



Utrecht Art Supplies

Product Profiles: Ecological Advantages of Watercolor and Gouache

Ask the Expert: "I want to start painting, but I'm concerned about the environmental impact of my materials. Watercolor seems like it would be a safe choice, but what is it made of? Also, is there a recycled paper option for watercolors?"



Raw Gum Arabic

A: Watercolor on recycled paper is one of the most "green" approaches to making art. By using watercolor and gouache, artists are encouraging ecologically responsible agriculture, consuming fewer raw materials and reducing the use of hydrocarbon solvents.

Gum Arabic, a fresh product of several species of acacia tree, is the binder for better watercolors and gouache. Raw gum is harvested without harm to the trees in a process analogous to maple syrup collection.

Gum production provides an economic benefit that discourages the cutting of wild trees in arid regions. Income from gum production also encourages the planting of cultivated acacia groves, important in holding back desertification in environmentally

devastated regions such as Sudan. The living plants also provide a source of food for livestock.



'The Old Sea Dog' by Henry Scott Tuke, watercolor heightened with white and gum arabic

Recycled watercolor paper is available from a number of manufacturers, including some made using pollution-free processes. High quality recycled watercolor papers yield great results and are perfectly suitable for permanent art. Artists accustomed to a specific traditional (rag) watercolor paper might want to test several brands to find which type works best.

In addition to using ecologically sustainable materials, watercolor painting is accomplished with much less pigment than other mediums, and no risky solvents. Watercolorists can take pride in choosing a medium that lets them leave their mark without treading on the environment.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#).

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