

# Precious Cargo: Some Things To Know When Shipping Art

by Anne Vazquez

**W**hen shipping framed items for your customers, you want to do your best to ensure they arrive at their destination in the same condition as they leave your hands. Whether the item is a gift being sent cross country or a series of framed works for a gallery exhibition, you're dealing with precious cargo, and knowing the best way to treat this process from beginning to end is key to your customer's satisfaction.

There's a number of issues to consider—protecting your customer's property from damage, ensuring arrival at the desired location, preserving the materials and labor spent in creating the frame package, and the consequences if something does go wrong. For these reasons, it's important you know the products and techniques that can minimize the risk to the items being shipped.

Broken glazing, dinged and dented corners, and punctures in the frame package are some of the dangers that framed artwork faces when making its way from Point A to Point B. By housing this artwork as safely as possible, you can ensure its integrity, as well as your reputation.

The glazing issue is two-fold. One, should I frame this with acrylic or glass? And two, how do I prevent either of these materials from being damaged in transit? This was a primary concern for Tom and Kimm Matovina, owners of Gallery Lainzberg in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

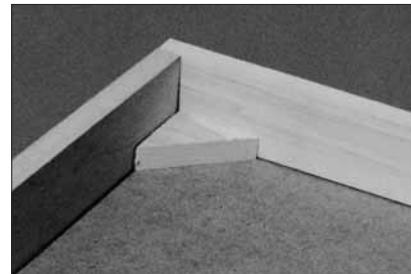
Dealing exclusively in animation art, the Matovinas moved away from catalog sales and focused on e-commerce by conducting marketing and sales through their website. Now, virtually all the artwork they sell is shipped.

For this reason, they decided to have each piece framed with UV-filtering acrylic sheet from CYRO Industries in Rockaway, New Jersey. "If we ship the cels framed in glass and that glass breaks, it's almost certain to destroy the animation cel," says Tom Matovina. He adds that since acrylic doesn't shatter like glass, they've found this the best way to protect the art from possible damage.

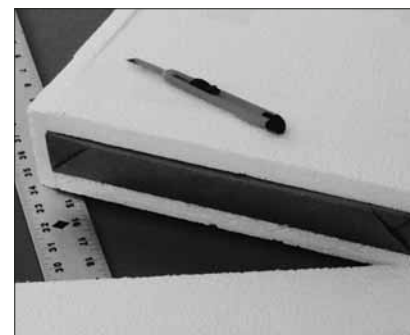
The Matovinas have also focused on shipping art in the most economical fashion. They prefer acrylic for that reason as well. "Frame weight is considerably reduced with acrylic sheet," says Jeff Gnagy, manager of The Art Cellar where the Lainzbergs have their cels framed.

Of course, there are those pieces of art that you want to frame with glass, and customers that do not want acrylic. In these cases, you could ship the piece without glazing and the recipient can arrange to have it installed by someone local to them. However, unless you can recommend a trusted contact, it may not be in your best interest to have someone else working on a piece that will have your name on it.

If you decide to ship the piece with glass installed, there are some measures you can take to protect the



*Photo 1: Since the corners of a frame or artwork can be easily damaged in transit, using corner protectors can go a long way to prevent denting.*



*Photo 2: Surrounding the frame package with Styrofoam® ensures that the item will be securely housed.*

piece. Securing the surface with masking tape is one way. Some people use regular masking tape and apply it in "X" formation (as you might do in preparation for a hurricane). It's important to make sure that whatever tape you use will not leave a residue when removed. (Static electricity may also form when you remove the tape. This may be a concern especially with framed pastels or fragile items.)

One product made specifically for this purpose is Glass Skin made by Airfloat in Tupelo, Mississippi. It is a low tack masking tape on a 12" wide roll. It can prevent the glass from breaking by minimizing its movement, and if the glass does break, the tape keeps it in place so the shards don't fall on the artwork.

Other common damage can be

the frame corners separating in transit. Corner reinforcements can address this problem, as well as scratches or dents. It's important to make sure the item is packed tightly to minimize jostling. There should be at least 1½" to 2" of packing material between the artwork and the inside edge of the carton. Bubble wrap, "foam peanuts," or Styrofoam® are some padding options.

Art.com, an e-commerce art and framing company in Raleigh, North Carolina, ships several thousand packages (of both framed and unframed art) each day from its facility. As such, it's very important for the company to have secure packing methods. CEO Joshua Chodniewicz says, "The key to our packaging is a unique insert, which is made of solid cardboard and bubble wrap."

If you're sending more than one piece, you can package them individually. If you don't want to do that, you can package more than one together in a carton. Al Ferrentino, owner of Now Freight Systems in South Kearney, New Jersey, often ships multiple pieces for trade show booths. He suggests you "layer the items like a cake." For best protection, you can do this using a wooden crate with slats. Package each item individually and then pad on all sides with packing materials.

Ferrentino also recommends using screws, rather than nails, to secure crates. This is because screws can be removed more easily than nails. When using a wooden crate, it's also better to use one made of plywood rather than pressed wood, which can come apart if exposed to moist conditions.

Shippers are accustomed to handling packages with the address label right side up. Take care where you place the label to maximize the proper handling. Use arrows to indicate the

top of the package to minimize damage. It may serve as a reminder for handlers to make sure the package stays upright. You can also mark the package with "Fragile" or "This Side Up" to encourage extra caution. It may also be helpful to indicate where the package should be opened so that the recipient will open it right side up.

If, for some reason, the address on the outside should become obliterated, the shipper would not be able to decipher the recipient's information. You can try to ensure safe delivery by placing another address label inside the package. In the cold weather, it may be better to use a black marker to label packages instead of adhering an address label since cold weather can affect the glue on some labels.

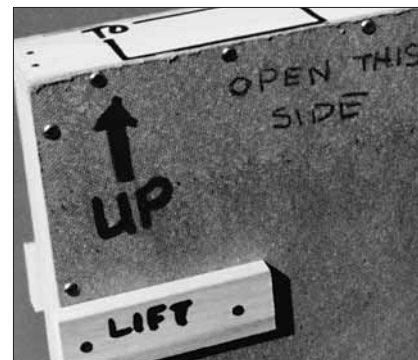
### **Insurance**

It's important to look at your business insurance and know what it covers. When purchasing your insurance, ask about stipulations for items in transit. For example, some policies stipulate a limit on coverage depending on the time in transit. In turn, that will affect how you decide to ship the artwork.

For instance, Capax, a provider of business insurance for framers, limits its coverage to packages shipped within the continental U.S. However, the Modesto, California-based company does not put a limit on time in transit.

Also, ask your carrier about the specifics of insuring a piece of artwork with them. Some art items are considered irreplaceable and they will put a limit on how much they cover, or not insure them at all. Others cover only certain kinds of loss or damage.

You may want to insure the amount of your deductible with the



*Photo 3: Writing arrows and instructions on the shipping carton is one more way to try to minimize damage by handlers.*

carrier and then your insurance for property in transit will cover the rest. Kirk Giles, Underwriting Manager at Capax agrees this is a valid approach. That way the shipper avoids paying twice for insurance protection, he adds.

Becoming proficient in successfully shipping art will make both you and your customers happy. Be sure to arm yourself with the tools needed and take the time to bundle them up. Remember the old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." ■