

Creative Drawer

Color Color Where Did It Go?

Not all color dyes, inks, paints, are light-fast or colorfast. Some are fugitive, that is they can fade or change. Usually this is caused by UV, but some colors fade even in the dark, even if well protected.

Your best protection against fading is minimizing the damage caused by UV, which is in sunlight, artificial light, especially fluorescent tubes . . . if you can see something, there is probably some UV in the light.

There are UV filtering glasses and plastics designed to minimize the effects of UV. These used to have a distinctive orange cast which was even more obvious when used for framing—the light passes through the glazing twice—than just for windows. Today, most UV filtering glass and plastic is relatively neutral even without spending lots of money on museum glass. Keeping your art work out of direct sunlight is a low cost, albeit partial, solution.

It is easy to say “go cheap” when the frame shop what sort of glazing you want: window glass for \$10, plain acrylic for \$20, UV filtering acrylic for \$30, or museum glass for \$100. We suggest you take a breath or two before answering.

(If you see that you family pictures are fading or shifting in color, scan them and burn a CD. Don't forget, your film could be fading too. CD's don't last forever either, but this is inexpensive insurance, and a good bad- weather project.)

What you cannot protect against easily is damage to the image from the substrate: pulp paper, which yellows and gets brittle from the acid in it, will ultimately hurt the image; chemicals used in processing photographs, if not washed out, can cause the image to deteriorate.

Our recommendation is to buy with care. Find out what papers, inks, printers, etc. are being used. Whether you spend \$5 or \$5000 you should know. Some years ago, the archival qualities of a print was the stuff of curatorial conferences, but today that information is usually available, certainly for the photographic and inkjet world of prints.

Even prints made on 100% rag paper with archival inks and UV coatings—which some tests show can double the time before fading or color shifts become visible—will fade if poorly treated or exposed to environmental contaminants. But you are better off getting work that is as archival as possible.

We cannot recommend more *The Permanence and Care of color Photographs: Traditional and Digital color Prints, Color Negatives, Slides, and Motion Pictures*, by Henry Wilhelm, with contributing author Carol Brower. This book was published in 1993 and is over 700 pages long. (Be assured, they won't be making a movie of it.) It is available as a PDF at no charge at <http://www.wilhelmresearch.com>. Wilhelm Research is in the forefront of lightfastness/media research. Most inkjet papers, printers, and inks that are used for producing fine art images have been and are being tested. The results are easily located using their search window.

Two good sources of archival storage and framing products are: University Products at <http://www.universityproducts.com> and Light Impressions at <http://www.lightimpressionsdirect.com>.