



## Utrecht Art Supplies

### Why are canvases considered more valuable than watercolors?



*Winslow Homer - Flower Garden and Bungalow, Bermuda, 1899*

Ask the Experts: "I'm a watercolorist just starting to show my work through galleries. When it came time to set prices, the gallery owner said she doesn't sell watercolors for as much as oil paintings. I don't really understand this, since I work as hard on my watercolors as any oil painter. What is the reason for this?"

A: It's probably true that some collectors still tend to value works on paper in general lower than paintings on canvas or panel. This is an older, long-held attitude that ties the value of art to the materials, and also reflects a time in the past when watercolors were largely a sketch medium. Keep in mind, though, that attitudes can- and do- change over time, and that this is just one dealer's opinion. Other galleries may be more successful with your works on paper than this one, especially if they specialize in that type of art.

The "promotion" of some materials and media over others is nothing new in art. Art materials have been held in various degrees of esteem over the centuries. In the Middle Ages, leading into the Renaissance, the intrinsic value of pigments and colorants was closely tied to the

perceived value of art. Real gold leaf and gemstone pigments provided an overt display of wealth when used in art.

Wooden panels were considered the most "worthy" support for painting when canvas was first introduced by the Venetians in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the Modern period, when artists began to use cotton canvas, linen was still considered the best choice for fine portraits (a status it still enjoys today.)

While it's true that watercolor was once considered a sketch medium, over the past century it has emerged as a serious expressive medium suitable for complex, highly developed finished art. Watercolors by artists like Winslow Homer, Georgia O'Keeffe and Andrew Wyeth are now among the most famous, recognizable images. Watercolor paintings by important artists have achieved prices in the millions.

Of course, that doesn't mean that most of us will see our watercolors valued at that level or anything close, but it does indicate that water-media art is seen as important today in the same way as works on canvas. Especially considering the materials expense and hours of work a top-quality watercolor can represent, it seems only fair!

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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