

THE ARGYLL COLLECTION

Framing a Masterpiece by Jan Fraser

Every picture is a masterpiece – whether it's a child's drawing, a football shirt, an old photograph, or an Old Master. The right frame will not only protect and conserve your artwork, it will also enhance its appearance. Framing an artwork can be done to different levels depending on the piece; most fall within these three:

- standard – suitable for inexpensive artworks and prints where a minimum price is the major criterion
- conservation – this is the choice for the majority of artworks, using acid free materials for long term protection of the piece
- museum – using the very best quality materials and techniques to preserve valuable artworks for generations to come

Artworks framed to conservation and museum standards are also fully reversible – that means that the piece can be removed undamaged from the assembly at any time in the future.

Different types of artwork demand particular treatments. The three main types are:

- watercolours and prints
- oil paintings on canvas
- textiles and 3D items

Watercolours and prints

These are usually framed with a surrounding mount under glass. In the past, coloured mount board was popular, but a pale shade which complements the artwork tends to open it up rather than close it in. If colour is needed, a double mount with a 3-5mm inner border can achieve a good effect.

Smaller artworks can use lighter mouldings (the lengths of wood from which the frame is made) which also helps to enhance the appearance of pale delicate artworks. Bolder, darker

pieces will be dramatised by a plain black frame, possibly with a gold or silver fillet inset into the mount.

All pieces are laid on conservation grade mount board, with a suitable mount, glass and backing board, and sealed with an appropriate tape. This protects the piece from damage and dust, although framed pieces still have to be protected from sunlight and extremes of temperature and humidity.

Oil paintings on canvas

Traditionally oils are not framed under glass, although this is done more often now to protect the picture. Since many oils have a significant depth to the paint, a greater space is needed between the painting and the glass, and so a slip, or thin light frame is placed between them. A transparent spacer can also be used which allows the moulding to come to the edge of the artwork.

Larger heavier paintings need a stronger moulding to support them and the glass. Oils are held into the frame using bent brass plates which screw on to the frame. Usually the back of the canvas is left uncovered, but an additional light frame can be fitted to the back of the picture to hold a cover which provides additional protection.

Textiles and 3D items

Small, light textile pieces can be framed as watercolours after stretching on to an appropriate board. Heavier pieces, and items such as clothing demand a box frame which gives the greater depth necessary. Glass is fixed at the front of a box frame and the sides lined with mount board of an appropriate colour. Items such as shirts and dresses can be arranged on a backing board and attached with fine nylon line or tags. Again, these are finished with a backing board and taped to give a dust free seal.

The right choice of moulding is vital to produce a good result. Small 'L' shaped pieces of different mouldings, or 'chevrons' give an idea of how the colour and shape interact with the artwork. Usually silver works well with predominantly blue artworks, and gold with brown and red, although it is impossible to generalise. The shape of the moulding is also important – does it slope towards the picture drawing the eye in, or outwards? A picture without hard lines needs a plain or curved moulding rather than hard square edges. But most importantly the moulding must complement the artwork without being overpowering – the best frames are not noticed for themselves!

All artworks are finished by providing 'rings and strings' usually D rings and picture cord or brass wire for oil paintings. Smaller pictures can be hung on a single hook, but larger ones are easier to hang and adjust on two hooks placed apart on the wall.

Fashions in frames change and all artworks benefit from being reframed, or at least cleaned and reframed every 5 -10 years.

Jan Fraser

Easdale Images

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