

Handling Museum Objects

The #1 reason that museum objects are damaged or deteriorate is due to handling and movement. Even proper handling may lead to damage and deterioration. That is why all handling and movement of works should always be kept to a minimum.

Step 1: First Rules of Art Handling

Safety is of utmost importance: yours, the people around you, and the artwork being handled.

Verbal Communication

- Know who is in charge. Only ONE person can direct any operation at a given time. Do not give directions unless you are placed in charge as a lead, or assistant supervisor. Accept directions only from the supervisor, assistant supervisor, or lead in your team, in that order. If one person in your team is more experienced, then that person should be lead. This is for your safety and the safety and protection of the artwork.

Supervisor #1 ⇨ Assistant Supervisor #2 ⇨ Lead of Your Team #3



- Verbal communication of where you are going and what you are doing is key! So please communicate clearly and listen to one another before beginning to move a work. The supervisor will give the direction.

Step 2: Prepare Yourself

Sharp Objects Hurt

- Pockets should be free of any thing that could catch or abrade an object, such as keys, pens, pencils, sharp objects, etc. Clothing should be free of dangling items such as jewelry, your ID badge, as well as fanny packs, backpacks, or protruding walkie-talkies and bulky cell phones.
- Wear comfortable non-restrictive clothes, but nothing overly loose. Jeans and sweats are okay.
- If you have overalls or clothing with painter’s pockets, you may be able to conceal bulky items effectively, ask your supervisors to make sure and remove anything sharp from the pockets.



Feet First: Wear Comfortable Shoes

- Flat, closed toed shoes are required; sneakers, tennis shoes, comfortable work boots are fine. High heels, platform shoes, sandals, thongs, and other toe or ankle revealing shoes cause a restriction of movement, tripping hazard and/or exposure to potential injury when moving art.



Eyes Open and Clear

- Long hair needs to be tied back to avoid any obstruction of vision. If you have long hair, make sure it is pulled back and/or tucked in to your clothing. It can get caught in gears or abrade a fragile object.
- Hats or caps with bills can also be hazardous to the surface of artwork. Caps with bills need to be removed to avoid possible damage.



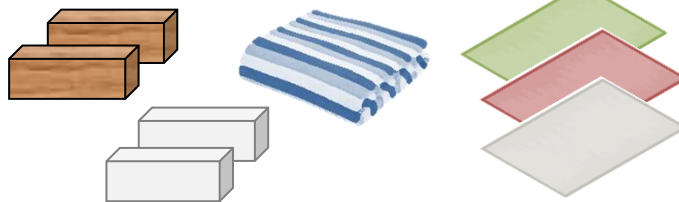
Prepare Your Mind

- You should always approach object handling with a calm and respectful attitude.
- Even if you are short on time, move slowly, carefully and methodically. Be mindful of your body and its movements. It is more important to do this job correctly than quickly.
- When handling art your motor skills, perceptibility and communication ability is of utmost importance. If you are ill, or are suffering from an injury, need to use a prescription or over-the-counter medicine that will affect your equilibrium, motor skills or coordination, please let the supervisor know immediately. You may be able to help out in other ways other than handling art. If you get hurt while working please let the supervisor know immediately.



Step 3: Plan Ahead and Prepare Your Area

- Prepare the area where you will be taking the work of art so that the object can be easily and safely placed PRIOR to your movement there. A clean work area will keep dirt and soil from depositing on the artifacts.
- Have equipment and supplies that you will need handy, such as gloves, carts, padded blocks, bags, dust masks, acid-free tissue, blankets, Ethafoam, etc.
- Never set artifacts directly on the floor or a table. You can scratch or abrade the surface of the object or the floor by doing so. Use packing blankets, wood blocks or Ethafoam blocks to pad the floor and use Ethafoam or blankets to pad the table. Lay carpets/pads/blocks down on the floor if leaning the unwrapped work against the wall; lay a clean blanket on the surface you will be using when wrapping the work.



- Avoid using writing instruments around artwork. When needing to write, use pencils only around museum objects. Pencil is much easier to remove than ink.
- Avoid moving/lifting objects over other artworks. Have an appropriate temporary area for the works that obstruct you from your intended art piece.
- Smoking, drinking, eating or foods of any kind are not allowed around artwork or in the storage or gallery areas. Consuming or being under the influence of alcohol or drugs (recreational) while practicing any kind of art handling is



Handling Museum Objects

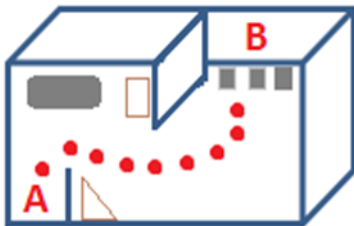
prohibited. Dancing or listening to personal audio equipment (earphones/headphones) while handling art is also prohibited.



- To reach elevated objects use a ladder/stepladder (NEVER a chair). Have another person ready to receive the object while they spot you on the ladder. Make sure the ladder is secure.
- DO NOT run in the galleries, running can put you and the art in danger.



Traffic Paths



- Check and clear the pathway that you will be using BEFORE you begin to move the art. Make certain that there are no objects on the ground (pencils, pens, screwdrivers, scissors, box cutters, tape rolls, tape dispensers, trash, etc.) that can cause a roller-bearing effect, a tripping hazard, or a cumbersome movement when moving the art.
- Some clutter is unavoidable when installing, packing and crating; just be mindful of what objects surround you.

- There may be traffic along the way. Just prepare by being alert, vigilant and cautious at all times. Avoid taking unnecessary turns and motions that extend your path.

Avoid Skin Contact with the Art

Glove Tips

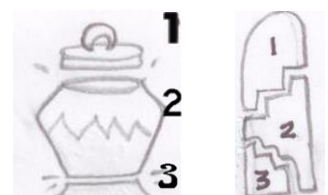
- Don't ever directly touch the surface of a work of art with your exposed skin (i.e. fingertips, hands, arms, legs, etc.). Oil and acids from your skin can damage work surfaces and leave residues that in the long term, deteriorate the surface, cause discoloration or become an area that will attract dirt.
- Please wash your hands before handling, installing, or wrapping art, even when you will be wearing gloves.
- Change gloves often! Using soiled gloves will deposit dirt onto the next items you touch.
- Either Cotton or Nitrile gloves can be used to handle metal objects, lacquered objects, upholstered furniture, textiles, books, wood objects, porous materials such as unglazed pottery and ceramics. Photographs and paper items can be handled with freshly cleaned hands, BUT please ask supervisor for authorization before doing so.
- It is best to wear Nitrile gloves when handling glass, glazed ceramics, anything with a smooth or slick surface, fragile paper or textiles.



Step 4: Assess the Object

Assess for Idiosyncrasies

- Museum objects may be unexpectedly fragile, each work is unique and has its set of idiosyncrasies.



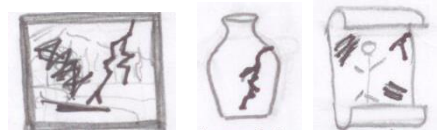
Handling Museum Objects

- Check the object for insecurities, fragile areas, weak points, stress points, previous repairs, etc. before handling it. Usually the most stable position to carry or transport an object is the display position, but this is not always the case, so be cautious.
- Loose, fragile or moving parts are often designed to be separated from the object and should be removed, packed and transported separately. Do not attempt to lift from handles or protruding parts. Instead, lift from bulkiest part of the pieces whenever possible with both hands.
- Consult the Collections Manager if you have any questions about proper handling or transport of a particular object before you move it.
- Some condition reports will have handling instructions. If so, follow them, and ask questions as needed.



Assess for Damage

- **Again, Before Moving Anything:** Look for existing damage to work. If there is damage notify Collections Manager or project supervisor, immediately (broken, dirty, bent, etc.). It will be important to make notes of damage and condition.



What do I do if something gets broken?

- No matter how carefully you prepare and plan, we are all human, and objects may get broken or damaged.
- Report any damage **immediately** to the Collections Manager. Do not panic, it is necessary to know as much as possible for the stability, repair / conservation, and maybe even insurance needs of the work.
- If at all possible, leave everything as it is. Do not attempt to clean it up. If it is a safety hazard or is in danger of further breakage where it is, carefully gather up all of the pieces (no matter how small) and set them aside or put them in a zip-lock bag. DO NOT attempt to put the pieces back together. This may cause abrasion and may prevent them from being put back together correctly by a conservator.

Step 5: Handling the Object – General Rules for Handling Museum Objects:

- WHEN YOU ARE NOT SURE, DON'T DO IT
- STRIVE TO DO NO HARM – YOU ARE AN AGENT OF PRESERVATION AND PROTECTION

Transporting Objects

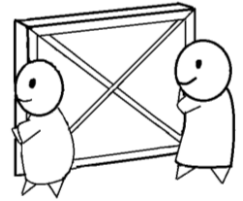
- **Move objects only when necessary.** Is there another way of getting the information you want or accomplishing your task without moving the object? You are much more likely to damage an artifact by carrying it around, so carry the objects as short a distance as possible.
- **Carry removable parts separately from the object.** Secure any loose pieces. Tie them down with twill tape if necessary.
- **Move one object at a time, no matter how small.** One small object in each hand is NOT acceptable. A better option might be to use a padded box, tray cart, with padding in between the objects to keep them from abrading each other.
- **Always support objects with two hands.** Using both hands, support the object from underneath. For framed works, grasp with two hands: one on either side or one at top and bottom. Carry framed works vertically and only **One Artwork at a Time**. Avoid carrying horizontally...only on very rare



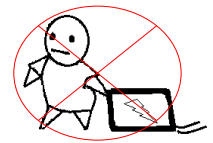
Handling Museum Objects

occasions is this done. Carry the work so that the front surface faces you, so that you protect that surface with the front of your body at all times.

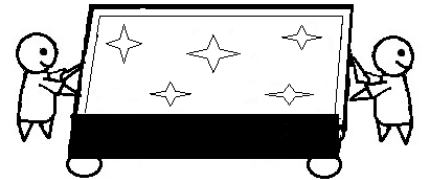
- **Use two people or more if there is any question about the size or awkwardness of the object.** Do not attempt to lift anything that you think could be too weighty. Very heavy/large objects must be transported by a dolly or cart.
- **Always have one more person than you think you need.** Someone needs to watch out for door frames, corners, ceiling beams or people. If an object is more than 36 in./3 feet wide, long or deep, you must use two people to move the object, with one as the LEAD. Distribute weight evenly, with you and your partner or team member lifting each side of the work evenly.
- **Never lift an object by a protruding part.** This may include handles, spouts, arms, straps, hinged lids, etc. These are usually the weakest part of an object.



- **Never drag works of art.** Never carry artwork by the top, by a single stretcher bar or hanging wire.
- **Never walk backwards.** Your vision must never be obstructed. You must not impair your vision at any time.



- **Use carts or dollies to transport objects longer distances.** Do not overload carts. Avoid letting pieces hang over the edge - they are more susceptible to bumping into things. Stabilize artifacts with tissue or Ethafoam blocks if they are wobbly. Use pads/ blankets to keep art from shifting on surface. Move the cart slowly and carefully to avoid vibration, collision. This is not a race. Watch out for cabinet handles and shelf corners.

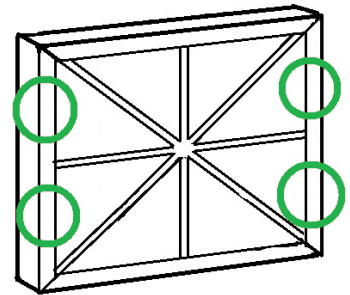


- **Cleaning must be done with special tools.** Notify the Collections Manager if an item is dirty.
- **Frames and Stretcher bars may not be reliable.** Some stretcher bars and frames are not always made to withstand the weight of the entire work of art. They may sometimes be damaged, LOOSE or separate from the top of the artwork if too much weight is applied.

Partner 1/3 Carrying Guideline

- Distribute the carrying weight by holding the work from the side of the work with both hands. In general, one hand can be placed at about 1/3 from the top of the work, the other from 1/3 from the bottom of the work. Mirror each other.

Note: This is a guideline, each work is unique and this applies only as a general rule. If you are not able to reach either end at the 1/3 mark, move each hand closer to the center of the work so that you are comfortable when lifting and carrying the work.



Step 6: What should I do if I see someone else handling museum objects incorrectly?

- Gently point out the broken rule to them; let them know the reasons behind the rule. This type of criticism is often not well-received. Do not let this deter you. Remember you are ethically obligated to preserve these objects. No one is above these rules.
- Take criticism to your own handling with grace and acknowledgment. Correct the behavior.

Metal objects

- **ALWAYS** wear gloves. Metal objects should not have contact with each other. Avoid storing metal objects with rubber, felt or unsealed wood. These things can promote corrosion in metal.

Ceramics and Glass

- Use Nitrile gloves unless they are porous or unglazed. They are more susceptible to breakage than many other types of objects. Always support them from their bases. Use padding between these types of objects in storage and during transport. If these types of objects run into each other, it can cause breakage, scratching or crack continuation.

Textiles

- Support a textile from underneath. Use a flat surface, or roll with a tube for support if necessary. Drape large pieces over both arms. Refrain from lifting by edges or corners.

**Loose Photographs**

- Wear glove unless instructed otherwise. Never use breath to blow off lint or dust.

Furniture

- Lift and carry furniture regardless of the distance. Dragging, pushing, and pulling furniture applies stress to the fragile legs and other elements of the furniture.
- Do not pick up a chair by the crest rail, arms, or stiles to prevent cracking glue joints and breaking or weakening the dowels, mortise-and-tenon joints and other forms of joinery. Large armchairs and settees should be moved with two people, one on each side.
- Move each component individually. Remove drawers to lighten the weight. Secure moveable parts such as hinged doors, and drop lids with 1" cotton twill tape. Collapse table leaves before moving.
- Carry marble and glass tops vertically rather than flat; the horizontal weight may cause the piece to crack or split. Tables should be lifted by placing hands below the skirt.
- Be careful of all ornamentation, especially applied pieces, gilt or silvered materials and painted surfaces.

Books

- Do not pull shelved books by the top of the spine. Push books on each side of the desired book toward the back of the shelf, place fingers toward the top of the desired book on both sides of the spine, and pull gently from the shelf. Open books carefully to prevent forcing or cracking the binding or stretching the board from the surface material.

Open Door Policy:

- Suggestions and ideas are welcome when given in a productive and polite manner. Direct any suggestions and comments directly to the project supervisor.
- Know that, when appropriate, those suggestions may be implemented, but know also, that a plan may already be in place.
- Remember that only one person can be directing at one time. Suggestions do not automatically become directions...
REMEMBER: Proper Communication is necessary and Safety comes First!