

How to Safely Pack and Ship Flat, Glass-less Art (cels, etc.)

In addition to selling, we purchase a LOT of art on eBay. And from all the damaged art we receive, we have concluded that most eBay sellers are confused about how to pack flat-art (without glass) for shipping.

About 50% of sellers we buy from appear to believe that the Post Office or one of the other carriers are responsible for protecting their packages. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In practice a package takes a lot of abuse from the second it leaves the seller's hands. The very first thing that happens is that it is stacked casually with other boxes. And a \$200 drawing in a floppy envelope with the words "Do Not Bend" on it is not going to survive this. We've actually received art like this and we can assure you that the 40 lb. non-standard box resting on half of our \$200 drawing doesn't care that it says, "Do Not Bend."

Let us say this very clearly: **the carrier DOES NOT guarantee that an item will arrive undamaged. AND, in then, end it is the SELLER who will be responsible for paying the damages (insurance aside).** That's right – according to eBay, the SELLER is responsible for the condition of the item until it arrives at the buyer's door – NOT the carrier. Ebay states very clearly, "the seller is responsible for the item until it is in the buyer's possession."

So, knowing that – how do WE keep our packages pristine and our art in perfect condition to your door? How have our packages survived rain and bad carriers and neighborhood animals and that nasty 40 lb. box? Well we began by doing a little research with Fedex AND working backwards from the possible types of damage that might occur. In other words, we first determined what damage we were working to prevent and worked backwards from there.

Here's the major categories of damage we've seen on art we've purchased – and therefore the damage we're working to prevent:

Crushing
Punctures
Water damage
Folding/Bending

So first, what carrier to chose? From years of buying and selling art we know that USPS Priority Mail has a better overall track-record in terms of not having damage than UPS, Parcel Select or other options (the notable exception may be Fedex - which is prohibitively expensive). If your customers will accept the expense of Fedex, go for it. For everyone else, Priority Mail is likely the best choice. Remember, every seller's goal should be that the art arrives intact – not that it arrives cheaply-but-damaged. So this, plus the free insurance up to \$100, is why we use Priority Mail.

Now, let's begin addressing the damage categories.

Crushing: we need a box that is larger than our art so that if it IS crushed, the art is okay. It needs to have some strength to it to deflect some of the crushing. And lastly it needs PADDING to absorb the crushing before it gets to the art. In our case we've chosen Priority Mail boxes that are (in most cases) at least 1.5 inches larger than our art on each side to give the art some space. We then fill that space with padding that has some resistance to it: crushed newspaper or peanuts or something similar. There are additional steps we take in the categories below that also help to prevent crushing damage.

Punctures: we need to provide resistance to punctures as well as ALLOWING some punctures to happen without touching the art. As we mentioned under **crushing** we already provide space around our art AND padding to absorb some of the puncture force. In addition we slide another thin layer of cardboard up against the inside wall of the box to take some of the force of a puncture. We mat most of our items so we also make sure that we turn the backboards of the art outwards. AND if it is a single piece of matted art, we place ANOTHER thick piece of cardboard against the open face of the

mat. If it is a pair of matted artworks we place the openings inside and the backboards facing out.

Water damage: we need to protect against rain, soaking, etc. We need to allow for the fact that water may indeed touch our box - but PREVENT it from touching our art. So we use the Priority Mail tyvek-type envelopes on each piece of art. We also bag each piece of art with an interior bag, in addition to the Priority Mail bags. This, plus the many layers of padding and cardboard may not make our package entirely waterproof (if dropped in the ocean), but it will keep it safe from the more likely scenario that it may be left on a doorstep for eight hours during a rainstorm.

Folding/Bending: we need to protect against the folding and bending damage that WILL occur from carriers stacking boxes or automated machinery catching our packaging. Bulk-with-resistance and many or strong layers of cardboard are our primary defense against folding and bending. Our packages are a good 3” thick – filled with padding and layers of cardboard as well as the matting of the art itself. It resists almost all folding and bending. At the worst we might have some outer crushing but the interior with the art remains intact.

Note: one issue we see frequently is when the material that is used to prevent folding/bending actually damages the art! If a seller places a piece of cardboard with a seam or a fold in it immediately against the paper art, it WILL transfer that seam to the art – sometimes permanently. This is where the layering, padding and the matting of the art becomes even more important in protecting against this.

Of course there are other things to remember when packaging: tape is the destroyer of art. NEVER place any kind of adhesive on the art itself. Also, be aware that the buyer needs to be able to open the packaging without damaging the art. We see a lot of sellers go a little tape crazy which can cause lots of stress on the art when trying to pry it free from the crazy-tape-seller’s packaging.

Finally – we believe that there is an exponential relationship between the amount or strength of the packaging needed and the size of the art. This means that the packaging for a 40” pan cel will need to be not just 4 times larger and stronger than a 10” cel, but perhaps 8-10 times larger or stronger. The larger the item, the more easy it is to bend it. Therefore MORE packaging is needed to prevent this. And sometimes, as the art gets larger, the scheme we outlined above may just not work because the box sizes just aren’t available. If that’s the case, we suggest layer upon layer of cardboard. Strength and thickness are the friends of loooong art. We will often do this when the art reaches a certain size and there is no frame.

We hope that this guide will help sellers prevent their art from becoming permanently damaged. At least 25% of the items we purchase arrive with significant damage. This means that 1 in 4 pieces of art are on the road to destruction merely by sending them from one place to another. It’s a horrifying statistic considering that we are not really owners of art, but custodians or stewards of the art we hold. At our gallery, we keep our view on the long-term – it is our goal that any art that passes through our hands be in the same condition 30 years from now (or whenever it leaves our hands), as it was when we received it.

Charles Scott Gallery has been buying and selling animation art, antiquities and other items of interest for over 25 years. You can also find us on the web, where we have additional helpful guides for collectors at <http://www.cscottgallery.com>