

Preserving Children's Artwork by Dana Ailer

When it comes to children's artwork, parents tend to hoard. Who can possibly part with those one-of-a-kind masterpieces? But kids are prolific artists; and if you don't take steps to keep your collection under control, you'll have boxes of construction paper dinosaurs stashed in every closet in the house. Here are some ideas to help you enjoy and preserve these treasures.

RULE 1 : Don't Keep 3-D Artwork.

No matter how many glue sticks were invested, that cardboard castle with pipe cleaner 'fireworks' is not going to store well. For 3-D works not made from durable materials, the best way to preserve the piece is with photos. Take the piece outside (but not in direct sunlight) and shoot several different angles; zoom in. Make notes about the piece: Who made it? When was it made? Why was it made? What *is* it exactly? What did your child have to say about it? You can keep these photos and notes together in an album which will be much easier to store and much more enjoyable to look at in a year.

RULE 2 : Cheap Art Materials Disintegrate; Make Digital Copies Now

News print, construction paper, water-based markers, and tape don't age well. All of these materials as well as tempera paint and a lot of non-toxic glues can change color and come apart in a matter of months. You can prolong the life of artwork created with these materials somewhat by storing the piece flat in a dark place; but what fun is that? You want to *enjoy* your child's artwork. The safest way to do that is with digital copies of the originals.

Flatbed scanners have improved in quality and decreased in price a lot over the last few years, and are becoming as common as printers in home offices. Your scanned images can be sent to any online photo printing service and reproduced in a wide range of standard sizes - perfect for framing. But if you have limited technical skills or equipment, local print shops such as McClung Printers in Waynesboro (www.mcclungco.com) can scan or photograph the artwork for you and give you the finished product in digital format.

RULE 3 : Show it Off

Obviously your child is an artistic genius; now it's time to let the whole world know. With the help of some great online services, the digital images created by scanning or photographing your children's work can be turned into anything from postcards to lunch boxes, from garden flags to wall clocks. Websites like Cafe Press (www.cafepress.com) and Zazzle (www.zazzle.com) offer a huge range of printed products with no minimum order requirements so you can order just one or 10 Christmas ornaments, t-shirts, or water bottles. By putting your child's artwork on household items, you'll get to enjoy those little masterpieces every day. And just imagine how much Grandma would love to receive an umbrella or mousepad decorated with her favorite pumpkin's original art.

The most important thing is to just enjoy and share your children's artwork. It will mean so much to them to see you putting a lot of value on something they created. And, no matter what kind of day you're having, you will have to smile every time you look at your tote bag with the giant purple flower created by your first-grader. Do keep some of their original work stored flat in a dark place, but don't keep so much that you're overwhelmed by the sheer mass of it and never take it out to enjoy it. These days of log cabins made from popsicle sticks and self-portraits that utilize macaroni are fleeting. Enjoy them!