

Sending Tapestries. Packaging, Carriage and everything else!

By Margaret Jones.

Carriage:

The whole thing about sending artwork anywhere is tricky but abroad is a bit of a nightmare. I remember being invited to exhibit in Canada and gaily agreeing to send a piece of work nearly 150cm wide. Then I found out that pretty much the cheapest way to send it was to buy it a plane ticket of it's own and send it as an economy passenger. Canada is particularly bad as it seems they have all sorts of duties that must be paid. In the end I gave it to the nice man at Parcelforce as a parcel of no value whatsoever and kept my fingers crossed. It still cost £100 to send and the same back again.

You can use a professional art carrier and they will cost a small fortune. If it is an incredibly delicate or precious piece of work, then you might want to pay out for that standard of care and insurance – see below about insurance.

Some exhibitions insist you use their carriers and can get grumpy if you don't. With Heallreaf we don't do that, but we do have a weeks window when the work has to arrive, if that is the case please keep to it, we are flexible in our approach, but some aren't or can't be, especially if the work is going straight to the gallery, often galleries have little or no storage space.

Insurance:

With the problem of carriage also comes the problem of insurance.

I generally work on the principle that if you send something tracked then if it get's lost it can be found again.

If you want to insure your work during carriage for its full insurance value, then you are going to pay an awful lot for carriage. For Heallreaf 4 I asked overseas weavers to send their work with a low value on the customs label. Bless them they all complied, and I only had to pay one lot of customs duty and that was because Fed Ex got confused. At that time anything worth more than £139 would be due for import duty.

For some obscure reason HMRC can't differentiate between work being imported for sale or work being in the country for a short time before being returned to the owner. I have spent hours on the phone to them trying to sort it out. You can claim the duty back from HMRC but there is the admin fee for Royal Mail to tell you the work is stuck in Customs which isn't returnable, or not easily. If you are the Tate or similar you can get what they call an ATA Carnet but it is complicated, expensive and when I last looked has to be arranged by the sender.

All I can say is that if you are sending work abroad, please comply with the exhibitions requests as to carriage and customs labels because if you don't it's a nightmare for them and if you cause

them a nightmare they aren't going to want you to exhibit with them again. I know of one exhibition that has a blacklist of artists who don't comply.

Packaging.

Small tapestries are easy, pop them in a little fabric bag and put them in a jiffy bag. When you send a tapestry it is easy to forget that the packaging must be capable of being reused, either between exhibitions or just to return the work to you, or if you are lucky, to send it on to the buyer.

If the work has come straight from a framer, it is tempting just to leave it in their cling wrap, but generally that packaging is destroyed when the work is taken out of it, leaving the organiser with absolutely no packing for onward transit.

So:

Rule 1 – bubble wrap and sticky tape do not go together. As soon as you rip the tape off the bubble wrap it gets destroyed, the bubbles pop and it is just a sheet of thick polythene. I usually try to get about ¼ inch elastic and cut off a length, tie the ends together and you have a giant elastic band. This can wrap around the bubble wrap and when it is taken off the bubble wrap remains intact. Or instead of elastic you can use old stockings or tights (washed please).

Rule 2 – Label all your packaging. There is nothing worse than putting up an exhibition and being surrounded by packing and not being able to remember whose packaging was whose. Well, yes obviously there are worse things, but it isn't fun and to be honest if you have a lot of packaging even if you do label every piece, you might not get exactly all of it back. Some artists over package so you find yourself wondering where on earth you can use this extra 3 metres of bubble wrap.

Yes: we do have a bubble wrap conundrum; it isn't easily recycled and isn't environmentally friendly. You can get paper bubble wrap, and something called 'hive wrap' - you will recognise it if you see it – which ever you use the two rules above still apply

Rolling tapestries:

If you are going to roll a large tapestry these are rules, I was taught, and I always follow them. Roll it around a big tube, say around 10cm/4inches in diameter, anything smaller and you might find the ends curl up and take a while to straighten out once it is hung. I sometimes roll smaller if it is going to be for a short time.

Always roll it with the front side out, somehow, they just don't like being rolled the other way.

For example: lay a cloth (or sheet of Tyvek*) that is larger than the tapestry on a table and lay the tapestry face down on it with the warps running away from you, place the tube at one end of the tapestry and roll it gently, not creasing either the cloth/Tyvek or the tapestry. Once it is rolled you can tape the end of the cloth/Tyvek down with masking tape or you can tie it. If

tying, you don't want to leave a dent in the tapestry, so I use strips of fabric about 2.5cm/1 inch wide to tie it up. I have also seen wide ribbon with the artists name embroidered on it.

Then if packing off with the postman or a carrier you can roll it in bubble wrap, fix with aforementioned big home-made elastic bands and then cover in at least two layers of thick brown paper.

Or

You can get an even bigger diameter tube and put the whole thing in that, seal up the ends and off you go.

And of course: DON'T FORGET TO LABEL YOUR TAPESTRY.

You might assume the organisers know which work is yours but usually a show is to be taken down really fast and often there are helpers who might not know your work, label it on the back with your name, the name of the work, the selling price and if necessary, which is the top.

This all sounds really simple and obvious but trust me you don't think about it hard until you get all those badly wrapped tapestries arrive in the post, or as happened to me once at the end of a show you are given back a pile of tapestry and tissue paper and very meaningful look!

*Tyvek is a 100% high density polyethylene. It is a spun bonded sheet which is resistant to chemical and liquids but is completely inert and is breathable. It used by archivers and builders and will do amazing things when heated so is often used by textile artists to create 3D structures. It is also recyclable. If you use masking tape on it, it will shred so best to get those homemade elastic bands out as it isn't cheap.