Why Varnish A Painting?

Some say varnishing is an aesthetic choice. So why should artists protect their artwork? Let’s say you’ve recently finished a piece of art – it’s fantastic and you can’t wait to display it or sell it. You haven’t applied a protective coating because you love what you have done and are not sure what a coating will do to your art. So you think you are better off doing nothing. Here’s why you should change your mind…

To Protect Against Dust, Dirt, Moisture, Pollution
If you don’t varnish, over time dust, dirt, moisture and pollution will change the look of your painting. For example, acrylics are porous, soften in the heat and can sometimes remain a little tacky, so they are almost like a “dust magnet,” allowing dirt and airborne particles to bind to the surface. All types of paintings can be damaged if they are left unprotected. Uncoated oil paints can absorb atmospheric moisture and crack over time. A final varnish will seal the surface of your paintings to reduce surface tack and keep the dust, dirt, moisture and pollution out. If you sell your work, this also helps protect the buyer’s investment.

To Protect Against Fading or To Display Without Glass
Sunlight, as well as most types of indoor lighting, can fade some of the beautiful colors that you used. Even if you paid special attention to the lightfastness ratings of all paints used, you know that some colors are always going to be more likely to fade. A varnish with UV absorbers and stabilizers can provide additional protection against color fading of the artwork, as well as protect the integrity of the varnish coating. For example, Krylon® UV Archival Varnish has an exclusive blend of powerful UV light absorbers (UVA) and stabilizers (HALS) to provide your painting with the most UV protection available in a fine artist quality product. The thicker the coating of varnish, the better the protection.

To Protect Against Surface Abrasion
You take the utmost care in packaging your paintings for shipping or display, and yet, sometimes the unthinkable happens and damage occurs. A coat of varnish is going to add more protection to your painting and if something has to get scratched or scraped, it’s much better to have that happen to the clear varnish than to the painting beneath.

To Enhance Surface Sheen
Varnishes are available in many finishes from high gloss to matte. You can choose a finish close to the sheen of most of the paint colors on your artwork for a more invisible looking finish, or you can enhance your painting with a stronger gloss to increase color saturation. Or you might prefer to tone down any gloss so that the painting has a matte finish. It’s important to know that when using a matte varnish, you should only apply one coat or sometimes matting agents in the varnish can give a “frosted” or “cloudy” look to your painting. While matte varnishes that contain beeswax are less likely to cause the frosted appearance, they still reduce clarity with additional coats and cause the varnish to be a little softer. Another reason to just use one coat of matte is that multiple coats may actually increase the surface gloss level so that it starts to look more like a satin or semi-gloss finish. If you desire more protection than one coat of varnish provides, it is best to add multiple coats of gloss varnish and finish off with a coat of matte.
Why Varnish A Painting?(continued)

To Unify Surface Sheen
Paint colors may dry to different gloss levels because they are each formulated with unique pigments and paint additives. Additionally, some absorbent painting surfaces can have different degrees of absorbency across the surface. When a painting is completely dry, some areas of the surface may appear matte, some satin and some glossy. A varnish will even out the final appearance of your painting, giving it a consistent overall look. Varnish can also further saturate your paint colors, giving them the look that they had when wet. Krylon® Conservation Varnish saturates colors beautifully and gives the same appearance as a natural varnish, without yellowing.

To Reduce Frequency of Cleaning
All paintings require cleaning over time; however, adding a varnish will reduce the frequency of those cleanings and reduce the risk of any possible damage to your painting, ensuring it will last beautifully for many years to come. Choose a varnish that is removable so that if the varnish layer becomes discolored one day (due to pollution or smoke damage, for example), the varnish layer can be easily removed and replaced with a fresh coat of varnish. Be aware that matte finishes get dirtier faster than gloss finishes, but it’s still easier to clean than an unvarnished painting. It’s a good idea to add the name of the varnish and other artist materials that you used on the back of your painting support for future reference.

Always make sure you varnish your painting when it is completely dry, and remove any dust and dirt with a soft brush before applying in a dust-free environment. A spray varnish applies two to three times faster, easier and more evenly than brush-on varnishes, and won’t change the look of your original brushstrokes. For the highest quality varnish protection, choose from Krylon® UV Archival Varnish and Krylon® Conservation Varnish, both in the Gallery Series™ Premium Artist Spray line.

For more information on Krylon® artist products, visit krylon.com/galleryseries.