

Conservation of Album of Drawings

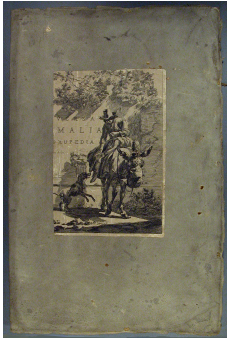
Anonymous, Netherlandish (?), WA1994.44,
The Ashmolean Museum

Abstract

This poster describes part of an MA project concerned with the treatment of a miscellaneous album of late 18th century Netherlandish drawings, from The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. The condition of the album and the drawings, made of classical friable media, were assessed and drawings selected for treatment. Scientific analyses of the materials, media, and techniques were used. Here, the focus is on the structure of the album itself. A mock-up of the album was first made, and the album then stabilised with minimum intervention.

Album background

Collecting Netherlandish art was popular in late 18th century England. The album belonged to Sir Bruce Stirling Ingram (1877–1963), a keen art collector, and was anonymously added in 1994 to the Ashmolean Museum sketchbook and album collection, itself started with a bequest from Francis Douce in 1834 (drawings and prints by European masters).



Left cover after treatment



Mirror image of cover print from *Diversa animalia quadrupedia*, after Nicolaes Berchem, ca 1660, The British Museum

Condition survey

The album probably dates from the 18th century. It has a reversed leather cover with laminated rope-fibre millboards, ties at its head, tail, and fore-edge, and contains 19 leaves with 88 drawings (and 2 prints on the boards). The binding had broken and sewing holes could be observed. The millboards were partially-detached from the cover along the edges. The handmade, laid paper pastedowns were damaged at the edges, with surface dirt, abrasion, and yellow stains. The handmade, laid paper textblock is made up of folded leaves, with cut-out drawings, fully or partially missing leaves, and skinning holes, as well as adhesive residues, inscriptions, and heavy offsets throughout.

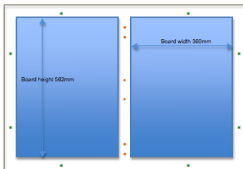
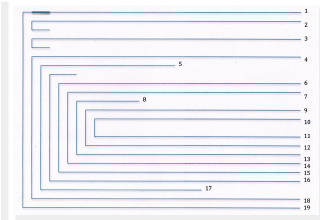


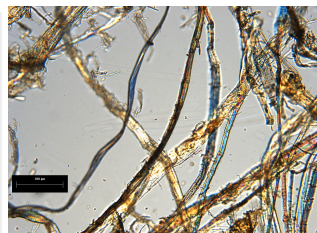
Diagram of cover and rope-fibre millboards



Textblock diagram



Left pastedown fore-edge, showing the brown rope-fibre millboard (X20)



Magnified polarised image of rope-fibre millboard fibres (X200)

Treatment

For the safe handling and long-term appreciation of the album, various treatment options were discussed with Ashmolean curatorial and conservation staff. Given its relatively low use and uncertainty about its original structure, minimal stabilisation of the album was carried out and it was not rebound.

Surface cleaning

A soft brush was used to dust along the internal spine and the top and bottom margins of each folio. The pastedowns were surface-cleaned with a chemical sponge, a plastic eraser, and a soft brush. The primary supports of drawings in graphite were cleaned with a chemical sponge cut in small pieces held with tweezers.

Primary support stabilisation

Ten primary supports with at least two detached corners were re-attached with V-shape Japanese paper tabs. Small repairs were also carried out for a few primary supports.

Securing the album cover

Using a variety of brushes, wheat starch paste was used to secure the laminated and partially-detached sections of the rope-fibre millboards and one cover.

Providing a protective folder

As poor handling can cause further mechanical damage, it was decided not to interleave the album with acid free tissue. An acid free board (1000 µm) was thus used to make a four-flap horizontal folder. For extra strength, two additional sheets of acid free board were pasted to the central area (with perpendicular grain).



Surface cleaning



Securing edges of laminated cover

Storage survey

The album and sketchbook collection of the Ashmolean Museum is stored in a secure, small, dedicated dark room lacking space. A short-term storage condition survey (4 days during June-July 2011; see below) was carried out using an environmental monitor. Questionnaires were also sent to various institutions to probe their storage practices.

	A	B	C
Relative humidity (%)	46 ± 5	52 ± 5	47 ± 5
Temperature (°C)	22.4 ± 0.7	23.5 ± 0.7	23.9 ± 0.8
UV light (lumen)	41 ± 18	6 ± 1	37 ± 12
Visible light (lux)	16 ± 7	92 ± 9	17 ± 9

Sketchbook and album collection environmental monitoring data.

A: Bottom of bookcase. B: Top of bookcase. C: Outside storage room door.

Acknowledgements

Alexandra Greathead, Dr. Jon Whiteley, Jevon Thislewood, staff at The Ashmolean Museum. Mark Sandy, Alan Buchanan, Professor Nicholas Pickwood, Dr Athanasios Velios, Michael Yianni, staff and all my classmates at Camberwell College of Arts. Robert Minte, Sandrine Decoux (Bodleian Libraries), Dr Paul Garside (British Library), Dr Ruth Siddall (University College London), Ros Buck (Chantry Library), Corinne Letessie, Rhea Sylvia Blok (Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt), Jonathan Farley (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew), Dr Anna Bülow (The National Archives), Ann Evans (Glasgow Museum Resource Centre), Caroline Bendix, The Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust, The UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, my family.