

# PAINTING GROUNDS

*Unprepared painting supports must be primed before paint can be applied otherwise they are too absorbent. The gesso, or painting ground, is the first (prime) layer of paint to be put on the support in order to isolate the support from subsequent layers of paint. This first layer makes the support more receptive to paint.*

## Acrylic Gesso:



Today, acrylic gesso is the most commonly used primer for either oil or acrylic paints. Acrylic gesso is not a true gesso but is generally referred to as such. It is the best ground for use with acrylic paints, as both ground and paint are flexible when dry and contain polymer binders which make for good adhesion. Acrylic gesso can also be used as a ground for oil paints but it is recommended that at least 3-4 coats of gesso be applied to the painting surface to ensure the oil does not leach through. Some conservationists, however, would argue that acrylic gesso is not an ideal ground for oil paints due to the inflexibility of fully cured oils over more flexible acrylic grounds.

Nevertheless, acrylic gesso is the most convenient ground available and is widely used by many artists for both mediums. It is a great all-purpose primer that will stick to almost any surface that is free of oil, grease or dirt. It dries quickly to a very strong and flexible surface which will not crack or become brittle. Once dry, acrylic gesso resists water and moisture which alleviates the need for preliminary

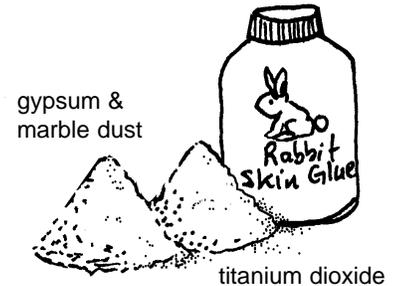
sizing. It is also unaffected by the corrosive action of acids and oxidation. Acrylic gesso is non-toxic, safe and easy to use.



## Traditional Oil Painting Gesso:

True gesso is the traditional ground for oil painting. It is essentially a white painting ground made from a mixture of chalk, white pigment, glue, and water. True gesso is best applied to a rigid surface such as an unfinished wood or masonite panel as it is generally too brittle for fabric supports.

To make traditional gesso, the ingredients are mixed in a double boiler over low heat. The glue serves as a binder to create a smooth, spreadable gesso, which is free of bubbles. Once ready, the gesso can be applied to the support in successive coats at right angles to one another. The final coat must be sanded to remove the brush strokes and then left to cure for at least two weeks. When oil paint is eventually applied to the surface the gesso is very absorbent. This means that the ground and the paint will make a good bond. If high absorbency is not desired, a highly diluted coat of varnish can be applied over the gesso before you begin painting.



## Oil-based Painting Grounds:

Oil-based painting grounds are ideal for both wood and fabric supports. If you are using a wood or masonite panel to paint on you can apply the oil-based ground directly. If you are using a fabric painting support, however, you must size the fabric with Rabbit Skin Glue or PVA (poly vinyl acetate) first.

Oil ground is a solid coat of white oil paint specially formulated to act as a ground upon which subsequent layers of oil colour will adhere. Oil grounds are usually thinned with mineral spirits or turpentine to the consistency of heavy shaving cream. The ground must be thin enough to work thoroughly into the weave of the canvas without leaving pronounced brushstrokes but still be thick enough to

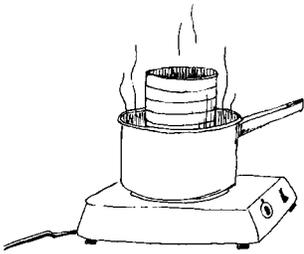
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maintain the integrity of the ground. The white primer should be applied after the rabbit skin glue has dried for at least 24 hours. One to two coats are usually enough. The white primer must cure for at least two weeks.

## NOTES:

### *Rabbit Skin Glue and PVA Sizing:*

The function of sizing is to coat the raw fibres of the painting support to prevent oil from causing rot. It serves as an isolating layer when using fabric supports. Size is traditionally made from a mixture of water and dried Rabbit Skin glue which is heated in a double



boiler over low heat. It is also available in a more contemporary, ready-made solution called PVA (poly vinyl acetate).

Rabbit Skin glue is an animal hide glue used as sizing for fabric supports where traditional gesso, oil-based gesso and oil paints are to be used. Rabbit Skin glue is also a good binder for making traditional gesso, for use with gilding and for adhering paper or canvas to virtually any support material such as wood. PVA is a more contemporary size which is used to seal fabric supports before oil-based grounds and oil paints are applied.



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