

Gainsborough Varnish Remover or Gainsborough Mastic Varnish Remover?

QUESTION:

"I don't know if I need to order Varnish Remover, 4557, or Mastic Varnish Remover, 7167, (plus Neutralizer). As they are so expensive, is there any way of guessing first which type it is likely to be? Age of painting, for example? It looks like 1800s. See photos attached. Thank you."

*Letter to customer from Cheryl
Lekas, Gainsborough Products, LLC*

"Dear

LION Picture Framing Supplies Ltd asked me to respond to your question about whether you need to order Gainsborough's Varnish Remover or Gainsborough's Mastic Varnish Remover to clean your oil painting, and if there is any way of guessing in advance which remover will be the best choice.

Unfortunately, I'm not aware of a way to determine in advance which varnish remover you need and I'm not able to tell by looking at the photo you kindly provided. A painting varnished in the 1800's could have Damar or Mastic Varnish on it (usually a yellow discoloration), or it could have a more difficult to remove protective coating of Copal Varnish or Linseed Oil (usually a darker discoloration), which might require using a different product.

We usually test with PC-123 Varnish Remover first because Damar Varnish tends to be more commonly applied and PC-123 Varnish Remover is a good remover for Damar Varnish. If PC-123 Varnish Remover did not produce the desired results then we would test with PC-151 Mastic Varnish Remover, then with PC-127 Varnish Softener and lastly, with PC-211 Linoxyn Remover until we found a product that successfully removed the varnish or linseed oil coating on the painting.

Gainsborough's PC-11 Neutralizer is used in conjunction with all of Gainsborough's cleaners, varnish removers and linoxyn remover to stop the cleaning action and wipe away the solvent residue and loosened dirt/varnish.

If any of Gainsborough's cleaners, varnish removers or linoxyn remover are too strong, you can dilute them with Gainsborough's PC-11 Neutralizer. Caution must always be used, because it is possible to damage an oil painting by over-cleaning.



You may wish to refer to our "Cleaning an Oil Painting" article, PUB033, on Lion's website.

Here is a test you can perform to help determine if you have smoke and dirt on an oil painting or aged varnish. Apply some saliva to a cotton-tip swab and gently roll back and forth in a small area of the painting near the edge. Saliva has enzymes and is a mild cleaner. Do not substitute soap and water, which can damage an oil painting. If you see dirt coming off on the swab and see a brighter area in the painting, then that might indicate that the painting will benefit with just a cleaning with Gainsborough's PC-27 Emulsion Cleaner. If you don't see any yellowing or darkening of your swab then you most likely have discolored varnish or aged linseed oil on the painting and using a varnish remover or linoxyn remover will most likely be required. Often if you look at the edge of the painting that is covered by the picture frame you can see the original color of the painting. This gives you good idea of what the painting will look like once it is cleaned.

I'm sorry that I'm not aware of a way to determine which varnish remover you need to clean your oil painting in advance of purchasing the supplies.

Thank you for your interest in Gainsborough's oil painting restoration products, supplied by LION Picture Framing Supplies, Ltd.

Sincerely, Cheryl Lekas Gainsborough Products, LLC"
www.gainsboroughproducts.com