

## **Safety and your home studio**

Hello all, since most everyone is going to be working at home for some time, I wanted to take the opportunity to share tips for working safely in a home studio.

Living with your work process is a bit different than being able to leave everything behind in the studio and head home for the night. Live/work spaces create a unique set of issues that are best served by the artist being as organized and neat as possible. I've lived in a studio apartment that I could literally roll out of bed and into my chair and roll 3 feet to my easel. Not the best thing when you are using solvents, oil grounds, drying agents, or dust making processes. I had to get somewhat creative to keep safe, and I'm thinking most you will have to do the same. So, let's get started and please email me with any questions.

### **Ventilation**

Exchanging air in your space is one thing I can't stress enough for everyone. If you have access to a window get yourself a window fan that you can either vent out or draw air into your space.

Fans like this work well, and they usually have a reverse switch for intaking air or expelling air.



A major key to ventilation is what is called return air. In a big building, return air can be made up from a second intake vent or from the surrounding open spaces. In your apartment, see if you can leave a door open across from your window and create some air movement.

### **Solvents, chemicals, pigments**

Keep containers closed when not in use and store them in their original container if possible, in a closed cabinet, preferably locked for those curious kids, pets, and partners. Really limit the amount of solvent, driers, etc. you put out when you are working. Remember you are in a smaller space and fumes will fill a smaller volume of air quicker than a large space.

Much less exposure to vapor with something like this...



Then with something like this...



Remember brushes used for oil painting can be cleaned with linseed oil and/or soap and water to further reduce solvents. Just make sure to wipe off excess paint before adding oil or soap.

Pigments in paints can be dangerous. Make sure to review the labels on paint tubes and become familiar with the makeup of pigments. We all know that items like cadmium and lead are toxic, but so are earth pigments like burnt and raw umber (they contain iron oxides, manganese silicates or dioxide).

### **Rags**

Keep rags in an airtight container and dispose of them daily if you can. Rags are the number one reason for fire in a studio setting. They can spontaneously combust given the right circumstances, especially if you are using linseed oil. When I know I'm going to be creating lots of rags I will dump them in a closeable container with a garbage bag, pour water on them, and discard as soon as I can. This greatly reduces the fire risk.

### **Off-gassing**

The chemicals we use for paintings and many other art practices often take quite some time to fully dry. Whether you are laying down a wash with solvent or using a drying agent like liquin, there are many excess fumes that hang around for a long time. If you can close off the work area and vent that's best. If not, try to move the work to another area so you are at least not sleeping in the same space as the work, the more volume of air you have and exchanging that air are your best friends in this situation.

### **Eating, Smoking**

I do not recommend eating or smoking while you are working. There is way too much chance for contamination, you do not want to get cadmium red on your cigarette or sandwich. Just wait until you take a real break and get a chance to wash your hands.

### **Dust**

Dust from sculpture processes or sanding are a general hazards artists have to deal with. Living with those processes compound the issue. Working with water-based clay can be an issue if you allow scraps or entire projects to dry out. Stepping on those dry scraps can kick up dust/silica which can suspend in the air for quite some time. You don't want that stuff settling on your pillow if you can help it.

Some precautions to take:

- Keep water-based clay projects wet and wrapped in plastic.

- Keep a scrap bucket/bin filled with water by your workstation to throw scraps into.
- Don't sweep up your area. Pick up the larger pieces and mop, mop, mop, the rest to knock out the dust.
- Wet wipe down surfaces often, this will help clean up dust that has escaped.
- Humidifiers seem to help drop the fine silica dust out of the air. Something to consider.

### **Sanding**

Use caution when you need to sand anything. Never sand down a painting if you can help it. You are essentially making a very fine particulate of every chemical, pigment, ground, etc. you used on that painting. Get another canvas or panel.

Make sure you use a mask made for particulates and isolate your process from the rest of your living space if you must sand.

### **Studio Enclosure**

Plastic sheeting can be taped or stapled into place floor to ceiling to help create a makeshift area to help separate your live space from your workspace and control where dust or fumes can go. It's cheap, lightweight, and readily available in hardware stores.

### **Sinks**

Be careful not to crossover between cleaning your dishes, cooking food, etc. and cleaning your materials or using your home sink as a slop sink. Some apartment buildings have a slop sink area in the basement, check your building out and see what it has. A bucket of water can be used in a pinch as a makeshift sink. If you only have access to your apartment sink be sure to wash your sink fully before returning to normal use.

### **Using Resins**

Resins are often troublesome to work with and many are dangerous, like polyester resins. I don't recommend working with resins at home, they require good ventilation.

### **Pets and Kids**

Make a daily cleaning part of your home studio routine and put away palettes and materials in closed containers to keep family and pets safe.

### **Hazard Awareness and SDS Sheets**

Here is a quick reference chart to help familiarize yourselves with hazard symbols that are often located on the chemicals we use. Check your labels.



Safety Data Sheets (SDS) are a system of hazard material sheets that include information such as the properties of each chemical; the physical, health, and environmental health hazards; protective measures; and safety precautions for handling, storing, and transporting the chemical.

Sections 1 through 8 contain general information about the chemical, identification, hazards, composition, safe handling practices, and emergency control measures (e.g., fire fighting). Sections 9 through 11 and 16 contain other technical and scientific information, such as physical and chemical properties, stability and reactivity information, toxicological information, exposure control information, and other information including the date of preparation or last revision. The SDS must also state that no applicable information was found when the preparer does not find relevant information for any required element.

The SDS must also contain Sections 12 through 15, to be consistent with the UN Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS).

I know it sounds like a lot of information, but we as artists should know as much as possible about the chemicals we use. As an example, here is a link to Gamblin's Gamsol SDS to help you become familiar with the format.

<https://gamblincolors.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/SDS-Gamsol.pdf>

You can google just about any chemical you want to use to find their SDS and some online art stores post their SDS within the product descriptions.

That's about all I can think of now, email me any questions you may have, and I'll see if I can answer them. Stay safe and stay in touch!

Best, Mike