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Accessioning and Managing the Petersburg Area Art League Collection

A thesis project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

ACCESSIONING AND MANAGING THE PETERSBURG AREA ART LEAGUE COLLECTION

By Janelle S. Wilson, M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at
Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010

Major Director: Dr. Margaret Lindauer,
Associate Professor, Museum Studies Coordinator, Department of Art History

Since the 1960s, the Petersburg Area Art League (PAAL) has obtained works of art for its permanent collection through purchases, private donations, and through the local art show, the Poplar Lawn Art Festival, later known as Artfest. Recently, however, the organization has decided to become a non-collecting institution in order to focus on its mission to promote the arts in Petersburg through gallery shows for local artists and educational programs. While PAAL's staff members share a love of art and a dedication to the local community, they have not been trained in professional standards for handling museum collections as outlined by the American Association of Museums (AAM). Consequently, the PAAL collection had not been adequately documented or stored in a manner that protected the works from potential damage or degradation. This museum project was designed to help the Petersburg Area Art League meet AAM standards. During the summer of 2010, the collection of 150 artworks was accessioned;

its storage facility was reorganized; a database was created; and a collections management policy that would ensure the continued care of the collection after the completion of this project was written and approved. This paper describes challenges encountered and resolved during the two-month project and provides a reference for those who wish to take on similar projects in the future.

Introduction

This museum project took place at the Petersburg Area Art League located in the historic district of Old Towne Petersburg, during the summer of 2010. It consisted of organizing, documenting, and accessioning PAAL's collection of 150 artworks. In addition, a collections management policy was created to ensure the continued care of the collection once the project had been completed. This project write-up will begin with a brief history of PAAL and its collection to recount how the collection came to be in its present state. My work on the collection came at an essential time for PAAL, insofar as the organization is currently undergoing renovation and expansion, not only to the building, but also to its public programs. A thoroughly documented and well organized collection will allow PAAL's staff to properly care for the works in its possession, while making it easier to access the objects and use them for gallery shows and in selected educational activities.

In order to accomplish the goals of this project, I referred to current museum collections management literature that provided guidelines and methods for documenting a collection.

Although PAAL is not currently seeking accreditation from the American Association of Museums (AAM), I determined that it was best to follow the AAM Accreditation Commission's standards as closely as possible, in case accreditation is sought in the future. The AAM was created in 1906 and is devoted to the development of standards and best practices for the museum profession. Museums in the United States that meet these standards may be accredited by the AAM. Among approximately 16,000 museums in the country, only about 750 are

accredited at any one time.¹ According to Hugh Genoways and Lynne Ireland, the authors of *Museum Administration: An Introduction*, the Accreditation Commission is the section of the AAM that “sets the ‘gold standard’ and grants accreditation to museums that meet its rigorous criteria.”² The standards most relevant to PAAL are the possession of a current and approved collections management policy, the use of a reliable system of documentation, and the documentation of at least eighty percent of the collection.

By taking on this project, I sought not only to provide PAAL with a well documented collection but also to gain valuable professional experience. After completing my Master of Arts degree, I plan to pursue a career in museum collections management and registration. Working with the PAAL collection provided first-hand experience in accessioning, creating a database, and writing collections management policies. To some people, the work that registrars and collections managers do might seem dry and not very intellectually demanding. As Janet Grossman, retired Associate Curator of Antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum, states, some of her “curatorial colleagues think that registrars are an irritating fact of museum life,” and that a registrar’s or collection manager’s attention to detail is “a hindrance to the creative process that most curators imagine themselves engaged in.”³ That being said, it is the effort and dedication put forth by the registrars and collections managers, in collaboration with the rest of the museum staff, that make the museum’s exhibitions and day-to-day activities possible.

¹ Hugh H. Genoways and Lynne M. Ireland, *Museum Administration: An Introduction*, (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2003), 240.

² Genoways and Ireland, *Administration*, 12.

³ Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore, eds., *MRM5: Museum Registration Methods*, 5th Ed, (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 2010), 18.

Chapter One: A Brief History of the Petersburg Area Art League and its Collection

In order to fully appreciate the context of this project and the initial state of the Petersburg Area Art League collection, it is useful to begin with the history of the organization and how it came to own its diverse collection of artworks. Like many institutions that house and display art, the PAAL was founded by a group of people with a passion for art and a desire to enrich their community, rather than by people trained in museum and collections management. Originally named the Petersburg Art League, PAAL was formed in 1932 by the late Miss Anna Dunlop, who served as the organization's first president.⁴ After studying art as an elective at St. Mary's School in Raleigh, North Carolina, Miss Dunlop continued her education at the Art Students League in New York. She later traveled to Europe, studying art in Germany, England, Italy, and Paris. While in Paris, she studied under the famous artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler and honed her artistic skills by copying works at the Louvre. When she returned to Petersburg, Virginia, she opened her own studio and school, known as the Petersburg School of Art, which fueled interest in the arts within in the Petersburg community. At the same time, Dunlop continued her artistic endeavors, and was the first artist whose work was featured in a one-person show at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia. Her work was also displayed at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. In 1950, Dunlop was presented with a silver star inscribed by the artists of Petersburg in recognition of her efforts to

⁴ The history of PAAL has been documented by an anonymous author of an informal document on file at PAAL.

promote the arts in the community. In the 1950s, the Petersburg Art League, with Dunlop's support, changed its name to the League of Petersburg Artists, and held its meetings in various locations around Petersburg, including Dunlop's studio. It was not until 1960 that the organization began operating under its current name, the Petersburg Area Art League, and it took yet another decade for PAAL to find a permanent location.⁵

PAAL's current location at 7 East Old Street was built by Robert Buckner Bolling in 1859 and historically known as the Bolling Warehouse. The warehouse was an ideal place to store goods carried along the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad, which began operating one year earlier with a train station located directly behind Bolling's property. Over the years, the former warehouse has seen many uses and owners. In 1971, when Mr. Walter Brown purchased the property, PAAL rented the second floor of the building, which became its first consistent location in which to hold meetings and activities. Mr. Brown also supported the local art community by opening the Rock Street Craftsman Guild in the rear of the building on the first floor. In 1983, Walter Brown's widow, with the support of her family, donated the entire building to PAAL, guaranteeing a continued presence for the organization in Petersburg's historic Old Towne district.⁶

The Petersburg Area Art League collection is currently housed on the second floor of the Old Street building. The first artworks obtained by PAAL, in the 1960s, were those that were awarded first place at the annual art show, known as the Poplar Lawn Art Festival, later called Artfest. In return for a cash prize, the winner of the show would donate his or her winning work to PAAL. Because of this arrangement, about forty percent of the works in PAAL's collection were obtained between the years 1965 and 1999, the last year Artfest was held. According to

⁵ "Overview of Petersburg Area Art League: History of Petersburg Area Art League," unpublished document, Petersburg Area Art League.

⁶ "Overview."

PAAL's history, the first Poplar Lawn Art Festival was held in 1959, and, over the years, grew in popularity, eventually becoming one of the best art shows on the east coast. The growing popularity led to increased financial prizes awarded to the winners. In 1972, the first-place winner took home a cash prize of \$500; by 1994, the prize for first place had grown to \$10,000.

In addition to the artworks obtained from the Poplar Lawn Art Festival, PAAL has purchased works. However, they make up a very small portion of the collection, about four percent. A much larger percentage, over half the collection, is composed of works that were donated to the organization, works that were never retrieved after gallery shows, and those made by students from local schools or art classes taught at PAAL. Overall, the collection of 150 works range widely in quality and were created by local and Virginia artists in a variety of media, including sculpture, oil painting, watercolor, photography, drawing, and various other two dimensional forms.⁷

On August 6, 1993, a class-4 tornado tore through Old Towne Petersburg and caused debilitating damage to PAAL's building, to the extent that institutional operations and the PAAL collection, some of which had received water damage, were moved to a temporary location (at first St. Paul's Episcopal church, then the South Side Flea Market) until repairs could be made. After five years of renovation, the Petersburg Area Art League returned to its home on Old Street in 1998. Though the building was habitable, construction had not yet completed and is still in progress. An educational center has been finished on the second floor, funded, in part, through a grant from the Cameron Foundation. According to its website, the Cameron Foundation is "a not-for-profit organization established to promote and provide support for programs and activities that benefit the residents of the City of Petersburg, Virginia, and the surrounding area." The Cameron Foundation is also supporting the joint venture between PAAL and Virginia State

⁷ Ibid.

University to create a museum exhibition space in the rear of the building. Along with the Cameron Foundation, the City of Petersburg has assisted PAAL in its efforts to create additional community space by donating the empty lot adjoining the Old Street building to PAAL for the purpose of creating an art park where sculptural works will be displayed and events that the entire community can enjoy will be hosted. While improvements to the building were being made, the storage space that housed the PAAL collection consisted of a single room that had not yet seen any expansion or improvement and also contained art supplies.⁸

The Petersburg Area Art League is a non-profit, non-collecting institution and a state-wide partner of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Currently, PAAL is not looking to acquire any new works, but, instead, to use its current collection in conjunction with its mission “to promote and nurture the visual arts in the Petersburg area.” PAAL plans to offer afterschool youth programs, adult workshops, and classes available to people living in Petersburg and its surrounding counties. The PAAL staff, which includes, artists, people dedicated to the community, and people with experience working with non-profit institutions and grant writing, recognized the need to organize the collection so that the works could be used in educational programs, displayed in selected exhibitions, and stored in such a manner as to better ensure the preservation of the works. Because the PAAL staff does not currently include a member with museum collections management training, PAAL president, Ellen Ende (with permission from the Board of Directors) granted access to storage and collection records to me, allowing me to gain valuable professional experience, while also satisfying PAAL’s need to organize and document its collection, and to create a management policy that will ensure continued care of its artworks.

⁸ Ibid.

Chapter Two: Project Write-Up

I. Preliminary Work and Initial Reaction

I first saw the PAAL collection in the fall 2009 semester, prior to writing my thesis proposal. I met with the PAAL president, Ellen Ende, and the gallery administrator, Pam Roberts, to discuss the possibility conducting a thesis project. During the meeting, they took me to the storage room on the second floor of the building where the permanent collection was held. Because I had seen other museum storage rooms and because of my knowledge of collection storage standards and practices, I was taken aback by the state of PAAL's storage facility. The room itself was rectangular in shape, with white painted walls and a wooden floor. The wood on the floor was very old and part of the original construction of the building. Large nails had loosened themselves from the floorboards, and many other miscellaneous items, including string, pieces of paper, and tree leaves, covered the floor. The temperature of the room was cool, and I was informed that the controls for the air conditioning and heating were on the second floor. The room lacked windows and was in the interior of the building. While the construction of the room was sufficient to house the collection, the room was overcrowded and difficult to navigate. In fact, the back of the room was almost impossible to reach, and a path had to be cleared before it could be accessed (See Figure 1 and Figure 2). Though a few shelves lined the walls, most of the artworks were placed on or around three old painting storage racks that were not being used to their full potential (See Figure 3). Works were placed both on top of and inside the racks, with many works placed on top of each other in a manner that compromised the individual

pieces, insofar as the weight of the pieces and the edges of the frames could potentially damage the works beneath (See Figure 4). Other works were wrapped up in bubble wrap, brown paper, or plastic bags and placed among the chairs, frames, and other non-art materials (See Figure 5 and Figure 6). The crowdedness of the room risked damage to the art works as materials would have been added, removed, or rearranged. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that the room was also used for arts and crafts storage, which is not advisable, for the materials might be accidentally placed upon and damage the stored artwork.

After viewing the room, I determined that I would be able to organize the collection, and, with the help of the PAAL staff, separate the non-art materials from the permanent collection. Ende and Roberts also let me know that more shelves would soon be installed along one side of the room, providing storage space for all the arts and crafts and various other objects that had no other place to go. Though it would take time to get PAAL's storage space organized and the collection accessioned, I knew that the work would provide a much safer environment for the collection and make the artworks more accessible.

Prior to beginning this project in summer 2010, I conducted research during the spring 2010 semester to make certain that I would be fully prepared for my work at the Petersburg Area Art League. I began my research by meeting with the Ende and Roberts. The purpose of this meeting was to ensure that both the PAAL staff and I shared similar expectations for the project and that the methods I planned to use would meet approval. First, I needed to know which style of object labeling, either semi-permanent or temporary, would be preferred by the staff. Second, I solicited their thoughts about what type of database for the collection would be appropriate. Ende and Roberts preferred a semi-permanent object label that could not be accidentally removed or easily lost. Further information on the object labeling process will be addressed later in this

write-up. However, at this point I should note that from my prior experience working at the James Madison University art collection in Harrisonburg, Virginia, I knew that all materials required for properly labeling an artifact or work of art could be obtained in a collections labeling kit. In order to verify the distributor of collection kits, I contacted the director of the Madison Art Collection, Dr. Kathryn Stevens. She confirmed that the materials could be purchased through the company Gaylord Brothers, whose online website, www.gaylord.com, lists library supplies, furniture, and archival materials that the company provides.

Once I knew how to obtain the necessary collections labeling materials and had informed PAAL of what I would need, I turned my attention to researching potential databases. Like the collections labeling process, final database selection and implementation will be described later in this paper. It was necessary to know which software program I would use to document PAAL's collection so that any necessary purchases could be completed prior to starting the project. While some of the current collections management literature notes the significance of databases, descriptions of the programs available in this literature are not detailed enough for a prospective user to make an educated selection for purchase. Websites for companies that sell database software also provide descriptions; however, I found that the most useful information came from people who used one or more of these programs in a museum setting. I accordingly turned to the listserv maintained by the Registrar's Committee of the American Association of Museums (RC-AAM).

RC-AAM, a section of the AAM, was formed in the 1970s. Its mission is to further the best practices and standards for collections stewardship. The RC-AAM listserv provides a means for registrars and those interested in collections management to communicate, provide support, and assist each other with collection related questions. As a member of this listserv, I

was aware of its potential for helping me evaluate database software. I sent out a message stating that I was searching for a database for a non-profit organization with a very small collection. By the following day, I had received over twenty responses from registrars working in various states, including Connecticut, Indiana, Texas, Florida, and California. The overall consensus was that programs used by larger institutions (e.g., The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Chrysler Museum of Art) would be unnecessary and that database systems such as Filemaker Pro or Microsoft Access would be the most appropriate as well as the most affordable. Based on responses from the RC-AAM listserv, my research of websites, and my observations of the day-to-day demands that PAAL encounters, I settled on a program that I initially believed to be suitable to document the collection. Armed with the knowledge of how I was to go about labeling and databasing the collection, as well as with the Object Information Sheet (Appendix B) that I created to document relevant information for each work in the collection, I felt prepared to begin my project of organizing and accessioning the Petersburg Area Art League collection.

II. Documenting the Collection

The Petersburg Area Art League collection, according to a list compiled by the staff, included ninety-three artworks in 2008. I was provided with a copy of this list, which I used as a starting point for the organization of the collection. The list provided the date the works were acquired (beginning in 1965), the title of the works, the artists, and the dimensions. For some objects, the abbreviations “BIS” and “PP” were also recorded. The abbreviation BIS stands for “Best in Show,” which refers to the objects donated to PAAL by the winners of the Poplar Lawn Arts Festival. The other abbreviation, PP, stands for “PAAL Purchases,” works purchased by PAAL’s staff over the years. Other information, such as whether the work was a donation, given

a special award, or part of a series was also noted. One piece of information which caught my attention was the fact that several of the objects were listed as “missing.” By referring to this list while organizing the collection, I would be able to identify individual objects, make note of those that were not listed, and attempt to locate the works that were assumed to be missing.

When I arrived at PAAL for my first day, I was disappointed to find that the shelves in the storage room had not yet been installed and that none of the non-art materials had been organized. (For a timeline of this project, see Appendix A.) Despite this minor setback, I began doing my best to separate the artworks from the other miscellaneous objects in the storage room. The first problem I came across was the number of works I was locating that were not mentioned on the collection list. Many of these works appeared to be of high quality, while others were obviously made by children, perhaps students from local schools or children who had been enrolled in one of PAAL’s art programs. The majority of these works were framed and had PAAL labels attached to them, indicating they had once been displayed in a PAAL exhibition. I mentioned to the PAAL staff that I had come across these unlisted works. Due to staff changes and an absence of detailed records, they did not have an explanation for how or why the works were stored at PAAL but not included on the inventory list. Some works could have been donated or purchased, while others might have simply been left at PAAL by the artists. Despite the absence of records, I included each piece of art in the permanent collection, making sure that each would be appropriately documented. Once the works were documented, PAAL staff members and the Board of Directors could decide what to do with the previously unlisted works. By the time I finished documenting each piece, the number of artworks in PAAL’s collection had increased from ninety-three to 150.

The first step when documenting an object is to assign it an accession number; according to Hugh H. Genoways and Lynne M. Ireland, authors of *Museum Administration: An Introduction*, “accessioning is the process of entering objects and their proper documentation into the possession of the museum.”⁹ Each accession number is unique and is used to tie documentation and other records to the object.¹⁰ There are multiple systems for assigning accession numbers; however, two- and three-part systems tend to be the most common. When using these systems, each number is separated by a period. The first number indicates the year the object was accessioned and the “the second number indicates the sequence of the transaction by which the objects were formally taken into the collection.”¹¹ For example, an object that was acquired in the third transaction taking place in the year 1995 would be *1995.3*. A third number is included in an accession number only if more than one object was received during a single transaction. For example, if multiple items were obtained through the third transaction of 1995, the accession numbers would be *1995.3.1*, *1995.3.2*, *1995.3.3*, etc. Museums generally use the two- or three-part system because they can be continuously expanded as the collection grows.¹² Though objects are ideally accessioned in the year they are acquired, various circumstances, such as staff changes or collection relocation, can delay the accession process. In such circumstances, the accession number will reflect the accession year rather than the year in which the object was donated or purchased for the collection. Because the works at PAAL came into the collection through individual transactions, I used the two-part system, and, because they were not accessioned when they came into the possession of PAAL, the first work was assigned the accession number *2010.1* and the last accessioned as *2010.150*. Accession numbers were

⁹ Genoways and Ireland, *Administration*, 180.

¹⁰ Daniel B. Reibel, “The Registrar as Human Resource Manager,” in *Registrars on Record: Essays on Museum Collections Management*, ed. Mary Case, (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1995), 39.

¹¹ Buck and Gilmore, eds., *MRM5*, 207.

¹² *Ibid.*

assigned to the artworks as they were located in storage. Coincidentally, the work numbered 2010.01 was a self-portrait of Miss Anna Dunlop, the founder of PAAL.

Once an object has been assigned an accession number, standard object information should be recorded. I created and used Object Information Sheets (OIS) to document important information about a work, including the accession number, title, artist, dimensions, donor information, and description. After completing an OIS, I placed it into a file folder that had been labeled with the associated object's accession number. These files make it possible to easily locate information concerning a work, and registrars agree that "complete, accurate, and retrievable documentation reflects well on the [documentation] system and the collection."¹³ Not all museums document collection information in the same way, though steps have been taken towards standardizing the process. In 1979, the International Committee for Documentation (CIDOC) of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) recommended that museums keep records of specific types of collection and object information.¹⁴ According to its website, ICOM was established in 1946 "by and for museum professionals;" it represents "the global museum community." In order to address the many challenges faced by museums internationally, ICOM created a forum of "experts from 137 countries and territories." More specifically, CIDOC, as an ICOM committee and explained on its website, is "committed to the development of museum documentation." It recommends that the minimum amount of recorded information should include the following ten items: the name and address of the owner of the object; the object name; the object classification; acquisition information including the mode, date, source, and place of acquisition; object history; and description.¹⁵ The Object Information Sheets created for

¹³ Reibel, *Resource*, 42.

¹⁴ Karol A. Schmiegall, "Managing Collections Information," in *Registrars on Record: Essays on Museum Collections Management*, ed. Mary Case, (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1995), 49.

¹⁵ Schmiegall, *Information*, 49.

this project include these ten categories of documentation, but not all of these details were available for each artwork. For many works in the collection, the only recordable details were those that could be viewed and measured. For these works artist, title, and history, were simply noted on the OIS as “unknown.” The objects that were unidentifiable or not listed on the original collections list were labeled as “Found in Collection” or FIC. Unknown objects are often found in collections during inventories, and it is not unusual that it is impossible to discover when or how they came to be there. These items may have been gifts, purchases, bequests, loans, left over from special events and programs, or objects that belonged to former staff.¹⁶ If the origins of an object cannot be determined, the object becomes an FIC and may be accessioned into the collection, as was the case with many of the works found at PAAL. However, if the PAAL Board of Directors decides it no longer wishes to have the FICs or any other accessioned works in the collection, then the board members should do their best to follow the appropriate deaccessioning methods.¹⁷

Deaccessioning is a “formal change in recorded status of the object” resulting in disposal of the object.¹⁸ Methods of disposal include donating objects to another educational institution, exchanging objects with another non-profit institution, repatriating cultural items, returning objects to donors, and selling objects through public auction and private sale. Another method of disposal includes the physical destruction of the object. This is done when the object has deteriorated beyond the point of any possible restoration due to natural disasters, vandalism, accident, or other causes. Items can also be destroyed if they are considered hazardous, which

¹⁶ Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore, *Collection Conundrums: Solving Collections Management Mysteries*, (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2007), 37.

¹⁷ Buck and Gilmore, *Conundrums*, 45.

¹⁸ Buck and Gilmore, *MRM5*, 101.

includes those containing chemicals, explosive materials, or asbestos.¹⁹ When disposing of objects, the institution should take care that no items are acquired by museum staff, board members, or other relatives, for this can result in people questioning the museum's ethics and reasons for deaccession.²⁰

Over the past thirty-five years, deaccessioning has become a controversial topic and museum professionals have become very aware of "legal responsibilities, the public's expectations of museums, and ethics codes for institutions and individuals."²¹ Despite the controversy that can sometimes surround the deaccession process, deaccessioning is necessary because it removes objects from a museum's collection that can no longer be properly cared for or that no longer fit the museum's mission. In the 1970s, several institutions, the most prominent of which was the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, became aware of the need for a strong deaccession policy when their collection disposal methods became publicly scrutinized. Thirty years later, complaints are still made over the removal of objects from collections. While some complaints come from disgruntled donors whose gifts are being deaccessioned, others are more legitimate. In some instances, legal and ethical codes are violated when museum staff or their relatives personally benefit from the sale of objects, or when the funds generated by a sale are deposited in accounts for institutional operations unrelated to the collection.²²

One such case that shook the museum community occurred in 2007 at Randolph College in Lynchburg, Virginia. On October 1, 2007, the director of the college's Maier Museum of Art was taken by surprise when the college president, accompanied by supporting staff, city police, an attorney, and contracted art handlers, arrived to remove four paintings from the permanent

¹⁹ Ibid., 103.

²⁰ Ibid., 102.

²¹ Ibid., 100.

²² Ibid.

collection. These paintings would be put up for auction in order to raise money for the college's general operating budget. College trustees knew the sale of the works would be criticized. In 2005 a proposal to sell these four works was discussed, and public opposition to the idea was immediate. Upon hearing the college's plans, museum patrons cancelled memberships and withdrew promised gifts, and donated works were asked to be returned or were given to rival schools. Nevertheless, in 2007, this decision to sell the paintings was supported by Randolph College trustees, though it went against the AAM code of ethics, which states that any funds produced through sales must go toward improving the permanent collection. Though there is no legal recourse for violating AAM standards, public backlash can be severe. The situation at Randolph College was aggravated by the presence of police officials who ultimately feigned a bomb threat in order to keep angry bystanders at bay. In reaction to the planned sale of the works, the museum director, along with other staff members, resigned in protest of a valued educational tool turned into a commodity. The museum community, as well as the local community, were outraged and asked that the college reverse its decision. Such reversal never occurred.²³

Though the collection at PAAL is not as prominent as those at the Metropolitan Museum or the Maier Museum, these situations demonstrate the care that PAAL staff members and the Board of Directors should take if the decision to remove works from the collection is ever made. If such a decision were made, the first step would be to confirm that thorough information about and artwork has been recorded. This information would have been generated during the completion of the Object Information Sheets. Once the OIS has been appropriately filled out, the next step in properly documenting a collection consists of photographing the objects.

²³ "The (Im)permanent Collection: Lessons from a Deaccession," The American Association of Museums, accessed October 15, 2010, <http://www.aam-us.org/pubs/mn/deaccession.cfm>.

Photographs allow a collection to be visually documented and provide detailed views of an object's condition.²⁴ Two types of photography frequently used in museums are analog, which is film based, and digital.²⁵ Many museums use a combination of both, though digital photography is quickly becoming the dominant format.²⁶ In order to keep their records up to date, some museums are currently undertaking large projects to digitize their photography collections. Prior to beginning this project, no visual documentation of the artworks existed. I used my personal digital camera, a Canon PowerShot SD600, to photograph the works. The front and back views of the works were photographed, and, in some cases, details were also documented. The unframed view of the artwork was photographed whenever possible; however, many works could not be removed from their frames due to the threat of causing damage to the work. The framing methods used by the professional framers, which included the use of nails to hold the artwork in the frame and paper to conceal the back of the image, also prevented works from being taken out of their frames. Because the photographs are not of professional quality due to glare and poor photographing conditions, they should not be used for publication. However, the photographs are sufficient documentary images.

III. Application of Accession Numbers

After an object has been thoroughly documented, it is important to ensure that accession numbers and object information can be traced back to the appropriate artwork. Accession numbers are applied directly to an object using various methods. One of the best sources for information on the application of accession numbers, as well as all other aspects of museum registration, is *Museum Registration Methods, 5th Edition (MRM5)*, published by the American

²⁴ Buck and Gilmore, *MRM5*, 277.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 278.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 282.

Association of Museums in cooperation with the Registrars Committee. The first edition was published in 1958 during a “vital period in the development of standards for collections care” and has since then been enhanced and edited as practices and standards evolve.²⁷ The *MRM5* was written by and for museum professionals, and it was my preferred source for instruction on object marking.

Three methods of object marking that can be employed include temporary, permanent, and semi-permanent. Temporary markings, such as tying on a tag or labeling an object’s storage container, can be easily removed and are not directly applied to the object. This method should be used for objects that cannot be marked directly, such as loans or when it is unclear how other marking methods will affect an object’s surface. Permanent marking is done directly on the object and is irreversible. This method is frowned upon in most situations. The ideal accession number label will be secure enough so that it is not easily removed, but reversible in the future. The last, and most common method of marking, is semi-permanent. Semi-permanent markings are applied directly to an object, but are also removable. However, no method of marking should be considered completely reversible. The acrylic base coats used in semi-permanent methods can lead to object discoloration, and tags might cut into the surface of an object.²⁸ Risk of damage is decreased by placing the accession number on a spot that is not visible while the object is on view, yet is easily located when the object is in storage. To simplify locating accession numbers, consistent locations should be used for similar objects, but exceptions can be made if a surface appears unstable due to flaking paint or excessive wear.²⁹

As previously mentioned, I spoke with PAAL president and gallery administrator prior to beginning this project and they informed me that they would prefer the artworks in the collection

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ Ibid., 234.

²⁹ Ibid., 238.

to be marked using semi-permanent methods. The collections labeling kit I received from the Gaylord Brothers company provided me with all the necessary materials, including acrylics, solvents, pens, and tags. I placed the numbers, when possible, in the upper right hand corner on the back of the works. The numbers were applied directly to the artworks and on the back of the frames in the instances where frames could not be removed. All accession number locations were noted on the works' Object Information Sheets. Because many of the artworks had been professionally framed and their backs covered with black or brown paper, many accession numbers were applied with either a HB pencil or an all-purpose Stabilo pencil in white. The white and black all-purpose pencils were also used on objects with plastic or slick exteriors. The pencils are water-soluble and the numbers can be wiped away if necessary. Another method I used is often referred to as an "acryloid sandwich."

Acryloids, acrylic resins, are used by museums as base and top coats when applying accession numbers to objects with paint or ink. Base coats should be used on most surfaces because they provide removable, hard writing surfaces. They also protect objects from inks and paints while ensuring that the accession numbers will not be lost, insofar as acryloid base coats are not readily removed without solvents such as naphtha, which removes Acryloid B-67 and acetone, which removes Acryloid B-72. Some materials, such as porous wood, might require more than one coat of acryloid. Because acryloids and their corresponding solvents cause damage to certain materials, it is important to always research the acryloids beforehand.³⁰ The first of the most commonly used base coats, Acryloid B-67, dries hard and clear, is difficult to remove, and yellows with age. It is also the least likely to damage the surface of museum objects. Waxed and oiled surfaces are the only materials it should not be applied to. In contrast, Acryloid B-72, though it also dries hard and clear, will not yellow with age. However, the

³⁰ Ibid., 239.

surfaces it can be used upon are much more limited. Acryloid B-72 is best used on unpainted metal, glassware, ceramics, and wood, and should not be placed on paint, shellac, or plastic.³¹

An “acryloid sandwich” can be made once an acryloid has been selected for a base coat. This is done by applying a thin, rectangular line of acryloid onto the clean, dry surface of the object. For the PAAL collection, I used Acryloid B-72, insofar as it is the easiest to remove and is safe to use on wooden frames. After the acryloid dries, the accession number is written in ink or paint. I wrote the accession numbers in black acrylic, which is removable with acetone, using a rounded nib quill pen. Prior to writing the numbers, I applied a layer of white acrylic over the acryloid base coat to ensure that the numbers would be clearly visible. The accession number, once dry, was then sealed with another layer of acryloid. This process of applying a layer of acryloid, an acrylic number, and a top coat of acryloid is what gives the method its name, the “acryloid sandwich.”

Not all of the artworks in the PAAL collection were labeled using pencils or acrylic. When the surface material of a work could not be determined and applying an acryloid proved a possible risk, or when no viable surface to apply the accession number could be found, an acid-free paper tag was attached to the work. The tags are composed of a soft, white cotton string and are pH neutral. It is important to make sure that all paper materials that come into contact with the artworks are acid-free to prevent possible damage. The safety of the works should always be top priority when applying accession numbers. Over the years, object labeling methods have evolved, and once commonly used methods have been discarded. Nail polish, once widely used as a base and top coat, is now severely frowned upon by museum professionals. Not only can the nail polish yellow, turn brittle, and shrink with age, it can also flake off after time, taking the

³¹ The Northern States Conservation Center, *Collection Labeling Kit: Instruction Booklet*, (St. Paul, MN: The Northern States Conservation Center, 1998), 4.

applied accession number with it. Another item no longer used is nail polish remover. Though most nail polish removers contain acetone which will dissolve Acryloid B-72, they can also contain additives such as perfume, oils, and dyes, substances that should never come into contact with collection objects.³²

IV. Storage

To create a safe environment for the PAAL collection and allow for the quick location of objects, the storage room on the second floor of the 7 East Old Street building was completely emptied and reorganized. As stated by Genoways and Ireland, “it is recommended that the number of functions or activities be limited for the designated collection storage space. The more activities, the greater the chance they will come into conflict with one another.”³³ Though the arts and crafts material in the storage room could not be removed due to a lack of available space, measures were taken to ensure that these materials and the permanent collection would remain separated. To accomplish this, PAAL president, Ellen Ende, contracted Pathways to build new shelves in the storage room. According to Pathways’ website, it is a private, non-profit community development corporation that works to rebuild and strengthen the City of Petersburg. The shelves were built with donated wood and assembled by members of Pathways’ Youthbuild program. Youthbuild was created in 2001 and, as mentioned on the website, provides at-risk youth with productive roles rebuilding their community. Before construction on the shelves could begin, the storage room had to be emptied (See Figure 7). This process was simplified by the fact that I had previously removed the collection from storage and had placed the works in a vacant room to be organized. The remaining items in storage were removed under

³² Ibid., 247.

³³ Genoways and Ireland, *Administration*, 199.

the supervision of the PAAL staff. After the shelves were completed, the extra storage items organized, and the permanent collection accessioned, the artworks were returned to the storage room. The storage racks had been rearranged and letters assigned to each shelf. The letters “A” through “J” were printed on labels and attached to the racks so that the locations of works could be identified. As works were returned to storage, their locations were recorded on the Object Information Sheets. The works were placed both in and around the painting racks in the safest manner possible. Works were positioned back-to-back and front-to-front to prevent hanging wires from damaging other surfaces, and great care was taken to ensure frame and canvas edges, which could easily cause rips and scratches, did not press against the front of unframed works (See Figure 8).

As the collection and arts and crafts materials were returned to the storage room, materials considered harmful to the collection were kept away from the area designated for the storage of the works. A list of items that could pose a threat to a collection is described in the *MRM5*, and all of the items that were initially used to wrap or store the PAAL collection were included in the list. When this project began, plastic was used to cover many of the works. Though plastic might seem like a practical way of keeping dust off objects, it can contain chlorinated compounds and plasticizers that can damage an object. Airtight plastic bags can also trap other contaminants that may eventually mold or mildew.³⁴ Bubble wrap, a plastic product that is often used to protect a work during transport, should not be used in storage for the reasons mentioned above. Furthermore, prolonged contact can leave circular marks when the wrapping is placed next to a delicate surface.³⁵ Another material covering artworks at the beginning of this project was brown paper with a soft, tissue-like layer. Because I did not know what the material

³⁴ Buck and Gilmore, *MRM5*, 296.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 328.

was, I asked the PAAL staff if they could verify whether the paper was archival since archival paper is acid-free and safe to use to store objects. Unfortunately, the staff was unsure of the paper's origin, so I removed it from the works. Paper products can be highly acidic and even archival paper will acidify over time, requiring it to be replaced every few years.³⁶ The material most frequently found among the collection and acting as a buffer between works was cardboard. Like plastic, cardboard can also appear to be a practical way to protect works; however, cardboard is "subject to moisture breakdown, may be very acidic, and should be restricted to short-term use only."³⁷ Due to limited time and resources, I was unable to remove all of the harmful materials from the collection. Wood products, especially those that are unsealed, can create damaging acids, but with the exposed wood floor and the simple plywood painting racks as PAAL's only storage option for the collection, there was little that could be done.³⁸ Though all woods produce acidic vapors that can pose a threat to a collection, some are worse than others. Composite boards, such as chipboard, plywood, and hardboard, produce organic acids and vapors from their bonding materials. To reduce the risk these materials pose to the collection, PAAL staff should apply a layer of paint, varnish, or lacquer to the storage racks which will act as a sealant for the escaping acid.³⁹

Further risk to the collection can be reduced by monitoring the environmental condition within the storage room. The ideal conditions for preserving a collection include a relative humidity of about 50% and a temperature of roughly 19°C (66.2°F).⁴⁰ Relative humidity, also known as RH, is the "ratio of water vapor in the air to the amount that it could hold if fully saturated" and can be measured by a hygrometer. A low level of RH represents a dry

³⁶ Ibid., 296.

³⁷ Ibid., 328.

³⁸ Ibid., 296.

³⁹ Timothy Ambrose and Crispin Paine, *Museum Basics*, 2nd Ed, (London: Routledge, 2006), 178.

⁴⁰ Genoways and Ireland, *Administration*, 200.

environment while higher levels point to higher levels of humidity. A stable RH is important to maintain, insofar as changes in the moisture in the air can cause objects to expand or contract, resulting in possible damage to the object.⁴¹ Temperature should also be monitored in storage rooms, for fluctuations can affect the RH and can speed up the rate of deterioration.⁴² The equipment necessary to monitor the RH and temperature, a hygrometer and a thermometer, are both simple to acquire. However, if funds are not available, there are currently many grants that provide collection management and storage assistance for non-profit institutions (For more information, see Appendix D).

V. Database

In the museum world, the safety of the collection is always top priority; however, without proper documentation, a great collection can be rendered almost worthless. Therefore, it is important that collection records be maintained and stored in a way that will guarantee their security. This was accomplished at PAAL by filling out Object Identification Sheets and storing them in object files, and also by creating a collection database. The database is saved on the PAAL office computer and can be readily transferred to other offsite locations. PAAL has seen severe damage to its building and collection in the past due to tornados and water damage. Having this alternate from of collection documentation will allow PAAL to retrieve their files if anything should happen to the paper copies. Collection information is often recorded on cards, sheets, ledgers, and in computer databases. Some of these databases include Filemaker Pro, Microsoft Access, Microsoft Excel, Quattro Pro, Lotus 1-2-3, PastPerfect, Paradox, Argus, and

⁴¹ Ambrose and Paine, *Basics*, 172.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 173.

GalleryPro. Computer databases are useful because of their ability to organize and link large amounts of data, incorporate digital images and other media files, and perform searches.⁴³

An attempt to nationally computerize museum information was conducted in 1965 at the University of Oklahoma. A software system called GIPSY was used to consolidate the records of the ethnographic collections of the Oklahoma museums. The project was begun with the intention of creating a mass inventory of the “estimated one million ethnographic objects held in museums throughout the United States.”⁴⁴ Though the project never reached its goal of creating a national database, it did expand to museums in Missouri before it was abandoned. In the late 1960s, a forum called the Museum Computer Network (MCN), run by a group of New York museum professionals, was created to discuss the information problems faced by museums. They ended up adopting a system called GRIPHOS, created in the early 1970s, to resolve the information problems discussed in the forum. Another system, SEGLEM, developed by the Smithsonian, was also designed in the 1970s. However, overall dissatisfaction with GRIPHOS and SEGLEM resulted in museum professionals creating individual programs to meet internal needs. Databases continued to be improved over the years. Prior to the 1980s, database systems could only handle information entered into the programs as text, creating the need for a program that could also incorporate images and other forms of media files. Three programs that met these expectations were Museum Systems, Argus, and KAMIS. Each program allowed users to create their own database fields, websites, and interactive exhibits.⁴⁵ When selecting a database, museums should first determine the quantity and type of information they wish to store. Some programs are designed to house only a limited number of entries, while others are capable of

⁴³ Genoways and Ireland, *Administration*, 101.

⁴⁴ Allison Siffre Guedalia Kupietzky, *Subject Access to a Multilingual Museum Database: A Step by-Step Approach to the Digitization Process*, (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007), 2.

⁴⁵ Kupietzky, *Subject*, 2.

holding hundreds of thousands of records. The cost of the program should also be considered, for prices can vary dramatically.

I reviewed the database options provided by the RC-AAM listserv registrars and those I located through my own research. Initially, I decided to use the program PastPerfect. Compared to other database programs, PastPerfect is relatively user friendly, insofar as entry fields, such as title, date, and artist, are already established. The cost of the program, which is generally set at \$870, caused me great concern, but Ende informed me that it might be possible to acquire the program at a reduced price. I later discovered that PastPerfect offers a free trial version of its program, which eliminated my concern over the price. The trial version has no expiration date and contains all of the program's features. However, it is considered a trial because it can hold only 200 records. Because the PAAL collection consists of only 150 works I decided that the trial version of PastPerfect would be an ideal fit for PAAL's database needs. My feelings toward the program changed, however, after reviewing it and becoming more familiar with its functions. Though PastPerfect is relatively simple in comparison to other programs, it was still too complicated and involved for PAAL's needs. Not only did the program include functions that were unnecessary, such as the ability to track contacts, donations, and ongoing or planned activities, but the time it would take PAAL's staff members to learn how to use the program efficiently was not available. The ability to track donations, receipts, and contact information is generally considered a positive aspect of collection databases. PAAL, however, already has methods for tracking this information in place, and to include these functions in the database program would only cause unnecessary frustration. Despite my decision not to use PastPerfect, a copy of the trial version was installed on the office computer. If PAAL's Board of Directors

ever decides to make the transition to a larger database, then the trial program will allow the staff to view example records and make comparisons with similar programs.

My solution to the lack of a collection database at PAAL was to create one using the program Microsoft Excel. Small institutions use this program, along with Microsoft Access, to create straightforward databases that are simple to organize and edit. Microsoft Excel was also already available on PAAL's computer and would, therefore, cost them nothing. To create the database, I incorporated all of the informational fields found on the Object Information Sheets. I also included space to note the current location of the artworks and whether the works had been photographed. Furthermore, additional space was provided for PAAL to catalog any loans coming in or out of the building and list works that are considered to be missing. The Excel database information can be printed and sorted by accession number, artist, and location. At the start of this project, the PAAL staff asked me to include photographs of the works in the database so the works could be viewed without being disturbed in storage. I added images to the Excel database by inserting the images as comments. This causes the images to appear in a separate box when the cursor is hovered over the accession numbers. The frontal views of the works are included in the database. The remaining images, including back and detailed views, can be found on the PAAL's computer labeled with their work's accession numbers.

VI. Collections Policy

Accessioning objects, keeping track of object information, organizing storage space, and installing collection databases are all activities that are needed to maintain the security of a collection. Museums ensure these activities take place by having a set of board approved policies and procedures, referred to as collections management policies, in place. Policies

establish the standards, or the “why,” that regulate a museum’s daily activities, and procedures provide the “how,” the details and step-by-step methods necessary for carrying out museum policy. Procedures, which do not have to be approved by the board, are occasionally kept in a separate document. This separation makes it easier for staff to adjust to new methods without having to get the entire collection management policy re-approved.⁴⁶ The board approved collections management policy created for PAAL outlined the uses of the collection and PAAL’s position as a non-collecting institution. Because of the number of volunteers at PAAL and the recent staff changes, a collections management policy drafted in a two-part format will allow those who handle the art to quickly locate necessary information and procedures without having to search through the policies. PAAL’s collection management policy and procedures (Appendix C), which have been approved by the Board of Directors, will be a valuable tool for governing collection operations and use as PAAL expands its presence in the community and develops new programs and educational activities.

⁴⁶ John E. Simmons, *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies*, (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2006), 3.

Chapter 3: Conclusion

As Elizabeth E. Merritt states in *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums* published by the AAM, an institution with a collection should attempt to follow AAM standards “as appropriate to its circumstances.”⁴⁷ A small-town arts center run primarily by volunteers cannot be expected to look or operate like a large encyclopedic art museum. However, it is possible for either type of institution to meet the same national standards, insofar as “they can each make intelligent use of available resources to do their work in a way their peers recognize...as being appropriate to their circumstances.”⁴⁸ While the Petersburg Area Art League may not be accredited by the American Association of Museums, its staff members use the resources available to them to the best of their ability. By having a fully accessioned, documented, and organized collection, PAAL can confidently use its artworks in its growing list of afterschool programs, art classes, gallery shows, and workshops. Though the collection has been documented, information, such as artist and title, remains unknown for many of the works. A future project that focuses on uncovering more information about the works and local artists would strengthen documentation and increase the historical value of the works in PAAL’s collection to the community. Overall, this museum thesis project successfully identified and addressed the need for organization and proper documentation. A collection that is appropriately

⁴⁷ Elizabeth E. Merritt, *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2008), 14.

⁴⁸ Merritt, *Standards*, 14.

cared for will ensure that people with an interest in art and Petersburg history will be able to enjoy the works housed at the Petersburg Area Art League for years to come.

Figures



1. Interior of the Storage Room at the Petersburg Area Art League, View 1; June 8, 2010;
Photograph Credited to Author



2. Interior of the Storage Room at the Petersburg Area Art League, View 2; June 8, 2010;
Photograph Credited to Author



3. Interior of the Storage Room at the Petersburg Area Art League, View 3; June 8, 2010; Photograph Credited to Author



4. Works Stored inside a Storage Rack; June 8, 2010; Photograph Credited to Author



5. Works Stored in Bubble Wrap; June 8, 2010; Photograph Credited to Author



6. Works stored in Plastic and Brown Paper; June 8, 2010; Photograph Credited to Author



7. Interior of Storage Room before Construction; June 18, 2010; Photograph Credited to Author



8. Interior of Storage Room with Organized Collection; July 8, 2010; Photograph Credited to Author

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Appendices

Appendix A: Project Timeline, Summer 2010

- Spring 2010: Held initial discussions with PAAL's president and gallery administrator to determine database and accession number application methods.
- June 1: Completed discussion with gallery administrator concerning the new shelving in the storage room and the purchasing of necessary materials for the project.
- June 2: Began organization of the storage room. Materials moved so that objects in the rear of the room could be accessed. Began identification of works.
- June 3: Began assigning accession numbers to works and documenting them with an Object Identification Sheet (OIS). Began photographing works.
- June 4 – July 7: Documented and assigned accession numbers to works.
- June 8: Began removing materials, acidic paper and cardboard, from the works and storage.
- June 15 – July 7: Applied accession numbers directly to the works using pencil, acryloid B-72 with acrylic ink, or acid-free tags.
- June 16: Wood for the new storage shelves arrived.
- June 18: Created files to house the OIS and other relevant paper documents.
- June 19 – June 28: Storage emptied and works placed in a separate room to allow for the installation of the new shelves.
- July 1: Shelving in storage completed.
- July 6: Storage racks arranged so works could be returned to storage.
- July 7: Labels created and applied to storage racks.
- July 8: Returned all works to storage and assigned each works a specific location.
- July 13: Confirmed that all works had returned to storage.
- July 16: Labeled all digital photographs with their corresponding accession numbers.

July 17 - 19: Input data from the OIS into an Excel database.

July 19: Completed Excel database and created database pages for loans and unlocated works.

July 20: Database and photographs placed on the PAAL computer and OIS placed into file folders.

August 13: Photographs of works attached to corresponding OIS and placed in file folders.

Appendix B: Object Information Sheet

Object Information Sheet
Petersburg Area Art League

Name of Object:	Accession Number:
Artist:	Date Created:
Object Type:	Date Received:
Donor Name/Address:	
Description:	
Dimensions Framed:	Dimensions Unframed:
If Framed – Method of Attachment:	
Identifying Marks/Labels/Signature:	
Condition:	
Accessioned By:	Date:
Additional Comments:	

- Attach Photograph of Object –

Appendix C: Petersburg Area Art League Collections Management Policy and Procedures

**Petersburg Area Art League
Collections Management Policy**

Compiled September 12, 2010 by Janelle Wilson

Approved by the Board of Directors

I. Introduction

A. Policy Purpose

This policy exists to ensure the proper acquisition, care, and maintenance of items held in the public trust by the Petersburg Area Art League (PAAL). This policy is to be reviewed annually by members of the Board of Directors and revised as necessary to maintain conformity to the organization's mission statement and current professional standards.

B. Mission Statement

Current Mission Statement: To promote and nurture the visual arts in the Petersburg Area.

Working Mission Statement: The Petersburg Area Art League's mission is to provide an educative and open environment for expression and collaboration in the fine arts. In order to best serve the Petersburg, VA community, PAAL will:

- offer enriched art courses to stimulate creativity and promote learning
- foster relationships and mentorships among faculty and students through afterschool programs
- incorporate music, theater, and dance through institutional expansion
- house and exhibit a gallery of visual arts collections to share with the community

C. Petersburg Area Art League Background and Collection Scope

The Petersburg Art League was formed in 1932 by the late Miss Anna Dunlop and organized with the help of Mrs. George Reese, Mrs. Louis Walker, and Mrs. Anna Lou Musgrove. This group was renamed League of Petersburg Artists in the 1950s as suggested by Miss Dunlop. The Petersburg Area Art League began operations under its present name and constitution in 1960, as a direct descendant of the two earlier organizations. The Petersburg Area Art League, located at 7 E. Old Street, Petersburg, VA, is a non-profit organization, affiliated with Virginia State University, and it is a state-wide partner of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

The Petersburg Area Art League's collection is housed on the second floor of the Old Street building, and is composed of local student works and works of Petersburg and other Virginia artists from the 1940s to the present. Works were acquired through donations, PAAL purchases, and through the annual Poplar Lawn Arts Festival, later known as Artfest. The collection consists primarily of paintings, though photographs, prints, drawings, and sculptures are also present.

D. Collections Plan

The Petersburg Area Art League Collection shall be used to promote the arts in Petersburg area through gallery shows, collection exhibits, loans, and as examples of artistic methods and styles in art education classes.

II. Governance

The Petersburg Area Art League is governed by the Board of Directors whose purpose is to help the organization prosper by providing ideas, guidance, direction, and encouragement to the organization and ensuring that sufficient resources are available to support the organization's programs and initiatives. Members of the board, while seeing to the overall governance of PAAL, also contribute to the day-to-day operations of the organization, working alongside the gallery administrator and volunteers. The Board of Directors holds the final vote on all collection activity (accessions, deaccessions, loans, insurance, etc.).

III. Acquisition

As a non-collecting institution, the Petersburg Area Art League shall not accept donations nor make purchases to add to the collection.

Works shall be considered only if found to contribute to PAAL's expanding institutional activities and endeavors (e.g., PAAL Art Park and Sculpture Garden), and works shall not be accepted without support from a 2/3 majority of the Board of Directors.

Any items acquired shall be accessioned into the collection following collection management procedures.

IV. Documentation

All objects and activities of objects in PAAL's collection shall be documented on paper and in the digital collection database, as outlined in the collections management procedures.

V. Deaccession

Objects considered part of the Petersburg Area Art League Collection (items that have been accessioned) must pass through a deaccession process which includes nomination for deaccession by a member of the PAAL staff, followed by approval from the Board of Directors with a 2/3 majority vote.

An object may only be deaccessioned if one or more of the following criteria are met:

- The object does not conform to the mission of the museum.
- The object is too deteriorated to be exhibited or conserved.
- The conservation needed to exhibit the object poses too great a financial burden for the organization.
- The object is a duplicate of another object in the collection.

Objects deaccessioned by PAAL will be disposed of in an ethical manner. They cannot be sold to people with association to the museum, including paid and unpaid staff, volunteers, and board members. Funds generated through the sale of deaccessioned objects can only be used to purchase objects for the collection and/or care for the remaining works in the collection. Funds cannot be used for operating expenses or building renovations.

VI. Access

Access to the collection is limited to the Board of Directors and the gallery administrator. Gallery volunteers, patrons, and researchers shall be allowed access only after receiving permission from the aforementioned PAAL staff.

The handling of the collection objects will also be limited to the Board of Directors and gallery administrator. Other individuals must receive permission to handle the works and demonstrate knowledge of proper object handling.

VII. Loans

All proposed loans, incoming or outgoing, are subject to the approval of the Board of Directors.

A. Incoming

Objects will only be accepted for loan if PAAL can assure their safety from potentially harmful situations or environmental conditions (e.g., high light levels, pests, mishandling, theft, etc.) during exhibition and transport, and if proposed loans do not pose a financial burden (e.g., insurance cost, display requirements, etc.) greater than PAAL can bear.

B. Outgoing

Objects will only be sent on loan if the borrowing institution can assure the safety of the works and meets PAAL's standards for climate, light, fire suppression, pest control, etc. Borrowing institutions must provide wall-to-wall insurance for the borrowed object, unless waived by the Board of Directors.

C. Courier Policy

PAAL does not require a courier to ride with artwork in transit, but shipping methods must be approved by both parties prior to transporting the object.

VIII. Care and Maintenance

The care and maintenance of the collection is the responsibility of the entire Petersburg Area Art League staff.

A. Conservation

As funds allow, collection items are conserved on an as needed basis. Conservation may be undertaken only with the approval of the Board of Directors and preformed only by a qualified conservator.

B. Storage

All objects held by the Petersburg Area Art League must be stored in the safest and most stable conditions possible. The organization must take care to store collection objects in a manner that will not accelerate object deterioration and which also follows collections management procedure.

C. Inventory

A complete inventory of the collection should be completed every year. Inventories should also be completed after the movement of the collection, to ensure that objects have been returned to their designated location.

IX. Risk Management

It is the responsibility of the Petersburg Area Art League to assess the risk of any proposed activity and determine if said activity poses a reasonable or unreasonable risk to the collection. Reasonable risk constitutes an activity whose benefits outweigh the possible damage to collection items. Unreasonable risk constitutes an activity whose benefits do not outweigh the possible damage to collection items.

PAAL staff must inform the lending institution of any possible risk to loaned items and if the parameters of a loan agreement can no longer be met.

A. Insurance

All insurance policies must be approved by the Board of Directors. Reasonable, adequate coverage will be maintained to cover maximum possible loss per incident, and insurance policies will ideally correspond to the calendar year whenever possible.

B. Pest Control

It is the responsibility of all the staff to maintain a clean working environment in order to minimize the possibility of pest infestations. Should pest control services be required, it will be up to the Board of Directors to determine the best course of action that in no way compromise the objects in the collection.

C. Security

It is the responsibility of all the staff to ensure the general security of the building, with all locks and alarms set at the end of the work day. Gallery attendants are responsible for monitoring visitors in the gallery during open hours and after hour events. The Board of Directors is responsible for the maintenance of the building's security system.

Petersburg Area Art League
Collections Management Policy - Procedures
Compiled September 12, 2010 by Janelle Wilson

I. Introduction

These procedures are to be used as guidelines for the care and maintenance of the Petersburg Area Art League collection and must adhere to the PAAL collections management policy. Procedures should be applied to handling of objects, documentation, accessions, loans, deaccessions, and storage.

II. Object Handling

All objects are to be handled with extreme care and only by PAAL staff or people who have received formal permission from PAAL staff and have demonstrated knowledge of art handling.

A. General Rules

- Prepare yourself.
- Do not rush.
- Plan ahead.
- Think through procedures before handling any object.
- Keep all harmful materials away from objects.
- Do not allow eating, drinking, or smoking in any room which contains collection objects.
- Gloves should be worn to prevent transfer of oils from hands. Common glove materials are cotton, nitrile, butyl, neoprene, and latex.
- Carry only one object at a time, no matter the size.
- In storage, always return an object to its designated location.

B. Handling Paintings

- Always use both hands. If the painting is framed, never assume the frame is stable.
- If possible, keep paintings oriented in the direction they hang.
- When storing unframed and framed paintings, lean paintings of similar size against each other and place them facing back-to-back and front-to-front. Make sure the frame of one painting is not pressing against the canvas of another.
- Never stack paintings more than five deep, and do not stack paintings that are extremely large and/or heavy. Furthermore, never stack paintings that are unframed.
- Avoid touching the front surface of the painting whenever possible.

C. Handling Ceramics

- You may use ungloved, clean, dry hands, unless ceramic is porous or unglazed.
- Gently grip by base, never by any protruding lip or element.

III. Documentation

Proper documentation of a collection is necessary to ensure the organization and care of individual objects. All objects should be documented in the following ways:

- An Object Identification Sheet (OIS) should be completed for each object when it is accessioned.
- A digital database entry should be made to reflect the information recorded on the OIS.
- Each object should be photographed.
- All paper documents relating to the object (including the OIS) and its activities (e.g., outgoing loans), as well as copies of photographs should be placed in a file labeled with the objects accession number.

IV. Accessioning

Upon arrival, all objects coming into the PAAL collection should be accessioned to allow for proper documentation.

A. Accession Number

The first thing that should be done when documenting a new object is to assign it an accession number. This number will allow for easy identification.

The accession number shall reflect the year in which the number was assigned and the object number of that year.

Example: The 1st object accessioned in 2011 = 2011.01

The 14th object accessioned in 2012 = 2012.14

The 132nd object accessioned in 2015 = 2015.132

B. Object Identification Sheet

Once an accession number has been assigned, the OIS and digital database should be completed with information including, but not limited to, title, artist, medium, measurements, and storage location.

C. Photographs

A photograph should be taken of the back and front of an object. If possible, both the framed and unframed views of an object should be taken as well. A front shot should be placed in the file and database for easy identification, while the remaining images should be kept in a separate digital file. These images are not intended for publication, but merely for identification.

D. Application of Accession Number

To allow for immediate identification of an object, accession numbers should be applied directly to the objects using only approved methods and materials.

In most cases, accession numbers should be placed on the object itself; however, if the object is unable to be removed from a frame or casing, apply the number to the frame while noting the location of the number in the object file.

Application process:

Before applying the number, make sure the location is clean, dry, and easy to locate. Try to keep the location of the number consistent among the collection objects. For example, the upper right corner on the back of a painting is an easy to find location.

When applying numbers to objects, refer to the information below or to the Collections Labeling Instruction Booklet.

When applying numbers to wood, ceramics, unpainted metal, and glassware:

- apply a small line of Acryloid B-72 in acetone on the wood and let it dry;
- apply a small line of white acrylic over the acryloid to create a visible and smooth writing surface and let it dry;
- use a quill pen with a rounded nib to apply the numbers in black acrylic and let it dry;
- apply a small line of acryloid over the ink to seal the numbers and let it dry.

To remove an accession number applied with Acryloid B-72 and acrylic:

- Use a clean cotton swab dipped in a small amount of acetone solvent and gently roll the swab over the number and wipe away.
- Do not dip dirty swabs into the solvent containers.

CAUTION! Acetone solvent will dissolve many materials, such as paints, plastics, and oils. Do not use on objects with surfaces that include these materials.

When applying numbers to paper:

- A simple HB pencil is sufficient for applying numbers to paper. Do not press down hard on the paper.

When applying numbers to smooth surfaces, photographs, and plastics:

- A white or black water soluble, all-purpose Stabilo pencil can be used to write on these materials.

V. Materials

All accession materials can be located in the Collections Labeling Kit, which also includes an instruction booklet that provides further descriptions of the materials, as well as surfaces on which can and cannot be used.

Refills for the kit can be obtained through the website: <http://www.gaylord.com/>

VI. Loans

All loans, incoming or outgoing, should be documented on paper and in the digital database. Photographs should be taken to verify object condition whenever an object leaves or enters PAAL's possession.

VII. Deaccessions

All deaccessions should be documented on paper and in the digital database. This documentation will ensure that proper procedures are followed and works are not carelessly removed. All files for deaccessioned works should be retained; highlighting a file can provide easy identification of files of objects that are no longer in the collection.

VIII. Storage

The location of all objects in the collection should be documented on paper and in the digital database. All works should be assigned a specific location in storage and should be returned to that location after any loan or exhibit. This will allow for easy access and location of objects in the collection.

When storing objects, do not use materials such as cardboard or non-archival paper. Over time, these materials can become acidic and can damage the objects. When archival paper is used to wrap the objects, the paper must be replaced every few years. Over time, even archival paper can pose a threat to the objects. If it seems unlikely that the archival paper will be replaced, it would be in the objects' best interest to simply forego using any wrapping materials.

Appendix D: Collections Assistance and Funding

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Technical Assistance

http://www.vmfa.state.va.us/Learn/Statewide_Programs/Technical_Assistance.aspx

Available to Statewide Partners, the VMFA offers professional expertise and technical assistance in the areas of environmental control, physical security, educational programming, fundraising, and non-profit organization.

Virginia Commission for the Arts, General Operating Support

<http://www.arts.virginia.gov/Guidelines%20for%20Funding%202010-2012/index.html>

The VCA offers funding to non-profit organizations that support artistic expression, such as dance, music, literary and visual arts to allow for the strengthening and expansion of programs. Funds can be used for general operating expenses, special projects, construction or renovation costs, and as reserve funds.

National Endowment for the Humanities, Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions

<http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/pag.html>

Preservation assistance grants are available to small and mid-sized institutions to allow for the preservation and care of their humanities collections. Grants may be used to hire a conservator or consultant, educate staff in collections care, purchase storage furniture and preservation supplies, or purchase environmental monitoring equipment.

National Endowment for the Humanities, Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections

<http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/SCHC.html>

The NEH provides funding for the implementation of sustainable preservation methods that target the greatest risks to collections. Funding may be used for, but is not limited to, installing new heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; improving security and protection from fire, floods, etc.; and upgrading lighting to achieve maximum energy efficiency.

Heritage Preservation, The Conservation Assessment Program

<http://www.heritagepreservation.org/cap/>

Heritage Preservation provides a conservation assessment of an institution's collection, environmental conditions, and storage facility. The professionals administering the assessment will help prioritize needs and offer advice for handling issues.

Institute of Museum and Library Services, Connecting to Collections

<http://www.imls.gov/collections/grants/implementation.htm>

The Connecting to Collections Statewide Implementation Grants are available to select organizations within a state and are designed to encourage state-wide museum cooperation. These grants may be used for improving collection environments, developing emergency plans, assign responsibility for collections care, and increasing support and knowledge of collections care.

Vita

Janelle Sue Wilson was born in Hampton, Virginia, on June 2, 1986. During her early years, Janelle and her family moved around due to her father's military career. Returning to Virginia in 1992, Janelle's family settled in Virginia Beach where she began grade school, graduating from Salem High School in 2004. She attended James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and graduated magna cum laude in 2008 with a degree in Anthropology, focusing on Archaeology, and a minor in Art History. Janelle decided to attend Virginia Commonwealth University to pursue her Master's degree in Art History and Museum Studies. During her graduate and undergraduate career, Janelle interned at the Madison Art Collection at James Madison University; the Virginia Quilt Museum in Harrisonburg, Virginia; the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia; and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia.