

Presentation, conservation and care of artworks

(Source: adapted from

<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/studioarts/Pages/Planning.aspx>)

Visiting exhibitions, whether in person or online, provides us with the opportunity to view artworks on display and to see how they are presented to viewers. By visiting and viewing exhibitions, we learn about the physical considerations of conservation and care, and study the methods employed by galleries, museums, collections, online spaces, other exhibition spaces and site-specific spaces to ensure that there are no physical changes or damage to artworks.

The conservation of artworks in an exhibition is the concern of artists and the personnel associated with the exhibition spaces where the artworks are placed. We will also learn about the complex considerations of conservation and care in relation to artworks, safeguarding them now and for the future.

Definitions of exhibition spaces

Online exhibition

An online exhibition is curated using digital technology in an online venue. Online exhibitions are only available to access via the internet and do not exist in a physical exhibition space. For example, an exhibition created via platforms such as Kunstmatrix or Ikonospaces.

Virtual exhibition

A virtual exhibition is an online digital replica of a physical exhibition. For example, technology such as Matterport stitches together photographic images of an exhibition space to create an interactive three-dimensional model of the physical gallery. Alternatively, virtual exhibition experiences may be available for audiences to access via a live or recorded tour of the exhibition through still and / or moving imagery.

Galleries

A gallery is an arts organisation in which audiences can view works of art on display indoors. For the purposes of this study galleries are distinct from museums as they do not hold a permanent collection and instead present a calendar of changing temporary exhibitions. Galleries may or may not have built in climate control facilities. There are various types of galleries with specific roles within the art industry, such as artist-run-spaces, public galleries and commercial galleries.

Museums

An art museum is an organisation dedicated to both the display and safekeeping of art. Exhibitions on display in the galleries of a museum may include artworks drawn from the museum's own collection or on loan from artists and / or other lending institutions. Museums typically have climate control infrastructure built into their facilities and back-of-house facilities for storing artworks. There are various types of art museums including public, private, university and house museums.

Collections

A collection is the accumulation of artworks by a public, private or university art museum. Collecting institutions typically have a specific acquisition policy or purpose that guides the development of their collection over time. The collection held by an arts organisation can form the core of their research, exhibition-making and education programs.

Site-specific spaces

Site-specific spaces present artworks that have been made for a particular place. The artist takes into account the context where the art will be shown as they develop the artwork. Site-specific spaces can be indoors or outdoors.

Other exhibition spaces

These can include artworks exhibited in unorthodox locations or venues during events or festivals and also artworks on display in artists' studios.

Presentation of art works

For the purposes of this study the presentation of artworks includes the following practical and aesthetic considerations:

- lighting and the effect of lighting on the appearance of the artworks and atmosphere within the exhibition space
- how spatial qualities such as the dimensions of permanent and temporary walls, sight lines and sound bleed can influence the placement of artworks and movement of audiences within an exhibition
- how surface treatments on walls and floors of the exhibition space (such as paint colour, wall texts or floor coverings) affect the overall atmosphere and narrative within the exhibition space
- how the placement of artworks and the relationships between them can communicate ideas, themes and stories that support the intentions of the artist(s)
- overall aesthetic display of artworks to influence the interaction of viewers and their understanding of the ideas behind the artworks on display
- student consideration of the aesthetics of the presentation of their own finished artworks in an exhibition space to realise their intentions.

Conservation

For the purposes of this study conservation practices for artworks include:

Environmental considerations

- methods of protecting artworks while they are on display, such as exhibition furniture (plinths and vitrines) and invigilation
- art handling, transport and storage methods for artworks
- condition reporting practices
- material stability of different art forms
- lighting levels while artworks are on display and in storage
- how temperature and humidity can affect the condition of artworks on display and in storage.

Ethical considerations

- Cultural protocols and instructions for the display, storage and handling of specific artworks, including works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Art Industry personnel involved with presentation, conservation and care of artworks are sensitive to the intention of the artist(s) who produced the work. They develop appropriate methods of storage, handling and display.
- Balancing the intentions of exhibiting artists with the care and conservation of artworks and access for audiences. Artworks that are performative, ephemeral, participatory, conceptual, produced using unstable materials or obsolete technologies can generate complex questions related to their care, conservation and display. Art Industry personnel consider the intention of the artists as they develop singular, appropriate methods to manage these artworks over time.
- Site-specific and public art (such as street art) is made and presented outside of galleries, museums, collections and online galleries, in a context that is often temporary and / or ephemeral nature. This leads to questions of what and how these artworks should be collected, preserved or conserved, and by whom.

Considerations for the display of artworks

Practical and aesthetic considerations		
Lighting	Fluorescent LED Track Spotlight	What effect does lighting have on the appearance of artworks?

Spatial qualities	Scale Sightlines Flow	What effect does the placement of temporary and permanent walls have on artworks? Consider sightlines, sound bleeding, and movement of the audience through exhibition spaces.
Surface treatments	Wall colour Floor Coverings Text panels Signage Banners	What effect do surface treatments have on the overall atmosphere of the exhibition space and artworks? Consider wall colours, floor coverings, text panels, signage.
Placement of the artworks	Narrative Themes Ideas	How does the placement of artworks and the relationship between them help to communicate ideas, themes and narratives in the exhibition space to support the intentions of the artist and curator?
Exhibition furniture	Plinths Vitrines Cases Chairs / Seating	How does the exhibition furniture such as plinths and vitrines help to protect artworks while they are on display?
Conservation and care considerations		
Environmental	Condition reporting	How do condition reporting practices help to care for artworks on display and in storage?
	Lighting and lux levels	What effect does lighting have on artworks on display and in storage?

	Temperature and humidity	How do temperature and humidity affect the condition of artworks on display and in storage?
Ethical considerations	Cultural protocols	What measures are in place to ensure that culturally sensitive artworks are cared for correctly?
	Unstable materials and obsolete technologies	What measures should be considered when caring for and displaying artworks that use unstable materials and obsolete technologies? What can museums do to ensure that artworks that use unstable materials and obsolete technologies can be viewed in the future?