

Sarah Nunberg  
Art Conservation Partnership, LLC.  
April 21, 2003

### Outline for Art Handling Review

1. Use common sense and think about what you are doing.
2. Personal Preparation:
  - Always wash your hands before handling art- especially after lunch.
  - Do not wear excessive jewelry such as dangling bracelets, rings that may scratch, long necklaces or id tags hanging from your neck- these may get in the way of safely handling objects.
3. Gloves:

Assess what type of material the object is made of and if you need gloves for safe handling. The gloves should fit well without restraining movement and without too much excess room to avoid clumsiness. Clean hands are better than dirty gloves. Working in the storerooms your hands can get very dirty. You may not be as aware of how dirty your gloves get vs. how dirty your hands get so gloves can give you a false sense of "security".

Work on the move, especially in the basement storerooms, may allow for infrequent use of gloves and frequent hand washing (because of how dirty your hands can get from handling many dirty objects). Everyday museum work and move work in areas other than basement storerooms, may require more diligent use of gloves (the objects being handled are most likely less dirty, and they have possibly been cleaned).

Objects in the Asian department storeroom and in BS1 are generally clean and will require more use of gloves- especially in the Asian storeroom.

  - A. Choice of type of gloves:

Nitrile gloves: good for most objects that require gloves. These are my preference. People are not usually allergic to them and they are more comfortable than latex. Another option is to wear nitrile gloves over cotton gloves- but beware this will get bulky and can cause clumsiness.

Cotton gloves: good for materials with surfaces that are stable and smooth. They are not good for surfaces that are covered with powdery paint, surfaces that are unstable or flaking. Cotton gloves are also not appropriate for objects made of material that will catch on them, such as highly corroding metal, or splintery wood.

Latex gloves: good for more powdery, flaking surfaces and objects with protruding areas that may catch on cloth gloves. These gloves are often not good to use because many people have allergies to latex and to the powder used inside. Do not use the latex gloves with the powder on the inside- this will get on objects after you take the gloves off. Latex gloves are cheaper than nitrile and I will use them when I expect to change gloves often.

B. Glove type/no glove choice according to object material:

Metal objects: always require gloves to prevent contact with the oil/dirt on your skin and the object- the oils and dirt will corrode the surface.

Highly polished metal surfaces: are particularly vulnerable to scratches or corrosion formation from dirty/oily hands and gloves should always be worn in when handling these objects.

Glass objects: usually do not require gloves- the glass surface is sleek and you can slip with gloves. Also iridescence of archaeological glass is flaky and gloves will exacerbate the condition.

Stone objects: cotton, latex or nitrile gloves. Clean gloves should be worn for highly polished surfaces such as clean white marble, but in cases like sugary sandstone or other unstable surfaces, clean hands may be a better choice, or at least use latex gloves- definitely not cotton.

Ceramic objects: cotton, latex or nitrile gloves. Clean hands will not damage stable glazed, fired ceramics. Slipped, fired ceramic surfaces are usually stable and can be handled with any type of gloves, though latex and nitrile are usually best. Clean latex or nitrile gloves should be worn for fragile, powdery ceramic surfaces. Cloth gloves are good for stable not slippery surfaces. Again, use your discretion before handling. It is best to handle painted ceramics (or any other painted objects) in areas where there is no paint, such as the underside of the base or the interior of a vessel. Clean hands are a good option. In general ceramic surfaces with painted decoration that is not fired on is usually unstable.

Painted surfaces: latex or nitrile gloves if the surface is not too flaky. Handle where there is no paint esp. if the paint is powdery-use discretion if gloves are necessary. Clean hands may cause less damage than cotton gloves on powdery or flaky surfaces.

Wood objects: use gloves to protect clean stable surfaces from fingerprints and oils or dirt. If it is a splintery object you may want gloves to protect yourself and latex or nitrile would be best here. Cotton gloves would be ok for finished, stable not too slippery surfaces.

Other organic material: latex or nitrile gloves are best. Cotton may stick to organic material such as cotton, resin etc.

#### 4. Handling objects

- Examine the object before handling- read my tag!!!
- Move slowly!!- Especially in the Asian store room and in BS1 where space is tight.
- Always ask for help if you need it- especially if an object is too big for one person to handle or if it appears weak or in sections. This is very important.
- Use two hands when handling an object.
- Only carry one object at a time.
- Always know where you will put the object before you have picked it up.

- Look to see if the object is made of one piece or if it is made in sections – example: if it has a lid or if it is in sections that are mechanically joined. If there are sections, disassemble each section before moving the object or make sure you can support each section. Usually the bottom and the middle section should be supported, but this depends on the condition and make-up of the object.
- Assess the condition- are there breaks or weak areas. Support the weak areas and do not depend on them for lifting.
- Avoid picking up objects by their handles, by the thinnest part, at a break join, or by the rim.
- Handle objects over a table or a cart. If you are working over a concrete floor area, put padding over the floor.
- Always have an area prepared to place the object before you move it. This should be a clean, flat padded surface. Archival material is not necessary for this temporary situation- glassine, Tyvek, kraft paper, sometimes felt are useful non-archival materials (use common sense and don't stand a tippy object on a soft mound of folded felt). Volara, Ethafoam, blue board are archival solutions that can be reused as long as they remain clean. Mat board or other cardboard are also useful as long as they remain clean.
- Never put an object close to the edge of a table or cart.
- Use sandbags/soft weights to keep the object in place and protect it if someone bumps into the table or if it is on a moving cart.
- Always leave at least a few inches between objects so they do not damage each other.
- Do not stack objects.
- If you need a writing utensil use a pencil when handling objects, unless there is a specific reason to use markers or pens. Ink is much harder to remove than graphite.

#### 5. Transporting objects:

- When transporting an object use a cart, or if necessary, a basket. Do not carry an object long distances without a carrying mechanism. If you need to open doors etc, and are carrying the object in a basket that requires two hands, put the object down, open the door, move the object through the doorway, put it down again and close the door-same for carts. When necessary, have two people.
- General rule: MOVE SLOWLY. Look where you are going-especially around corners and through doors. Floors are uneven and bumpy so take this into account when you are moving around.
- Do not walk backwards.
- Always secure objects with sandbags. Think about where you are placing the sandbags so that they do not damage the object.
- Think about how the object will travel best- either on its base, on its side, upside down. Place the sandbags so that they prevent tipping or rolling of the object.
- If you are transporting a cart of objects through public areas that may be crowded, if possible, cover the objects with soft tissue and put an "art below" sign on or next to the tissue. If possible, it is best to have two people transporting carts

in this situation. Be aware of the safety of the objects and the possibility of a visitor taking a small object off the cart or accidentally bumping into the cart.

6. Use of carts: Move carts slowly over bumpy surfaces. Go slowly. Push one cart per person, never more than one cart at a time.

- Rubbermaid or metal two-shelf carts: These are best for moving objects. Do not place supplies and objects on the same shelf. If you need to transport both, it might be best to put the object on the top shelf and supplies on the bottom, though again, use your discretion.

Always check to see if there are objects on the bottom shelf of the cart before moving the cart. Support/secure all objects before moving the cart.

- Baker's carts: These are best for temporary use. Only use the two middle shelves for transportation. Never leave an object on the top or bottom shelf and walk away. You may forget that the object is there. Another person may not see the object(s) and roll the cart away - this is how an object will get broken. These carts roll very easily. Be aware of this when moving them- they will roll away on you.

7. General rules in the storerooms:

- No food or drink in the storerooms.

- Close cabinet doors when you leave an area (even for short periods of time).

- Do not leave objects on carts for extended periods of time.

- Always put objects away when you leave your work area. Keep this in mind when you are taking objects off the shelves- only take off as many as you will be able to get to in a given time.

- Remember other people will be using the storeroom so leave your workspace accordingly- Do not leave carts with objects in the way.

- Objects on the storage shelves are packed in tight- if you need a specific object in the back of a shelf, remove all objects that are in the way. Try not to reach over objects.

- Lighting in Asian storeroom?

8. Bring to conservator's attention:

- If the object is extensively flaking, notice evidence of insect activity, large cracks.

- If an object breaks leave it as it is get help- a conservator, a person from the registrar or another experienced art handler. Put a note in the area, block it off, or radio someone. Do not put it on a shelf and walk away. Do not gather the pieces, bring it to your work area and then notify others.

- Always stop and ask if you have questions.