

Conservation and Exhibitions

Packing, transport, storage and environmental considerations

Nathan Stolorow

Butterworths

Conservation and Exhibitions

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Packing, transport, storage, and environmental considerations

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Series Editors' Preface

The conservation of artefacts and buildings has a long history, but the positive emergence of conservation as a profession can be said to date from the foundation of the International Institute for the Conservation of Museum Objects (IIC) in 1950 (the last two words of the title being later changed to Historic and Artistic Works) and the appearance soon after in 1952 of its journal *Studies in Conservation*. The role of the conservator as distinct from those of the restorer and the scientist had been emerging during the 1930s with a focal point in the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, which published the precursor to *Studies in Conservation*, *Technical Studies in the Field of the Fine Arts* (1932–42).

UNESCO, through its Cultural Heritage Division and its publications, had always taken a positive role in conservation and the foundation, under its auspices, of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), in Rome, was a further advance. The Centre was established in 1959 with the aims of advising internationally on conservation problems, co-ordinating conservation activities and establishing standards and training courses.

A significant confirmation of professional progress was the transformation at New York in 1966 of the two committees of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), one curatorial on the Care of Paintings (founded in 1949) and the other mainly scientific (founded in the mid-1950s) into the ICOM Committee for Conservation.

Following the Second International Congress of Architects in Venice in 1964 when the Venice Charter was promulgated, the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) was set up in 1965 to deal with archaeological, architectural and town planning questions, to schedule monuments and sites and to monitor relevant legislation.

From the early 1960s onwards, international congresses (and the literature emerging from them) held

by IIC, ICOM, ICOMOS and ICCROM not only advanced the subject in its various technical specializations but also emphasized the cohesion of conservators and their subject as an interdisciplinary profession.

The use of the term *Conservation* in the title of this series refers to the whole subject of the care and treatment of valuable artefacts both movable and immovable, but within the discipline conservation has a meaning which is distinct from that of restoration. *Conservation* used in this specialized sense has two aspects: firstly, the control of the environment to minimize the decay of artefacts and materials; and, secondly, their treatment to arrest decay and to stabilize them where possible against further deterioration. Restoration is the continuation of the latter process, when conservation treatment is thought to be insufficient, to the extent of reinstating an object, without falsification, to a condition in which it can be exhibited.

In the field of conservation conflicts of values on aesthetic, historical, or technical grounds are often inevitable. Rival attitudes and methods inevitably arise in a subject which is still developing and at the core of these differences there is often a deficiency of technical knowledge. That is one of the principal *raison d'être* of this series. In most of these matters ethical principles are the subject of much discussion, and generalizations cannot easily cover (say) buildings, furniture, easel paintings and waterlogged wooden objects.

A rigid, universally agreed principle is that all treatment should be adequately documented. There is also general agreement that structural and decorative falsification should be avoided. In addition there are three other principles which, unless there are overriding objections, it is generally agreed should be followed.

The first is the principle of the reversibility of processes, which states that a treatment should normally

be such that the artefact can, if desired, be returned to its pre-treatment condition even after a long lapse of time. This principle is impossible to apply in some cases, for example where the survival of an artefact may depend upon an irreversible process. The second, intrinsic to the whole subject, is that as far as possible decayed parts of an artefact should be conserved and not replaced. The third is that the consequences of the ageing of the original materials (for example 'patina') should not normally be disguised or removed. This includes a secondary proviso that later accretions should not be retained under the false guise of natural patina.

The authors of the volumes in this series give their views on these matters, where relevant, with reference to the types of material within their scope. They take into account the differences in approach to artefacts of essentially artistic significance and to those in which the interest is primarily historical or archaeological.

The volumes are unified by a systematic and balanced presentation of theoretical and practical material with, where necessary, an objective comparison of different methods and approaches. A balance has also been maintained between the fine (and decorative) arts, archaeology and architecture in those cases where the respective branches of the subject have common ground, for example in the treatment of stone and glass and in the control of the museum environment. Since the publication of the first volume it has been decided to include within the series related monographs and technical studies. To reflect this enlargement of its scope the series has been renamed the Butterworths Series in Conservation and Museology.

Though necessarily different in details of organization and treatment (to fit the particular requirements of the subject) each volume has the same general standard which is that of such training courses as those of the University of London Institute of Archaeology, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Conservation Center, New York University, the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, York and ICCROM.

The authors have been chosen from among the acknowledged experts in each field, but as a result of the wide areas of knowledge and technique covered even by the specialized volumes in this series, in many instances multi-authorship has been necessary.

With the existence of IIC, ICOM, ICOMOS and ICCROM, the principles and practice of conservation have become as internationalized as the problems. The collaboration of two Consultant Editors, W. T. Chase, Head Conservator, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, and Bernard M. Feilden, Former Director of ICCROM, will help to ensure that the practices discussed in this series will be applicable throughout the world.

Acknowledgement

The cost of drawing the line diagrams in this book was contributed by the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property, Rome (ICCROM).

Preface

This book has been in preparation since 1966 when my first work on exhibitions and conservation concerns was published by Butterworths²⁹. This was a fairly technical but slim manual which focused on a specific subject, that of the development of controlled environment cases for the travel of works of art. I was working in Ottawa at the time and was able to continue my studies in this field whenever my conservation administrative duties allowed me to do so. Laboratory and research facilities were first available at the National Gallery of Canada, and later when I was Director, at the newly formed Canadian Conservation Institute. A second more general and practical book was to materialize. The assembly of extensive notes, researches, experiences and case histories started in 1976–77. I made every effort to include international initiatives and was much encouraged by the enthusiastic response and generosity of colleagues in various countries.

In early discussions with the Editors it was suggested that the subject matter be broadened but still allow for technical details—but above all should be generously illustrated with photos, diagrams and practical information. This book was to be used as a manual by conservator practitioners, by exhibition organizers, technicians, and transportation specialists. I was also aware of the policy and publications in the Butterworth Series on Conservation and geared my writing to this growing but specialized audience. After considerable paring down, the book is a manageable size and in my opinion reflects the status of theory and practice in exhibitions conservation.

There is no doubt that more and more exhibition institutions and authorities are applying 'high technology' for their packing, case design and transportation requirements. The new breed of Exhibition Conservator³¹ is part of this development. Let us hope we will see better conservation practices and less wear and tear of cultural property in an era of increased art

movement, democratization of collections, and blockbuster international exchanges.

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N.S.

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