

# Protecting Your Art Collection

Collecting art, antiques and other artefacts is becoming increasingly popular, even if on a modest scale. Works of art add a personal touch to any home, and having them on display brings pleasure. But they are also at risk from theft, whether this is from professional criminals, or opportunist burglars looking for anything of value.

Whilst accurate figures are hard to define, internationally, art theft is third behind the illegal drugs and the arms trade, and of this, approximately 50% of thefts are from homes. Items are often listed as household items, and most art is either poorly or not even catalogued. This makes identifying objects difficult, and recovery extremely hard. It is estimated that only 5-10% of stolen art is returned to its rightful owner, and then frequently after several years and protracted legal disputes.

## Home Security

The first step in protecting your collection is to start with home security. Carry out a risk and cost benefit assessment. Look at local crime levels, and balance the cost of any security measures against the value of the collection, and don't forget to keep home contents insurance up to date.

Imagine security as the layers of an onion, starting at the perimeter of your property, then working inwards to the objects you want to protect. Try and imagine how you would get into your house quickly and unseen if you had lost the key. This will help identify weaknesses.

Check fences/hedges, and make sure there are no hiding places which a burglar can use to hide their efforts to force entry into the property. Make sure all doors and windows are secure and have good quality locks (and are locked when the property is empty). If window locks are not practicable, consider locking bars or shutters.

External lighting is one of the most effective deterrents. PIR activated lighting is ideal as it reduces the running cost of full-time lighting, and activated by movement, can act as an alarm (solar powered PIR activated LED lights can reduce costs even further). Lighting should cover approach routes and should be positioned to avoid shadows.

An intruder (burglar) alarm system with a visible external alarm box can act as a visible deterrent, as well as give warning of an intruder. There are a variety of systems on the market, from DIY stand-alone systems, or hard-wired systems linked to an Alarm Monitoring Centre (AMC). Intruder detection systems should cover, as a minimum entry points (doors and windows).

Good alarm systems can also be linked to individual paintings and display cabinets, or alternatively, consider using stand-alone movement or vibration detection alarms.

There are many CCTV systems on the market aimed at the domestic market. Whilst they can be a deterrent, unless there is some form of monitoring and response, they are very much an "after the event system."

If cameras are installed care should be taken over what is in their field of view, avoiding infringing on the privacy of neighbours. Cameras are best placed covering entrances and high-value items, and positioned so that they capture the face of any intruder. One option that is gaining popularity is to

install security cameras that use mobile phone technology to send a message and image to the owner when movement is detected.

## Fixing

Most pictures in homes are hung using a simple hook and wire system. This allows paintings to be moved easily, changing their display, but equally also their quick removal. This weakness can be overcome by the use of alarms.

An alternative are lockable mounting systems. These use a spring mounted clip to secure the picture to a bracket mounted on the wall, locking the picture onto the wall making it hard to remove. The better systems require a special key to remove the picture from the bracket. The down-side for this type of system is that pictures are harder to move around, and as a mounting system they are not suitable for uneven walls, or weak walls (such as plaster).

Ornaments, especially those that are portable are very vulnerable to both opportunist and deliberate theft. This risk can be reduced by displaying them in locked display cabinets, which can also be alarmed.

## Privacy

Whilst most home burglaries are opportunist, a small percentage are more deliberate, with the thief deliberately targeting the home because they believe valuables are inside. Maintaining tight control of any information on your collection can be seen as the outer ring of defence. This can be achieved by:

- Controlling access to your property, and where visitors can go.
- Putting valuable items away when temporary visitors, such as workmen, are present.
- Not openly advertising the collection.
- Avoid posting photo's of your collection on-line.

## Marking

There are several proprietary property marking systems available on the market, including DNA, Micro-dot, etching and engraving, or attaching bar-code labels or RFD tags. Any marking system raises conservation issues, especially those that involve a "physical" process. Even the less intrusive systems such as UV and micro-dotting can raise questions over the artistic integrity of the object being marked.

In the case of the DNA kits, these place a unique coded dot on an item which is then registered either with the owner, or for some licensed products with the provider (which may involve a subscription fee). Signs showing that property inside is protected by security markings is also a visible deterrent.

UV marking involves marking the item with a dye which is only visible by using a UV light. The marking typically involves a unique serial number or postcode.

Whilst easy to apply, both and UV marking will fade with time and as a result will require renewing. This will depend on where the marking is placed, its exposure to light and any handling.

Etching or engraving are other options, but this approach will involve permanently marking the object, albeit for good reason. Etching or engraving can be hidden from sight, for example by marking the base.

In the case of paintings, marking the surface of the artwork is not advised as this will de-value it. Marking the frame is an option, but can be overcome by the more aware thief by changing the frame. Marking the back of the medium is possible during framing, but renewing is difficult. Marking the back of the painting prior to framing with an indelible pen is an option, but care is required due to the risk of seepage onto the face of the painting.

Marking property with bar-codes and RFID tags whilst an option, will require additional equipment, such as specialist labelling machines and readers. The labels or tags are also easy to remove. As a result they are not normally considered an option for domestic applications. However, as they can be a solution for temporary displays and commercial galleries.

## Purchasing and Provenance

Purchasing art direct from the artist or from an established gallery or dealer should not present any problems. Remember to keep details of the date of purchase as this aids proof of ownership. Ask the dealer for details of previous ownership, details of the artist.

Care should be taken when purchasing any original art from less established sellers. Some tips:

- Be suspicious of any item where the asking price does not equate to its market value.
- Check the identity and address of the seller and record the details.
- Be suspicious if the seller does not know, or is vague about the history of the artwork.
- Check the property against records of stolen art. Several private companies will assist with this task.
- If you are still uncertain, refuse to buy it.

## Further Advice

Whilst this advice is suitable for most collections, if you have high-value items, or consider yourself at especial risk, Doran Risk Consulting can provide expert practical advice.

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# Art/Object/Artefact Catalogue

<b>Owner:</b>	
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<b>Address:</b>	
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<b>Object Title:</b>			
<b>Artist/Maker:</b>			
<b>Object Type:</b>			
<b>Material/Technique:</b>			
<b>Dimensions (Frame):</b>	<b>L:</b>	<b>W:</b>	<b>D:</b>
<b>Dimensions (Object):</b>	<b>L:</b>	<b>W:</b>	<b>D:</b>
<b>Marks/Inscriptions:</b>			
<b>DNA/UV Marking:</b>	<b>Y/N</b>	<b>Location:</b>	
<b>Date of Purchase:</b>		<b>Cost:</b>	
<b>Place of Purchase:</b>			
<b>Documentation:</b>			

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<b>Photo 1:</b>	<b>Photo 2:</b>
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<b>Photo 3:</b>	<b>Photo 4:</b>
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Notes:

1. If stolen art is recovered, you need to be able to provide proof that you're the rightful owner. The aim of cataloguing is to help to provide sufficient detail to prove ownership.
2. Documentation should include any receipts, auction or gallery identification tags etc. If possible, include any history of the artist and previous ownership. This "provenance" helps reinforce any claim of ownership, as well as proving the identity of the artist.
3. If the object has a DNA or UV mark, this detail should be recorded, including the general location of any marking.
4. A minimum of two photographs is advised; one showing the whole object, the other a close-up of any signature, damage, or other unique detail.
5. Receipts should be kept, not only to prove ownership and provenance, but in addition for insurance purposes. Notwithstanding this, the value of artworks can change (up or down), and should be kept under review, but having a receipt can provide a starting point.