

Making Your Own Canvas Boards for Painting

Presented by Chris Miller at the Aug. 2019 RGAA Meeting

There are several advantages of making your own canvas boards:

- Cost: You can often make them for half the cost of purchasing canvas boards at an art store.
- Canvas: You can pick the particular type of cotton or linen canvas you want, as well as the sizing, from a large selection of canvas types available from art supply stores.
- Size,: You can have the boards cut for a relatively low cost to whatever size you choose.
- Satisfaction: This may not apply to everyone, but I get personal satisfaction from making my own canvas boards. It seems to give me more psychological skin in the game when doing my art.

Materials List:

1. **Canvas** — I often use **Claessens** #15 or #66 single-oil-primed linen canvas, purchased online. This has a medium texture. I like single primed since it provides a better grip for the paint than does a double-primed canvas. I also have recently begun using **Senso** clear-primed linen canvas, purchased online from Jerry's Artarama. I like the natural look of the raw canvas peaking out from the painting in some places and it takes the paint well. I purchase the canvas in rolls from online art supplies providers. The rolls I purchase are often 86 inches long and have six yards of canvas. You can purchase smaller rolls, but the larger rolls give you the best price. The rolls arrive at your front door in tubes with metal caps that must be removed with plyers and sometimes a screwdriver.
2. **Boards** — I purchase my MDF boards from Hunter Bower Lumber, located at 7301 Menaul Blvd NE, Albuquerque. MDF stands for medium-density fiberboard. They will cut the boards to whatever size you want at a relatively low cost. They also have a display area to the left of the front ordering desk with precut MDF boards for artists. When ordering boards, I usually order anywhere from two to four dozen at a time and they generally are ready for pickup within two to three days. The

boards are light and work well. I use a 1/8-inch thickness for board sizes 12X16 and smaller, and 1/4-inch thickness for board sizes 14X18 and larger.

3. **Glue** — I use Miracle Muck adhesive glue purchased online from Raphael's art supplier <http://raphaelsap.com/miracle-muck/>. I purchase a gallon at a time, which lasts me at least a year. The one-gallon container costs \$27.65.
4. **Painting tray and roller** — I use a painting tray and small roller (4 inches to six inches), which can be purchased at any hardware store where paint is sold. I use a plastic insert for the painting tray, which can be discarded afterward. Plastic inserts are often sold in packages of 6-12 and are very inexpensive. The rollers have a foam applicator that can easily be cleaned in the sink.
5. **Marker, yardstick, scissors and rubberbands** — I often use a pen or fine-point marker to mark the size of the boards on the unprimed side of the canvas. I mark the size a little larger than the actual board, leaving about 1/8 inch overlap on each of the four sides of the board. In other words, for a 9X12 inch board, the size of the marked canvas will be around 9.25X12.25 inches. A yardstick also comes in handy when marking the canvas for many boards of the same size. A decent pair of scissors will easily cut through the canvas.
6. **Heavy weights** — I typically use heavy art books to place on top of the board once I have glued the canvas to it. It takes about an hour for the glue to fully dry. This typically works well for small canvas boards, 11X14 inches and smaller. I do this on a large countertop island in my kitchen. For larger canvas boards, I personally use a large heavy mirror on wood (3 feet by 4 feet) that I removed from the back of my bedroom dresser. I do this on the floor of my art studio.
7. **Cutting board and box cutter** — Once the glue has fully dried, I place the canvas board on a cutting board and with the box cutter quickly trim the edges on the four sides of the canvas board.

The Process:

1. Since the canvas rolls are rather long I need a large area of open floor space to roll out the canvas about a yard at a time. I roll it out with the primed side down.
2. I use one of the cut boards to mark its size on the backside of the canvas, leaving about a quarter-inch, or a little more, overlap all around the board. When marking the canvas I often will do multiple numbers of each size, i.e., often doing up to a dozen each of 6X8 inch, 8X10 inch, 9X12 inch, 11X14 inch, and 12X16 inch boards at a time. A yardstick comes in handy for marking multiple numbers of the same size boards.
3. I use scissors to cut the canvas. Once multiple sizes are cut, I group them by size and then roll up them against the natural curve created by the roll. That is, when cut they naturally curve inward on the primed side of the canvas. I group them by size and roll them with the primed side out and put a rubberband or two to keep them that way for at least 20 minutes. When the rubberband is removed, they then tend to lie flat.
4. For boards 12X16 inches and smaller, I use a table (in my case, the large island countertop in my kitchen) to glue the canvas to the boards. For boards larger and 12X16 inches, I do my work on my studio floor.
5. When glueing the canvas to the boards, I do the following:
 1. I pour about a half-cup of Miracle Muck into the painting tray, dip the small roller into the Miracle Muck, and then roll in onto one side of the board. I make sure that all edges and corners are especially covered adequately.
 2. I lay the cut canvas primed side down and place the board on top of it, glued side down. I press the board onto the canvas with my hands for about 10 seconds.
 3. I then move the canvas board to another part of the table and place heavy books on it as it dries, with the canvas side down. I continue to do this with other boards and gradually build a stack of about a dozen canvas boards drying with heavy books on top of them.
 4. If you start with the smallest boards — 6X8 inches or 8X10 inches — you can then move to the next larger size and continue to build up your stack of canvas boards, placing the heavy books on top of them as they dry.
 5. Note: When doing canvas boards larger than 12X16 inches I use the floor of my studio since I use a large, heavy weight (a mirror em-

- bedded in a wooden frame taken from my bedroom dresser) and place the canvas boards under the mirror frame to let the glue dry.
6. After the glue has dried on the canvas boards, I place each canvas board, with the primed canvas side down, on a large cutting board and use a box cutter to trim the edges. Trimming the edges takes only a couple of seconds per edge.