



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for  
Cultural Materials  
Conservation



# SAFE HANDLING PAINTINGS

Paintings exist in many formats – unframed, framed behind glass or rolled. Careful, safe handling will ensure the long-term preservation of the painted surface.

Before handling, make sure you assess the painting on both the front, back, as well as the frame (if present). Check that there is no flaking paint. Check that the painting is secure in the frame and that there are no loose components across the frame. Consult a conservator if in doubt.

## HANDLING TIPS

- Plan your movement (see *SAFE HANDLING – GENERAL* Fact Sheet).
- Carry with one hand underneath and one at the side.
- Avoid touching the canvas.
- Where possible, carry the object in its correct orientation.
- Carry with the painted side faced towards you for better protection.
- If a canvas painting does not have a backboard, check that the stretcher wedges are secure, they can cause damage if they fall between the canvas and the stretcher.
- If the painting has no backboard, make sure hanging wire will not touch the back of the canvas - secure it with tape if necessary.
- If the painting has no backing board, avoid curling your fingers between the canvas and the wooden support (stretcher) that the canvas is attached to, as this can cause cracking in the paint layer.
- Use two people to handle large paintings and if possible – an A-frame trolley for additional support.
- If you must move a painting with flaking paint, carry it flat and face up, so that you don't lose any paint while you are moving.
- Carry wrapped paintings with extra care because you cannot see what you are touching.

## RESOURCES



reCollections  
Caring for Collections  
Across Australia – Handling,  
Transportation, Storage and  
Display, Heritage Collections  
Council, available online:  
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/36wi>



Basic Handling of Paintings  
Canadian Conservation Institute  
Notes, available online:  
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/g2wi>



Caring For Your Paintings  
Smithsonian Museum  
Conservation Institute, available  
online:  
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/c2wi>

The term ‘glazing’ refers to the glass or Perspex (clear acrylic sheeting, sometimes called Plexiglass) sometimes used in framing systems for paintings and works on paper or photographs.

Glazed artworks should be carried with care:

- Acrylic glazing such as Perspex is easily scratched. Glass can break if dropped or knocked.

If transporting your object, protect it from vibration and movement (see *PACKING FOR TRANSPORT* Fact Sheet).

Sometimes paintings are unstretched – or have to be transported rolled. When rolling a painting:

- Roll canvas with paint-side out to avoid compression.
- Cover art with glassine paper or Tyvek and roll around a wide, solid core material like PVC pipe or solid card tubes.
- Use pipe/tube that is long enough to accommodate width of canvas, so edges don’t crush, and you can handle the roll end without touching the painting.
- Once rolled, soft wrap in bubble wrap.
- Unroll immediately after transport. Paintings should be stored flat or re-stretched promptly. Do not leave pictures rolled for long periods in storage.