

Choosing permanent paper

This is another in a series of lessons on art and drawing by special columnist David Messing. He has taught for eight years and operates an art store, Art Store and More, 18774 Middlebelt, Livonia. Messing encourages questions and comments from readers. You may write him at his store or c/o Observer Newspapers, 23352 Farmington Road, Farmington MI 48024.



By David Messing
special writer

I am a city boy, but I do love animals. The problem with being a city boy is that I have an unrealistic view of some of the basic laws of nature.

Case in point: people eat animals. How gross! When I eat pork sausage, I don't think of grinding up pink little piggies. I think about a plastic tray full of sausage links with see-thru plastic wrapping. When I eat a hamburger, I don't think about a big eyed cow. I think of a frozen disc about five inches in diameter with waxed paper on each side. And baby beef liver? Well I can't even write about that. And so it is in a mass beef liver production world we rarely see the basic elements of the products we buy.

Paper is one item that people and artists rarely consider. For most people paper is just something to write or type on. But to an artist, paper is the basic foundation of their expression. And the love between the artist and his specific choice of paper is no doubt superstition. Like the fisherman who must wear his fishing hat and use his favorite lure, we artists insist on using the paper with which we have had the best luck. I, for example do all my

artifacts

watercolors on Strathmore No. 400 watercolor block. I wouldn't even think of using any other paper.

HOW SAD It is when an artist or student of art happens to pull off some fantastic sketch or drawing and it is on an inferior grade of paper. But what makes good paper, good, and why is it expensive? What is vellum and parchment, rag and acid free paper?

Parchment originated in Pergamon a city in Asia Minor. As a matter of fact, parchment is derived from the word Pergamena. Vellum originally was made from the skin of an infant calf or as it is called in Latin: vitulus. Parchment was originally obtained from the skin of adult sheep or goats. These skins were soaked in lime liquor solution, dehaired and stretched to a remarkable thinness. The terms vegetable parchment, parchment paper, document parchment, vellum drawing and antique vellum, are among the modern terms for the paper we now use which resembles the physical properties of the authentic animal skins.

Before I mention rag and acid free, I would like to define the terms: "permanence" and "durability." Permanence is the degree to which a paper resists impurities in the air and within itself. Durability is the degree to which a paper retains its original qualities under usage. It is the necessity for durability and permanence that forced the early papyrus paper makers to seek alternate materials. Today the necessity for permanence and durability is just as important. But thanks to modern technology we artists can even loosely sketch on high quality, long lasting and durable papers.

MOST DRAWING papers contain rag. Only those papers containing 70 percent or higher can declare themselves as "high rag." Textile fibers (cotton linters, linen, and old rags) are almost permanently resistant to aging. Anything done on "rag paper" will keep for posterity. Now high rag papers are the most durable which means they will hold up to erasing and the vigorous efforts of the artist. Permanence however is not a result of the rag content alone. It is also a result of PH or acid free specification. Acid free refers to any paper which has a PH of 5.5 or higher. Anything with a PH of 5.5 or lower is considered not permanent and will yellow and age within a matter of years. So the rag content builds in strength and durability and PH ensures the permanence and long life of the paper.

I guarantee that you will shock the art store sales help if you walk in and say "Hello, I intend to do some sketching and would like to see what you carry in art papers with a PH of 5.5 or above and at least a high rag if not 100 percent rag."

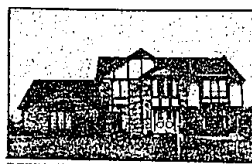
Most pads say little or nothing and require a long distance phone call to learn of their quality. You usually can tell by the price of the paper. The high rag, acid free paper is always going to cost more than poorer quality papers. Most paper companies claim their basic line of papers have a rag content and are PH balance and are therefore safe for most of your sketching and art work.

Paper companies also have a high quality line which, when you feel your need, is worth considering. Strathmore has No. 500 line which is, as usual, excellent. Morfitt Co. also recently came out with a high rag, neutral PH line called Portfolio.

So just like me at the meat market you don't need to know the whole history of what you are buying just look at the label and buy what you think looks best.



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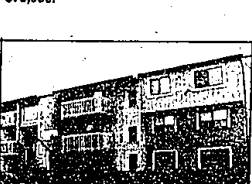
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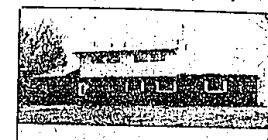
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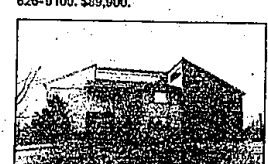
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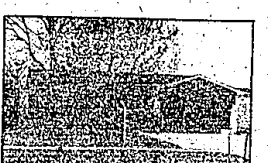
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