

Preserving Your Art: The Care and Framing of Acrylic & Oil Paintings



Creating a piece of art is only the first step in its journey; protecting and displaying it properly ensures it can be enjoyed for years to come. Acrylic and oil paintings each have unique qualities that require specific approaches to care and framing. This guide offers essential tips for maintaining the vibrancy and longevity of your artwork, from choosing the right materials and varnishes to selecting the perfect frame. Whether you're an artist or a collector, these professional techniques will help keep your paintings safe, beautiful, and ready to inspire.

Care and Protection of Acrylic Paintings

1. Choosing the Right Canvas or Surface

- **Description:** Acrylic paint is versatile, making it suitable for a wide range of surfaces. Canvas is a popular choice because it's lightweight, durable, and has a natural texture that complements acrylic's flexibility. Acrylic paper and wood panels are other excellent choices.
- **Recommendations:** For longevity, use surfaces labeled as archival or acid-free, as these won't degrade over time. Pre-primed canvases are convenient, but applying an extra layer of gesso can improve the surface's durability and enhance color vibrancy.



2. Protection from Dust and Dirt

- **Description:** Acrylic paint dries to a flexible, water-resistant surface, making it resilient but also prone to dust buildup. Regular dusting can help maintain its appearance.
- **Cleaning Tip:** Dust gently with a soft, dry cloth or an artist's brush. Avoid using water, as even a small amount of moisture can dull or damage the finish.

3. Varnishing Acrylic Paintings

- **Why Varnish:** Varnish provides a protective layer, shielding the painting from UV rays, dust, and environmental pollutants. It also gives an even finish, which enhances the painting's appearance.

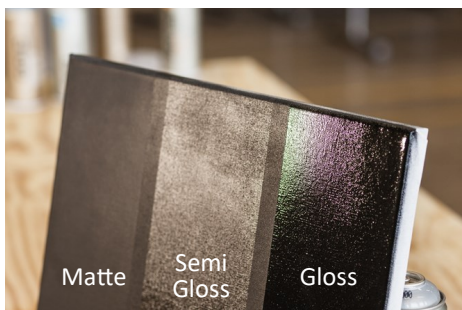


Image Courtesy of Montana-Cans

- **Types of Varnish:** Glossy varnishes enhance colors, satin offers a balance, and matte gives a subtle, glare-free finish. Look for removable, archival varnishes; removable varnishes can be cleaned or replaced without damaging the underlying painting.
- **Application:** Varnish once the painting is fully dry (usually a few days to a week). Use a clean, wide brush or spray applicator, following the manufacturer's instructions for best results.

Read more about varnishing your acrylic paintings in this article from Golden Artist Colors at:

<https://justpaint.org/introduction-to-varnishing/>

4. Storing Acrylic Art

- **Storage Tips:** Avoid stacking acrylic paintings directly on top of each other; use protective sheets in between if you must stack. Store in a cool, dry place, as high heat and humidity can soften acrylic surfaces, potentially leading to stickiness.
- **Climate Control:** Avoid extreme temperature shifts. If possible, store in an area with consistent temperature and humidity to prevent warping or softening.



Framing Acrylic Paintings

1. Choosing a Frame Style

- **Floater Frames:** These are a top choice for acrylic paintings as they allow the edges of the canvas to remain visible, creating a “floating” effect. They give a modern, professional look while offering protection.



Floater Frame

- **Standard Frames:** For acrylics on paper, standard frames with mats provide additional support and allow the artwork to fit securely within the frame.

2. Protection Without Glass

- **Why Skip Glass:** Acrylic paintings form a hard, water-resistant surface once dry, so they don't require glass protection. Leaving the painting without glass allows the textures and colors to remain vibrant and maintains airflow.
- **When to Use Plexiglass:**
If framing acrylic on paper, consider Plexiglass instead of traditional glass to avoid reflections and reduce weight. However, use only acid-free mats and backing to prevent damage.

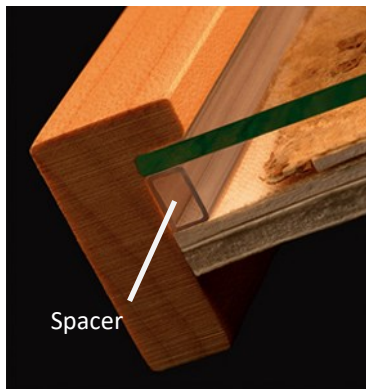


3. Using Mats

- **For Acrylic on Paper:** Mats prevent the artwork from touching the Plexiglass, reducing the chance of smudges or damage.
- **Acid-Free Materials:** Always choose acid-free or archival mats and backing for longevity. Neutral-colored mats work best to avoid distracting from the artwork.

4. Assembly Tips

- **Spacers:** Use spacers if the painting is close to the edges of the frame. This maintains space between the artwork and frame, avoiding scratches.
- **Secure Backing:** If using a frame, ensure the backing is acid-free and tight. Seal with framers' tape to prevent dust or dirt from getting in.



Care and Protection of Oil Paintings

1. Choosing Quality Canvas and Primers

- **Description:** Oil paint requires a primed surface to prevent oil from absorbing into the material, which can cause the paint to deteriorate. Linen and cotton canvases are popular, with linen being a high-quality choice for professional work.
- **Priming:** Use gesso or oil primers for a stable surface. Proper priming prevents “oil sink,” where paint loses its vibrancy as oil absorbs into the canvas fibers. Primed wood panels are also a solid option for oil paintings.



2. Protecting the Surface from Damage

- **Description:** Oil paint takes weeks to months to fully cure, depending on thickness and environmental conditions. The surface remains sensitive to scratches, dirt, and oils from hands during this time.
- **Cleaning Tips:** Dust occasionally with a soft, dry brush or microfiber cloth. Avoid wiping or rubbing, as it could disturb the paint. Avoid water or cleaning products, as oil paintings are sensitive to moisture.

3. Varnishing Oil Paintings

- **Timing:** Oil paintings need a long time to dry thoroughly (6-12 months) before they're varnished. Applying varnish prematurely can trap moisture and cause cracking or yellowing.
- **Types of Varnish:** Gloss varnish



intensifies colors, while matte varnish gives a softer look. Use removable varnishes for easy cleaning and future restoration.

- **Application:** Apply varnish in a dust-free area using a clean brush or spray can. Allow each coat to dry fully between applications.

4. Storing Oil Paintings

- **Storage Tips:** Store upright to prevent pressure on the surface. Use a dust cover if storing long-term but avoid plastic wrapping, as it can trap moisture. Acid-free paper or cloth covers can protect the surface from dust without compromising breathability.
- **Climate Control:** Store in a dry, cool area with stable humidity and temperature to prevent cracking or yellowing.

Framing Oil Paintings

1. Choosing a Frame Style

- **Floater Frames:** These are ideal for oil paintings as they provide airflow around the edges while showcasing the thickness of the canvas. They're a popular choice for contemporary and traditional works alike.
- **Open Frames:** Traditional open frames offer a timeless look and are ideal for classic oil paintings. Choose frames that complement the colors and mood of the artwork without overpowering it.



Art by Kathy Prince

2. Avoiding Glass and Plexiglass

- **Why No Glass or Plexiglass:** Oil paintings need airflow to prevent cracking and yellowing. Glass can trap moisture and even stick to the paint over time.

- **Alternatives:** To protect from dust without glass, consider using a “dust cover” or a fitted backing on the frame. This will protect the back of the canvas and keep the frame secure while allowing air to circulate.

3. Backing and Support

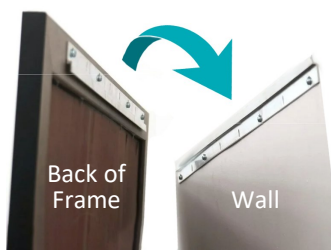
- **Rigid Backing:** For smaller oil paintings, rigid backing with acid-free materials helps keep the artwork stable in the frame.
- **Dust Cover:** Add a dust cover to the back of the frame for more protection. Use acid-free paper that won’t trap moisture.

4. Assembly Tips

- **Use Bumpers or Spacers:** Small adhesive bumpers on the back edges of the frame can help prevent the frame from pressing directly against the wall, improving airflow.
- **Security:** Secure the canvas tightly within the frame using brackets or clips but avoid pressing directly on the paint surface.

General Framing Tips for Acrylic & Oil Paintings

- **Choose Acid-Free Materials:** Whether using mats, backing, or dust covers, always use acid-free, archival-quality materials to prevent yellowing or damage over time.
- **Hanging Hardware:** Use appropriate hardware based on the painting’s weight. Heavy oil paintings may require D-rings or wire for stable hanging, while lighter acrylics can use straight hangers or D-rings. If the art is very large or heavy, it is best to use a French Cleat or Z-bar hanger.



French Cleat/Z-Bar Hanger

- **Avoid Direct Sunlight:** Position framed paintings away from direct sunlight to prevent fading or discoloration over time.
- **Humidity Control:** Hang paintings in areas with stable humidity levels to prevent warping or cracking, especially important for oil paintings.

Pro Tips

For Acrylics: Use Removable Varnish

Removable varnish, such as GOLDEN's Gloss Waterborne Varnish, is ideal for acrylic paintings, as it allows the surface to be cleaned or restored later without damaging the artwork.



Use UV-Protective Varnish for Acrylics

If the painting will be displayed in a bright area, a UV-protective varnish can help reduce fading over time. GOLDEN's Gloss Waterborne Varnish protects interior acrylic paintings from dust and ultraviolet light.

For Oils: Wait Before Varnishing

Allow oil paintings to dry completely for 6-12 months before applying varnish. This waiting period is crucial to avoid trapped moisture, which can lead to cracking.

Frame with Room to Breathe

For both acrylic and oil paintings, framing without glass helps preserve the paint surface. Use floater frames or open frames to ensure airflow around the artwork, preventing mold or yellowing.

Keep Artwork Off the Ground

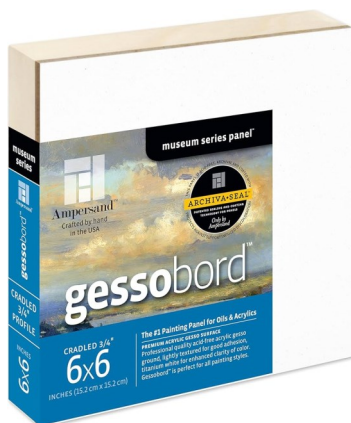
Store or display paintings at least a few inches above the floor to avoid accidental contact with dust, moisture, or pests.



Common Mistakes to Avoid

Don't Skip the Primer

For oil paintings, applying paint to an unprimed surface can cause the oils to soak into the material, leading to deterioration. Always prime your surface to protect the artwork. You can also use Ampersand wood panels, which come cradled or uncradled, and gessoed for both oil and acrylic painting.



Don't Use Glass with Oil Paintings

Glass can trap moisture against oil paintings, potentially leading to cracking, yellowing, or mold. Avoid glass or Plexiglass on oil works to maintain necessary airflow.

Stacking Unprotected Artwork

Stacking paintings without protective sheets can lead to scratches, dents, and even color transfer. Use acid-free paper or glassine between each piece if stacking is necessary.

Don't Use Non-Archival Materials

Acidic materials, like non-archival tape, mats, or backing, can cause yellowing over time. Always opt for acid-free, archival-quality materials to ensure your artwork's longevity.

Don't Rush Drying Times

For both mediums, rushing drying times—whether between painting layers, varnishing, or framing—can cause long-term issues like cracking or dull colors. Allow adequate drying time at each stage to avoid these problems.

Materials Guide

Types of Brushes for Acrylic and Oil

Acrylic Brushes: Synthetic brushes are ideal for acrylics as they resist damage from the paint's chemicals and provide good control. Try Winsor and Newton's Professional Watercolor Synthetic Sable Brushes.



Oil Brushes: Natural bristle brushes work well with oil paints, offering excellent color-holding capacity and durability. Try Winsor & Newton Artists' Oil Synthetic Hog Brushes.



Choosing Quality Canvas

Cotton vs. Linen: Cotton is affordable and works well for most artists, while linen is more durable and ideal for professional or long-lasting pieces.

Pre-Stretched vs. Roll: Pre-stretched canvas is convenient for immediate use, whereas rolled canvas can be stretched later for custom sizes. In addition to pre-stretched canvas, we carry Fredrix canvas and linen rolls.



Archival Supplies for Framing

Acid-Free Backing Boards and Mats:

These materials help prevent discoloration and degradation over time.

Archival Tape: Use archival hinging tape to secure artwork within the frame, especially for acrylics on paper.

Art Care FAQ

How Often Should I Dust My Painting?

Answer: Dust paintings gently with a soft brush every few months. Avoid using any water or cleaners on the surface, especially for oils.

When Should I Reapply Varnish?

Answer: Depending on exposure to light and dust, reapply varnish every 5-10 years to keep the artwork protected and vibrant.

Can I Use Household Cleaners on the Frame?

Answer: Avoid household cleaners on frames, especially if the frame has an open or floater design. Use a lightly damp cloth for wood frames or dust with a dry cloth for all other types.

What's the Best Way to Transport Paintings?

Answer: Transport paintings in protective covers or bubble wrap, ensuring that no materials press directly on the painted surface. Keep artwork upright to prevent damage. If transporting more than one framed painting, place them so that art faces art, and hardware on the back faces hardware to prevent the frames from getting dented or scratched.

Checklist for Long-Term Care

This checklist offers a quick, actionable guide that you can reference to maintain your paintings.

- **Dust Paintings Every Few Months**
- **Keep Away from Direct Sunlight**
- **Control Temperature and Humidity**
- **Check Frame and Backing Regularly**
- **Store Upright if Not Hanging**
- **Reapply Varnish Every 5-10 Years (if needed)**



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The Care and Framing of Your Watercolor Art

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