

CONSERVATION

1. Humidity

- Humidity is the percentage of water found as vapour in any given volume in the air.
- The ideal climate for most materials is between 50%+/- 5% relative humidity
- Below 45% organic materials such as wood/leather/ animal glue & shell all become brittle, dry out and may split or warp.
- Above 65% mould will grow, veneers will detach/ metals may corrode and paint may flake.
- With the above extremes the changes can magnify with material combinations due to the different stress levels of materials.
- Wood/paint = wood expands or contracts, paint flakes (this has happened to most acrylic/oil paintings from the 19th century)
- Wood/textile = textiles become stained/ brittle
- Metal/paper = metal corrodes, paper becomes stained (modern photography sometimes uses aluminum as a backing to photographic works)
- More dangerous than constantly high or low RH is a constantly fluctuating RH. If organic objects are constantly absorbing and de-absorbing moisture, or shrinking and growing the object will split, buckle and paint will flake.

2. Temperature

- The optimum is 20 C (+/- 10%), this is the international standard.
- Like the humidity, in big public galleries this is monitored and controlled by a computer run database system onsite, and can give out graphs on the last 12 months of readings. The system takes readings every 15minutes.
- Long exposure outside of the optimum temperature will result in the following possible reactions:
 - Paper, textiles, lacquer, leather, natural fibres, bone, wood and paint can become embrittled and darken.
 - Rubber can crumble .
 - Celluloid can yellow.
 - Higher temps will speed up natural decaying reactions.

Larger public galleries have a temperature and humidity control system that is run by a designated computer database. Readings are generally taken every 15 minutes from small wall mounted thermohydrographs. This information is processed within the database, which then runs the appropriate Air Handling Unit (AHU) or Fan Coil Unit (FCU) for the area, whether it is storage or display.

3. Light

- Light damage is both cumulative and irreversible, so the light level and duration of exposure is very important to the longevity of the art.
- Some colours and materials are affected by light more drastically than others, thus by limiting either one or both of these factors the damage to the work is lessened. Light in this content is both the light that can be seen as well UV exposure.

- Standards differ depending on the composition of the work. For instance works on paper require a lower light level (around 55 lux) than acrylic/ oil paintings, which can accommodate up to 120-200 lux, although not for prolonged periods. Stone/ Glass/ Ceramic and metal can accommodate almost any sort of light levels.
- UV is very damaging due to its high energy. This is why Museum standard lighting tends to be Tungsten bulbs rather than Fluorescent tubes. Tungsten lamps are hotter than Fluorescent tubes, so they are kept a greater distance from the works.
- Because light damage is cumulative, in most Galleries/ Museums works are rested after an extended exhibition. Generally, an allowance of 3 months per every 12 months is standard; however, with travelling exhibitions this is sometimes unable to be provided and so the works are rested for several years in storage until shown again.

4. Pest and Rodents

Not all pests directly harm the collection, but may attract others that do, so a monitoring system needs

to be put in place, such as an Integrated Pest Management system.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is used in most galleries and museums and comprises the aspects of good housekeeping, cleaning both Front of House (FOH) as well as Back of House (BOH) and the laying and monitoring of traps to record the types of infestations that may occur. It also includes the regular surface fumigation both outside the perimeter of the building as well as the inside the building if required.

5. Handling

- Handling differs depending on the storage type as well as the medium of the item. For example with framed works, especially with gilt frames cotton gloves are used. For works on paper/ Ceramics/ Metals and glass latex (or nitrile) gloves are used. In both cases it is to prevent the oils and acids from the skins marking the surfaces of the artifacts. With the latex gloves these are used to assist with the grip of the artifact. In some instances, where handling of the work may be dangerous sturdier gloves (riggers) are required.
- Fingerprints may not show up immediately, in the case of silver it may take several years to etch into the surface. This can also happen to the surface of photographs. Once the fingerprints are there they cannot be removed.
- When works are crated or packed they can be carried without gloves as this is quite often preferable for gripping purposes. Latex can also be worn with paper-based items as at times cotton can catch and possibly tear the work.
- Handling is minimized wherever possible, as this reduces the risk of damage to the work.
- Whenever moving an object make sure that the path is clear of obstacles. Do not pass the object to another person. Rather put the work down on a clean surface for the other person to pick up. Passing can increase the risk of damage.

STORAGE

Paintings

Both contemporary and classic are hung on mesh frames, as can be seen in the image to the left, which are suspended on a roller system in bays. Each frame is double sided allowing works to be hung on both sides for maximum storage. Each of the frames rolls out into an aisle to allow access to the works.

There is often also wall mounted mesh to hang extra large works on.

Works on Paper - framed

These are also hung on the mesh frames. Shelves are also used with dividers to minimize the number of works stacked together, as seen below.

Works on Paper – general

Always used acid free or archival quality storage papers. This is particularly important for some photographs such as albumen prints and cyanotypes; blueprints and some Japanese woodblock prints, as they are sensitive to alkalis. These items require either acid-free or unbuffered packing.

Textiles

As with works on paper, this is stored between acid free or archival quality storage papers. Generally, it is stored in boxes, and if the work is quite structural (like heavy pleats and starches) might be packed with other soft packaging like bubble wrap.

Decorative Arts (such as pottery and glassware)

this is often stored on shelves, or sometimes individually boxed.

Sculpture

this is generally store on shelves in a similar fashion to large Decorative Arts. Often there is a dust cover for protection.

Travelling

Items that travel are either soft packed or crated, depending on the number of destinations, costs involved and fragility of item. Soft packing is the use of soft materials such as bubble wrap, cellophane, foam, and tissue with or without the use of boxes or a surrounding framework for objects. Crating is the use of such materials in conjunction with a wooden or metal container with temperature buffering as well as the higher degree of protection that full enclosure can provide.



from left to right: Framed works on wire racks, solander boxes for works on paper, framed works in shelves.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF GALLERIES

PUBLIC

Public galleries are not-for-profit organisations and funded by government, bequests, and donations. They are responsible for the collection, storage and display of artworks in accordance with Gallery policy. Bendigo Art Gallery is owned and operated by the City of Greater Bendigo with additional support provided by Arts Victoria. Bendigo Art Gallery aims for a broad range of temporary exhibitions that cover a diversity of artistic styles and may be the work of individuals or groups. Exhibitions are sourced through touring organisations, proposals and curated in-house using the permanent collection or works borrowed specifically for an exhibition. As public galleries do not aim to profit from exhibitions, they are able to choose to display any kind of art, regardless of whether or not it may have commercial appeal.

COMMERCIAL

A commercial Gallery is a private business and is dependent on selling artworks to make a profit. They receive no government funding. A Consignment/ Representative Gallery is run by a dealer who is responsible for a 'stable' of artists, who display work on a regular basis. Artists may be exclusively aligned with a single gallery and this prohibits them from being featured by another gallery. Works are sold by the gallery through exhibitions and sales from the stock room. Commission is taken at a rate of 20-40% of the total sale price. Commercial galleries are reliant on making sufficient profits and hence this may influence the type of artists they choose to represent.

During an exhibition: Major Representative Galleries install the exhibition, process sales, arrange events (for example openings) and promote the artist through advertising, articles etc.

ARTIST RUN

These spaces are often self-funded, or receive some local or state government funding. They are run by a committee based largely of artists who plan the exhibition schedule based on written proposals. Sometimes fees are charged to hire the space. Artist Run Spaces good way for emerging artists to self promote and sell their own work and hopefully be selected by a commercial gallery to become part of the stable of artists.

OTHER ART SPACES

Auction houses such as Christies, or Leonard Joel and profit based and mainly display artwork that clients wish to have auctioned. Clients usually include private buyers and public galleries targeting works of a specific artist.

Public/outdoor art spaces and laneways: The City of Melbourne now acknowledge that city laneways such as the heavily graffitied Hosier Lane, perform a significant role in attracting new audiences to Melbourne and many have become tourist attractions in themselves. To this end, they now provide funding for laneways projects for artists and graffiti and stencil festivals.

Internet galleries: in addition to the online function of many commercial galleries, some galleries work mainly as an online business. This makes it easier to display artwork and may have advantages in attracting international clients. Examples include Art2Muse <http://www.art2muse.com.au/> and Green Gallery <http://www.greengallery.com.au/>

Cafes and restaurants often also act as commercial galleries although displaying work in such an environment can post environmental risks due to fluctuating humidity and temperature levels and the presence of food. Generally costs to exhibit in a café are lower and

exposure to new audiences is made possible.

University Run Galleries: Many universities such as Melbourne, Monash, RMIT and Deakin manage their own art galleries. They tend to vary in terms of their role in building collections and providing a venue for their own students to exhibit.