

## Raw Materials

### Rabbit Skin Glue

Glue sizing and oil priming is the traditional method of preparing a canvas for oil painting.

#### Rabbit Skin Size

*Dissolve 1 part rabbit skin glue to 10-15 parts of cold water. Soak until the glue has absorbed all the water to a porridge consistency, (1 hour or overnight). Then stir and heat gently in a double boiler until the glue dissolves (do not boil the glue). Leave the glue to cool for a couple of hours to form a jelly. Keep the container covered to prevent loss of water through evaporation. Test the strength of the glue with a finger – the surface should be rubbery, yet just soft enough to split. The split formed should be irregular, if it is smooth and clean, the size is too strong: re-warm it, add water and allow it to reset. If you are mixing up a batch for use at a later date, glue size will keep in the fridge for up to a week before starting to decompose.*

Size acts as a penetrating liquid to fill the pores of the canvas and to isolate the fabric from the subsequent applications of primer and oil paint. Rabbit-skin glue is a strong adhesive and must be used thinly or it will crack. One thin coat is sufficient to size a canvas; too thick a layer forms a continuous, level film on the surface, and prevents the subsequent priming layer from bonding with the canvas. Size may be applied hot to panels and boards, but on canvas it must be applied lukewarm. If it is too hot, it will soak through the canvas on to the stretcher, so that you have to prise it free with a palette knife. Hot glue size may also cause the fabric to over tighten.

### Fillers

Fillers or extenders are substances added to paint to increase its bulk. As a component of gesso they fill open pores or holes in a support or ground.

#### Traditional Gesso

- 1 part whiting
- 1 part glue size

**Calcite, kaolin, talc and whiting** are all useful as fillers. Because of their ability to bulk out paint, they make economical paint additives to achieve impasto effects. These materials act as binders and can be mixed to become mediums. Adding too much filler will lead to cracking. The colour of the paint will need to be adjusted to counter the “pastel effect” caused by the addition of the filler.

### Beeswax

Beeswax medium makes oil paints go further and provides a thick texture suitable for impasto. Bleached beeswax yellows with age.

#### Beeswax Medium

*Melt 100g beeswax in a double boiler over a low heat. Add 85 ml turpentine and stir. Leave to cool and solidify, then store in a sealed jar.*

Mix beeswax medium into paint or add to pigment for a nice satiny finish.

## Damar Crystals

Damar comes from conifer resin. Dissolved in turpentine it becomes a useful varnish for oil paintings that enhances colours with minimal gloss and yellowing. It does not crack or bloom (become opaque). Ready prepared damar varnish is available, or you can make your own, using small lumps of damar resin.

### Damar Varnish

*Crush damar resin, place it in a muslin bag and suspend it for two or three days in a jar of gum turpentine (use 1 part by measure of crushed resin to 4 parts turpentine.) When the resin has dissolved, strain the varnish again through a clean muslin bag, and it is ready for use.*

### Glaze Medium

*Glaze medium gives clarity and brilliance to glazes. It uses stand oil, a thick, viscous form of linseed oil which dries slowly (5 days or more for a thin layer), levels out well and dries to a durable, elastic film that yellows less than straight linseed oil. Mix 1 part stand oil and 1 part damar varnish, then add 5 parts turpentine. Stir each time it is used. If a more viscous medium is required, use less turpentine.*

## Shellac

Shellac is a yellow resin formed from secretions of the lac insect. It is a traditional, universal sealer for sealing screen-printing, unfired clay, and plaster and for varnishing paintings. It is also added to some artist inks to make them waterproof. Shellac can also be applied to the surface of a painting as flakes. It can be applied by using a brush or cloth pad.

### Shellac Varnish Recipe

*Mix shellac flakes with methylated spirits to form a saturated solution.*

*400 ml = 100 g shellac + 400 ml meths*

*1 litre = 250 g shellac + 1 litre meths*

*Leave until thoroughly dissolved, stirring occasionally. Then strain the liquid into another container.*

### Safety Precautions

*Keep out of reach of children. Treat mixed solution as a solvent. Dispose of residue in approved manner. Do **not** leave applicator pads "screwed up" as spontaneous combustion may occur. Rinse the applicator cloth thoroughly in water and detergent and hang out to dry to reuse.*

Shellac **can** be made into a really thick or thin mixture – both work well. Apply over both oil and acrylic paintings. Can create interesting effects when mixed into wet paint. The mixture is very tacky and dries to a hard, glossy film. Acts as a resist to water-based paint. Imparts a warm glow to a painting.

### *Information Supplied by*

## **Impressions**

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