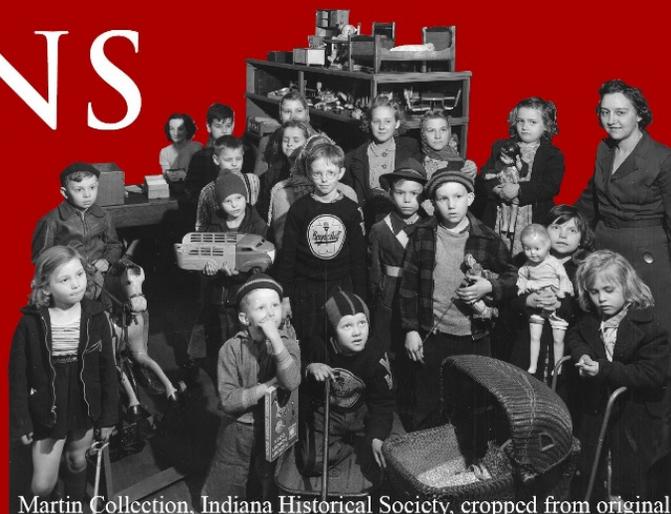


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COLLECTIONS

Advisor



Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society, cropped from original

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The Care, Display and Storage of Paintings in Museums and Historic Homes

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Indianapolis Museum of Art

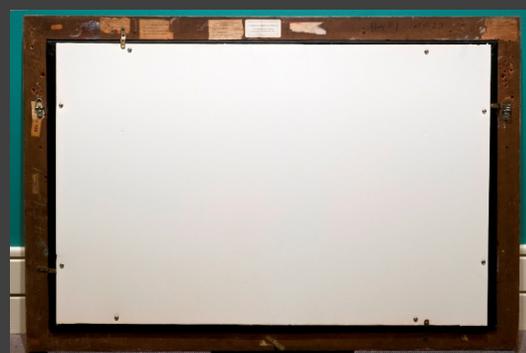
www.imamuseum.org

“Courtesy of the Indianapolis Museum of Art”



Paintings on display

Paintings are complex layered structures that, while fragile, can last as long as their components stay together. Preventative conservation measures in your galleries and storage areas should include: regular examinations; controlling temperature, humidity and light exposure; pest management; and proper framing, handling, display and storage. Remedial conservation procedures to stabilize and repair damages, cleaning and other interventions should only be undertaken by a professional painting conservator.



Example of a foam core backing board and hanging hardware

Condition checks

Regular condition checks are necessary to identify any changes to the works on display in the galleries. Organizations should develop a schedule for checking works on display that fits their staffing/volunteer

situations. Obvious changes to the condition of a painting such as scratches, flaking paint or damage to a frame are immediately reported and investigated. Condition records on file provide a baseline of the condition of each work of art entering the collection. The IMA conservation staff checks every painting and frame in the galleries on a six-week rotation before carefully dusting them with very soft brushes of different sizes. Avoid using feather dusters as they can cause damage.

Environment

The optimal environment should be based on the nature of the collections, the building's needs and the ability of the HVAC system (Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning) to control temperature and humidity. Recent research suggests that for most paintings in good condition, a relative humidity within the annual range of 40 to 60 percent and a temperature range of 59 to 77 degrees Fahrenheit is acceptable. Understanding the condition and unique requirements of your collection may suggest the need for tighter controls and/or for particularly sensitive items to be placed in special display or storage cases to buffer and protect them from environmental damage.

Lighting

Lights should be off and window shades closed whenever possible to reduce the total annual exposure. Ultraviolet filtration of light sources is as important as is controlling the intensity and duration of light exposure. Unfiltered direct sunlight as well as intense artificial fluorescent, halogen and incandescent lights can accelerate fading of colors, yellowing of varnishes, heat damage and other problems. Reducing light levels and blocking UV radiation are keys to long-term preservation efforts. Picture lights are generally not recommended as they can cause hot spots and tangled wires can push against the back of an unprotected canvas.

Pest management

Integrated Pest Management programs allow for regular monitoring and treatment of potentially damaging pests in the facility. A good IPM program consists of prevention (sealing potential entry points), monitoring



Painting racks for hanging two-dimensional works in storage



David Miller, chief conservator

and identification (strategically placed insect and mouse traps that are checked regularly), with treatment occurring when needed (www.museumpests.net). Some pests are more damaging to collections than others so it is important to identify the type of insect or pest before commencing treatment. All works of art, crates and supplies entering the facility should be checked immediately before they are integrated into the collection. This will minimize opportunities for active infestations.

Framing

Framing of paintings requires specialized knowledge and should only be done by someone with appropriate training. Paintings should never be nailed into the frame, but be secured with mending plates screwed to the frame. A painting on canvas should have a rigid backing to protect the back from accidental damage, to minimize vibration during transport and to help regulate environmental shifts. A backing should be made from an inert substance such as foam core, acid-free mat board or Coroplast.

Hanging

The type of hanging method used for paintings is dependent on the type and size of the painting. Eye hooks with picture wire are not recommended due to the instability of hanging a two-dimensional work from one point. One secure way of hanging is to mount a pair of “D”-rings on each side of the back of the frame or stretcher of a painting. “D”-rings are available in a variety of sizes depending on the weight of the framed painting. All hanging hardware should have correct weight “J” hooks installed in the wall. If the wall is new construction, it is best to reinforce the drywall with $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch plywood especially if the framed painting is large or heavy. If you are installing two-dimensional works in original plaster walls, it is recommended that you use appropriately sized anchors. Cold exterior walls need to have an air space between the back of the painting and the wall to prevent possible condensation from forming, resulting in water damage and/or mold. Simple shims, bumpers or other materials like cork can be used to create a gap.

Storage

Stored paintings should be hung in their proper orientation on racks using independent “S” hooks that are inserted through the hanging hardware on the back of the paintings. Imagine a chain link fence with a frame around it that is either attached to a wall, suspended from a ceiling or slides on a track on the floor and is supported at the top. Unistrut, Porta Storage and others make excellent products for storing framed two-dimensional works. If this type of rack is not possible, paintings can be stored in bins with foam core, Masonite or something rigid in between the frames to protect them. The bins should be made from products that will not negatively affect or interact with the artwork and can be lined with an inert product like Ethafoam to cushion the frames and allow for sliding the paintings in and out of the bins easily.

For damage, seek advice from professional paintings conservators to aid in preserving your collections. The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) can assist you in finding a conservator. www.conservation-us.org

- Association of Indiana Museums (AIM) www.indianamuseums.org
- Canadian Conservation Institute www.cci-icc.gc.ca/publications/notes/index-eng.aspx
- Connecting to Collections Online community www.connectingtocollections.org
- Indiana History Society Lending Resources Center www.indianahistory.org/our-services/local-history-services/lending-resources
- Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute www.si.edu/mci/english/learn_more/taking_care/care_painting.html

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