

## Making Ripples

### Treeless “Papers” for Artists

by Amanda Bancroft

For the adventurous nature lover and artist, treeless substitutions for paper are a brave new world. If you love trees and want to use less paper, these synthetic surfaces will charm anyone with the results they can produce. Many of them last for centuries, recycle plastic from the waste stream, require no chemical fixative spray, are durable and archival (just research the exact surface and brand to be certain).

YUPO is machine made in the USA from 100 percent polypropylene that's also 100 percent recyclable (category 5). Visit [yupousa.com](http://yupousa.com) to read their environmental statement. YUPO is popular for experimental watercolor and printmaking. It comes in solid white or translucent options of various sizes. Since it's waterproof, mediums like alcohol markers, paints, watercolors and ink just sit on the surface, drying very slowly over a period of days. This creates unique blotchy effects that have minds of their own, difficult to control. For dry mediums like graphite and colored pencil, there is much more control and very fine detail can be achieved. It's even possible to completely erase colored pencil, something that paper doesn't fully allow; beware that erased areas will not behave like fresh areas. If you don't like the watercolor painting produced on the YUPO, you can wash off the piece to white, allow it to dry, and begin again! However, it really isn't possible to layer colored pencil on YUPO because it's almost toothless, meaning there isn't enough texture to hold layers.

Drafting film is made of polyethylene, similar but delightfully different than YUPO. Commonly used for architectural drawings, it's translucent and one or two-sided with matte coating, so layering multiple drawings is possible to create depth. With speed, alcohol markers create consistent, streak-free areas of color that dry fairly quickly and can be erased like magic! You can achieve some layers of colored pencil on drafting film, but not as many as on paper. The benefit is the incredibly fine details that toothy paper often obliterates: whiskers, hair, plant veins and other thin lines are more easily drawn on film, and completely erasable.

DuraLar polyester film (like Mylar or acetate) is nearly the same as drafting film. It's also translucent and either one or two-sided with matte coating. DuraLar and drafting film are like high-definition video: colors are vibrant, details are crisp. Duralar has a more buttery feel than drafting film, and colors appear a bit lighter. It's pleasant to feel the pencil soar across the sheet as though it were flying in air! But some artists prefer the slightly toothier feel of drafting film. Also, these surfaces emit a mild chemical odor that bothered me. It's all about preference and the results you desire for your artwork, and paper alternatives offer one more sustainable option to artists. These surfaces are available locally at the Art Location in Fayetteville or online at Blick Art Materials, but if you want free samples, contact their manufacturers.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: [www.RipplesBlog.org](http://www.RipplesBlog.org).