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"Artists Unglazed"

Subhead: For artists, is glazing a thing of the past?
December 2026

Acrylic sandwiches, cradled boxes, and gallery wraps have been around for decades supporting artists' desire to reinvent painting substrates and avoid glazing. Encaustic has redefined the list of original art that may be left unglazed along with oils, acrylics, various mixed media, and coated photographs, but many other original media still require glazing. Today there are current trends where artists are sealing their originals with varnish and wax to pursue glass free options, even for friable and moisture sensitive art including pastels, watercolors and alcohol ink. What's a framer to do?

Substrates
It is already common practice to float frame oil, acrylic, encaustic, and textured paintings on canvas or panel without glazing. This helps prevent damage to textured, delicate surfaces, allowing paint to fully dry and cure, but often still requires specialized maintenance and/or varnish to protect against dust and environmental hazards. Unprotected art allows for enhanced, direct viewing of all textures and color, totally unencumbered by glass or acrylic, while it becomes more vulnerable to dust, scratches, moisture, and environmental pollutants, requiring routine maintenance.

Many manufacturers have risen to the call and developed commercial painting surfaces designed with strength, durability, versatility, and no glazing in mind. Ampersand's Archiva-Seal technology for sealing high density, moisture-resistant, formaldehyde-free hardboard claims to be an archival, acid free clay coating, non-ye11owing, and apparently ready-to-use. Ampersand Hardbord is marketed as a 1/8" flat panel for standard framing, their 3/4" cradled panels are meant for float framing, and 2" deep cradles are for unframed art. Ampersand Claybord is designed for mixed media painting using water-based paints, ink, collage, pencil, and digital art. There's also Gessobord for oils and acrylics, Aquabord for watercolor and gouache, Pastelbord for soft sticks, and Scratchbord--which features a coating of India ink. All are marketed as "Seal your work with spray fixative...and frame it without glass." These painting panels are said to be endorsed by conservators, have an accelerated test life of 200 years, and artists are buying in and painting on them. As a result these same artists, using these panels, may also be requesting frames with no glass as stated in the advertising. So be prepared. The thing is, although the panels may have been prepared and sealed for assorted media, once the art has been created the new original art surface must also be protected, if not glazed.

Fixatives
Krylon Gallery Series UV Archival Varnish is a favored product for sealing and preserving artwork, so their marketing boasts, "originals may be mounted and displayed with no glazing." It is considered conservation quality in that it is removable with mineral spirits or isopropyl alcohol for conservation purposes. It also comes in gloss for oils; satin for colored pencils, acrylics, and digital prints; and matte for watercolors, pastels, and colored pencils. It protects against dirt, moisture, and fading (so states the marketing)—with a non-yellowing formula, containing Hindered Amine Light Stabilizer (HALS) and UV Absorber (UVA) helping prevent fading and discoloration, for long-term preservation.

Varnishing Watercolors
There's a bit of a new craze with watercolor artists to varnish their originals so as not to require glazing. Varnish is designed to reduce damage caused by humidity, dust, dirt, smoke, ultraviolet radiation, scuffs, and scratches, making it similar to glazing. 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, permanently altering the original. The impregnation of the substrate with varnish could re-categorize the watercolor, into a mixed media piece, and potentially exclude it from being considered a watercolor by some societies, museums, and conservators.



Golden warns that "the varnishing of watercolor paintings is a non-reversible addition to artwork that will permanently change both the nature and appearance of the piece. Understanding these issues as well as performing application

testing is critical before applying any varnish to a watercolor painting." Golden Heavy Gel Glass medium applies white and dries clear, and may be applied with brush or roller. **(photo 1)**



The most recent trend is to seal and mount original watercolors to a cradled box, making it ready for display, or placing into a float frame. To present a watercolor without glass and frame requires the application of a spray fixative first to prevent colors from smearing when a sealing topcoat is applied with a brush. As with all friable media, use of fixatives is necessary when no glass will be used. AND the most important fact to remember is that no framer is ethically allowed to apply a fixative, sealer, or varnish of any kind, or for any reason, only the artist may do that.

Waxing Instead

Another recent online solution to sealing the surface of a watercolor is waxing. If created on paper it will require a rigid support that would usually be supplied during traditional framing. Ampersand boards, canvas, Gatorboard, foamboard, hardwood panels, hardboard, MDF, or Dibond would all work as alternative supports. Waxing is a quick and easy process that may darken and/or enhance the artwork's colors. A thin, even layer of wax medium is applied to the surface of the painting wearing a disposable glove or lint-free cloth. Drying time depends on the type of paper, thickness of the coat, and weather conditions, and can take from 6 hours to a week to fully dry, then buff the surface by hand with a dry, lint-free cloth. Waxing also fully waterproofs the surface, where spray sealer does not. **(photo 2)**



Test samples of sampled waxes are over alcohol ink on Yupo, manually applied with a textural pattern for easier viewing. When applied smoothly, dried, and buffed they create a smoother matte or gloss finish. **(photo 3)**



Dorland's Wax Medium is a non-yellowing mixture of resin and pure beeswax that strengthens oil paint film against shrinkage and cracking while sealing out dirt, air, and moisture while maintaining luminosity and color clarity. Use directly from the jar over dried oil, cold wax, casein, watercolor, or tempera, rubbing in small circles, and let dry several days or weeks before final polishing with a soft lint free cloth. It also seals artwork with a clear, tough satin finish. It will not yellow or turn brown with age like some resin picture varnishes. **(photo 4)**



Gamblin Cold Wax Medium a mixture of natural beeswax (wax pastilles), Gamsol and a small amount of alkyd resin. The term “cold” in Cold Wax Medium refers to the fact that heat is not required for working with this wax medium, as it dries by solvent evaporation, rather than the cooling of wax, as in encaustic painting. As the Gamsol evaporates out of the medium, the soft wax hardens to the density of a beeswax candle, so though waterproof, it can still be scratched or gouged. **(photo 5)**



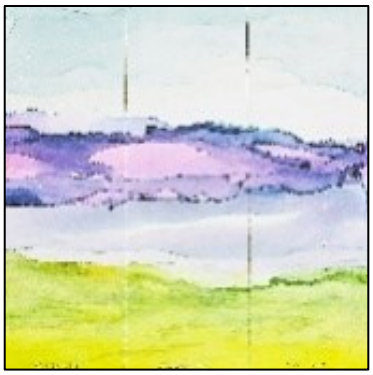
A mixed media original with heavy gesso texture, overlaid with watercolor and gouache washes,
divided visually into thirds. Left is Dorman's Wax, center is uncoated mixed media, right is Gamblin Cold Wax, all manually applied to test seal the surface. **(photo 6)** Note the darkening of the colors left and right in this photo but the alcohol ink in photo 7 has not been affected by the wax, so no darkening.

Yupo & More

Yupo--Pixiss, Nara, TerraSlate, TerraSkin--are non-porous, synthetic papers that can be mounted using high-tack pressure-sensitive adhesives or 130°F low-temperature, permanent dry mount HA board. It is favored for its contemporary look and is often used in no-frame mounting techniques. To mount a finished painting to a wood, metal, or other substrate, using traditional PVA or EVA water-based glues will not hold. YUPO is a totally inert material, but yellows without UV exposure.

Unglazed paintings on Yupo require sealing by the artist to protect the medium, but one under glass with mats need not be sealed. If unsealed, Yupo should be treated as gently as a pastel. And like a pastel, artists are resistant to applying

fixatives as they can alter the surface pigment colors. An original alcohol ink on Yupo was visually divided into thirds, leaving the center section uncoated. Dormand's Wax (L) and Gamblin Cold Wax (R) was then applied with a smooth, lint free rag to test seal for waterproofing and smearing. **(photo 7)**



Both watercolors and alcohol inks are commonly used on synthetic papers. Golden Archival Varnish is a removable acrylic varnish that is mineral-spirits-based and comes as an aerosol. During application one must be gentle and careful because light abrasion can remove both watercolor and acrylic from YUPO, even if there is no moisture involved. Once a couple of layers of topcoat have been applied, the painting is protected well enough to move on to mounting it. Acrylic Gel Medium or any gel medium will work to bond watercolor papers to a rigid substrate like a cradled box or hardboard, as well as high tack pressure sensitive and roller. And since the surface is protected it may not require glazing.

Final Thoughts

As if the lack of glazing and a frame weren't enough, a company called Art Boards has recently launched a line of mount boards conveniently called Archival Mounting Panels. These 1/4" thick Natural Maple, and 3/8" thick Natural Fiber panels have been coated with BEVA heat-activated adhesive allowing artists and photographers to mount paper and canvas to a rigid surface at home. These boards are marketed as "…fully archival and foolproof…just heat them in a conventional oven, toaster oven, or use household iron to activate (the adhesive), then quickly place the artwork, paper or canvas on top...apply pressure using a brayer or soft rag, and the bond is made." What could possibly go wrong?

Art materials are evolving, and framers need to understand new products; hear the requests and desires of their artist customers; and be prepared to discuss framing options, preservation, and glazing issues with them. At least if they are in your shop they have decided their art either needs glazing, or they weren't successful with their toaster oven.

END

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Photo 1 – The Golden Gel was deliberately coated very texturally with a brush for demonstration.

Photo 2 – Waxing to waterproof and seal surfaces: (L) Gouache/uncoated watercolor original, strip of Gamblin Cold Wax, uncoated original, (R) strip of Dormand's Wax. Drops of water sit on top of set wax, while the center uncoated watercolor was damages by water and a Q-tip.

Photo 3 - Samples of (L to R) Dormand's Wax, Gamblin Cold Wax, and Golden Gel Gloss applied over alcohol ink on Yupo. Uncoated art to the left of each test.

Photo 4 – Test sample of Dorland's Wax Medium, a mixture of resin and pure beeswax.

Photo 5 – Test sample of Gamblin Cold Wax Medium, a mixture of wax pastilles, Gamsol, and alkyd resin.

Photo 6 - A mixed media original with heavy gesso texture, overlaid with watercolor and gouache washes, divided visually into thirds. Left is Dorman's Wax, center is uncoated mixed media, right is Gamblin Cold Wax, all manually applied to test seal the surface.

Photo 7 – Original Alcohol Ink on Yupo visually divided into thirds (center is uncoated original) then wax sealed with strips of Dormand's Wax (L) and Gamblin Cold Wax (R) to test sealing, waterproofing, and smearing.

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