How to travel with oil paints

MENORCA PULSAR

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How to travel with oil paints

Many artists ask us how they can travel with their oil paints avoiding problems at airport controls. Here we explain what you can carry inside your suitcase and also what you can not. What to answer and what not to answer. Also, what is allowed to carry, but you'd better not try to.

Most artistic materials are safe to travel with, but some are considered dangerous. **If your oil paints are not properly packaged, labeled and documented, even if allowed, they can mean a red flag for border agents**.

Here we summarize everything you need to know to travel calmly and have no surprise ;)

Packaging



Make it easy for the agent to inspect your colors: **keep things tidy, well packed, and try not to have paint stains everywhere, that's a good starting point**. Build a Travel Kit, you'll see that it is not complicated at all.

Check the tubes.

▪ Make sure the tubes do not leak, are not filthy and that the caps are tightly closed. It's basic.

▪ It is advisable to pack the tubes in a way that you avoid that their corners, with the clattering, produce any perforation. You can use a box with compartments, use bubble wrap or newspaper sheets.

▪ Keep your luggage light and try to travel with small tubes; 37ml is perfect. **The tubes of more than 100ml. (3.4 oz.) are not allowed**.

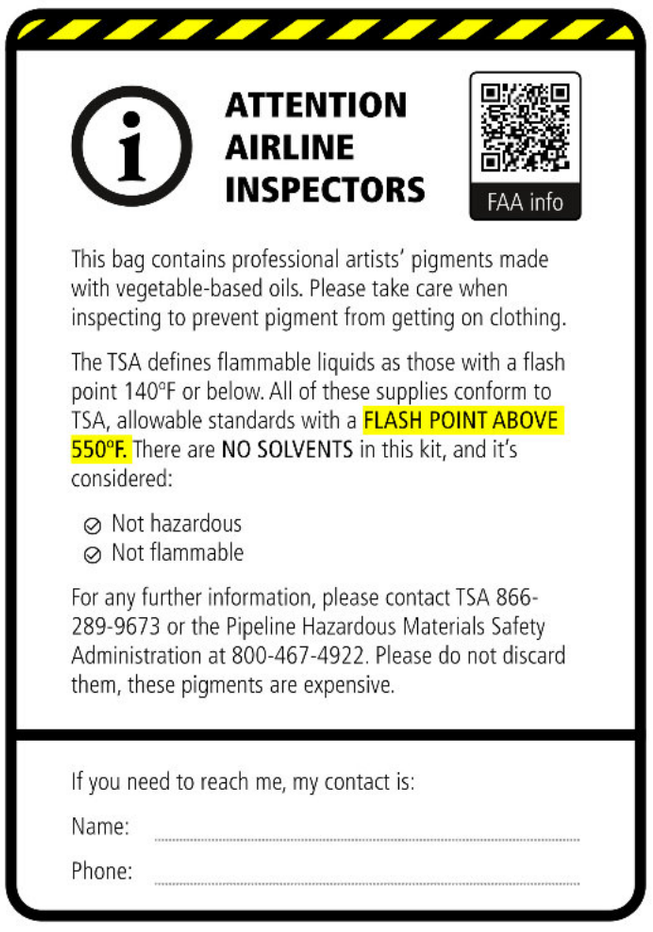


Use a transparent plastic box.

▪ Use a transparent rigid plastic box —like a *Tupperware*— to store your tubes. This will allow agents to examine the contents at a glance and without opening it, in addition to protecting the tubes from bumps. The box also allows you to attach the documentation on the lid so that it is visible and accessible.

▪ Another option —low cost— is to use a transparent plastic bag with a ZIP seal. It is less safe, but it works well.

Labeling



Use our label.

- Labeling the box with an "artist pigments" sign should be enough, but we can always do better by providing all the necessary documentation. Just in case.

- **We strongly recommend that you download this label that we have designed, print it and glue it on the box or bag containing the oil paints.** You can download it for free in JPG and PDF :)

Links:

Download in JPG

Download in PDF

ATTENTION AIRLINE INSPECTORS

FAA info

This bag contains professional artists' pigments made with vegetable-based oils. Please take care when inspecting to prevent pigment from getting on clothing.

The TSA defines flammable liquids as those with a flash point 140°F or below. All of these supplies conform to TSA, allowable standards with a FLASH POINT ABOVE 550°F. There are **NO SOLVENTS** in this kit, and it's considered:

- ⊘ Not hazardous
- ⊘ Not flammable

For any further information, please contact TSA 866-289-9673 or the Pipeline Hazardous Materials Safety Administration at 800-467-4922. Please do not discard them, these pigments are expensive.

If you need to reach me, my contact is:

Name: .....

Phone: .....

Documentation

MSDS download links.

Main brands of oil colors.

[Gamblin Artist Oil]

[Gamblin 1980 Oils]

[Rembrandt Oil]

[Van Gogh Oil]

[Winsor & Newton Artists' Oil Colours]

[Old Holland]

[Blockx]

[Michael Harding Artist Oil]

[M. Graham Oil Color]

[Daniel Smith Original Oil Colors]

[Williamsburg Oil]

[Holbeil Artists' Oil Color]

[Sennelier Artist Oil]

[Schmincke Mussini]

[Reeve's Oil Colours]

[Grumbacher]

[Utrecht Oil Paint]

[Utrecht Studio Oil Paint]

[Blick Artist Oil]

[Da Vinci Artist Oil]

[Daler-Rowney]

[Georgian Oil Colours]

[Norma Professional Oil]

[Permalba Oil Color]

[Fragonard Oil Colour]

Airport security departments have very strict regulations for flammable materials. While artistic materials are not usually flammable, some agents may think they are.

For agents to be sure that your paints are not flammable, you must print the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet) of the brand —or brands— of oil paints you use.

You can download these documents from the manufacturer's pages. Here we provide you with a list of the main brands and a download link of their MSDS.

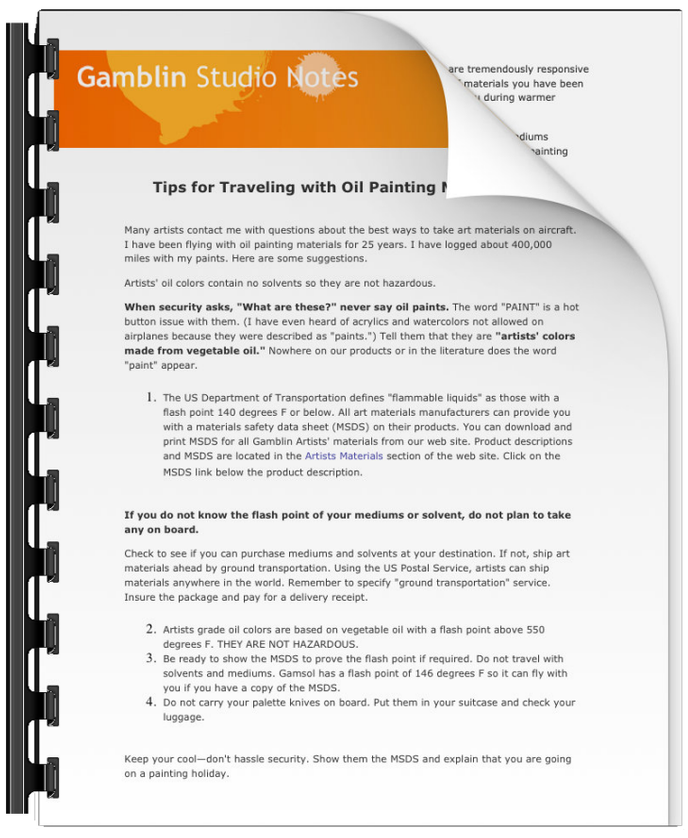
Without the tag and the MSDS, you may have problems. Highlight these two lines with a phosphorescent marker:

- *The artist's color is vegetable oil-based and is not hazardous.*
- *Safe flashpoint (550°F or higher).*

We recommend you print and visibly place these documents on your paintbox so that the authorities can check your luggage correctly and you can avoid any annoyance. Make it easy for the agent.

Prudence

Here you can download a guide like this one, with recommendations from Robert Gamblin.



Gamblin Studio Notes

are tremendously responsive
materials you have been
during warmer

diums
ainting

Tips for Traveling with Oil Painting M

Many artists contact me with questions about the best ways to take art materials on aircraft. I have been flying with oil painting materials for 25 years. I have logged about 400,000 miles with my paints. Here are some suggestions.

Artists' oil colors contain no solvents so they are not hazardous.

When security asks, "What are these?" never say oil paints. The word "PAINT" is a hot button issue with them. (I have even heard of acrylics and watercolors not allowed on airplanes because they were described as "paints.") Tell them that they are **"artists' colors made from vegetable oil."** Nowhere on our products or in the literature does the word "paint" appear.

1. The US Department of Transportation defines "flammable liquids" as those with a flash point 140 degrees F or below. All art materials manufacturers can provide you with a materials safety data sheet (MSDS) on their products. You can download and print MSDS for all Gamblin Artists' materials from our web site. Product descriptions and MSDS are located in the Artists Materials section of the web site. Click on the MSDS link below the product description.

If you do not know the flash point of your mediums or solvent, do not plan to take any on board.

Check to see if you can purchase mediums and solvents at your destination. If not, ship art materials ahead by ground transportation. Using the US Postal Service, artists can ship materials anywhere in the world. Remember to specify "ground transportation" service. Insure the package and pay for a delivery receipt.

2. Artists grade oil colors are based on vegetable oil with a flash point above 550 degrees F. THEY ARE NOT HAZARDOUS.
3. Be ready to show the MSDS to prove the flash point if required. Do not travel with solvents and mediums. Gamsol has a flash point of 146 degrees F so it can fly with you if you have a copy of the MSDS.
4. Do not carry your palette knives on board. Put them in your suitcase and check your luggage.

Keep your cool—don't hassle security. Show them the MSDS and explain that you are going on a painting holiday.

[Download PDF]

Although your equipment perfectly complies with the current TSA laws, your luggage may not be well labeled and agents may not admit it. And then they'll start making questions...

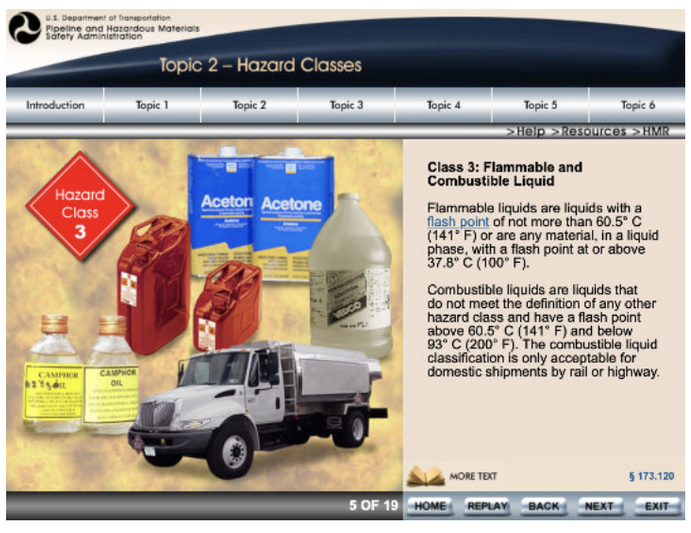
The first thing —and the most important one— is not to alarm them unnecessarily. Keep calm, you are not doing anything illegal. Just show the documentation requested and do not panic, even if they're not right.

If they inspect your luggage and ask you "What the hell are you carrying here?", **it is better NOT to say that you carry "oil paints" because it can lead to misunderstandings**. Technically, there is no problem in carrying "oil paints" inside your luggage, but it is better to talk about "colors" or "pigments".

Not all agents are familiar with art materials and are suspicious of whether they are safe or not. So let's make it easier and do not talk about "paint", because the word is associated with a flammable material that contains solvents.

So, as Robert Gamblin suggests, **it is prudent to say that you carry "colors made with vegetable oil."** This is the best thing you can answer.

Oils, mediums and solvents



On this fancy website of the US Department of Transportation, "flammable liquids" are defined as anything that swells below 141°F (60.5°C).

See definition.

Can we carry oils, mediums, and solvents? Yes and no... it's a tricky thing to answer, so let's go bit by bit:

Yes, you can carry oil.

According to Winsor & Newton, linseed, safflower, walnut, and poppy oils, in addition to stand-oil and drying oils, they are allowed (>230°C).

However, we know some cases of artists whose oil bottles have been confiscated, but it's not usual.

Of course: **do carry bottles of less than 100 ml.**

What is allowed by law:

Products with flash points below 60°C, which are flammable materials of Group II or Group III, are considered unsuitable for air travel. These include most of:

- Solvents.
- Mediums.
- Varnishes.



This is the perfect *Liquin* bottle for traveling, less than 100ml. Do you need more? No problem: it's allowed to carry more units.

However, you must demonstrate that it is not flammable by attaching the corresponding MSDS.

Download Liquin Original MSDS.

Mediums such as *Liquin* are technically allowed, as they comply with the regulations.

And the same goes for some types of solvents, such as *Gamsol* by Gamblin, or *Sansodor* by Winsor & Newton, although these solvents are on the edge of the legal limit, they are within the list of things allowed.

Gamsol has a flashpoint of 144°F, four degrees above the tolerance threshold, but **we do not recommend traveling with *Gamsol* inside the suitcase**. That's why we provide it at our workshops, so you can avoid annoyances.

If you still want to try to carry solvents with you, *technically* there are no problems if it's within the list of things allowed. Of course: prepare the documentation properly and accept that it's possible that, despite having everything in order, they will not admit it in any way.



Gels such as *Gamblin's Solvent-free Gel*, are allowed.

Download *Solvent-free Gel* MSDS.

What happens in the real world:

From experience, we know that it is not advisable to travel with these solvents because agents usually choose to be prudent and do not admit them, regardless of the flashpoint laws.

So, as a general rule, **never travel with liquid solvents**: even if you have the MSDS ready to be shown, think of them as prohibited and keep in mind that mineral essences and turpentine will hardly pass a check.

On the other hand, gel mediums —especially those that are sold in a tube— have a special treatment and can pass through controls more easily. The problem comes with flammable liquids.

Tips

▪ Carry your paints inside your checked/hold luggage, and **NEVER carry your paints inside your carry-on/hand luggage**.

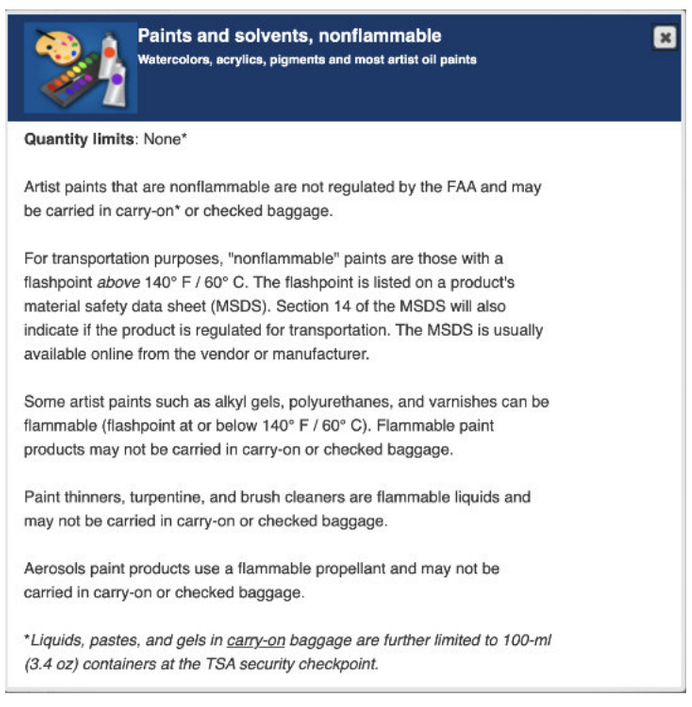
▪ **Put the paintbox or bag on top of your stuff**, and inside a rigid container that protects the tubes from any cargo handling displacement that may crush them and get all your belongings stained with paint.

▪ **Do never carry a paint knife inside your hand luggage**. The metal detector will beep a red flag and the scanner will detect something very similar to a blade. All your materials must be properly documented and packed inside the hold luggage.

▪ **We recommend that you carry your materials along with your personal belongings**. If you have a suitcase only for your materials, it is easier to grab attention and be retained. For whatever reason, suitcases with only material are more likely to be retained in controls.

▪ On the other hand, **be very careful with low-cost companies**, as their business model is based on making a profit out of people's carelessness. If there's any slight issue with your luggage, they will go after you and squeeze you. So be very careful if you fly with Ryan Air or EasyJet because cheap can be expensive.

Links



- International Air Transport Association (IATA) is the worldwide organization of regular airlines. Within the “IATA Dangerous Goods Regulations” section at their website, hazardous materials for travel are specified. https://www.iata.org/

- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), is the organization that defines management roles in the world of aviation. According to their definition, your oil paints are not dangerous inside an airplane. https://www.faa.gov/hazmat/packsafe/

- According to the FAA, there is no restriction on the number of tubes you can carry. However, all liquids, pastes, and gels should be limited to being transported inside containers of no more than 100ml (3.4oz). https://www.faa.gov/hazmat/packsafe/more_info/?hazmat=54

Hopefully, these tips, along with the label we have designed, will help you in having zero problems with customs agents.

Thanks for reading this guide. You can share it freely with whoever you want ;)

April 7 to 13, 2025 → Lazaretto Quarantine Island, Menorca (Spain)

