

# THE ART OF NEW YORK LIVING

## Serious Stuff

*By Kenneth Jay Linsner*

In the last few months I have been asked to examine the artwork in several water-loss claims. As I've suggested in an earlier column, water loss is THE major source of insurance claims involving works of art. Of the pieces that I've looked at in such diverse places as a 10,000 square foot home in the Hamptons and a one bedroom four-flight walk up in Manhattan, the bulk of the items damaged were works on paper.

Paper as a support for works of art is subject to damage and deterioration from many causes, including water and high humidity. While some papers, especially modern ones, deteriorate because they are made of poor material, all types, even papers of 100% rag stock can be damaged from a variety of environmental conditions. Besides the obvious water related problems these include excessive light, heat and pollutants. Most importantly, paper is subject to the migration of harmful compounds from surrounding materials...especially the cardboards used by less aware framers.

Framing is often assumed to be one means of protecting—as well as displaying—works of art. Unfortunately, by the use of improper materials framers can do more harm to the work of art than if it had never been framed.

Here are some key points to run by any framer you might use:

1. *Are you using 100% ragboard in the mounting and matting process?*

Before a work of art is put into a frame it should be properly supported on acid free board. Most framers do use 100% rag board all of the time...normal mat boards are colored cardboards with a core of ground wood which will deteriorate and liberate acid onto any paper with which they are in contact. You should insist on the use of 100% ragboard...not just 'rag-faced' board.

2. *How do you intend to hinge the work?*

The generally accepted method of matting involves preparation of a window mat and backboard cut to fit the frame. The object is hinged to the backboard, at the upper corners only, with rectangular pieces of Japanese paper half of which is adhered to the object, the other half to the backboard. The work on paper should NEVER be glued to backboard or 'dry mounted' down. Gummed linen tapes, some of which claim to be archival, are also acceptable, but they may, in the end, cause yellowing or staining depending upon the adhesive and method of moistening (saliva is a no-no). Pressure sensitive tapes should not be used under any circumstances. Some pressure sensitive archival materials are available...such as the filmoplast series of tapes and the framer should advise you if he/she intends to use them.

3. *With certain works of art a window mat is not aesthetically pleasing.*

In such cases the object should be hinged to an all-rag backboard and framed so that the work of art does not touch the glass. In all framing backings should be somewhat larger than the work of art so that its edges do not touch the frame. A neutral plastic 'frame space' can be applied to the cover glass edges so that it keeps this glass from the work even in conditions where humidity may buckle the back board. Linen or silk covered mats and backboards should be isolated from the work with a piece of acid free paper to keep adhesives used in gluing the cloth to the backboard from staining through...since these are rarely archival.

4. *What are you going to use to glaze my picture?*

Glazing is essential for protection against dirt and pollutants. Today we can also protect the work from the harmful effects of ambient ultraviolet light and near visible light. A series of ultraviolet light absorbing Plexiglas retailed as UF-1 or UF-3 or UF-4 can be very useful in this. The glazing will, indeed, yellow in time since it is absorbing the radiation that would otherwise reach the work. It must be replaced on a regular basis. Textiles are also vulnerable to attack by light and silk can loose up to ½ of its strength in only 300 hours of exposure to indirect unfiltered light. So not only should you consider this when framing works on paper, but also such things are silk scarves

and costumes. Unprotected colors in works of art and textiles will fade quickly.

5. *An ongoing debate as to whether sealing the back of a frame is beneficial has been raging for decades.*

Should the work of art and its matting be allowed to ‘breathe’? In metropolitan areas such as New York I would answer... “Seal away.” These paper backings are rarely more than barriers to dust and grime and I think backing are useful in that regard.

Some additional caveats include the warning not to hang works of art (on paper or not ) near radiators or other heat sources, such as flues, and the suggestion to avoid hanging works in very damp rooms or against damp walls. Very dry conditions, such as those usually found in New York apartments during the winter, may encourage brittleness and accelerate other adverse conditions.

I thought this an appropriate lesson for all of us have spent the summer collecting up art and memorabilia, which we will want framed. Follow the basics and your stuff can withstand most of what New York living has to throw at it. Next time .... what happens to all that stuff collected in those old apartments on the Upper West and East Sides when their owner’s can’t take it with them?