

SKILL BUILDERS

BY CHRIS A. PASCHKE

Handle With Care

How to assure your pastel painting travels flawlessly from point A to point B.

CREATING A MASTERPIECE IS ONLY THE FIRST STEP. Sometimes the inner beauty of a medium comes with understanding the special care required to maintain it after completion. Whether transporting a painting from a plein air location to the framer, or shipping to a client, knowing how to safely deliver a pastel is vital.

Professional framers are routinely warned against laying a pastel package face down even during the fitting stage of framing, for fear that pigment dust might drop onto the back of the glass when it's being stapled closed. Obviously, originals aren't framed when first being transported. At this stage, most artists will carry the fragile work to the framer. The transport of both framed and unframed pastels is a challenge, and when hand-delivery isn't an option, there are methods for transport that are designed for maximum protection with minimal damage or pigment loss.

Initial precautionary measures can be taken before you've made your first mark. Sanded paper is easiest to care for when it has been mounted to a 4- or 8-ply rag backing prior to applying any pastel pigment (see photo 1). Working on mounted sanded paper panels makes possible the later transport of unframed plein air or incomplete pastels without damage by use of sandwiching.

Going the Distance

In a perfect world, all framed originals could be hand-delivered to their display destination, but many times these

pieces require shipping to exhibitions, galleries or distant collectors. There's an unfortunate misconception that the rigidity of the packaging exterior is the most important element for preventing damage during shipping. When a corrugated cardboard box is lined—on all sides, top and bottom—with ¼-inch plywood and stacked full of 1-inch sheets of polystyrene, the shipping box is very solid (see photo 2). However, any exterior concussion or trauma is transferred through all those rigid layers directly to the art at the center of that box, no matter how thick.

The piece of glass art shown in photo 4 has been wrapped in multiple layers of newsprint paper, then sandwiched snugly between the layers of polystyrene as padding. Even with 3 inches of surrounded boards and foam, there isn't enough actual cushion to prevent concussion.

Generally, the shipping box and wrapping materials must be capable of tolerating a fall of 10 feet to meet most company shipping requirements. But beyond the prevention of broken glass or a popped frame corner, the challenge with a pastel is the delicacy of the medium. Any hard blow can dislodge pigment onto the inside of the glass or along an exposed bevel if a spacer and reverse bevel haven't been used (see "How To Speak Framer," *Pastel Journal*, June 2010, for more on spacers and bevels). Hence the padding that's surrounding the art must absorb the concussion so it never reaches the framed pastel at the center.

Glass Support

When shipping framed art, precautions must be taken to protect it from glass breakage. One common suggestion is to tape the glass to help hold the pieces together if they should break during shipping—but not all tapes are created equal. Selecting a high-tack clear shipping tape can leave sticky residue, while a low-tack blue masking tape might not hold securely enough to prevent glass shards from damaging the art.

There are commercial products that have been developed for use when shipping glass. Patco 5560 is a moderate tack tape used for temporary surface protection during shipping. It's an affordable, removable polyethylene protective film that's resistant to abrasion, moisture and solvents. Similar to the protective film found on brand new electronics, it removes easily and cleanly, leaving no adhesive residue and readily conforms to irregular surfaces. Also, note that a simple criss-cross of the tape doesn't cover enough area and cannot hold broken glass in areas that aren't in contact with the tape. The safest method is to use parallel strips of overlapping tape and cover the entire piece of glass. Be careful not to contact the frame with the tape as it could damage the moulding finish when removed.

Another option is Glas-Skin, from Airfloat Systems. This professional 12-inch-wide, 100-yard roll of protective film can be applied directly to the entire surface area of the glass. It's moderate in tack, and easy to apply and remove.



1 The bottom two boards are ¾-inch foam center boards; the next is mounted pastel paper covered with glassine; and the front board shows glassine folded back to expose mounted paper.



2 The cardboard box is lined on all sides, the top and bottom with ¼-inch plywood, and is stacked full of 1-inch polystyrene sheets, making a very rigid package.



3 Cover the pastel with glassine and tape it to the back. Align the two foam boards and clip edges to prevent slipping.



4 Here, glass art is sandwiched between layers of polystyrene foam to be placed into a plywood-lined, double strength cardboard box.

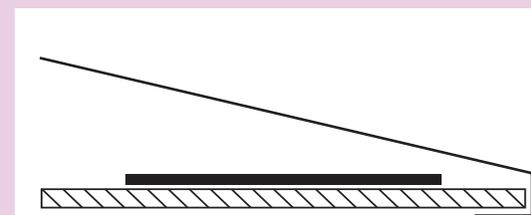


Diagram 1



Diagram 2

GLORIOUS GLASSINE

When covering, carrying or storing your work locally, glassine is the best material to cover a pastel. It's a translucent, water- and air-resistant paper that's slick and not prone to static or pigment transfer.

Attach the glassine cover sheet by taping one end of it ½ inch around the end of the mount board and secure tape to the back (diagram 1). Smoothly lay the glassine across the pastel, then wrap it around the other end and attach to the back (diagram 2). Multiple pastels may then be gently stacked one on top of the other, and covered with slightly larger sheets of ¾-inch foam center board (photo 2, above) and firmly held together with binder clips (photo 3). It's the attachment of the cover sheet and locking of the stacked layers that keeps the pigment from flaking, dusting or rubbing off during storage or transport.



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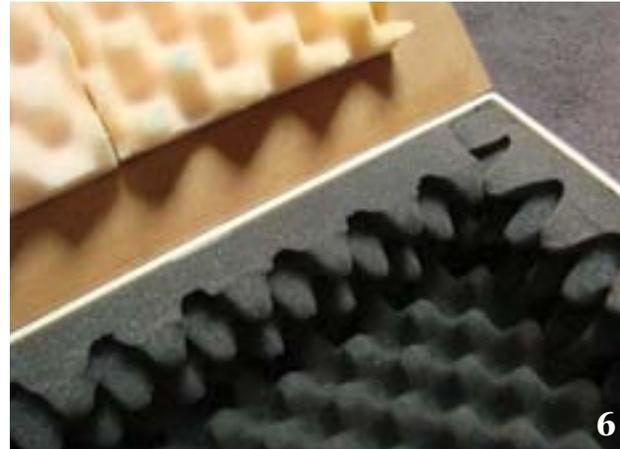
5 The paper will cushion this flat art better than some, but concussion can still affect the inner art.

CUSHION CAUTIONS

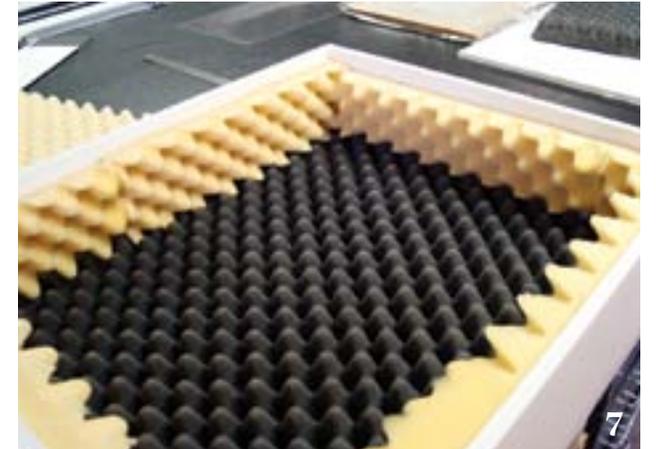
Bubble wrap features encapsulated air, which provides decent cushioning against shock and abrasion. Use multiple layers of wrap in both directions for a full 2 inches around the frame and from the box wall. Corrugated liners and inserts may be added around the perimeter of the package to increase box strength and improve package performance, but shouldn't be considered additional cushioning. Though shipping companies may recommend crumpled paper and newspaper for some items, it's ineffective for framed art.

Loose fill—pellets or peanuts—is an untidy invention, but it's lightweight and gives decent cushion. Typically, loose fill is only recommended for use with non-fragile items such as books, not glass frames. The pellets can compress and settle during shipping and cause the art to shift during transport and create static electricity (although anti-static pellets are available). Never use pellets whenever framed art is being shipped and returned after display, as the unpacking and re-packing causes a great mess. Some galleries and museums go so far as to disqualify shipped art if pellets have been used. The bottom line: Since galleries frown upon any use of wadded paper, pellets, taped bubble wrap or boxes within boxes, it's best to avoid them.

SKILL BUILDERS



6 This box was constructed with white and brown Kraft Gatorboard (foam center board is an even sturdier choice). Gray commercial eggcrate insulation lines the box base; bed sponge is shown on top.



7 The box is lined on the bottom, sides and top with 2½-inch convoluted foam. The yellow is soft mattress padding, while the gray is more dense, acoustic foam.



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Foam center board has a cushion and is more forgiving than other rigid materials, making it the best choice for a shipping box. This ½-inch box has been lined with 2½-inch eggcrate foam.



The sealed hinged box is ready to ship. It has been taped with 2-inch-wide heavy duty packing tape and marked to indicate the hinged side, score sides and top.

Cushioned Boxes

For shipping small framed art, commercial corrugated containers, such as the Airfloat StrongBox, are available and provide the strength of plywood without the weight. This box has two layers of convoluted (egg crate) foam with a third layer of perforated foam squares for custom fitting framed art. They're available with single- and double-wall corrugated construction and are tough, reusable boxes.

Self-made, hinged boxes can also be used for shipping framed art (see photos 6 through 9), as they're reusable and can be custom-sized to the art. The best boxes are built using ½-inch foam center board and should be sized to allow for 1½ to 2 inches of sponge padding on all sides of the frame. Some people build their boxes using Gatorboard, thinking it's more rigid and will protect better, but the veneer on either side of the foam center is actually more brittle and, rather than absorbing concussion, will often fracture or

puncture. Clay coated ½-inch foam center board gives under pressure, which absorbs concussion better, and the ½-inch thickness is also a fabulous insulator against heat and cold.

For padding, eggcrate foam is best because of its contoured design, which readily conforms to the odd shape of some mouldings and the recessed glazing and backing. Soft mattress egg crate padding is available from home stores and gray acoustic convoluted foam is available up to 2½ inches thick online.

Once the box pieces are cut to size, assemble it by hot-gluing all pieces together, then reinforce all seams with 2-inch shipping tape. Burnish all of the tape once it's applied to fully activate the pressure-sensitive adhesive. Cut large pieces of eggcrate foam to fit the bottom and top of the box (see photo 7), and hold it in position using hot glue around the outer perimeter of the foam. The sides of the box should also be lined (see photo 8). The peaks and valleys of the eggcrate shape help suspend the frame and allow for maximum cushioning.

Finishing Touches

The frame should be placed in a strong plastic bag that's designed for artwork to protect from moisture and scratching during shipping. Avoid additional layers of corrugate or foam board around the frame; they might prevent the egg crate foam from conforming to the shape of the frame. Place all paperwork (receipts, entry forms, return labels, fees and box information) in a manila envelope inside before sealing the box. Seal the edges of the closed lid with 2-inch shipping tape and make certain to also burnish all of the tape to activate the adhesive. Be sure to label the box clearly with shipping and return addresses, include phone numbers, mark it top and bottom and note that it's fragile.

Pastel is a sensitive medium. Masterpieces begin with careful consideration, and end in much the same way. The knowledge of how to transport your work safely will ensure a greater audience, and one-time framing. ■

FIND ADDITIONAL PASTEL SHIPPING RESOURCES ONLINE AT WWW.ARTISTSNETWORK.COM/MEDIUM/PASTEL/SHIPPING-ART-BEST-PRACTICES.

CHRIS A. PASCHKE (www.designsinkart.com), of Tehachapi, Calif., is an artist, Certified Picture Framer and Guild Commended Framer.