

# OIL & ALKYD VARNISHES

*Varnishes are used for protecting paintings from dirt and atmospheric pollution. They are meant to be removable for cleaning and restoring paintings, in order to replace it with a fresh coat. Varnishing also helps give paintings a consistent look, as oil painting techniques are notorious for creating paint surfaces that have an uneven quality. Grounds are often variably absorbent and one pigment may react differently from another, resulting in a surface of dull and shiny spots. A varnish can provide a consistent coating in either a high gloss, matte or satin finish. Varnishes are either natural or synthetic but regardless they should be thin, clear, non-yellowing and flexible - to bend with the inevitable expansion and contraction of the painted support.*

## PICTURE VARNISH

This is the final coating for oil, alkyd and acrylic paintings. Its purpose is to create a uniform finish and to protect the painting from dirt and atmospheric conditions. A picture varnish should only be applied to a thoroughly dry painting — 6-12 months for oils, 1-2 months for alkyds, 24 hours to 2 weeks for acrylics. A painting with delicate glazes may take less time to dry and should not be left unvarnished for too long.



## RETOUCH VARNISH

This solution is the same as a picture varnish, but it contains more turpentine, so it will not form a skin or create a high gloss when it is sprayed or applied with a soft brush. The purpose of a retouch varnish is to recreate the original color appearance of wet paint on areas where the paint has dried out or appears to have

sunken-in. It is applied only over those areas which have dried, making color matching of new and dry paint easier. Some sunken-in areas require more than one coat of retouch varnish to retrieve the fresh color of wet paint. It should be applied in very thin layers and allowed to dry thoroughly between coats.

## DAMAR VARNISH

Damar resin, also spelled dammar, is tapped from the damar fir tree found chiefly in Indonesia and Malaysia and is the most traditional varnish for oil paintings. It appears in stores as clear or slightly yellowish, dusty crystals about 2.5 to 5 cm (1 to 2 inches) in diameter. Gum turpentine is the solvent of choice for the artist wanting to dissolve damar crystals as other solvents either dissolve the resin incompletely or are difficult to store safely in the average studio. Damar varnish yellows with age, and its films become brittle. This is caused by exposure to ultraviolet light, present in most lighting systems, and is nearly unavoidable unless you use special filters over the light source. Yellowing and brittleness are also caused by oxidation, which in turn is encouraged by exposure to ultraviolet light. Although Damar is reversible varnish, its repeated removal and replacement to counteract yellowing are significant problems for conservators charged with the care of a work, since the process can ultimately be harmful to the painting.



## VARNISHES AT OPUS

**ECO-HOUSE Damar Picture Varnish:** This damar varnish is made with a combination of damar pine resin and Eco-House Mild Citrus Thinner with small amount of linseed stand oil for elasticity. This varnish can be used as a final picture varnish over well-dried oil paintings. It yields a glossy protective finish. For reduced gloss, Eco-House Citrus Thinner can be added.

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**GAMBLIN Gamvar:** Gamvar is a low molecular weight, synthetic resin varnish that has a refractive index similar to damar natural varnish. Applying it as a top layer will saturate the colors of your paintings and intensify the transparency of glazes. While varnishing is an aesthetic decision made by individuals, historically varnishes protect paintings from environmental dirt and dust. Gamvar contains an ultraviolet light stabilizer which protects paintings from UV radiation.

**GOLDEN MSA Varnish with UVLS:** A mineral spirit soluble Acrylic (MSA) varnish that incorporates a system of UltraViolet Light filters and Stabilizers (UVLS). Removable for conservation. Physically tougher than waterborne acrylic varnishes. Protects from UV damage. Adheres to a wide variety of surfaces and paint mediums, including acrylics, oils, alkyds, pastels, watercolours and temperas. Non-yellowing.

**KRYLON Kamar:** Clear, non-yellowing, restores brilliance of "sunken-in" colours. It allows for the temporary protection and retouch workability on paintings which aren't dry. Developed as a synthetic alternative to traditional damar varnish in a convenient aerosol spray can.

**LIQUITEX Soluvar:** Pure acrylic spirit varnish for oil and acrylic paintings. It is removable with mineral spirits or turpentine. Paintings must be completely dry.

**STEVENSON Damar Crystals:** Comes in clear or slightly yellowish crystals about 2.5 to 5 cm (1 - 2") in diameter. Gum turpentine is often used to dissolve the crystals as many other solvents either dissolve them incompletely or are not safe for keeping in the studio. Damar varnish yellows with age, and its film become brittle. Damar is reversible, but its repeated removal and replacement to counteract yellowing are significant problems for conservators since the process can be ultimately harmful to the painting.

**STEVENSON Satin Varnish & Medium:** Gives a satin, low-gloss clear finish that is weather-resistant, water and humidity-proof. Removable with turpentine for cleaning purposes. May be applied with a soft brush or diluted for a spray. As a re-touch varnish it softens to permit binding of the under-painting with the overlay, yet the colours will not mix together. For glazing it may be mixed with tube colours to give a transparent effect. It can also be used as a binder to mix with dry pigments or other materials like sand to create different effects.



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