



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Sydney University Museums

COLLECTIONS GUIDELINES

SECTION 5: COLLECTIONS CARE

Macleay Museum
Nicholson Museum
University Art Gallery

Version: March 2013

SECTION 5: COLLECTIONS CARE

5.1 Overview

5.1.1. Definition

Collections care refers to the physical measures taken to minimize conditions that may cause damage to collections. Such measures are based on the principle of preventive conservation, which include the maintenance of controlled and secure environments for storage and display, monitoring for pests, and an emphasis on proper handling and recordkeeping.

Collections care also has a cultural dimension wherein source communities may have an appropriate vested interest in the way specific material is stored, handled, conserved or otherwise maintained.

5.1.2. Purpose

Sydney University Museums (SUM) is committed to preserving its collections for future generations through a conscientious program of collections care. This document establishes the conservation and consultation principles to which SUM will adhere in regard to storing, displaying, conserving, handling, transporting, and maintaining the collections in its care.

5.1.3. Objectives

The objective of these guidelines is to enable Sydney University Museums to align its commitment to physical collections care with the National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries, which state that:

- The museum makes decisions on preventive conservation based on current conservation advice and practices. (Standard C2.1)
- The museum actively strives to create and maintain an appropriate and stable environment for its collection. (Standard C2.2)
- The museum's display, storage and handling methods minimise risks to its collection. (Standard C2.3)
- The museum makes decisions about conservation treatments based on current conservation advice and practices. (Standard C2.4)

In addition, SUM recognises the obligations of its custodial role for Australian Indigenous heritage items and commits that their management will be in accordance with the principles of consultation outlined in Museums Australia's Indigenous heritage policy, *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities* (2005) and the University's repatriation policy, *Policy and Procedures Concerning the Management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains and Culturally Significant Items* (1996). Such principles of consultation will also be extended where possible to other Indigenous source communities.

5.1.4. Scope

These guidelines cover the physical care of objects and specimens from the Sydney University Museums permanent collection and custody collection. University of Sydney Union collections are within the scope of this section in line with the SUM-

USU management agreement (2008) regarding collections care. Material on loan will also be subject to these standards and any additional provisions detailed in covering loan agreements.

SUM education collection, reference library, and unaccessioned assets do not fall under these guidelines, nor do collections belonging to other University departments.

5.2 Preventive Conservation

5.2.1. Principles

Preventive conservation principles underpin the collections management practices at SUM, which recognises that preventing damage and minimising deterioration to objects and specimens is easier and more cost effective than remedial action. Through the practice of preventive conservation, SUM aims to limit deterioration of collections due to environmental, human, and inherent factors. Concerns for the preservation of individual objects and specimens are at the heart of any decision relating to their use.

5.2.2. Strategies

Preventive conservation strategies employed by SUM are based on current conservation advice and professional practices, and are integral to all museum activities and procedures, including building works, exhibitions, access, public programs, and storage. The following preventive conservation measures are used to provide proper care of collections:

- Regulated and monitored temperature, relative humidity, and atmospheric pollutants.
- Controlled visible and ultraviolet light levels on light-sensitive items.
- Secure environment with protocols in place for controlled access.
- Integrated pest management program.
- Safe handling and transport of collections.
- Archival storage units and packaging materials that provide a buffer between collections and the environment.
- Routine preventive maintenance, including cleaning and regular building inspections.
- Disaster preparedness and planning (see section 6.0).

5.3 Stable and Secure Environment

As far as possible, SUM will provide a stable and secure physical environment for the range of materials included in the collections.

5.3.1. Environmental Control

Environmental conditions in display and storage areas will be regularly monitored, recorded and assessed in light of the collections' conservation requirements. To the greatest degree feasible, temperature, relative humidity, light, and atmospheric pollutants will be monitored and regulated on an ongoing basis.

Storage and display environments will be improved and upgraded as resources permit, in light of ongoing assessments of the various museum environments and the needs of the collections.

5.3.2. Controlled Access

SUM will provide secure exhibition, storage, and laboratory facilities with controlled access in order to limit damage to or loss of collections.

Collections of notable cultural sensitivity or of pre-eminent scientific value, as well as objects of high commercial value, may be additionally secured to ensure limited access by authorised staff only.

Public galleries will remain attended or locked. Open cases or collections in transit will remain attended. Unattended doors to collection exhibition, storage, or lab areas will remain locked. Doors will not be blocked open or left unlocked.

Access to collection storage areas will be restricted to SUM staff. Volunteers, visitors and contractors must be supervised by SUM staff. Only SUM staff will be issued keys to SUM collection storage areas.

Keys to galleries and collection areas (mechanical or electronic) are the property of the University and are subject to the regulation of the University's Security Systems section. Keys to exhibition cases are the property of SUM and will be subject to regulation by the Collections Manager in consultation with Senior Curators.

5.4 Integrated Pest Management

Pest control aims to prevent damage to both buildings and collections. In line with international best practices, SUM's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plan focuses on preventive, proactive, and preferably non-chemical means of pest control.

5.4.1. Detection

Pest activity will be monitored by regular inspection of spaces and monitoring traps placed in each collection storage area and exhibition space.

All incoming collection material (acquisition or loan) and packing material will be inspected prior to entering exhibition, storage, research or office spaces.

5.4.2. Physical Prevention

SUM staff will prevent pest activity by:

- Working with University Campus Infrastructure Services (CIS) to maintain environmental controls and building repairs with a view to limiting environments attractive to pests.
- Regularly cleaning and removing rubbish from collection storage and gallery areas.
- Excluding food consumption and food waste disposal from collection storage areas, research rooms and conservation lab.
- Cleaning and removing rubbish from gallery areas immediately following functions.

- Using barriers where possible to prevent insect movement (for example, pest-proof bags or containers to isolate objects or specimens, eliminating bridging in collection areas to limit pest movement opportunities).

5.4.3. Treatments

In the treatment of infested objects or specimens, SUM prefers the use of non-chemical treatments such as freezing and oxygen deprivation. Such treatments will be carried out under the supervision of the Collections Conservator.

Treatment of an infestation in one of the SUM buildings will be applied only by the Pest Contractor and only using approved chemicals that are specified in the pest contract.

5.5 Safe Handling and Transport

Safe handling minimises risk to collection materials and supports their long-term preservation. Safe handling and movement of collections will be practiced at all times in SUM. All collection objects and specimens will be treated with equal care, regardless of their monetary value.

5.5.1. Display

Appropriate supports, materials and techniques will be used for collection items on display.

Archival-quality materials will be used for exhibit mounts and supports where possible and appropriate.

Use of any exhibit construction material that is not of archival quality will require a stable barrier material to be placed between it and collections material.

Display conditions and duration will be governed by the conservation needs of individual items.

5.5.2. Storage

As far as possible, materials used for housing and packaging SUM's collections will be stable, non-reactive, and of archival quality.

Storage units such as cabinets and shelving will be chemically stable and of sufficient strength to support the weight and size of the collections they house.

Packaging materials used to house objects or specimens will be chemically stable and free from acids or additives.

Objects and specimens will be protected as far as possible from passive risks and unnecessary handling. For example, items will not be stored directly on the floor, dust covers will be used to protect larger items, and supports will be given to fragile items.

5.5.3. Handling and Transport

SUM collections will be handled using appropriate equipment (such as gloves, containers, cushions, trolleys) and with sufficient staff to mitigate the risks inherent in handling.

Materials that provide superior cushioning properties may not necessarily be archival but materials that have direct contact with the surface of the object or specimen must be archival.

All objects and specimens will be evaluated individually before they are handled, packaged, or transported in order to determine whether they are sufficiently stable to withstand each activity. Handling, packaging, and transport methods will be chosen based on the individual requirements and sensitivities of each object or specimen.

Damage to an object or specimen in the course of handling or transport will be documented through a formal Incident Report.

Transport of SUM collections will take place in University owned vehicles or those procured through University contract. Use of private vehicles for collection transport will be discouraged.

5.6 Conservation

Sydney University Museums recognises that deterioration or damage may occur to collections even under the best-managed conditions. Conservation may therefore be necessary return deteriorated or damaged material to stability.

5.6.1. Principles

Decisions about conservation treatments will be based on current conservation advice and practices.

SUM endorses the conservation philosophy of minimal chemical and physical intervention to the object or specimen, use of sympathetic materials, the principle of reversibility, the compatibility of materials, and the keeping of complete and accurate records of the conservation process.

Conservation work is undertaken within national ethics, principles, and practices by reputable, trained conservators.

5.6.2. Guidelines

Decisions about appropriate conservation treatments will be evaluated in consideration of the significance and value of the collection item.

The condition of any collection item requiring conservation will be recorded and considered, and a treatment proposal prepared, before any conservation work is carried out.

Records will be kept of all conservation treatments (or restoration activities), including the materials used, who carried out the treatment, and any physical changes to the object or specimen.

Suitable storage and display environments will be chosen for treated collection items, with the aims of maintaining their stability and long-term preservation.

5.6.3. External Contracts

Where possible, conservation treatment will be done by SUM staff. Where specialised expertise is required from external sources, work will be conducted under a well-defined, comprehensive agreement between SUM and the conservator.

5.7 Implementation

5.7.1. Responsibilities

All SUM staff share responsibility for daily collections care, preventive conservation, and security of collection spaces.

To ensure that the highest standards of collections care are maintained, SUM will not delegate collection-related duties to any person lacking the requisite knowledge, skill, and training.

Training in collection care will be made available to all SUM staff and volunteers. Such training will be mandatory for those with direct involvement in handling collections.

5.7.2. Documentation

Records will be kept of conservation assessments, condition reporting undertaken prior and following exhibition or loan, and any restoration work. Information on issues affecting collection items (eg conservation needs, damage) or the collection as a whole (eg leaks, pest infestation, disaster) will be documented according to the University's Recordkeeping Policy and the *SPECTRUM Documentation Standard*.

5.7.3. Reporting

There are no formal University reporting requirements for SUM collections care and maintenance activities.

5.7.4. Review

The SUM Collections Care guidelines will be reviewed every five years.

5.8 Related Documentation

5.8.1. University References

Archives and Record Management Services. (2000). *University Recordkeeping Policy*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Macleay Museum. (1996). *Policy and Procedures Concerning the Management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains and Culturally Significant Items*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Sydney University Museums and University of Sydney Union agreement for management of the University of Sydney Union Art Collection. Memorandum dated 25 March 2008.

5.8.2. External References

McKenna, Gordon and Patsatzi, Efthymia, eds. (2009). *SPECTRUM: The UK Museum Documentation Standard (version 3.2)*. Cambridge, UK: Collections Trust.

Museums Australia. (2005). *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities: Principles and guidelines for Australian museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage*. Canberra: Museums Australia (national office).

National Standards Taskforce. (2008). *National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries (version 1.0)*. Melbourne: Museums Australia (Victoria office).