



## Utrecht Art Supplies

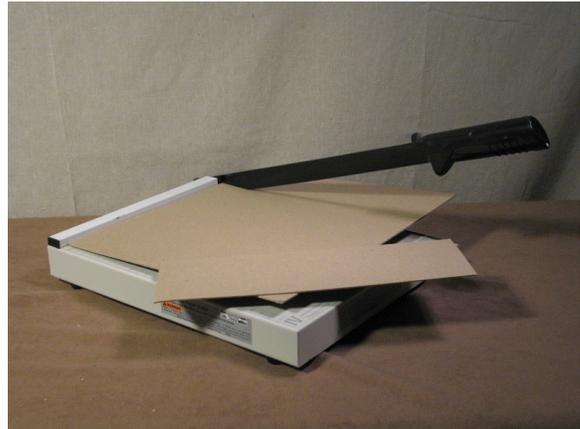
### Studio Craft: Removing Picture Varnish

Every so often, it's necessary to remove varnish from a painting. Occasionally runs or drips occur, dust and hairs can become embedded, or you may want to apply a different type of varnish than was originally used.

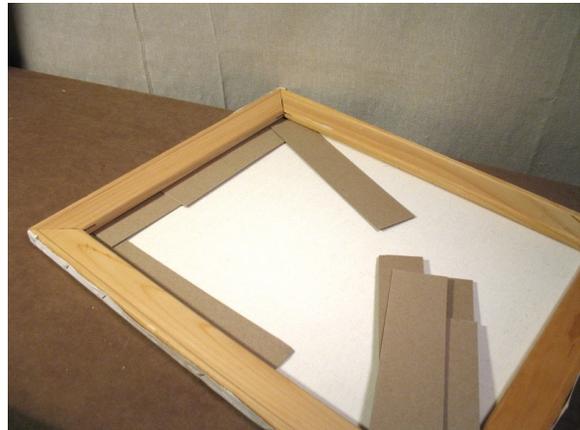
This tutorial describes the process of removing varnish from your own relatively fresh paintings. This is not a conservation tutorial; care of antique or valuable works of art should only be handled by a trained professional. If there is any doubt as to the materials used, the age or origin of the picture, do not attempt this procedure. Work in a well-ventilated area. Sensitive individuals should wear solvent-proof gloves when using turpentine.

The easiest coatings to remove are synthetic solvent-borne products sold specifically as picture varnishes (as opposed to craft coatings). Most of these are easily removable with odorless mineral spirits. Tree exudate gum varnishes like damar and mastic can be reversed with pure gum spirits of turpentine. Lint-free white cloth rags are ideal for removing varnish because it will be immediately apparent if any color has been lifted during the process. Do not use paper towels.

Pictures that contain a large volume of damar or include many layers of retouch varnish within the paint should not be cleaned with turpentine, as the paint may be soluble. Do not attempt to remove alkyd or water-based acrylic mediums that have been applied as a clear isolation layer- you will not be able to lift these coatings without affecting the paint beneath.



Before beginning the varnish removal process, cut strips of thin, stiff cardboard.



Insert strips between the back of the canvas and the stretchers to help prevent leaving an impression of the stretchers on the front of the picture.



Once all cardboard strips have been inserted, place the painting face up on a work surface. Working systematically in sections, use a cloth to apply solvent one small patch at a time. Use a gentle, circular motion, taking care not to press deeply into the painting. If the coating does not lift right away, leave solvent on the surface for a few seconds. Use a dry, clean cloth to wipe away solvent and varnish before moving to the next passage. Inspect rags often for signs of paint. If color appears on the cloth, refrain from further cleaning at that section.



Repeat the removal process on passages where the original coating remains. After the entire painting surface has been treated, remove cardboard and allow all residual solvent to evaporate. The painting should be ready to accept a fresh coating of varnish.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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