



■ By Michael Chesley Johnson

Learn how to get artwork on paper from here to there in perfect shape.

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As we all know, one of an artist's great rewards is to sell a painting, but one of the possible problems is shipping it. Works on paper, such as watercolor, pastel and acrylic—typically framed under glass—pose special problems because glass can break and damage the artwork. At the very least, the buyer may have to get a new piece of glass cut; at the worst, the artist may have to repair or replace the painting or even refund the purchase price.

The best solution, in my opinion, is to ship the painting unframed. I always try to steer buyers to purchasing my pastels this way, since this practice almost guarantees the painting will arrive in perfect condition. The secret to success is to cover the painting with glassine (a translucent, water- and air-resistant paper) and sandwich the glassine-protected work between two sheets of foam board, as demonstrated in Foam-Board Sandwich (opposite page).

As an extra precaution, I always attach a note to the foam board for the framer, warning that the package contains a pastel painting and is subject to damage by smearing. Although I don't want to insult the framer's professionalism, I do let this person know that the painting must not be fixed. This is just my personal preference—I rarely use fixative because it tends to darken the color.

Wind one layer of bubble wrap around the

Foam-board sandwich

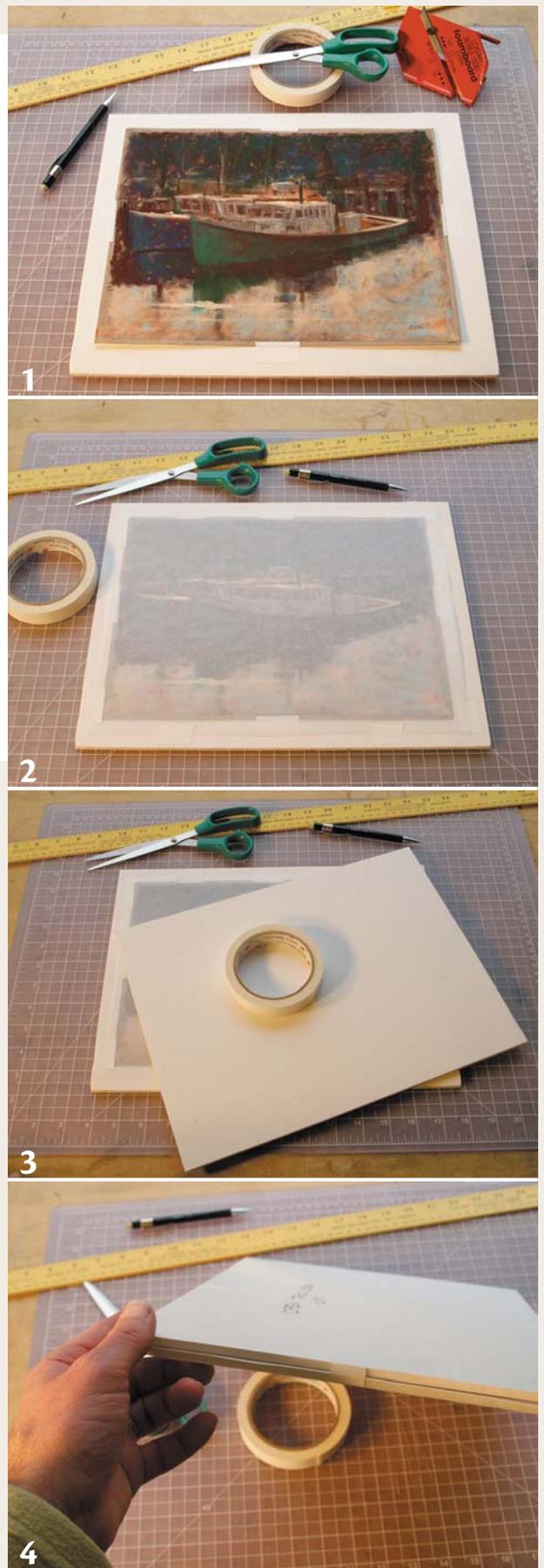
- 1** Cut a sheet of foam board at least 1 inch wider than the painting on all sides. Center the work on the foam board face up and tape down the corners and other key points with archival artist's tape.
- 2** Next, cut a sheet of glassine paper slightly larger than the work. This paper is the best covering for pastels because the slick surface of glassine won't pick up pastel dust. For media other than pastel, you can use any acid-free paper, such as watercolor paper. Center the paper on top of the painting and tape it down with archival artist's tape. You don't need to tape down every square inch—just corners and edges to make sure the paper doesn't shift.
- 3** Cut a second sheet of foam board the same size as the first and place it on top of the glassine-protected painting, completing your foam-board sandwich.
- 4** Tape the sandwich together with four pieces of masking tape—one piece in the middle of each edge. Now your sandwich is ready to be wrapped in bubble wrap that's secured with packing tape.

sandwich, making sure there's plenty of padding at the corners, and secure the wrap with packing tape. Put the sandwich in a shipping carton (cardboard is fine) and stuff the empty spaces with more bubble wrap.

If shipping a framed painting is a must, know that the use of glass pushes the danger level to “red.” Acrylic glazing is 10 to 20 times stronger than glass and one-third the weight. (*Glazing* is the term for a transparent sheet, either glass or acrylic, used for protecting a work on paper.) If you do use glass, you'll need to anticipate breakage.

Taping the glass helps trap broken fragments, lessening the potential for damage to the painting. Avoid using masking tape, which can be difficult to remove and leaves a residue on the glass. Instead, use low-tack tape. Place parallel tape strips over the glazing, making sure to overlap each strip so the surface is completely covered. Fold back the tape ends so they don't touch and damage the frame. HBM Supply makes a good low-tack tape. Another option is Glas-Skin from AirFloat Systems, a 12-inch wide adhesive tape that comes in rolls. (See Packing and Shipping Resources, on page 47, for contact information.)

Most problematic are framed pastel paintings because they're prone to spreading dust on the mat, liner and glass whenever they're bumped—and you





Packing a Strongbox

- 1** This unlined, 17x22½x3, corrugated Strongbox can hold a frame up to 14x19x2. Two sheets of egg-crate foam, with a sheet of perforated-cut foam between them, fill the box.
- 2** The perforated foam is easy to tear to size by hand.
- 3** The framed painting should sit snugly into the “hole” that’s left after the perforated-cut foam is removed.

can expect a lot of bumping if you’re shipping cross-country! Joe Husovsky of Fine Art Shipping in Los Angeles says, “If the work is hinged (attached) only at the top, orientation of the work while in transit is extremely important.” He recommends that hinged artworks should travel with fine art carriers that ensure proper orientation will be maintained in transit. (See Packing and Shipping Resources, opposite page).

You may use a pastel fixative, but it will not prevent dusting unless you saturate the surface to liquefy the pastel. The best practice I’ve found is to give the painting—before framing—a good whack on the back to dislodge as much dust as possible. (Don’t try this with pastels done on velour, as the painting will vanish. Been there, done that.) Also, try framing without a mat or liner. Avoid using acrylic glazing; the plastic generates a static charge that plucks little bits of pastel off the painting, creating a ghost image on the glazing. Some exhibitions and competitions, however, require shipped work to be framed with acrylic glazing. If you’re under such a requirement, wipe the inside of the glazing first with an anti-static dryer sheet.

Despite all these caveats, I will add that I’ve had good luck with shipping framed pastels.

A sturdy shipping carton is a must for framed works, whether your glazing is glass or acrylic. The sturdiest carton is a wooden crate; however, without the right tools and skills, these crates can be difficult to build. Also, wood is expensive to ship because of its weight. For these reasons, the wood crate is used mostly for very large works. Husovsky recommends that crates be of at least ¾-inch plywood with pine battens, handles and skids. A minimum of 2 inches of foam should be used between all sides of the art and the crate.

For smaller pieces, consider corrugated cardboard boxes specifically made for shipping artwork. Airfloat Systems makes the Strongbox, a reusable container that

comes in several sizes. The artwork rests in egg-crate foam that's perforated so you can custom fit the "hole" into which the artwork fits. (See Packing a Strongbox, opposite page.) If you need more protection, you can buy a corrugated Strongbox lined with a puncture guard made of ABS plastic (a light, rigid plastic noted for its shock-absorptive quality). This box also comes in a variety of sizes.

If you're not using a wood crate or box made specifically for shipping art, the box you use should meet standard shipping guidelines. United Parcel Service (UPS) recommends that the artwork be surrounded by at least 2 inches of cushioning and be placed at least 2 inches away from the walls of the box. UPS also suggests that you double-box your artwork, with more cushioning between the inner and outer boxes. Guidelines differ from carrier to carrier, so make sure you meet the specifications of whomever you choose to do business with. All major carriers provide packing guidelines on their websites. I'm a big believer in overpacking, even if it costs a bit more.

As a last step, make sure you label your box properly. Include the complete address and phone number for both you and the recipient. Place a duplicate label or packing slip inside the box in case the outside label becomes unreadable.

What about insurance? Husovsky says the correct term is *declared valuation coverage*. He explains: "In the event of a claim, the declared value is the maximum that can be recovered, no matter what the actual value of the artwork. As a part of any claims process, the insurer will need to supply substantiation of value, which can be an appraisal or recent sale of similar work." Make sure you insure your artwork adequately.

Consider getting a specialist if the process of shipping artwork by yourself overwhelms you. Husovsky's company counts among its clients galleries, museums, foundations and major corporations. He says, "It's wise to get an estimate from a professional art-packing company. In many cases, the cost may be not much more than it would cost you in time and effort to buy and gather proper supplies and do your own packing. Also, a professional packing job may allow you to ship in a more economical way, and the packaging may be reusable."

Whichever road you take, remember that your art is irreplaceable—make sure you pack it accordingly. 

Packing and shipping resources

Packing supplies

- Airfloat Systems Inc.
800/445-2580
www.airfloatsys.com
(for Glas-Skin and Strongbox)
- HBM Supply, Inc.
303/355-1080
www.hbmsupply.com
(for low-tack tape)

Shipping services

Most major cities have fine-art shippers. You can find them in the phone book or by means of an Internet search with the key words *shipping services*. These companies ship to any destination, and they'll make sure your artwork is well packed. Below are a few reputable fine-art shippers located in key areas of the United States.

- Adam Crease Shipping (New York City area)
718/482-8606
www.adamcreaseshipping.com
- Fine Art Shipping (California area)
310/677-0011
www.fineartship.com
- Terry Dowd Inc. (Chicago area)
773/342-8686
www.terrydowd.com
- FedEx Custom Critical
800/255-2421
www.customcritical.fedex.com/art

FedEx offers an art shipment service for business-to-business customers. This could be a good choice if you're shipping several paintings to one client, gallery or museum.

If you live in a smaller city or town—or find a specialized shipping service to be cost-prohibitive—you may have to settle for a less specialized shipper, such as the UPS Store, Mail Boxes Etc. or FedEx (regular service). These shippers should be aware of carrier guidelines regarding fine art, but you'll want to inquire to make sure. If you live in a rural area, you may have to pack your own work and ship it via the United States Postal Service or have UPS do a pickup.



For tips on storing art papers, go to www.artistsnetwork.com/article/storing-art-papers and www.artistsnetwork.com/article/storing-watercolor-paper.