

CONSERVATION CENTER

for Art & Historic Artifacts

Inventorying Museum Collections

Katie Lowe, Preservation Specialist



CONSERVATION CENTER FOR ART & HISTORIC ARTIFACTS

In a typical year:

- Preservation Services specialists complete over 50 survey projects.
- Approximately 60 CCAHA-sponsored workshops, conferences, webinars, and training sessions are presented.
- The Digital Imaging Services staff digitizes thousands of pages of fragile archival documents, books, and photographs.
- Conservators assess and treat more than 6,000 individual artifacts, from over 400 clients.
- Housing & Framing Services house approx. 75% of the artifacts treated (folder, sleeve, box, mat and frame, or sealed package).



AGENDA

Agreements &
Understandings

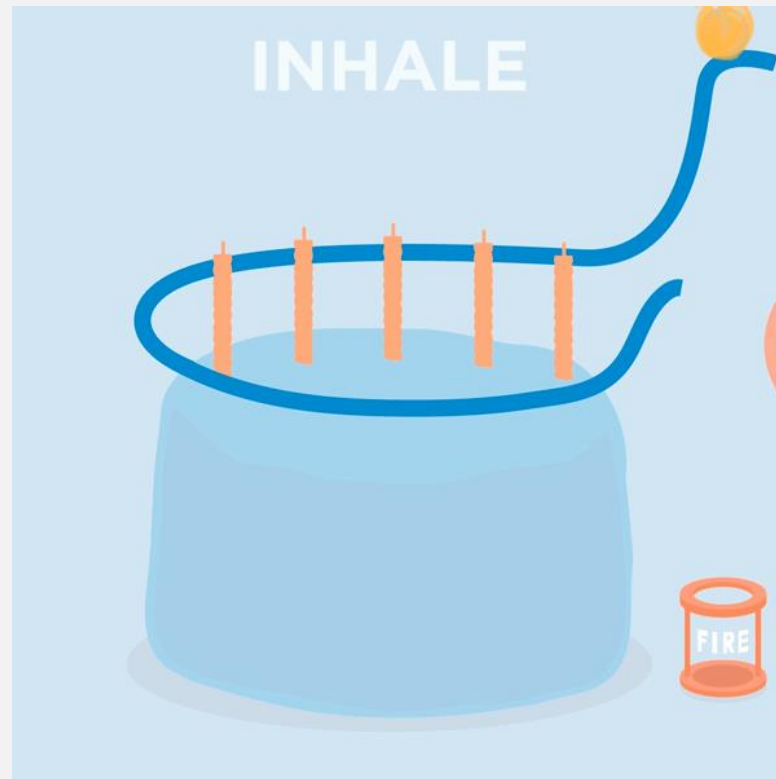
The Inventory Process

Sticky Situations

Resources

Questions

BREATHE





AGREEMENTS

- Be gentle with yourself
- Be realistic with yourself
- Don't panic (you're not behind)

UNDERSTANDINGS

- You won't leave this session an expert (and that's not your job)
- You don't need to reinvent the wheel, but modification is welcome
- Perfectionism isn't your friend
- Stress is an excellent motivator, until it isn't
- Knowledge is power
- "The dishes are never done"



THE INVENTORY PROCESS

WHAT IS AN INVENTORY?

Basic

A list of objects
and their
locations

Comprehensive

A complete
report of the
status of
collections.

A list of the property held by a
collecting organization, ideally
connecting each object to an
identification number, a physical
location, and a record.

Complete Inventory

Includes objects in the permanent collection, acquired objects that have not been accessioned, objects in temporary custody, loans, and external loans. Good to perform routinely.

Partial Inventory

Focused on one part of the collection and usually precipitated by museum activity. Ex.: objects in one storage room, objects on exhibit, objects gifted by a specific donor.

Spot Inventory

Most limited in scope – Monitors record accuracy and overall collection health through a representative sampling of objects. Good to perform routinely.

WHY CONDUCT ONE?

“[the objects in our collections] are not ours; they are not even “our museum’s.” These objects belong to current and future generations and, as such, are not ours to lose track of or misplace.”

- Museum Registration Methods, 5th Edition.

REMINDER:



OTHER REASONS

- Know what you have!
- Identify collections health concerns; identify mitigating actions
- Security
- Insurance claims
- Funding opportunities
- Research accessibility
- Legislative obligations
- Institutional audit requirements
- Exhibits
- Post-disaster event

TOOLS

Intellectual Tools

- Policies & Procedures**
 - Processing & data entry procedures
 - Accessioning & Deaccessioning
 - Old loans, undocumented objects, etc.
 - Flagging procedures
- Numbering System**
- Nomenclature**
 - The Revised Nomenclature for Museum Cataloguing*

Practical Tools

- Labeling tools**
 - Temporary
- CMS**
- Spreadsheets & forms**
- Workspace**
 - Clean
 - Nearby
 - Flat

SPREADSHEETS & FORMS

Item Problem Slip

Object # _____

- Needs Accession Number Assigned
- Needs Object Number Assigned
- Needs Label
- Needs to be Rehoused
- Needs Conservation
- Needs to be Deaccessioned
- Object is Missing
- FIC Object
- Needs High Resolution Photo
- Other _____

INVENTORY COMPLETE

2017 2018 2019

DO NOT ADD ITEMS TO SHELF!

Inventory Worksheet

Building:

Room:

Wall/Shelf/Box:

Date:

Inventory Team Members:

Location	Object Name	Numbers or Marks	Comments

The Andy Warhol Museum

Cataloguing Worksheet

Registration no: _____

Object name: _____

Title: _____

Description: _____

Marks: _____

Dimensions (h x w x l): _____ x _____ x _____

Weight: _____

Condition: _____

Completeness: _____

Maker: _____

Second maker: _____

Manufactured: _____

Date: _____

Provenance (history, previous owners, historical importance):

References (books or research files):

Location: _____

Location date: _____

Significance to collection:

Storage and display requirements:

Exhibition history: _____

Date of acquisition: ____ / ____ / ____

How was it acquired?

Gift

Purchase

Transfer

Unknown

Tax incentives gift (number: _____)

Donor name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Phone: _____

Mobile: _____

Email: _____

OBJECT NUMBERING

Collection Type.Full Year Acquired/Accessioned.Order of Acquisition/Accession.Variables

OBJECT NUMBERING

Collection Type	Year Accessioned/Acquired	Order Accessioned Acquired (that year)	Variables	Final Number
Permanent collection	2024	21 st accession in 2024	None	2024.21
Loan	2024	21 st loan acquisition in 2024	None	L2024.21
Permanent collection	2024	21 st accession in 2024	Several objects donated at the same time by the same donor; objects are not component parts	2024.21.1 2024.21.2 2024.21.3 ...
Permanent collection	2024	21 st accession in 2024	Object with component parts	2024.21a 2024.21b 2024.21c ...

INFORMATION TO INCLUDE

Inventory

- Inventory date, staff name
- Object name
- Accession, acquisition, or other identification number
- Location
- Any issues requiring follow-up action

Object Record

- “Tombstone” information
 - Description
 - Artist/maker
 - Medium/materials
 - Measurements
 - Provenance & acquisition/accession documentation
- Brief condition report

THE PROCESS

“Museum workers must develop their own systems, based on the history and tradition of their individual museums.”

-Collection Conundrums: Solving Collections Management Mysteries

THE PROCESS

1. Establish purpose & scope
2. Establish timeline & workflow
3. Gather your tools
4. Train (if-needed)
5. Trial Run
6. Modify
7. Inventory
8. Next steps

THE PROCESS: TIMELINE & WORKFLOW

TIMELINE

- Be conservative
- Establish “goal posts” and methods for routine check-ins.
- Factor in:
 - Staff capacity
 - Upcoming projects
 - Current records
- Consider options for increasing capacity
 - Temporary hires, staff diversions, & interns
 - Project moratoria

WORKFLOW

- How will you move through the collection?
 - By collection type
 - By need
 - By box, shelf, and room
- Assign specific staff roles
- Figure out your “garden bed”

NEXT STEPS

Back it up!

- Hard copy
- Cloud
- Server/hard drive

Establish a maintenance system

- Record object movement **at the time of movement** + update record accordingly + consistency = maintenance.*
- Schedule the next:
 - Complete inventory
 - Spot inventory
- Modify policies & procedures (if-needed)

Spread the word & celebrate!

Fundraise



**STICKY SITUATIONS:
WHEN NEXT STEPS ARE
COMPLEX**

STICKY SITUATIONS

- “Old Loans”
- Undocumented Objects & Missing Objects
- Missing or incorrect information
- Hazards
- Condition issues & rehousing needs
- NAGPRA

OLD LOANS

- **Old Loans**
 - Expired loans AND loans of unlimited duration, where:
 - lenders are not in contact with the museum **and cannot be located**
- **What to do?**
 1. Make a note in the object record
 2. Attempt to locate and contact, **document in writing**
 3. Determine your legal obligations
 - a) Old Loan Laws
 - b) Common Law
 - 1. Consult legal counsel**
 4. Resume/Return/Acquire

UNDOCUMENTED OBJECTS

- **Undocumented Objects** – Objects with no identification number or record; Undocumented Object + Inability to Reconcile = **Found-in-Collection (FIC)**
- **What to do?**
 1. Assign a tracking number & temporary record
 2. Attempt to reconcile
 3. If reconciled, return to original number & add tracking number to the record
 4. If unreconciled:
 1. Consult state museum property law (**w/ legal counsel**) & museum policy to determine next steps
 1. Accession → Assign FIC number, create record, keep in collection
 2. Accession → Assign FIC number, create record → Deaccession

MISSING OBJECTS

- **Missing Object** – Record exists, object cannot be located
- **What to do?**
 1. Attempt to locate, **document in writing**
 2. Designate “lost” or “missing” in object record
 3. Determine when the object was last seen, **document research and findings in writing**
 4. If found, rehouse and log new location in object record
 5. If unable to find, consider making an insurance claim
 6. **Do not delete object record**

MISSING/INCORRECT INFORMATION

- **What to do?**
 1. “Flag” the object record
 2. If the object record is publicly searchable:
 1. Temporarily unpublish, or;
 2. Keep public, delete inaccurate information, or;
 3. Keep public, keep inaccurate information, make a note indicating that it is unverified and undergoing research
 3. Research & modify

HAZARDS

- **What to do?**
 1. “Flag” the object record and label. Restrict handling.
 2. Put on your PPE!
 3. Mold and pests: **isolate immediately**
 1. Freeze, if possible
 2. Upgrade to a respirator
 3. Follow IPM procedures, consult a conservator if necessary
 4. Research & confirm
 1. If confirmation is not possible, assume hazardous
 5. If not hazardous, return to normal operations; indicate safety on object record
 6. If hazardous or unconfirmed, follow appropriate storage & handling procedures; consider deaccessioning as-needed
 7. Update object record, object label, and CMP accordingly

CONDITION ISSUES & REHOUSING

- **What to do?**
 1. “Flag” the object record
 2. Perform a condition report; indicate treatment or rehousing needed
 3. Consult CMP & relevant staff to discuss treatment/rehousing priorities
 4. Log any treatment, movement, or rehousing in the object record

NAGPRA

- **Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)**
 - A federal law mandating the protection and return of Indigenous human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. *Applicable only to federal agencies and organizations receiving federal funds.*
- **What to do?**
 1. “Flag” the object record
 2. **Stop. Do not perform any further research into the object.**
 3. **Take off exhibit; take off online catalogue.**
 4. Consult The National Park Service’s [NAGPRA website](#) and/or [The National NAGPRA Program](#) for assistance.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It doesn't have to be scary! You have lots of free resources, and good planning will create a super smooth runway for you. And remember:



RESOURCES

- *Collection Conundrums: Solving Collections Management Mysteries*. Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore. 2007.
- *Museum Registration Methods, 6th Edition*. Edited by John E. Simmons and Toni M. Kiser. 2020.
- *Nomenclature 4.0 for Museum Cataloging*. Paul Bourcier and Heather Dunn. 2015.
- [Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging](#). AASLH, The Nomenclature Committee of AASLH, The Canadian Nomenclature Committee, Parks Canada, The Canadian Heritage Information Network, and Rowman & Littlefield. Updated 2024.
- [“Cataloguing.”](#) Museums & Galleries of NSW.
- [“Inventory Project Forms Packet.”](#) Texas Historical Commission.
- [“Conducting an Inventory: Resources.”](#) Utah Division of Arts & Museums.
- [“Inventory.”](#) Collections Trust UK. 2022.
- [“Old Loans and Objects Found in Collections.”](#) American Alliance of Museums.
- [“Museum Property Acts and Abandoned Loan Legislation.”](#) ARCS. 2018.
- [“Object Marking.”](#) American Alliance of Museums.
- [“There’s a Form for That: Documenting Your Collections.”](#) Beverly Balger Sutley. 2016.
- [“Hazards in Collections.”](#) The London Museum. 2019.
- [“Guidelines for Re-Housing: Renovation and Moving.”](#) 2022.
- [“Planning Your Re-Org Project.”](#) FAIC.
- [“Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.”](#) The National Park Service. 2024.
- [“The National NAGPRA Program.”](#) The National Park Service. 2019.
- [“Choosing a Collections Management System.”](#) The Collections Management Systems Task Force, AASLH.



[Rescheduled Emergency Planning Roundtable](#): November 4th, 2024, 12:00PM – 1:00PM ET.

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[Website & Social Media Archiving](#): November 13th, 2024, 12:00PM – 1:00PM, ET.

Katie Lowe, Preservation Specialist

klowe@ccaha.org