

## More for the Price Does Not Add Up to Good Art

*In art products there are basically 3 standards of quality: -*

1. *Play*
2. *Student*
3. *Artist*

### Play Quality

Aims for: -

- Economy
- Variety
- Appealing packaged in sets

### Drawbacks

Low quality level means that: -

- Brushes lose hairs quickly and are quick to lose head shape;
- Paints have little pigment. Colours are mixtures of pigments so they are unpredictable when mixing. Lots of fillers bulk up paint meaning that paints does not spread well when brushed.
- Watercolour papers are often 'rigid' and have poor absorbency.
- Canvas has fewer coats of primer applied and canvas is thinner so that paint esp. oils, seep through. Stretcher bars are easily dented, they tend to warp and there is a higher incidence of misshapen stretchers. Inadequate tooth means that you will more quickly reach the stage where the paint won't adhere when painting with acrylics.

### Student Quality

This is the quality of product that art tutors and art schools require for a good reason. Student quality products aim for: -

- Economy
- Acceptable handling properties

### Characteristics

- Pigments in paints are synthetic to keep the costs low – yet retain light fastness (often better than natural pigments), and consistency of colour. Predictable results when mixed.
- Paints spread well
- Canvas primed with a good quality of gesso so paint is retained on the surface without bleeding
- Watercolour papers have a reasonable absorbency which allows watercolours to granulate and for effective wet-on-wet technique

### Artist Quality

Also referred to as Professional quality.

- Pure, natural pigments are used in paints so prices vary markedly between colours.
- No fillers to bulk up media – just pigment and binders
- Canvas often triple primed, stretcher bars made of hardwood so are durable and keep straight, often hand stretched.
- Canvas and papers have archival properties to endure the tests of time.

## Choose Quality Over Quantity

Beginners often take the approach of “I’ll choose the cheapest products to see if I like it”, and thus make it difficult to achieve good results. This is why art schools and tutors recommend the student quality ranges for new artists. These products allow the newcomer to experiment with the medium and have some likelihood of reasonable success.

Likewise, beginners are often afraid of larger canvasses/papers finding the size intimidating. However, I feel it is good to encourage new artists to begin at the larger end – because it is easier! Once the new artist has developed their skills a little, and mastered the basic technique, that’s when they are ready to reduce and even miniaturise their work. I would always recommend that a beginner experiment initially on paper rather than canvas to keep their price down. When they are ready to try for their first “masterpiece” then I recommend using a quality product.

Shortcuts, (e.g. avoiding stretching watercolour paper, using plain water to thin acrylics and watercolours rather than adding the appropriate mediums) may also work to the artist’s detriment. Sure you do need to buy a roll a wettable tape, and take a few minutes to stretch the paper but the finished painting will look so much better on perfectly flat paper. Likewise, adding too much water to acrylics will reduce their adhesive properties and overly dilute the colours. Watercolours should have surface tension breaker or ox gall added when thinning paint to improve the flow and adhesion of the paints, especially when using wet-in-wet techniques.

When we set out to paint, we aim to achieve our best work to-date. It therefore makes sense to use materials that will assist us rather than hinder us. The moral of the story is you should choose the best materials you can afford. If on a limited budget it is better to begin with just one or two colours e.g. white and umber, and work on a monochromatic level. Then, as you can, add colours that will allow you to mix to achieve a whole rainbow of possibilities. Concentrate on one or two aspects of painting at once so you have a real chance of developing the skills to achieve your very own style and have fun at the same time. (In other words, don’t bite off more than you can chew!)

## Present Your Art Well

Having produced your masterpiece, it then becomes critical that you present the work well. To use any old frames knocking around the garden shed, or picked up in second-hand shops and garage sales as bargains, will very rarely achieve a desirable effect. Using inferior framing materials (asymmetrical, damaged, unsuitable dimensions, inappropriate colours) will downgrade your art. Why frame at all unless you are doing it to enhance the work.

As soon as you put artwork in a frame, the frame becomes part of the bigger artwork. Good framing

- Isolates the art
- Draws attention to the art rather than itself
- Enhances the art by drawing out the focal points
- Reflects the mood and topic

There are principles, which govern effective framing – but no rules (other than those which affect the quality and longevity of the materials).

## Colour

When choosing matboard colours consider: -

- Light and bright colours advance visually
- Dark and dull colours retreat
- Colours of lesser intensity will washout the colours of the art
- Colours of greater intensity will overwhelm the art
- Colours have meaning and convey mood e.g. red is hot, blue is cool. Yellow is cheerful, black can be dramatic and sombre.

## Size

Matboard widths will greatly influence the success of a framing job. A common error is to choose narrow mats for fear of overwhelming the work. In reality, skimpy mats look mean; they distort the perspective of the image and plain and simply downgrade the artwork by looking amateurish. Add class to a framing job by choosing a mat width that sets the work off well. There is a range within which a matboard will successfully set off the artwork. Outside that range will overwhelm or underwhelm. The actual measurement is determined visually – colours and size have visual weight. The decision is not one that can be made by a calculator. The one factor, which is constant, is that the lower border will appear narrower than it actually is, when the work is hanging on the wall. Hence a competent picture framer will make the lower border slightly wider. This means that when the work is hanging, the perspective is not distorted in any way and you are not “irritated” by the narrower lower mat.

## Frame Shape & Size

Frames provide the outer boundary to the work. Looking inwards, it is the start of the artwork. Hence your selection should set the scene by reflecting the nature of the work in colour, shape and size. Bold artwork will usually work well in a compatible bold frame. Delicate pieces need to be treated “gently” with a soft approach. Colour, shape, size and style all add up to reflect the artwork. For example an image with bold rounded shapes may look out of place in a softly coloured, angular frame. Take your lead from the artwork!

The **ONLY** way to choose framing is to try samples on the work. Keep an open mind and try your framer’s suggestions too, before you make your final choice. You may discover a better, more effective style of framing. Remember to take your lead from the artwork. You always risk compromising the artwork if you choose framing to suit your room décor as the key guide. All art deserves good framing. Good framing adds to the quality of the artwork. Poor framing will **always** downgrade the work. Promote your art to the best it can possibly be.

*Information Supplied by: -*

## **Impressions**

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