



SAVING YOUR Treasures

A Website about what you can do to protect and preserve the things of importance in your life



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Object Handling Procedures

Handling an artifact is serious business, and while it is important to be cordial with your colleagues and friends, you must never lose sight of the gravity of the task of working with valuable objects and museum collections. Consider each object you work with as unique and irreplaceable.

Do not handle an artifact unless it is necessary and expressed permission has been given by the owner or responsible staff member. Never eat, smoke, or drink in the vicinity of an object. Serious consequences can be avoided with careful thought and preparation before, during, and after handling an object.

BEFORE HANDLING

To protect the artifact from scratching, marking, or bumping, remove dangling necklaces, sharp rings, protruding belt buckles, pens and pencils from shirt pockets, and tuck neckties into shirts.

Before moving an object, look at it carefully, find its weakness, and handle it accordingly. To the extent possible, remove covers and loose parts prior to moving. Secure any other loose parts, such as drawers or cabinet doors of furniture pieces, and broken glass.

When handling artifacts, choose your gloves carefully. For most artifacts, clean latex, or nitrile gloves work best. In some cases, paper and textile artifacts may be handled with freshly washed and dried hands. Clean cotton gloves may be used for handling if necessary, although they could catch or snag on rough or fragile artifacts. If they must be used, be sure to change them frequently to minimize soil transfer from one object to another. They should not be used to handle heavy objects or slippery artifacts like ceramics or glass. When handling ethnographic artifacts or natural history specimens contaminated with pesticides such as arsenic, DDT, mercuric chloride, or lead, cotton gloves may not provide adequate protection.

Assure the safety of artifacts by carefully and thoughtfully packing and/or padding them for transport. Never discard packing materials without searching them for loose or associated materials (flakes, lids, labels, etc.) When using a ladder, always work with a

partner. Hand the object down to your partner before descending; don't climb down with the item in your hand.

Plan the movement of objects. Prior to moving an artifact, prepare a clean, clear space to receive the object that covered with clean padding as needed. If possible, always work with a partner. While this is obvious for large objects, it is also beneficial when handling small artifacts. When planning your route, consider drafts, doors, people, uneven floors, etc. Once you decide on your route, inform others of your plans. Planning and communication are essential to minimize the possibility of unnecessary damage.

DURING HANDLING

Always use a cart, container, or support board to move objects more than a few steps, especially when going up or down stairs. Move artifacts into the cart or container one at a time.

When moving artifacts, support their weight by placing your hands under them or on the strongest parts of the main body. Use both hands to move artifacts. Do not lift objects by parts such as handles, straps, or lids. Do not lift furniture by arms or backs, paintings by top frame rails or hanging hardware, or ceramics by handles. Carry textiles fully supported on both arms, on a rigid support, or rolled on a tube. Do not lift them by the edges.

To lift or move paper documents use both hands. Hold diagonal corners of the sheet, if stable, or use an acid-free folder or blotter to support the piece during movement. With paper objects, special care must be taken while moving to ensure that loose parts do not blow away. Handle paper objects mounted in mats or other devices by their mounts.

Never touch the surface of a painting or material with a friable surface (for example, pastel or crayon drawing, flaking paint surface, cracked or crizzled glass).

If you must transfer an artifact to another person, place it on a table or cart and allow the other person to lift it from there. Do not transfer the artifact directly to the other person.

When handling and examining an artifact, hold it over a table or other surface so that if the object is dropped it will fall a shorter distance. It is often necessary to carry out examinations on padded surfaces to prevent abrasion and provide better support.

AFTER HANDLING

If it is necessary to leave an artifact unattended in a secure area, place a protective cover over it and clearly indicate its presence with a hand-written or printed "OBJECT BELOW" card placed on top of the protective cover.

If an artifact is damaged, do not panic. Prior to moving the artifact or retrieving the associated pieces, take a photograph to document the accident. Retain all pieces,

however small, and clearly associate them with the artifact, placing them in labeled zip top bags or acid-free boxes. Do not attempt to put the pieces back together. This is a job for a conservator. Prepare a written document outlining the accident and place it with the photographs in the artifact's permanent record file.

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