



Myths and Realities about Acrylic Gesso and Encaustic

An acrylic binder does not mean a less absorbent coating. R&F Encaustic Gesso is extremely absorbent and durable.

Real-world testing at R&F has demonstrated time and again, it is not the binder that dictates whether or not a ground is suitable for encaustic—it is how one uses it.

Early on, R&F advised artists against the use of encaustic over acrylic mediums. From 1988 until 2007, that was perfectly sound advice. We did not feel that the acrylic mediums and grounds on the market at that time had the porosity or tooth necessary for encaustic paint to reliably adhere to a substrate. In 2008, after a considerable amount of time in development, we introduced our acrylic-based encaustic gesso. So, how does this work?

Acrylic is bad, right?

Well, no.

When used properly, acrylic is one of the most durable and preferred binders available to artists. It has wonderful adhesive properties and flexibility. Carefully tweaked with some other materials, it is quite suitable for use with encaustic paint.

Think of it this way. For years, artists have successfully used traditional rabbit-skin glue gesso as a ground for encaustic. Rabbit-skin glue by itself is a slick, non-porous, and brittle medium. On its own, it is not a good ground for encaustic. When you combine it with the right proportion of solid materials (titanium, chalk, etc.) it becomes a very suitable ground for encaustic. So, one more time. It's not about the binder.

The reason R&F feels confident about this (like all our products), is that we test them. Again and again. Until we feel confident about their performance. Then we test them some more.

When we developed our encaustic gesso (and later, when we worked with Ampersand to create Encausticbord), we wanted something that was absorbent and felt like watercolor paper, but could be brushed on smooth and dry quickly with little effort. We also wanted something that was not soluble with water after it dried, since many artists combine encaustic with other media. And we wanted a gesso that had excellent adhesion on all kinds of substrates, that would be flexible and durable enough to withstand changes in the environment over very long periods of time. After a lot of hard work and lots of testing, we got all of these things. And some acrylic.

We recommend you apply R&F Encaustic Gesso by rolling on two thin coats with a foam roller. One heavy brush coat will also do, but it will take longer to dry.

Keep painting.