

The Whitworth Art Gallery

Collection Care / Conservation Policy

1 Mission

To fully realize the potential of the Whitworth Art Gallery as one of the world's premier university art galleries.

2 Core Purpose

To hold in trust for future generations our collections and our building.

To deliver excellence in collections care, acquisition, curatorship, research, learning, interpretation and access, ensuring the needs of our visitors are at the heart of this work.

To contribute toward the academic and cultural life of the University of Manchester and the city of Manchester as a world leading university in a world class city.

To model the distinctive role of the university art gallery as a public and intellectual resource.

3 Goals

We aspire to be:

- A valued and integrated university art gallery
- A research institution
- A values-led organization

We aspire to have:

- A risk taking, internationally significant exhibition programme
- Diverse audiences that reflect our city and region
- Excellent collections-based teaching and learning
- Exemplary collections care: exemplary access to the collections for visitors
- Dialogue and engagement with our many visitors
- An iconic building that meets the needs of our audiences

We aspire to make:

- An internationally significant contribution to visual culture

4 Collection Care / Conservation Policy

The Whitworth's collection care and conservation policy will:

- Take measures to slow deterioration and prevent damage of works of art
- Manage, monitor and improve the state of the collections, environment and buildings

- Enhance long-term access through effective and pragmatic solutions to storage, display and the use of collections
- Resource and implement programmes of work in line with the policy
- Provide and maintain documentation systems designed both for conservation and collection care
- Undertake research and publish on conservation and collection care practice
- Raise awareness of conservation and provide advice and support to individuals and other institutions
- Achieve or exceed current standards of conservation and professional practice measured against appropriate benchmarks

This policy deals with collections in store, on exhibition and display, or on loan to/from the Gallery, and the systems designed to care for them. The Gallery aims to ensure exemplary standards of collections care and will endeavour to be a leader in significant aspects of collection care. The Gallery will benchmark its conservation standards and practice against key international comparators.

5 The Collection Care & Access Team

5.1 The team

The Collection Care & Access team is formed of collection care staff and the House Services team; it comprises specialist paper and textile conservators (x2), a preventive conservator (shared post), exhibition & collection care technicians (x3), a registrar (shared post) and study centre administrator (a shared post based at Manchester Museum, but who deals with Whitworth image reproduction services), and is lead by the Head of Collection Care & Access (shared post). The House Services team, is lead by the House Services Manager (shared post) and includes facilities, events and technical staff who manage and maintain the Gallery building and grounds (see team structure - Appendix 1).

5.2 Setting standards

In conserving or caring for objects and collections, the Collection Care Team exercise the judgment gained through education, training and experience in deciding what is reasonable and acceptable, and will comply with standards of good practice widely accepted in the museums sector in the UK, for instance the codes of ethics published by the Museums Association and the Institute of Conservation (ICON) and the standards expected by MLA implemented through the national Accreditation scheme for museums.

5.3 Staff training and CPD

Conservators have received specialist training, are accredited or working towards accreditation through ICON, and all members of the team are encouraged and supported in networking, peer consultation and benchmarking, and in pursuing continuous professional development. Individual and team training needs are reviewed annually through PDRs.

5.4 Advice and support

Collection care staff may provide advice to the general public on conservation and collection care, and provide advice and support to professional colleagues and institutions as appropriate. On occasion, a request for extensive support from an external source may be taken on by member of the team on a freelance basis subject to the policies of the University and with the agreement of the Gallery Director.

5.5 Teaching and training

The Collection Care team will contribute to teaching students of the University of Manchester in the area of conservation and collection care, and similarly may provide these services to students from other HEIs. The team will also offer training regionally to other museum sector colleagues, and will undertake educational activities for the general public as part of the Gallery's learning and engagement offer. The team provides in-house training to Gallery colleagues and volunteers as appropriate.

5.6 Collections Access

The Collection care team works with curatorial colleagues to ensure sustainable access to works from the Gallery's collections. The Collection Care team will contribute to innovative collections access and engagement, and implement 'storage for access' as part of the Gallery capital building development project.

6 Preventive Conservation

Collections are safeguarded in the Gallery through the specification and management of the following systems:

6.1 Physical systems

6.1.1 Building maintenance

As part of the University of Manchester, the long-term maintenance of the Gallery is the responsibility of the University Estates Department. The Gallery's House Services Manager is responsible for the day-to-day management and maintenance of the building, and together with the House Services team oversees a programme of routine building inspection, assessment, monitoring and maintenance.

6.1.2 Physical security

Security procedures are in place, including intruder detection linked to University Security and the police; trained and dedicated staff control access points to the building, swipe card systems, keys and locking-up procedures. Access to collection stores and objects on display is restricted to relevant personnel. The National Security Advisor reviews Gallery security as necessary.

6.1.3 Mechanical and electrical maintenance

Mechanical and electrical systems are maintained by the University Estates Department and through service contracts. As with buildings maintenance the Gallery's House Services team monitor all systems and liaise closely with University Estates.

6.1.4 Storage and display furniture, packaging and supports

The Collection Care team works together with curatorial colleagues in the design and construction of storage and display furniture as appropriate for the materials being housed. Materials should be inert and tested as necessary prior to use. Conservation grade materials are used for supports, packaging and the long-term storage of objects.

6.2 Electronic Systems

6.2.1 Environmental systems

Heating and air-handling systems to control temperature and relative humidity are in place in Gallery stores and galleries; with its recent building develop programme, and in line with broadening environmental parameters, the Gallery is taking a sustainable passive approach to environmental control, and implement an environmental conditions awareness programme. Maintenance of environmental control equipment is managed by the Preventive Conservator and through annual service contracts.

6.2.2 Building Management Systems

The Gallery's BMS controls and monitors the building's mechanical and electrical equipment including heating, ventilation, lighting, fire, and security systems; use of the BMS falls within the remit of the House Services team in liaison with University Estates. The environmental performance of the Gallery is regularly assessed to improve energy efficiency, and to reduce costs and carbon emissions.

6.2.3 Lighting

A number of different lighting systems are in place suitable for the display of Gallery collections, including DALI control in the newly built and refurbished exhibition galleries. In other areas the Gallery is gradually installing more energy efficient systems including LEDs. Conditions are augmented by the use of louvres, and blinds as necessary, and glazing includes UV filters. The Collection Care team is responsible for setting and monitoring lighting to safeguard the Gallery collections and items on inward loan.

6.2.4 Fire and evacuation systems

Suitable fire and evacuation systems are in place to ensure the safekeeping of Gallery personnel and collections; the House Services team in consultation with the University Fire Officer conducts regular reviews of the systems and procedures.

6.2.5 Collection Management software

Conservation and collection care documentation is recorded on the Gallery's Collection Management System, KE EMu. This includes conservation treatment records, collections surveys and object assessments, environmental records, and movement control.

6.3 Human Systems

6.3.1 Integrated Pest Management

All Gallery staff are responsible for IPM which includes adhering to the Gallery's Food Code and the maintenance of designated food preparation and consumption areas. The Preventive Conservator is responsible for implementing the IPM programme throughout the Gallery, chairing the IPM Group, staff IPM induction and an annual training programme for permanent and casual staff.

6.3.3 Housekeeping

The collection care team take responsibility for cleaning and housekeeping in stores, whilst a daily cleaning schedule of the Gallery building, both front and back-of-house, is undertaken through an external cleaning contract. Additional cleaning is put in place for all public and commercial activities, especially those involving catering and events.

6.3.5 Monitoring collections in galleries and stores

The Collection Care team, and in particular the Preventive Conservator is responsible for monitoring and maintaining suitable environmental conditions for works in storage and on display. The Gallery is able to monitor temperature, RH and light via telemetric data loggers stored on a dedicated computer and this is reviewed on a regular basis. Within the DALI controlled exhibition galleries, the Gallery is moving to setting and monitoring cumulative exposure.

6.3.6 Emergency response plan

The Gallery is currently reviewing its Emergency Response Plan to include disaster preparedness, emergency response and collections salvage. In the event of an emergency, relevant staff are contacted via the University Security and Estates teams and the Gallery's House Services Manager. Disaster recovery equipment and materials are located in several key parts of the Gallery building; this is managed by the Preventive Conservator.

6.3.4 Collections surveying

Curatorial and collection care staff work together to prioritise conservation treatments through a rolling programme of collection familiarisation, surveying and assessments. Particularly sensitive or vulnerable parts of the collection are identified and reviewed on a regular basis.

7 Remedial Conservation

7.1 Conservation treatments

The conservation of Gallery objects is carried out or overseen by appropriately qualified professional staff. The Gallery will safeguard as far as possible the material integrity and significance of each work, and will intervene to change a work in the following circumstances by:

- 7.1.1 Ensuring the long-term stability of an object via minimal intervention procedures
- 7.1.2 Aiding interpretation of an object by partial or full restoration as appropriate
- 7.1.3 Enabling the study and research

7.2 Documentation and recommendations for future action

All treatments and courses of action will be justified and recorded via the KE EMU collections management database and will include photographic records. Record keeping may include storage, display, handling and environmental recommendations.

8 Conservation Plan

8.1 Annual work programmes

The Collection Care & Access team produce an annual Operational Plan based on strategic priorities (see Appendix 2). The programme will include:

- 8.1.1 Prioritised improvements to the building and support systems
- 8.1.2 Storage and environmental improvements
- 8.1.3 Supporting study, exhibition and access
- 8.1.4 Implementing and developing the electronic systems
- 8.1.5 Training and development of staff in conservation

8.2 Resources

The Gallery will allocate internal resources, and use its best endeavours to secure external resources to support this programme. In instances where conservation requirements fall outside of the expertise of in-house staff, the Gallery will work closely with colleagues in the institutions making up the Manchester Partnership Museums (the Whitworth, Manchester Museum, and Manchester Art Gallery), or will employ suitably qualified external contractors.

9 Policy Review

The Gallery will periodically review the effectiveness and efficiency of the policy and its implementation. This Collection Care / Conservation Policy will be reviewed at least every 5 years. The next review will be due in 2019.