

Framing Focus

Preservation Considerations

Frame your art with preservation in mind and it will look like new for years to come.

If you own art there are two things you need to know. Not all artwork is alike, and none of it comes with a maintenance manual. Yet unless your artwork is cared for properly, it will deteriorate. So, how do you decide when and how to care for your artwork?

The answer to that question is complex. How the artwork was created, where it has been and under what conditions, and what kind of care or treatment it has received all affect its future care. The more you know, the better care you can give. This care starts with your decision to frame and display your art. When framing, consider these questions:



The backing board used to frame this print turned acidic, staining and darkening most of the print.

- If decorative qualities—color, style, design—are your most important considerations, then you may choose framing materials and techniques based solely on your decorating needs.

- If the longevity and preservation of your art is your primary concern, then the selection of framing materials and techniques must all be directed toward preservation.

- If both the preservation of the artwork and the decorative value of its framing are equally important, you may have to adjust either some of your decorating expectations or your preservation concerns.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; each piece of art has its own value and should be framed accordingly.

Choosing Materials

The materials used to frame your artwork have a direct effect on it. The type of matting used, the materials used to mount

the artwork, and even the glass in the frame are all important. Words like “acid-free,” “pH neutral,” and “archival” are often used to describe matboards and backboards suitable for preservation framing. Most of these materials have an additive or buffering agent to reduce any acidic condition which may occur. Matboards and backing boards that are not preservation quality may become acidic over time, and damage the artwork they surround.

Because paper reacts to changes in temperature and humidity—expanding when they are high and shrinking when they are low—it is often mounted to keep it flat. Yet there are objections to fully mounting art: if the art becomes damaged at a later time, it may be harder to conserve if it is fully mounted. The mounting may also introduce materials into the artwork that may not be removable.

There are preservation alternatives that you may consider which allow the art to be mounted in ways that are reversible, and which allow the art to change with temperature and humidity while framed.

Surface protection is also important. Glazing, either glass or acrylic, keeps foreign substances (like airborne dust or oil from fingerprints) off the surface of the art. UV-blocking glass or acrylic will also help to protect your art from fading and other types of damage caused by ultraviolet light rays.

Display

How and where your art is displayed will also have a direct effect on its condition and longevity.

Environmental elements—light, humidity, temperature, and even pollution—can affect your artwork. Discuss where you intend to hang your art with a framer as you plan your frame design.

Art, like everything else, needs constant care. Sometimes this care and maintenance should be performed by a trained specialist. When in doubt, ask. Making informed decisions about framing your art will add to your enjoyment of it and improve its condition and longevity.



The top mat used to frame this piece darkened the edges of the print.