

Collections Care

Two-Dimensional Art – Prints, Drawings and Paintings

Humans have been drawing and painting images for at least 40,000 years, the oldest of which can still be found in caves in Indonesia, France, and Spain. Early drawing and painting pigments came from minerals and clays, such as charcoal, ochres, and hematite. For paints, the pigments would be ground and mixed with a liquid binder like saliva, resin, egg yolks, milk, or, later, oils. Water-based acrylics were not available until the 20th century. Prints and drawings are usually created on paper and so are very susceptible to the typical deterioration mechanisms that affect other paper artifacts, such as historical documents. The substrate used for paintings, however, can vary widely, and may include paper, canvas, wood, metal, and glass, all of which may complicate a particular painting's preservation needs. All types though are vulnerable to physical damage, light exposure, moisture, and general soiling. As with any museum or personal collection, appropriate handling techniques and storage are the first line of defense in their preservation. General tips include keeping art out of direct light and handling pieces with clean cotton or powder-free nitrile gloves; inspecting for loose paint and pigments and adjust handling and storage needs as appropriate; carrying small paintings with two hands; moving large pieces with at least two people; and general good housekeeping in storage and exhibition areas. Further tips on caring for two-dimensional art, such as prints, drawings, and paintings, can be found below. For additional information on caring for paper-based art, see also "Caring for Your Collection: Works on Paper."

Prints and Drawings

- American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (AIC): [Caring for Your Treasures – Paper: Documents, Manuscripts, and Works of Art](#)
- [Ellis, Margaret Holben: The Care of Prints and Drawings \(book\), American Association of State and Local History. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2016.](#)
- Henry Ford Museum: [Documents and Works of Art on Paper](#) (by Mary M. Fahey, Chief Conservator)
- National Archives (United Kingdom): [Caring for Your Prints, Drawings, and Watercolors](#)
- Victoria and Albert Museum (London, UK): [Caring for Drawings](#)

Paintings

- American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (AIC): [Caring for Your Treasures – Paintings](#)
- [Canadian Conservation Institute:](#)
 - [Basic Care – Paintings](#)
 - [Care of Paintings on Ivory, Metal and Glass](#)
- Henry Ford Museum: [The Care and Preservation of Oil Paintings](#) (by Mary M. Fahey, Chief Conservator)
- National Park Service: [Museum Handbook: Appendix L, Curatorial Care of Easel Paintings](#)
- [Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute:](#)
 - [Care of Acrylic Paintings](#)
 - [Caring for Your Paintings](#)

- [Does My Painting Need to Be Cleaned?](#)

Framed Art

- American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (AIC): [Caring for Your Treasures – Matting and Framing Works of Art and Artifacts on Paper](#)
- Connecting to Collections Care: [Reframing the Problem: Caring for Framed Objects in Small Institutions \(aka: On a Budget\)](#) (Presenters: Wendy Partridge and Jayme Jamison of ICA Art Conservation, Cleveland, OH)