



CONSERVATION CENTER
for Art and Historic Artifacts

264 South 23rd Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103



Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts

Established in 1977, the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts is a nonprofit regional conservation laboratory serving cultural, educational, and research institutions, as well as private individuals and organizations throughout the United States. Located in Philadelphia, the Conservation Center specializes in the treatment of art and historic artifacts on paper, rare books, photographs, and archival material. The Conservation Center is the largest regional conservation laboratory in the country and is dedicated to the preservation of artistic and documentary works that describe our lives and histories.

- Quality work done by experienced professionals who specialize in the conservation of paper-based art and artifacts
- State-of-the-art laboratory with 24-hour monitored security system
- Full range of services including treatment, on-site consultation, surveys, preservation planning, workshops, emergency assistance, and matting and framing services
- Ability to treat oversize materials, to handle a large volume of work, and to meet deadlines
- Over 25 years of successful service and experience

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Monday through Friday

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WARNING: Improper Framing Can Cause Irreparable Harm!



Nearly every day at the Conservation Center, examples of the long-term, sometimes irreversible, damage caused by improper matting and framing are seen. Items exhibit needless staining, fading, tears, or distortions.

Poor-quality mats and other unsound framing practices can result in permanent harm to paper items, including prints, watercolors, maps, photographs, letters, certificates, and other family heirlooms on paper. These problems will never go away on their own and can worsen over time.

It is vitally important to determine the condition of the artwork before matting and framing. With its state-of-the-art conservation laboratory, the Conservation Center has the resources to ensure that paper-based artifacts are carefully examined before framing. Conservators and technicians can identify the signs of damage and can recommend matting and framing strategies to minimize any further deterioration.



The Framing Decision

At the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, all artwork is treated with the same high standards that are applied in the country's leading museums, libraries, and archives.

Proper matting and framing not only enhances presentation – it helps to preserve the artwork for future generations, protects investments, and safeguards memories.

Conversely, the long-term damage from improper framing can be irreparable. The value of the artwork decreases and its beauty fades.

It is critical to select high quality matting and framing materials. Museum quality mats and frames are now available in an almost unlimited variety. The staff at the Conservation Center is qualified in helping to select the most appropriate frame and in ensuring that the finished piece is properly housed.

What Can Be Framed?

The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts specializes in the treatment of paper-based items, many of which are ideal for framing, including:

- Prints and drawings
- Watercolors
- Maps
- Photographs
- Awards, certificates, and diplomas
- Letters and autographs
- Posters
- Postcards, baseball cards, and other paper-based collectibles
- Parchment

Framing Services at the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts

The Mat

The mat board used by the Conservation Center for matting all works is the highest quality mat board available. It is made of 100% cotton and is usually buffered with calcium, making it slightly alkaline in order to protect the paper from the damaging effects of acidity.

The window mat is the standard matting system used for most works. In this type of housing, the artwork is sandwiched between the backmat and the window mat. The two boards are hinged together with gummed cloth tape – never masking tape or cellophane tape.

Works on paper are usually hinged at the top edge to the backmat. The hinge allows the work to hang securely, while safely allowing for expansion and contraction of the paper that can occur with seasonal changes in the environment.

Museum-quality hinges are made from strong, lightweight Japanese paper and are applied to the work with wheat starch paste. Tapes are never used to hinge paper artifacts.



The Sealed Package

The Conservation Center's innovative "sealed package" system helps to protect artwork from the damaging effects of changing humidity, as well as from atmospheric pollutants, dust, mold, and pests. Within the sealed package, the matted work, the acid-free backing materials, and the glazing are all joined together as a single unit. The assembled materials are sealed on the package back

and edges with a polyethylene/nylon/foil laminate film. The new matboards containing zeolites can protect the internal environment of the sealed package from gaseous pollutants.

The glazing – the glass or acrylic that secures the work within the frame – is critical in protecting a framed work. The Conservation Center generally uses an ultraviolet filtering acrylic glazing. This high quality glazing has two functions: it creates a physical barrier between the front of the matted work and the outside environment, and it provides ultraviolet filtering. This "UV filter" screens out the most damaging wavelengths of light, which can contribute to fading of the paper, inks, watercolors, and other media.

The Frame

A high quality frame adds immeasurably to the appreciation of the artwork. An aesthetically pleasing frame can draw the eye into the picture and bring out its highlights and depth. The frame provides the finishing touch. Firmly supporting the sealed package, the frame ideally complements the artwork without placing undue stress on the work itself.

Period frames are valuable in themselves. In deciding whether to reuse a period frame, it is crucial to consider its condition and the nature of the artwork. A period frame should only be reused if the frame molding is able to support the sealed package. In some cases, the period frame can be modified to accept a sealed package.

Displaying the Finished Work

Finally it is important to find a suitable location for the framed work, keeping in mind that even the best housing cannot protect paper artifacts from the harshest environmental conditions. Avoid hanging artwork in direct sunlight or on an outside wall. Consider humidity and temperature when choosing an area to display the work. Avoid extremes. In a stable environment, artwork will be preserved for many years.

Know the Enemy: Common Threats

- **Humidity:** Moderate to high levels of moisture in the air can degrade paper and promote the growth of molds.
- **Light:** Over time, light causes damage to paper and media.
- **Acidic mats:** There are many acidic mat boards available on the market, and the presence of acids in mat boards can damage the artwork.
- **Temperature:** High temperatures can increase the rate of damage from acidity and other threats.
- **Tape:** Most tapes can cause long-term damage to artwork. Masking tapes, cellophane tapes, and even so-called "archival" tapes can cause irreversible staining.