

Ask the Artsperts

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Harmon-Meek Gallery, Naples, FL

Preparing for a Hurricane

Dear Artsperts:

In the hours before Hurricane Irma struck Naples I began to worry that maybe I should have done more to protect my art. Do you have advice on what I should do before the next Hurricane blows this way?

Signed,
Weathering the Storm

Dear Storm,

Art can be impacted a number of ways during a hurricane like the one we just experienced this past September with Irma. Hurricane Harvey impacted Houston in a vastly different manner than Irma and Irma had different effects on Marco Island and Naples versus Jacksonville.

Whether high winds or high water, both usually result in loss of electricity and thus loss of humidity and temperature control. High humidity and rapidly fluctuating temperatures are the two factors beyond wind and water which are of concern to the safety of artworks. Today many homes and businesses are equipped with impact glass and generators which help, but not everyone has or can afford those precautionary items. Plus even hurricane windows can leak if not sealed properly and generators depend on a constant source of fuel which may run out.

You should first consider the option of getting the artwork out of the storm's forecasted path. If you have an offsite storage facility to move works of art and antiques to away from coastal or flood regions, preferably above the first floor, that is a good option. If you are evacuating by car and have the space, wrap very valuable or sentimentally valuable objects - even just in thick towels or blankets - and bring them with you.

Newer homes with impact glass and built-up from the street level can protect artwork without much concern; perhaps consider hiding easily movable works of art of high value to inner rooms away from windows and elevated off the ground. High-rise condominiums with impact glass or hurricane shutters are fairly safe as well as long as they have been installed correctly and are properly sealed.

If works have to be left at home then again removing them to an interior room and elevating is still a good option and very valuable or sentimentally valuable objects can be sealed in plastic sheeting with plastic tape and even boxed in cardboard. The plastic sheeting can be found in hardware stores often in the paint section and comes in rolls of various sizes. A good scissor or razor blade will cut the plastic down to size and then you can wrap the painting just like you would a present and seal with tape. This should keep moisture out. If you can put the works in a cardboard box that should help protect the work from puncture.

Often the real problem occurs after the storm has passed when standing water, open homes, and loss of electricity become the primary issues of concern. Unwrap the works wrapped in plastic to let them breathe. If works can be moved to a facility with air conditioning then that would be the ideal solution, assuming you can retrieve them at all. Remember that artists created paintings long before air conditioning so they are not that fragile. It is long exposure to humidity, water damage and puncture that are of most concern. Paintings on canvas will loosen with humidity and should be brought back to their normal taught state slowly when the power returns.

You should also be cautious about art newly available to the art market that may have been damaged by a storm. Just like with used cars, after a storm some unscrupulous individuals may try to sell their damaged art work. Be careful when buying art at auction especially if you cannot physically examine the art yourself. Be sure to examine the backs of canvas and the back of works to ensure no water damage or recent reframing. Look for signs of mold, mildew or fungus.

In the end protection of life is of greater concern than that of material objects, but we can understand your interest in wanting to save your art as well.

Sincerely,
The Artsperts



An interior bathroom is good place to store art during a major storm. Elevating works is also a good idea.