



CCI Notes

10/16

Wrapping a Painting

Introduction

A painting must always be protected from both physical damage and changes in relative humidity and temperature. For this reason, paintings should first be wrapped if they are to be taken outside a building or placed in a packing case for travel.

Wrapping a painting, as described below, provides it some physical protection while helping to isolate it from short-term humidity fluctuations.

A well-sealed wrapping allows the organic components inside the wrapping (e.g., the wood of the stretcher, the linen of the canvas) to buffer the enclosed air space around them, as long as temperature variations are not extreme. If temperatures might drop more than a few degrees, insulation may be necessary. For information on cushioning, insulating, and packing paintings, please refer to "Further Reading" at the end of this Note.

It is assumed that paintings on canvas will be in good condition before being wrapped, and will have been furnished with backing boards. Some paintings will require special preparation before wrapping. For guidance on assessing the condition of a painting, applying backing boards, and special preparations see *CCI Notes 10/10 "Backing Boards for Paintings*

on Canvas" and 10/15 "Paintings: Considerations Prior to Travel." If a painting is not in good condition but must travel (e.g., to receive treatment), it is prudent to seek the advice of a professional conservator.

Wrapping a Framed Painting

A painting in good condition that is in a frame or that is furnished with edge strips (see *CCI Notes 10/8 "Framing of Paintings"*) can be treated in the following manner:

1. If the corners of the frame are fragile, provide extra padding or make cushioned cardboard corner-covers to fit over them.
2. Cut a piece of air bubble wrap (e.g., Bubble Pak, Aircap) or a sheet of thin, closed-cell foam (e.g., Microfoam, Sentinel foam) large enough to wrap completely around the painting. Lay the air bubble wrap (bubble side up), or foam, on a flat surface. (This step is optional if the painting will be put into a cushioned packing case.)
3. Cut a piece of plastic sheet (2 to 4 mil [50.8 to 101.6 μm] polyethylene plastic, or Mylar) large enough to wrap completely around the painting, allowing for overlapping of the four edges. Lay the plastic over the air bubble wrap or foam.

4. Cut a sheet of cardboard to the exact outside dimensions of the front of the frame. (If desired, to provide further protection, cut the cardboard larger than the frame and then score it so that it folds over the sides of the frame.) Lay the cardboard over the plastic. The cardboard will be held in place by the subsequent wrapping (see Figure 1). Make sure the cardboard is rigid enough so that it cannot bend to touch the surface of the painting. On a large painting, a more rigid material may be needed (e.g., multi-wall cardboard, Gatorfoam board).

The cardboard over the front of the frame will help protect the painting from accidental blows to its surface. If the cardboard has been in an environment properly conditioned for paintings, it will also add to the buffering capacity of the painting's organic materials when inside the wrapping.

5. Lay the framed painting face down on the cardboard. Wrap the plastic, fairly tightly, around the painting to overlap on the back (Figure 1), and tape all edges to create a good seal.

6. Wrap the air bubble sheet or foam around the painting. Again, overlap the edges at the back or sides and seal them with tape.

The wrapped painting is now ready to be hand-carried or placed and further cushioned in a protective container or packing case, with insulation if necessary.



Figure 1. Framed painting wrapped in plastic and taped.

Wrapping an Unframed Painting

A painting in good condition, but without a frame and without adequate edge strips, should be protected by a 'travel frame' before being wrapped. The sides of a travel frame are deep enough to project beyond the painted surface so that a cardboard or stiff plastic sheet may be placed over the painting without touching its surface. A painting in a travel frame makes a stronger and more rigid package, which reduces risk to the painting during handling. The type of travel frame used will depend on the painting under consideration.

The travel frame illustrated in Figures 2 and 3 can be used for smooth-surfaced paintings that can be safely held by a slight, cushioned pressure (just enough to hold securely), which is provided by padded face and back corner plates. The back corner plates are permanently attached to the frame, but the face corner plates are fastened with screws in pre-drilled holes, so that securing the plates and subsequent pressure adjustments cause minimal vibration. The frame is not otherwise attached to the painting. To prevent the painting from shifting in the frame, fill in any gap between the painting and the sides of the travel frame by carefully inserting thin sheet material (e.g., Microfoam strips, cardboard strips, or matboard strips). Make necessary adjustments for a snug fit.

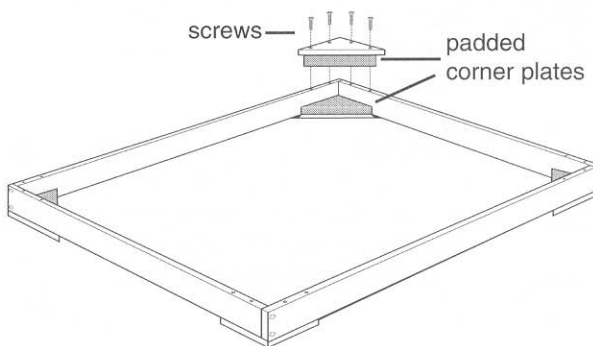


Figure 2. Travel frame.

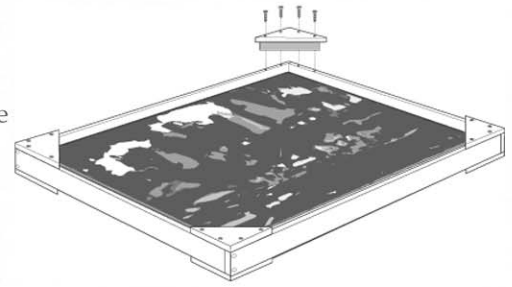


Figure 3. Painting in travel frame.

Another type of travel frame (Figures 4 and 5), based on a design used at the National Gallery of Canada, is suitable for most paintings on canvas, including those whose surfaces or corners are too fragile to be in contact with a travel frame. This travel frame can also serve as a permanent storage frame because no material is in constant contact with the paint surface. Mending plates can be used to attach a painting to this frame, but the screws have to be loosened and tightened for each use. (Taking screws repeatedly in and out of the same screw holes in a travel frame will eventually render the holes incapable of holding the screws; you may wish to consider using threaded T-nut fasteners in the wood to prolong use of the holes.) Multipurpose fasteners, such as 'Oz Clips' or similar hangers used at the Tate Gallery in London, have the advantage that they are permanently attached to the stretcher of a painting (Figure 6). They are used in closed position for display and in open position for attaching the painting to a travel/storage frame. When measuring for this frame, allow adequate hand space between the sides of the painting and the travel frame in order to place, secure, or remove the painting easily.

As an alternative to the use of multipurpose fasteners, screws can be used to attach the travel frame directly to

the back of the painting's stretcher. However, this can be a risky procedure. The painting and the travel/storage frame need to be supported safely during attachment (e.g., face up on sawhorses) while their backs remain accessible so that screws can be inserted, and screws must not pass through to the front

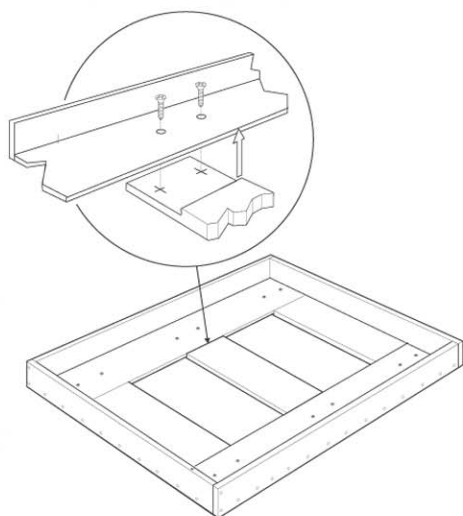


Figure 4. Construction of travel/storage frame.

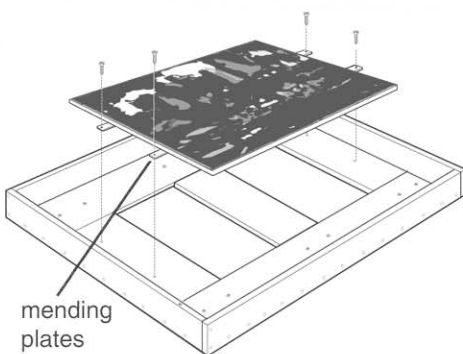


Figure 5. Painting in travel/storage frame.

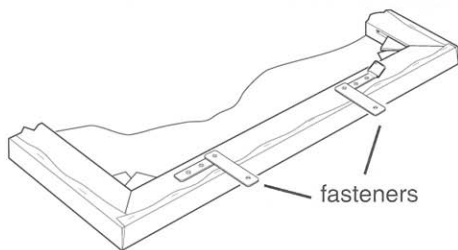


Figure 6. Multipurpose fasteners on painting's stretcher (in open position).

of the stretcher. Drawing a template of the painting's stretcher both on the back and inside of this frame can help position the screws and aid in future repositioning in the frame.

Once a painting is in its travel frame, follow the directions under "Wrapping a Framed Painting" given previously.

Further Reading

Booth, P., T. Green, and C.L. Sitwell. "Moving Pictures," seminar, 1984. *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* 4, (1985), pp. 41-52. Butterworth & Co. (Publishers) Ltd.

Canadian Conservation Institute. "Backing Boards for Paintings on Canvas." *CCI Notes* 10/10. Ottawa: Canadian Conservation Institute, 1993.

Canadian Conservation Institute. "Framing of Paintings." *CCI Notes* 10/8. Ottawa: Canadian Conservation Institute, 1993.

Canadian Conservation Institute. "Making Triwall Containers." *CCI Notes* 1/4. Ottawa: Canadian Conservation Institute, 1997.

Canadian Conservation Institute. "Paintings: Considerations Prior to Travel." *CCI Notes* 10/15. Ottawa: Canadian Conservation Institute, 1993.

Cushion Design Using the Cushion Design Calculator and PadCAD. Ottawa: Canadian Conservation Institute, 1994.

For further information about the cushioning and packing of a painting, please contact the staff of the Fine Arts Section of CCI.

Mecklenburg, M., ed. *Art in Transit: Studies in the Transport of Paintings*, papers from the International Conference on The Packing and Transportation of Paintings, September 9-11, 1991; London, U.K. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991.

Richard, M., M. Mecklenburg, and R. Merrill, eds. *Art in Transit Handbook for Packing and Transporting Paintings*. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991.

Various papers from the ICOM Working Group on the Care of Works of Art in Transit, e.g. Volume II, pp. 583-619, of the 8th Triennial Meeting preprints for the conference held September 6-11, 1987, in Sydney, Australia, and Volume I, pp. 401-427, of the 9th Triennial Meeting preprints for the conference held in 1990 in Dresden, German Democratic Republic.

Suppliers

Air bubble wrap:
local packaging suppliers

Corrugated cardboard:
local packaging suppliers

Gatorfoam board:
local art or plastics suppliers

Microfoam (DuPont):
local packaging suppliers, such as Canadian Paper & Packaging Co. Ltd.
3001 Brabant-Marineau
Montreal QC H4S 1V5
Canada
Tel.: (514) 333-4040

Oz Clips:
Moving Art
Box 11034
Alexandria VA 22312
USA
Tel.: (703) 941-8206

Masterpak
P.O. Box 1465
Long Island City NY 11101-9998
USA
Tel.: (800) 922-5522
Fax: (718) 937-6413

T-nut fasteners:

local fasteners suppliers, or
Spaenaur Inc.
815 Victoria Street North
P.O. Box 544
Kitchener ON N2G 4B1
Tel.: (800) 265-8772
Tel.: (519) 744-3521
Fax: (519) 744-0818

Tate Gallery hanger:

contact designer directly:
Bruce McAllister
26 Balfe Street
London N19EG
UK
or
Tate Gallery
Millbank, London SW1P 4RG
UK
Tel.: 071 821 1313

Polyethylene sheet:

local packaging suppliers;
hardware stores

by the Fine Arts Section
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