

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

PRESERVATION
AND
CONSERVATION
PLAN

2011–2014

OVERVIEW

The National Portrait Gallery Corporate Plan 2011–2014 mandates the following: 'maintain, conserve and store portraits from the collection in accordance with International Museum Standards and legislative requirements'.

To achieve this mandate the National Portrait Gallery (the Gallery) refers to and applies the principles articulated in the International Council of Museums code of ethics for museums.

2.23 Preventative Conservation

Preventive conservation is an important element of museum policy and collections care. It is an essential responsibility of members of the museum profession to create and maintain a protective environment for the collections in their care, whether in store, on display, or in transit.'

2.24 Collection Conservation and Restoration

The museum should carefully monitor the condition of collections to determine when an object or specimen may require conservation-restoration work and the services of a qualified conservator-restorer. The principal goal should be the stabilisation of the object or specimen. All conservation procedures should be documented and as reversible as possible, and all alterations should be clearly distinguishable from the original object or specimen.'

Security, access control, stocktake and emergency management procedures provide further protective measures to ensure the preservation of the Collection.

PREVENTATIVE CONSERVATION

Preservation of the Collection is best achieved through preventative conservation strategies that prevent, retard or minimise hazards that can cause harm or damage to Collection material. Preventative conservation applies to works of art in the care of the Gallery whether in storage or on display. Preventative conservation strategies include:

- Providing a stable environment by controlling temperature and relative humidity
- Control of air quality
- Integrated pest management
- Control of light levels (lux and UV)
- Appropriate storage and use of packing materials
- Well-planned circulation routes for artworks that minimise risk
- Appropriate art handling

The level of pest activity in the Gallery building/s, and in/on items from the collection and works of art on loan is to be maintained at minimum levels, noting a nil level of pest activity is impossible to achieve.

The overarching aim of the Plan is to protect the collection from damage due to pest activity. In addition, the Gallery must comply with all requirements of Australian Quarantine and Inspection Services regulations.

All public areas and those occupied by staff are also given a high priority for protection against pest activity, in line with health and safety obligations.

ENVIRONMENT AND AIR QUALITY

Stable and controlled environmental conditions are critical for art museums. The temperature in art storage and display areas is maintained at 21.0 ±1°C and relative humidity of 50%±5% per 24 hour period with no more than 3% change in relative humidity in one hour – refer to the Gallery's Air Quality Policy. The set points for environmental conditions are consistent with the parameters required by

the National Gallery of Australia and other major cultural institutions for outward loans.

Environmental conditions are monitored and maintained through the Gallery's building management system with data sensors in each gallery space and storage area. Environmental conditions are also monitored by thermohygrographs located in each gallery space and storage areas.

PEST MANAGEMENT AND QUARANTINE

The Gallery implements an integrated pest management (IPM) plan to monitor, detect and eliminate insects and vermin. Works of art should be checked for insect activity upon delivery to the Gallery and if necessary quarantined from Collection material pending appropriate treatment – refer to the Gallery's Integrated Pest Management Plan and the Gallery's Quarantine Procedures.

The goal of the IPM for the Collection is to:

- Protect the Collection from pests which damage works of art.
- Reduce the amount of pesticides used in the facility in order to reduce risk to Collection materials and exposure to staff and visitors.
- Utilise a combination of monitoring and control practices, including staff vigilance, regular inspections, pheromone traps and good housekeeping practices.

DISPLAY LIGHTING

The Gallery operates lighting that is adjustable in terms of position, lux level and spectrum to reduce the damaging affects of light exposure to Collection material. Lux levels are maintained at internationally recognised conservation levels for specific media types. The lighting levels are benchmarked with the National Gallery of Australia conditions for outward loans of works of art.

- 300 lux; inorganic objects
- 200 lux; paintings, organic objects
- 150 lux; durable plastics
- 50 lux; works on paper, textiles, photographic prints, bark paintings, light sensitive plastics
- Maximum UV content of light must be controlled to less than 75 microWatts per Lumen.

COLLECTION STORAGE

Appropriate storage is a key strategy for the long term preservation of the Collection. The Gallery maintains on site storage for all Collection material. Appropriate storage units are provided for the different Collection areas of paintings, sculpture and works on paper and storage units are constructed from inert materials where possible. Collection storage utilises archival quality storage and packing materials to minimise exposing the Collection to pollutants. Collection items will be matted or framed as appropriate for safe storage, handling and retrieval.

ART HANDLING

The Gallery will ensure that art storage staff receive appropriate training in handling the Collection and will have access to appropriate art handling equipment and consumables to safely store and retrieve the Collection.

CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION TREATMENTS

The Gallery will record the condition of works of art when they are accessioned into the Collection. Conservation and restoration activities will focus on stabilising works of art when their condition if left unattended will cause further deterioration. These activities will be carried out as soon as practical after acquisition.

The Gallery may also carry out conservation treatment that will enhance or facilitate the display and exhibition of Collection items as required.

Conservation treatments will be carried out by a trained conservator subject to Department procurement guidelines.

DIGITISATION OF COLLECTION

The Gallery will photograph each newly acquired Collection item to produce and archive a high quality digital record of the work of art. Digitisation will provide access to the Collection and record the condition of the Collection items.

SECURITY AND EMERGENCY

The Gallery's security systems and procedures and the Gallery's building emergency procedures are central to the effective preservation of the Collection and of works of art in the Gallery's care; refer to the Gallery's Security Management Plan and Building Emergency Procedures.

STOCKTAKE AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

The Gallery will undertake a stock take of all Collection items on an annual basis.

REFERENCES

- 1 National Portrait Gallery Corporate Plan 2011–2014 clause 1.5
- 2 ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums 2006, <http://icom.museum/ethics.html#section2>