

OBJECT HANDLING PROCEDURES

Object handling is a serious undertaking and one must never lose sight of the risks associated in working with museum collections. Only Winterthur Museum staff or students who have passed Care and Handling Training are authorized to handle objects. Use the following guidelines when handling or moving items:

- Do not handle an object unless it is necessary. Carrying trays should be made for the majority of your objects, particularly for those smaller objects that you will be treating and frequently moving in and out of the storage cabinets.
- Have a clean, clear space ready for the object before you move it. Be aware of the route you intend to take with the object. Consider doors, people, uneven floors, potential trip hazards, etc.
- Before handling an object, look at it carefully, note its weaknesses and handle it accordingly. Remove any lids or other loose parts prior to moving.
- Avoid wearing dangling, sharp, or heavy jewelry, rings, or belt buckles, or carrying pens and pencils in shirt pockets around objects.
- Generally, gloves should be worn when handling objects. Both cotton and nitrile gloves are available. Cotton gloves can work well in many circumstances, however note that they are more slippery than nitrile gloves, especially when handling slick or heavy objects; that they tend to snag more easily on objects with projecting, friable parts (such as a basket); and that hand oils will eventually permeate through the weave of the glove, if worn for long periods of time. If gloves are not worn, for instance when handling ceramics and glass, be sure your hands are clean and dry.
- **Always** wear gloves when handling metals. Avoid using cotton gloves with plastic dots on the fingers; these can leave residues behind on metals that cause localized corrosion.
- Slippery objects, such as ceramics and glass, may be handled with bare, clean, dry hands, unless their surface is particularly sensitive to fingerprints. If you wish to wear gloves, choose nitrile for maximum grip.
- Never touch the surface of an object with a friable surface (e.g. pastels, crizzled glass, flaking paint surfaces).
- Always lift and support the body of the object. Do not lift objects by protruding or secondary parts, such as handles, straps, or lids. Do not lift furniture by arms or backs, paintings by frames or hanging hardware, or ceramics by handles. Carry textiles fully supported by both arms; do not lift them by the edges. To lift or move paper objects, use both hands. Hold diagonal corners of the sheet or use an acid-free folder to blotter to support the piece during movement. Objects considered unstable or particularly fragile should only be moved on a support.

- Ensure the object's safety by carefully packing and/or padding it for transport. Never discard packing materials without searching them for associated materials (flakes, lids, labels, etc.).
- Do not handle, move, or carry more than one object at a time. Always use a container or support tray, a carrying basket or a cart, to move objects more than a few steps, especially when going up or down stairs or elevators. Many containers/carts are readily kept in the objects and metals lab, or in the objects lab storeroom, for such a purpose.
- If possible, try not to transfer an object directly to another person. Place the object on a surface and allow the other person to lift the object from the surface.
- When using a ladder or stepstool, always have someone else present. If possible, do not descend the ladder/stepstool while holding an object. It is preferable to hand the object down to the person assisting before descending (in this case, it is ok to transfer the object to the other person directly). For our purpose, a stepstool is kept next to the door in the objects lab storeroom.
- Never try to move a large or heavy object alone—for your sake and the sake of the object. Get help and plan the move carefully with a partner before lifting.
- When leaving an object unattended overnight or during the weekend, make sure the object number is associated with it, for instance by writing it on a paper tag you keep with the object. Cover the object with a layer of protective material (e.g. plastic sheeting, cloth, or both), then place an "Object Below" card on top. Extra cards are kept on hand in a drawer next to one of the entrance doors to the Objects lab.
- If an incident occurs and an object gets damaged, do not panic. Retain all pieces, however small, and clearly associate them with the object. Immediately advise any of your supervisors, who will immediately notify the Registrar's Office accordingly.

Excerpted from *Procedure Manual for the Objects Conservation Laboratory of Winterthur Museum and Country Estate and Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation, Academic Year 2012-2013*

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