



FAQ - Mural Production & Installation

David McShane, Director of Resident Artists and Senior Mural Advisor, answers frequently asked questions on mural production and installation.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED BELOW

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6. *What kind of primers do you use?*

01

Q

What are the steps and considerations for mural installation on different types of surfaces like metal surfaces, aluminum panels, brick walls, stucco, and retaining walls?

A

For unpainted metal surfaces

Prime with a high-binding acrylic primer, like [Sherwin Williams Pro-Cryl](#) or [Kem Bond HS Universal Metal Primer](#). Once you have done this, you can paint directly on the surface, or install polytab "parachute" cloth on it.

For aluminum panels

There are several kinds of metal / aluminum panels you can use for mural installation. For reference, [Laminators Incorporated](#) manufactures and distributes metal panels and has a breakdown of different types to choose from (plastic core, paintable on one/both sides, etc). Choose the best type of panel for your project needs and budget.

Alumalite (with corrugated plastic core) has a specific advantage because it is lighter weight and more rigid, but it does dent more easily. This type of panel should not be used in a location where it could easily be dented, for example, on a playground near sports equipment. Alternatively, Omega Bond (with a solid plastic core) is heavier weight, flexible, and less likely to dent. Mural Arts Philadelphia primarily uses Alumalite Standard or Omega Bond.

If you are using acrylic paint or installing cloth directly on the alumalite panel or omega bond panel, you should peel off the protective film on the "good side", and we suggest first using fine-grit sandpaper to lightly sand and scuff the surface of the panel for maximum adhesion. Once you have lightly sanded, wipe off the surface with cheesecloth or a damp sponge, and prime using a high-adhesion primer (like [Sherman Williams' Extreme Bond primer](#), or something similar). After the surface has been primed, you can move ahead with direct paint or polytab "parachute" cloth installation.

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For brick walls

If the brick wall you are using has already been painted, take a scraping tool like a hand scraper, and scrape the wall thoroughly where there are areas of loose paint, paying special attention to mortar joints and any areas with loose bricks.

If the wall has never been painted, we recommend powerwashing the surface. Whether you are painting directly onto the wall or using the polytab “parachute” cloth method, make sure to prime the brick wall with a 100% acrylic exterior primer like [Sherwyn Williams PrepRite ProBlock Primer](#). We do not recommend putting paint or gel directly onto a brick surface.

Anytime you are installing a mural on a brick or masonry wall where areas have been patched with cement or repointed, be sure to wait a minimum of 28 days (minimum cure time for cement) before painting or adhering cloth (preferably longer) to avoid bubbling or alteration of the pigment’s color.

For stucco walls

Stucco walls with a significant amount of texture are not conducive to the poly tab “parachute” cloth method. Too much texture will cause air bubbles or will rip the cloth as you attempt to smooth the surface over the gel.

For highly textured surfaces, we recommend painting directly onto the wall or grinding down the texture beforehand (this is a lot of work, make sure to wear a dust mask if using this approach). Alternatively, you can resurface a highly textured wall with a skim coat of stucco to make it smooth or use panels on top of the stucco.

Before installing a mural on any stucco walls, check for sags, bulges, or rust stains. Knock on the wall and check to see if it sounds hollow, push on the wall and check for any flexibility or give. If you notice any of these conditions, that may mean the wall has issues with significant moisture or is detaching from the wall behind it. In that case, we recommend avoiding using that wall for a mural.

If there are small cracks in the wall, it may still be usable as long as the cracks are not severe (smaller than ¼ inch). For small cracks, you can use paintable caulk to fill the gaps. Similar to brick walls, we recommend powerwashing the surface of stucco and priming with with a 100% acrylic exterior primer like Sherwyn Williams PrepRite ProBlock Primer.

For retaining walls

Retaining walls have significant moisture on one side of the wall. Over time, they tend to form small cracks because of different pressure and moisture levels on opposite sides. For this reason, we recommend using aluminite or other metal panels for murals on retaining walls, including under bridges, underpasses, and tunnels.

We do not recommend using the poly tab “parachute” cloth method for retaining walls as water will seep through and rip the cloth.

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02

Q

What is the difference in approach for outdoor vs indoor murals?

A

For indoor murals

Use materials that are low in volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and will not emit any harmful chemicals or gases that you could inhale. Be sure to check the safety data sheet for any product you use to ensure it is safe for interior use.

With interior murals, you will have more flexibility in choosing your materials because weather and ultraviolet light exposure are not significant factors.

Consider using a projector to project the mural design onto your interior wall when painting directly onto the surface (unless it is a curved wall). We recommend a digital projector that can project in hi-res and that has keystone capabilities so that the projected image is not overly pixilated and can be corrected to perfectly square if it is projected at an angle. The [EPSON Pro EX7280 3LCD WXGA Projector](#) is an example of a digital projector with these capabilities. When considering what to use to seal your interior mural, know that you will be most vulnerable to handprints and scuffmarks.. We recommend using two coats of clear acrylic-based sealant for interior murals because it is washable.

For outdoor murals

There are many more factors to consider, specifically water penetration, weather, and ultraviolet light exposure. More planning and consideration of these factors should be in place before installing an exterior mural.

03

Q

What is the difference in approach for permanent vs temporary murals?

A

For permanent murals

The poly tab “parachute” cloth method and acrylic gel adhesive should be used for permanent projects only. Once installed, it is extremely difficult to remove. You can easily paint over a mural installed using the cloth method, but removing the cloth to return the wall to the original substrate is significantly harder than removing direct paint from a wall.

For temporary murals

You can use alumalite or other metal panels or wooden/composite sign painters panels which can be affixed to the wall with screws and easily taken down later. This would also allow the temporary mural to be relocated to another wall if desired. If you go this route, make sure you install the temporary mural in a way that allows you to keep track of where the screws are so you can unscrew the mural from the wall, when needed.

We recommend having an engineer assist you to ensure any wall you are screwing into can hold the weight of the panels you are using. Make sure you do not cause any cracks in the wall when screwing in the panels or use caulk to fill in small cracks before continuing on. Wheat paste with paper mural panels is another great option for temporary murals. It can be removed fairly easily by power washing.

04

Q

What materials are used for the poly tab “parachute” cloth method?

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The materials we use have very specific requirements in order to work effectively. Temperature, in particular, is critical to the longevity of a mural. When using the poly tab “parachute” cloth method, do not install cloth if the outside temperature is below 50 degrees farenheit, as the gel may not adhere properly and the cloth may eventually detach from the wall.

Materials

For purchasing already pre-primed cloth check out artist, Ben Volta’s business, [Mural Provisions](#). Pre-primed cloth will save you time and is more cost effective than purchasing an entire roll of poly tab cloth from fabricators for a single project.

For paints, we use heavy-body acrylic paints purchased from [Golden PaintWorks](#). Depending on the color and surface, you can also use [Sherwin Williams Pro-Cryl High-Performance Acrylic](#) or other top tier house paint from other reputable manufacturers. These products are less expensive and also generally will fade faster than true mural paint. If using Golden Paints, their technicians are very helpful if you have any questions about their products.

For gel, we use [Golden Mural Adhesive Gel Heavy Gel Semi Gloss](#) from Golden Paintworks.

05

Q

How do you protect your murals?

A

This depends on the location of the wall and other factors. For outdoor murals in locations that are exposed to significant sunlight, we recommend using [Golden MSA Varnish](#).

IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTE: The MSA Varnish should only be used outdoors. Make sure you wear a respirator when you use this product. We recommend reading the manufacturer's information on proper application techniques.

For outdoor murals with less sunlight exposure, we use [Corotech High-Performance Clear Acrylic Sealer](#) from Benjamin Moore.

If you’ve used gel during installation, make sure you wait 24-48 hours for the gel to thoroughly dry before sealing your mural.

06

Q

What kind of primers do you use?

A

Depending on the type of surface, we use:

- Sherwin Williams PrepRite ProBlock Primer or Sherwin Williams Pro-Cryl Bonding Primer
- Sherwin Williams Seal Krete wall conditioner for a “transparent primer”
- Sherwyn Williams ProCryl or Kem Bond HS Universal Metal Primer for metal surfaces

Make sure to prime any wall surface before adhering primed poly tab “parachute” cloth.

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