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# ATTENDING TO

RUINING A PRICELESS WORK OF ART IS NOBODY'S IDEA OF A GOOD TIME BUT DESTROYING THE ART ONBOARD IS EXACTLY WHAT COULD HAPPEN IF IT IS NOT TREATED PROPERLY.

Fine art can be damaged in myriad ways, from overzealous cleaning to bad maintenance practices, making it an area that needs an informed approach. We spoke to Rosie Sumner of the Fine Art Trade Guild and Nicola Elstone

of Elstone Hayes Associates for their advice on making sure you do not wipe away any national treasures or irreplaceable heirlooms next time you are doing a quick whip around with the duster.

## FADING & DAMAGE

Neglect, substandard framing and poor-quality fixings are the main cause of damage to artworks, according to Sumner, while Elstone lists damage caused during transportation, installation and damage due to adverse weather conditions as the biggest culprits.

"Smaller, manageable works of art, especially statues, vases and similar, [should be] stowed safely and securely for the duration of any storm which will send the yacht pitching and rolling for some time. Generally all art pieces [should be] securely fixed in position so that they cannot easily move but this is not always

feasible as it can result in damage to bespoke furniture," says Elstone.

UV blocker glass will help reduce the speed of fading but Peter Hayton GCF and member of the Fine Art Trade Guild, who has framed works for the marine industry for the past 15 years, points out that most pictures do not get too much sun onboard vessels as windows in superyachts are generally smaller than those found in houses.

Unfortunately, the unavoidable salty, watery conditions found on yachts can be extremely damaging to works of art. Using waterproof materials in the construction of frames and then sealing the frame with a good quality, low modulus sealer as an extra defence against water or moisture ingress can help protect against accidental spillages at sea (or as a result of raucous parties in port).

# ARTWORK

WORDS ISLA MCKECHNIE

## MAINTENANCE

Elstone says that in an ideal world art should be placed, permanently hung and then not interfered with bar a gentle dusting now and then.

"You must remember that the owners have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds, and possibly more, on art for their vessel. Some pieces are contemporary and some are truly antique. Where possible, once fixed in position they should not be touched".

There are steps you can take to make sure the art in your care is not subjected to excessive damage or everyday wear and tear. For a start, art should be framed properly to museum or conservation grade to give it the best protection from physical damage, airborne pollution and acids generated by other framing techniques. If you are unsure whether the pieces onboard need framing to a higher standard, consult a professional framer; you can find them through the Guild of Commended Framers (GCF).

As much as possible, avoid heat and damp, as rapid changes in temperature cause paper and wood to dry out and adhesives to fail while damp can cause

pictures to ripple and encourages fungal growth, resulting in brown stains.

When hanging, use high quality wall fittings, preferably with a locking system, to make sure the picture does not fall at any time and check them regularly. Sumner points out that it is particularly important when hanging art on superyachts as opposed to on land, to avoid putting pieces in positions where they will be knocked or rubbed against.

"Companionways and quarters are generally narrower and used more often. A person is more likely to sway or fall when a vessel is underway and is likely to grab onto anything to regain their balance. Lastly, it is worth bearing in mind that a frame that sits flat on the wall and does not protrude is less likely to get knocked or damaged in the confines of a boat than bulkier frames."

Sumner also suggests that if pictures are intended for passageways, they should be fitted with Perspex glazing as extra security against breakage. That way, if someone does fall against the piece, the artwork (and the person) will not suffer cuts and abrasions. >

## CLEANING

And if an artwork does get something spilt on it?

Sumner says you can clean it, but softly, softly, and your best bet is always calling in a conservator. Mop it dry with absorbent materials as quickly as possible and then get it stripped out of the frame as soon as you can by a professional framer to see if anything spilt on the picture has seeped into the frame and onto the artwork. Pieces behind glass are susceptible to damage from liquid spilt on them as it can permeate the frame fairly quickly and cause adhesions between the artwork and the glass, which can be irreversible.

Elstone says that, as a rule of thumb, you should not clean art.

"There are many and varied types of art. Some pieces, cast and blown glass for instance, are more forgiving when cleaned with mild soapy water but others, like paintings or delicate sculptures, are not. Unglazed paintings and ceramics, some sand blasted glass and untreated textiles should never be touched. Only a

trained professional should be engaged to clean art; a general light dusting every now and then should suffice and chemicals should never be used on art pieces."

On a yacht it is possible for diesel smuts from exhaust fumes to travel on the wind and adhere to any surface they come in contact with. Being aware of this and doing all possible to avoid it, like closing doors and windows when travelling at lower speeds, can help prevent a build up of surface dirt.

Another cause for cleaning is finger marks. Especially in hot weather when people are perspiring, oils and acids can come out through the fingers and mark artwork. Suntan oils can carry pigments that stain if they come in contact with pictures, making it all too easy to damage improperly framed images onboard.

Sumner says frames are best just dusted and for oil paintings advocates using a very mild solution of soapy water, like Fairy Liquid, to dampen a small piece of cotton wadding. She points out this should only be used on minor blemishes

though; for anything else call in a professional. For works behind glass use a good glass cleaner with a soft cloth on the glass, or a cloth dampened with a very mild solution of soapy water. Never spray anything directly onto the glass as it may seep down the edge of the frame and begin to cause damage, undetected, until it is too late.

Never wash ivory, and if you need to clean glass or ceramic pieces of art, do so with a very mild solution and check that the product you are using is designed for the type of surface on which you are using it. Canvas can be a danger area, so approach it carefully.

"In the case of canvas products, especially printed canvases, I would advise very careful testing first [before cleaning] as a lot of canvases are not properly sealed when stretched and water-based inks can be rubbed off if too much pressure or water-based cleaner is used," says Sumner.

### SO THE DEFINITE DOS AND DON'TS WHEN IT COMES TO CLEANING ART?

"Some say the definite do not is do not! But I think that a lot of common sense can be used. That said, if you only think you know what the material is or whether the surface has been treated then better not do anything at all. And follow the old English proverb 'when in doubt, do nowt,'" is Elstone's opinion.

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With grateful thanks to **Rosie Sumner** of the Fine Art Trade Guild ([fineart.co.uk](http://fineart.co.uk)) and **Nicola Elstone** of Elstone Hayes Associates ([elstonehayesassociates.com](http://elstonehayesassociates.com)).