Utrecht Art Supplies
Ask the Expert: Economy vs. Professional Grade?

Ask the Expert: " I work large and tend to use a lot of paint. Is an economy grade the best choice, or am I better off using Professional Grade with extenders?"

A: It depends on your process, budget and pictorial objectives, and also which brands you're considering.

Some "economy grade" paints are perfectly suitable for permanent art, while others may not offer the lightfastness, pigment concentration and overall durability required for your work.

Professional quality artists' colors are a great value, ounce for ounce. They might be more costly per tube, but they go a lot farther in mixtures, tint more powerfully and cover better than scholastic grade.

Paints that are considered "student grade" generally have less pigment than professional-grade colors, with fillers added to achieve a workable consistency. Pigments selected for lower quality paints might not meet quality standards for professional-grade products. Cadmium-barium red, for instance, is produced with a chalky filler, and as a result lacks the strength and brightness of Cadmium Red Pure. Certain student-grade colors may also be less lightfast.

In higher price categories Professional Grade colors include some pigments that are too expensive for economy grade paints, so key colors might not be available at all in student grade, or only as a hue substitute made from cheaper pigments. Using extenders like Modeling Paste for acrylics or Alkyd Gel for oils helps stretch premium colors where no good substitute is available.

That's not to say that lower priced paints aren't a good choice for some- Utrecht Studio Series paints, for example, are certainly good enough for professional art, with brilliant color and dependable lightfastness. Value priced bulk paints can be ideal for artists using large volumes of opaque color without a lot of complicated mixing. For work involving delicate adjustment and complex color harmonies, though, the cost of professional grade paint is well justified by the performance on the palette and results on the canvas.