

## Medium / Varnish

### Source:

The medium I use was originally based on the work of Don Jusko and his research into media. (<http://www.realcolorwhell.com/mediatable.htm>). I've since altered the formula to fit my needs.

### Attributes:

When applied as a varnish, which is how I use it (see below), it creates a uniform, satin finish on the painting. It brings out the color of any sunken-in pigments, similar to "oiling out," but without being overly glossy. With a satin finish, it's easier to view and photograph the painting.

Being similar to a retouch varnish, it doesn't give the painting the complete protection of a final varnish (which usually contains Damar), but it will afford the painting some protection. I always apply a final coat to the painting to ensure a uniform satin surface.

### Ingredients:

1 part linseed oil  
1 part safflower oil  
1/2 part stand oil  
1/2 part Dorlands Wax  
and for a 16 oz. jar, 1 1/2 teaspoons Cobalt or Japan drier. (Slightly less than 2%)

Lately, I've been experimenting with reducing slightly the amount of wax and increasing slightly the amount of stand oil, which will impart a slightly greater amount of gloss. With less wax, the medium is more fluid.

You can use standard 16 oz jars, such as a clean salsa or peanut butter jar. Place a piece of masking tape up the side of the jar and mark off 1" increments. Pour linseed oil up to the first 1" mark, safflower oil up to the second mark, stand oil up to 1/2" and finally add Dorland's Wax up to another 1/2" for a total of 3". With the lid on the jar, gently heat it. (Immersing it in a pan of hot water will work but, for convenience, I use a Mr. Coffee mug warmer.) When the wax has completely melted, shake the jar vigorously for about 30 seconds, then add 1 teaspoon of Cobalt drier. Immediately cap it and shake it again thoroughly. (Do NOT add the drier before the heating process. It's highly toxic and will give off fumes as it heats. Add it only after heating and mixing the four other ingredients.)

When the mixture cools, the consistency will be that of soft, room temperature butter. But when applied, it immediately becomes semi-liquid, with the viscosity of a thick syrup. With the addition of the drier, the medium will darken. However, because it's applied over the painting in a very thin layer, it will not noticeably darken the painting.

### Using the medium:

Traditionally, media are used *during* the painting process: a small amount is mixed into each pile of pigment on the palette while painting. I do not use it this way. I apply it only one time and *before* the painting process.

Beginning a new painting, I paint without the use of any medium and allow the painting to dry. Then, prior to working on the painting again, I scoop out a liberal amount of the medium and apply it with a paper towel or cloth over the entire painting. Using the side of a roll of paper towels, I then wipe off the excess so only a very thin, even layer of the medium remains on the canvas. It should glisten on the surface but not run. I then paint directly into the wet medium. After finishing for the day, the painting is allowed to dry, which usually takes 3 or 4 days. The process is then repeated for each painting session until the painting is finished.

### **Using the medium as a glaze:**

The medium works perfectly for glazing. I apply it in one of two ways:

1. For touching up or a small area on the canvas, I apply the medium as described above, then use a brush to work in a very small amount of a transparent pigment into the medium in the area I wish to glaze. If it's too strong, it's easily removed. If more is needed, I simply use more pigment. The medium will remain workable for several hours.
2. If I wish to apply a color (or a gradient involving one or more colors) to the entire painting or a large area of the painting, I first mix the color(s) into a pile of the medium on my palette and then apply it to the surface with a cloth.

### **NOTES:**

- By adding slightly less or more wax, it's possible to control the satin/glossy quality of the finish. More wax will result in a more mat finish, less will create a more glossy finish.
- While painting, when a mistake is made and paint is wiped off, the medium will also be removed. Don't reapply the medium. Simply continue to paint until the end of the day and allow the painting to dry. If the painting is finished, any mat areas can be touched up with the medium. If unfinished, any mat areas will be brought back to life when the entire painting is again covered with medium prior to painting.
- Why apply the medium to the entire canvas rather than mixing in a small amount with each mixture of pigments? There are four advantages:
  1. Mixing the medium to each pile of paint takes both time and concentration—it's important to mix the correct amount in each pile. I find that process distracting while painting.
  2. When brushing wet paint over dry paint, the thin film of medium on the surface will feather the brushstrokes, creating the appearance of wet-into-wet painting.
  3. By applying the medium to the entire painting before working on it, any sunken-in pigments are immediately brought back to their true value and color relationships by the medium. It's then easier to judge the painting before starting work.
  4. When painting in thin layers, the medium introduces a translucency that can enhance the color and richness of the paint.
- Using the medium works beautifully over a warm underpainting, before applying color.
- It's not necessary to cover the entire painting before starting a session if you haven't repainted the entire painting in a prior session. That is, if I spend a day working on just the sky of a large painting, then the next time I'm ready to resume work on the painting, I'll apply the medium only to the sky before beginning to paint. This avoids having several layers of medium upon medium on the painting, which can complicate the drying process.
- Over the last several years, I've slightly changed my method of using the medium as I've just described it. Now, I will often use no medium during the first several painting sessions, applying it only when the painting is nearly completion. The paintings tend to dry slightly sooner without medium. It's just saves a little time.