

Occasionally, someone raises questions regarding the safety of using an oil-based paint product directly on fabric. A brief discussion of this issue is included in the Paintstiks on Fabric book. This page provides additional information. If you still have questions about the chemical properties of Paintstiks, please send a message and I will attempt to find an answer for you.



Shiva Paintstiks are oil paint in a solid form. They are not crayons, oil pastels or soft pastels. Paintstiks are made of durable pigments blended with highly refined drying oils and wax solidified into a stick form resembling an oversized crayon. They are wrapped in a heavy cardboard tube that makes them easy to handle, help keep your hands clean, and prevent the warmth of your hands from softening the Paintstiks as you work.

Paintstiks were originally developed as an alternative form of oil paints for fine artists, but creative people quickly discovered that they could be used on almost any surface with a porous or matte finish. Since their introduction to the market in the 1960s, Paintstiks have been used on wood, fabric, metal, plastics, walls and floors as well as canvas and other artist's materials.

Shiva Paintstiks (also known as Markal Paintstiks outside the United States) are the only paintstik product that I recommend for use directly on fabric. To understand why, let's take a look at a few technical details.

Paintstiks Are Not Oil Bars

Shiva Paintstiks are often lumped into an art material category called "oil bars," but it's not a fair classification. After much discussion with chemists, product representatives and other artists, I have come to the following understanding about oil bars and Paintstiks.

The typical oil bar contains a high percentage of linseed oil. If you apply these products directly to fabric or paper, an oil "halo" will appear. These products can take a considerable

period of time (weeks or months) to dry. The high volume of linseed oil, which is typically very acidic, along with the long drying time make oil bars unsuitable for use on fabric or canvas unless some type of primer has been applied. The degradation to fabric exposed to oil bars and other oil paints may take years or decades to show up, but the manufacturers do not recommend using these products on unprimed fabrics.

Shiva Paintstiks, on the other hand, are unique. Paintstiks contain linseed oil, but the oil is refined in a manner that makes it less acidic. In addition, the percentage of oil in a paintstik is much lower than the typical oil bar. You will not get an oily halo effect when you apply Paintstik color directly to fabric or paper.

Note: According to a chemist at the manufacturer, all linseed oil, regardless of how it is refined, contains a small amount of "free acid." Therefore, Paintstiks are not an "acid free" product.

Fast Dry Time

Paintstiks have a very fast dry time when compared to oil paints and oil bars. Paintstik colors typically dry in 3-5 days when applied to fabric. (Allow 7 days for heavy applications of paint.)

Heat setting the paint accelerates drying cycle and completes the polymerization process that occurs as the paint dries. The short drying cycle means that your fabric is exposed to linseed oil for a relatively short period of time, reducing the opportunity for any acid present to harm the fabric.

After heat setting, a gentle washing will remove any chemical residue from the drying process. After it is washed, your fabric should be back to its original form, with the addition of the wonderful color and patterns you added with your Paintstiks.

Although the manufacturer has not done extensive aging tests to analyze the long-term effects of paintstiks on fabric, Shiva Paintstiks have been used on a variety of materials, including fabric since the mid-1960s. They have proven extremely stable, lightfast and washable when used according to the instructions.

Warning: Do not dry clean fabrics embellished with paintstiks. The dry cleaning solvents will break down the paints.