



3.1 Introduction to Pacific Collections: Collections Care



Care of Collections

Collections from the Pacific are largely composed of organic materials and consequently collections care guidelines for this type of material should be followed.

Temperature & humidity

Ambient conditions are best for organic materials (i.e. temperature = 20°C +/- 2°C within 24 hours, Relative Humidity = 55% +/- 5 within 24 hours). It is particularly important to avoid rapid or extreme fluctuations in either temperature or humidity. This is because moisture is lost or gained too quickly which can cause damage to objects. This may be evident in splits/cracks appearing in wood which has dried out too quickly; warping where wood has gained moisture too quickly; or natural binders drying out resulting in loss of decorative elements such as seeds, shells, beads or ochre that have been applied with resin, wax, orchid juice and similar materials.

Light levels

Some materials are light sensitive and although small, irregular amounts of light may not cause discernible fading, the cumulative effects of display lighting will. The main materials of concern in Pacific collections are feathers (particularly brightly coloured), hair, fur and some natural pigments. Trade cloth (often found added to artefacts to signify wealth and give the item value) is also particularly susceptible to light. Dark plant materials will gradually fade in time. Ideally, UV light should be excluded from galleries and appropriate lux levels should be set and monitored.

Pests

Clothes moths are the biggest problem, but be aware also of carpet beetles. They seek proteins, particularly keratin, and therefore are a danger to hair, fur, feathers, skin and wool. Wood borers cause small round holes in wooden objects and if a fine powder is found adjacent to holes then they are probably active and the item needs to be isolated and treated accordingly.

Storage

For packing artefacts that are being kept in store use acid-free tissue and acid-free boxes. Where appropriate you can use bubblewrap as long as it is not in contact with the object. Important things to consider are not over-packing certain types of artefact, as this can cause as much damage as it prevents e.g. feathers, and brittle plant fibres. Always provide support where it is required e.g. a headdress or woven bag might benefit from internal stuffing. Loose elements do not necessarily benefit from being wrapped and restrained. Each object requires individual consideration of its strengths, weaknesses and material type.

Mould

Organic materials are prone to developing mould in favourable conditions (e.g. RH constantly over 65%). Mould spores can lie dormant for a very long time. It is important to note that even if the gallery conditions are suitable, the micro-environment within a display case can be very different depending on a number of factors including internal display lighting, leaks, and proximity to radiators, windows, or cooling systems.

Further resources:

<http://www.cci-icc.gc.ca/resources-ressources/ccinotesicc/index-eng.aspx>

http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/consveogram/cons_toc.html

http://www.aiccm.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/reCollections/2_caring_for_cultural_material_2.pdf