

SMOOTH, SEMI-SMOOTH, ROUGH: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

SMOOTH

This is a very unusual surface to feel with your hand - smooth like a tusk but warmer. Your brain will struggle to work out what is under your fingers. It's a nice sensation.

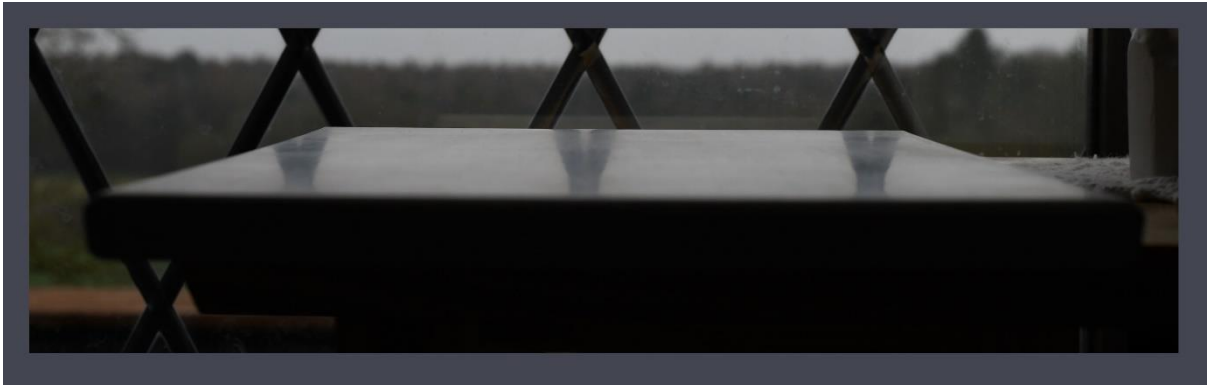
This surface is ideal for oil, tempera or acrylic paint. It is also suited to silverpoint & graphite drawing. It is extremely hard.

The smoothness of this panel is always imperfect. It has small changes in colour across the surface as the sealing glue changes colour. It has minute swirls from my rough hands, small pits, occasional smudges where the sealing glue layer has picked up dirt from my sleeve or something. These all disappear under your first paint layer.

THE EFFECT OF SMOOTHNESS

Smoothness alters the refractive index of a surface. You want your painting to return reflected light slap dab into your viewer's eye. A lumpy surface scatters light; a smooth surface returns it. So, substrate smoothness allows an artist to paint thinly yet very brightly. And your impastos will stand out like castles.

It is almost impossible to photograph something flat & white to show its character!



SEMI-SMOOTH

The semi-smooth panel is just a tiny bit less smooth than a smooth panel. It has a surface like the follicle patterns on calfskin vellum. Its purpose is to just make sketching and the bigger brushstrokes a little bit easier – a rough surface is greedy & grabs the paint off your brush head.

The texture of the cotton cloth beneath the gesso is not really visible on a semi-smooth panel, but I leave a matrix of tiny hills and hollows to achieve this mid-level tooth. It is the most difficult surface for me to get right.

Being handmade, the semi-smooth panel is also imperfect. It has small changes in colour across the surface as the sealing glue changes colour. It also has minute swirls from my palms, small pits, occasional smudges where my sealing glue layers has picked up dirt from something. These also all disappear under your first paint layer.



ROUGH

I use rough panels for alla prima work, for the swift preparatory sketches that will be presented to clients as part of the final suite of objects I hand over on completion of a commission. They suit expressive brushwork more and the heavily loaded brush.

These panels aren't rough in comparison to commercial painting boards, but a bit of the warp and weft of the cotton below is present as a fine matrix in the gesso.

