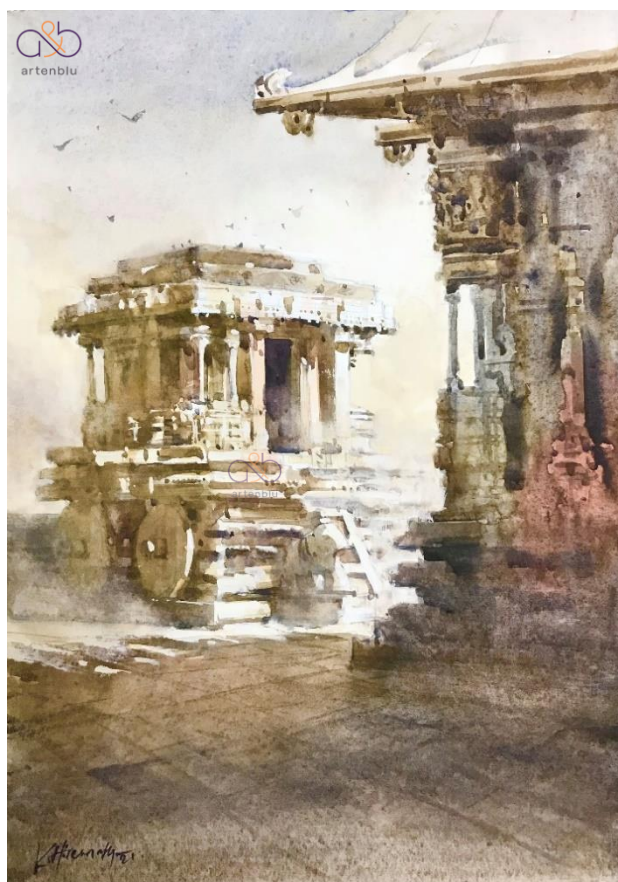


Guide to Preserving Watercolour Paintings

Watercolour paintings are prized for their luminous quality and delicate beauty. As a collector, you've invested not just money, but passion into your collection. This guide aims to help you protect that investment. We'll explore the unique challenges of preserving watercolours and provide practical, expert-backed advice to ensure your artworks remain as vibrant and captivating as the day you acquired them.

Understanding Watercolours: Watercolour paintings are created by applying pigment suspended in water to paper. Unlike oil paintings, where pigments are mixed with a binder and sit on top of a canvas, watercolour pigments are absorbed into the paper fibres. This makes watercolours particularly susceptible to environmental factors. The paper substrate can easily warp, discolour, or become brittle, while the pigments can fade or change colour over time if not properly protected.



Watercolour Painting



The Enemies of Watercolour Paintings

Light:

- UV rays cause fading and colour shifts in pigments
- Visible light can also cause damage over time
- Even artificial light can be harmful if too intense or prolonged

Humidity:

- High humidity can lead to mould growth and paper warping
- Low humidity can cause paper to become brittle and crack
- Fluctuations in humidity are particularly damaging, causing repeated expansion and contraction

Temperature:

- High temperatures accelerate chemical reactions that degrade paper and pigments.
- Low temperatures can make paper brittle
- Rapid temperature changes cause dimensional stress on the artwork

Pollutants:

- Dust and airborne particles can damage the surface

Proper Display Techniques & Storage

Protection from Light & Humidity:

- Use UV-protective glass in frames
- Hang paintings away from direct sunlight
- Maintain consistent room temperature and humidity

Handling Your Watercolours:

- Always wear clean, lint-free cotton gloves
- Support the entire frame or board when moving
- Never touch the painted surface



Storage Solutions:

- Store flat, never rolled
- Use acid-free materials for wrapping
- Avoid attics, basements and exterior walls
- Implement proper shelving and cabinet systems

Flat storage:

- Store unframed works flat in acid-free boxes or folders
- Use interleaving sheets between artworks

Materials:

- All storage materials should be acid-free and linen-free
- Consider using buffered materials for long-term storage

Environment:

- Avoid areas prone to temperature and humidity fluctuations
- Choose interior rooms away from exterior walls
- Elevate storage units off the floor to protect from potential flooding

Organization:

- Implement a cataloguing system for easy location and retrieval
- Avoid overcrowding in storage areas

Cleaning and Maintenance

- Use both hands when carrying larger pieces
- Dust frames gently with a soft, dry brush
- Leave paper and pigment cleaning to professionals
- Regularly inspect for signs of damage or deterioration
- Keep insects and pests at bay with proper prevention methods



Professional Conservation

Finding a conservator:

- Look for membership in professional bodies
- Ask for references and examples of similar work
- Ensure they specialize in works on paper

Conservation services:

- May include cleaning, repair, deacidification, or remounting
- Always ask for a detailed treatment proposal and cost estimate
- Understand that ethical conservation aims to stabilize, not restore to "like new" condition

Documentation:

- Keep detailed records of any conservation treatments
- Regular condition reports can track changes over time and inform preservation strategies

Preserving watercolour paintings is an ongoing process that requires attention to detail and a proactive approach. By implementing these guidelines, you're taking significant steps towards ensuring the longevity of your collection. Remember that each artwork is unique and may present its own conservation challenges. When in doubt, always consult with a professional. Your diligence in care will allow future generations to enjoy the beauty of your watercolour treasures.

If you need further information, please get in touch with us.

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