being used more extensively, too. Cotton is the most popular artist grade canvas fabric. Cotton fibres stretch more than linen, allowing for a tighter mounted canvas with less straining.

Cotton canvas panels offer the artist an inexpensive, versatile and portable canvas to paint on. They are constructed from finely woven cotton canvas mounted onto heavy cardboard backing – usually with acid-free glue. The glue provides a barrier between the board and canvas, helping to maintain longevity. The surface of the canvas panel usually has a very definite paint-gripping 'tooth' with minimum absorption, providing a perfect painting support for oils, acrylics, gouache and tempera colours. All sides of the canvas panel are glued and turned in, to prevent fraying and separation.

Please contact S&S Wholesale Customer Service by telephone on 1300 731 529 for further information and stockists. ■