

# Caring for your collection



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Building a collection makes you the custodian, as much as the owner. We understand the responsibility that artwork brings, and we recognise that protecting your collection is more important than recompense.

Here are some key considerations when caring for your collection.

## Conservation and restoration

Most fine art damage is caused by breakage or accidental damage.

When choosing hardware with which to display an artwork, first inspect each piece to make sure that its structural craftsmanship is sound, and it does not have inherent damage.

We recommend consulting a conservator who can:

- Examine the condition of the artwork and record any defects so that any change in condition can be traced back to understand when and how. This will help you to prevent further damage
- Assess any untreated pre-existing damage or previous repairs to prevent future problems
- Check frame supports or hanging hardware as both can weaken through time
- Check the mitres of old frames to make sure they are not separating
- Replace old hardware

## Inventory and cataloguing tips

- An inventory is necessary because it determines the physical condition as well as confirming the current location of the artwork prior to shipment. It can also be used to set priorities for conservation and restoration
- Provide fine art handlers with as much detail of the artwork as possible and keep a note for your own records. i.e. dimensions, weight, materials & techniques, inscriptions & markings, distinguishing features, title, date or period, maker etc
- Catalogue your collection and make sure it corresponds to the inventory. This method of record keeping will help document the collection and is crucial for the protection of art against crime
- Photographing your art collection can be vital to help police officers identify and recover stolen objects. Be sure to take close-ups of inscriptions, markings and any damage or repairs
- Keep collection documents in a secure place as these will be needed should the worst happen

## Climatic Conditions

Leading museums agree that the best suited temperature for displaying art is 20-21°C and 45-65% relative humidity. Maintaining this consistent temperature and relative humidity will greatly help to prevent damage to artwork.

If your collection includes a variety of materials (furniture, design, paintings, works on paper, photography, metal sculptures etc), then the climate should be geared to the most sensitive material.

### Works on paper and photography

- Ultraviolet-light-filtering glass will protect fragile works from light
- Special framing can help to avoid the diffuse of pigments
- Backing and matting should always be composed of high quality, Ph neutral materials
- Be sure of ample separation between work and both frame and glazing
- When cleaning the glass protecting the work use a soft cloth. Never spray cleaning agent on the glass as it can seep under the frame
- Most photography can be stored in paper enclosures and some can be kept in special kinds of plastic enclosures. Storage in plastic enclosures is not suitable for transparencies from the 1950s, film-based negatives, hand-coloured prints, prints with surface damage or glass or metal based photographs

### Bronze Sculpture

- The most delicate part of bronze is patina
- For cleaning you can use a dust rag, soft shoe brush or duster
- For heavy cleaning use neutral soap with water and soft cloth. Wipe clean, dry with the rag then allow sculpture to air dry completely
- Do not use any cleanser or solvent to clean the sculpture as they will scratch surfaces
- If the bronze sculpture is suited for waxing, furniture wax can generally be used

### Furniture

- Check regularly for traces of woodworm. Sawdust underneath the furniture can be a sign of active infestation. If furniture has active infestation it should be isolated immediately by placing it in a large sealed bag. Fumigation will be necessary
- Avoid placing antique furniture on floor heating
- Direct sunlight can lead to discolouring and shrinkage
- Once a year, apply a coating of good paste wax to maintain furniture
- Dry dust with a soft cloth for routine cleaning

## Preventing water, fire and burglary

### Water damage

- In the winter the temperature should not fall below 15°C. This prevents mildew starting to grow due to an increase in the relative humidity and prevents the risk of water freezing, causing water pipes to burst
- Ensure gutters are cleaned frequently, especially in the autumn. Dirt and leaves blocking them can cause water to start to overflow into a property
- If you are leaving a property unoccupied for an extended amount of time, have a key-holder inspect it at least twice a week to identify any problems before they become too serious
- Always make sure that there is easy access to the mains water-tap. In case of a burst water pipe immediately turn off the mains water supply and call a plumber

## Fire damage

- We recommend smoke or 'rise in heat' detectors to all fire-critical areas of your home such as the kitchen, laundry room and all exit routes such as staircases and boiler rooms
- All devices should be subject to a maintenance contract and should be checked frequently in order to make sure that they are up-to-date and ready for use
- We recommend that small multi-function fire extinguishers are to hand in all critical areas of the home
- Three bar electric fires should be replaced by safer, oil filled radiator type heaters
- Faulty electrical wiring can cause fires. A qualified electrical engineer should test any electrical wiring that is over twenty years old

## Burglary

- Burglar alarms should always be left set and doors and windows should be locked when you are out. Occupancy is often the best form of security
- It is wise to be contactable whenever you are away from home for an extended period by providing a neighbour or security company with a telephone number

## Packing

Professional Fine Art handlers will be able to offer a bespoke service when designing the packing or case-making for a treasured artwork.

Depending on how the artwork is being transported (road, air, sea), the artwork should be packed appropriately for the conditions.

## Case Options

- Transporting a framed painting by truck will require a custom made case such as a travelling frame. This will provide protection to corners and sides of a painting's frame. The addition of a central strut provides extra rigidity for larger paintings
- Custom crating is one of many services professional fine art handlers offer. Their skilled craftsmen can produce a bespoke crate for the protection of an artwork

## Artwork wrapping options

- Kraft paper gives protection during handling and transportation
- Glassine reduces the possibility of abrasion during transit and handling
- Polyethylene is waterproof. An item wrapped in polyethylene will maintain the relative humidity in which it has been stored or displayed reducing the risk of a change in the water content of the item due to outside changes in temperature
- Putting paintings in an inner packing case provides substantial protection against the possibility of abrasion to the picture frame and gives further protection from damage
- Silica gel can be put inside the packing case to provide protection from the possibility of damage caused by the change in relative humidity. It does this by stabilising the moisture content of materials such as wood, paper, parchment and ivory

## Furniture wrapping options

- Single/tri-wall card
- Bubble wrap provides cushion protection during handling and transport, suitable for containerised exports
- Tissue Paper/Newsprint is acid proof and provides cushion protection during handling and transportation
- Plastic furniture covers reduce the risk of condensation or water damage because plastic is non-absorbent
- Soft Tyvek is a non-abrasive, gas permeable, non-dusting, water resistant, inert material that is excellent for lining cavities and covering foam pads. It is expensive and durable and best used on highly lacquered items

## Transporting and displaying an artwork

We recommend hiring a professional installation company to prevent damage when the art is being handled - statistically art is most at risk in transit.

A fine art handler should be made aware of any access restrictions. It's best if the installer make a visit in advance to clarify the overall project.

Paintings should not be on shelves or mantels as they will be in danger of falling.

Protect fine art by installing it at a safe distance from direct heat sources such as radiators and electric heaters. Fluctuations in heat can cause long-term damage to an artwork which can lead to costly art restoration treatments.

Conserve fine art by hanging it at a safe distance from damp areas such as bathrooms, spaces with poor ventilation and steamy kitchen areas. Moisture and humidity can damage artwork significantly over time.

To limit long term damage, avoid placing objects in direct sunlight, and shield the artwork by installing UV-filters on your windows.

Sculpture or three-dimensional objects should be treated uniquely to ensure proper installation. For example, each piece should be assessed before deciding the best method of protection when packing for transit.

## Fine art storage warehousing

It is important for both private and corporate art collectors to consider the reputation of a fine art storage warehouse before entrusting them with the protection of their art.

The fine art warehouse industry is largely unregulated, so take care when choosing. Some key elements to consider:

- Do the company provide a professional art handling training program for their employees?
- Do the company carry out thorough background checks on all employees?

- Do the company employ a barcode inventory system in order to help locate items at any given time?
- Is there a central control system with camera monitors?
- What types of alarm systems are installed? Does the facility have a fire detection system that provides instant notification to the fire department?
- Is the facility climate and humidity controlled?
- Is there a plan in place to protect against infestation?

Research and identify the preventative measures a facility is taking to ensure the safety and security of the artwork, it is important to remember that fine art warehouses are not immune to everyday risks and disasters.