

Fixing Oil and Wax Pastels – Tips from Golden Paints



Image: Oil paint layers lifting and cracking over wax crayons.

Oil pastels are made with non-drying oils and wax, which means they never dry or cure. This can be a great feature as they remain workable indefinitely, but it makes varnishing pretty much impossible as subsequent coatings do not adhere on these pastels permanently.

Image 1 shows detail of a wax crayon painting that was completely painted over in oil. The oil layers seemed to adhere at first, but several years later, cracked open and delaminated. Although we have no long-term testing of GOLDEN Varnishes over oil and wax pastels, we would expect similar results and do not recommend varnishing these materials at all.

Artists who wish to use a varnish or fixative on their oil pastels despite the risk of future delamination will likely encounter a second problem, namely tackiness. Especially softer oil pastels remain tacky, also when varnished. In our testing we found that GOLDEN Archival Varnish Gloss remains very tacky over some oil pastels, also when applied as a second coating over various fixatives. Fixatives contain significantly less binder than a varnish and therefore might perform better on these pastels in terms of tackiness.

Of the Sennelier Oil Pastel Fixative and the Lascaux Fixative, the Sennelier product gave the best results, with the oil pastel remaining tacky only ever so slightly. However, product formulations can always change without notice and testing remains essential.

⇒ Oil and wax pastels do not cure and are best shown behind glass. We do not recommend varnishing, but if varnishing is attempted, follow manufacturer's recommendations for sealants and fixatives.

Comments from other Golden Paints Art Educators:

"Switch to RandF pigment sticks for a similar and final mark making. Final because they are oil based and should not be followed with more acrylics, but unlike oil pastels, they would not require any other fixing once dry. Dry time varies by color but no longer than around 14 days at the long end."

"It's always going to smear. The easiest solution is don't do it. The second solution is to mat the work and put it under glass. The third solution is to let the oil pastels do what oil pastels do ... don't completely dry. Once an oil pastel, always an oil pastel. They are exceptionally beautiful. But know what you're working with."