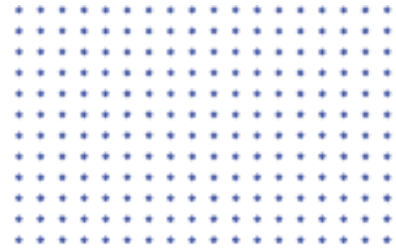


Caring for Family Treasures

Abridged Version





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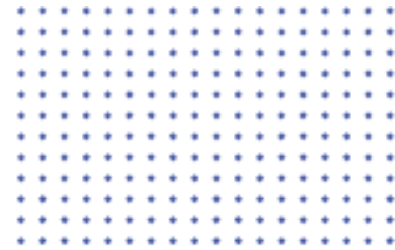
Special thanks to Debra Hess Norris, University of Delaware
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With support from The National Endowment for the Humanities
The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts
The University of Delaware
Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library
Centro de Conservación y Restauración de Puerto Rico



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Caring for Family Treasures is an abridged version of a series of blog posts entitled, “Attics and Basements and Closets, Oh My! Caring for Family Treasures” written and published in 2020 by graduate students in the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC). Blog posts were published weekly on the program website in the spring and summer of 2020. The full, original series can be viewed here: <https://www.artcons.udel.edu/about-us/family-treasures-series>. In the words of the original authors,

“The central importance of cultural heritage to foster joy and well-being and to connect communities. All objects, whether in museums or personal collections, can transcend borders. They act as windows to—and voices from—the past as we collaboratively work toward a better and more unified future. As conservators, we are committed to preserving all collections, including those that may be marginalized, hidden, or underserved, and the goal of the Family Treasures series is: to put the power of preservation into everyone’s hands and homes.”

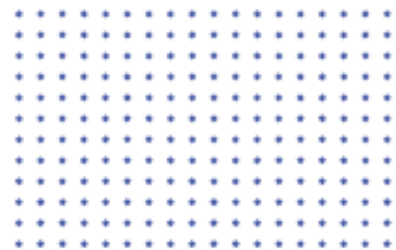
In 2024, the blog posts were edited and compiled into this guide by staff at the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) to support a series of workshops hosted jointly by CCAHA and the Centro de Conservación y Restauración de Puerto Rico (CENCOR). All images included in this guide are courtesy of the original authors and contributors.

INTRODUCTION

Museums, libraries, and archives are places where we can go to see amazing treasures that are collected, preserved, and presented in the public trust. They are not, however, the only place where these treasures exist. Most of us have things – photographs, letters and cards, paintings, furniture, jewelry- that we cherish. We want to see them preserved for our own enjoyment, but also for the enjoyment of generations to come. This guide is intended as a resource for those caring for their own personal or family treasures. Recommendations included in this guide are adapted from the strategies used by professional conservators and collections care professionals to care for collections in museums, libraries, and archives.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Original blog post by Annabelle Camp, Fellow in Textile Conservation



Images courtesy of Annabelle Camp and Olivia Reed

1. Sort

The best way to understand what you have in your family photograph collection and to eventually store these treasures properly is to sort and organize. Different categories could be based on size, subject, or type. Knowing the type of prints you have will help you decide which ones are susceptible to light, moisture, and other environmental factors. This can inform how you store and display your photographs. These online resources can help you identify the types of prints in your collection:

- <https://gawainweaver.com/>
- <http://www.graphicsatlas.org/>

2. Label

During or after the sorting process, take time to label your prints. This can be done easily and reversibly using pencil on the back. Do NOT use a pen or adhesive labels, which can eventually bleed to the front or cause staining. This process can certainly lead to fun conversations in your household as you and your friends and family work together to remember who or what is in that picture!

3. Document

An excellent way to ensure the long-term preservation of your family photographs is to digitize them. If you do not have a desktop scanner, don't fret! There are now many scanner apps available for your phone or tablet. If you cannot scan all your prints, prioritize those that you think have faded or are your favorites.

4. Frame or rearrange

As you sort through prints, you're sure to find forgotten favorites. Take time to fill any empty frames you may have or rotate out photographs you currently have on display. This will help with their preservation. If you currently have photographs displayed in front of windows or in direct light, take this opportunity to move them to a safer location.

5. Store

Once you have everything sorted and labeled, you should store your photographs in a way that will keep them safe and allow you to easily access them in the future. Ideally, photographs should be stored flat in archival acid-free boxes or in albums in non-adhesive polyester sleeves. These materials can be purchased from archival materials suppliers, but they are not required for preserving your photographs. If your collection does not contain film, it can be safely stored in a plastic tub. Try to avoid cardboard boxes if you can. Acid-free envelopes can also be used to maintain groups of photographs. Store prints in an interior closet in your house instead of the attic or basement.

While you sort, label, and rearrange your photographs, take time to enjoy them, and find hope in knowing that you are preserving them for future generations to enjoy as well.



Image courtesy of Annabelle Camp

FAMILY ALBUMS

Original blog post by Rachel Bissonnette, Fellow in Library and Archives Conservation



(Left) use clean towels to support your album while it is open; Images courtesy of Annabelle Camp and Debra Hess Norris

An album is a book form intended for mounting (usually) flat objects like photographs, postcards, newspaper clippings, or programs/brochures. You might also find pressed flowers, swatches of cloth, locks of hair, buttons, and stamps. Albums and scrapbooks embody shared memories and help us trace our family roots. Each page of these treasured heirlooms can spark a conversation or story about the people and places thoughtfully documented by our loved ones.

Albums protect the materials inside, but how can we protect our albums? While there are many different types of albums, there are some general guidelines you can follow when caring for yours.

It may be tempting to take the photos out of your family album and reorganize them, but an important aspect of preserving an album is maintaining the order. This prevents what we call in the field of conservation “dissociation,” which results in the loss of information about an object. Whoever put the album together initially chose the arrangement with care, and if the album is taken apart, this information would be lost. What connects us to our family albums is not only the photographs within, but also the decisions people made when they put the album together.

There may be physical parts of album structures that are vulnerable, e.g. the pages or the spine. Here are some steps you can take at home to safely handle your album:

- Wash your hands. Washing your hands helps to prevent oils and grime from getting on your album.
- While the album is open, support it so that there is not too much stress on the spine of the book. You can roll up clean towels to form a support.
- The paper may be weak and/or the photographs loose on the pages, so turn pages carefully. Colored paper can be especially acidic and prone to damage. If the pages are too weak to handle or are causing stains, you may need to place acid-free tissue paper between the leaves.

- If there are loose elements, keep them with the album. You can place loose photographs in acid free envelopes or folders and tuck the folders between the pages where you found them to maintain the order.
- It may be tempting to take photocopies of pages to share with far-away friends and family; however, placing your album on a scanner may cause too much stress. Instead, snap a picture with your phone!

When you have finished enjoying your album, you will want to store it safely. An archival box is ideal, but a plastic tub works well, too. Avoid storing your album in an acidic cardboard box! The safest place in your home is an interior closet because you want to minimize light exposure and temperature/humidity fluctuations.

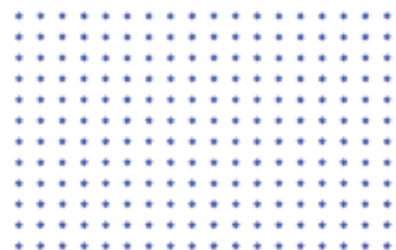
Revisiting our family albums and scrapbooks can remind us of joyous moments and happy occasions when we were able to gather with our loved ones. Until the next time we can gather together to share our albums, we can practice safe handling of our collections to ensure that our heirlooms are well-cared for.



Image courtesy of Annabelle Camp

DOCUMENTS & ART ON PAPER

Original blog post by Laura McNulty, Fellow in Library and Archives Conservation



Images courtesy of Evan Krape and Annabelle Camp

We accumulate a lot of paper in our lifetimes! Birthdays are marked with cards, graduations with diplomas, friendships and relationships with letters. Newspapers are clipped, ticket stubs are saved, and treasured drawings and paintings are hung on walls. But these treasured papers can be damaged if they don't receive proper care. Improper handling, unstable environments, and improper storage cause most visible damages to paper.

1. Light

Both visible and ultraviolet (UV) light can cause colors to fade, paper to yellow and become brittle, and some types of media to disintegrate. Watercolors, ink drawings, newspaper and other low-quality papers, and colored papers have the highest sensitivity to light and are most at risk of damage. In your own home, objects that are on display should be placed away from direct sunlight. If possible, use frames with UV filtering glazing. When not on display or in use, paper should be stored away from light sources or protected from light in folders or boxes.

2. Handling

Paper is handled a lot. Many of us enjoy re-reading cards and letters we've received over the years, and that involves taking them out of the box, unfolding them, and then refolding them to store them away again. Repeated handling of paper can cause tears, broken corners, or smudged media. Make sure to wash and dry your hands before handling paper. Try to handle fragile or brittle paper as little as possible. For papers with friable media (graphite, charcoal, pastel, etc.), the best preservation strategy is to have them matted by a trusted professional with good quality materials. This makes them easier to enjoy and safer to handle.



3. Environment

Paper is very reactive to the air around it. Temperatures that are too high can accelerate the chemical reactions that lead to yellowing and embrittlement. Too much moisture in the air can cause mold growth, cockling, bleeding of watercolors and ink dyes, and discoloration of low-quality paper. It is best to store your collections in a dry, cool place. Attics and basements tend to be warmer and damper, respectively, and should be avoided, if possible. Storing your collections in folders and boxes offers a buffer against any sudden and/or drastic changes to the environment.

4. Storage

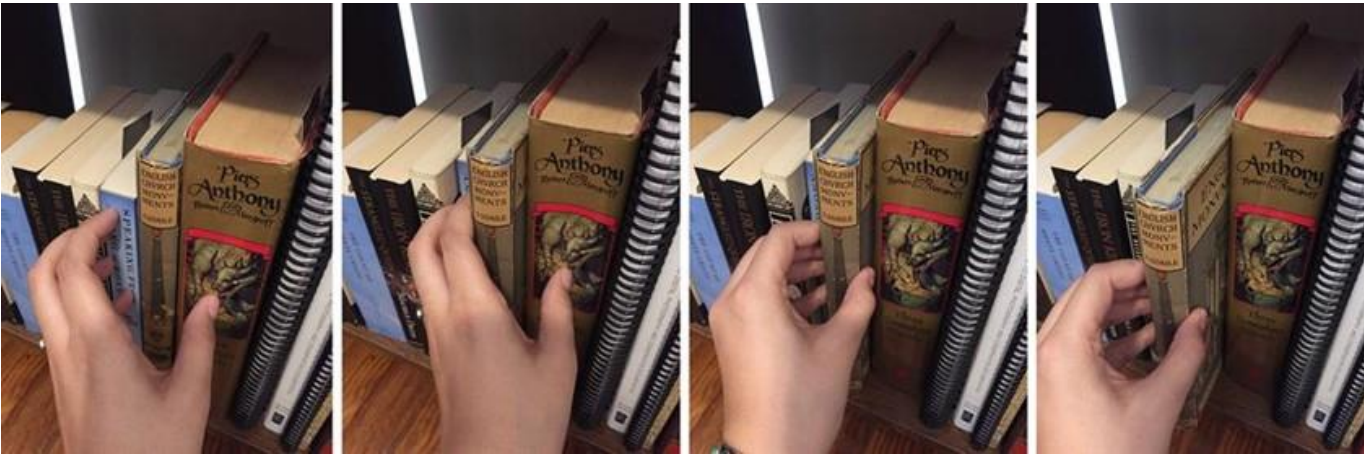
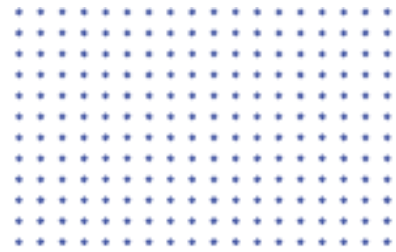
Low quality boxes and folders can become acidic over time and cause yellowing, discoloration, embrittlement, and staining. Store paper-based collections in well-labeled, acid-free folders within boxes. Boxes should be made of acid-free board or stable plastics, such as polyethylene or polypropylene. Place a barrier of acid free tissue or paper between objects in folders if they are acidic.



Image courtesy of Annabelle Camp

BOOKS

Original blog post by Jess Ortegon, Fellow in Library and Archives Conservation



Push in books on either side before taking the one you want from the shelf; Image courtesy of Jess Ortegon

Books have been with many of us for all our lives, from baby books to thick novels to family bibles and coffee table books. Books that many of us own at home come in a wide variety: paperback, hardcover, leather bound, or spiral-bound to name just a few. Having all different kinds of books can make caring for a collection seem daunting, but there are three preventive measures you can take to care for all kinds of books: handling, storage, and cleaning. Here are a few tips for each:

1. Handling

Always wash your hands before handling books to prevent oils, grime, or food residues from causing problems. When taking a book from the shelf, resist the temptation to pull it from the top. Push in the books on either side of it and then hold the book by its spine to pull it out. This will prevent tears on the spine or crushing the bottom of the spine as a book is tilted out. Use bookmarks, paper scraps, or even ribbons to mark your place. Do not use paper clips, sticky notes, or folded page corners, as these can all cause damage from tears to leaving adhesive residue. If you write in your books, use a pencil. Pens, highlighters, and markers will leave more permanent damage like smudges or bleeding.

2. Storage

When storing your books, you can have them either upright or lying down. For oversized or heavy books, you can lay them down on your shelf to prevent distortions that could occur if the books are leaning against one another diagonally. Bookends can also be used to support books in an upright position. Store your books away from direct sunlight, which can fade or discolor spines and dust jackets. Avoid storing books in (acidic) cardboard boxes. Shelves, archival boxes, or even plastic tubs will provide a more stable environment for long-term storage.

3. Cleaning

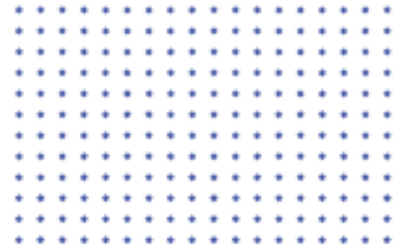
Regular dusting of your books is the best method of cleaning. Use a cloth or duster to dust off your books while they are on the shelf. Make sure to clean your shelf occasionally, too!

Our books bring us comfort and joy in many ways, whether we're starting a new novel or rereading an old favorite. So, as you go through your books to dust and rearrange them, take a moment to remember all the fond stories that kept you reading through the day, and how you can continue to maintain these treasured collections.



Image courtesy of Jess Orten

PESTS & PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION



Original blog post by Marie Desrochers, Fellow in Preventive Conservation



Images courtesy of Joan Irving

Since the beginning of time, humans have lived alongside insects and other pests. Insects, spiders, centipedes, and mice are all examples of small critters that are essential to the delicate balance of life. However, it is typically preferable to NOT find them in our homes where they can wreak havoc and destroy objects we treasure. In art conservation, we use a system called “Integrated Pest Management” (IPM) to prevent pests from damaging collections. The purpose of IPM is to avoid, block, and detect pests all without the use of chemical pesticides, which can be damaging to people and collections.

1. Avoid

Pests need food, water, and shelter to survive. Dust, debris, and dark damp spaces are good sources of all three necessities, so good housekeeping is the best way to prevent a gang of insects or mice from moving in.

2. Block

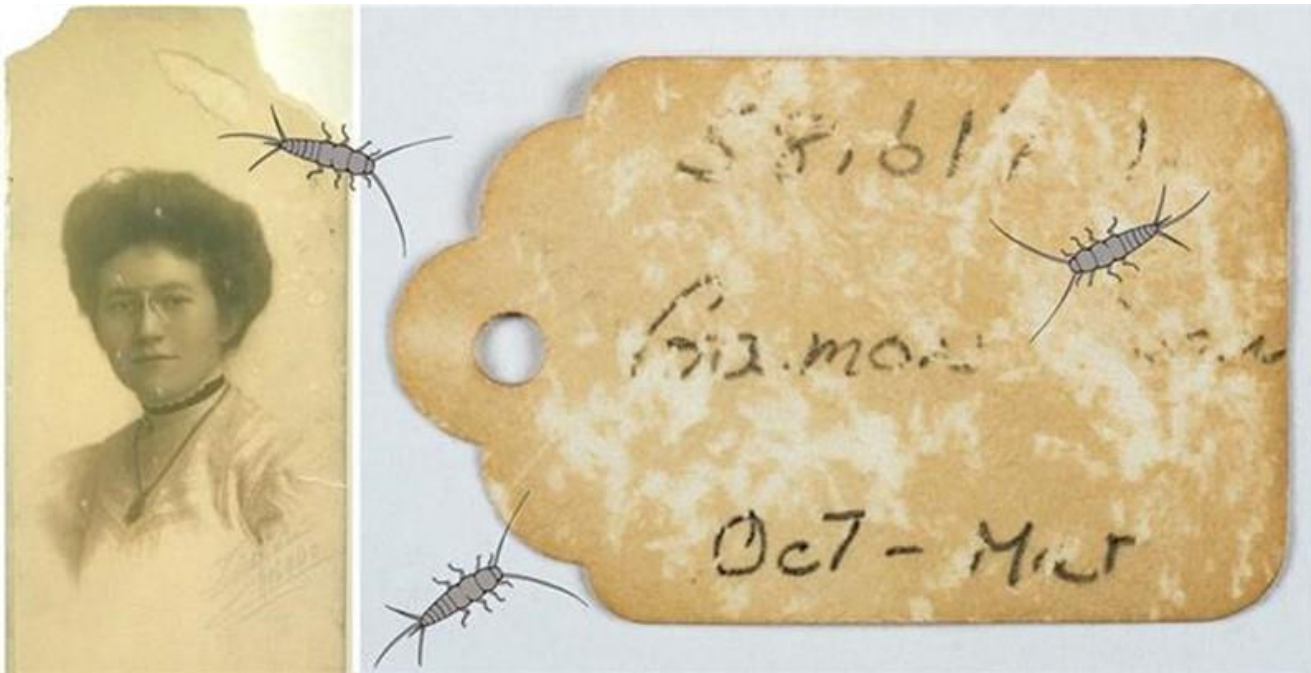
Blocking pests from getting to our treasured collections means blocking them from getting into the house. Tiny cracks in the walls, foundation, between floorboards, and in areas surrounding windows and doors allow pests to enter. Install door sweeps on exterior doors, check window screens for holes, and recaulk faulty seals to limit these entrances.

3. Detect

No matter how much avoiding and blocking we do, there are always going to be some pests that find their way inside, so keep your eyes and ears open for any activity. In the museum world, we collect pests in traps, identify the species of the pest, and keep track of activity in a database. At home, you can make a mental note about what pests you find, which can give you clues about how and why they are getting inside. Pest cycles are seasonal and may take years to evolve, but paying attention to habits over time can help you problem-solve in the future. While most pests are not likely to eat our treasured collections, there are some frequent offenders to be aware of. Silverfish and booklice will graze on paper, especially paper coated with glues and other starchy media. Clothes moths and carpet beetles will feed on proteinaceous materials like leather, wool, and silk.

If you do suspect pests are munching on collections, avoid using chemical pesticides like mothballs. Instead seal the item in plastic and call a conservator for help.

By following the steps outlined above, ideally you can prevent pests from following a “stay-at home” order in your house and protect your family treasures in the process.



Images courtesy of Debra Hess Norris, Melissa King, and Joelle Wickens

WATER EMERGENCIES

Original blog post by Maddie Cooper, Fellow in Preventive Conservation



Images courtesy of Tram Vo and Debra Hess Norris

A grandmother's wedding dress in the closet, a photograph album in the attic, or a box of baseball cards in the basement: these are all family treasures likely to be stored in hidden corners of our homes. While these spaces are convenient for storage, they can also put collections at risk of damage caused by leaks, floods, or mold growth. These events can be discouraging, but it is important to know that there are steps you can take to save your heirlooms after a water-related emergency.

1. Be Safe

Your safety is always the most important part of salvage. Check for structural damage before re-entering affected spaces and wear protective clothing like long pants and sleeves, rubber boots, and gloves. Mold can begin to grow within 48 hours after a water event. If you see or suspect mold, wear an N100 facemask and eye protection during salvage. If the mold outbreak is severe or you suspect collections have been in contact with sewage or dangerous chemicals, call a professional.

2. Be Prepared

Think about the five items in your house that you would save if you had to choose. Coming up with a priority list ahead of time can help you focus on what is most important to you and your family if there is an emergency. You could also put together an emergency kit with gloves, facemasks, eye protection, clean towels, unprinted newsprint or paper towels, and a few plastic bins. Most of us have a closet or shelf where we keep the flashlights and batteries. This is the perfect spot to keep your emergency salvage kit.

3. Document Everything

It can be tempting to jump right in and start grabbing your wet heirlooms once you notice a water emergency but stop and take photographs with your phone or camera before touching any collections. These pictures will be important for insurance and recovery purposes down the road.

4. Salvage

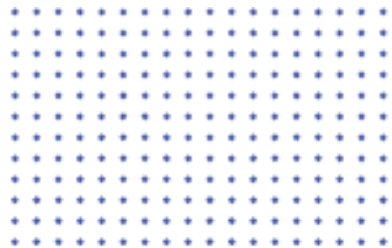
Waterlogged objects are especially fragile when wet, so try not to handle them directly if you can. Instead use bins or other supportive materials to move waterlogged treasures. Gentle air-drying is appropriate for most materials. Place on towels, unprinted newsprint, or other absorbent materials in a well-ventilated space, and change out the absorbent materials when saturated. Use fans that circulate air in the room without blowing directly on objects. If water has seeped into frames, carefully remove artworks, and allow them to air-dry. While these materials may cockle and curl after drying, they can be gently flattened under light weight later. Textiles, photographs, paper, and books that cannot be air dried immediately can be wrapped in butcher or wax paper and frozen until a professional can treat them.

By taking care to act safely and deliberately, you will likely be able to save those heirlooms for generations to come.



Images courtesy of Melissa Tedone

RUGS & CARPETS



Original blog post by Abigail Rodriguez, Fellow in Objects Conservation and Margalit Schindler, Fellow in Preventive Conservation



Images courtesy of Abigail Rodriguez and William Donnelly

The art of making carpets goes back thousands of years, and they are still bringing color, texture, and life into our homes today. There are many different types of carpets and rugs, including woven, knotted pile, flatweave, and more. The materials and methods used to make rugs and carpets affect their care, but there are some general practices that will help preserve all carpets and rugs. The biggest risks to rugs and carpets include exposure to light, insect infestation, and wear. The following tips will help you preserve carpets and rugs for generations to come.

1. Insects enjoy eating both animal and plant-based fibers. Carpet beetles and moths are known to cause significant damage. When caring for a rug, keep an eye out for insects, their casings, and their droppings. If you notice an infestation, wrap affected materials in plastic sheeting and isolate them from other textiles. Do not apply any chemical pesticides, which can cause damage and be a risk to health and safety. Instead, reach out to a conservator for more guidance.
2. When vacuuming treasured rugs or carpets, avoid floor brush attachments. Instead, use an upholstery attachment and vacuum in the direction of the pile. Make sure to vacuum the back of the rug, any padding, and the floor beneath the rug at least once a year.
3. If the rug or carpet is on the floor, use furniture cups beneath the legs of furniture and place synthetic padding under the rug to prevent catching and slipping.
4. If the rug or carpet is hanging, make sure it is well supported. This means making sure that the weight of the rug is distributed to prevent uneven stress.
5. Long term exposure to light can cause fading of dyes and embrittlement of fibers. Draw blinds and turn off lights in room with rugs and carpets when they're not occupied.

6. To store rugs and carpets, roll them with the pile facing out. Avoid folding, which can cause creases and weak points. Wrap rolled rugs and carpets with a dust cover made from undyed fabric like cotton muslin or a white bed sheet.

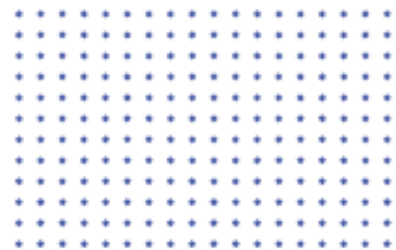
With good maintenance and care, rugs and carpets can stay vibrant and strong for generations to come.



Images courtesy of William Donnelly

UPHOLSTERY

Original blog post by Allison Kelley, Fellow in Objects Conservation and Rachel Bissonette, Fellow in Library and Archives Conservation



(Left) exit holes from past pest damage; (Right) careful vacuuming of upholstery using a covered nozzle; Images courtesy of Jess Chloros and Rachel Bissonette

No matter the value, sentimental or otherwise, we all are likely to have pieces of upholstered furniture we care about. What then can be done in the name of preservation to keep these objects in the best condition possible? One way to find good preservation practices is to look at the methods museums use to care for their upholstered objects and find ways to apply them at home.

1. Function

We aren't usually allowed to sit on upholstered furniture in museum collections, but that's not often the case in our own homes. While you may choose to make especially old or meaningful furniture in your home for "eyes only" there are ways you can protect the upholstered furniture that you do use. Measured sitting and handling will go a long way towards preventing any accidental damage. You may also choose to make some furniture "off limits" to pets and children.

2. Light

Light exposure may cause dyes to fade or fibers to degrade. For pieces that are used only occasionally, you can make use of slipcovers to protect them from light and dust. It could be a fun project to make a custom-fitted cover if you have spare fabric lying around, but placing a clean sheet or a shawl over the object works

just as well. As an added measure, curtains or blinds could be kept closed when a room with upholstered objects is not in use.

3. Pests

Not every pest is going to cause damage to your furniture, but there are a few common fabric and wood pests to look out for such as carpet beetles, clothes moths, powderpost beetles, and dry wood termites. Some tell-tale signs of infestation include egg casings and frass (insect excrement). If you suspect you have an infestation, isolate the object and reach out to a conservator, and/or exterminator in your area familiar with pest eradication.

4. Cleaning

Dust and dirt are unsightly and they're a food source for pests, so you want to keep furniture clean. The best way to clean an upholstered object is vacuuming with an upholstery attachment at the lowest effective suction setting. Try not to drag the nozzle across the surface and be sure to clean in a consistent pattern. Don't use household stain removers, which can cause additional damage. If something spills, blot the area with a rag or paper towel and ask a professional before applying any household stain removers. Avoid leather dressings/oils for leather upholstery.

With good preventive care, upholstered furniture can remain vibrant and functional for decades.



Images courtesy of Genevieve Bieniosek and Allison Kelley

SMALL NEEDLEWORK

Original blog post by Kris Clossen, Fellow in Textile Conservation, Magdalena Solano, Fellow in Paintings Conservation

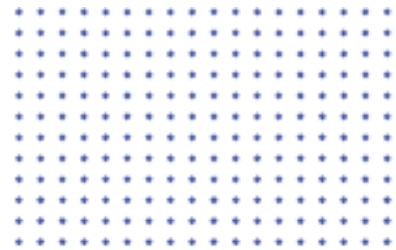


Image courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library

Needleworks can be anything created with a needle, including embroidery, crochet, tatting, and lace making. Good care of needleworks begins with thorough examination. Look closely for damage like loose threads, fading, or dye transfer. It's also helpful to examine the frame, box, or closet where the needlework was stored and look for signs of insects, dampness, and dust.

When storing and displaying needleworks, the major preservation concerns are light, dust, temperature, relative humidity (RH), and pests. Strategies for combating those risks include the following:

1. Storage

Use acid-free boxes or plastic bins for storage. Regular cardboard and wood boxes, and even cedar chests, are acidic and can cause damage. If you must store needleworks with these materials, wrap them first in prewashed, undyed fabrics, like white sheets or pillowcases, for protection. Try and store them in a closet on a main floor where they can be protected from big shifts in temperature and humidity.

2. Display

Try to close blinds or limit light exposure in rooms where important needleworks are displayed. Framing needleworks can protect them and allow for good presentation. Avoid acidic boards and metal tacks or

staples for mounting your flat textiles; instead consider archival mounting boards and using stitching for mounting.

3. Cleaning

In most cases, light vacuuming or dusting will suffice. Wet cleaning should be completed with extreme caution and only if necessary. For delicate, fragile, or important pieces in your collection, you should consult a conservator or a professional dry cleaner. If you decide wet cleaning could be safely completed in your own home, consider these tips:

1. Test the dye sensitivity of each thread by pressing a damp cotton swab on each colored thread and looking for dye transfer before cleaning. If dye does transfer to the swab, do not move forward with wet cleaning.
2. Hand wash with mild detergents and cold distilled water.
3. Never wring out your needlework after washing.
4. Do not use a machine for drying, instead dry your needlework flat.

Even with these precautions, cleaning needleworks (especially embroideries) can be a very delicate task. If you are ever unsure, consult a conservator.



Image courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library

QUILTS & BEDSPREADS

Original blog post by Annabelle Camp, Fellow in Textile Conservation and Jess Ortegon, Fellow in Library and Archives Conservation



Images courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library and Annabelle Camp

Quilts and bedspreads are not only family heirlooms and cozy fixtures in our homes, but they're also found in museum collections. Whether they are made of T-shirts or silk, machine-stitched or hand-pieced, all quilts and bedspreads are unique. In museums, conservators follow specific protocols to preserve these treasures for future generations. Here we outline some of the ways you can adapt these methods to ensure that your personal quilts and bedspreads will last.

1. Storage

Try not to store your personal quilts directly on or in acidic materials like wood and cardboard. Ideally, you should store quilts in an acid free box in an interior closet. If you do not have a box, cover the quilt in a white towel or cotton to prevent dust accumulation. Pad out folds with rolled white towels or undyed cotton to prevent creases and tears. Check quilts routinely and look for signs of pests, particularly moths and carpet beetles, which may be attracted to wool components like batting.

2. Display and Handling

Make sure to wash your hands before handling precious quilts and bedspreads. Large pieces can require multiple people to handle them safely. Limit light damage by rotating quilts and bedspreads throughout the year and closing blinds when rooms aren't in use. If you wish to hang a quilt, make sure it is well

supported. A sleeve and rod approach is often appropriate: stitch a cotton muslin sleeve to the back of your quilt along the top and use a dowel to hang.

3. Cleaning

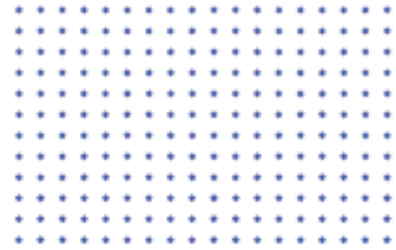
Quilts are complex, layered objects, and it can be difficult to predict how the fabric, dyes, and interior batting will react when washed. If you have washed your quilt before and feel comfortable doing so again, there is no reason you shouldn't. If you are washing a quilt for the first time, understand that there are risks associated. Never use bleaches on your quilts, as they will weaken the textiles, and if you have an heirloom quilt that you believe requires cleaning or mending, contact a conservator or high-end dry cleaner for further guidance.



Image courtesy of Jess Ortegon

CLOTHING

Original blog post by Katie Rovito, Fellow in Paintings Conservation and Nylah Byrd, Fellow in Objects Conservation



Images courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library and Katie Rovito

Whether it's your grandmother's gown or your child's Halloween costume, there are certain things we especially want to keep as memorabilia or preserve for future generations to wear again one day. The following are tips to help you preserve these very special pieces.

1. Exposure to moisture and high temperatures can damage clothing, so try to store it in a part of your house with a stable environment like an interior closet on a main floor.
2. If you're storing clothing flat (like a wedding gown in a box) choose a box that allows for the fewest folds possible. Pad out folds and dimensional pieces (like shoulders) with old white tee shirts or towels. You can also use cotton muslin or another undyed cotton fabric to line the box and act as a sling to help support the garment when you're handling it.
3. Bugs like protein rich textiles like silk and wool. The best way to prevent infestation is storing clothing in cool, dry spaces and routinely checking for signs of pests. Avoid using moth balls or other chemical deterrents, which can cause damage.
4. Clothing in good structural condition can be stored hanging. Buy padded hangers or make your own with polyester batting and cotton.

5. Avoid storing clothing long-term inside plastic drycleaner bags. Instead make dust covers with breathable cotton.
6. Make sure to label storage containers.

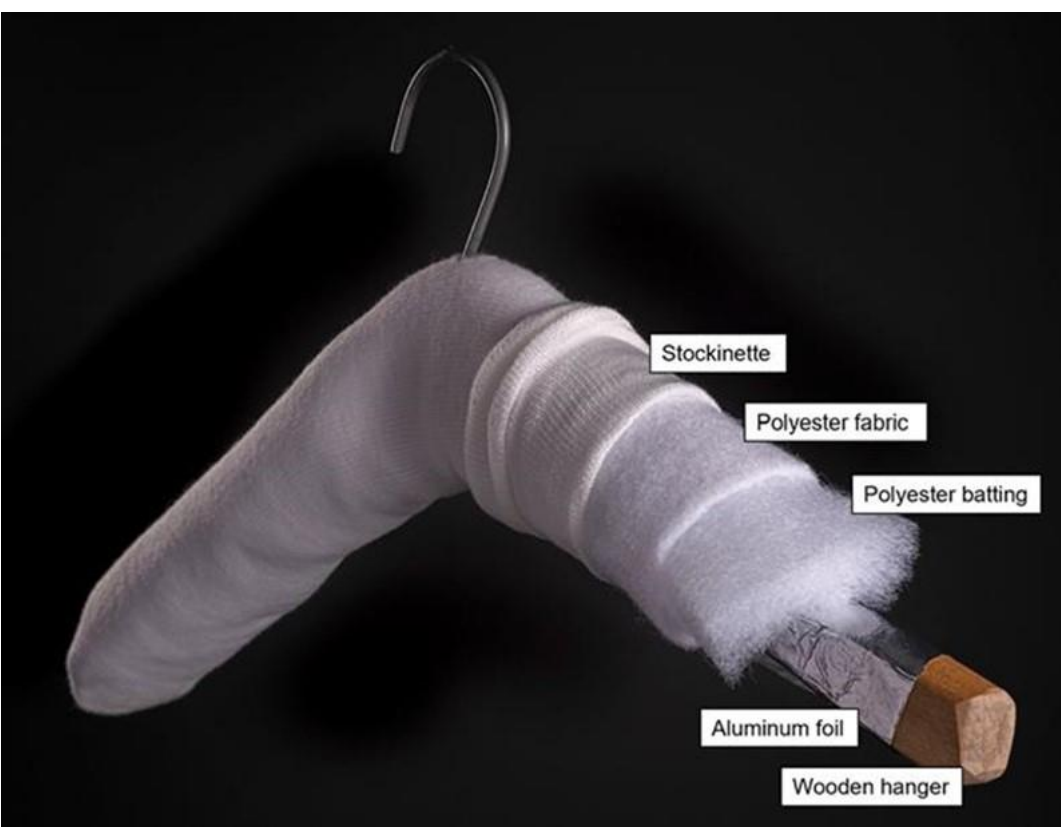
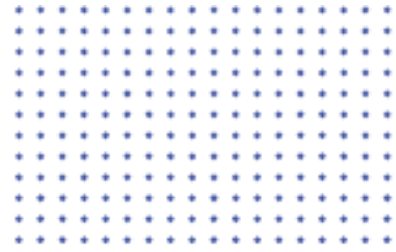


Image courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library

CERAMICS

Original blog post by Abigail Rodriguez, Fellow in Objects Conservation



Images courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library and Katie Rovito

Ceramics are part of all different aspects of our lives, from tilework and flowerpots to fine dinnerware and decorative arts. The following tips will help you care for treasured ceramics in your home.

1. Handling

Dropping and generally rough handling is one of the most common causes of damage to ceramics. When handling ceramics, try to do the following:

- Think through the handling process ahead of time and prepare for each step.
- Before picking up an object, look closely for repairs, loose parts, lifting decoration, hairline cracks, or vulnerable pieces.
- Most ceramics can be handled with clean, dry hands. Use nitrile gloves to handle unglazed ceramics and ceramics with gilding or luster. If you don't have gloves, use a clean towel or rag to pick up the object.
- Support the object evenly with both hands, and avoid placing weight along rims, handles, or knobs as these are areas that could be weak or have previous repairs.
- To move ceramics long distances, place them in a box padded out with clean towels or some other padding.

2. Display

Ceramics are generally resistant to humidity, temperature, and light. An ideal display environment for a ceramic object is one that is protected from physical damage and major dust accumulation. Vibration can cause ceramics to “walk” to the edge of shelves and counters, so avoid displaying ceramics next to the washing machine or other areas that could get shaky.

3. Cleaning

When ceramics get dirty, gentle dusting with the right tools will usually do the trick. Carefully examine the ceramic and surrounding area before dusting. For stable, glazed surfaces, use a lint-free cotton duster to wipe down the surface. For un-glazed or intricate surfaces, a dry brush can be used with a vacuum to lift the dust. The nozzle of the vacuum should be held away from the surface of the object while the dust is brushed towards the suction.

From everyday domestic objects to treasured art objects, the care of ceramics can be as simple as keeping handling to a minimum, using shelving to minimize dust accumulation, and regularly dusting stable surfaces. Following these careful steps, ceramic objects can be preserved for many years to come.



Images courtesy of Michele and Bob Rodriguez

BASKETRY

Original blog post by Anabelle Camp, Fellow in Textile Conservation



Image courtesy of Annabelle Camp

Found across the globe and throughout millennia, baskets are typically made of plant fibers or wood splints (although any flexible material can be used). They can be priceless works of art or simply attractive objects used to hold your magazines or keys. Due to their complexity and diversity, baskets pose many preservation issues. However, the following are four of the most common issues encountered in the conservation of baskets and ways to prevent them.

1. Surface Grime

Surface grime is a common issue on baskets. Due to the woven structure, dirt can easily become embedded in the basket's weave, where it can absorb moisture and attract pests. To prevent dust accumulation, store your baskets on a shelf or in a case. Always handle baskets with clean hands. If cleaning is necessary, dust lightly with a soft brush and direct dust into the nozzle of a vacuum.

2. Breaks and Losses

Baskets can be prone to cracking, breaking, and loss. Always handle baskets with two hands: one to support the base, and the other to support the body. Rims and handles can easily snag or catch on clothing or jewelry, so be cautious of what you are wearing. If you do use a basket to hold keys or magazines, this can

also cause distortions and ultimately breakage. To prevent this, consider how much weight the basket can hold. Do not overfill it and always empty it before moving.

3. Light Damage

Too much light exposure can cause discoloration and embrittlement of fibers. Try to keep baskets in areas with low light to preserve original colors.

4. Pests

Since baskets are typically composed of organic materials, they can be food sources for common household pests like silverfish, wood-post beetles, and even mice. To prevent pest damage, dust baskets regularly and routinely check for insect droppings and casings nearby.

The complexity of basketry may make its preservation seem daunting. However, following these guidelines will help to ensure that all your baskets will stay woven into your lives for years to come.



Images courtesy of Annabelle Camp

GLASS

Original blog post by Allison Kelley, Fellow in Objects Conservation

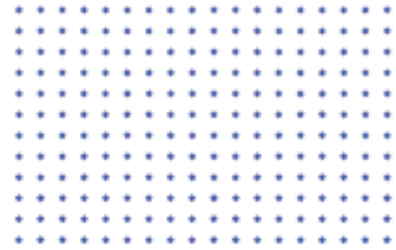


Image courtesy of Catherine Kelley

Glass can be found in everyday objects like drinking glasses, windows, and mirrors, as well as in jewelry or fine art pieces that are decorative or artistic. Even what we sometimes call “fine crystal” is, in actuality, very clear glass. With materials like glass that we handle every day, it can be useful to step back and think about some of the specific qualities and best-care practices that can be used to ensure the longevity of our cherished belongings.

1. Handling

The biggest risk to glass is breaking caused by bumping, dropping, or rough handling. The best way to preserve glass objects is to handle them with care. Always hold the object with both hands and move with care. Wash your hands before handling objects, but do not wear gloves, which can decrease sensitivity and cause objects to slip. When moving long distances, transport glass in a box padded out with clean towels or some other padding.

2. Cleaning

If dry dusting alone does not remove dirt or grime, a cloth dampened with water is a good method for cleaning glass on display. Glass cleaners like Windex are effective, but the additives in the formulation can leave residues on the surface. When using these products, follow with a pass of a cloth damp with water to rinse and remove the residues before thoroughly drying. When cleaning glassware used for eating and

drinking, keep in mind that objects that are placed in a dishwasher will be exposed to more wear and tear than those that are hand washed. Handwashing with soap, water, and a soft sponge or cloth is the gentler method of cleaning.

3. Storage and display

Storing drinking glasses and serving dishes in a cupboard or cabinet is a good way to protect them from dust and accidents. If glass is stored in the open, keep it away from the edges of tables and shelves. Some glass (mostly older glass) has components that are sensitive to light exposure, but in general, glass is able to withstand light and a variety of temperatures.

4. Change Over Time

Glass is generally stable when left on its own. Deterioration processes in glass take a very long time, though they can be made worse by acidic environments and fluctuations in humidity. Signs of these processes can include crizzling (small networks of cracks), weeping (formation of droplets on the surface), and spalling (small fragments flaking off the surface). If you suspect a piece of glassware used for food is showing signs of these conditions, stop using it. If you see signs of weeping, leave the surface alone. These conditions cannot be reversed but they can be slowed. To discuss preservation options, consult a conservator.

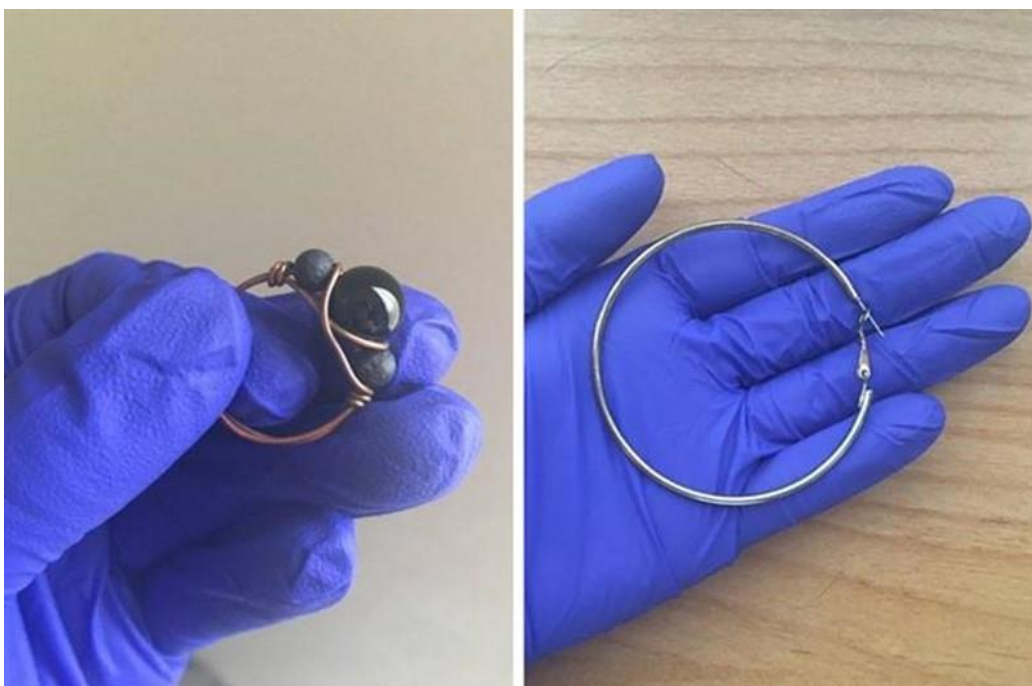
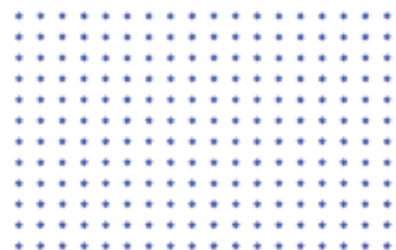
Although glass is incredibly fragile, these tips will keep your heirlooms around for years to come. We can all “raise a glass” to that!



Images courtesy of Catherine Kelley

METAL JEWELRY

Original blog post by Nylah Byrd, Fellow in Objects Conservation



Images courtesy of Magdalena Solano

Jewelry can be beautiful and deeply meaningful, especially when it relates to loved ones and family traditions. While jewelry can be made from many diverse materials, it often contains some form of metal. The following recommendations will help you care for cherished jewelry pieces with metal components.

1. Handling

When preserving jewelry at home, the first step is deciding if the object will be worn or preserved for “show”. For jewelry that is still in use, handling decisions are up to the wearer. Those wishing to preserve jewelry for “show” might choose to wear gloves when handling to prevent corrosion caused by the oils on our hands.

2. Storage

Jewelry boxes are great ways to store jewelry still in use. Corrosion could occur if pieces made from different metals are left in contact with each other for extended periods of time, so make sure pieces are separated from one another when they’re not being worn. If you’re storing jewelry in wood or cardboard containers, make sure there is a barrier layer between the wood or cardboard and the metal. Small polyethylene bags are inexpensive and are good for storage and separation of individual pieces.

3. Corrosion

There are two types of corrosion: passive and active. Passive corrosion creates a protective layer on the metal. Active corrosion continuously degrades metal. It is important to keep metal objects away from water, salts, and acids to avoid active corrosion. An ideal metal storage environment is dry with a low relative humidity.



Images courtesy of Nylah Byrd and biinform.com

PLASTICS

Original blog post by Abigail Rodriguez, Fellow in Objects Conservation



Images courtesy of Abigail Rodriguez

Plastics are everywhere, including our treasured collections. While lots of people think of plastics as “indestructible,” many plastics are very vulnerable to damage that can make our vinyl records unplayable, our resin jewelry unwearable, and our Barbie dolls unrecognizable. The following are tips for caring for the plastics in your collection.

1. Identification

The term, “plastic,” describes a huge variety of materials all with different properties. While there are many ways to categorize plastics, they have been traditionally classified as: natural, semi-synthetic, or synthetic, based on the origin of the materials used to make them. Early semi-synthetic plastics like cellulose nitrate tend to break down more quickly than others. These plastics, which were used to make photographic and motion picture film in addition to other products, emit acids that can damage other materials around them. While there are several chemical tests to identify cellulose acetate and/or nitrate, a good rule of thumb is to separate plastics that are actively degrading (crumbling, shrinking/warping, emitting a vinegar smell) from other materials.

2. Care and Display

Most plastic degradation is cyclical and irreversible, which means prevention is important! Display plastic objects on interior shelves or in shaded areas to keep them from direct light exposure. Try to keep them away from heaters, windows, and warm light sources. You may also choose to handle important plastic objects with gloves. Dust plastics on display regularly using a soft cloth.

3. Storage

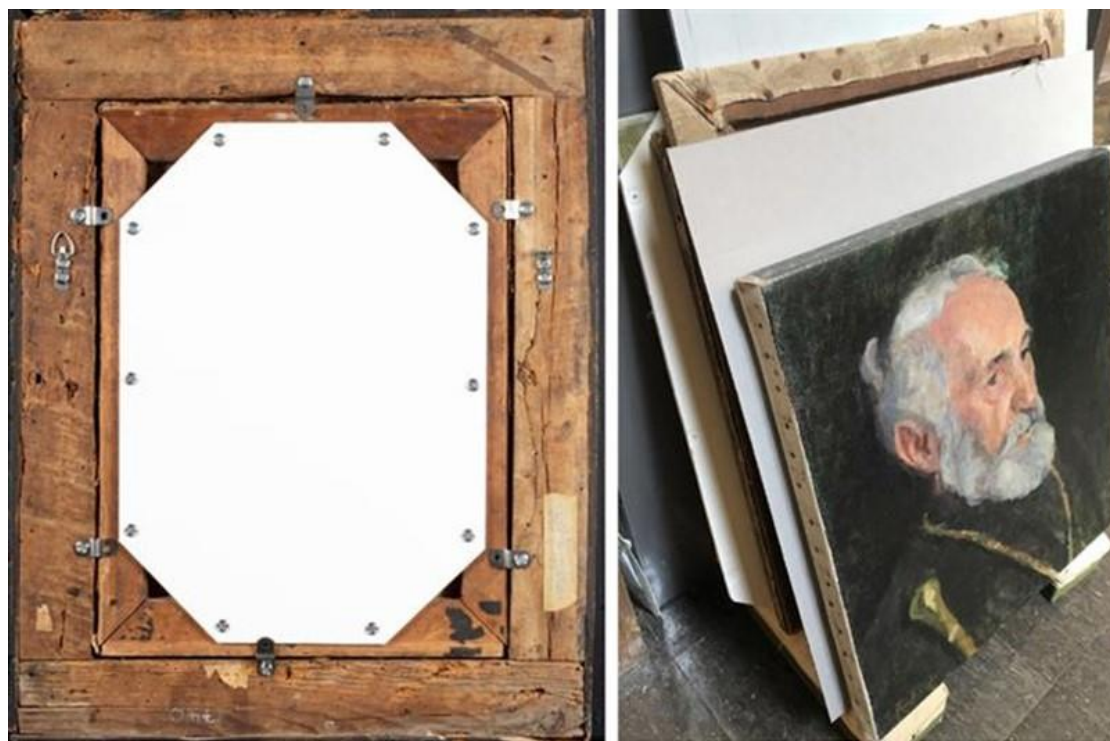
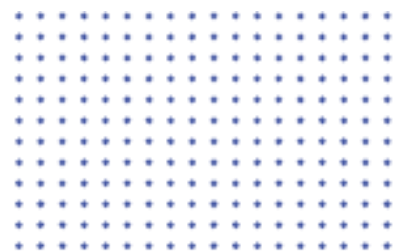
Using good quality storage materials is another way to prevent damage. Practices like storing vinyl records in acid-free paper sleeves inside their jackets will keep them functional for longer. Materials like wood and cardboard can be acidic, so if these materials are near objects, try to separate them with a barrier layer of acid free tissue, paper, or undyed cloth.



Images courtesy of Abigail Rodriguez

PAINTINGS

Original blog post by Katie Rovito, Fellow in Paintings Conservation



Images courtesy of Joyce Hill Stoner

Paintings can be both visually beautiful and sentimentally precious. Whether you're displaying your child's Picasso-esque portrait of grandma or a real Picasso from your priceless modern art collection, there are things you can do to ensure the long-term preservation of a painting.

1. Structure and Environment

Paintings are layered... Literally! Even a simple painting may include a wood stretcher, a sealed cotton canvas, ground layers, paint layers, varnish layers, and then a frame. All these layers react in slightly different ways to the environment around them. To prevent damage, keep paintings out of areas with big fluctuations in temperature and moisture (like attics, basements, and garages). Try not to hang paintings in areas with direct sunlight, and keep blinds drawn and lights off when rooms aren't in use to prevent light damage.

2. Frames

Frames protect paintings and provide good support for hanging. When using hanging hardware, choose "D" rings over eye hooks. Picture wire can be easily threaded through "D" rings and provides better support

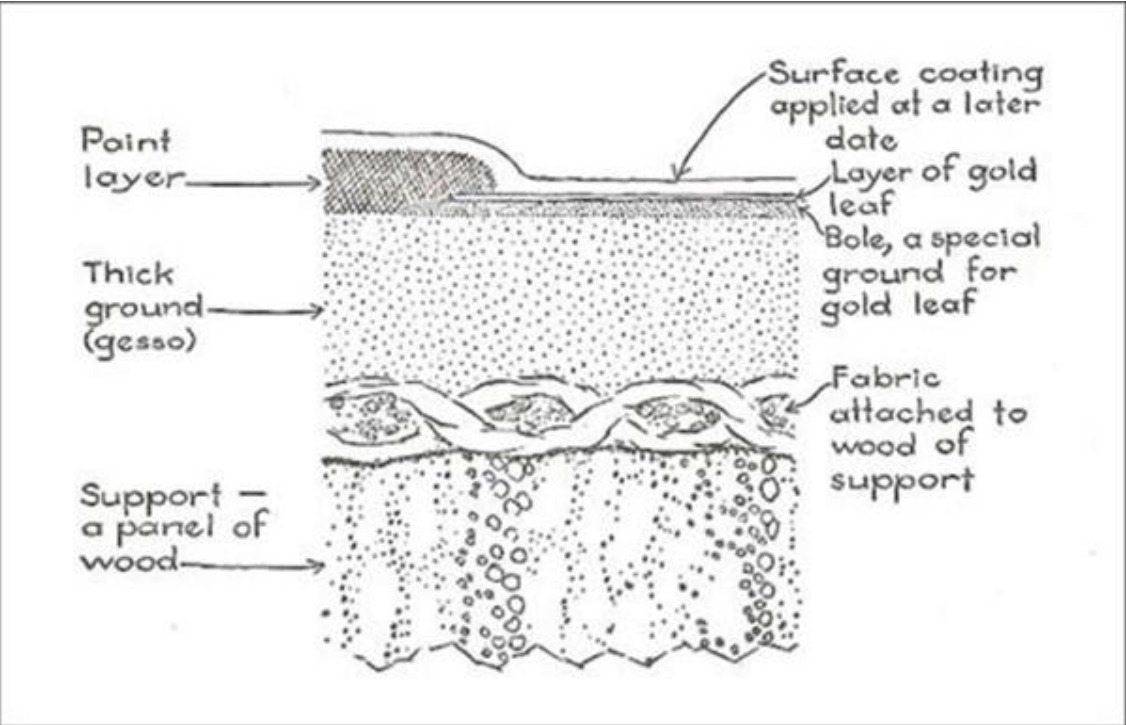
for the artwork. Make a backing with acid free board to prevent bumps and buffer from environmental changes.

3. Storage

Paintings are often happiest on the wall, but if you need to store them off the wall, they can be safely stacked vertically. Put down blocks of foam or wood covered in a moving blanket or some other fabric padding to raise the paintings off the floor. Stack paintings back-to-back and front-to-front with cardboard or foam core separators to avoid pressure points. Only stack as many paintings as can be safely supported, and don't stack paintings horizontally unless they are damaged. Large canvas paintings can be removed from their stretchers and rolled around a large diameter tubes with the paint facing out. When transporting a painting, avoid placing any plastic sheeting or bubble wrap directly on the surface of the paint. Even if a painting is fully dried, plastics can stick under certain conditions.

4. Treatment

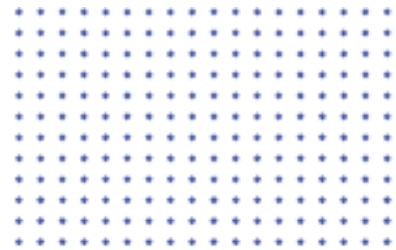
As paintings age, oil paint becomes more translucent, varnish yellows, and paint cracks. Some signs of aging are expected and non-urgent. For example, a yellow varnish, while disfiguring, is not harming the painting. That said, if the yellowing or surface grime is bothering you, call a conservator. If you notice that the paint is actively flaking, store the painting flat to avoid losing pieces, and save any flakes you can. A conservator can re-adhere the fallen chips and consolidate the loose layers.



Images from George L. Stout's book, *The Care of Pictures*

WOOD FURNITURE

Original blog post by Sarah Towers, Fellow in Wooden Artifacts Conservation



This table top was situated directly beneath a window for decades and experienced extreme fading due to light damage. The dark brown patches, protected by objects formerly placed on top of the table, reveal the original color of the wood; Images courtesy of Sarah Towers

Whether it's your great-grandmother's bureau or a favorite thrift store chair, your treasured wood furniture may be artistically, historically, or personally significant to you. At the same time, furniture is created for a functional purpose. Finding a balance between protecting our furniture and maintaining and honoring its functionality is a mix of preventive care basics and compromise to suit our homes and lifestyles. Wood is an organic material, meaning that it can shrink or expand in response to environmental changes; it will fade when exposed to light, and it is a favorite snack for some wood-loving pests. The following are recommendations for caring for your treasured pieces:

1. Extreme temperature and/or humidity can cause wood to swell, shrink, or split and veneers to bubble and pop off. Avoid storing prized furniture in attics or basements where these extremes are more likely to occur.
2. The color of wood is created naturally by chemicals in the wood itself, or artificially by stains or tinted varnishes. These colorants can change and fade when exposed to light. Try to keep treasured furniture away from direct sunlight and close blinds in rooms that aren't in use.
3. Before lifting furniture, take a moment to find the weight bearing parts of the piece that are the sturdiest (the seat of a chair) and lift from those elements. Avoid lifting from elements like arms or chair rails that can easily become detached.
4. Avoid commercial furniture cleaners, polishes, and waxes, which can leave harmful residues and attract dust over time. Instead, routinely dust or wipe your furniture with soft lint-free cloths (diaper cloth material or old pillowcases are useful for this).

5. Wood can be a tasty snack for insects like powderpost beetles and termites. Check for small round or oval exit holes in the wood surface. Seeing these exit holes is not necessarily a cause for alarm; most antique furniture has some level of pest damage that is no longer active. The best way to identify an active infestation is to look for fresh wood-colored powder in or around the exit holes or in small piles underneath furniture. If you see this, immediately seal your furniture in a plastic bag, isolate it from the rest of your collection, and consult a conservator.

Use your furniture with pride and joy. Gentle care will ensure your furniture lasts long past your own lifetime.



Images courtesy of Sarah Towers

GILDED FRAMES

Original blog post by Jonathan Stevens, Fellow in Wooden Artifacts Conservation



Image courtesy of Katie Rovito

Frames protect and display pictures, mirrors, and textiles, but they can also have artistic or historical value. Framing is usually considered a matter of personal taste, but original and historic frames can be beautiful, and they can tell us a lot about the history of the artwork. Frames can be made from a variety of materials, but these tips focus primarily on the care of gilded wood frames:

1. Structure and Environment

Gilded wood frames are not unlike paintings in that they can have a lot of layers. The wood body of the frame may be carved and/or decorated with “compo,” which is a combination of chalk, animal glue, oil, and resin that can be molded into intricate designs. There are then layers of gesso or drying oil depending on the gilding process, then the thin layer of metallic leaf, then in some cases, a toning layer or another surface coating. All these layers react differently to changes in temperature and humidity, which can cause damage, so you want to keep your gilded frames in areas that don’t get extremely hot, cold, damp, or dry.

2. Handling and Hanging

Improper handling and insufficient hanging hardware are common causes of damage to frames. When moving a frame, use two hands to grasp the frame on both sides, making sure not to lift by fragile carvings

or ornament. For hanging hardware, avoid threaded screw eyes, especially for heavy pictures or frames, as they can easily loosen over time. D-rings screwed to the back of the frame are a more reliable way to attach picture wire. If bits of gilding, carving, or ornament become detached from your frame, “bag and tag” them in separate plastic bags. Saving these fragments can make any future conservation treatment less complicated and expensive.

3. Cleaning

Gilded surfaces can be extremely delicate, so cleaning them presents challenges. Dust frames gently using a soft natural bristle brush like a sable brush or an unused cosmetics brush. Avoid feather dusters, which can snag and scratch delicate surfaces. If gentle dusting isn’t doing the trick, contact a conservator. Don’t apply water or commercial cleaners which can strip coatings and scratch or remove delicate metallic leaf. If you’re cleaning a mirror or glass in a gilded frame, use an ammonia free cleaner. Spray the cloth rather than the surface of the mirror or glass to prevent drips that can pool and damage the frame.

4. Touchups

Although it may be tempting to use gold-colored paint to touch up a worn frame, don’t do it. “Gold” paints are often actually pigmented with copper alloys like brass or bronze. While they might match the gold of the frame initially, they almost always oxidize to an unappealing brownish-green layer that can be very difficult or impossible to remove. When in doubt, it is always better to accept a small amount of natural wear than to attempt treatment at home. Reach out to a conservator with any questions.



Images courtesy of Jonathan Stevens

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Original blog post by Sarah Towers, Fellow in Wooden Artifacts Conservation

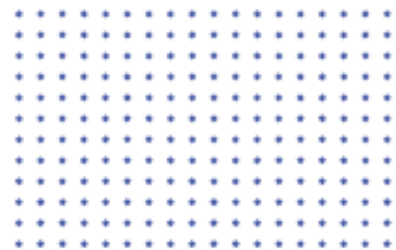


Image courtesy of Emily Brzezinski

Originally written by Sarah Towers, Wooden Artifacts Conservation Fellow

Many of us have musical instruments at home. They could be antiques that haven't been played in one hundred years or they could be brand-new and played daily. Instruments fall into a grey area of collections because they can have a lot of artistic or historical significance but they are often expected to function which can lead to them breaking down over time. The following tips will help you care for your cherished musical instruments.

- The sound an instrument makes is often dependent on the ways in which the materials it's made of interact with each other and with the player. This delicate balance is disrupted by quick changes in temperature and humidity, which put instruments under stress that throws off the sound. Avoid storing musical instruments in areas of your house that get extremely hot, cold, moist, or damp like attics, basements, and garages. Bathrooms and kitchens are also places to avoid.
- Keep your instrument in its case if the case is in good condition. The case acts as a buffer between the instrument and the environment, and it also protects from light damage. If there is a lot of wiggle room within the case, pad it out with undyed cotton or soft foam.
- Stringed instruments, pianos, and drums all rely somewhat on tension to produce sound. The full tension required for playing can cause stress to an instrument not in use as it changes with the environment around it. If you don't plan to play an instrument anymore, or at least not for a while, store it at less than full tension. This means loosening the strings on stringed instruments like guitars and loosening drumheads. This will give them room to "breathe" when there are shifts in temperature and humidity.

- Before picking up an instrument, think about what elements might be vulnerable to damage and adjust your handling accordingly. For example, don't carry stringed instruments by their necks, which can weaken the joint to the body and cause a break.
- Wipe instruments down with a soft cloth when you're finished playing.
- Avoid handling metal components of instruments when you're not playing. The oils from our hands can cause corrosion over time.
- Limit dust by covering instruments when they're not in use. Dust gently with a soft bristle brush if needed.
- Contact a professional for any treatment. Be clear about your goals for treatment, whether they are bringing the instrument back to playing condition or repairing it for display only.

Don't forget to enjoy your musical instruments in whatever form that takes for you! Most damage occurs when instruments fall into disuse and eventual neglect. If you can play your instrument or display it with pride, you will be able to enjoy it every day.



Images courtesy of Sarah Towers