



## Utrecht Art Supplies Is Varnishing Necessary?



**Ask the Expert: "Is it really necessary to varnish every painting? What about artists who just like a flat look?"**

**A:** We think in most situations where a picture is to be displayed in a private home or business, varnishing is a sensible measure that protects paint and makes cleaning and maintaining finished art easier for the collector.

Display conditions should be taken into consideration when deciding whether a painting should be left without varnish. Most private collectors are not able to provide a museum-standard climate control environment or frequent professional cleanings. It's a lot safer and easier to dust a varnished surface than a porous paint surface, and a lot less complicated for a professional restorer to work on as well.

If a painting is left without varnish, the display location should be relatively free of dust and contaminants. Airborne residue from cooking, smoke and general dust can all be problematic

to remove from an exposed paint film, so it may not be wise to display unvarnished paintings near a kitchen or bar.

In spite of the practical benefits of varnishing, it can't be denied that a glossy top-coat does alter the appearance of some paints. Colors tend to deepen when varnished; contrast and overall tone can change. Many artists prefer the matte finish of some types of paint, and don't want to alter this effect by varnishing. Matte or satin-finish varnishes are a good option for painters who don't want a "candy" gloss.

While not completely flat, matte varnishes generally aren't as reflective as gloss products, and are less prone to alter colors. Matte varnish is a particularly good choice when it's hard to control lighting in the display environment, or any time glare is a challenge.

Matte varnishes can be applied over gloss products of similar composition, so artists disappointed with a gloss finish can top-coat with matte with no need to remove the initial layer. (This only works with matte over gloss, not the other way around.)

Sometimes applying varnish simply isn't possible. Many mixed-media pieces can't be varnished easily, or at all depending on materials. Framing under glass can be a good option in this case. Limiting the length of time an unvarnished piece will be displayed can also help preserve artwork. Placing art objects in storage at intervals is a common practice with watercolors and prints, and it's a good strategy for reducing exposure to any vulnerable artwork, including unvarnished pictures.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

Intended for reference only. Observe all package instructions. Dick Blick Holdings/Utrecht Art Supplies is not responsible for any damage to personal property that may result from use of the information presented herein. © Copyright 2016 Dick Blick Holdings Inc. All rights reserved.