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ASK THE EXPERTS

## Studio Craft: Fixing an Acrylic Top Coat



**Ask the Experts:** “I applied a coat of Gloss Medium to my finished painting as a varnish, but I kept brushing into it for too long, and now there are some textured places that don’t look good. The brush marks make awful glare, and I don’t think I can show this painting the way it looks now. Is there any way to fix it myself? Hiring a restorer is out of the question for me.”

**A:** Before making any suggestions, we need to state that we are not conservation professionals, and cannot give any qualified advice about treating valuable works of art. Please be aware that amateur attempts to fix damaged art objects can go very wrong, and can result in the destruction of the artwork. No untrained individual, no matter how skilled as an artist, should attempt to apply conservation treatments to the work of others, especially on valuable or antique objects.

Because this is your painting, recently executed by your own hand, provided you are prepared to assume all risks, we can share a few possible options as studio artists, based on what we might do on our own artwork, if similarly affected.

Unfortunately, we think you are going to be pretty limited in what you can do to remedy the imperfect top coat. Gloss Acrylic Medium and other acrylic products bond more or less irreversibly with other acrylic layers. Any solvent that would be able to remove the dry gloss medium layer would certainly affect paint layers beneath. As we see it, this leaves you three options.

### Apply an additional top coat

It may be possible to apply a different acrylic medium which will fill, level and obscure irregularities in the imperfect gloss medium layer. If a new coating levels out the surface, it may reduce glare and make the piece more presentable. As with the gloss medium layer, any additional acrylic dispersion medium will become a permanent part of the picture, along with any further imperfections.

### Reduce the texture

If the main problem with the imperfect top coat is that the texture makes the piece difficult to display due to glare, it might be possible to reduce the amount of texture by abrading slightly with extra fine sandpaper or steel wool. Depending on the amount of texture from the support material (e.g. canvas weave) and the thickness of the top layer, it could be very difficult or impossible to carry this out without removing some color.

If the painting is on canvas, in order to prevent creating a ghost impression of the stretcher frame, insert stiff chipboard shims between the canvas and stretchers from behind and support the canvas when sanding to prevent sagging. Stop sanding at the first sign that color is lifting. Remember, the objective is to remove the minimum amount of gloss medium necessary to reduce glare; do

not try to fully remove the entire layer, unless your intention is to sand into the paint and rework the image.

Following the process of abrasion, wipe away all dust with a damp cloth, allow the surface to dry. Because the sanded surface may have a semi-opaque, frosted appearance, it may be necessary to re-coat with a smooth, clear acrylic product or varnish.

### **Leave it alone**

If there is any chance you will be seeking professional conservation services, or if you are not confident in your ability to apply any in-studio remedy, it may be best to simply leave the picture in its current state rather than risking damage. Preserving the painting in its current condition leaves all options open for later treatments. You could apply a removable picture varnish to possibly make the work more presentable in the interim, but make sure to use a synthetic resin product that is reversible with light duty solvents

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