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ARTIST NEWSLETTER

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The right side of paper?
A helpful resource on the different sides of paper

MAIN FEATURE

Musings of a Lifelong Papyrophiliac

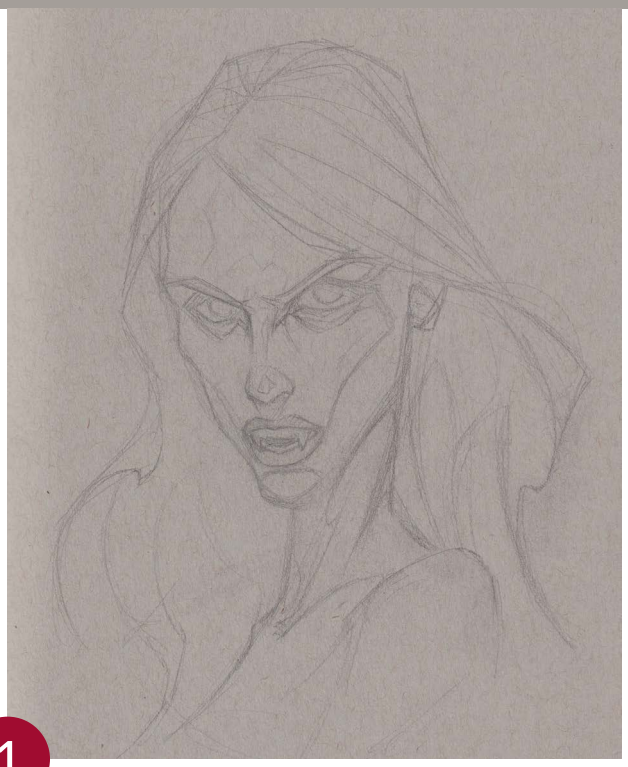
By Kevin Keele

Paper. What is more exciting? More full of potential? What great piece of culture-defining art, in almost any medium, begins its journey from idea to reality with anything other than a blank piece of paper? I would argue it is unrivaled by all other creative tools. The most expensive gadgets attempting to capture its effectiveness are judged, in part, by how well they replicate the tactile experience of writing, drafting, painting, and drawing ON PAPER. Yet paper never runs out of battery, it never interrupts you with notifications, nor causes strain to the eyes, and whatever you create upon it can't be consumed and regurgitated by generative AI. Plus, it's a renewable resource. And isn't it just more fun to flip through a physical sketchbook than scroll through files or posts on a screen? I love paper.

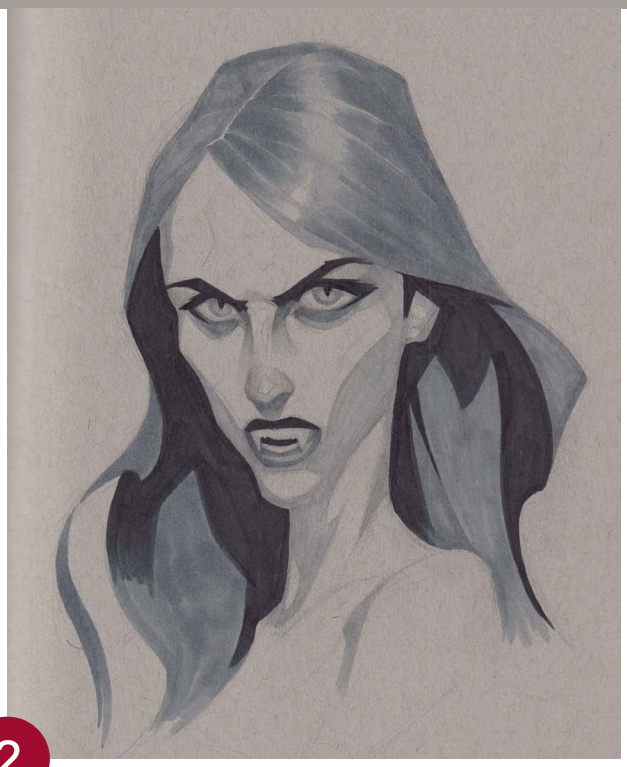
I. Love. Paper.

It should come as no surprise that I also love blank paper in its collected and bound form: sketchbooks. I've kept one continuously since high school (way back in the 90s!) and my most recent ones are the *Strathmore 400 Series Toned Gray or Tan.*

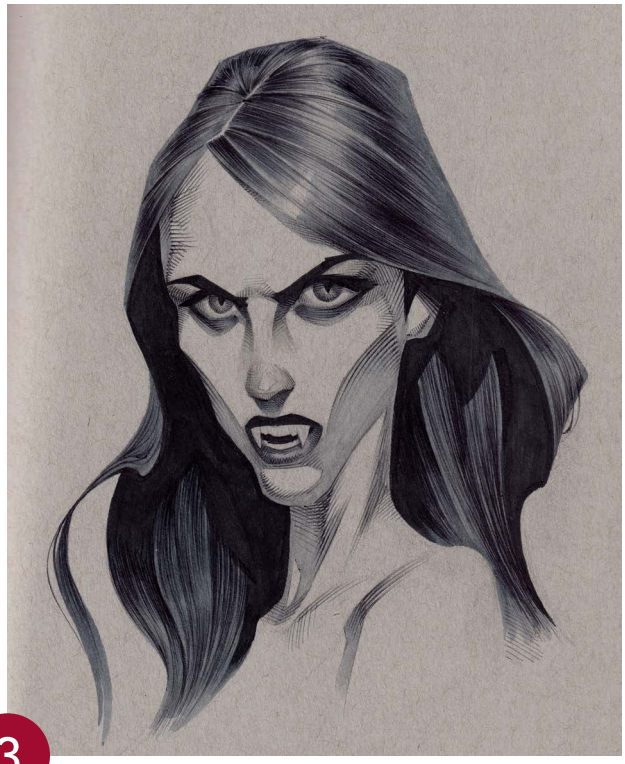
The tools I use to fill each page are the following: a mechanical pencil, alcohol-based markers (black, C3, C5), ballpoint pens, and white gel pens.



1 When starting a drawing, I start with a bunch of quick thumbnails until I land on something that's working. I then lay the drawing out in pencil, being sure to define the value changes and ensuring I like the shapes of all the shadows and highlights.



2 Next, I lay down the values with the markers.

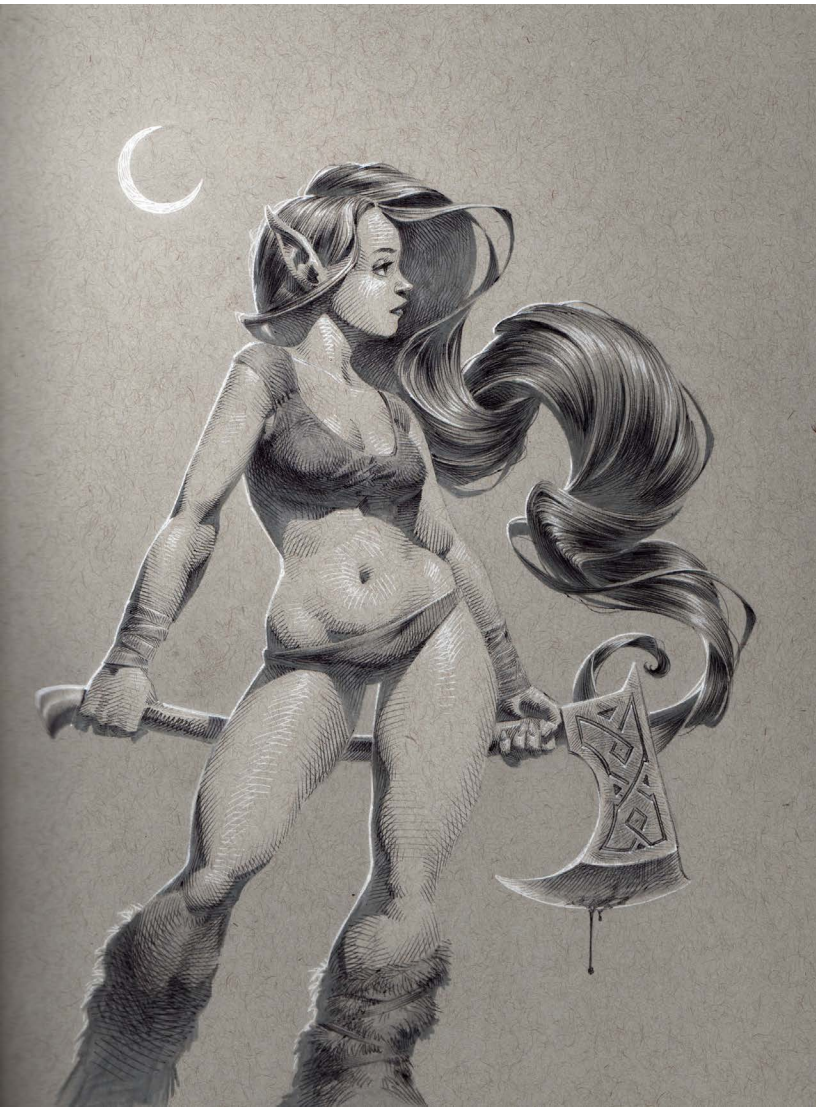


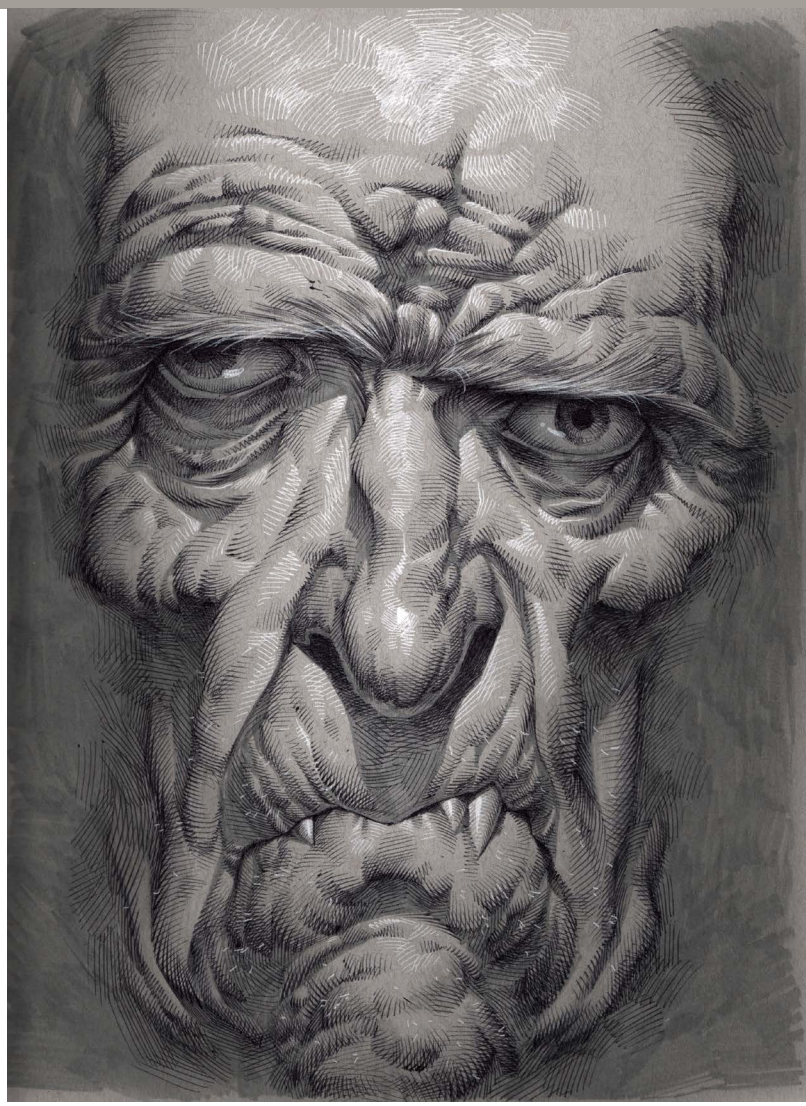
3 After that, I bring in the ink, refining the details and shadows with hatching.

4 Finally, I hit it with the gel pens for hatched highlights and maybe a rim light.

Any hatcher will tell you that the lines should follow the form. Too often, however, I find artists let this limit the direction they use. You can make almost any direction work if you vary the weight and curve enough to reinforce the form. This lets you play with the way the lines interact and, for me, that's where a lot of the fun is. In the places where you wish to increase the cumulative value and hatching becomes cross-hatching, I prefer to cross the lines at more of a forty-five(ish) degree angle than the traditional ninety. I think it looks better. I like to build on the directionality of one set of lines by making a new row that increases on their shared angle, and another beyond that, etc. It's more fun and gives the rendering some flair.

It's the contradictions that make any art style interesting. I like to draw wrinkly, weathered, or weird faces but attempt to do so with refined rendering. I draw soft surfaces like skin, but in mediums that don't blend. I want my sketches to look dimensional, but also designed and drawn.





I like those elements. I even like my own art sometimes. But recently, it was feeling distant¬—even from me. My work was losing its grounding, and I wasn't enjoying the process anymore. After panicking a little, I began going to figure and portrait drawing sessions to reconnect myself with tangible subjects and, thankfully, it helped. The elements that were missing came right back and were better than before. Drawing regularly from reference is massively important, even if it only provides a hidden foundation to the rest of your work.

> *"I would encourage everyone to develop some creative side that enriches their life."*

For me, the joy in capturing a form is in finding and exaggerating the shapes on the edges and doing the same with those that emerge as it goes from light to shadow. It's an inexhaustible resource. Even the slightest change in the angle or lighting of the subject can really alter the shape of a highlight or shadow. Staying practiced at seeing, interpreting, and recreating those observances, in my own way, is always an enjoyable challenge – one that helps me bring some believability back to the things I draw, even when those things are goofy monsters.

Instagram: @kkeelart
Website: kkeeleart.artstation.com

I once felt I was keeping a sketchbook in the incorrect way, especially when I'd watch a friend focus on iteration and experimentation. Unlike him, I would start a piece and noodle away at it for what I worried was way too long. However, when I tried to do it his way, it just didn't click. I'd want to stick with things longer. For whatever inexplicable reason, I enjoy the tedious side of art. It's meditative. It took another friend to convince me that there was nothing wrong with drawing the way I like. It's a thought I've really attached myself to. Especially when done as a personal tool of expression, there is truly no wrong way to create, and certainly no wrong way to keep a sketchbook.

I would encourage everyone to develop some creative side that enriches their life. Even if it's as simple as doodling pirates and the undead in ballpoint pen.

We live in a world that often views the creative process as an obstacle to the final product, something to eliminate or optimize. I object to that notion. Slow down. Take your time. Enjoy the richness in little failures and triumphs along the way. Make something truly unique.

And I'd suggest there's no better place to start than with a blank piece of paper.

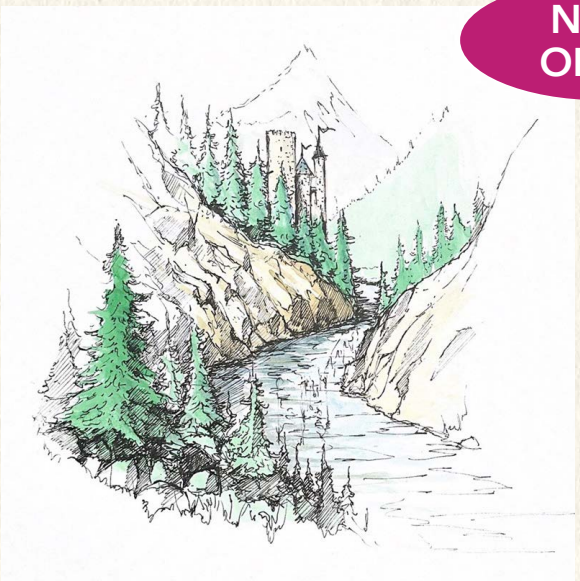
Strathmore® ONLINE WORKSHOP SERIES

Join us for Strathmore's **FREE** 2024 Online Workshops!

Strathmore's Online Workshops feature free video lessons and downloadable instructions created by experienced artists. Follow along in the online classroom as instructors guide you through various art topics. After a lesson is released, it remains on the site for viewing the rest of the year.

Share all the fun on *Instagram* **and** *Facebook* **using #StrathmoreWorkshops**

Workshops start March 4 and continue through December 31, 2024



NOW OPEN!

WORKSHOP 3

Drawing Imaginary Scenes in Ink + Color
Sam Gillette

Using pens, markers, acrylic inks & watercolor washes, you'll learn how to draw 4 magical scenes showcasing misty castles, a cozy greenhouse and more. Sam will detail how he uses perspective, simple line techniques, shading and details to make ink illustrations pop on paper.

LEARN MORE & FOLLOW ALONG

WORKSHOP 1
The Beauty and Power of Mixed Media

Instructor:
Georgina Kreutzer

NOW OPEN!

Using a single medium can be limiting, but diversify your toolbox and you have a powerful array of options to render your subjects. This four-part workshop touches on the beauty and power of mixed media to create small, captivating works.

LEARN MORE about Workshop 1

WORKSHOP 2
Tropical Botanicals in Watercolor

Instructor:
Tin Bejar

NOW OPEN!

This workshop is packed with easy-to-learn techniques perfect for painting tropical botanicals. We'll learn watercolor skills like how to create graded washes in a monochromatic palette, glazing, variegated washes, wet-on-wet, and adding gouache backgrounds.

LEARN MORE about Workshop 2

WORKSHOP 4
Painting the Seasons with Gouache

Instructor:
Tiinasdiary

Start Date: November 4, 2024

We'll create 4 different gouache paintings through the seasons; spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The most important goal is to have fun painting landscapes, but also learn new techniques, use vibrant colors, and get inspired by the beautiful nature that surrounds us!

LEARN MORE about Workshop 4

Join us for our free workshops at: **strathmoreartiststudio.com**

400 SERIES **GREETING CARDS**

'Tis the Season for Card Making!

Spread the holiday cheer this season with handmade greeting cards. Our high-quality Blank Greeting Cards come in heavy weights and a variety of surface types for a range of styles and mediums.

400 Series Watercolor Cards

These high quality cards are made from classic Strathmore 400 Series 140 lb. cold press watercolor paper. This heavy weight paper has excellent surface strength and resists buckling. Ideal for watercolor, acrylic or gouache.

140lb / 300gsm | cold press surface

400 Series Mixed Media Cards

These heavy weight cards offer the attributes of a watercolor paper but with a vellum drawing finish. They are ideal for watercolor, gouache, acrylic, graphite, pen and ink, colored pencil, marker and collage.

184lb / 300gsm | vellum surface

400 Series Bristol Cards

You can now find our beautiful 400 Series Bristol Smooth paper in cards. The surface is perfect for pen & ink, mechanical pencil, airbrush, and markers. There is little to no tooth, making it easy to create fine lines, detailed art, or marker drawings.

2-ply weight | smooth surface

All 400 Series Cards are available in 2 sizes: 3.5"x4.875" and 5"x6.875"

LEARN MORE HERE

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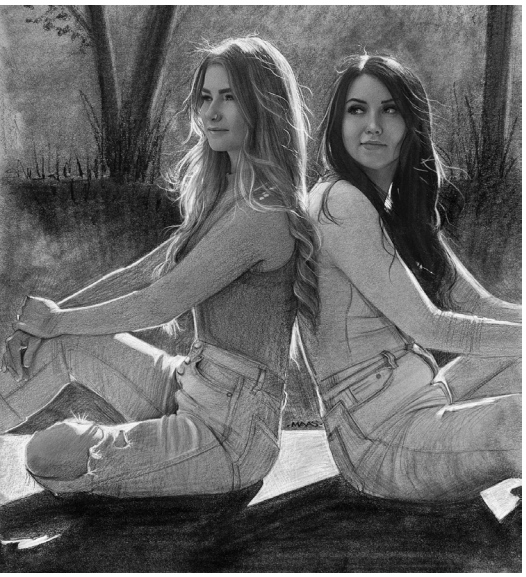


ARTIST SPOTLIGHT
WITH STRATHMORE AMBASSADOR
JUSTIN MAAS

Instagram: @maas.art

Artist Justin Maas is well known for his stunning portrait drawings and the way he uses form, line and light to render his pieces. He is a full time professional illustrator, fine artist and graphic designer, and we are proud to call him a Strathmore Ambassador. We sat down with Justin to get some insight on his work.

Q: What's the most common art-related question you get from your followers, and what's the answer?

A: "How long did that take" which is such a tough question to answer because my answer is almost certainly misleading. I could say "3 hours" which may constitute the time between when the paper was bare & the time I signed it – but that only tells a small portion of the story.

It doesn't take into account the years- no, decades of practice that came first. A drawing that takes me 3 hours now may have taken me 5 a couple of years ago, and perhaps 20 or 30 hours a decade before. And ultimately, its not important – a drawing takes as long as it takes - but I hate answering it for the main reason that I don't want an artist just starting their artistic journey to be discouraged. "3 hours? That would take me 3 weeks!" because we should never compare ourselves to other artists, only to ourselves a week, a month, a year before.
So sometimes I think the right answer is "it took me 30 years to be able to draw that" although I know that's not the answer the casual follower was looking for!

Q: What's the best piece of art advice you've been given?

A: Robert Bateman once told me (paraphrasing) "The first 10 percent of creating a piece of artwork is pure joy. The last 10% is euphoria… everything in between is boring, unadulterated work."

As artists we are conditioned to think we should love every minute of working on a piece but there's a reason it's called "Artwork" and not "Artplay." It IS work. And that "80% in the middle" can be a whole lot of hard work – not always of the enjoyable kind.

My pro tip: if you're not feeling into a piece, starting a new one (or at least working through thumbnails and compositional sketches) can get you motivated & help you go back to that first piece and get through the slog of the 'middle part of the painting.' This is why I often have dozens of pieces on the go at once – all in various stages of completion.

READ THE FULL INTERVIEW

ACRYLIC LANDSCAPES

with Angela Anderson

Join artist Angela Anderson as she takes you step-by-step from mastering brushstrokes and mixing colors to transforming your canvas into a stunning landscape. Learn to paint fluffy clouds, majestic mountains, and vibrant flowers as you bring a beautiful scene to life.

SUPPLIES:

Strathmore *300 Series Stretched Canvas*, 9"x12", traditional profile

Strathmore *400 Series Acrylic Pad*, 9"x12"

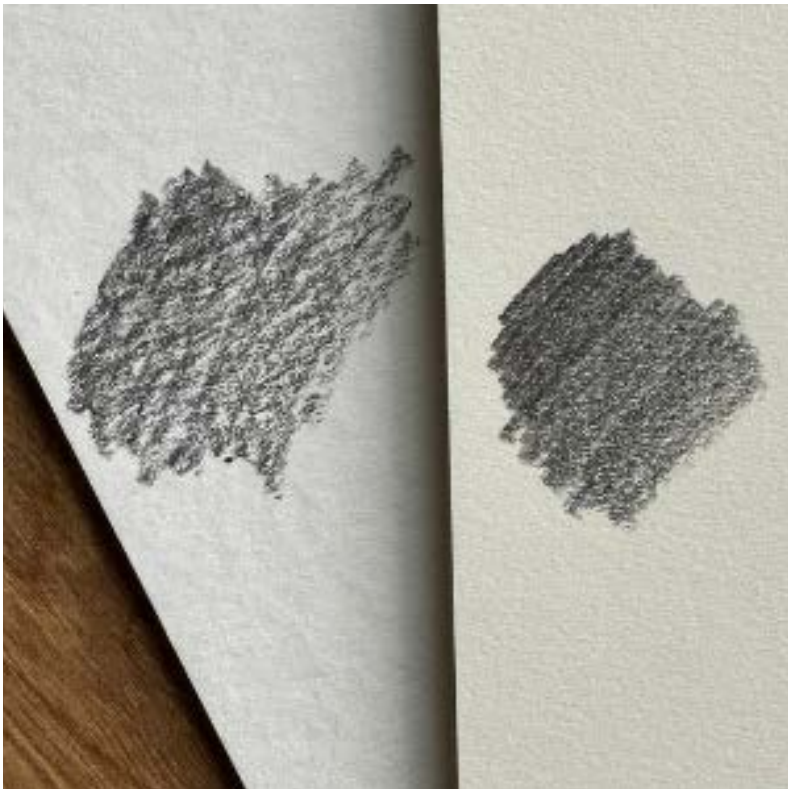
Maimeri Polycolor Acrylics

Princeton Brushes: *Velvetouch*, *Select Artiste* or *Aspen*

CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE FULL TUTORIAL SERIES & GIVE IT A TRY!

FAQ: DOES ART PAPER HAVE A "RIGHT" SIDE?

The top and back side of papers made on Fourdrinier paper machines (the most common type), have different physical and visual properties. The differences can be barely discernible or significant depending on the type of paper, felt, chemistry and fibers used. In papermaking, the top side of a fine art sheet is called the felt side and the back side is called the wire side.



Left: Strathmore 400 Series Watercolor Paper, Right: Strathmore 400 Series Drawing Paper

The **felt side** (top of paper) of a textured paper is traditionally produced by a *Dandy Roll* or by a *Marking Felt* that presses against the wet paper pulp and leaves an impression, giving paper its distinct texture. The marks vary by paper type. For example, felts used on cold press watercolor papers have a coarse, heavily textured pattern while the felts used on drawing paper have a fine, slight texture.

The **wire side** (back of paper) is named after a mesh screen at the beginning of the Fourdrinier that the wet pulp travels along. Water drains through the wire mesh and helps form the wet paper pulp into paper. During this process, the paper "picks up" some of the wire pattern.

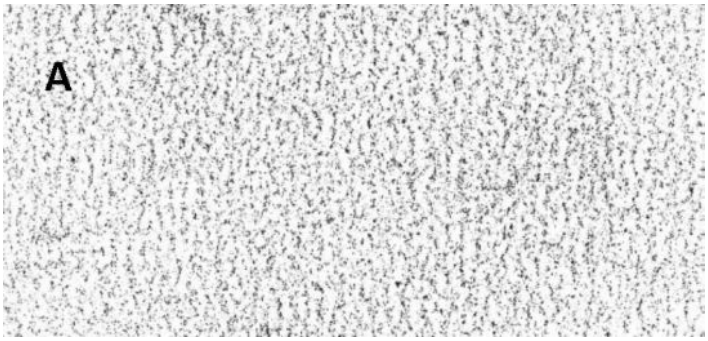
Which side should I use?

The surface finish and working properties (like surface strength and absorbency) are engineered into the felt side of the paper. That's not to say that the back of all papers will not perform well. Many artists use the back sides of paper, for example, when working in sketchbooks or if a smoother surface is preferred. But for many types of paper, the top-to-back-side differences may be more obvious and the artist will prefer to work on the felt side.

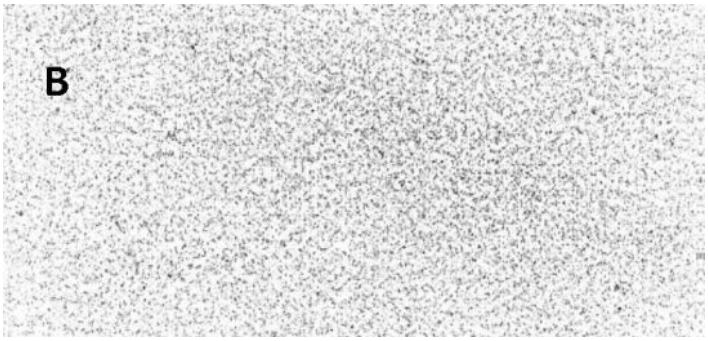
What if I can't tell which side is which?

The felt side usually has a more random pattern, like a fingerprint from the marking felt. The wire side often boasts a smoother surface and a more uniform mesh-like texture, sometimes in rectangles or diamonds. Since the felt side has more textural variation, it's usually easier to spot the wire mesh pattern.

We marked the felt and wire sides of our 400 Series Mixed Media paper with a carbon smudge to make the patterns visible.



A: Felt side: Larger and irregular pattern



B: Wire side: Finer, regular pattern of the wire mesh

The next time you reach for a new sheet of paper, take a moment to examine both sides and see which one you prefer! There's no right or wrong answer, so experiment and find what works best for your art.