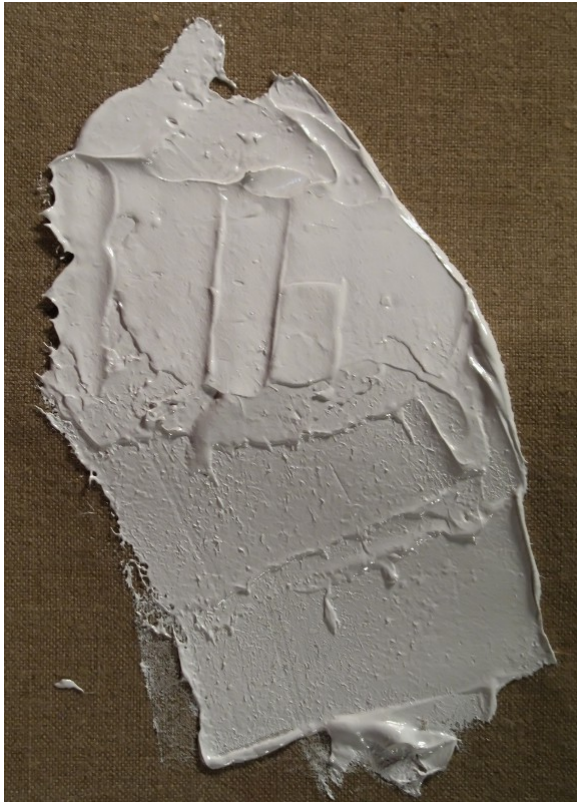




**Utrecht Art Supplies**  
**Studio Craft: Impasto Basics**



**Ask the Expert: “I like the look of thick paint (the thicker the better IMHO). Are there any rules or guidelines for using impasto?”**

**A:** Applied correctly, thick passages of paint can prove as durable as any technique, but improperly applied or excessive impasto can lead to defects or even paint failure.

Flexibility has a lot to do with how broadly impasto can be applied. Paint like acrylic which retains flexibility as it ages can be piled on fairly heavily. Alternately, oil paint doesn't offer the same degree of flexibility over time and may crack if thick passages cover a broad surface area. The addition of alkyd medium can help increase flexibility, reducing the chance of cracking in heavy applications.

Movement in the support can impose stress on the paint film. For this reason, there is a difference in how impasto can be handled on flexible fabric supports like canvas versus rigid panels. Shrinkage, expansion and sagging in a stretched canvas can cause thick passages to crack, and weakly bonded pieces of paint may detach over time if the damage is severe.

Rigid panels like hardboard, MDO plywood and honeycomb aluminum sandwich board can generally support much heavier paint than stretched canvas. Even highly flexible acrylics may cause a stretched canvas to sag when applied too thickly, so panels should be considered any time the weight of the paint might exceed the strength of a flexible support.

The painting ground also plays a key role in how well impasto can adhere to the support. Adequate priming is always important, even more so when paint is heavy. Careful support preparation with a professional quality primer is essential to provide optimal texture and absorbency so paint can attach securely. That way, even if cracks develop, paint will still remain in place.

A good approach to painting in impasto with oils on stretched canvas is to limit the broadness of application, placing thick passages in smaller, isolated spots surrounded by thinner paint. It's possible to create the illusion of heavier paint by application with a knife, or texture can be built up in the priming layer, prior to painting with acrylic-based products like modeling paste.

Finally, it's important to consider drying time when painting thickly. Even a fast-drying medium like acrylic paint can take a long time to dry if applied in thick passages. Heavy impasto in oil paint may take as long as a year or more to dry thoroughly.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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