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ASK THE EXPERTS

## Product Profiles: Stretching Your Own Canvas vs. Pre-stretched



Stretching and priming your own canvas gives the broadest choice of materials, surface and proportions, as well as the satisfaction of having total control over your materials. That said, prepared grounds today come in a huge variety of sizes and surfaces. The craftsmanship and quality of pre-stretched canvas is at least the equal of what most artists can achieve in the studio, with the added benefit of eliminating time, labor and space needed for in-house preparation.

Purchasing professionally prepared canvases and panels is nothing new. Artists have been relying on colourmen and art supply dealers for literally hundreds of years to deliver ready-to-use painting supports. Gallery owners are quite accustomed to artists at all career stages using pre-stretched canvas, and in most presentation techniques, it hardly matters whether the canvas was stretched by hand or machine.

Preparing canvas in-studio is more common today than at any time in the past several centuries. Nearly 70 years ago, Utrecht played a significant role in reviving this craft through the availability of high quality materials and technical knowledge to easily prepare canvas with excellent, permanent results. In fact, it's now considered by most to be a fundamental studio skill, a way for the artist to be involved in virtually all aspects of the craft. Many artists do enjoy this aspect of materials preparation, and find hand-stretching an enjoyable exercise that yields results different from anything that can be purchased.

Stretching your own can be very affordable when done in volume. Gesso in particular is significantly less expensive by the gallon compared to pints. In-studio preparation does require advance planning and space to work, plus canvases need time to dry and cure, so artists stretching their own need to be prepared to wait a bit before using fresh canvases.

Pre-stretched is often the best choice for artists working in small studios, as well as those who need to devote 100% of studio time to painting rather than preparing supports. There's certainly no shame in using professionally prepared canvases and panels- artists from Vermeer to Picasso and beyond have chosen to work on prepared supports rather than making their own. As an added advantage, manufacturing processes often yield a tighter, more consistent result than what most artists are able to craft by hand, with uniform tension, no puckers and impressively clean edges.

Above all else it's important to select or make a support that's appropriate for your pictorial objectives. Either approach can bring out the best from your materials, skill and creativity.

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