



**Utrecht Art Supplies**  
**Studio Craft: On Thinning Oils**



**Ask the Expert: "My instructor told me that I should start my paintings (oils) with the paint thinned way down with turps, almost like watercolor. Is this right? I've read other places that thinning oil paints too much can cause problems."**

A: Thinning with solvent alone in the initial sketch is a fairly common practice intended to keep a "lean" (low oil) first layer consistent with the fat over lean principle of layering. In general, good brands of oil paint can be thinned moderately with solvent without compromising adhesion and film strength. Thinning excessively to a watercolor wash level of dilution is probably too much, however.

Excessive use of solvent can lead to weakly bound paint with a dull, lackluster appearance. In extreme cases a powdery pigment residue can be rubbed off the dry paint surface. If you can see color on a cloth rubbed lightly over the dry painting, it's a sure sign there is unbound pigment.

With thinners and mediums, try to use the minimum amount necessary to achieve the desired effect. It doesn't take much thinner to "open up" the paint enough for a thin, fluid wash. Use more vigorous brush work to rub colors thin rather than breaking down the paint vehicle with too much solvent.