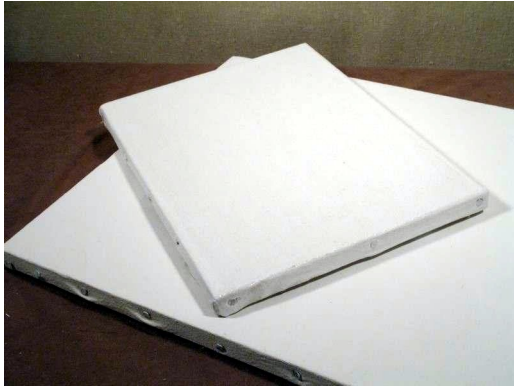


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ASK THE EXPERTS

Product Profiles: Studio Primed Canvas vs. Factory Primed



Hand-primed canvases

Ask the Expert: "My paint looks, feels and dries different on pre-primed canvas compared to the ones I prime myself. What makes the difference?"

A: There are noticeable differences in how paint behaves, looks and feels on a pre-primed canvas compared to ones made in the studio. How the paint moves under the brush, consistency of coverage, drying rates and how the paint develops its final appearance are all influenced by the support and ground. Understanding these differences helps select the type of support that is best suited to your techniques and goals.

The processes used for priming canvas in a production facility are not the same as the methods artists use for preparing their own canvases. The priming formulas and methods of application used in factory prepared canvas can vary from one manufacturer to another, so there can be differences in how each brand performs.

Canvas preparation makes fabric suitable for use as a painting support by imparting texture, absorbency, color and rigidity, and by isolating the fabric from direct contact with paint. The artist's objectives and processes determine which canvas is most desirable, and whether canvas prepared in-studio would be better than manufactured fabric.

The texture of a hand-primed canvas is usually noticeably different from that of a factory-primed support. The untreated surface of cotton and linen canvas is covered by a layer of raised fibers called a

"nap". Hand priming, especially with acrylic dispersion painting ground ("gesso"), combines with raised fibers to produce a rough, abrasive texture. This texture can be incorporated into the painting, but if a smoother surface is desired, a priming knife can be used instead of a brush, and sanding can further reduce texture.



Factory-primed linen canvas

The final texture of factory-primed canvas is normally smoother than brush-applied priming. This is partly because this technique of application naturally leaves a flat surface compared to brush application. The priming used in commercially prepared canvas is usually applied with a squeegee or blade, either mechanically or by a worker positioned on a bridge over scrolling fabric. Factory-primed canvas may also be further smoothed through use of a calendaring roller, a smooth cylinder press.

Knife priming and calendaring not only smooths the primed surface, it also compresses the painting ground into the fabric. Mechanical canvas preparation may involve special priming formulas and fabric treatments designed to help the canvas pass smoothly through machinery, and to keep it in good condition when rolled for storage. Such treatments are not always employed, but if they are used and are not removed before painting, these additives may affect the way paint behaves on the primed support.

In order for canvas primed in the studio to maintain a flat plane without rippling, it must be stretched on a frame or panel. Factory primed canvas stays flat because tension

is mechanically maintained during the priming process, and because drying is accelerated through forced air and heat. Sizing and priming helps the canvas remain flat by imparting stiffness, an important function since all stretched canvas tend to lose tightness over time.

Priming on the stretchers is a key advantage of in-studio canvas preparation. By hand-stretching raw canvas, the fabric achieves maximum sustainable tension before sizing and priming are applied. The finished canvas conforms to the stretchers better than factory-primed fabric supports. Hand-priming also enables full coverage of the canvas sides, including the attachment hardware (staples or tacks).

Hand-priming allows the artist to craft a painting ground which exactly meets their preference. Hand priming achieves a thicker, more textural ground than mechanical techniques. The primer can be tinted to any hue desired, with modifications and inclusions added. In-studio canvas preparation gives a high degree of control over absorbency and texture, which helps the artist achieve the type of brush movement and paint distribution desired.

Most artists use some combination of hand-primed and factory-primed canvas. The convenience and uniformity of pre-primed canvas is undeniable, and even artists who are highly involved in all aspects of craftsmanship will use primed canvas at least some of the time. What's most important is identifying what type of support delivers the specific properties that your art requires.

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