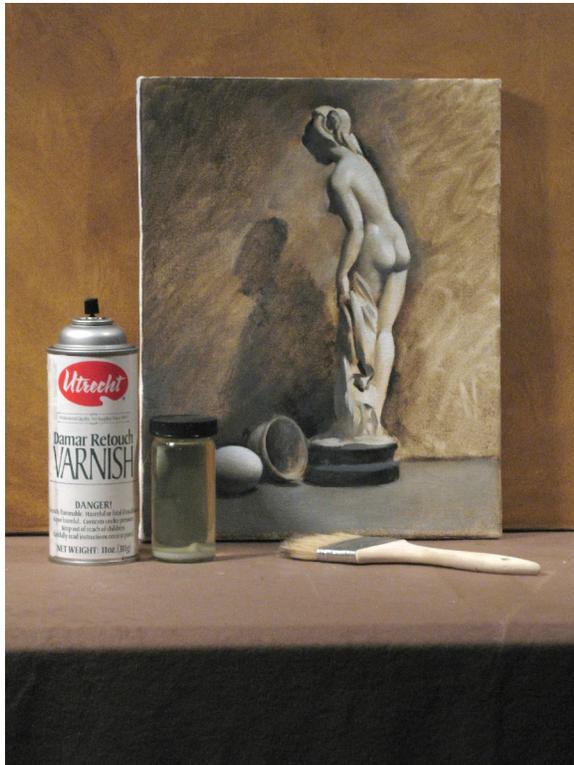




**Utrecht Art Supplies**  
**Studio Craft: Waiting to Varnish**

**"Do I really have to wait 6 months to varnish my painting?"**



How long to wait before varnishing depends on several factors:

- **Type of paint**
- **Pigments and mediums used**
- **Thickness of application**
- **Type of ground/support**
- **Ambient temperature/humidity**

Oil paints cure slowly over months, while acrylics dry very quickly by evaporation. Even with acrylics, however, thick applications can remain soft internally for weeks.

Some oil colors dry more slowly than others, so a single passage may remain soft while fast drying areas are fully dry. Paintings stored in cold, humid conditions may dry more slowly than those stored in warm, dry environments.



Oil paintings dry to the touch can receive a coat of **Retouch Varnish** or light application of synthetic picture varnish. Retouch Varnish restores luster and imparts even gloss, deepening colors while it protects the paint film.

It's generally best to wait 6-12 months depending on paint thickness, or until paint has formed a firm solid before applying a heavy final varnish. (The 6-12 months "rule" dates at least as far back as A.P. Laurie's "The Painter's Methods and Materials", 1926, at a time when heavy resin-oil varnishes were still in common use.)

If damar retouch has been applied, it can either be removed for re-coating or full-strength damar can be applied over top. (For best results do not top-coat retouch damar with a synthetic varnish.) A light single coat of synthetic varnish can be top-coated later with the same product.

Varnishing early isn't likely to retard drying by oxygen starvation (modern grounds remain permeable from the back), but varnishing still-soft paintings can result in an imperfect top coat with irregular texture or bloom beneath the varnish. Of course, paintings wet to the touch should not be varnished at all- varnish can intermix with colors, making removal without damage to the art nearly impossible.

Acrylic paintings can be varnished as soon as they are thoroughly touch-dry and solid through the entire film; no residual moisture should remain. Use synthetic varnish for acrylic paintings.

Proper picture varnish should remain optically clear, flexible and neutral in color and should be reversible to facilitate future cleaning and conservation. Think of varnish as analogous to glass over works on paper: distinct and separate from the artwork, replaceable and unobtrusive. Synthetic solvent-borne varnishes like Gloss Picture Spray Varnish or Gloss Oil Varnish are good options for both oils and acrylics.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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