



Utrecht Art Supplies

Painting Grounds: Oil-based vs Acrylic?



Ask the Expert: "Why would anyone use a polymer/acrylic based gesso as substrate for an oil painting? Wouldn't an oil based primer be better?"

A: Acrylic dispersion painting ground (gesso) is highly compatible with oil paint. There are a number of advantages to using an acrylic-based ground under oil paint:

Flexibility

Oil paint loses flexibility with age. Acrylic dispersion painting ground (Gesso) retains flexibility much longer into antique age than oil paint.

Absorbency

Utrecht Acrylic Gesso is formulated to absorb just enough oil paint vehicle to form a strong bond without leaving the paint under-bound.

Adhesive power

Acrylic polymer dispersion has very strong adhesive power, so an acrylic gesso ground will attach irreversibly to most porous,

textured supports. By comparison, drying oils are much weaker adhesives and can (under adverse conditions) de-laminate from the support.

Convenience/Simplicity

Most support materials must receive an isolation layer of some sort of size before applying an oil ground, then the oil ground must dry before use. These additional steps make single-day support preparation practically impossible. Acrylic Gesso serves both as an isolation coat and ground in one, so it's possible to prime one day and paint the next.

Compatibility

Acrylic dispersion painting ground can be applied to a wide range of materials, including canvas, paper, panel, stone, leather, bisque-fired ceramic and even some metals.

Oil-based grounds do offer advantages of their own, and there are many artists who prefer the smooth brush movement and lower absorbency of oil priming. Some artists also find that acrylic gesso has a slightly abrasive surface, and believe oil priming is easier on brushes. Probably the most popular advantage to oil priming is its long, successful role throughout the history of the craft.