

## *Personal Property: Timely Response and Triage*

### Collectors off-site Information:

- Insurance policy information
- Off site collection inventory (with a map of items per room and floor)
- Collection valuation/appraisals
- Documentation/photography
  
- Resources:
- Experts/conservators
- Art packer
- Art transport company (with climate controlled, alarmed, air ride trucks)
- Fine art storage facility or warehouse if necessary
- In high security situations: security/escorts

### Action Steps:

- As soon as the property can be safely entered, immediately document in situ and contact your broker/insurance and experts/conservators. Your conservators will advise on the process of response and removing the items of concern. Items with damage or of concern should be moved as soon as possible to a controlled area where they can be kept safe from further damage and exposures.
- As items are removed, they should be inventoried with a brief written notation and photographed. Numbering each item and creating an inventory will assist in the management of the recovery process. Although it is important to address the items in a timely manner, a few moments spent ensuring precise records are kept can be invaluable going forward.
- During recovery, if items become structurally unsound, be sure to retain all components where possible and keep them together. Bag and label any pieces which come loose for easy identification.
- Never assume an item is a loss. During the recovery stage, all items that can be removed should be considered for possible conservation, unless a conservator deems an item a total loss.
- Wet or damaged property should be transported as soon as possible to a conservation center or temporary facility for immediate safety and triage if possible. When dealing with important and/or high-end property, experts should assist with the arrangements to transport items in a climate controlled-air ride truck. If it is necessary to ship property through Federal Express or another service, begin the process immediately so that items can be assessed by experts prior to the occurrence of any extreme drying which can potentially cause damage. Books and works of art on paper can be shipped in coolers with ice packs so that they can be kept in their current state.
- When handling wet items where the threat of mold growth is present, wear protective clothing such as respirators, goggles, boots and gloves and in the case of extreme conditions, Tyvek suits.
- Wet items with mold growth should be carefully cleaned under controlled conditions to minimize dispersal of spores and halt the process of contamination by a professional.
- During triage, conservators will carefully review each piece and undertake controlled and monitored drying as necessary.

- Once items are stabilized, a conservator should prepare a thorough condition report of each piece and provide detailed treatment recommendations with photography for your review. This process should include consultation with clients to determine which items are eligible for conservation and expected treatment outcomes.

*Personal Property: Disaster Response Procedures  
Do's and Don'ts*

*Once an emergency has occurred, there are several steps you can take to guard against further damage:*

- After a water loss, *never stand damaged works of art upright*. Lay them flat on a level surface to prevent water from running down the piece and pooling at the bottom, which can cause severe localized damage. It is easier to restore a piece that has moderate damage dispersed evenly across the surface than to repair radical damage concentrated in one area.
- Do not wipe the surface of a wet painting. When wet, the paint layer is fragile and can be easily separated from the canvas.
- If you can, send wet items to a conservator immediately. ~~With some works of art, particularly paper, a~~ conservator has the most success while they are still damp.
- If not, begin drying the items to prevent mold growth. Do not attempt to dry art in the sun; this may discolor works of art on paper. Place items in a cool room with indirect fans and portable dehumidifiers. It is important to reduce the humidity in the room slowly, rather than have the work of art undergo another severe change in environmental conditions.
- Wet photos, books, postcards, stamps or documents that have stuck together should not be separated. Either freeze them or keep them wet and send them overnight in a cooler packed with gel-packs to prevent thawing or drying.
- If a work under glass appears to be stuck to the glass, *do not attempt to separate it*, as this will likely cause additional damage. Use masking tape to mark the front of the glass with an X so that if the glass breaks during shipping, the tape can hold the broken shards of glass in place and prevent further damage to the piece.

*Long Term Collection Care*

**Temperature and Humidity**

Two of the most important considerations for the preservation of an art collection are the temperature and humidity where they are stored and displayed. Rapid fluctuations in either can cause items to expand and contract, destabilizing support structures. Conversely, consistent temperature and humidity levels can help preserve your collection for generations to come. Keeping humidity within a moderate range can help to prevent mold growth and deter insect infestations, while cooler temperatures can minimize the process of aging and deterioration. With that in mind, the following guidelines are recommended levels for establishing a proper environment for a collection:

Many types of art respond well to relative humidity levels between 40 and 55 percent, and temperatures between 65 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit. These average temperatures are maintained by most museums that house art in a

variety of media but are not appropriate for all collections. In general, works of art are subject to condition issues if exposed to extreme temperature or humidity levels. In particular, when a work of art is subject to radical changes in humidity and temperature, especially over a short period of time, it is most susceptible to damage. Experts have experimented with different ratios of temperature and humidity for the storage of sensitive materials. If your collection contains sensitive materials, it is best to consult a conservator with expertise in art storage issues.

As many thermostats can be imprecise, you may want to consider installing a compact digital thermohygrometer in areas where art is stored or displayed. A dehumidifier may be necessary in damp areas, especially during summer months. An evaporative humidifier may be necessary during the winter and in dry climates. These can be found either through a home improvement store or [www.conservationresources.com](http://www.conservationresources.com).

### **Location**

When planning to display art, choice of location is an important factor in minimizing damage caused by climatic changes, light exposure and accidental injury.

In general, display items on interior dividing walls rather than on outer perimeter walls that can experience greater climatic variations. If art is to be installed on exterior walls, placing rubber spacers on the back of the frame can allow air to circulate and minimize harm.

Placing art objects near fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources can cause increased exposure to elevated temperatures, soot, and rapidly fluctuating humidity levels. Proximity to heating and cooling vents should be avoided for the same reasons. Art should not be hung in bathrooms, below pipes or near any exposed water sources. Display of three-dimensional and framed art in high-traffic areas can invite accidental damage. Items in hallways and dining rooms, in particular, should be hung high enough to avoid impact with handbags, chair backs, or doors.

### **Light**

Controlling the amount of light exposure is also critical to the long-term preservation of an art collection. Excessive light exposure can cause irreversible damage to art. Light is particularly harmful to works of art on paper, such as photographs, watercolors, items with colored inks and any type of negative. Light damage is also cumulative and the subtle changes that occur may not be immediately detectable. UV exposure may manifest itself as brittleness, darkening, bleaching, yellowing, general fading or the change of only certain colors.

Here are some general guidelines to consider:

- Art should always be kept away from any direct light, since fluorescent light and sunlight contain high levels of UV radiation.
- Picture lights mounted to frames should be avoided. They can create, "hot spots." They can also cause damage to the work if they fall or break.
- Keep curtains or shades drawn and lights off when the room is not in use.
- UV3 Plexiglas can be used when framing works of art or with the use of vitrines.
- UV protective film can be installed on windows where necessary.
- Museums rotate works every three to six months – consider giving your art a break by putting it in storage in exchange for something that has not been displayed recently.
- The eye can be deceived and should not be trusted with measurement of light. A handheld light meter, such as one might use when measuring light for a photographic exposure, can be used to measure light falling on your art work. This method, however, does not measure UV radiation. A meter for UV may be worth purchasing if a significant art investment is in need of protection.

- Know your art: certain words will fade in only a few foot candles of light. In these instances, the above listed measures may not be sufficient. Identifying these works is most important and should be done with the assistance of art professionals.

### **Framing**

Framing materials can be a compliment to a work of art and can also offer structural support and protection against minor environmental hazards. More importantly, inappropriate framing media can cause damage. These general guidelines can help with maintaining and framing your art to conservation standards:

- Framed paper items should only be mounted and matted with museum-standard acid-free materials, which are neutral or alkaline (have a pH of 7 or above). Un-matted items can become permanently stuck to the glass, particularly when exposed to high humidity levels. Direct contact with glass can also cause surface changes in the work, therefore matting or spacers are important.
- Items in contact with acidic materials can experience burns and general darkening. Spray mounts, rubber cement, laminating or tapes can cause irreversible staining, rippling and creases.
- When choosing a glazing, make sure that it offers UV-filtering protection such as UF3 Plexiglas, to reduce the impact of light exposure. While Plexiglas can be a more shatterproof alternative to glass for many framed works, powdery or loose material such as pastels or charcoal drawings should only be framed under glass. Acrylic materials can cause a static buildup that can lift these pigments away from the paper surface. UV filtering glass options are available, such as Museum Glass.
- A protective dust seal backing should be applied to avoid contamination by dirt, dust and insect pests.
- Proper hanging hardware should be attached to the frame rather than to the item's structural supports. Hang items from picture hooks, rather than nails, and always make sure there are enough to properly support the weight of the item.
- A professional art installer can assist in determining the best display and hanging system for your collection.

### **Handling**

Over-handling is an easily preventable potential source of unintended creases, stains and tears, especially for materials weakened by age or damaged by improper storage or non-archival matting and framing materials.

When handling is necessary, always use archival gloves to handle art or valuable paper materials. Simple contact with oils, perfumes, lotions or sweat present on human skin can cause discoloration. Papers and documents that are regularly accessed can be photocopied or archivally framed so that they can be read without being handled unnecessarily. While photocopying does expose papers to a short intense burst of UV radiation and is not recommended for art works, this can be less harmful to documents than regular manipulation. Never affix notes or paper clips to valuable documents. Tape or sticky notes can leave behind residues that are detrimental to paper; and, metal clips can cause creasing, corrosion and staining.

### **Storage**

Items in your collection that are particularly delicate or taken out of general display should be securely stored in an inner closet or other similarly protected environment with stable climatic conditions with a limited fluctuation in temperature and humidity. Care should be taken in choosing a proper storage location. Ideally, a room or closet should be designated for art storage and fitted with horizontal racks, and/or flat files. Art should not be stored in attics, basements, garages or other areas that can experience extreme temperature changes or are susceptible to water damage.

Framed items should be stored vertically (so hinging methods are not stressed or weakened), separated by stiff acid free boards to protect the image surfaces. Paintings that are improperly stacked can become dented or torn if the corners of one frame push into adjacent canvas surfaces.

As with items on display, art that is stored should be archivally secured using appropriate acid-free conservation materials. Textiles and unframed paper items should be stored in acid free storage boxes or placed in individual acid free folders. Separate each item with sheets of an archival storage medium.

Protective window mats can also help to avoid direct contact with the image surface. Place archival storage sheets inside each exposed window area of a mat. Items with high acid content, such as photographs or natural textile fibers, should be wrapped in un-buffered materials. Boxes, such as a Solander box, should be stored horizontally to avoid stress on the outer edges of the material.

Heavy, fragile or beaded material should be stored flat in an archival storage box with padding placed below seams or creases. Large flat textiles can also be wrapped with acid free material, rolled onto archival tubes and stored on a secure horizontal support.

Avoid mothballs and cedar chests for textile storage. They can expose items to harmful off-gassing, and do not offer protection from insect infestations. Avoid poster storage tubes, unprotected wood and wooden drawers or cardboard, cellophane, wax paper, newspaper, and dry-cleaning bags. They can cause acid burn, off-gassing, residues and stains - especially in a closed environment. Photographs should not be stored in self-stick photo albums. The adhesive can cause staining. Non-archival photo sleeves can expose materials to harmful vapors and may encourage moisture buildup.

Store items at least 4 inches above floor level to ensure that there is adequate air circulation. If you have questions about appropriate storage systems, contact a professional conservator for advice and assistance.

### **Cleaning**

Keeping your collection and storage areas clean is important for its preservation. Art, particularly paintings, should only be dusted every four to six months after a close inspection to make sure there is no loose or flaking material. Use only delicate cleaning materials such as soft brushes for exposed areas. Feather dusters should not be used as they can scratch and snag surfaces.

Over-cleaning can cause damage. Foreign materials can become imbedded. Loose or powdery surfaces can be lifted or separated. Never use liquid or commercial cleaners. They can react with the art media or expose the art to harmful fumes - this applies even for items under glass.

Vacuums with HEPA filters can remove most environmental particulates from the area around an art collection. Be sure to reach the top shelves and corner areas as well as the floor. This is often where insects reside in dust deposits. Clean and replace heating and cooling unit filters regularly. The safest way to ensure the safety of your collection is to leave all but routine dusting to a professional conservator.

### **Pests**

Humidity, warm temperatures, dust and food particles are all invitations to rodents and insects, which are naturally attracted to the cellulose fibers in many items and the adhesives used to mount them. When they are not consuming your valuables, they may be tunneling, nesting, or laying eggs, these can all cause injury to valuables.

Infestations should be handled by a conservator in conjunction with a pest elimination professional. The art objects themselves will need to be cleaned in order to eliminate re-infecting the area with insects. Some insects, such as

firebrats and silverfish, have larva and young that are nearly invisible to the eye. They can live for up to two years and go for extended periods of time with absolutely no sustenance.

Signs that you may have a pest problem include:

- Holes
- Grazed surfaces
- Droppings
- Hairs
- Skin flakes
- Bugs/Larva
- The presence of spiders (which consume insects)
- keep potted plants away from art or art storage areas as they can attract insects

### **Care of New Art Acquisitions**

When introducing new items into your collection, it is important to have them cleaned, repaired and stabilized by a professional conservator. Even light dirt films and other thin, seemingly unobtrusive films, can degrade materials. The presence of particulates can attract pests. Weak or torn areas can also threaten the structural integrity of the work in the long term. A conservator can address these issues and make sure that new acquisitions are free of insects, mold, and other potential contaminants that could spread to other items in your collection.

### **Other Environmental Hazards**

Art should be kept safe from environmental pollutants such as pesticides, cleaning fumes, air fresheners, foggers, laminates, furniture sprays or cigarette smoke.

Additionally, art should be removed from any area where painting, plastering, wallpapering carpet installation or steam cleaning will occur. All of these can create harmful fumes which can degrade the surface of art works. During any home improvement project, make sure that your collection is safe from debris. If the project is large scale or long term, you may want to move your art to a temporary storage facility for safe keeping. Return art only after the walls and floors are completely dry and chemical fumes have been cleared from the air.

### *Tips for Collectors: Packing & Shipping*

Before packing a painting or work of art, be sure that it is secure in the frame and that there are no loose pieces that could potentially damage the art while in transit. Ensure that glassine is not touching the surface of the painting to avoid adhesion to the varnish layer.

It is best to wrap paintings in glassine or paper first, which will help to ward off any condensation that might occur from moisture exposure, followed by a protective layer of Mylar or polyethylene. Dartek, a polyester sheeting that 'breathes', can be used with no inner wrapping for short trips.

Do not allow packing material to touch the surface of a painting or work of art. If need be, create a shadow box. Wrap the corners or other exposed surfaces in a thick layer of cardboard followed by a layer of bubble wrap. If a frame seems unstable, remove it and wrap it separately with cardboard and bubble wrap. Paintings should be faced with cardboard.

Do not wrap a painted surface directly in bubble wrap. Put a layer of moisture-absorbent material between the item and the bubble wrap, and apply the bubble wrap with the bubbles facing away from, rather against, the surface. This will prevent the bubbles from denting the item. The outwards-facing bubbles will also be able to better protect

the item during transport and prevent the bubble from causing a "honey-comb" effect to a painting's varnish layer. If you are reusing packing material, make sure that it is clean and free of mold, mildew or debris. It may be worth the small investment to purchase new, clean materials for each move.

For longer trips requiring transfers or overnight stays, painted works should be further packed in a cardboard box or, preferably, a custom -designed crate built by a company specializing in this field. These can even be climate-controlled for fragile pieces. Crates that are being reused, particularly if designed for a different painting, should be closely inspected to make sure that the packing material is adequate to its new task and that it has not deteriorated over time.

Try to ship artwork at the start of the work week versus the end of the work week to avoid over handling. Standard carriers will often store or pile items in a warehouse during weekends. Never roll or fold a painting using a tube. Both techniques require extensive art-handling experience and should only be carried out by conservators or professional art movers.

For short trips it may be tempting to simply wrap a painting in a towel or blanket, but this is generally not a safe method as the surface of the wrapping can scratch the surface of the painting. This is particularly true for items with loose or flaking paint, which should ride uncovered face-up. If the item must be wrapped, it is best to drape it loosely with a polyethylene drop-cloth, available from a hardware store.

If traveling by car, clear the area where the painting will be placed of any items that may come loose and either damage the item or prevent it from riding safely. In warm and humid climates, the vehicle in which the art will be transported should be pre-cooled in order to keep it in a stable environment; in northern areas, it should be preheated.

If a painting has had a long trip or if there is a climatic change in its environment and you suspect that condensation may have occurred, it should be unwrapped as soon as possible. The safest option is to hire professional art movers and packers who use climate-controlled vehicles fitted with a low-vibration "air ride" feature to transport art. During long trips the movers should ensure that the truck is protected and the temperature controlled with alarm systems for overnight stays. If you feel that your painting is not being handled correctly, let the company know of your concerns. It is recommended that professionals entrusted with your collection have had employee background checks which should be routine policy.