Collection Management Policy

DakshinaChitra Heritage Museum

Table of Contents

A. Policies

1. Introduction
2. Statement of Vision and Mission
3. Objectives of the Collection Department
4. Purpose of the Collections Management Policy
5. Governance and Responsibilities
6. Acquisitions
7. Deaccessioning
8. Care and Handling of the Collection
9. Records and Inventories
10. Access to the Collection
11. Loan Management -
    - A. Outgoing Loan
    - B. Incoming Loan
12. Compliance and Policy Review

B. Procedures

1. Responsibilities of Registrar
2. Responsibilities of the Cultural Director and Senior Management Team (SMT) regarding Collection

A. Policies

I. Introduction -

DakshinaChitra Heritage museum, a project of the Madras Craft Foundation (MCF), is a premier institution dedicated to celebrating, promoting, and preserving the diverse arts, crafts, architecture, and lifestyles of South India. Since opening to the public in 1996, the Museum has consistently fostered cultural appreciation through engaging, participatory experiences. Looking ahead, DakshinaChitra aims to expand its digital presence, strengthen scholarly collaborations, and increase global outreach, ensuring its relevance for future generations.

II. Statement of Vision and Mission

Vision:

To be a leading centre for the preservation, interpretation, and celebration of South Indian heritage, inspiring cultural pride and global recognition.

Mission:

1. To collect, preserve, and promote the diverse art, craft, architecture, and lifestyle traditions of South India.
2. To create participatory, educational, and engaging experiences for the public.
3. To serve as a platform for research, education, and appreciation of South Indian cultural expressions.

III. Objectives of the Collection Department

1. Primary Objectives:
    a. Systematically collect, conserve, and exhibit artifacts representing South Indian heritage.

b. Conduct scholarly research, documentation, and dissemination of knowledge about the collections.

2. Secondary Objectives:
    a. Curate thematic exhibitions and educational programs.
    b. Develop digital access tools to broaden public engagement.

IV. Purpose of the Collections Management Policy

This policy establishes the framework for the acquisition, documentation, care, accessibility, and responsible disposal of the Museum's collection, ensuring:

1. Compliance with national and international museum standards (e.g., ICOM Code of Ethics).
2. Transparent and accountable collection management practices.
3. Ethical stewardship of cultural assets.
4. Promotion of public access, education, and scholarship.
5. Use of collection images for institutional advancement and fundraising purposes.

V. Governance and Responsibilities

V.1 Registrar

- Manage acquisition processes, accessioning, cataloguing, and inventory control.
- Conduct through provenance research and maintain comprehensive records.
- Oversee artifact storage, condition assessments, and digital documentation.
    a.
- Coordinate and manage incoming and outgoing loans.

V.2 Cultural Director and Senior Management Team (SMT)

- Review and approve all acquisitions, deaccessions, and loan arrangements.

- Ensure alignment with the Museum's strategic objectives and mission.
- Present acquisitions and deaccessions in regular Board reports.

VI. **Acquisitions**

A. General Principles

- The Director, Cultural Director, Registrar, Curator, Textile Conservator, and Conservator should propose exceptional works of art for acquisition to the collection that significantly further the Museum's stated mission.
- All works should be in an acceptable state of preservation unless the deteriorated physical condition is integral to the meaning of the work.
- The Museum must be able to display, store, and care for the proposed acquisition according to generally accepted museum practices.
- The Museum is committed to the principle that all collecting be done according to the highest standards of ethical and professional practice. The museum adheres to the International Code of Ethics established by ICOM (International Council of Museums).
- Considering the majority of our objects are donated, Donors, before donating any objects to the museum or wanting to gift a work of art to the museum, must produce a **letter of intent to donate or to gift**, along with proper documents regarding its ownership and provenance. This would legitimise and give us a clear provenance.
- If a Contemporary piece of art is being acquired/donated from/by the living artist of the artist's own work, then the artist should provide a "**Letter of Authentication**" along with the work of art.

B. Acquisition Guidelines

1. Acquire an item or consider a walk-in donation only after thoroughly considering its long-term value, how it will be used and the availability of contextual information.
2. Acquire an item only if the museum can provide adequate, continuing long-term care for the item and public access to it, without compromising standards of care and access relating to the existing collections.

3. Exercise due diligence when considering an acquisition. Verify the ownership of any item being considered for acquisition and that the current holder can legitimately transfer the title.
4. Reject any item that lacks a secure ownership history, provenance and documents and invoices supporting the ownership of the donor/ lender.
5. **Documents required for an established and unquestionable provenance are** -
    a. ** Receipts, Invoices, Bills of Sale: These confirm dates of ownership transfers and identify the parties involved.
    b. Appraisal Reports: May provide information about the object's value at a certain point in time, potentially for estate or insurance purposes.
    c. Auction Records: If the object has been sold at auction, sale records and auction catalogues can provide valuable information.
    d. Exhibition Catalogues: If the object has been exhibited in a museum or gallery, catalogue information can document its presence in that context.
    e. Inventory Numbers: If the object was part of a museum or corporate collection, its inventory number can be used to track its journey through the collection.
    f. ** Wills, Estate Inventories, Legal Documents: These can trace ownership through inheritance or legal transfers.
    g. Photographs: Images of the object with its previous owners can be valuable evidence.
    h. ** Signed Statements of Authenticity: From the artist or an expert can help authenticate the object.
    i. Original Gallery Sales Receipts: Provide evidence of purchase from a reputable source.
    j. Historical Photographs: Can document the object's condition and location over time.
    k. Customs, Export, and Import Documentation: May verify legal movements of the object across borders.
    l. Publication and Exhibition Records: Catalogues, brochures, and scholarly articles mentioning the object can provide additional context.
    m. Appraisal and Authenticity Records: Expert appraisals and scientific analysis reports can verify authenticity and origin.

**** Note - Starred documents are mandatory for consideration of acquisitions**

6. Careful selection is essential when acquiring items. The following points should be considered while selecting an object for acquisition. -
    a. The condition of the item.
    b. The acquisition price includes purchase price, transport costs, immediate conservation costs, documentation and research costs.
    c. The museum's ability to safeguard the item and provide access and expertise in the long term.
    d. The quality of information associated with the item, particularly information about its context.
    e. Detailed history, provenance, and documents & invoices supporting the ownership of the donor/lender, leading back to the source of the object
    f. The object should be consistent with the acquisition policy of the museum.

7. The museum is under no obligation to accept a gift or bequest offer. If the items offered do not meet the criteria set out above, refuse them firmly and tactfully, explaining the reasons why.
8. The following procedures will guide the steps of accepting a donation into our museum collection -
    a. To donate, email our registrar museumcollection.dc@gmail.com or write to us in advance to discuss your donation or to schedule a meeting.
    b. Please include the following in your inquiry -

        I. It's significant per our vision.
        II. Artifact description
        III. Artifact photo
        IV. Detailed history, provenance, and documents & invoices supporting the ownership of the donor/lender and leading back to the source of the object
9. Walk-in donations can be discussed only if the donor provides a proper letter of intent of donation, mentioning all the above points addressed to the Registrar. After discussing them with the Cultural Director and SMT, they can be considered for the Museum Collection, taking all the guidelines of the Museum Collection Policy into consideration.
10. Any kind of acquisition - whether donation, purchase, or loan- will be considered only after discussion between the Registrar and the Cultural Director, taking into account the guidelines of the Museum Collection Policies, which will be signed off by the Senior Management Team (SMT).

At each board meeting, the SMT will present a collections report that shares acquisitions/accepted donations.

11. Once an artifact is donated, ownership of the artifact transfers to the museum. Donors cannot request to reclaim their donation in the future, nor can they ask to change the donation into a long-term loan. It should be clearly established from the outset whether the object is a donation or a loan.

C. Objects which can be considered

Ethnological objects, which include textiles, utensils, wooden, stone, ceramic, leather, or metal objects, which tell stories of different ethnic groups or communities of the South and their culture, are the main priority objects of our collection.

Craftspeople and their craft are major stakeholders for the museum. Fine examples of craft by craft masters, both living and deceased, should be a part of our collections. While emphasis should be placed on South Indian crafts, crafts representative of the traditions of India from other parts of the country can also be collected.

Folk performing artists are also stakeholders. Their costumes and musical instruments from South India should only be collected. Classical instruments used in the South can also be collected, but should be donated or loaned for an exhibition.

Archaeological artefacts and Ancient Art: These would be few but should tell the history of the early settlers in South India. They would be used only for special exhibitions, or as part of special exhibitions. These collections are not a priority, unless donated or on long-term loan. These objects, if antique, should either be registered as Antiques by ASI, and we should get a copy of the certificate and have to change the ownership to the name of the

Museum through ASI (Archaeological Survey of India), or the Museum has to register those objects under ASI.

Contemporary Art: As DakshinaChitra reflects an evolving culture, Contemporary art from artists of South Indian origin only should be purchased or acquired.

D. Approval Process:
   - Reviewed by the Registrar and Cultural Director.
   - Endorsed by the SMT
   - Reported to and ratified by the Board of Trustees.

Note: Donations are irrevocable and permanently become part of the museum's collection.

VII. Deaccessioning

A. General Principles

The term "deaccession" means that an artwork is removed from the collection and considered for disposal by **sale, exchange or other means**. Any deaccession of a work should be solely for the advancement of the Museum's mission. The criteria for determining whether an object should be deaccessioned include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The work does not further the mission of the Museum.
2. The work is redundant or is a duplicate and is not necessary for research or study purposes.
3. The work is of lesser quality than other objects of the same type in the collection or about to be acquired.
4. The work lacks sufficient aesthetic merit or art historical importance to warrant retention.
5. The SMT determines that the return of the object to the previous owner is in the best interest of the Museum.

6. The Museum is unable to conserve the object reversibly.
7. The work is unduly difficult or impossible to care for or store properly.

B. Procedure

- The Registrar submits a recommendation to the Cultural Director.
- SMT reviews and approves deaccession proposals.
- Registrar will keep the complete record of the objects deaccessioned from the Museum Collection, both manually, in the Deaccession register, and digitally, in the Collection Management Database software.

VIII. Care and Handling of the Collection

The Museum is first and foremost a repository of works of art, and its mission requires the care of works of art in its collection. The Museum shall conserve them per the highest standards. The Museum shall provide a safe and appropriate environment for the collections, with effective security and environmental control, for the benefit of present and future generations. The Museum shall maintain a Collections Emergency Plan that is continually updated in accordance with current best practices based on current knowledge. The Museum's standards of care shall also be maintained for works of art on loan to the Museum or borrowed from the Museum.

The Museum's Conservation Departments are charged with the long-term care of the collection and shall maintain exact documentation on all examination and treatment work. The Museum's Conservation Departments and the Collection Management Department share responsibility for the technical examination of the Museum's collection and for the development of long-term preventive methods and conservation strategies, including best installation practices.

ICOM's standard for the museum storage environment will be used for proper storage of the artworks. The standard museum storage environment includes:

1. Temperature (T) - 16℃ to 25℃
2. Relative Humidity (RH) - 45% to 55%
3. Light - <150 LUX

IX. **Records and Inventories**

The Registrar shall maintain accurate, up-to-date records on the identification, location, and condition of all the objects in the collection, as well as of the ongoing activities such as exhibitions done using works of art from museum collections, or objects loaned from outside collectors or galleries or museums for any exhibition.

The Museum needs a Collection Management Database software to categorise and store information on objects housed within the organisation. The software will allow the cataloguing and maintenance of records of artefacts, photos, artworks, documents and more, all in one place.

It is the responsibility of the Registrar to make weekly inspections of the galleries and exhibition cases. The Registrar shall inventory the contents of its galleries, exhibition cases, and storerooms at least twice every calendar year. These inventories must be submitted in writing to the Director, who shall report the findings to the Board of Trustees. The inventory is subject to review by the Internal Auditors.

X. **Access to the Collections**

It is fundamental to the Museum's mission to provide access to the Museum's Collections and promote appreciation of its significance.

Among the primary means of achieving this goal is presenting exhibitions of its own works and those borrowed from other owners. The Museum shall provide additional access to its collections through its Collection images and details from the catalogue cards. The Museum shall support continuing scholarly investigation and research to document, publish, and advance understanding of the Museum's collections as well as contribute to broader academic and public discourses.

The Museum shall support and encourage awareness and understanding of the lifestyle and traditions of South India, by disseminating information through the development of publications, programs, and its website for a variety of audiences ranging from children to adult audiences and scholars. These will draw upon its collection and research as primary sources for stimulating aesthetic engagement and promoting familiarity with South Indian art and lifestyle in its historical, cultural, and material contexts.

XI. **Loan Management**

A. <u>Outgoing Loan</u>

<u>Review of Requests</u>

As an important means of fulfilling educational and scholarly purposes, the Museum can lend works of art from its collection to qualified institutions. Loan requests must be evaluated in light of the historical and scholarly value of the exhibition for which they are requested, as well as the condition of the object and the need for it to remain at the Museum.

All the loan requests shall be initially reviewed by the Board of Trustees/ Founder, Director, Cultural Director and the Registrar. After being satisfied with the facilities report regarding the micro and the macro-environment arranged for that object, proper security, proper handling and display of the object - produced by the Borrower, the Cultural Director, the Registrar and the Conservator, may approve the outgoing loan.

<u>Duration, Conditions, Insurance, Immunity</u>

1. All loans should be for a specific period of time (normally not to exceed one year) and may be recalled immediately if the Museum's review of the borrower discloses unsatisfactory conditions or

continuation of the loan is placing an undue administrative burden on the Museum.

2. The object's condition must be documented pre- and post-loan, both theoretically as a condition report and also through photo documentation of the object from four sides - front, back, left and right sides of the object.

3. The museum environment and display conditions should be monitored in accordance with the detailed procedures approved by the Museum. The detailed procedures will depend on the nature of the object, and will be decided before the object is lent to the receiver/borrower.

4. All borrowers must agree in writing to the Museum's Conditions for Outgoing Loans (contained in the borrower's agreement) prior to shipment of the loan, and the borrower's agreement must be signed by both parties.

5. All loans must be governed by formal agreements ensuring full insurance coverage and proper care. Loans should be insured for full replacement value.

B. <u>Incoming Loans</u>

The Museum accepts temporary loans of art for short-term exhibition ("Exhibition Loans") and long-term display in its galleries alongside the Collections ("Loans to the Collections").

1. For a **Short-Term Loan**, the lender has to fill up an Incoming Loan Form, mentioning all the details about the object(s) and the purpose for which it will be lent to the museum. Short-Term Loan Receipt has to be signed by the Lender, the Museum Director, and the Registrar and the original copy should be handed over to the lender. The Registrar should fill out the Loan Cards and should be signed by both the lender and the Registrar. This should be updated again in the loan register and the collection management database software. On return

of the loaned object after the due date, the lender has to sign the Short-Term Loan Return Receipt and the Loan card, with a declaration of receiving the object and having no claims.

2. For a **Long-Term loan**, a contract has to be made with the details of all the objects the museum wishes to take as a loan from another individual or a museum, with proper photographic documentation of every object, as it has to be signed by both parties. The Director, Founder/Board of Trustees, and Registrar are the authorities for sanctioning the Long-Term Loan.

3. Managed through formal agreements outlining responsibilities and conditions.

4. Both written documentation (on catalog cards) and photographic documentation has to be completed, along with the condition report of the artworks.

5. Return protocols must be clearly followed, with a detailed condition report of the artwork, including photo documentation before, during, and after the packaging process.

XII. Compliance and Policy Review

- This policy shall be reviewed every three years or earlier if needed.
- All collection activities must comply with Indian law, international conventions, and recognised ethical standards (ICOM's code of ethics).
- Deviations from this policy require prior approval from the Cultural Director and SMT.

B. Procedures

B.1 Responsibilities of Registrar

1. **Acquisition –**
    a. Artifacts are acquired either through purchase, donation or borrowed from individuals or organisations.
    b. Researching the provenance and the ownership of the artifacts, if donated or purchased
    c. Preparing and signing of MRN (Material Receipt Number)
    d. For a donation, write an acknowledgement letter, file one copy in the acknowledgement file, and send the letter to the donor.

2. **Accessioning –**

    a. Assigning Serial and Accession Numbers in the master register
    b. Writing /painting accession number, if the artifact is an object
    c. Stitching a tag if the artifact is textile, and writing the accession number with a permanent black marker on it.

3. **Master Register –**

    a. There are three Master Registers - one for textiles, one for objects, and one for Contemporary Art. The Master registers are in both physical as well as digital format.
    b. The Master Register lists all the artifacts in the permanent collection in the order of acquisition.
    c. The Serial No. is given continuously to the object received and is added to the collection. Accession No. is given in ascending order, year-wise. (It begins with 1 with the start of a new year. For textiles, the letter 'T' is added before the Accession No. For Contemporary Art, letters "CA" are added before Acc. No.)
    For example: Artifact with S. No. 1002 and Acc. No. 2/2004 is the 1002nd artifact in the DakshinaChitra Collection and is the 2nd object received in the year 2004.

d. Master register includes - the Serial number, Name of Artifact, Accession Number, Provenance, Method of Acquisition, Address of the donor or the supplier (if purchased), Date, Bill Received, Value, MRN (Material Receipt Number), Storage Location
e. Similarly we have a loan register to keep a record of the incoming and outgoing loan objects, keeping a record of all the objects the museum received as loan and it also records the date of its return.
f. Register of Deaccession of artifacts for keeping a record of the artifacts are deaccessioned because of reasons like objects in poor condition which cannot be restored or conserved further, or as the object has been stolen or gone missing from the display.

4. **Cataloguing –**

a. Documentation – Recording of data related to the objects, description of the object, study the use of the object and categorization based on its use and documenting the condition of the object when acquired, as per catalogue card.
b. Photo documentation – Photograph the artifact in the studio and attach the color print to the catalog card, keeping the digital copy archived by the year the artifact was received by the collections department.

5. **Maintenance of Site Register and Store Register –**

Updating and modifying the Site Registers of permanent exhibitions and store registers both manually and digitally when changes are made.

6. **Research –**

a. Researching and studying artifacts using books from the museum library or verified sites from the internet or the

researched papers produced by scholars or researchers or studying the communities.

b. Transferring data onto the catalogue cards
c. Providing information to the researchers or scholars
d. The Museum will thoroughly research the ownership history of any archaeological materials or ancient art prior to its acquisition, including making a rigorous effort to obtain accurate written documentation concerning its history, including import and export documents. When relying on such documentation, the Museum will make every effort to verify the authenticity by contacting persons contemporaneously connected to the document(s). The Museum will require sellers, donors, and their representatives to provide all information they know and documentation they possess related to any archaeological materials or ancient art being offered to the Museum. All this should be followed for proper and verified knowledge of the provenance of the object and its ownership.

7. **<u>Storage</u> –**

a. Proper storage of artefacts
b. Regular and frequent inspection of the object in display and the storage environment (twice a month)
c. Maintenance of the store register and the artifact storage Excel sheet
d. Storage spaces –

1. Artifact Storeroom 1 (AS-I), inside the Textile Conservation Lab, houses artifacts from Tamil Nadu and Kerala

2. Artifact Storeroom 2 (AS-II), near the Kadambari art gallery, houses artifacts from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh

3. Artifact Storeroom 3 (AS III), inside Conservation lab Hall, and cupboards, numbered as CL C 1, 4, 6, 7, 8

4. The storeroom at Sattanur, houses Golu dolls, which are exhibited during the Dussera festival, every year.

5. Drawing Cabinet Leather puppets, unframed paintings and prints are stored flat in this special cabinet

6. Framed paintings are stored in a vertical position on slotted angle racks

e. Textile Storage

1. Delicate and old textiles are preserved by rolling them in acid-free tissue paper on PVC pipes and shelving them on the textile stand in the Conservation Lab.

2. Due to lack of space, not all textiles are rolled. They are neatly folded and stacked in the cupboards in the hall, and they are numbered as - CL C 2, 3, 5, 9, 10

8. **<u>Display and Movement of Artifacts</u> –**

a. Selecting an artifact to be displayed based on the theme of the exhibition, and then moving them for display at the exhibition site
b. Recording the movement in **Catalogue cards, Site Register, Master Register and Excel sheet (digital)**
c. Periodic physical inventories are done to confirm the accuracy of the location

9. **<u>Loan</u> –**

a. Getting the incoming loan form filled out by the lender and receiving those artifact(s) from them.
b. Filling out the **Short-Term Loan Receipt** and handing over the original copy to the lender.
c. Filling out the **loan card**.
d. Updating the **Loan Register**.

e. On return, the lender has to fill in the date of return and sign there with a declaration of receiving the object and having no claims.
f. You also need to fill out a loan form when DakshinaChitra lends artwork to any other institution or organization.

10. **Stock-taking**

a. Conducting biannual stock-taking in March and September every year of all display and storage areas
b. Preparing Inventory

11. **De-accessioning**

a. The term “deaccession” means that a work is removed from the collection and considered for disposal by sale, exchange or other means. Any deaccession of a work should be solely for the advancement of the Museum's mission.
b. For De-Accessioning, the Registrar will share the details of the object, along with the reason for de-accessioning the same, with the Director of Culture. The Director of Culture will then determine whether it can be de-accessioned or not, and then share the details of that de-accessioned object with the SMT. The SMT will include deaccessioned items in the board report.
c. Registrar will keep the complete record of the objects de-accessioned from the Museum Collection, both manually, in the Deaccession register, and digitally, in the Collection Management Database software**.

12. **Receipts**

a. Receipts are issued for all objects coming into the museum's custody.
b. The person bringing the artifacts provides the donor’s name and address. If purchased, the bill must be checked and signed

by the Registrar. If the bill is not available, the information should be sought from the MCF Accountant-In-charge.

c. Must verify the list and bill with the artifacts coming to the museum collection, and are then moved to the artifacts storeroom.
d. The bill book needs to be prepared and signed, and then produced to the Accounts department for MRN.
e. The accountant inputs the data into the computer, preparing the material receipt note (MRN). The registrar signs both the original and a copy; the original is sent to MCF, while the accountant retains the copy.
f. The artifacts are then moved to the stores immediately for accessioning and cataloguing work

12. **Acknowledgement Letter**

a. MC-Incharge sends acknowledgement letters to the donor/lender.
b. A copy of the letter is filed in the donor letters file.

13. **Setting Thematic exhibition at the reception area**

Setting a thematic exhibition at the reception area every month based on the festivities

14. **Exhibition using museum collection artefacts**

Curating an exhibition once a year, at one of the galleries (Kadambari or Varija) using artefacts from the museum collection.

B.2 Responsibilities of the Cultural Director and Senior Management Team (SMT) regarding Collection

The Cultural Director and the Senior Management Team (SMT) have the following responsibilities concerning the collection:

1. The power to accept or decline acquisitions, in the form of donations, gifts, bequests, or purchases, and borrowing from other individuals/organisations, is vested in the Director of Culture and the Senior Management Team (SMT). At each board meeting, the SMT will present a collections report that shares acquisitions/accepted donations.
2. Based on the Registrar's recommendation, the final decision to deaccession works of art due to their irreparable condition, irrelevance to our museum collection, or an excess of duplicates is the responsibility of the Cultural Director and the Senior Management Team (SMT). The SMT will include details of the deaccessioned items in the board report.
3. The Biannual inventory is also checked and verified by the Cultural Director and SMT.

** from page 19 - To be acquired