

[General Description](#)[Concerns](#)[Uses](#)[Supplies needed to prepare rabbit skin glue](#)[Instructions for Sizing Canvas](#)[Instructions for Sizing Panel](#)[Instructions for Sizing Paper](#)[Instructions for Adhering Fabric to Panel](#)[Applying Water Based Grounds Over Rabbit Skin Glue](#)[Making Traditional Gesso](#)[Coverage](#)

## RABBIT SKIN GLUE

### General Description

A genuine rabbit skin glue made from the hide and bones of rabbits. Comes as a crystalized powder. Commonly used as a size, an adhesive and a component of traditional gesso in painting.

Gel/Bloom strength: 550 grams

### Concerns

Rabbit skin glue is hygroscopic, meaning it absorbs atmospheric moisture and swells or contracts in response to humidity. This fluctuation will cause its tensile strength to change, and a stretched canvas to repeatedly go slack and retighten. This movement can ultimately cause oil paint to crack. Due to this occurrence, it is recommended to store or display paintings in a controlled environment with a desirable ideal range of humidity being between 40-70%RH.

### Uses

#### Size:

- Canvas/Linen: Coats fibers before priming to block oil penetration that would deteriorate the fabric through oxidation. Stiffens and tightens the canvas/linen.
- Paper/Wood: Lessens absorbency and blocks oil penetration.

#### Adhesive:

- Adheres fabric or paper to panel.

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Traditional Gesso:

- Typically made from a mixture of chalk, hide glue and often white pigment.

**Supplies needed to prepare rabbit skin glue:**

- Rabbit skin glue
- Water
- Hot plate
- Double boiler or a sauce pot and a clean metal container
- Palette knife
- Brush

**Instructions for Sizing Canvas**

Do not stretch canvas too tightly over stretcher bars before applying glue. Canvas can tighten dramatically and cause support to warp or fabric to tear.

- In the top container of the double boiler soak 1 part rabbit skin glue to 10 parts water. Let sit 1-3 hours until powder has swollen and completely dissolved, stirring occasionally.
- Slowly heat water in the bottom of the double boiler (low to medium heat). **Do Not Boil.** Boiling will cause it to lose adhesive strength and become ineffective.
- Once fluid, brush thinly onto canvas, allowing it to penetrate the weave.
- If pinholes are evident after first coat has dried, use second coat to fill in. Two thin coats are recommended to block oil penetration.
- Keep mixture warm in between coats. If cooled it will gel.
- After each application take a palette knife or piece of rigid cardboard and run it between the stretcher and the back of the canvas to make sure the rabbit skin glue has not glued the two together.

**Instructions for Sizing Panel**

Be sure panel is clean and free of dust, dirt, oil or wax as foreign material will impede adhesion.

- In the top container of the double boiler soak 1 part rabbit skin glue to 10 parts water. Let sit 1-3 hours until powder has swollen and completely dissolved, stirring occasionally.

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- Slowly heat water in the bottom of the double boiler (low to medium heat). **Do Not Boil.** Boiling will cause it to lose adhesive strength and become ineffective.
- Once fluid, brush apply and allow to dry, check for pinholes and recoat.
- Keep mixture warm in between coats. If cooled it will gel.

### Instructions for Sizing Paper

- In the top container of the double boiler soak 1 part rabbit skin glue to 10 parts water. Let sit 1-3 hours until powder has swollen and completely dissolved, stirring occasionally.
- Slowly heat water in the bottom of the double boiler (low to medium heat). **Do Not Boil.** Boiling will cause it to lose adhesive strength and become ineffective.
- Once fluid, add an additional 30 parts water to the mixture making the total mixture 1 part rabbit skin glue to 40 parts water.
- Pour mixture into a shallow pan or tray that will hold the paper laying flat.
- Submerge the paper in the mixture and soak for several hours. Several sheets can be done with this mixture although soak them one at a time.
- Remove paper, drip off any excess glue and lay on a large sheet of glass. Do not force dry.

### Instructions for Adhering Fabric to Panel

- Be sure panel is clean and free of dust, dirt, oil or wax as foreign material will impede adhesion.
- In the top container of the double boiler soak 1 part rabbit skin glue to 10 parts water. Let sit 1-3 hours until powder has swollen and completely dissolved, stirring occasionally.
- Slowly heat water in the bottom of the double boiler (low to medium heat). **Do Not Boil.** Boiling will cause it to lose adhesive strength and become ineffective.
- Once fluid, brush this mixture on to the surface of the panel as well as soaking the fabric that is to be applied.
- Place the wet fabric on the panel and fold the excess material around the sides and back.
- Using a brayer roll the surface from the center out to insure even adhesion and no air bubbles or wrinkles. Do this on the sides and back as well.
- Allow to dry standing up.

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## Applying Water Based Grounds Over Rabbit Skin Glue

Using water based grounds over a canvas sized with rabbit skin glue could cause the glue to swell and lessen its effectiveness. If using a water based ground consider sizing the canvas/linen with 2 coats of an acrylic based size such as Golden GAC 100.

## Making Traditional Gesso

Traditional gesso is a mixture of hide glue, chalk and sometimes whiting or other white pigment. Traditional gesso should only be applied to rigid supports that have been sized with rabbit skin glue. There are numerous variations of this recipe available in books and online.

### Glue Mixture

- 1 part rabbit skin glue
- 5 parts water

### Chalk and Whiting Mixture

- 1 part dry white pigment (Titanium White or Zinc White)
- 4 parts precipitated chalk
- The amount of glue mixture should equal the amount of chalk mixture by volume.
- In separate container, slowly mix chalk and dry white pigment. Avoid mixing vigorously as this will create dust. Wear a NIOSH approved dust mask to avoid breathing in particulates.
- In top of the double boiler soak 1 part rabbit skin glue to 5 parts water. Let sit 1-3 hours until powder has swollen and completely dissolved, stirring occasionally.
- Slowly heat water in the bottom of the double boiler (low to medium heat). **Do Not Boil.** Boiling will cause it to lose adhesive strength and become ineffective.
- Once dissolved remove from heat.
- Using a sieve or fine wire mesh sieve the chalk mixture into the warm glue mixture.
- As the chalk mixture is absorbed it will sink to the bottom.
- When all the chalk mixture has been added slowly stir with a broad wooden stick until it has a creamy consistency. \*Stir slowly to avoid creating air bubbles.

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- Apply with a brush and while still wet massage out the surface with your fingers to remove any air bubbles.
- Apply several coats removing any air bubbles and sanding in between.
- After the last coat has been sanded, use a damp rag to polish the surface to an eggshell finish.

## Coverage

Below is an estimate of the coverage of rabbit skin glue over canvas, board or paper so you may better approximate the amount you will need.

1.12 ounces of dissolved rabbit skin glue will cover 1 square foot of canvas

2.25 oz. RSG = 2 sq. ft. canvas

4.50 oz. RSG = 4 sq. ft. canvas

9 oz. RSG = 8 sq. ft. canvas

13.5 oz. RSG = 12 sq. ft. canvas

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