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ASK THE EXPERTS

Studio Craft: Painted Frames



Detail of a painting by Seurat with painted frame

Ask the Experts: "I have a canvas that came with a plain wooden frame. I think it would be interesting to leave the canvas framed and continue the painting from the canvas onto the frame. Are there any famous artists who have done this? I can't be the first."

A: You're certainly not the first artist to consider painting a frame to match a painting. Seurat famously created Pointillist works with frames painted in harmonious colors and patterns. And, while few survive, it is known that Van Gogh painted his own plain oak frames to match floral still lifes. Today it's pretty common for artists to handle framing in-studio, and for many, presentation is part of the overall creative process.



To ensure your hand painted frame lasts as long as the picture it holds, devote a little time to preparing it. If the

frame is unfinished wood, it can be lightly sanded and coated with acrylic gesso. A painted or varnished surface may need heavier sanding or a bonding primer before applying gesso or paint.

Painted frames can be extremely appealing to some collectors, but not all potential clients will appreciate them. Frames are a transition between architecture, furniture and artwork, and galleries usually prefer to present paintings in frames they think will appeal to their clients. Because of this, artists' frames often don't remain with the original piece- dealers and collectors tend to re-frame artwork according to taste.

Frames crafted by an artist can become collectible themselves, and can enhance value if kept with the artwork as originally intended. Knowledgeable collectors are aware of this, and even when having a piece re-framed will retain the original presentation materials. If you want to make sure your painted frames are preserved with your artwork, consider including notation inside the rabbet (inner channel). Include your name, size of the frame, date and the title of the piece which the frame accompanied. That way, if your frame is separated from the artwork, it's still possible to identify it and (hopefully) reunite frame and painting later on.