

A Potpourri of Framing Tips

by Diane Day, CPF

Cleaning a Painting

Cleaning the surface of a painting can be a delicate and risky job. What works on one painting may not on another. Some conditions that affect cleaning are:

- What is the age of the painting?
- Are there several layers of paint?
- Is the paint thin or thick?
- Is there a protective coating? If so, what type is it?
- Is the painting oil or acrylic?
- What type of material is the painting on?
- What kind of dirt, grime, soot, etc. is on the painting?
- Has it been cleaned before?
- What is the present condition of the painting?

After answering these questions, the right solvent mixture must be chosen. Then the correct techniques need to be used in its application. In other words, this means that cleaning a painting is a job for a conservator.

Environmental Conditions

Relative Humidity (RH): This is based on the amount of water that a given volume of air can hold at its saturation point. High humidity encourages mold growth and invites insects. Generally, 50% RH is considered a good level to maintain for works on paper.

Temperature: Because heat is related to humidity, a sudden drop in temperature can cause humidity to reach dangerous levels in a short time. Generally 70°F is considered a good level to

maintain for works on paper.

Light: Low levels are best and as little natural light as possible. Avoid placing lights close to artwork. Five foot candles or 50 lux ("low" dinner lighting) is recommended for paper and textiles. Fifteen to 20 foot candles or 150 to 200 lux is recommended for moderately sensitive objects like oil paintings.

Air Pollution: Keep the amount of dust and dirt to a minimum. It is not advisable to expose artwork to new wood products, new carpeting, or household chemicals because the off-gassing can be harmful.

Pests: Poor housekeeping creates an inviting environment for pests. If you find insects in a frame package and do not know how to handle them, contact an entomologist. A local agricultural department or service, or a local university should be helpful.

Making Decorative Tapes

Take a sheet of decorative paper and apply a sheet of pressure-sensitive adhesive to the back. Do not remove the back cover sheet on the adhesive. Tape the entire thing to a matboard and cut into strips as needed.

Making Mirror Cords

Buy rosettes and cording at a local fabric or home decor store. Sew the cording and a rosette to picture wire and then attach the wire to the frame.

Mounting Laminated Items

Try using vinyl wallpaper paste.

Mounting Stamps

In order to avoid activating the adhesive, use Mylar-D sleeves or stamp mounts.

Removing Soot

Call a conservator. Do not handle the artwork or otherwise disturb the soot. By doing so, you can make the soot particles penetrate the artwork and may then become impossible to remove. In order to maximize successful results, the artwork must be handled properly.

Some Fabrics Hold Up Better Than Others

Silk loses half of its breaking strength after 200 hours of full sun.

Jute loses half of its breaking strength after about 200 to 300 hours of full sun.

Cotton loses half of its breaking strength after about 400 to 480 hours of full sun. *Wool* loses half of its breaking strength after about 480 hours of full sun.

Storage Units/Flat Files

Metal units are better than wood, especially for storing works on paper. If wood must be used, all surfaces should be sealed, lined with lignin-free board or polyester film (Mylar). When choosing metal, pick an anodized aluminum or powder-coated steel unit.

When Handling Artwork

Wear clean, white gloves or wash your hands before handling artwork. Acids, salts, and oils from your skin, as well as dirt, perspiration, and hand creams can cause staining.

Weights

Various materials and objects can be used for weights. Take scuba diver weights or large metal washers and cover them with felt. Squares of glass covered with matboard and taped at the edges will also work.