

Developed in collaboration with Conservator James Bernstein and Golden Artist Colors, Inc.

Protective Backing Boards for Stretched Paintings



Foam board panels are pre-cut, abutted and screwed to the members of the stretcher reverse.

A protective backing is the final component in the stretched canvas equation. The backing prevents dirt, foreign materials, objects and people contact from entering and damaging the painting reverse.

An effective backing material should be lightweight, uniformly rigid, strong and available in a variety of formats. Foam board has been a popular choice for protective backing boards for some 40 years. One-eighth inch thick foam board (available up to 40" x 60") will suffice for small to medium paintings. Three-sixteenth inch thick foam board panels are available 48" x 96" (or by special order 60" x 120") providing continuity and rigidity for larger pictures.

The backing board may be secured to the stretcher reverse (or the painting frame reverse) with flange-head screws. The screw length should only be a half-inch or so; short enough so they do not protrude through the other side of the wood. Select attachment locations with care, never allowing screws to pierce, weaken or lock the corner or cross-brace expansion joints.

There is a misconception that good-sized openings need to be cut into protective backings to allow the canvas "to breathe". Unless in the tropics, this simply is not the case; all that is needed are small one-eighth inch puncture holes every few feet; these may be introduced with an awl point.

Since a backing over the entire painting reverse will limit access to cross bracing, carrying handles or straps (that fold or fall

flat when not in use) should be attached towards the outside left and right of the painting reverse, at a good gripping height (approximately 24" from the painting bottom). An alternate to fold-away carrying handle hardware are 6" loops of flexible woven strapping (nylon or polypropylene), which flop out of the way behind the painting when not in use.

Labeling of the backing reverse, identifying the artist, artwork title, year, dimensions, weight, materials used, varnishing preferences and any special instructions for handling, installation and care, will be very helpful to all encountering the painting in the future.

For further discussion and resources regarding canvas preparation and stretching, see:

Bernstein, James. *A Remarkable Way to Stretch Canvases (and other Essentials of Canvas Preparation)*. JUST PAINT New Berlin, NY: Golden Artist Colors, Inc. Issue 17, September 2007.

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