WASHINGTON STATE
ARTS COMMISSION

PAINTINGS GUIDE

A primer of painting materials and methods for your ArtsWA project

Developed in collaboration with
Peter Malarkey, Painting conservator

Version 1.1, March 2023

Table of Contents

Introduction 3
Painting Supports 3
  Fabrics 3
  Stretchers 3
  Strainers 4
  Plywood, pressed particle board, and aluminum composite panels 4
Stretching canvases 5
  Tools for stretching and priming 6
  Stretching process 6
  Stapling and tension notes 8
Primer layer 9
  Priming process 10
  Strength and uniformity notes 11
Paints 11
  Acrylics 11
  Oils 13
  Spray paints 14
  Water-based oil paints 14
Material quality 14
Framing 14
Site selection and installation 15
  Emergency egress 15
  Other site complications 15
  Air currents 16
  Light exposure 16
  Installation hardware 16
  Installation tips 16
Health, safety, and the environment 17
Practice and questions 18

Introduction

As artworks move through their lifespan, they change. Wherever you install the artwork, the environment and age affect their materials. Grime, variations in the building's internal climate, contact or damage from building users, and ultraviolet radiation from windows and lights alters artworks.

This document gives information about painting materials to help your artwork remain as stable and durable as possible in busy interior public environments. You can lengthen your artwork's lifespan by using professional-grade artist's materials and simple constructions for your painting supports.

Additionally, by adopting these materials and methods, you should have a straightforward approval and contracting process for your ArtsWA commission. If you are considering other materials and constructions for your artwork, please check first with your ArtsWA project manager. Deviations from the materials listed here may require a longer and more involved approval process.

Painting Supports

Whether your support is a panel or a stretched canvas it is meant to give a strong and chemically stable base for the rest of the layers you will apply onto it. It needs to stay flat and in plane over time. You can use the following simple support types.

Fabrics

You can use strong cotton canvas or linen stretched onto a professional-grade artist's stretcher or stretched or glued onto a panel with an archival glue.

Stretchers

Medium- and heavy-duty stretchers can be used for state painting projects. Most commercially available ½" or 5/8" deep stretcher stock is not strong enough for the long-term tension support needed for medium sized to larger stretched artworks. Stretchers are used to hold the linen or cotton fabrics under uniform tension and are available in both wood and aluminum. In most cases wood stretchers are preferable as they can be tooled more easily for installation hardware

and backing panels. The depth of the wood or metal stretcher stock should be at least 1” for paintings over 24 inches square. Because the stretcher joints may need to be adjustable over time, they should incorporate wood wedges (“keys”) or some other expansion system at the inner corners. The LeBron style expansion bolt stretcher is also a very useful tension system. The corners of any adjustable stretcher should not be joined permanently with screws, glue or other hardware.

Larger stretchers should have cross members (each with their own keys or expansion bolts) at approximately every 20– 24 inches of the stretcher perimeter, based on the strength and depth of the stretcher stock.

Strainers

Like a stretcher, a strainer is a four-sided wood framework that forms a fabric stretching support. Unlike a stretcher, a strainer does not have expandable joints. Future caretakers of your artwork cannot adjust a strainer’s fixed joints. The only way they can adjust the tension of a strainer-based painting is by un-stretching and re-stretching the painted fabric. ArtsWA therefore does not allow strainers to be a support for your artwork.

Plywood, pressed particle board, and aluminum composite panels

Panel supports offer your artwork rigidity and provide protection from the dents or tears that can harm a stretched painting. You can paint directly onto a primed panel, or you can glue or stretch a fabric onto a panel if you prefer the surface of a fabric.

Prior to wrapping or gluing fabric to a panel, the panel itself should be well primed with an artist’s acrylic gesso. This creates an isolating layer between the painting fabric and any acids generated by the panel as it ages. You should also prime the back and sides of the panel. If you are gluing fabric onto the panel, use a non-acidic artist’s PVA-based glue. Do not use wood glue for applying your artist’s canvas to a panel.

You can make your artwork panels from high quality plywood, medium density overlay (MDO), or aluminum composite such as Dibond, which is made of aluminum skins over a polycarbonate core. Masonite or other pressed fiberboard panels such as medium density fiberboard (MDF) are not acceptable. They are too fragile for publicly sited artwork.

Panels may warp if they are not supported by a wood lattice framework that is glued to the back of the art panel. Premade panels with strong wood backing frameworks are commercially available in both custom and stock sizes, usually with a panel depth of ¼ inch, though this should be verified with each panel builder. Often the panel can be bought pre-primed. If so, be sure that the panel makers are using professional-grade artist's primer.

If you are building your own panels, be sure they are supported by a wood framework at the back. This can be built from 1 x 2-inch wood stock, with spacing of 12 inches for ¼ inch panels, and spacing of 16 inches for thicker panels. This 1 x 2-inch backing framework should be built, screwed, and glued before mounting. The wood should be joined so it is 2-inches deep. When solid and dry, mount it to the back of your panel with wood glue and stainless screws, inset to the back carefully. If you want to use a thicker panel, such as 5/8 or ¾ inches, consider the weight of the artwork overall and the safety factors involved in installing. We suggest using thicknesses over ½ inch for panels only if you have a specific reason for it.

If you prefer not to work in a square or rectangular format, shaped panels are acceptable. Some sculptural relief on the panel is also acceptable. You can add additional layers of shaped panel material to give a relief effect. The assembly should be structurally simple and well-glued and -screwed together using high-quality carpenter's wood glue and stainless-steel screws. Any added components should not project more than ¾ inches from the rest of the artwork.

Stretching canvases

There are advantages whether you stretch your own canvases or buy them custom ordered and pre-stretched. Stretching your own canvases takes time, space, and practice but saves on material and shipping costs and gives you full choice over the materials in your painting, beginning with the support. Likewise, doing your own priming lets you define the quality, thickness, texture and even color of your priming layer.

Almost all of your tension should come from the stapling process. However, you can tap out the stretcher keys slightly to adjust tension as you are completing your stretching. If you expand the keys to help tighten a new canvas, do it uniformly for all corners, and continue to cross-measure

the corners to be sure that your painting is remaining in square. Do not measure for any framing plans until after your support is fully stretched, in square and solid.

Tools for stretching and priming

- Clean table, larger than the painting.
- Linen or artist's heavy weight canvas.
- Stretcher bars.
- Expansion keys for the stretcher bars
- T-50 3/8" Stainless steel staples. You can also use a hammer and canvas tacks.
- T-50 size Staple gun
- Canvas pliers
- Standard head screwdriver for removing staples and tightening corner folds.
- Framing square or similar 90-degree template
- Measuring tape
- Artist's professional-grade acrylic gesso
- Clean, 4-inch minimum soft bristle housepainter's brush
- Scissors or utility knife
- 150 – 220 grit sandpaper
- Hammer or mallet
- Vacuum

Stretching process

- Assemble the stretcher. Be sure that all wood units are straight by looking down the length of them, for any curvature. Bring the four interlocking joints of the stretcher completely together, using a hammer or mallet. The 45-degree joinery should be butted tightly together at each corner.
- Cross-measure the stretcher from bottom left to top right corner, and from bottom right to top left corner, to be sure that the diagonal measurements are exactly equal.
- Apply the framing square to the four corners to be sure they are 90 degrees each. Adjust as needed and continue to tap the joints tight with the mallet. (Keep repeating these measuring steps while you are stretching to be sure your stretcher is staying square.)
- Spread your fabric on a table. Lay the assembled stretcher carefully over your fabric. Align the stretcher and the fabric so that the weave pattern in the fabric is parallel with

the stretcher, and not off-angle to the stretcher. (Keep checking this fabric-to-stretcher alignment while you are stretching, as the fabric will want to shift.)

- Mark the fabric, adding a minimum of 4-inches per edge around the perimeter of the stretcher. (Example: a 40 x 40-inch stretcher will need a canvas that is a minimum of 48 x 48 inches.) The extra fabric per side is for the canvas pliers to grab onto. Do not trim away excess canvas when you are done stretching, instead please fold and staple it to the back of the stretcher.
- Remove the stretcher from the fabric. Cut the fabric along your marks.
- Lay the stretcher back on the fabric and re-align the fabric and the wood units.
- Gently pull each corner of the fabric and staple it to its corner of the stretcher. Tension does not need to be tight, just enough so that the staples pull slightly from each other. These staples and many of the following several staples will be removed as the tension and alignment get adjusted.
- Using canvas pliers in one hand to pull the fabric taut, set four staples, one staple at the exact center of each side.
- Add one staple at either side of the center staple. Spacing should be 1-inch apart until you have the canvas well anchored, and then your spacing can move to 2-inches apart. Setting these first few staples at the center of each side is establishing a t-shape of tension, crossing the center of the painting, and it can take some adjusting to get this tension uniform. Be sure that the few staples on each side are pulling equally across from each other, and that all the stretcher units are staying aligned and in square. (If the stretcher is shifting, temporarily screw or bracket the joints together, being careful not to split the joinery. Remove the hardware once you are done.)
- Once you have established a uniform and taut “t” of tension that crosses the canvas in both directions, begin adding one staple at a time, growing the row of staples out from the center of each edge. Once you have set two new staples per edge, rotate the canvas and repeat. The “t” that you set with the first few staples will develop into a diamond shape of four slack waves, moving toward the corners from the center as you continue to set staples. As you set each staple, pulling with the canvas pliers, be sure that your pull is reaching this wave and pulling it outward.
- The perimeter of the canvas will start to accumulate dimples of slack. After you have set roughly six staples per side, check for dimples that are not coming out through stretching.

As they appear, go to each corner, and remove the original (temporary) staples. Re-stretch each corner, pulling down the length of the stretcher to remove these edge dimples and re-set new *temporary* corner staples to hold them taut.

- As you stretch, the fabric should sound like a soft drum if you flick it with a finger. Run your palm across the tensioned area of the fabric and feel for variations in the tension. Ideally it will feel uniformly taut. Adding the first layer of gesso will tighten the fabric, so do not over-stretch it at this phase.
- Keep stapling and rotating the canvas until your staples are about 6 inches away from each corner. Leave the corners unstapled and remove any set-staples from the corners.
- At each corner, lift the stapling edge of the fabric upward and fold the fabric under itself. Use the screwdriver to push the under-fold as far forward and neatly behind the over-fold as possible. Continue stretching each corner, and before finally stapling the folded parts of each corner, push them back into a neatly tucked position again with the screwdriver, and stretch, and staple the entire folded assembly twice.

Stapling and tension notes

Using a staple gun is a convenient way to stretch canvases. You can also use canvas tacks. If a T-50 hand staple gun is too large for your hands, try a pneumatic or electric staple gun, or a smaller hand stapler. The final stretching staples should be stainless steel, and they should be strong staples at least 3/8-inch across. The depth of your staples will vary. Three-eighth and half-inch are good lengths for final staples. Temporary staples used during stretching that are removed in the process can be shorter, and they do not have to be stainless steel.

Regardless of which stapler you use, it is useful to learn how much downward force to use so that the staple sits at the right height. Ideally your staples will sit just above the level of the fabric. Tap them down slightly with a hammer so they contact the fabric. Do not tap them so tightly that they crush into the fabric. Crushing the fabric will cause weakness along the line of the staple and will eventually wear a tear into the fabric.

Stretching works best if the staples are set at the edge of the stretcher. If you prefer you can place your staples at the back of the stretcher. This makes tension control more difficult when stretching, so pay extra attention to the uniformity of your fabric's tension if you staple at the back of the stretcher.

Stretching seems to work best with the canvas pliers in your non-dominant hand to control the fabric tension and the staple gun in your stronger hand to set the staples once you have the tension where you want it for that staple.

Some distortion in the fabric is inevitable as it stretches toward staples, but by pulling uniformly with the canvas pliers from staple to staple, and watching the fabric, you should be able to control the amount of fabric tension and distortion before setting the staple. If, as you pull, the fabric begins to bunch against the last staple you set, the best thing to do is remove that staple, re-set the tension to pull out the slack there and then re-staple it. This keeps the slack where it belongs, which is moving outward toward the corners away from the growing row of staples.

Primer layer

The priming layer is the first layer to be painted onto the support, and it has a few purposes. It stiffens the painting fabric, gives a smooth painting surface, and creates an isolating layer between the paint and the support. The primer layer helps to separate materials from one another while still forming a bonding layer between them, so they affect each other less as they age. This is necessary because many of the materials involved, especially oil and wood, release acids over time. On stretched canvases the primer gives strength and rigidity to the fabric and the painting overall.

The most common and convenient priming material is usually sold as “artist’s acrylic gesso”. It can be used for either oil or acrylic paintings. It is a water-based, acrylic emulsion ground together with white pigments.

You can prime your oil painting supports with a traditional oil-based primer instead, which is white pigment ground with oil rather than acrylic. Priming with oil-based primers is more involved than acrylic gesso priming, and the primed canvas needs at least six months to harden enough to be painted on. If you decide to use an oil-based primer, you will first need to add a protective sizing layer to the canvas, usually rabbit-skin glue, to protect the plant-based canvas fibers from the acidic oil in the primer.

“Gesso” is a term with a long history in painting and building trades. It shows up very early in painting manuals and is sometimes sold today in its traditional version-- which is not based on an acrylic binder, but usually on an animal glue binder. In most cases the traditional gesso is a combination of white pigments, bulk fillers, and rabbit-skin glue. Traditional gesso, if you want to buy it or make it, can be used on rigid panels, but is not flexible enough to be used as a primer for stretched canvases. In most applications for ArtsWA, the best gesso to use will be a modern, acrylic type gesso.

Priming process

- Prime the canvas with the first layer of primer. The fresh primer should just overlap the edges of the art surface, but not painted onto the edges or the staples, yet. While the primer is wet, work the brush firmly inward into the fabric to be sure you have filled all voids in the fabric and coated as many of the fibers as possible. Check that there are no air bubbles. On the back of the canvas, scrape off or spread out any little spheres of wet primer that have pushed through the weave. Do not add any other primer to the back of the canvas.
- The first priming layer will increase the fabric tension overall. Once it has dried, you can decide if the tension is right for you. When you flick it gently with your finger at different places, on either side, it should give the same amount of vibration and a soft, audible tone.
- If the painting is too slack, or if it is showing buckles from non-uniform tension, remove the staples beginning at the center and replace them as you go, using more tension. As you paint, the fabric will stretch slightly, so having the canvas taut and uniform at this point is critical.
- Re-stretching may not be necessary if the slack is minimal. In that case, place the stretcher keys, one in each corner, and tap them slightly to expand the corners.
- Once you have re-set the tension sand the gesso lightly, wipe off the sanding dust with a damp cloth, then add the second layer of priming. This and following layers of primer can cover the edges of the fabric and the staples.
- Continue adding primer layers, building them thinly, up to four layers. Dry between each layer, sand lightly, and remove debris.

Strength and uniformity notes

For the strength of the primer layer, it is better to use multiple thin layers of primer rather than one or two thick layers. Use three or more layers of primer and sand gently in between coats to give better adhesion between the layers. Be sure to wipe off the sanding dust with a damp cloth as you work.

When priming panels, prime the back and sides of the panel too, with at least one coat. This will help to keep all surfaces of the panel more uniformly responsive to changes in humidity and temperature and will help prevent warping.

When priming canvases, look immediately at the back of the canvas while the gesso is still wet. If there are droplets of primer that have pushed through to the back, brush out these beads across the back of the fabric. This keeps them from drying as spheres and helps to keep the porosity of the fabric more uniform. This will help the fabric to stay in plane as it ages. The back of the fabric should not have any primer added.

Paints

The most common and durable paint types for publicly sited artworks are acrylic and oil. While they have similar appearances, oil and acrylic are different chemically and should not be intermixed or layered together. Acrylic and oil are described separately below, because of their physical and chemical differences.

Acrylics

Acrylic paint is a mixture of dry color pigment milled with an acrylic emulsion. The thinner used with acrylic paint is water. The primer for acrylic paintings is acrylic type gesso. (This is the same acrylic gesso you can use for oil paintings.)

Acrylic paint can be layered easily. If you are applying acrylic in multiple layers, it is good to add a very small amount of extra acrylic medium into the next layer of paint mixes. This will keep the successive paint layers increasingly more flexible and will help keep upper layers from cracking over time.

When thinning acrylic or spreading the mixture for more transparency, it is important not to over-thin with water as this will disperse the acrylic polymers and pigments. It will also dry into a paint coat that is physically weak and more vulnerable to loss of paint material. Use only enough water to make your paint easier to spread. If you want to thin your paint for a transparent layer, mix in a small amount of acrylic medium or other acrylic gel. This will allow the pigment particles to spread out and become more transparent but will keep the paint coat strong.

You can check for good paint strength and adhesion by rubbing a dried painted area with a soft cotton cloth, with slight force. If the cloth is picking up color, then you may need to keep your paint coats stronger by using less water and, if necessary, by adding slightly more acrylic binder.

Acrylic Layering Sequence

- First layer: The basic support which can be fabric on stretchers, fabric on panel, or panel alone. These are all acceptable for your contract.
- Second layer: The primer layer, which is artist's acrylic primer or acrylic gesso. Do not use traditional glue-based gesso primers, as the acrylic art paint will not stick well to the animal-based glue binders in traditional gesso.
- Third layer: This is the layering of the art paint, whether it is made of one or more coats. This is the main art layer and should be made with high quality artist's acrylic paints. Acrylic paint on its own or slightly thinned with water will form a strong artist's paint. Gels and other mediums can be added, but they are not necessary for strong paint layers unless you are spreading the paint extremely thinly or building up multiple layers, where upper layers need more flexibility. There is a range of professional artists' additives for acrylics, all meant to give different textural effects or to help with different paint effects such as bulkiness, transparency, or to give a certain degree of shine or matteness to the paint. If you are using extra gels or additives, please keep the added amount very small and mix them well with the paint as you are mixing your colors.
- Fourth layer: The clear protective layer. You apply this to make your acrylic paint layer durable and allow the following UV-protecting varnish to be reversed if necessary. In higher traffic situations, or if your acrylic paint needs to be better bonded, this additional protective acrylic layer will help. It protects against some abrasions and makes future maintenance and repair easier. This layer can be either simple artist's acrylic polymer or

other acrylic painting sealing product. Apply the layer thinly and uniformly. This will become a permanent part of the artwork. It cannot be removed.

- Fifth layer: The final varnish. This is an intentionally reversible varnish material, and not the same material as the acrylic resin used as your previous protective layer. The varnish you choose should contain ultraviolet light stabilizers and must remain easily soluble. This final varnish adds a workable layer of protection from further abrasion and ultraviolet light. This layer is meant to be reversible or workable in the event of damage. You can apply this layer by painting or spraying over the permanent protective layer.
  Before applying the final varnish layer, check that previous layers are well-adhered. Acrylic paintings can be vulnerable to solvents, which varnishes contain and are part of the process for removing varnishes during future repairs. To check if you can safely add a varnish to your acrylic painting, rub all colors of the dried acrylic paint surface with a soft cloth or cotton lightly moistened with mineral spirits or naphtha, pushing firmly. If you are getting color on your cotton, this means that the acrylic polymers are vulnerable to these solvents, and you need to add another clear protective layer (see Fourth layer above). If your cotton does not show color, you can safely apply varnish, reversibly.

Oils

Oil and acrylic paint use the same dry pigments for their color. For oils the pigments are ground in a plant-based oil, most often linseed or safflower oil. These are called drying oils because they harden enough to be useful as permanent paints. Walnut oil and poppy seed oil are also used.

Paint can be made more brushable by small additions of thinner, which evaporates nearly completely from your paint. Thinners can be rectified turpentine, odorless turpentine, or odorless mineral spirits. These all require some ventilation. It is important to use good quality, clean paint thinner and only enough to help with the brushing of your paint. Overthinning your oil paint will overextend the polymers and pigments, resulting in weak paint films.

In the oil painting materials world, there are many additives and variations on mediums. Most of these products are unnecessary or based on overcomplicated components and in many cases (such as with driers) they are harmful to your painting in the long term. In general, whatever small amount of medium you use should be very simple: raw cold pressed linseed oil, stand linseed oil, and alkyd resin are good additives. Avoid driers and complicated medium recipes,

particularly if the manufacturer does not specify the ingredients. Avoid mediums containing varnish (such as damar resin).

Spray paints

Spray paints and airbrush are fully acceptable in your painting. If possible, it is important to use only artist's spray paints. As with any paint, spray paints are a combination of dry pigment and some form of binder (such as acrylic resin), combined with a solvent and a propellant gas. It might not be clear what the binder in the spray paint is, so it is important to check the company literature of your spray paint brand to identify what type the binder is for the spray paint. Be sure that it is compatible with your main paint type, oil with oil, acrylic with acrylic. In mockups, test for good adhesion between the spray paint and the surface below it.

Water-based oil paints

Do not use water-miscible oil paints in paintings contracted with ArtsWA. They are a newer product that needs more study before you include them in ArtsWA projects.

Material quality

There are many art materials manufacturers that make professional-grade lines of artist's paint, primers, mediums, and varnishes. Commonly used professional art materials come from Golden, Liquitex, Windsor-Newton, Gamblin, and Nova Color. This list of good quality art material manufacturers is not complete and we do not recommend one company over another. Whatever brand you use, please use only their professional quality lines, and not their student or economy lines. When combining products in your paint mixing, such as mixing an acrylic medium into an acrylic paint, or painting medium into your oil paint, it is generally better to use all products from one brand. Use paints with a high lightfastness rating of 1 or 2. All art paints will contain labelling about the lightfastness and toxicity of the pigments in the labelling or product information.

Framing

Your painting's edges may be vulnerable to damage, depending on where its hung. ArtsWA requires you to protect the edges with a frame. This is especially true in hallways and in stairwells near banisters, where there is a higher chance of contact from hands, backpacks, or

equipment. Frames should not include glass or acrylic sheeting ("Plexiglas") over the artwork. As you develop your project, work with your Project Manager to plan your framing.

If your painting is a stretched canvas, it should include a backing panel, screwed to the stretcher reverse with stainless hardware, that covers the entire back of the painting. The panel should be archival cardboard, or another archival panel material.

Site selection and installation

You may have some choice about where in the building your painting is installed. Consider how much foot traffic might be in the installation area, and how that foot traffic relates to the painting. Can it be reached? If so, how should you protect your painting? Look for high hanging locations to keep your artwork out of reach. Based on the location, your painting may receive accidental or intentional damage from balls, janitorial, or construction equipment, scuffs, food and drinks, pencils and pens.

Emergency egress

Wherever your artwork is placed, public safety will be a priority. Your installation hardware and methods will need to ensure that the artwork stays in place and does not loosen in the event of earthquakes, accidental contact, or mechanical failure of the installation hardware. Your artwork will also need to be located so that there is no interference with exits from the building in event of a fire or other emergency. Your artwork should not be hung along fire escape corridors and should not be hung above exit doors or hallway entrances, where they could theoretically fall during an emergency. Your ArtsWA project manager can help in considering potential issues with egress.

Other site complications

Some installation locations will be difficult to access for initial installation and any future maintenance or conservation. As you choose your hanging site consider what lifts, scaffolds, or other equipment will be needed for access to the painting for installation, examination, removal, or maintenance. This is particularly important in stairwells, where costly scaffolding must be built to facilitate artwork access. Ramped areas, spaces with fragile flooring materials such as tile, narrow spaces, and those with low weight thresholds can also be problems. They will not support

the use of a scissors or boom lift to access the artwork. Ultimately, costly, or complicated artwork access will mean that ArtsWA is less able to maintain or repair your artwork.

Air currents

The architecture in your installation area will have an effect on your painting over the long term. If your artwork is near heating vents or HVAC registers, there will be uneven temperatures and air currents across your painting that will affect how the painting accumulates grime. This does not prohibit you from hanging your artwork there, but it should be kept in mind and avoided if possible.

Light exposure

Are there windows near your painting? How much natural light is in the room? Avoiding direct sunlight will increase your painting's lifespan. Direct sunlight can cause fading, cracking, and other irreparable damage over time. Regardless, ArtsWA requires that you use a varnish that contains UV stabilizers.

Installation hardware

French cleats are ArtsWA's preferred way for you to install your artwork. Cleats hook the painting onto the wall by using interlocking brackets placed on the wall and on the back of your artwork. Cleats are effective but require careful planning to be sure that the two cleat components join easily, and that the back of the painting does not interfere with good alignment of the cleats.

Your installation method will need to ensure seismic safety with a third point or other method of securing your artwork. It must not be able to "jump" off the wall in an earthquake. Consider adding T-screw security mounts. You should apply at least one along the artwork's bottom center edge. If the artwork width is larger than 48 inches, apply one on each bottom corner.

Your contract with ArtsWA may require you to have a structural engineer approve and stamp your installation method.

Installation tips

Plan your installation process carefully, ahead of time, and review your plan and division of responsibilities with your ArtsWA project manager. It is useful to rehearse your installation steps

so you are familiar with the weight and size of the artwork and can decide how much help you will need. Planning becomes more important the higher you install and when stairs or ramps are involved. Based on the height of your artwork, you may need ladders or scaffolding. OSHA (the federal Occupational Health and Safety Administration) keeps a close eye on construction projects, so be sure any ladders or scaffolding you are using are in full compliance with OSHA rules.

Understand the building floorplan and wall area so you can plan your routes for moving the artwork through the building to the installation site. Be sure your artwork can get through all doors and around corners on the way to the site.

Check with your ArtsWA project manager about compliance with state contracting requirements for you and your installers. You might want to consider contracting the installation to a fully licensed and bonded art installer or contractor.

Health, safety, and the environment

Many paint materials are toxic until they have hardened into the finished product. Do your painting in a well-ventilated space, and use a respirator that stops organic vapors, when varnishing or using a lot of thinner (including odorless thinners). Do not eat while painting, and thoroughly wash your hands before proceeding to any other activities. Many products are flammable, so keep all materials away from heaters and sources of combustion, and do not smoke.

If you are generating paper towels or rags, let them evaporate completely before putting them into your waste can to avoid flammable fumes building up and causing a fire.

Art materials can also be hazardous to people and other species. Specifically, thinners, metal-based pigments, and acrylic polymers all wind up in the water system and do harm. Please safely contain all your painting materials, with good ventilation, and do not put them down the drain. Keep brush-rinsing jars, painting rags, and other studio waste well ventilated in their own containers and dispose of all art materials through the hazardous waste system in your area. Do not combine your studio waste with your household waste.

Practice and questions

Regardless of your experience, your finished artwork will benefit from planning and practice with the materials. Painting materials, especially oils, are not always predictable as they harden so it is good to do preliminary studies and even full-scale mockups before doing the painting itself. We encourage you to understand your materials through reading, practice, and discussion with other artists about their methods and experience. If you have questions about your process or materials, your Project Manager at ArtsWA can put you directly in touch with artists, technicians, or painting consultants who are happy to discuss your questions.