

ROUTINE MAINTENANCE

It is important not to dust the surface of paintings with a rag or dusting product. To remove dust the surface can be safely brushed with a very soft Japanese Hake or large make-up brush. Make sure that the brush ferrule does not touch the paint film. If in doubt of the painting's surface stability, do not attempt this.

Once every two to five years remove the painting from the wall and check the security of the picture-hanging wire and hook. Also examine the screw-eyes or D-rings to which the wire is secured. Hardware failure can cause the painting to fall and potentially become damaged.

WHEN TO CALL A CONSERVATOR

If you are concerned that your painting might be in “bad” condition or its appearance has changed to your eye, the first thing to do is to examine the work under a bright light. Look for tears, flaking or cracks in the paint, and grime or yellowing of the varnish.

- ◆ If a painting is flaking and small or large pieces of the paint surface are falling off it, is important to store the work flat until you can take it to a conservator.
- ◆ Do not attempt to patch, tape or glue tears in the canvas. This can cause irreversible damage. A qualified paintings conservator can work to repair tears in a safe manner.
- ◆ Do not use cleaning materials sold in art stores that claim to “restore” or “revive” paintings. These contain strong solvents which can dissolve paint.

To find recommendations on caring for your art and listings of professional conservators by region and expertise, contact the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (AIC). www.aic.stanford.edu

REYNOLDA HOUSE MUSEUM of AMERICAN ART

2250 Reynolda Road, Winston-Salem NC 27106
336.758.5150 | reynoldahouse.org

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REYNOLDA HOUSE
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Tips for Preserving



YOUR
PAINTINGS

We all enjoy art that has been carefully collected or passed down to us through our families. Here are some easy tips on how to help prolong the life of some of your cherished treasures.



LIGHT

HUMIDITY AND TEMPERATURE

HANDLING YOUR PAINTINGS

Exposure of paintings to bright light or direct sunlight causes gradual or sometimes rapid deterioration.

- ◆ Do not display works on walls opposite windows or in direct sunlight.
- ◆ Consider using UV filters on your windows if you cannot avoid hanging works in rooms with a lot of sunlight. Many glass companies now offer UV film installation.
- ◆ Try rotating your paintings so that no painting is hanging in a highly lit area continually. Store paintings in clean, dry areas off the floor.
- ◆ Avoid using picture lamps attached to frames to illuminate your painting. These often produce a great deal of heat which can cause paint to crack and flake.

The various components that make up a painting respond differentially to environmental changes. The seasonal cycling of high to low relative humidity increases paint cracking and the likelihood of eventual paint loss.

- ◆ Hang your most valued paintings in the rooms of your house that have the most stable temperature and humidity levels. Avoid hanging works in areas of your house that have high relative humidity, such as basements or bathrooms. High relative humidity provides an excellent environment for mold growth that, if uncontrolled, will feast on the paint medium and fracture the paint layers from within.
- ◆ Do not hang paintings next to vents, radiators, fireplaces, or in areas of your house that are drafty, such as in between two windows.
- ◆ Avoid turning the heating or air conditioning system off completely. If you are going away on a vacation leave the system on a reasonable temperature. Extremely high or low temperature or relative humidity will cause the canvas or wood support to swell or contract respectively.

All too often damage is done to paintings by simple handling mistakes and accidents.

- ◆ Always prepare the path along which you must walk before transporting art objects. If there is a question of the size of the object being too large to handle by one person, always opt to use two people. Before starting the process of moving the object decide how you will jointly carry the piece and make sure you have a secure grip and ability to carry it.
- ◆ Carry paintings by the frame using both hands on each side. Have the painting face you so that the front doesn't accidentally brush any other objects. Avoid picking up a painting by looping your fingers under the top edge of the frame. This can push the canvas away from the stretcher and loosen the canvas.
- ◆ Take care in leaning your painting against anything unless you are only letting the frame or the outer stretcher bar touch another object. Any item leaning on the canvas itself can cause puckering and stretching of the canvas which can lead to more serious problems with the paint surface.

Handout produced by Rebecca Eddins, Director of Collections Management, Reynolda House Museum of American Art, and Ruth Cox, Paintings Conservator (pictured above treating Max Weber's The Dancers, from the Reynolda House Collection).