

Relocating a Framed Collection State Library of New South Wales, Sydney



Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material Inc. National Conference, Katoomba 1-3 Nov 2017

AUTHORS: **Louise Anemaat**, Acting Executive Director, Library & Information Services and Dixson Librarian, State Library of New South Wales louise.anemaat@sl.nsw.gov.au / **Barbara Dabrowa**, Senior Conservator – Frames, Art Gallery of New South Wales barbara.dabrowa@ag.nsw.gov.au / **Catherine Thomson**, Senior Conservator, Book, Objects and Paintings, State Library of New South Wales catherine.thomson@sl.nsw.gov.au



Figure 1. State Library of New South Wales, Mitchell building

The collection of the State Library of New South Wales (figure 1) includes almost 1700 framed works in all formats. Acquired by the Library primarily for their documentary rather than aesthetic value, the collection includes many significant works of art recording the earliest visual responses to European settlement, as well as contemporary works documenting significant people, places, events, buildings and landscape.

By 2015 the existing Framed Collection Store in the Mitchell building (figure 2) had reached capacity. Commissioned 30 years earlier, the storage facility no longer met current storage, access or work health & safety requirements. Structural issues with the roof also resulted in water leaks and crumbling ceiling render.



Figure 2. Interior of the old Framed Collection Store, Mitchell building

A new framed collection store in the Macquarie building was commissioned to:

- deliver appropriate environmental, storage and security conditions
- allow for 20 per cent collection growth
- provide improved lighting, work spaces and collection access.

PREPARATION OF THE COLLECTION FOR RELOCATION

Prior to relocation to the new storage facility, preparations were undertaken to assess the condition of the artworks and their frames (figures 3 & 4). The call numbers were methodically checked, followed by a careful review of the verso and face of each artwork. Evaluation focused mostly on the frames (as they had never been assessed before) to establish their originality, style, finish and condition.



Figures 3 & 4. Condition assessment of collections in the old Framed Collection Store

An Excel spreadsheet (figure 5) was created to assist with prioritising the fragility and susceptibility to damage of the frames and works of art during relocation. This database included call numbers, the names of the artists and artworks, medium, photographs, brief descriptions and conditions of both the artworks and the frames. A colour chart was designed at the top of the spreadsheet and then used within the text for all information to be tracked more easily.

Figure 5. Excel spreadsheet used for assessment and relocation of the collection

A number of frames were found to be too fragile to be able to protect the artworks, or to be moved, and so stabilising conservation treatments were undertaken. This included consolidation of the flaking areas with diluted Plexol® B500 (figure 6) and gluing of separated pieces of the ornaments using Titebond® professional wood glue.



Figure 6. Consolidation of a fragile frame

All hanging devices were checked for strength and changed if necessary using proper D-latches or hooks according to the weight of the artworks in their frames. The most vulnerable works of art and their frames were carefully packed in appropriate protective wrapping of white Tyvek® sheets and bubble wrap with badges attached (figures 7 & 8).



Figures 7 & 8. Wrapping fragile artworks in the old framed collection store before relocation

THE RELOCATION

The new framed collection store was commissioned on 1 September 2015. Planning for the move required collaboration across different branches of the Library and the contracted art handlers, International Art Services (IAS).

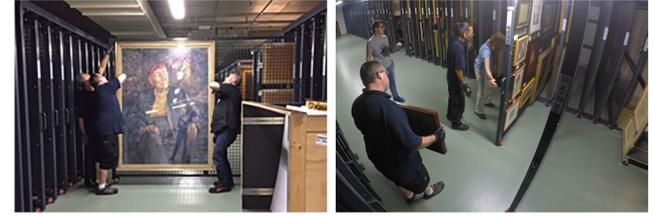
The complex route from the Mitchell building to the Macquarie building was fine-tuned after a trial run, relocating one rack of items of assorted sizes through staff-only areas. One of the lifts on the planned route proved too small for one type of transit trolley. The alternative route was through public spaces. A risk analysis was undertaken for the relocation and a Security escort was organised for the transits through these areas during opening hours.

Collection Care staff supervised packing in the old Framed Collection Store (figure 9), the transit of each shipment (figure 10) and the hanging of items in the new store (figures 11 & 12).



Figure 9. Packing trolleys in the old Framed Collection Store

Figure 10. Shipment in transit between the old and new Framed Collection Stores



Figures 11 & 12. Installing collections in the new Framed Collection Store

The progress of the move was closely monitored. With input from all parties, changes were made to the methodology during the first week and this resulted in a more efficient process. An additional Collection Care courier and extra support from the Library's Security team reduced the amount of downtime experienced by IAS and Library staff, which meant an increased number of shipments during opening hours.

The item assessment spreadsheet was adapted to register the movement of each item and its new rack location once relocated. Transit forms (figure 13) were prepared to identify each shipment, and enable clear communication between staff in the old and new Framed Collection Stores. The spreadsheet and the transit forms together enabled the progress of the relocation to be tracked.



Figure 13. Transit form on the one-hundredth shipment

Framed items were safely relocated over 16 days in November 2015. The relocation took a week longer than anticipated. The trial sample timing did not reflect the variability experienced with the whole collection. While a transit shipment could contain 20 items, more commonly they contained only five, or even just a single item.



Figure 14. The last shipment of collection items leaving the old store

Figure 15. The installation of the last item in the new store

CONCLUSION

The project successfully improved the preservation of the framed collection, providing space for collection growth, improved storage conditions, safer access for staff and improved lighting. It also involved a comprehensive survey of the condition of the framed collection, including the first survey of the frames, providing a base from which to prioritise future conservation work on these collections.

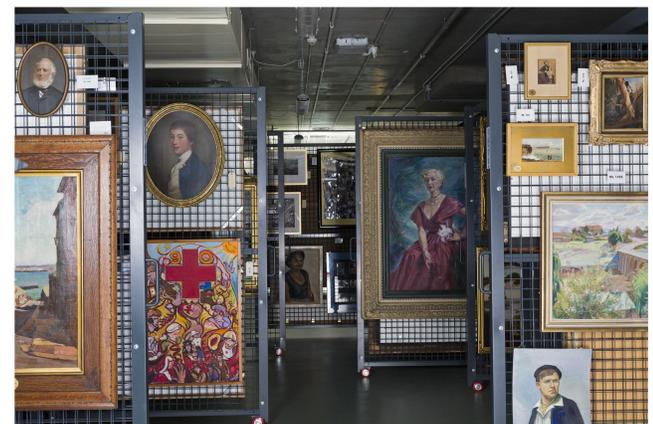


Figure 16. The new Framed Collection Store after relocation, showing part of the collection

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Collection Care Branch, State Library of New South Wales
Art Gallery of NSW for supporting Barbara Dabrowa's secondment to the State Library of New South Wales as Project Leader
International Art Services

A SELECTION OF PAINTINGS FROM THE STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES COLLECTION



DG 6



DG 60



ML 1199



ML 1195



ML 687



ML 318



DG 265



ML 1293



DG 5