



## Utrecht Art Supplies

### Ask the Experts: Printing Inks and Paints Compared



'Portrait of Hagiwara Sakutarō', woodblock print by Onchi Koshiro

**Ask the Expert: "I am trying to figure out how relief ink is different from other types of inks and paints. Can they be used interchangeably? Can I paint with ink, and print with paint?"**

**A:** Printing inks have different properties depending on the intended application. Tack, stiffness, thixotropy, length, drying rate and other aspects are balanced and adjusted to yield good image transfer.

Relief printing ink should be slightly "long" (stringy) with enough stiffness not to bleed at the edges. It should have some tack for image precision and should dry at a moderate rate, but not so quickly that prints will be difficult to release. By comparison, screen printing ink needs to be slower drying so screens won't clog, and very "short" and buttery to flow through fine mesh, with low tack so prints release easily from the screen.

Because each process carries different requirements from the materials, most of the time it's best to select ink that's formulated for the printing process you'd like to use, but sometimes it doesn't hurt to experiment. Relief and monoprint are more forgiving than intaglio and lithography. Some artists pull monoprints using leftover ink on the mixing slab. With lithography in particular, it's important to use only the correct materials so the stone or plate isn't damaged.

Depending on the process, artists' paints can work fairly well as printing ink, but printing inks don't usually make good paint. Thick, sticky relief ink is not very "workable" compared to paint, which can be more easily manipulated by hand.

Oil-based inks include varnishes and driers that wouldn't work as well on canvas as they do on paper. Artists' oil colors generally don't make good printing ink because the oil paint vehicle can be destructive to unprotected paper, but acrylic paints generally make very good printing ink, either straight from the container or slightly modified with mediums and retarders as needed. Some brands even offer mediums specifically designed to convert artists' acrylic colors to printing inks.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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