

Care of picture frames & gilded objects

Picture frames and gilded objects are constructed from a variety of materials, often more complex than they may first appear. The wooden element of picture frame is often a soft wood for example pine, lime poplar but hard woods are also used for example oak and Ash.

Heat and Humidity

Wood is hygroscopic in that it moves with moisture content, as it dries or expands, which is dependent on the environment it is kept in. Environmental changes do cause movement of timber and applied finishes. This may cause the opening of structural joints and cracking of the finish. Prevention is better than cure. We strongly advise the following:

Do not hang your pictures in strong or direct sunlight that could cause extensive damage to your painting but also warping and cracking of the picture frame. As a guide 50 Lux (light reading) is the maximum that a painting picture or print should be exposed to, significant damage will occur above this level.

Do not hang in a damp environment or above a radiator where temperatures will fluctuate.

The ideal environment has an ambient temperature with Relative Humidity (RH) of 55c degrees but a range between 60 – 70c degrees is an achievable range.

Maintain a constant temperature of 18-20c degrees. Variations in the air temperature will significantly alter the Relative Humidity.

Pests and moulds

Anobium punctatum, the common furniture beetle causes the most frequently seen damage, boring 1-3mm diameter flight holes into the surface of the wood. Damage can be slight to extreme, weakening the object's structure. Active woodworm should be treated immediately; tell tale signs are light wood dust underneath the object. Avoid storing your picture frame in damp or wet conditions, which can cause staining and structural damage.

Keep an eye out for any signs of the above and take action at the earliest moment you notice a problem. A conservator can help repair and restore damaged finishes and improve the appearance and structural integrity. Pest damage will increase when the relative humidity is too high.

Wear and tear

Normal wear and tear from a domestic life can cause scratches, dents and abrasions, or staining from contact with water and other domestic solvents. To lightly polish the frame, use a clean, dry cloth and lightly rub the surface of the frame to restore the shine.

Cleaning

Keep cleaning to a minimum and only give your picture frame a light dusting with a soft bristle brush or soft, dry, clean lint free cloth. It is important to avoid use of water and solvents, which could stain or remove the painted finish.

Monitoring

Check your pictures and frames at regular intervals, at least every 5 years! Take a photograph and write down the position of any areas of damage (such as new flight holes), on an annual basis. If you notice serious damage, bring your picture in to **Insitju Fine Art and Conservation LTD** for an inspection report and repairs as necessary.

Moving

Keep moving and handling to a minimum. Best practice is to wear latex snug-fitting gloves to avoid oil and moisture from your hands damaging the finish on a frame. Ensure there are enough of you to move a heavy picture to avoid putting a strain on the joints. Make sure you have a clear route and a space prepared to take the frame before you start. Move your items one at a time.

Storage and display

Avoid heat sources such as radiators and fires and do not hang your pictures on walls at risk of damp and leaks. Ensure your pictures are securely attached to the wall or relevant area.

Fittings

Examine your fittings carefully and ensure they are securely attached to your picture frame, not bent, rusted or loose. Note that metal objects will corrode if the relative humidity is too high.