

# Canvas Concerns Storing and Shipping

What is the best way to store unprimed canvas? Or primed canvas? How should one store stretched canvas? What is the best way to ship a stretched canvas? How does one preserve and store canvas that has been removed from its stretcher bars? In order to protect this important and essential art material, as well as your finished paintings, read on.

Canvas is a very strong material. Usually made of all cotton, cotton and linen, or linen, it can be woven in any texture from smooth to nubby. Newer synthetic fibers have been introduced as well, and these add strength of a different sort to the basic natural fiber content. Synthetic fibers resist rot and decay far more readily than natural cotton or linen. This quality makes synthetic "canvas" a good candidate for exterior display.

Cotton, linen or synthetic canvas can be purchased either primed (usually with a high quality acrylic primer) or unprimed. Artists who have developed their own formula for underpainting ground or who do not want the surface sealed use the unprimed surface. Many acrylic painters love the near watercolor effects of using unprimed canvas. Both primed and unprimed canvas should be stored away from strong direct light or exposure to moisture. Light will destroy canvas just as it does any form of fabric. Primed is slightly less susceptible to light damage, but UV contact should be limited whenever possible, whether primed or unprimed. Ideally, canvas should be rolled around a firm center and covered to protect the roll from dirt and grime (and UV).

Stretched canvas should be stored standing upright along one edge. Multiples should be stored in such a way as to prevent abrasion of the next canvas. One way to accomplish this is to stack the first two back-to-back, in pairs. Then fronts contact only fronts and backs contact only backs. Standing in some sort of rack can best facilitate this. Storing one on top of the other in a stack will promote warping of the stretcher bars and also creates a situation where objects could fall onto a painting and cause damage or possible rips.

Shipping a stretched canvas requires one of several options to be exercised. First and most chosen is the procedure of wrapping the (dry) painting in soft foam sheeting and then packing in a heavy cardboard carton. Shipping/storage companies offer several choices in heavy corrugated boxes. Choose one that is at least 6" larger on all sides than the painting (including the thickness of the art). Fill all areas around the painting with foam sheets, making sure there is no room for the painting to slip or move during transport.

Crates can be built (either by you or a freight company) for shipping ornate, oversized, or extremely valuable artworks. These crates resemble what you might expect a giant piece of heavy machinery to be shipped in. The sheer size and proportions of the crate make it an expensive option, but one that might be necessary for some works.

Paintings purchased at times when crating is impractical (such as when traveling), can be removed from their stretcher bars for shipping. This makes the size (and the cost) smaller and more manageable. To remove the tacks or staples from the stretcher bars, use a sharp instrument such as the tine of a screwdriver or a pocketknife and a pair of pliers. Gently lift the tack or staple up, and then grip it with pliers. Remove all tacks or staples. Cover the painting with a soft cloth or smooth paper and carefully roll the painting to fit a large, heavy mailing tube. Avoid rolling too tightly. Pad each end of the tube so that the edges will be protected from crushing. It is sometimes possible to reuse the stretcher bars, so they might be collapsed and shipped with the canvas. Ship stretcher bars in a separate package or tube, as they could cause creasing or other damage if shipped inside the tube with the painting.

Rolled, painted canvases should be unrolled and re-stretched as soon as possible. The simple act of rolling a painting, even though the surface is somewhat flexible, could cause cracking or other damage; and the longer it stays rolled, the more likely damage is to occur. If you are unsure how to re-stretch the canvas (and there is a special technique to stretching) consult a professional framer who will be able to re-stretch the work for a nominal fee.

Proper storage of artworks, especially stretched canvases, is vital to their long life. If stretched canvases are exposed to prolonged periods of high humidity (such as a warehouse or garage storage facility that is not air conditioned), severe warping of the stretchers can occur. That is the most immediate and obvious damage. Humidity creeps into the painting and penetrates between the painted surface and the canvas onto which it is painted. Cracks and crazing are the end result. When examined closely, these cracks (caused by excessive humidity) go all the way through the painting, right

to the canvas core. It may take many months for the extent of the damage to become visible, but by that time the damage is already done. Correction can be made by a conservator, but at a very high cost.

As you can see, by taking just a few simple precautions in the storage and shipment of canvases, you can save yourself lots of time, disappointment and money.