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WINTERTHUR

Care and Handling of Objects:

Tips for Handling Fine Art and Antiques

There are two types of gloves:

There are several types of gloves on the market. Winterthur primarily uses NITRILE Gloves which are non-latex, powder free disposable gloves. NITRILE Gloves can be recycled.

Plain cotton gloves may also be used for handling, but cotton gloves can snag fragile surfaces and can also transfer soiling between objects. Cotton gloves can also affect manual dexterity and grip. If using cotton gloves, avoid gloves with PVC dots, these dots are meant to aid grip, but the dots can leave harmful residues on surfaces.

**Cotton gloves should be washed in gentle/scent/dye-free detergents (DREFT) and without fabric softeners. Gloves be line dried to avoid shrinkage.*

Gloves typically get used when handling the following objects:

Metals - Silver, bronze, gold, brass, iron, etc.
Hand oils can collect on the surface of the object, which will lead to concentrated areas of tarnish in the area and will eventually etch surfaces over time.

Painted, Lacquered or Gilded Surfaces - Toleware (Painted Tinware), Chinese export objects, frames for paintings. Handling painted surfaces with bare hands can lead to the buildup of grime. Our bare hands and the humidity generated through contact can damage fragile lacquered or gilded surfaces, particularly when flaking is occurring on the surface.

Organic Materials - Basketry, Leather goods, Taxidermy, Bone, Ivory, etc.
Insect pests are one of the Ten Agents of Deterioration, and for this reason many organic objects have been treated with solvent based pesticides. Known hazards like metallic salts used in taxidermy or felting processes, lead contamination, arsenical dyes used in textile manufacture, etc., should be identified in the catalog record with handling notes. Tin Mercury Amalgam Mirrors are another known hazard in the Winterthur Collection.

Bone and Ivory are listed, as oils from our hands can cause darkening of surfaces.

Resource:
https://hazardsincollections.org.uk/select-a-hazard

https://www.conservation-wiki.com/wiki/Tin-Mercury_Amalgam_Mirrors

William Donnelly – April 2024
Winterthur Institute Handling Practicum

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Gloves should not be used to handle the following objects:

Ceramics and Glass - Glass and ceramics can easily slip out of a gloved hand. If you must wear gloves, NITRILE gloves offer more grip than cotton gloves, but both lessen your tactile sensation.

Paper and Textiles - Gloves could damage fragile historic paper and textiles. However, textile objects known to have been treated with solvent based pesticides or dyed with arsenical dyes should be handled with NITRILE Gloves.

Furniture - Gloves are not recommended for use with furniture because veneer/old repairs may be snagged, and you have low tactile sensation which could cause the heavy object to slip from your hands.

Rugs - As with all textiles, gloves should not be worn when working with rugs.

**When handling objects without gloves it is best to have clean hands free of lotions and moisturizers.*

Work Attire:

Be aware of clothing when handling objects. Belt buckles, watches, rings, buttons, and zippers can cause scratches, gouges, cracks, and unseen accumulative damage. Shoes should be closed toed.

Handling Tips:

1. **Always look at the object before you make your move.**
    a. Look for vulnerable areas, damage, and old repairs.

    b. Never pick up ceramic/glass objects with the handle or decorative finials on lids. These areas are often applied later in the construction process and can be the weakest spot, they may also be the site of an old repair.

    c. Paintings should be supported at the sides and along the bottom, do not carry by the top cross support.

2. **Check the object for moveable parts, remove, and keep them organized.**
    a. lids, stoppers, candle cups, finials, drawers, etc.

    b. If you encounter reasonable resistance when attempting to remove a part, leave it in place. For instance, candle cups can be stuck in place, even though there is resistance, the candle cup should still be supported when inverting the candle stick to find the accession number.

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3. **Provide proper support and padding for all objects during movement.**
    a. Unframed works on paper should be lifted from their housing by slipping a card underneath.

    b. Textile surfaces should be protected (reduces the risk of abrasion) with a layer of acid free tissue paper, folds in the textile, should be padded with acid free tissue snakes (reduces creasing which is accumulative and could cause damage over time).

    c. Ceramic and Glass objects can be nestled into a basket, with cotton rags and/or snakes to support or nest objects. The basket was designed to be hand carried, but for these objects we prefer the basket to be transported by cart.

4. Rugs should be rolled without their pad.
    a. It is best to roll the rug evenly and for the roll to not be too tight.

    b. Rugs with thick pile fibers should be rolled in the direction of the pile. If the pile is extra thick it is possible that the pile could be damaged if it were to be rolled inward, to avoid damage, the rug can be rolled with the pile facing out.

    c. Large rugs should be rolled and moved by several people to support the length and weight of the rug.

    d. Rug pads get rolled separately and stored with the rug.

    e. For short term storage of rugs, undyed cotton towels or linen sheets can be rolled on themselves to create a padded support to roll the carpet upon. A muslin or cotton sheet can be used as a sling to hand carry the object to the temporary storage location. It will be important to warn anyone working in the storage area not to step on the soft rolled carpet.

    f. For long-term rug storage, an acid-free tube should be used to roll the rug which offers support and guards against creasing. The rolled rug and tube can be hung horizontally and covered with unbleached muslin (purchased at fabric stores and washed to remove sizing) to protect the rug from dust, dirt and damage that could be caused by storing the rolled rug on the floor.

        i. Winterthur has a lot of tight doorways and switchback halls. Some carpets can't be rolled onto archival rollers and moved to storage. In these instances, rugs can be folded for transport to the storage area, then rolled on the rigid tube once they've been relocated to the storage.

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5. Plan your move:
    a. What resources are needed for the move? Object carts, flat carts, baskets, rags, weight snakes. Are boxes or tools needed for the job?

    b. What is the pathway for the move? Will you encounter guests or tour groups?

    c. Does the object need a replacement?

    d. Do you have your paperwork from the registrar?

    e. How many people are needed for the move? At least two people should be involved with large object moves. During the move it is important for the move team to communicate the plan, e.g., where you're moving to and who goes where. To prevent injury, you should count out loud 1-2-3, with the lift being on three. Safety of the movers and the object is of the utmost importance during the movement of large objects.

Packing Tips:

1. Plan for the box to be packed by selecting the objects that will go into the box. Pack heavier objects on the bottom to lightest at the top. If an object has multiple parts, it is best to try and keep them within the same box.

2. Wrap each part of an object separately in tissue paper. For example, a teapot with lid would be wrapped separately. Use bubble wrap between layers and to pad around the objects. There should be no movement or rattling of the object during transport. Rattling could lead to damage and can be prevented by the proper use of tissue and bubble wrap.

3. Do not use tape within the box. Removing tape from wrapped objects can lead to damage. Instead, separate your materials, e.g., tissue for the first layer of wrapping and bubble wrap for the second or padding layer. This makes it easier to know when you've unpacked everything in the box.

4. An object content list informs handlers of which objects have been packed; this is recommended when packing many objects.