



# BLASCHKAS

## SHIFTING CONTEXT, SHIFTING VALUE

The 'Blaschkas' are glass models of natural history specimens made around the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by Leopold and Rudolph Blaschka. Created to capture and display the nature of ephemeral biological specimens, the models were not always physiologically correct, but reflect the modellers' extraordinary skill. Unfortunately, the techniques they used died with their makers. Over time, other more immediate technologies such as photography took over rendering the glass models an artefact of their time. They are now of great international significance and value because of what we can learn from them, rather than for what they were meant to represent.

The Australian Museum has a collection of 116 glass marine invertebrates made by the Blaschkas. Of these, 68 models had only recently been found and were in poor condition. Many of the fragile models had suffered damage through inadequate housing and poor early repair work. Very few have undergone treatment. However, they now attract great interest and this necessitates safe access.



'After' - the handling system

### The handling system comprises:

- a custom-made handling tray for each model
- boxes with internal compartments that house multiple models
- a support structure that gently but securely holds the base of the model into the handling tray. To extract a model from its tray, the support at the base must be carefully pulled away from the model to release its grip and vice versa to return it
- rigid, vertical tabs attached to each tray to facilitate lifting it out of the box
- in some cases, boxes with drop-down fronts incorporating components that slide out, according to the particular needs of each model.

The system considers the weight and size of each box when full. Models were matched in terms of size, type and height to be space-efficient in storage and to spread the weight evenly across the box.



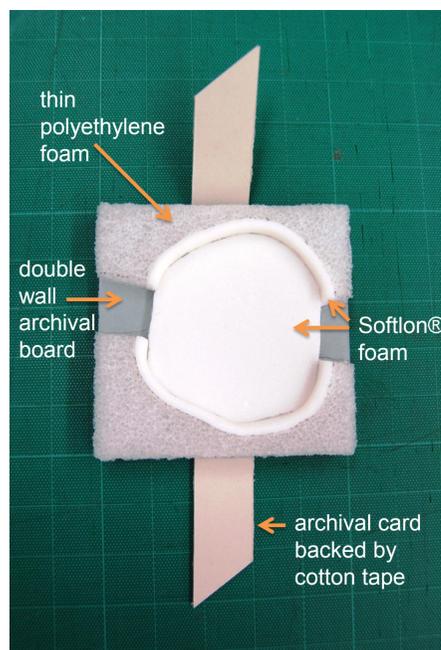
'Before' - as the Blaschkas were found

### Project overview

The aim of the project was to develop a safe handling system for the glass models. The storage system had to satisfy the dual purpose of providing safe handling and minimising the risk of a model becoming separated from its registration number. The actual models could not be labelled due to their delicate nature.



Safe and accessible storage



An individual handling tray



The system provides an elegant, effective and space-efficient solution with ready access to both the collection and individual models.

This project may provide a good model for other institutions grappling with keeping extremely fragile glass objects safely accessible for researchers and for the public to continue to learn from and enjoy.