

# Collections care and conservation policy

## Victoria and Albert Museum

2019

Approved by Trustees Collections Committee: 10 June 2019  
Review date: June 2024



# 1. Purpose of Policy

- 1.1 The National Heritage Act, 1983, established the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum to care for, preserve and add items to the collections, exhibit them to the public, make them available for study/research, promote enjoyment of art, craft and design, provide education, undertake research and to preserve/increase the utility of the collections.
- 1.2 The Board delegates authority to the Director to take operational decisions and to implement the obligations laid down by the Act.
- 1.3 The V&A's mission is to be recognised as the world's leading museum of art, design and performance. And to enrich peoples' lives by promoting research, knowledge and enjoyment of the designed world to the widest possible audience.
- 1.4 This Policy supports the Museum's strategic priority to sustain and develop our internationally significant collections. It is part of the Collections Management Policy framework, which also includes:
  - Collections Development Policy, 2019
  - Collections Information and Access Policy, 2019
  - Loans Policy and Conditions, 2018
- 1.5 The following definitions are set out in the British Standard PAS197:2009, 'Code of practice for cultural collections management':

**Collections Care:** the range of activities intended to safeguard a collection. These activities can include organisational policies, security, storage, cleaning, maintenance, handling, scientific investigation, environmental monitoring and control, exhibitions and loans, conservation, provision of surrogates and emergency planning.

**Conservation:** interventive techniques applied to an item to achieve chemical and physical stabilisation for the purpose of extending the useful life of the item and to ensure its continued availability.

## 2. Collections Care Principles

- 2.1 The V&A aims to achieve an appropriate balance between the use of, access to and the long-term preservation of the collections. The principles that govern the Museum's risk managed approach to collections care and conservation are informed by:
  - sectoral professional standards and best practice (see Appendix 1)
  - compliance with relevant legislation;
  - staff knowledge and experience;
  - research and analysis;
  - sustainability;
  - emergency/business continuity plans;
  - effective communication of collections care and conservation issues to stakeholders.

2.2 The Museum will apply preventive conservation measures to care for collection items over their lifespan. The V&A's approach is to apply preventive conservation measures in preference to interventive conservation wherever possible, [however the Museum endeavours to ensure that collection items are accessible and safe to handle, which may involve interventive treatment.](#)

2.3 Preventive conservation measures include:

- Providing suitable, secure and well-maintained buildings for the display and storage of the collection.
- Ensuring that display materials/methods, and storage systems/materials, used for, or in proximity to, collection items are appropriate for use.
- Providing an appropriate environment for collection objects in display and storage areas; monitoring/measuring relative humidity, temperature, visible light, ultra violet radiation and atmospheric pollutants as appropriate; identifying and prioritising improvements, informed by analysis and research.
- Implementing and monitoring an integrated pest management programme across the V&A estate.
- Following agreed V&A procedures, guidelines and training for preventive care and the handling, cleaning, storing, transporting, acquisition, display, lending and disposing of collection items.
- Good housekeeping.

2.4 New collection acquisitions and incoming collections should be assessed to ensure they present no risk to existing collections, e.g. through pest infestation, and are quarantined as appropriate.

2.5 Any item known, or suspected, to contain a hazardous material will be assessed and managed in line with legal regulations and best practice.

2.6 Any storage location change of a collection item should result in it being placed in matching or improved environmental conditions.

2.7 The Museum is committed to reducing the environmental impact and overall cost of caring for the collections, where possible and appropriate.

2.8 Collections Care and Conservation information and treatment records will be recorded in the Museum's documentation systems and made available upon request and as appropriate.

### 3. Interventive Conservation

3.1 The Museum's guiding principle is to minimise the amount of intervention required. Treatment will be appropriate to the proposed use, intrinsic nature and significance of the item, ethical guidelines and resources available.

3.2 Conservation treatments are undertaken by, [or under the supervision of](#), accredited or experienced V&A conservators who will also oversee work carried out by technicians, interns/work placement students and external contractors, in line with sectoral standards and best practice.

3.3 Conservation of collection items required for display, loan, study or where the condition requires urgent action to prevent loss/damage, [and to stabilise items to make them accessible](#), will be prioritised.

- 3.4 Conservation treatment methods will use stable and tested materials that, as far as possible, are reversible and do not compromise the intrinsic nature of the collection item, future treatment or use.
- 3.5 The Museum does not provide advice to the general public on how to undertake conservation or recommend any one particular specialist. Enquiries are referred to the UK ICON Conservation Register (Institute of Conservation).

## 4. Research

- 4.1 Scientific analysis and technical examination will be used to identify materials, inform conservation treatments, support curatorial enquiries and research and to maintain and improve the preservation and understanding of the collections. Examination and analysis (including destructive sampling for research purposes) may be undertaken following Museum procedures.

## 5. Monitoring and Review

- 5.1 This Policy is available to all and published on the V&A website. It is reviewed and approved every 5 years, or as required by the Board of Trustees' Collections Committee.
- 5.2 A Collections Care and Conservation Plan is prepared and reviewed on an annual basis to implement prioritised collections care and conservation proposals, on a phased basis and as resources permit.