

SOAS Gallery Collections Care and Conservation Policy

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Note: All policies must be read in conjunction with all other SOAS policy, procedure and guidance documents. Printed copies of policies may not be the most up to date, therefore please refer to the policy pages on the SOAS external website or intranet for the latest version.

1. Introduction

This Policy and the associated procedures apply to the Collections Care and Conservation needs in relation to the SOAS Object and Artwork Collections managed by the SOAS Gallery and which do not form part of the SOAS Library Special Collections or other collections held by SOAS.

- 1.1 SOAS Gallery's (thereafter "the Gallery") Statement of Purpose is to support the mission of SOAS, University of London, which is:

To be a leading centre of excellence in research and teaching relating to Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

This mission represents the primary objective of the University, as outlined in its 2024/25 Constitutional Documents, Article II, which are accessible on the [SOAS website](#).

The Gallery and its collections exist to support this mission, driving any future activities. The Gallery will uphold this mission preserving, promoting and providing access, including sharing knowledge to its objects and cultural collections.

Our vision in achieving this mission and statement of purpose is to preserve, maintain and enhance the collections in a sustainable way, in order to make the best possible use of them through our well developed and wide-ranging exhibition themes, scholarly research and teaching, and also as a source of scholarly research and teaching, and a source of knowledge exchange within SOAS and with any external partner schools of education.

- 1.2 This policy has been written in accordance with the Gallery's Statement of Purpose and the Collections Development Policy. All staff must read and agree to abide by the policy. The Collections Care and Conservation Plan sets out the way this policy will be put into action and should be read in conjunction with it and the Forward Plan, the Emergency Plan, and any other plans affecting the collections and the Gallery buildings.

- 1.3 The purpose of the Collections Care and Conservation Policy is to outline the duty of care and responsibilities towards the collection and to set a framework for:
- The long-term preservation of the collections and working with SOAS Estates to provide and maintain suitable environmental conditions within the buildings
 - Preventative and remedial conservation of the collections
 - The safe use of and access to collections, within the limits of the Gallery resources
 - Meeting ethical commitments and legal requirements.

2. Context and standards

- 2.1 The Gallery aims to improve the care and conditions of all its collection in accordance with Benchmarks in Collections Care, Signposts, or other approved national sector standards within the limits of its resources. These standards include Museums Association (MA) Code of Ethics; Code of Conduct for the Institute of Conservation (ICON); Spectrum; British Standards Institute (BSI) Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections (PAS 198:2012); BSI Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management (PAS 197:2009); BSI Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials (BS EN 16893:2018 and BS4971:2017); Health & Safety at Work Act; COSHH Regulations.
- 2.2 The safety and preservation of the collection will be considered from the outset of any plans to alter the displays or storage, to modify the buildings or to allow access to any part of the collections. Benchmarks in Collections Care will be used to assess and evaluate current standards of collections care. Priority areas will be determined for improvement in line with best practice.

3. People

- 3.1 The care of the collections is the responsibility of everyone who works in or visits the Gallery.
- 3.2 Any concerns regarding the collections should be reported in writing to the Collections & Engagement Officers and Head of Galleries & Exhibitions.
- 3.3 The Gallery team trains all staff and volunteers who handle the collections in the course of their work. No untrained personnel are allowed to handle items from the accessioned collection.
- 3.4 Researchers or other visitors working with the collections will be briefed on how to handle the items they are working on and will be supervised at all times.
- 3.5 The Gallery is supported by the SOAS Conservation Leader, who has responsibility for all SOAS Collections care and provides the necessary guidance and advice to the Gallery when required.
- 3.6 Any problems or concerns relating to the care of the collection are referred by the Collections & Engagement Officers or Head of Galleries & Exhibitions to the Conservation Leader at SOAS, or another appropriately qualified conservator on the ICON approved list.

- 3.7 The Gallery will check the suitability of conservators chosen to work or advise on the collections. A professionally accredited conservator or a conservator listed on the ICON Conservation Register will normally be chosen.
- 3.8 No item in the collections will be modified or altered until advice has been obtained from a suitably qualified conservator. The Gallery staff will in the first instance consult the SOAS Conservation Leader, and then if required, external advice may be sought. If appropriate, the advice of SOAS subject specialists may also be sought. Treatment plans which are arranged externally must be approved by the Gallery team.
- 3.9 The Gallery will keep detailed records of all treatments carried out on objects, including the name and contact details of the person or company that undertook the work.

4. The Buildings

- 4.1 We recognise that the maintenance of the Gallery buildings is fundamental to the preservation of both the building and collection, and work with SOAS Estates to ensure the buildings are in a suitable condition. The Gallery Building upkeep is carried out by the Estates Department at SOAS. The Estates Department has a Buildings Plan for the upkeep of all buildings which are its responsibility.
- 4.2 The Object and Artwork Collection is stored and displayed in the following buildings: Crozier Fine Arts Storage, The SOAS Gallery building, and in the SOAS College Building Directorate (SOAS, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London WC1H 0XG). The SOAS Estates department is responsible for the safety and procedures governing the use of all spaces in the building. The Head of Galleries & Exhibitions is the point of contact for all health and safety matters relating to the collection.
- 4.3 The two onsite Gallery Object Stores are secure spaces with restricted card access only and access to the stores recorded by SOAS Security. The stores have a monitored environment with targeted conditions of: Temperature – between 15–25°C with allowable fluctuations of +/- 5°C per 24 hr. Relative Humidity – between 40-60% with an allowable fluctuation of +/- 10% per 24 hr.
- 4.4 The Gallery security standards meet the eligibility requirements for the UK Government Indemnity Scheme [GIS] informed by the National Heritage Act 1980 and is routinely inspected by the National Security Adviser at Arts Council England.
- 4.5 The exhibition spaces have controlled and monitored environmental conditions with targeted conditions of: Temperature – between 15–25°C with allowable fluctuations of +/-5°C per 24 hr. Relative Humidity – between 40-60% with an allowable fluctuation of +/- 10% per 24 hr.
- 4.6 Consumption of food and drinks is strictly prohibited within the exhibition spaces with any exceptions guided by the food and drink conditions which apply under GIS and the National Heritage Act 1980, section 16.
- 4.7 The Estates Department at SOAS carries out an annual inspection of all buildings which are its responsibility and notifies the responsible board of any remedial or maintenance work required. The Head of Galleries & Exhibitions is notified of any required work, and responsibility for actioning any works is the responsibility of the SOAS Estates Department.

5. The collections

- 5.1 The Gallery is aware of the risks to the collection from environmental factors, poor handling, inadequate storage and display materials and methods, and of the need to record the condition of the collection. The Gallery cares for the collections in store, on display and, by setting suitable requirements for loan. It also monitors any items on loan for exhibition.
- 5.2 The Gallery staff monitor the objects in the collection through regular checks. This is done every three months for a targeted number of objects during the change-over of exhibitions. During this time, new objects are rotated in the permanent Collections exhibition in the Foyle Special Collections Gallery. These and other collections objects are inspected and checked.
- 5.3 The details are listed in the Collection Care and Conservation Plan and include:
- Awareness of vulnerable objects
 - Identifying threats to the collection
 - Checking building condition
 - Building maintenance
 - Inspecting and cleaning the Gallery
 - Housekeeping and cleaning objects on open display
 - Condition checking the collection
 - Collections Care and Conservation records
 - Environmental monitoring including temperature, relative humidity, light and dust
 - Environmental control and improving the environment
 - Pest monitoring and managing the threat from pests
 - Equipment maintenance
 - Storage materials and methods
 - Display materials and methods
 - Transporting objects
 - Collection care resources
 - Professional advice
 - Remedial conservation and working with conservators
 - Training for the collection care team
- 5.3 The Object Stores and the Gallery spaces environmental conditions are all monitored using Hanwell environmental monitor loggers and standalone loggers.

6. Specialist collections

- 6.1 The Gallery holds a range of objects and artworks, some of which require special collections care given their materials. This is managed through utilising appropriate methods of storage, suitable environmental conditions, monitoring, rotating displays, and audits.
- 6.2 Tibetan Thangkas: The Tibetan Thangkas require more specialist conditions than our other collections. Our Thangkas are stored stitched to a fabric backing and one is stored in a frame. They are on display but are rotated to ensure limited lighting exposure and kept at 50-60 percent RH and 60-70 °F (15.5 -21°C).
- 6.3 Asian works on paper: scroll paintings will be stored in their original rolled position, either in their original box (unless unsuitable) or in an appropriate archival box. They may also be stored flat or in a frame if they have already been stored in this manner.
- 6.4 Works on paper: will either be kept framed or otherwise will be kept in suitable conditions if loose, such as in archival boxes with protective Melinex sleeves.
- 6.5 Textiles: The Gallery does not intend to acquire textiles. However, if an object contains textile, such as within a Thangka, it will be kept in suitable lighting and storage conditions as described above.

7. Communication

- 7.1 This policy will be communicated to staff in the following ways;

The main staff who deal with the Collection are the Collections & Engagement Officers and Head of Galleries & Exhibitions, who must be familiar with this policy. Any other person working with the collection, such as those working on an exhibition, taking an object on loan, an academic using an object in teaching, or temporary staff, will be briefed on the policy as relevant to the activity they are undertaking.

SOAS Estates are responsible for building maintenance, repair, cleaning and pest monitoring, and are already aware of these responsibilities. They would not have direct contact with any objects.

The policy will be communicated with other staff, students and the public through publication on the SOAS Gallery website.

8. Glossary

Accessioning means the process of formally recording the admission of a new object or group of objects into the Collection.

Accreditation means the scheme administered by Arts Council England (ACE) which assigns accredited status to museums and organisations with collections management that meets the standards set out in ACE's publication: The Accreditation Standard.

Accredited Museum means a museum that has met the Accreditation procedures set by the Arts Council England (ACE).

Artworks means works on paper, paintings, sculpture, fine art photographs and occasionally contemporary works in various media.

Gallery team is the Head of Galleries & Exhibitions and the Collections Officers

National Security Adviser at Arts Council England is responsible for providing security advice and approval for loans to museums and galleries in the UK, processing and approving security assessments for GIS applications.

Object means any item not considered an artwork which forms part of SOAS's collection: permanent (recorded in the accession register); support; temporary (e.g., a loan); or those used for educational handling.

Responsible Officer means the Head of Galleries & Exhibitions or the Collections Officers or relevant deputy of either.

Spectrum means the recognised UK museum industries collection management standard and is used by all Accredited Museums. All Accredited Museums must meet the Spectrum standard for its primary procedures.

SOAS Object and Artwork Collection or '**the collection**' means all objects, artwork and artefacts that relate to Africa, Asia and the Middle East held by SOAS which are managed by the Galleries & Exhibitions Office, and which do not form part of the SOAS Library Special Collections or other collections held by the SOAS Library.

UK Government Indemnity Scheme [GIS] administered by the Arts Council England provides government-backed cover against loss or damage to art or cultural objects borrowed by UK museums from private lenders or from non-national museums and galleries in the UK or abroad.