

Guide To Caring For Your Original Artwork

The guide covers:

- General care for unframed watercolours.
- General care for framed watercolours.
- Specific tips for textured paper like Bockingford NOT.
- A checklist for archival framing.
- Annual inspection

A Practical Guide to Caring for Watercolour Paintings

Watercolours are a uniquely fragile art form. The pigments sit on the surface of the paper, making them highly susceptible to damage from light, humidity, and handling. Proper care is essential to preserve their beauty for generations.

Part 1: Caring for Unframed Watercolours (Handling & Storage)

This is the artwork's most vulnerable state. Maximum care is required.

✔ The Do's:

- **DO wash your hands** or wear clean, white cotton gloves before handling.
- **DO handle by the edges only**, using two hands to support the paper.
- **DO store it flat** in an archival, acid-free portfolio or Solander box.
- **DO place a sheet of acid-free glassine** or archival tissue paper over the painted surface to protect it from smudging and dust.
- **DO store in a dark, stable environment** (e.g., a closet or drawer on an interior wall), away from fluctuating temperature and humidity.
- **DO get it framed** as soon as is practical. Framing is its best defense.

✘ The Don'ts:

- **DON'T touch the painted surface.** Oils from your skin can cause permanent damage.
- **DON'T eat, drink, or smoke** near the artwork.
- **DON'T use paper clips, rubber bands, or regular tape.** They will cause stains and dents.
- **DON'T roll the painting.** This can crack the paint and crease the paper.
- **DON'T store in a basement, attic, or garage** due to extreme humidity and temperature.
- **DON'T store in non-archival plastic sleeves**, which can release damaging chemicals.

Part 2: Caring for Framed Watercolours (Display & Environment)

Proper framing and placement are crucial for long-term preservation.

✅ The Do's:

- **DO hang on an interior wall**, which is less prone to moisture and temperature changes.
- **DO hang away from all direct sunlight**. UV rays are the #1 cause of irreversible fading.
- **DO use UV-protective glazing**. Insist on glass or acrylic that blocks 97-99% of UV rays. Museum Glass is the gold standard.
- **DO ensure there is a mat or spacer** so the artwork never touches the glass.
- **DO maintain a stable environment** (40-55% relative humidity).
- **DO dust the frame gently** with a soft cloth. Spray cleaner on the cloth, not the glass.

❌ The Don'ts:

- **DON'T hang in direct sunlight**. Ever.
- **DON'T hang above a heat source** like a radiator, fireplace, or heat vent.
- **DON'T hang in a high-humidity area** like a bathroom or kitchen.
- **DON'T use bright spotlights** on the artwork. Use low-UV LED lights if needed.
- **DON'T ignore signs of trouble** like condensation or mould inside the frame. Take it to a professional framer immediately.

Part 3: Specific Tips for Bockingford NOT Paper

Bockingford is a high-quality, archival paper made from wood pulp. "NOT" (or Cold Press) means it has a distinct surface texture.

- **Protect the Texture:** The paper's "hills and valleys" can trap dirt and are easily damaged.
 - **DO** dust unframed works with a very soft, clean brush, not a cloth.
 - **DON'T** ever rub the surface, as this can flatten the texture and lift pigment.
 - **DO** ensure your framer uses a deep mat or spacers to keep the textured surface far away from the glass.
- **Respect the Fibre:** Bockingford's wood pulp fibres are shorter than cotton, making it slightly less robust against creasing or tearing.
 - **DO** handle with extra care to avoid bending.
 - **DON'T** attempt any DIY cleaning with water. You risk abrading the surface and creating a permanent fuzzy patch. Consult a professional art conservator for any cleaning.

Part 4: The Archival Framing Checklist

This is the ultimate "DO" for protecting your watercolour. Ensure your framer uses:

- **UV-Protective Glazing:** 99% UV-filtering glass or acrylic.
- **Acid-Free Matboard:** 100% cotton rag or alpha-cellulose museum board.
- **Archival Hinging:** The art should be "hinged" at the top with Japanese paper and wheat starch paste, allowing it to hang freely. It must **never** be glued or taped on all sides.
- **Acid-Free Backing Board:** Archival foam core or backing board.
- **Sealed Dust Cover:** A paper cover on the back of the frame to keep out dust and insects.

Part 5: Ongoing Preservation: Rotation & Inspection

Caring for art doesn't stop once it's on the wall. Proactive inspection and strategic rotation are key to long-term preservation.

Should I Move My Paintings Periodically?

Generally, stability is best. However, moving art for a specific, strategic reason is a vital conservation practice.

- **The Goal is NOT Decoration, but Preservation:** Don't just swap paintings between two different walls.
- **The Goal IS Strategic Rotation:** To reduce total light exposure, display a watercolour for a set period (e.g., 6-12 months), then move it into a dark, stable storage area (like a closet) for an equal or longer period. This "rest" dramatically slows the fading process.
- **The Exception:** You should always move art if its location becomes unsafe (e.g., during renovations or if a leak develops).

Art Inspection Tips: A Proactive Checklist

Perform this check annually. Take the frame off the wall and place it on a soft, clean surface in good light.

1. The Frame & Hanging Hardware (Structural Safety)

- **Frame Corners:** Are the corners tight and flush, or are they separating?
- **Hanging Wire & Screws:** Check for fraying wire or loose screws. Wiggle them gently to ensure they are secure.

2. Inside the Frame Package (The Micro-Environment)

- **Condensation:** Any fog or moisture on the inside of the glass? **This is a red flag** for a humidity problem.
- **Debris or Insects:** Any dust, small black specks, or insects inside? This means the frame's seal is broken.
- **Mould or Mildew:** Any fuzzy spots (black, green, or white) on the artwork or mat? **This is an emergency.**
- **Paper Condition:** Has the paper become wavy (cockled)? Has the artwork slipped down from behind the mat?
- **Mat Condition:** Is the white bevelled edge of the mat turning yellow or brown? This indicates the mat is not archival and is damaging your art.

3. The Artwork Itself (Fading & Health)

- **Color Fading:** Compare the art to an original, colour-accurate photo taken when you first acquired it. Fading often appears first in delicate pinks and purples.

4. The Back of the Frame

- **Dust Cover:** Is the paper on the back torn or punctured? This allows pests and dust inside.
- **Water Stains:** Any tide lines or discolouration on the dust cover?

What to Do If You Find a Problem

Unless it's a simple loose screw you can tighten, the rule is absolute: **Take it to a professional conservation framer.** Do not attempt to open the frame yourself, as you risk causing more damage. A professional can safely diagnose the issue and perform the necessary repairs with archival materials.