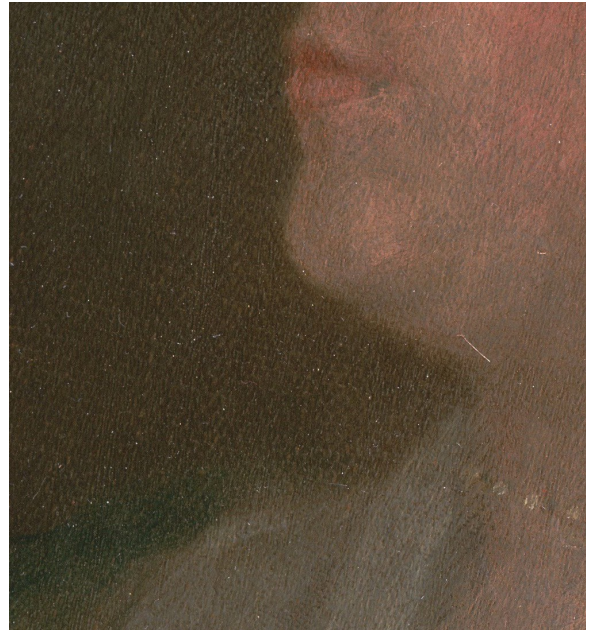


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## Herringbone Canvas



William Hogarth, "Anne Hogarth" (detail) ca. 1740

### Ask the Expert:

**"What is the purpose/history of the herringbone pattern canvas? Should I buy that weave pattern over another? Is it because it doesn't relax or go slack as much as a traditional weave would? Can you provide any further information?"**

**A:** Herringbone is a pattern of twill weave cloth which, though in existence since ancient times, became more widespread for use as a painting support in the 16th century. The Italian painter Titian was active during this period, and made many significant works on this type of fabric. Herringbone canvas is still used by artists today for its unusual texture, which is generally more aggressive than plain-weave fabrics like duck.

Reasons given for why painters might have originally selected herringbone canvas are largely speculative. Some artists probably chose it based on appearance alone, or because it was the best quality available. Still others may have selected it because, depending on the historical period, herringbone fabric may have been available in wider bolts than plain-weave canvas due to improved loom technology.

The latter explanation seems plausible when one considers that wide canvas could have eliminated the need for seams on large-scale canvases. Boucher executed at least one painting on twill-weave blue and white striped mattress ticking, which would seem an odd choice unless it was the best quality, widest canvas available.

Herringbone twill fabric releases wrinkles more easily than plain-weave cloth, always an advantage in stretching canvas. We're not aware of any data regarding stretched performance of herringbone vs plain-weave (our best guess is that they are both about the same) but the texture of the former might hold the priming better than a smooth duck-weave linen.