



Utrecht Art Supplies
Just for Fun: The Story of Gesso



There's more to the story of gesso than just what's in the bucket...

When most artists say "gesso", they use the generic trademark for the familiar acrylic dispersion painting ground that is nearly universal in the contemporary studio. Utrecht Acrylic Gesso, developed in 1957, is made using a pure acrylic polymer vehicle along with calcium carbonate and white pigment in a formula that provides optimal texture and a permanent, brilliant white color.

Gesso is a primer, a transitional coating between a substrate (support) and paint. The primer forms a strong bond with the support while providing a uniform, optimal surface for paint adhesion and color appearance.



"Gesso" is an Italian word that can mean chalk or plaster; it can refer to a plaster cast on a broken limb or classroom chalk. (Acrylic Gesso in Italian is "Gesso Acrilico")

As it applies to painting, gesso originally referred to a mixture of chalk or slaked plaster and glue which is applied as a painting ground or substrate for decorative treatments like gilding.



Traditional gesso is very hard; it works best on rigid supports (panels) and should not be used on flexible (cloth) supports, or cracking and flaking may result.



Acrylic Gesso (Acrylic Dispersion Painting Ground) is a synthetic primer that accepts oil, acrylic and alkyd colors. Acrylic Gesso can be applied to a wide variety of supports including canvas, wood, hardboard, paper, stone and even some metals.

The introduction of Utrecht Acrylic Gesso helped promote the resurgence of in-studio canvas preparation in the mid-20th century, offering an alternative to the previous practice of sizing and oil priming on separate days. No other painting ground offers the versatility, immediacy and flexibility of acrylic gesso.



An acrylic gesso priming can develop SID (support-induced discoloration), staining that occurs when water-based paints are applied to hardboard panels. Application of Acrylic Canvas Sizing before gesso can help prevent SID.



Acrylic gesso can be mixed with artists' acrylic colors to produce toned grounds; ready-to-use black gesso is also available.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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