

# Artist Watercolor Paper

It's understandable that some people get more than a little confused when shopping for artist watercolor paper. There are a lot of different brands of paper, different weights, surfaces and it goes on and on from there. As always at Cheap Joe's... we are here to help out. Below we have put together some basic information to help you with your art supply shopping. In order to make things a little easier to understand, we have put some explanations with some terms that you are likely to see. Hopefully when you understand more about the art supplies that you are looking at you will be able to choose the fine art paper that is just right for you!

## **Mould made:**

Some of the biggest names in watercolor paper, like Arches watercolor paper have been making watercolor paper in a mould since 1492. No, we aren't kidding... for a really long time! Back before you and I were ever around, these very talented artisans would use a wooden frame that had a fine screen stretched inside it and run this "mould" thru a mixture of gelatine, cotton fibers and fresh spring water. These cotton fibers would stick to the inside of the screen in a nice even layer. Then this screen was allowed to dry. This screen full of cotton fiber was then pulled away from the screen or mould to reveal a beautiful handmade piece of paper. Since the Industrial Age, moulds are have been altered just a bit and the screens are now stretched on a long roll. These moulds now produce a much longer sheet in a pass... but more about how that works later.

## **Deckled Edges:**

When you are looking for fine art paper or watercolor paper you will see that there are papers that have "deckled edges". These edges are created when the paper is made in mould. When the cotton fibers attached to the mould, they don't line up all even. Like everything in nature, this irregular edge is better and far more beautiful. When the brand new paper is removed from the much longer moulds that are used today, they have two natural deckled edges and then the other two are torn. The sheets are measured out and torn apart to leave the other two deckled edges.

## **Sizing or Gelatine:**

All watercolor paper is sized. That means that the fibers that make the paper are treated with a gelatine to make them less absorbent. If they were not, it would be like trying to paint on a cloth napkin. Gelatine for many years was made from animal products, more recently they are made from synthetic ingredients. Some papers have the sizing mixed right in to the mixture with the fiber, this is called gelatine permeated. This means every single fiber is treated evenly. Other art papers have the sizing painted on after the sheets are manufactured. This means that the surface is sized, but the fibers in the middle are not. So, careful when you scrub on sheets that are made with this technique.

## **Cold Pressed:**

The term cold pressed refers to the surface of the watercolor paper that you are looking at. Cold pressed paper is the most common and the most popular among watercolor artists. Cold pressed watercolor paper has a texture that is right in the middle between smooth and rough. Cold pressed watercolor paper gets its name from a finishing process employed by the paper makers. After the moulds of paper are created, they are then milled thru a set of cylinders to get the cotton fiber to lay down. These cylinders are cold, therefore the name cold pressed.

## **Hot Pressed:**

The term hot pressed is another term that describes the surface of watercolor paper. Hot pressed watercolor paper is also milled thru a set of cylinders to smooth the cotton fibers down. In the case of hot pressed watercolor paper, these cylinders are heated. This causes the fibers to lay down in a much smoother arrangement. It is just like ironing your cotton shirt with a hot iron. Hot pressed watercolor paper is the smoothest texture available and preferred by artists who use lots of detail in their artwork.

## **Soft Pressed:**

The term soft pressed is yet another term that describes the surface of watercolor paper. However, this term you will see much less often since this surface is only available in watercolor paper in the Fabriano Aritstico line. The texture of soft pressed paper is in between cold pressed and hot pressed art paper.

## **Rough:**

This is the last of the terms regarding watercolor paper surfaces. Rough watercolor papers are those that are not treated at all. These papers have a rough surface because they are pulled directly from the mould and are not run thru cylinders at all. This surface has the highest tooth of any watercolor paper.

## **Paper Weights:**

You will often see numeric values that describe the various watercolor papers that we offer. The higher the number you see, the heavier the paper. But, we bet you didn't know how that number is arrived at. Actually, they make a pile of 500 sheets of the standard size paper and then they weigh the stack. The numbers correspond to the weight of the various stacks. 140lb. paper is heavier than 90lb. and so on from there. The most important factor that you need to understand about watercolor papers is that papers made from cotton rag are just like your favorite cotton shirt. When they get wet, the paper will wrinkle up. So, when you paint with 140lb paper it will wrinkle up if you don't stretch your paper first. However, 300lb paper is thick enough to resist the wrinkling of the cotton fiber, this weight paper does not require stretching prior to painting.