

CARING FOR YOUR ART COLLECTION, BY AXA ART INSURANCE CORPORATION

Collection Management

In the Frame

By Eli Wilner

Frames can draw a viewer in with subtle beckoning or a visual snap to attention. They can effortlessly mirror visual elements in an image, or step into the distance, providing an extended blank space in which the image has full command.

Framing is integral to the care and display of an art collection. The perfect frame encloses and protects while showing a work to its best advantage. Framing protects the edges of a painting's support structure, especially the turnover margins of a work on canvas. A frame's protrusion can create a safe pocket for the surface of a painting and absorb the shock of a fall or other accidental impact.

Frames are at their best when used to enhance the beauty of a painting, affecting the way in

which the work is perceived. In recent years collectors and curators have become increasingly sophisticated in their knowledge of the development and nuances of period framing styles, thanks to the expanding body of research about frame makers, materials and construction.¹ Historically appropriate framing—having a frame style and design that is contemporary with the artwork—has increasingly become the preferred choice of collectors, replacing the heavy ornate styles favored by earlier generations. Numerous artists, from van Gogh and Seurat to Ad Reinhardt, have been so aware of the aesthetic interaction between painting and frame that they have taken matters into their own hands by either describing how to frame specific works or creating the frames themselves.²

Choosing a frame for your painting:

- If your painting has an artist-created frame, the choice has been made for you. In that case, don't change anything.
- If your painting is as yet unframed, consider using a period frame sympathetic to the stylistic intent of the work. A good way to start is by noticing how museums have framed other works of the same period.
- If you decide upon a period frame, either original or reproduction, be certain the frame interacts with the painting and does not overwhelm it.
- Be certain the frame will not cast a shadow on the image.
- If your frame is gilded and needs conservation, be sure that as much as possible of the original gilding is maintained.
- Confirm that the surface of your painting is not in direct contact with the raw wood of the frame.



George Catlin (1796-1872)
Catlin the Artist and Sportsman Relieving One of His Companions from an Unpleasant Predicament During His Travels In Brazil, 1854
Oil on canvas
18 1/4 x 25 1/2 inches

Eli Wilner & Company replica of an American 1850's style frame.
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT



Edwin Lord Weeks (1849-1903)
The Golden Temple of Amritsar, c.1890
Oil on Canvas
79 1/4 x 117 1/4 inches
Annmary Brown Memorial Collection,
Brown University.

Replica of a 19th century Orientalist style frame, applied ornament and gilded.

- Anti-reflective glazing offers extra protection to a particularly valuable or fragile painting. Does the placement in a hall or area with much human traffic make the painting vulnerable to accidental contact by household members? Here, too, glazing would be recommended.

Framing works on paper:

- Framing, matting and glazing are especially crucial to works on paper (i.e. drawings, pastels, watercolors, prints, photographs).
- Works framed in previous decades may need to be re-matted, as older matting may contain acidic wood pulp which is harmful to the paper.
- All mounting and matting materials should be acid-free.
- The work on paper should be separated from the surface of the glazing material.
- Glazing materials should be treated to filter out harmful ultraviolet rays as well as anti-reflective and shatter-resistant.
- If the artwork is especially large, acrylic glazing may be preferable to glass to ensure the safety of the work.

Lighting, installation, display and transport:

- Avoid affixing a light to a frame because of the heat and harmful UV rays which may lead to fading or discolorations of the image. Use general light instead. Fiber optic lighting systems promise to revolutionize the lighting of fine art, and are just now in their infancy.
- Attach appropriate hardware to the back of the frame. For a larger painting, use double hooks.
- When you ship your art, discuss whether it is best to keep the frame or substitute a travel frame. Do not store a work without a frame as the frame protects the surface of a painting.

Framing a painting can drastically change its tone. The idea is to create a single unified presentation, with the painting as the central strongest element. Successful framing is one of the rare occasions where exquisite beauty and practical sensibilities can coalesce.

Eli Wilner is founder and CEO of Eli Wilner & Co.

¹ Eli Wilner, editor, *The Gilded Edge, The Art of the Frame*, San Francisco, California, 2000.

² Brenda Richardson, "What's in a Frame?", The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1993.