

# Varnishing a Watercolor on Watercolor Paper

## Permanent Addition

- Because papers and other watercolor substrates are highly absorbent, any varnish applied to the surface will soak into it and become a permanent, non-removable addition to the piece. Once varnished, the watercolor can never be returned to its original condition.
- The impregnation of the substrate with varnish could re-categorize the watercolor as a mixed media piece and potentially exclude it from being considered a watercolor by some societies, museums and conservators

## Change in Appearance

The addition of varnish to a watercolor painting will;

- Change the appearance, texture and feel of the paper substrate
- Darken colors with the use of a gloss varnish
- Lighten colors with the use of a matte or satin varnish

Since varnishes offer a sheen that is different than that of the original watercolor painting the artist may want to consider photographing the piece prior to applying varnish.

## VARNISH APPLICATION

A varnish functions as a tough yet flexible protective film over artwork. It is designed to reduce damage caused by humidity, dust, dirt, smoke, ultra violet radiation, scuffs and scratches. Varnish should ideally be a removable coating that should endure environmental abuses that would otherwise compromise the longevity of artwork. When applied on weakly bound media like watercolor paint films, varnish also has the ability to seal and hold the pigment and binder in place on the paper.

*(above text is from the Golden Paints web site, instructions below from Golden Rep. I spoke to on the phone)*

1. First mount the watercolor to a board, such as hardboard (Masonite), for archival purposes seal the board with GAC100 first. Use an archival adhesive, such as matte acrylic gel, Yes! paste, Modge Podge or any archival adhesive. Weigh down the painting on the board overnight with a sheet of glass and jugs of water on top to weigh it down.  
OPTION: Do your painting on Canson's watercolor board, and skip the mounting.
2. Spray OUTDOORS (dry and temperature above 50 degrees), use Golden Archival Varnish with UVLS - Gloss.  
(Note: always start with gloss....matte will give a "frosty" appearance)  
Give it 3 coats, waiting 15 to 20 minutes between coats, and turn the art one quarter turn each time. Krylon also makes a UV Archival spray varnish. Clean the spray nozzle each time by turning can upside down and spraying until just gas comes out.
3. When spray is dry, you can bring indoors for next steps. I suggest waiting a few hours after the spraying (or the next day) to allow complete drying and "out-gassing" of spray varnish first.
4. ISOLATION COAT: *(note this step is optional – but allows for a truly archival varnishing, where as if many years in the future, the top varnish needs to be removed for cleaning purposes, the painting underneath will be protected.)*  
brush on with a wide soft brush a coat of 2 parts soft gel gloss to 1 part water. let dry a hour or so.
5. Final Varnish: Apply 2 to 3 coats of Polymer Varnish with UVLS, thinned 3 parts varnish to 1 part water, last coat should have the sheen you want, Satin or Matte. *(or a mixture of the two)*

Note: spray alone on paper does not work as well as using the brush on varnish. Spray alone on paper has a "fuzzy" feel.

*Now you can frame without glass!*

## Varnishing Watercolors or Gouache on AquaBord®, Boards covered with Watercolor Ground or on Yes!® Multimedia Canvas

You can follow the steps above OR...just use the spray alone. I usually use just the spray, about 5 to 6 coats. Remember...always start with gloss....your last coat or two can be the sheen you desire.