



Utrecht Art Supplies

Studio Craft: Protecting Art in Challenging Conditions

Ask the Expert: "I am finishing a painting for a hospital and it is to have a 'coating' so that it is cleanable. They suggest 'a clear archival UV coat to prevent damage from regular sanitizing and wiping.' I use oil paints. What should I use?"



Vigorous regular cleaning is OK for pots and pans, but not for paintings! (Image: André Bouys, "The Scrubber" 1737)

A: There are a number of acrylic solution varnishes with UV light stabilizers available, but we're not aware of any coating or varnish that would protect an oil painting from repeated "sanitizing and wiping". Your client needs to understand that paintings can be occasionally dusted, but actual cleaning should only be done by a trained professional.

Strictly speaking, the term "archival" means something suitable for long-term contact with important objects, safe and stable to museum or library standards. Products sold for "archival" applications can't enhance permanence if they aren't used properly or if artwork is handled in a destructive manner. Even if you were to apply a varnish that can withstand regular janitorial cleaning, it would still not afford protection for the bonds between support, priming and paint

layers which can be compromised by changes in humidity and the pressure of the hand during cleaning. In other words, the varnish itself might withstand cleaning, but the sticking power of the paint beneath could be affected, resulting in eventual cracking or paint loss.

The best solution in my opinion would be to have the piece framed under glass (UV protective glass if the client wishes). If they insist on varnish alone, the client should understand that any damage resulting from amateur cleaning attempts does not mean your painting is defective in any way.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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