



Utrecht Art Supplies

Easels as Gifts: A Non-artist's Shopping Guide

Ask the Expert: "I'm shopping easels for a holiday present and it's a little overwhelming. For instance, what's the difference between height and "canvas height"? Can you help make this task a little less daunting? I want to get the perfect gift without any mistakes!"

A: Artist's easels come in an enormous variety of styles, and it can be challenging to pick one to give as a gift if you're not an artist yourself. Beyond basic style (e.g. A-frame, H-frame, French Box etc.) there are important features and properties that can help inform your choice:

Height

Maximum easel height is the tallest setting with the mast or tray raised all the way up. Maximum canvas height refers to the tallest stretched canvas that can fit between the tray (where the canvas rests) and clamp (block that slides on the mast, resting on top of the canvas).



When the tray is attached to the mast, the top of the easel can touch low ceilings when raised to maximum. This style can certainly be used under low ceilings, but height restrictions might limit ability to raise the bottom of the canvas to full standing height. Easels with a tray that moves independently of the

mast offer the advantage of working at standing eye level without poking the ceiling.

Tabletop easels can be a good choice for the most space-restricted artists. A word of caution: when giving a table easel, make sure to select one that is designed as a working model, not just for display.

Tilt



An easel that allows the canvas to be tilted will offer better control of glare. A mast or chassis that tilts forward past 90 degrees vertical is great for pastel painters who need to keep dust from settling on the paper. Forward tilt is also a big advantage when spraying fixative to prevent large blobs from landing on the page.

Watercolorists benefit from easels that tilt horizontally. This design holds paper or canvas flat like a table to control runs and drips.

Materials

Wooden easels have a traditional beauty favored by many. Hand-rubbed hardwood gains a pleasing patina with use, incorporating stains and dents into an authentic-looking antique appearance. Wooden easels are also among the most economical where basic scholastic designs are concerned.

Aluminum is the first choice for lightweight studio and field easels. While not as traditional-looking as wood, aluminum offers superior strength and durability along with extreme light weight.

Steel easels are unsurpassed for strength and durability. A well-constructed steel easel can

withstand years of hard daily use in the studio and classroom.

Size and Portability



Portable easels can be as simple as a light tripod, or as complex as the classic French Field/Plein Air with drawers and trays that slide out. Field easels are designed primarily for working outdoors but are also great for providing an extra painting station in the studio. Select portable easels for artists who like to travel with paints, or for art students who would like bring something better than the standard classroom equipment.

A substantial studio easel that can hold a large painting with good stability is a great choice for artists who do the bulk of their work indoors, especially if they have a dedicated studio space. H-Frame and Full Studio/Crank easels have a fairly large footprint

Storage and Features



Articulated trays on A-frame, H-frame and Full Studio easels provide storage space where it's most needed. French Box/Plein Air easels include metal-lined drawers that double as supply trays. Optional accessories like brush holders and palettes may be included with Full Studio and French easels.



Most artists like to own more than one easel, so it's hard to go wrong. A few tips to help give the perfect gift:

- Start with what you know about the artist's work and pair that with the easel that matches the size, function and features they'll need.
- Before buying, find out details about assembly. Most easels don't need to be put together from scratch, but larger ones might need some basic final touches. Many manufacturers post videos online showing setup and adjustment.
- Important details of function and performance may not be immediately apparent at first glance. Easels of similar design can vary in price; if you're not sure why one easel costs more than a similar-looking one, don't hesitate to ask. You might be missing a key advantage like better materials or included accessories.