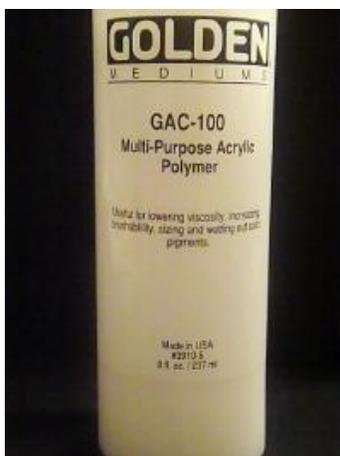


Sealer, Primer, Isolation Coat, & Varnish



A seal can be applied between the substrate and gesso/primer, or between the substrate and the first layer of paint if gesso is not desired. A seal may also be applied over the final layer of a finished painting to protect the painting's surface. Read also Isolation Coat and Varnish topics that follow.

A proper sealer applied to a painting will protect against Support Induced Discoloration (SID) by blocking the impurities from penetrating through a porous support or substrate as with a canvas. A sealer is a nonporous protective layer applied between the support and the primer (gesso). It can also be applied over a porous support when an opaque primer is not desired. For example, a wood surface where the grain is to remain present. GAC 100 by Golden is an excellent sealer to prevent SID. Choose the right sealer according to the materials used in your composition. Apply several coats and dry completely before gessoing the support.

There are other sealers like a polymer/acrylic medium or an acrylic spray sealer, but they may not all prevent SID. These types of sealers are most often used to seal the top layer of the finished painting.

What is Support Induced Discoloration (SID)? SID can occur in acrylic paints and mediums when a support naturally has impurities that discolor a translucent or

transparent acrylic layer. A size should be applied before gessoing the support so the impurities cannot be absorbed through the gesso and then into the acrylic film before it has had time to completely cure.

The SID action happens as the paint film cures; the water exits through both the surface of the paint and through the back of the porous support. While drying, the water is moving around between the acrylic paint and the support as it evaporates and draws the water-soluble impurities from the support and draws them to the acrylic film creating an unattractive yellowish film.

SID is far more noticeable in transparent glazes and thick translucent gels layers and can therefore change the colors of glazes as though yellow was added. For example, a red glaze will appear as a low chroma orange and a blue glaze will appear greenish.



Gesso - Gesso is considered a primer or even a ground; depending on what it will be used for. It is absorbent and has a slight tooth in which paints and other mediums can adhere to. Gesso can be applied over a sealer when used as a ground, or applied directly over a canvas as a primer. While gesso is useful as a primer or ground, it alone will not protect against SID - see Sealer.

Gesso can be thinned with water or applied thick for additional texture or tooth when coating a porous substrate. The application can be brushed, rolled, or sprayed onto a surface. It comes in white, black, and clear. Paint can be added if a tint of color is desired. It can be lightly sanded between dry coats for a smoother

painting surface. To lower its tooth, add water or 10% GAC100. To increase its tooth and absorption you can add some coarse solids like sand.

Isolation Coat - An isolation coat is a clear barrier that separates the painting from the varnish. It is non removable. It serves several important functions. First, it seals the surface of a finished painting before the varnish is applied, and protects the painting should the varnish ever need to be removed for conservation and cleaning purposes. The isolation coat also seals the surface of the finished painting and lessens the chance of the varnish and other elements from being absorbed into the paintings upper surface. It also allows for a smoother varnish application.

A mix of 2:1 soft glossy acrylic gel and water makes an easy brush on isolation medium. Golden Paints also offers an alternative of mixing 2:1 GAC500 with airbrush transparent extender that is sprayed onto the painting. While a professional airbrush artist would most likely use an airbrush or paint gun to spray on the isolation coat; I use a spray bottle with a mist setting for my large textured and bas relief paintings. I spray on several thin coats with a light mist while allowing each coat to dry between applications. Make sure to quickly absorb any pools with the corner of a dry paper towel or cotton swab. Let the isolation coat completely dry before varnishing. This can takes weeks or even months, depending on climate conditions.



Varnish - There is a difference between a true varnish and applying a gel or medium as a protective coating. Mediums other than an archival varnish cannot be removed for conservation or cleaning without causing harm to the underlying painting. Make sure to use a non yellowing varnish that has UV inhibitors. A medium labeled as both a varnish and glazing medium as seen in the top right photo is not an archival varnish so it cannot be removed later if necessary. Always include the archival varnish information on the back of your painting.

Read the manufacturer instructions before attempting to apply a varnish. Slowly stir the varnish to avoid trapping air bubbles. Use a dry soft bristle flat brush for applying varnish. Work fast and avoid heavy brush loads that drip and form puddles on the surface. Do not repeat strokes over an area that is not completely dry thus leaving behind brush marks and a cloudy finish once dried.

A varnish can do more than protect a finished painting from environmental agents. It will enhance the appearance of the color and depth, unify the surface sheen, and protect a painting against surface scratches.

I have several brushes assigned for varnishing only. Some highly saturated paints may leave behind a slight stain within the brush bristles. Varnish can easily breakdown this stain and transfer the unwanted color onto your work.

Always wash the varnish from your brush with soap and water before it starts to dry. Make sure to wash all of the varnish out of the area where the brush's heel

and ferrule meet. Any varnish trapped in this area will separate the bristles and destroy the brush once it has dried.

An acrylic painting that has been properly protected can be professionally cleaned if necessary. This is usually reserved for gallery and museum quality art. But you can also clean your own acrylic paintings occasionally without removing the varnish. Never clean a painting when you are not absolutely sure if it has been properly sealed or varnished. A painting without some kind of protective layer can easily be destroyed; especially with thin color glazes and mixed media.

To clean your own acrylic painting: First remove it from the frame. Test a small area first. Clean only small areas at a time. Use a soft clean cloth with cool water and a gentle soap. Gently rub just long enough that the impurities are lifted. Use clean water and a damp cloth to rinse away the soap film. Use a clean soft cloth to pat dry. Do not use a blow dryer.