

Introduction: shipping and crating

Artworks that travel can be vulnerable to damage due to poor handling by untrained art handlers, bad weather, rough roads, and poor storage. You can never assume that all institutions have well trained art handlers, but accidents are preventable. It is best to do research on art handling companies and get referrals before trusting your art to shippers. Professional shippers and craters are the best guarantee you have that your precious, valuable, and fragile objects arrive safely at their destination.

Advantages Of Using An Art Handler

An art handling company specializes in transporting artwork and dealing with galleries and museums. They have trained personnel and specially equipped trucks and storage areas with which to make artwork transfers. Many art handlers are artists themselves and have worked in museums and galleries. The specialists, combined with art handling tools and equipment, make up a team of people whose skills surpass those of regular movers. They are generally adept at handling and solving problems encountered with art. Although art handlers tend to cost more, they may be essential to safeguard your work. It is a good idea to interview the shipper to find out how your work will be handled.

Assess Your Shipping Needs

Before starting to pack, you need to address your artworks' specific shipping needs. Remember that each artwork usually has specific requirements.

- Assess the artwork to be moved, determine size, materials and their fragility.

The shape of the work is important.

- Consider where the work is being moved from and how far does it has to go.

Shipping something across town may be very different than shipping across the country where the packaging has to be handled by many hands. Shipping work overseas is another issue altogether.

- Determine if the work can be moved by truck, by hand, in your car or by air.
- Research shipping possibilities before making decisions, as the costs of shipping varies greatly. You will need to match the crate or packing for the correct transport. Will you be moving the work with a bunch of your friends or hiring an art handler?
- Determine how long the work will be packed in its packaging or crate. Will it be in storage for a long time, or will it be unpacked soon after it arrives at its destination. Work left in storage for a long time can be affected by environmental changes like humidity and heat.
- Consider the weight of the materials and objects you are shipping. You may need multiple crates instead of one large one, in order to safeguard your work and to keep the weight within shipping guidelines.
- Assess the cost of the materials you will need to build your own crate or research what it will cost to have it built for you. This may dictate the choices you make.

Crating: General Principles

Why crate artworks for transit? A custom art crate is a protective environment, designed to streamline transit from one location to another and to provide the ultimate safety for the art object that the crate contains. It must provide a barrier from water (rain, snow, condensation), soil, and shock (low-level vibration as well as a high-impact blow).

The art packed in an art crate should be inside the primary object or container, which is then floated in shock-absorbent materials within a solid outer shell. There must be no movement in any direction and the floated objects should be a safe distance from the hard surfaces of its protective container.

The size of the crate or shipping container will be determined by the size and shape of the artwork you are packaging. The amount of packing will be determined by the shape, size and weight of the object. It is a good idea to know the limitations of the receiver. If the crate does not fit through the door of the gallery, you could be in trouble. Consider if art handlers will be available on the other end to help unpack and move the crate.

How do you create safety for your artworks during transit without having excess costs or weight? Remember to never over pack an object. A crate of substantial dimension and weight can limit the possibilities of mishandling during shipping. Your safest bet is to build a crate that is too great for movement by one handler, but too small to require the use of a forklift.

The Object: Suitable For Travel?

Before determining the crate size, analyze if the artwork is suitable for travel by determining its physical condition and medium. If an artwork is fragile or in poor condition it will only get further damaged or possibly destroyed in transit. It is better to send a piece that is less fragile and durable. The medium and physical condition of an artwork will affect all crating preparations. The condition of the artwork may require an unusual orientation within the crate: a painting that shows signs of flaking or is still wet will need to be placed horizontally, with the fragile or wet surface up, inside the crate.

To avoid possible crating problems or surprises follow the steps below:

- Schedule a visit by the crate preparatory so that they may inspect the artwork size, depth, and medium, and fragility. This meeting will give the crater a firsthand look at your particular shipping needs and you can get an estimate of how much it will cost to crate and ship your work.
- Schedule a visit by all lenders before artwork is crated so they are prepared for installation. Also provide a drawing with the exact measurements of the piece. This drawing should include: height, width, depth, length, medium, and weight. Provide the host venue with shipping estimates and get the payment agreement in writing, especially if operating on a reimbursable plan.
- In the crate, provide detailed installation instructions for shipped artwork, and send these via E-mail and regular mail as well. The last thing you want is the people installing the work to make assumptions about how to handle the work.
- It may be a good idea to provide unpacking and repacking instructions. You may need to number packing pieces and provide detailed instructions. These instructions should be in the top of the crate once it is opened or outside the crate. Sending a second by mail or E-mail is often a good idea.
- Coordinate the return shipment of your artwork with the registrar or gallery director well in advance of the close of the exhibition. Make sure you cover the following information:

- Where the return shipment should be shipped to (gallery, studio, collector, home address)?
- Who pays for the return shipment?
- Who pays for insurance for the work both to and from the exhibition space?

Make sure there is an inventory list that travels with the art shipment listing the contents of the shipment and number of packages, method of shipping with tracking numbers, proof of insurance during transit and estimated time of arrival.

Supplies for Shipping and Crating

Below is a list of packing materials that will assist you in selecting the best material for a given job and for durable shipping containers. Not only will you need scissors, a mat knife, basic shop tools (hammer, drill), but also a clean and adequate space for crating.

Use archival (non-acidic) materials whenever possible, particularly when the art will have direct contact with the surface of your work. Archival materials are generally more expensive than non-archival ones, but they will not harm your work. Additionally, you should always try to purchase materials that are environmentally friendly

Bubble Wrap: A waterproof, double polyethylene sheet with circles of injected air that is great for cushioning. Often available in various thicknesses; re-useable, and transparent. Always keep the bubbles facing out because pressure or prolonged contact with the bubbles can leave impressions on work.

Cellulose Wadding: A soft, shock-absorbent crepe paper wrapping best used with solid objects without delicate protrusions; opaque; not recommended for reuse.

Corrugated Cardboard: Cardboard comes in all sizes and thicknesses. Though it has a high acid content, it is fairly strong and makes an excellent protective layer.

Ethafoam: ETHAFOAM (trademark of The Dow Chemical Company) brand polyethylene foam products are semi-rigid foams whose flexibility, resilience, and lightweight make it particularly useful as shock absorbers for solid three-dimensional objects. ETHAFOAM can also be used as interior packing in crates where a secondary package is “floated.” Chemically stable, ETHAFOAM’s tough, closed-cell structure is capable of high load bearing. It is not adversely affected by moisture.

Felt: Used as a covering material for foam pads or corrugated dividing sheets. It can be glued directly to interior crate surfaces to provide nonabrasive surfaces but does not absorb shock. Felt does soak up moisture, which is a major drawback.

Foam: Polyethylene foam is waterproof and comes in sheets and rolls of varying thicknesses. It is excellent for cushioning and does not break down over time.

Foam Core: Foam core is made up of a layer of foam sandwiched between 2 layers of paperboard. It comes both archival and non-archival, and is available in various thicknesses.

Foam Popcorn, Chips OR Peanuts: Traditionally made of polystyrene, they come in different shapes and sizes and are excellent for filling empty spaces around work. Look for the new bio chips that are made of recycled materials.

Gatorfoam: Gatorfoam is a series of unique, lightweight structural panels consisting of a rigid Polystyrene foam core faced on both sides by smooth, moisture resistant man-made wood fiber veneers. The foam and veneers are permanently bonded together in a sandwich construction. The face laminates have been specially developed to provide an excellent surface for painting, silk screening, laminating and photo mounting. It comes in various thicknesses and is much stronger than foam core.

Glassine: Glassine, a glazed, semi transparent paper, is an archival product used for the initial cover of artworks. Glassine can also be layered between multiple drawings, prints and other flat works on paper that are unframed. It is not water-repellent, thus not suitable for exterior wrapping.

Plastic Sheeting or Bags: Plastic sheeting or bags will form the moisture barrier around your work. If you can afford it, try to use an archival brand. Use plastic sheeting for paintings. They are reusable but electrostatic qualities attract and hold dirt, making onetime use more likely. To avoid condensation build up, use ventilation holes and 4-mil thickness.

Plywood and Masonite: Plywood and Masonite are available in various thicknesses. Plywood should be used to construct crates. Masonite should be used to protect unframed works.

Masking Tape or Blue Painters' Tape: Used to secure work inside the package/crate and to protect glass in frames from shattering. Painter's tape is easily removed, while some masking tape can be quite sticky and harder to remove.

Packing Tape: Used to seal your cardboard packages. Best used with a tape gun for efficiency.

Screws, Bolts and Nuts: Used to assemble wooden crates.

Tissue Paper: Available in both archival and non-archival forms; used as initial wrapping for three-dimensional objects. Non-archival tissue paper is very cheap and when crumpled up, it provides excellent cushioning for your work.

Volara: VOLARA (Trademark of Voltek, Inc.) brand closed-cell polyethylene foam can be laminated (with heat gun or contact cement) to ETHAFOAM blocks to provide resilient, smooth surface to cushion artworks. Bonding by use of heat gun is permanent and safe.

Where to Buy Supplies for Shipping and Crating

All the above materials can be found at one of the following suppliers. Call them for a free catalog. Check the web or your local phone book for shippers and suppliers, and be sure to ask a lot of questions before you make a decision.

Airfloat Systems 1 (800) 445-2580 www.airfloatsys.com

Masterpak 1 (800) 922-5522 www.masterpak-usa.com

Valentine Packing Corp. 1 (718) 545-6300

Box City 1 (800) 992-6924 www.boxcity.com

LA Packing & Crating (Ashley Distributors) 1 (323) 937-2669 www.lapacking.com
www.ashleydistributors.com

Home Depot www.homedepot.com

Loews www.lowes.com

Light Impressions 1 (800) 828-6216 www.lightimpressionsdirect.com

Uline 1(800) 958-5463 www.uline.com

Packing Unframed Photographs & Works on Paper

When your work is in transport from your studio, or between shows, there are several threats including water, temperature changes, humidity, rough handling or dropping. Proper packaging should protect the artwork against all of the above. Consider these suggestions:

- A layer of archival tissue or glassine should be placed between each work, including a sheet on the top and bottom of the stack.
- Wrap the works in plastic or enclose them in a plastic bag to keep out any moisture. Plastic should be archival if possible. Remove excess air and then seal it shut with tape.
- Place the package in the center of a piece of masonite (1/8" or thicker) with at least a two-inch margin around each side so that the work does not get crinkled or bent on the edges or corners. Masonite or any other hard board will protect your work from being punctured.
- Tape the package at all four corners to the Masonite board to prevent shifting during handling. In some instances you may want to wrap the board and the work. Make sure you do not harm the work.
- Place your consignment agreement or artwork checklist on top of the bag. Make sure that there are no staples or paper clips that will damage the work. It is a good idea to send a separate agreement or checklist through the mail or E-mail in addition to including it in the crate.
- Take a second piece of Masonite and place it on top of the first one making a sandwich with your work in the middle.
- Take two sheets of cardboard (same size as the Masonite) and place the Masonite sandwich between them.
- Completely seal all four sides of the sandwich with shipping tape.
- This sandwich may or may not need to be packed within a crate with additional packing.

Packing Paintings, Framed Works and Sculpture

- Framed pieces and sculpture should be packed in a reinforced cardboard box or a wooden crate especially if being shipped any distance.
- Cardboard boxes specially designed for transporting art are available in all sizes from several companies (listed above).
- Crates are generally made of plywood and fastened with screws to allow for easy opening and closing. Crates should always be sealed with several coats of polyurethane to be water-repellent. Label the crates with fragile or keep dry stickers or signage.
- The box or crate should be at least two inches larger than the work on each side to allow plenty of room for cushioning. You should always fill in the extra space around the work with cushioning materials like layers of foam or peanuts.
- Multiple works should be crated standing vertically with a layer of cardboard and cushioning between each work.
- Framed works, paintings or sculpture should be wrapped with glassine or archival tissue paper, and then sealed in plastic sheeting or bags. Never tape anything directly to the work. Also, use additional padding on all four corners of paintings and frames. You can make your own or order corner padding from a supplier.
- The glass in framed works should be replaced with Plexiglas, or it should be removed from the frame and wrapped separately. If this is not possible, make a grid of masking tape directly on the glass to hold it together in case it breaks during transit.
- Sculpture should be wrapped in glassine or archival tissue paper, sealed in plastic sheeting or bags and then floated within the crate to allow for plenty of cushioning on all sides.

Wrapping: General Principles

By wrapping artwork for shipping you are keeping the art clean and dry from airborne dirt. Always use clean materials and a clean work area to prevent dirt from accumulating on artwork. Keep wrapping simple so that there is no damage to the artwork in the process of unpacking. Wrapping should be taped only to itself; tape should never touch artwork, including the back of a painting or its frame. Avoid excessive taping for it will only be more difficult for the preparator to safely unpack the artwork. Excessive taping can also damage the packing and render it unusable for repacking. To waterproof work, use plastic sheeting.

Parcel Services

UPS 1(800) 742-5877 Limitations: 130" total height/width/length, and/or 150 pounds

Federal Express 1(800) 238-5355 Limitations: 10' in length, 165" girth, and/or 150 pounds

DHL 1(800) 225-5345 Limitations: none

U.S. Postal Service Limitations: 108" total height/width/length, and/or 70 pounds

Some Art Handlers to Start With

Cook's Crating and Fine Art Transportation, Inc. 3124 East 11th Street Los Angeles, CA 90023
1 (323) 268-5101

LA Packing 1 (323) 937-2669 www.lapacking.com

Atelier 4, Inc. 177 Water Street Brooklyn, NY 11201-111 Office: 1 (718) 875-5050 Fax: 1 (718)
852-5723 www.atelier4.com

Fine Arts Service Inc. 222 S Figueroa St. Los Angeles, CA 90012 1 (213) 617-2217

Crate 88 4091 Redwood Ave. Los Angeles, CA 90066 USA Office: 1 (310) 821-8558 Fax: 1 (310)
306-3572 www.crate88.com info@crate88.com

Precautionary Measures

- When shipping, always insure the work for the maximum retail price.
- Packages/crates should always be clearly labeled with handling instruction on the exterior using these symbols: a broken stem glass indicating that the package is fragile; an umbrella indicating that the package needs to remain dry; and a upward arrow indicating the top side; write 'face' on the exterior of the package to indicate the face of the artwork inside.
- You should also write a condition report listing any prior damage or potential vulnerabilities. This should be included inside the package to be sent. You should include photographs of previous damage or diagrams of the work if it needs to be reassembled once unpacked.
- You should make a detailed diagram of installation instructions for the crated piece, which should be placed inside the crate, as well as sent separately to the exhibition site.