



# PRIMERS FOR OIL PAINTING

## SIZE (hide glue / rabbitskin glue)

Is applied thinly before priming with an oil or alkyd based primer to protect the fibres of the canvas from the rotting effects of the oils, or to prevent the oil being drawn from the paint on wooden supports. When using acrylic based primers no sizing is needed.

The size is made by soaking the glue granules in water and warming gently until dissolved (do not allow to boil or the size will be impaired).

Approximate recipes for making the size solution are; -

For sizing canvas      40gm of glue granules to 1 litre of water.

For making gesso      70gm of glue granules to 1 litre of water.

## LEAD PRIMER

The traditional method of priming a canvas. An oil based white primer made with lead white pigment (which produces a more flexible film than zinc or titanium white).

N.B. Lead white is poisonous - always carefully wash hands after use and do not eat or smoke while using the primer.

After sizing, brush on a coat of primer thinned slightly with turpentine and work well into the weave of the canvas. After about 4 days it should be dry and can be lightly rubbed down with fine sandpaper. A second coat of primer can then be applied.

Lead primer should be left to dry for between 4 weeks and 6 months (opinion varies about the exact length of time) to prevent the cracking of subsequent paint layers.

## THIXOTROPIC ALKYD PRIMER

An oil based white (Titanium White) primer with the inclusion of fast drying oil-modified alkyd resins which are very durable and retain their flexibility. Apply in the same way as lead primer. Because it is thixotropic, it becomes more free flowing as it is brushed which makes it easier to apply without losing the body of the primer. Canvas should be sized before using this primer.

## ACRYLIC PRIMER \*

A white primer (Titanium White) based on a copolymer emulsion. Very fast drying and ready to work on in a matter of hours. Use 2 coats directly on to the canvas, thinning the first with water to the consistency of single cream.

# PRIMERS FOR OIL PAINTING (continued)

## **ACRYLIC GESSO PRIMER \***

A white primer (Titanium White) based on a copolymer emulsion with the addition of inert absorbent filler, giving a ground with more body than acrylic primer and the characteristics of traditional gesso. The use of a slightly larger particle size for the filler gives the primer a little more tooth.

Apply neat and work well into the weave of the canvas. For a smoother surface lightly sand with a fine sandpaper when dry.

Thick layers are not recommended on canvas as this can lead to a loss of flexibility and makes the ground prone to cracking.

## **CLEAR ACRYLIC MEDIUMS \ CANVAS SEALER \***

Clear acrylic binders based on copolymers. These may be used as an alternative to acrylic primer where no colouring is required. Application will vary from type to type and with some, more than one coat is recommended.

## **PVA**

A clear acrylic binder based on homopolymers rather than copolymers. For reasons of economy it can be used in the same way as Acrylic Medium, but due to the loss of plasticisers over a period of time, it can become brittle with age.

## **HOUSEHOLD EMULSION PAINTS**

They are generally based on polymers but are expected to have a very short lifespan when used for decorating purposes (e.g. 10 to 20 years). They are intended for use on rigid surfaces and may not have the flexibility needed for canvas. The use of inferior quality pigments and sometimes the addition of optical brighteners are other factors against their use. We do not recommend the use of these paints for priming canvas.

\* Although copolymers are a relatively new development in the history of painting, it appears that they retain their flexibility for an extremely long period. As oil films harden with time and become less flexible there is the possibility, that in the long term, this may cause a separation between the ground and the paint film above it. However, recent research suggests that the larger particle size in the new acrylic gesso primers provides a surface which gives much better adhesion for the paint film.

While we take every care to ensure the information supplied on these sheets is accurate and up-to-date Paintworks Ltd will not accept any liability for loss or damage resulting from use of the information provided.

©Paintworks 2003



**PAINTWORKS**  
ARTISTS MATERIALS & CONSERVATION FRAMING  
99-101 KINGSLAND RD LONDON E2 8AG  
Tel 020 7729 7451 . Fax 020 7739 0439 . E-mail [shop@paintworks.biz](mailto:shop@paintworks.biz)