

Varnishing a Watercolor Painting and Mat

This process allows you to present a painting that does not need glass/Plexiglas protection. This method is generally safe for watercolors and acrylic, but artists are encouraged to test the application on their particular media, before applying it to a painting ready for exhibition.

Ingredients:

- Clear archival spray varnish (Golden Archival Mineral Spirit Acrylic Aerosol with UV protection is one product that works well, and is available from Santa Fe Artisan) – matte finish is recommended to prevent glare
- Clear acrylic varnish (Golden Polymer Varnish with UV Protection is one product that works well, and is available from Santa Fe Artisan) – matte finish is recommended to prevent glare
- Wide (2-3 inch) soft bristle brush suitable for clear finishes (Lowe's Valspar All Stain White China Bristle works well)

Process:

1. Dry mount the painting to archival foam core or other solid support – this ensures a flat and wrinkle-free presentation. Hobby Lobby (as well as other art stores) has a dry mount service. Ensure the foam core/support is at least as large as the mat and/or frame that will be used. This will simplify the framing process.
2. Apply the first coat of spray varnish to the dry mounted piece – best done outdoors with low wind to avoid fumes. Make sure the surface is free of dust, hair or debris before application. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for application. Apply in a diagonal pattern across the painting. Allow to dry according to the manufacturer's instructions (usually 15-20 minutes).
3. Apply a second coat of spray varnish to the dry mounted piece – apply in a diagonal pattern across the painting in the opposite direction from the first application. Allow to dry.
4. Apply first coat of brush on varnish – mix the varnish according to manufacturer's instructions. Golden product is mixed with 4 parts varnish to 1 part of water in a plastic container with secure lid. Do not shake before use. Stir gently to avoid incorporating bubbles. A small amount of prepared product (about ½ cup) will cover a half sheet of watercolor paper, but it is best to prepare a larger amount and store it pre-mixed for further use. Use the soft brush to apply the varnish in large strokes across the painting. Proceed at a modest pace to avoid bubbles. Let dry for recommended time (6 hours).
5. Apply additional coats of varnish, as desired– follow the same process as before. At least 2 coats is recommended. Allow to fully dry between coats.
6. If using a mat, protect it with varnish in the same way. Spray or brush the back side of the prepared mat and let it dry. Then, brush on 1-2 coats of varnish to the front side, ensuring the bevel and edges are coated.

