



ART SUPPLIES ARE GOING GREEN

Art-supply manufacturers are making efforts to provide greener products. Artists themselves, however, still bear the biggest responsibility for being green, by disposing of their waste materials properly.

—
by Daniel Grant

In many areas of life, consumers may buy products that are less harmful to the environment than other brands, such as purchasing a hybrid automobile or food from farms that practice sustainable agriculture. Artists, too, strive to be good stewards of the environment through the purchases they make, but it is not as easy as switching to a hybrid car or using recycled materials.

Over the past 40 years, art-supply manufacturers have focused much of their attention on producing products that are safer for artists—for instance, using less lead in white paint (because of the association of lead with neurological disorders) or moving away from oil-based to water-soluble materials (in order to lessen the problems of vapors that may damage the lungs, liver, and central nervous system). When products are water-soluble, however, “artists are less likely to assume that they are harmful to the environment and just pour everything down the drain,” says Scott Gellatly, the product manager for Gamblin Artists Colors, in Portland, Oregon. “It is probably more important to inform artists of how to dispose of waste in a responsible manner.”

The internet makes it fast and easy to locate products that are environmentally friendly, understand how the manufacturing process impacts the environment, and determine ways to work as a good steward of the environment. For example, several major art-materials retailers have pages on their websites



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Father and Son

by Warren Chang,
2007, oil, 24 x 36.
Private collection.

that list green products. Dick Blick Art Materials, for example, has a comprehensive guide on its website (www.dickblick.com/green) that links to individual products such as the Blick Studio II Lyptus A-Frame Easel made from eco-friendly wood from Brazil, and Ampersand Clayboards and Gessobords made from sustainable forest products without the use of formaldehyde or harmful volatile organic compounds.

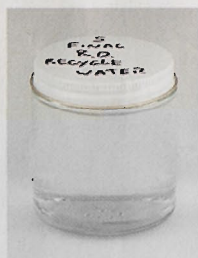
The website for Gamblin Artists Colors (www.gamblincolors.com) offers guidance for safe studio practices in its "Newsletters" section, including the recommendation that artists contact their local recycling center for instruction regarding disposal. Many other companies give similar advice. "On our tubes, we provide a very general statement, 'Dispose of appropriately,'" says Art Guerra, the owner of Guerra Paint & Pigment, in New York City, which sells paint-making components (www.guerrapaint.com). Golden Artist Colors, a manufacturer of water-based paints in New Berlin, New York, has a large section about waste disposal on its website (www.goldenpaints.com), including a general discussion of the topic, tips on best disposal practices, and tips to reduce waste. Ben Gavett, the company's director of regulatory affairs, points out that paint-tube labels aren't large enough to include much disposal information on them.

Waste disposal requirements differ from one county or municipality to another, requiring artists to find out which agencies are in charge and what their rules are. "If you want to be green as an artist, it means taking complete responsibility for everything you do in the studio, especially how you dispose of waste," says Mark Gottsegen, the administrator of the Cleveland-based Art Materials Information and Education Network (www.amien.org). "Art supplies are chemicals; even watercolors and gouaches, which are more environment-friendly than many other products, have pigments that are chemicals, and you don't want these things in your body or in the environment." In other words, artists cannot just buy their way into greenness but must be vigilant about what they do with all the supplies they use. "It is the artists' responsibility to find out things and act appropriately on that knowledge," Gottsegen notes.

These days, when everyone is striving to be more eco-friendly and green, a growing number of artists'-materials suppliers are marketing their products as being safe to the planet and nontoxic, which is not a legally regulated term. Some manufacturers of easels indicate whether or not the wood used comes from a plantation or sustainable forest rather than from an older-growth forest.

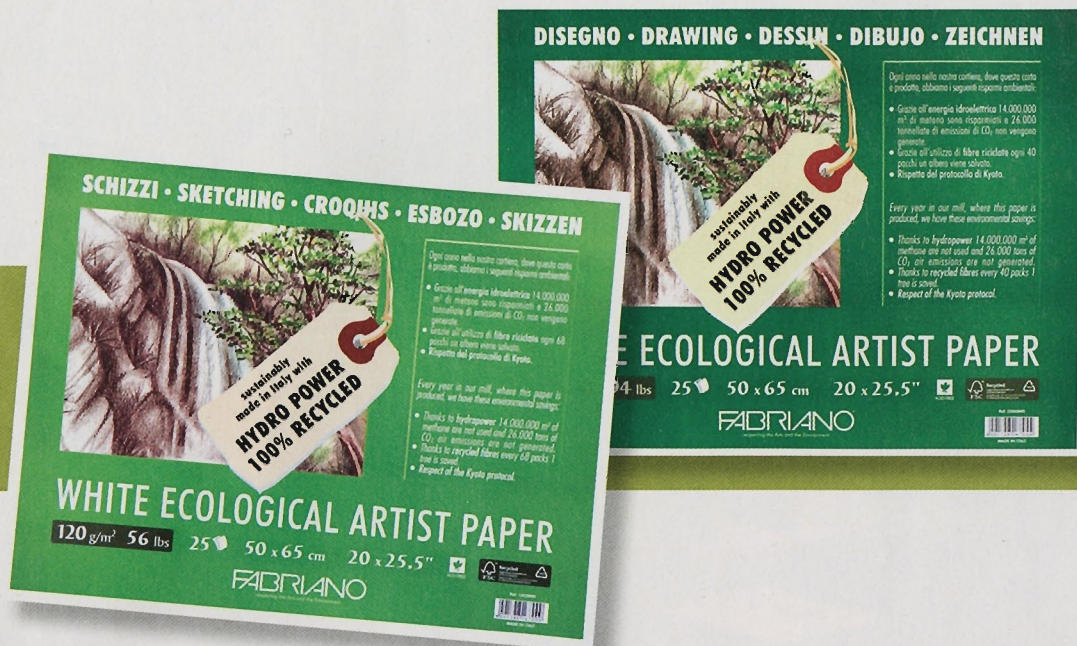


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ABOVE
Golden Artist Colors treats its wastewater with a multistep filtration process.

ABOVE RIGHT
Fabriano Ecological Artist Paper distributed by Savoir-Faire.



Glob (www.globiton.com), in Berkeley, California, touts the fact that its six paints (lemon verbena, tangerine, plum purple, berry blue, pomegranate, and basil green) are made from fruits, vegetables, flowers, and spices, and are biodegradable, nontoxic, gluten-free, soy-free, and vegan.

The Earth Pigments Company (www.earthpigments.com), in Tucson, Arizona, makes the claim that all of its pigments, binders, and mediums are nontoxic and environmentally safe, in large measure because they do not contain certain hazardous materials such as arsenic, cadmium, lead, mercury, radium, or tin. That's fine as far as it goes, but many artists want more than just earth tones. They will end up looking for other pigments, such as the cadmiums and cobalts, and they will simply purchase them from another supplier. It is important to note that most artists' materials suppliers don't make or produce pigments themselves but purchase them from mining companies abroad. In fact, these companies are not necessarily mining for pigments at all and instead are seeking a certain kind of ore when they happen to run across a vein of ochre or something else. This will be sorted out and sold to middlemen who supply it to the makers of artist's materials. The mining companies themselves operate under different national laws, which are generally strict and (one hopes) enforced.

For most companies that produce artists' paints,

the green claims principally involve how they dispose of waste. Golden Artist Colors, for instance, has a multistep process of treating the 2,000 gallons of wastewater it produces each day. The water is not dumped down the drain but rather is put through an initial filtering process that separates the acrylic solids from the water, according to Gavett. Those solids form a largely dry "waste cake" that goes to a landfill, and the remaining water goes into a reverse-osmosis filtering system that separates chemicals in one stream (sent to a waste-treatment facility) and clean water in another (to be reused back in the factory). "We recycle many different things—electronic equipment, paper, printer cartridges, you name it—but our largest concern is the water we use here," Gavett says. One of Golden's most recent green initiatives was the commitment to purchase 100-percent clean electricity, generated entirely from wind and low-impact hydro sources, which will result in a smaller carbon footprint for its paints.

Gamblin Artists Colors, whose factory is 100-percent wind powered, seeks to buy materials as locally as possible in order to limit its transportation carbon footprint, according to Gellatly. Like Golden, Gamblin reuses what otherwise might be viewed as waste material. The company has an air-filtration system to protect employees from exposure to pigment dust. Every year Gamblin collects this



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ABOVE LEFT
Gamblin Artists Colors' Torrit Grey is made from pigment collected in the Torrit Air Filtration System in the manufacturing plant.

ABOVE RIGHT
Blicks Studio II easel made from eco-friendly Lyptus premium hardwood.

pigment and, rather than sending it to the landfill, uses it to form a generally dark-gray paint. Called Gamblin Torrit Grey (for the company's Torrit Air Filtration system), the paint is available at participating retailers in April in honor of Earth Day.

Some companies focus on green buildings, office procedures, and manufacturing processes. Ten years ago, Dick Blick revamped its entire manufacturing and distribution facility in Illinois so that it now uses 10 percent of the energy normally required to heat and cool other structures of a similar size. Cheap Joe's Art Stuff, in Boone, North Carolina, also made major changes in its warehouse, distribution center, and workshop facility, and the company joined other businesses in the state as part of NC GreenPower, an

independent, nonprofit organization that supports the generation of renewable and cleaner sources of energy. "We believe that our contribution to NC GreenPower will help build a cleaner energy supply, a healthier environment and a stronger economy for North Carolina—now and for the future," says Mike Roberts, the CFO of Cheap Joe's.

Companies that manufacture artists' drawing materials were among the first to use recycled, low-impact, and renewable products in their production and packaging. For example, General Pencil (www.generalpencil.com), a family-owned company founded in 1889, uses sustained-yield incense cedar wood in making its drawing instruments, recycled paper in its packaging, and solvent-free

