

AIMEE ERICKSON'S PAINT CLUB

HOW TO SHELLAC PAPER FOR OIL PAINTING

Why paper? Paper is a great surface: it's inexpensive, which can encourage creativity; it's readily available; it has a nice range of surface texture, so is pleasant to paint on; and it is not bulky, so it stores easily.

Why shellac? It protects the fibers in the paper from being degraded over time by the slight acidity in the oil paint binder. Shellac also dries much more quickly than gesso, isn't sticky (so it won't glue the pages together) and does not warp the paper.

One coat or two? One coat is good. It will soak right in and protect the fibers, preserving a dry, textural quality to the paper's surface (this is how I like it). If you want a slicker, less absorbent surface, give it a second coat.

MATERIALS

- Zinsser Bullseye Shellac, Clear, 1 quart can from the hardware store
- Paint can opener
- Stir stick (you can use the same one every time)
- A foam brush (disposable)*
- Paper. Whatever type of paper you want to paint on—mat board, sketchbook, watercolor paper, really any type of paper.
- A hammer to put the lid back on the can.
- Disposable gloves are nice if you want to keep the shellac off your hands.

LET'S DO THIS

1. Set out all your materials. Protect your work surface if that's your style.
2. Use the paint can opener to take the lid off the can of shellac.
3. The solids will have settled to the bottom of the can. Stirred not shaken: use the stir stick to stir the shellac. *If you shake the can, bubbles will form in the shellac, which will not pop, and will make little craters in the film when it dries.*
4. Dip the foam brush into the shellac, then go straight to your paper. It'll soak in right away. Work smoothly and quickly and spread it as best you can, aiming for an efficient single coat. Dip again as needed.
5. Dry time. It dries fast, in one to two minutes. If you're shellacking a sketchbook, you can do multiple pages or even the entire book at once as long as you allow air to flow between the pages.
6. Cleanup. Put the lid back on the shellac (wipe out the channel with a paper towel if you like things tidy) and tap with the hammer to seal.

*TO RE-USE YOUR BRUSH

Shellac's solvent is denatured alcohol. Decant some denatured alcohol into a small container with a well-fitting lid. Let the brush sit in it for a few minutes before you go to apply shellac; this will soften up the bristles from the last time. When you're done, rinse the brush in the denatured alcohol again, blot it with a paper towel, then let it air dry.