

Collection Management Manual Handling

Galleries and museums worldwide are responsible for the care and preservation of an immense variety of (often irreplaceable) artworks, objects, and artefacts.



Artworks and objects held in the Bendigo Art Gallery collection include paintings, prints, drawings, sculptures, ceramics, textiles, decorative arts, and new media. The materials used to create these artworks are extremely diverse, and each requires particular care in order to ensure its preservation for generations to come.

An international standard of care exists for galleries and museums, and is acknowledged as providing the optimum conditions for the preservation of any artwork or object in an institution's collection, no matter how old or new it is or what it is made out of. These standards take into account the various elements which can affect an artwork, and are used throughout all collection management practices, including preventative conservation, environmental controls, security, and integrated pest management.

Informed manual handling is a critical aspect in ensuring the ongoing preservation of an artwork, as through direct interaction an object is exposed to significant risk. To ensure



their safety, artworks and objects require different approaches to handling.

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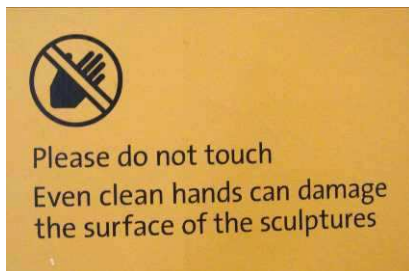
1. To Glove, or Not To Glove?

Gloves are worn to prevent the oils and acids from your skin from marking and damaging the surface of the work.



Fingerprints may not show up immediately; in the case of photographs and silver, it may take several years to etch into the surface. However, once the fingerprints are there they cannot be removed.

- Nitrile gloves – framed work, metals, textiles, some ceramic (unglazed) and glass
- Riggers gloves (also nitrile) – heavy objects
- Bare hands (clean) – glazed ceramic, some heavy objects
- Cotton gloves were once used extensively, however they do not provide adequate tactility and grip to safely handle many object types or mediums
- If artworks are in packing material they are carried without gloves, as this allows for a safer grip.



A packed artwork must still be handled with full consideration for its material content and construction.



Top, from left to right – nitrile, riggers, and cotton gloves.

Bottom – examples of signage used at Victoria & Albert Museum, and the British Museum

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2. Handling Processes

The handling and movement of artworks and objects is undertaken only when necessary, and minimised wherever possible, as this reduces the risk of any damage to the work.

Individuals involved in the movement of collection objects must have physical surety and confidence, balanced with attention to detail and an understanding of taking things at a steady (sometimes extremely slow) pace.

A gung-ho attitude and impatience is guaranteed to be a disastrous combination.



Specialist contractor J.K. Fasham's relocates 'The Wrestler' from the upper loading bay to the Sculpture Annexe in March 2011.

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Processes are put in place to assist with safe movement:

- Use of mechanical aids – trolleys, dollies, a-frames, pallet jacks – wherever possible, as this minimises accidents resulting from human error.
- Whenever moving an artwork ensure the path is clear of obstacles. If moving the object through a public space, use a ‘spotter’ to go ahead of the artwork and navigate.
- The artwork should not be handed to another person. The work is put down (on a clean surface), allowing the other person to pick it up.
- When moving large and/or heavy works, ensure there are enough people available to move the work safely.
 - A team leader is appointed, who will assess the movement required, and give clear concise instructions to the team at the beginning of each movement.
- Time – it is critical that enough time is factored in to any object movement, to ensure personnel are not felt hurried.



Framed artworks are moved on an A-Frame (middle), and smaller 3D works (ceramics, sculpture) are where possible kept in their boxes and moved on trolleys (top). Bottom: travelling exhibitions and sculptures often arrive in crates and are moved using dollies.

3. Exhibition Installation

Preparation

- Planning a schedule – the more complex the exhibition, the more detailed the schedule
- Ensure the right equipment and tools are available
- Protection of objects and personnel – what is safe for artworks is generally safe for people, due to the care taken to ensure the object's safety

Installation

- Established proven methods are used constantly, and taught to new/temporary staff and contractors
- Resourcing – teams are available and used as necessary to suit any given situation
- Correct manual handling procedures are observed at all times

Adequate time is taken to ensure safe installation



A technician does the math for a hang in Australian Art Gallery 2 (top).
Consultants, contractors, Bendigo Art Gallery and Victoria & Albert Museum staff remove a 1930s wedding gown from its crate (bottom).

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○ 4. Storage

The environmental conditions within a museum or gallery's storage facility should be the same as the display areas.

- Framed works are stored on space-saving movable racks, which have enough space between them to ensure that artworks will not come into contact.
- Unframed work on paper is stored in plan drawers or solander boxes, depending on the size of the work. Archival (acid-free) card and tissue is used to separate one artwork from another.
- 3D work – large sculpture, small sculpture, ceramic, decorative art – can be stored on open shelving, in crates or boxes, or palletised.
- If open shelving or pallets are used, ideally dustcovers are placed directly over the work (large sculpture), or over the shelving, to minimise any build up of surface dirt.



Framed works on movable racks (top); unframed work on paper in solander boxes (middle); decorative arts on open shelving (bottom).

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Crating is most often used when sending an artwork away on loan; the crate can then also be used to permanently store the work.

- Crates are made to suit an individual 3D artwork (or set of framed 2D works), and will have trays, supports, foam blocks and padding cut and installed for the safety of that specific work.
- Travelling frames are made for framed 2D works or paintings on stretchers. Those travelling short distances may only be soft packed, depending on the number of destinations, and fragility of item.



- Archive boxes include constructed solander boxes, and archival (blue-board) board boxes.
- Soft packing is the use of soft materials such as bubble wrap, cellaire, foam, and tissue with or without the use of boxes or a surrounding framework for objects.



Jan Nelson's sculpture 'Walking in Tall Grass (Blackwood)' is housed in a crate whenever it is not on display.

Examples of crating and travelling frames made by a Melbourne-based industry provider, TED.