

**Safeguarding Our Objects for Future Generations**  
**Overview**  
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Why does it seem that museum staff, especially the guards, go overboard protecting the objects on display? It's difficult to understand why a brief flash from a camera or moving close to a painting could cause any harm. Are the guards just mean? Actually it is the opposite; these museums are in the process of prolonging the lives of all the objects within their walls. They are doing what they can to ensure that these objects will survive in perpetuity in nearly the same condition as they appear to you today. Avoiding touch, keeping direct light (including light from flash cameras) off the works, and carefully controlling air temperature, may add years to the lives of works of art both in the museum and at home. Many of the techniques employed by museums may be adapted to help you preserve your own works of art, whether you have a Picasso painting or priceless images of your loved ones.

Touch, however slight, leaves traces of moisture and oils on objects, becoming a magnet for dust, dirt and other gritty particulates in the air. Once attached to objects, these contaminants become a permanent part of the piece. Cleaning, which should *only* be done by trained professionals, is costly and inevitably removes a bit of the original work along with the grime. Avoiding human touch goes a long way in safeguarding our objects.

Light is damaging to a great number of objects, including our own skin. We may readily see its impact in the form of a sunburn. Works of art do not show the devastating damage as quickly, but it is there nonetheless. Light can be so harmful that most museums limit viewing time of sensitive objects to a cumulative six months in any five year period. Each moment of light exposure is carefully monitored and recorded by the staff. One second of flash equals about three minutes of normal light, so cutting out hundreds of "flash moments" significantly increases the time that one piece may be exhibited. Museums cover windows with a UV light-blocking film. While you may not have this at home, you can observe the natural dark zones where sunlight does not fall across your walls. Place your most fragile objects, those made of paper, textiles, feathers, basket and wax, in these cool spots. Stone, metal and ceramic works will be less affected by light and may be placed in brighter spots.

We hope our visitors will join us in our attempt to prolong works of art, both in the museum by observing the safeguards in place, and at home by employing similar techniques. Our descendants will thank us!