



**N G
V**

EXHIBITING ARTWORKS AT THE NGV

ALIGNS WITH VCE ART MAKING AND EXHIBITING

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EXHIBITING ARTWORKS
AT THE NGV

This resource supports VCE Art Making and Exhibiting students to analyse the role of curatorial, exhibition design and conservation in the preparation, presentation and conservation of artworks in exhibitions at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV). Designed to be used in conjunction with an exhibition visit, this resource aligns with the key knowledge and key skills as outlined in:

- Unit 2: Understand, develop and resolve, Area of Study 1, Outcome 1
- Unit 3: Collect, extend and connect, Area of Study 3, Outcome 3
- Unit 4: Consolidate, present and conserve, Area of Study 3, Outcome 3

UNIT 2 UNDERSTAND, DEVELOP AND RESOLVE, AREA OF STUDY 1, OUTCOME 1.	UNIT 3 COLLECT, EXTEND AND CONNECT, AREA OF STUDY 3, OUTCOME 3.	UNIT 4 CONSOLIDATE, PRESENT AND CONSERVE, AREA OF STUDY 3, OUTCOME 3.
Key knowledge - background information about artists and artworks - the ways artworks in an exhibition have been selected for display - the influence of contexts on the representation of subject matter and the communication of meaning in artworks - connections between artworks in a thematic exhibition - strategies used to exhibit artworks from different contexts in a thematic exhibition, including ways to select and form relationships between artworks in the exhibition - processes used to document the design of an exhibition in their Visual Arts journal - use of appropriate art terminology in the presentation and evaluation of artworks	Key knowledge - the characteristics of exhibitions - the characteristics of exhibition spaces - the responsibilities involved in curating an exhibition - methods used for identifying and analysing the curatorial considerations and the thematic connections between the artworks and artists in an exhibition - methods used to develop didactic information about the theme, artists and artworks in an exhibition - the strategies used to plan and develop an exhibition in a specific space - art terminology used to discuss exhibitions, artists and artworks	Key knowledge - methods used and considerations involved in the presentation, conservation and care of artworks while on display in an exhibition space - considerations of conservation and care that relate to artworks in the handling, storage and transportation of artworks - relevant conservation and care methods that students can apply to their own artworks when on display - relevant conservation and care methods that students can apply to their own artworks in storage, handling and transportation - terminology used to discuss the conservation and care of artworks
Key skills - use a range of resources to investigate information about artists and artworks - justify the selection of artworks for a thematic exhibition - identify and analyse the influence of contexts on the representation of subject matter and ideas to communicate meaning in artworks - explain the connections between artworks in a thematic exhibition - discuss the ways in which artworks from different contexts are exhibited in a thematic exhibition - research and select artworks to design a thematic exhibition - explore a thematic exhibition and then design a thematic exhibition for an audience - develop and present information about a range of artworks in a thematic exhibition - document the research and design of a thematic exhibition in their Visual Arts journal - use appropriate art terminology in the evaluation and presentation of artworks	Key skills - research and discuss the characteristics of exhibitions - research and discuss the characteristics of exhibition spaces - research and discuss the responsibilities involved in curating an exhibition - discuss and analyse the curatorial considerations and the thematic connections between the artworks of artists in an exhibition - develop an exhibition proposal for a specific space using the works of the three selected artists from Unit 3 Area of Study 1 - explain and analyse the presentation of artworks in the exhibition and the thematic connections between them - present and discuss didactic information including the theme of the exhibition, and the artists and artworks - discuss the characteristics of exhibitions, exhibition spaces, artists and artworks using art terminology	Key skills - investigate, identify and evaluate the methods used and considerations involved in the presentation, conservation and care of artworks while on display in an exhibition space - investigate, identify and evaluate conservation and care in the handling, storage and transportation of artworks - discuss the relevant conservation and care methods that can apply to their own artworks when on display compared to artworks studied in exhibitions visited in the current year of study - discuss the relevant conservation and care methods that can apply to their own artworks in storage, handling and transportation compared to artworks studied in exhibitions visited in the current year of study - apply terminology in the discussion of the conservation and care of artworks

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA (NGV)

The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) is Australia’s first public gallery. It was founded in 1861 to collect, conserve, interpret and exhibit the state’s artworks and bring art to the people of Victoria. Today it is a dynamic and vibrant community asset which contributes to the cultural, educational, social and economic wellbeing of Victorians. The state collection comprises approximately 75,000 works illustrating the history and development of Australian, Indigenous and international art and design. In an average year, 2–3 million people visit the NGV and five million access the website [1]. The NGV Collection is displayed across two buildings in Melbourne’s CBD (Figure 1.1 & 1.2). With plans for a third building, located at 77 Southbank Boulevard, Melbourne, NGV Contemporary will be dedicated to showcasing contemporary art, design, fashion and architecture of local, national and international significance (Figure 1.3).



Figure 1.1 NGV International (NGVI) on St Kilda Road houses the international collection and major exhibitions.



Figure 1.2 The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia (NGVA) in Federation Square is the home of Australian art, presenting Indigenous and non-Indigenous art from the colonial period to the present day



Figure 1.3 The Fox: NGV Contemporary will be Australia's largest gallery dedicated to contemporary art and design.

THE VISION

The NGV vision is 'Creating an inspiring future: enriching our understanding of art and life' [2]. The Gallery aims to achieve this through diverse acquisitions, research, innovative displays and use of digital technologies, careful conservation and collection management, as well as a dynamic range of programs and activities inspired by the NGV Collection and exhibitions. This accessible, welcoming, and engaging approach contributes to community wellbeing, helps build a sense of community and connects diverse audiences with art, artists, and ideas.

FUNDING AND ACQUISITIONS

Entry to the NGV is free, but entry fees are charged for some exhibitions. NGV revenue comes from a combination of government grants, exhibition and event ticket sales, merchandising, memberships, cash donations, appeals, philanthropy and partnerships with businesses, groups and individuals.

For more about the NGV Vision, governance, funding and acquisitions you might like to refer to the NGV Annual Report and NGV Foundation Annual report on the NGV website [3].



Figure 1.4 Philanthropists, like the late Loti Smorgon AO and Victor Smorgon AC, support the NGV by donating artworks and funds for acquisitions. For example, this 2015 work by Ai Weiwei was acquired for the NGV Collection in 2017 using funds donated by the Smorgon family.

Ai Weiwei
Dropping a Han Dynasty urn 2015
 plastic on composition board (a-c)
 240.4 x 641.3 cm (overall)
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund, 2017
 2015.553.a-c © Ai Weiwei Studio

EXHIBITIONS

Exhibitions and displays are comprised of works of art and design from the NGV Collection and loans from other museums, organisations or individuals. Approximately forty exhibitions are held annually across NGV International and The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. Exhibitions feature diverse artists, periods, **aesthetics**, ideas, themes and materials. They range from the art of ancient China to the work of young, emerging local artists such as the annual *Top Arts* exhibition of VCE students' work. They include **Collection displays**, exhibitions showcasing individual artists, exhibitions around a theme, and blockbuster exhibitions like the Melbourne Winter Masterpieces series. The largest exhibition held by the Gallery to date was the 2017/18 NGV Triennial which attracted more than 1.23 million visitors [4].

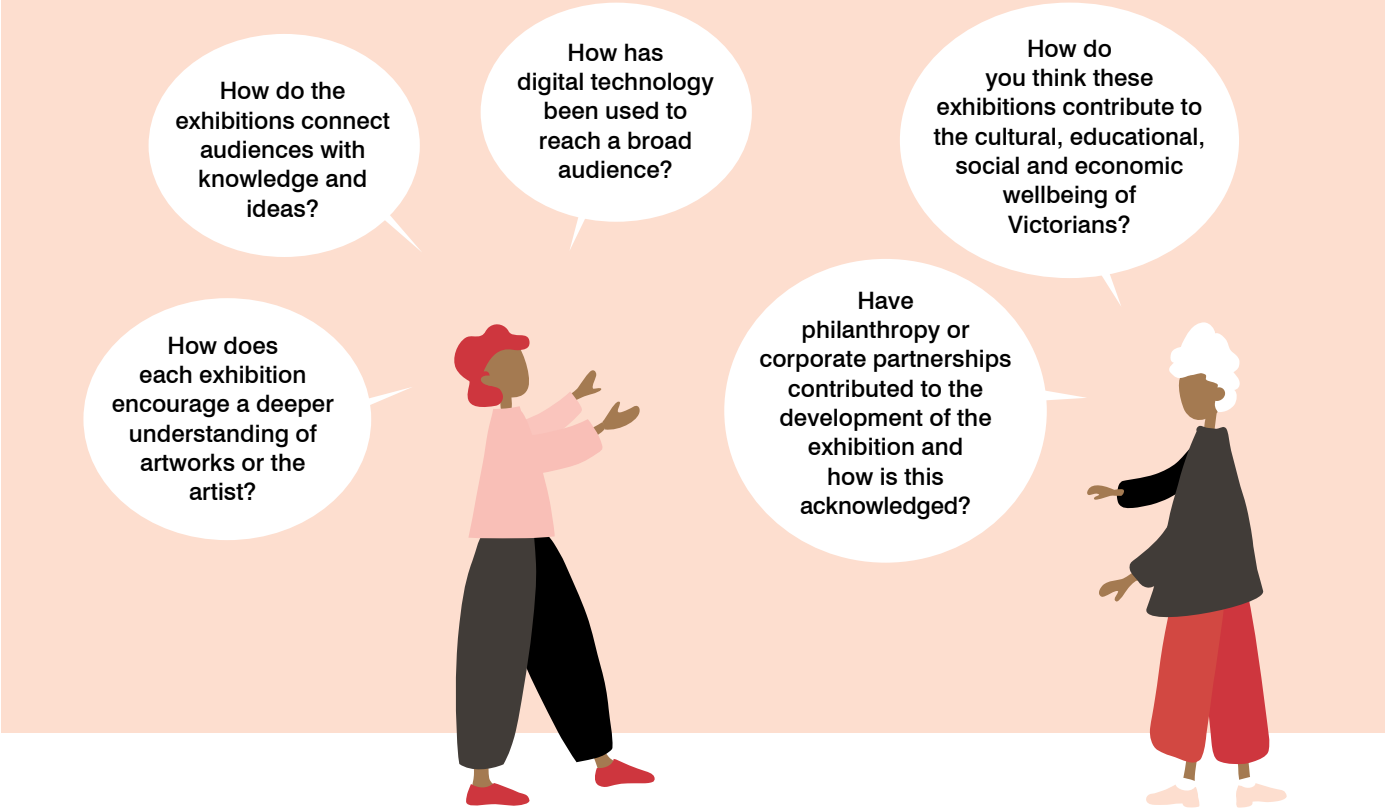


Figure 1.5
Installation views of the
entrance to Civilization:
The Way We Live
Now at NGVA

IN THE GALLERY

MISSION AND VISION IN ACTION

1. Before your visit, find the most recent NGV Annual Report on the NGV website. Look for the NGV's strategic framework, including the Gallery's mission, vision, goals and strategies.
2. Visit the NGV in person (or explore the website) and discover the range of exhibitions on display.
3. Choose two contrasting exhibitions and consider the following:



THE NGV TEAM

The NGV employs close to four hundred staff who work across departments that include Curatorial, Conservation, Design, Audience Engagement and Learning, Publications, Multimedia, Media and Public Affairs, Marketing, Cataloguing, Registration, Photography, Fundraising and Events, Exhibitions and Collections Operations amongst others. All teams collaborate to maintain the NGV Collection and to present the NGV's many exhibitions and displays. Each department or team has a specialised role for example:

- The Curatorial team are the experts on the art and design from their specialised area, and conceive exhibitions and displays that bring out ideas and stories around the work
- The Exhibition Design team create exhibition settings which display the artworks according to the curatorial theme or idea
- The Conservation team ensures works in the Collection are well cared for and those on display are presented safely and at their best.

2 CURATORIAL

Preparation for NGV exhibitions begins with concept development and a proposal. **Curators** propose ideas based on their research, strengths of the Collection, new ideas and emerging international movements. When making decisions about which exhibitions to run, the Executive Management Team (EMT) and curatorial staff consider each exhibition's cultural value and educational potential, how it fits with NGV's vision and the overall offering, how it will appeal to the NGV's broad audience and entice both regular and new visitors.

EXHIBITION THEME

Every exhibition is underpinned by a main theme or idea. The **exhibition theme** provides a framework to tell a unique, engaging and accessible story about the artist(s), their time and their work. To develop the exhibition theme and content, exhibition curators use their expert knowledge of the artist(s) and their practice(s) collaborating with them, where possible. Some exhibition themes are developed in partnership with other national and international cultural institutions and curators. The curator's explanation of the works selected and how they are arranged in an exhibition is sometimes called the **curatorial rationale**.

Artworks are carefully selected and arranged to highlight recurring ideas, subject matter, or materials and techniques. For example, in **retrospective** or historical exhibitions, the structure often follows a **chronological grouping** to demonstrate stages of an artist's development or provide historical context. An exhibition of an emerging or mid-career artist's work might be arranged according to key ideas the artist has pursued, by style or medium, or to provide the viewer with a series of sensory or conceptual experiences.

Collection displays include works from the NGV Collection which have been grouped to highlight ideas, eras, styles or themes. For example, poster design from Japan, Venetian glass, toxic materials used in art and design, or Surrealism. As with larger exhibitions, elements or ideas from the artworks are used to create an exhibition design that enhances or helps to tell the story of the works.



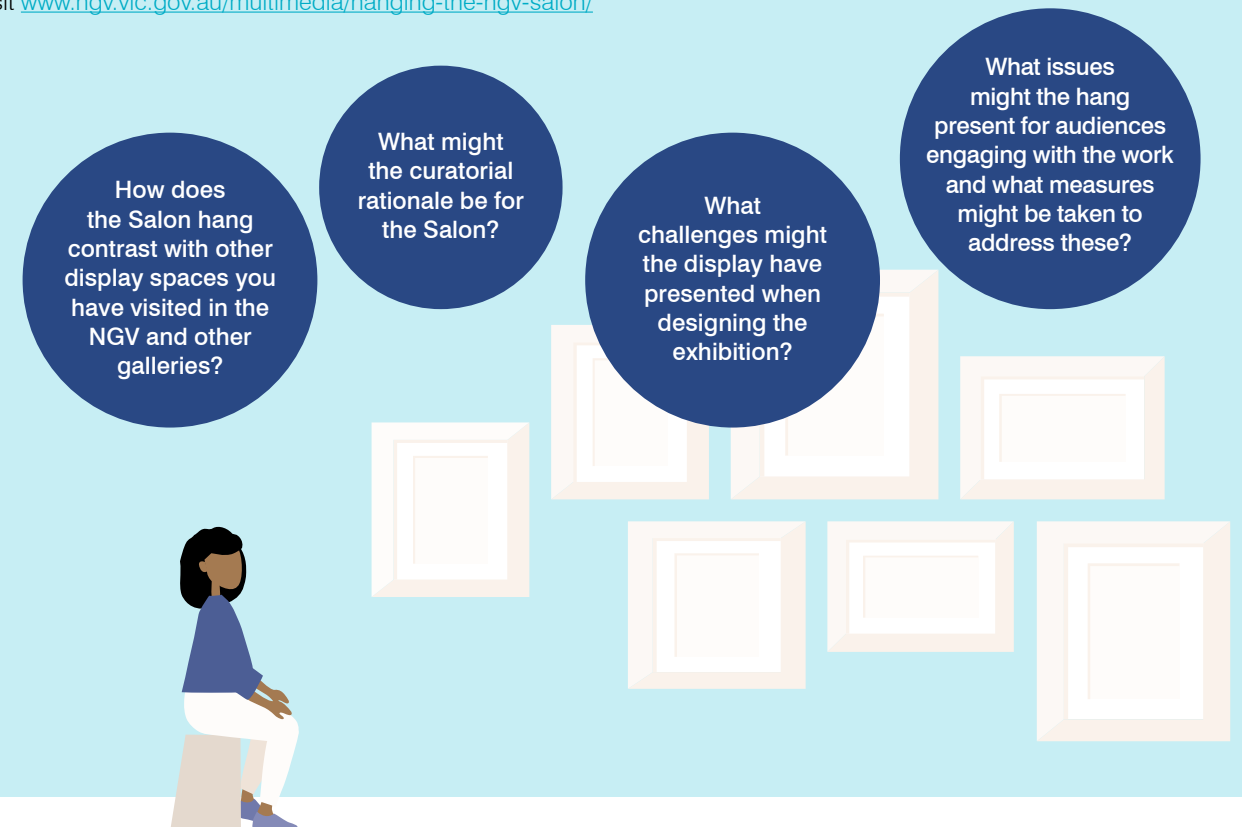
Figure 2.1
The NGV Salon features a dense arrangement of paintings that fills the walls of the gallery from corner to corner and almost floor to ceiling, with centre of the room occupied by groupings of bronze sculptures of figures and animals [5].

SCENARIO

COLLECTION DISPLAYS AT THE NGV

The 'Salon hang' reflects the way works were hung in the official exhibitions of the royal art academies of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries (Figure 2.1). At the time, official academies preferred representational works with a classical, historical, biblical or narrative theme. Deep maroon walls, fashionable in the 19th century, highlight the golden frames and accentuate the works. Carefully focused lighting illuminates the paintings. In this format, traditional wall labels would be difficult to read and visually intrusive, so information is available on touch screens instead.

The Salon arrangement required careful planning both to ensure the display looked good and to communicate the complex display to the art installers who hung the works. To see the process of hanging the works in the Salon visit www.ngv.vic.gov.au/multimedia/hanging-the-ngv-salon/



ARTWORK SELECTION

In addition to relevance to the overarching exhibition theme, curators must also consider other complex factors and variables when selecting artworks. Artworks in exhibitions are often loaned from museums, individual owners, art dealers, and private collections from all over the world so many practicalities must be taken into consideration. Figure 2.2 provides examples of curatorial considerations during exhibition preparation.

Figure 2.2 Curatorial considerations in artwork selection

CONSIDERATION	EXAMPLE
Strength of example	Does the work exemplify the theme or idea? Is it a significant example of the artist's style or interests? Is it iconic? Will it support the theme of the exhibition?
Breadth of practice	Does the work show how the artist's style or the main theme of the exhibition (or a sub-section of it) was applied across different media? Are there a range of creative expressions of the theme?
Exhibition history & exposure	Will it expose audiences to something not previously seen? Has the work been on display recently? Is it new to the audience? Newer works or those which haven't recently been shown may be prioritised over those which have been exhibited frequently.
Diversity	Are we representing new voices? For exhibitions which focus on a topic rather than a single artist, curators aim to include exhibitors from diverse backgrounds. Curators aim to tell stories previously unheard or less prominent.
Budget	Fewer, more costly, works or more, less expensive, works? Ticketed exhibitions such as the Melbourne Winter Masterpieces series have a larger exhibition budget and can offset costs through sponsorship, ticket sales, retailing and other funding and operations. Collection exhibitions often have more limited resources, so decisions are made on what is required to tell the strongest exhibition story.
Transportation logistics	Where is the work coming from? What is required to get it to the NGV? Freightling valuable works from multiple locations involves careful planning and coordination.
Artwork location	Where will the work be placed with the Gallery or exhibition? How does the placement of the works, and their relationship to each other in the exhibition space, assist in communicating the theme of the exhibition?
Size and weight	How easily can we move and accommodate the work? Large and heavy works make a grand statement and attract audience attention. However, they are often difficult to transport and labour intensive to install. The floor on upper levels of the Gallery can't support extremely heavy works safely. Many small works can fit into an exhibition space, and they also travel much more economically and easily. However, they can be difficult for large audiences to view.
Value	What measures will need to be taken to protect the work? High value works have higher insurance and security costs and often require additional measures to transport, store and display.
Physical condition	How much special attention does the work require to make it display ready? Fragile works need custom travel crates for transport and may have special handling needs. Some works require extensive conservation treatment to stabilise surfaces or treat pests or repair damage. They may also require maintenance during the exhibition and to prepare them for return transportation.
Presentation requirements	Does the work require special presentation? Lenders may request specific climate conditions (ie. temperature and relative humidity ranges), ask for special display cases or mounting systems, or to limit lighting if the work is light sensitive. Other requirements might include: • custom supports • complex audio-visual equipment • electrical works may need to be reworked to meet Australian safety standards • additional security measures (e.g. a stanchion or plinth) • large areas for display • special health and safety measures.
Availability	How easy is it to loan the work? Many institutions around the world compete for iconic artworks and some works on the exhibition wish list may be unavailable because they are on display elsewhere. Some works rarely leave their home because they are a "destination piece" ie. an attraction for the museum that owns them.

SCENARIO

DEVELOPING A BLOCKBUSTER EXHIBITION THEME

When developing a blockbuster exhibition that paired two major international artists, the EMT and curatorial team were aware that each artist had been widely celebrated in many solo exhibitions around the world. Because the artists individually had broad appeal, the exhibition risked telling a story which was too familiar to the NGV audience. Consequently, the team decided to present the artists in tandem, exploring the intersecting points of their art and lives in a world-first exhibition. This sharpened the curators' focus as they developed the narrative of the exhibition.



PROCESSES

Major exhibitions such as the Melbourne Winter Masterpieces and summer exhibitions are scheduled 3–4 years in advance. This is to allow enough time for the exhibition preparation process, including research, development and consolidation, loan requests and **loan agreements** to be issued, writing for the exhibition catalogue, transport logistics, and funding applications. Art galleries such as the NGV have registrars who track the Gallery’s inventory of art, whether on display, in storage, in treatment or on loan; and deal with international shipping and customs procedures when the works travel. They also manage incoming and outgoing objects of art from other locations.

THE CHECKLIST

During the exhibition preparation process, curators use planning tools to guide their decisions on how artworks will be arranged. The document that lists every single object and work of art included in an exhibition is called the **checklist**. The checklist is a reference document for every team that works on the exhibition. The checklist provides the definitive title of the artwork, its date of production, the name of the artist, the dimensions of the work and other essential information. The checklist often includes a reference image of the work.

LOAN AGREEMENTS

For exhibitions where loaned artworks are required, curators locate potential loans in national and international cultural institution’s collections or private holdings. They do this by using records of those collections which might be in exhibition catalogues, online collection databases, artist **catalogue raisonnés**, or by contacting curators at other museums. Once a target artwork has been identified, the Director sends a formal loan request letter to the owner. If the owner agrees to lending the artwork, the request is formalised with a loan agreement.

LEGAL AND FINANCIAL PROTECTION

As a member of Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan register (PCOL) [6], the NGV undertakes **provenance** research to establishes the chain of ownership, previous exhibitions and auction results for works from overseas lenders with gaps in their recorded history. This is to ensure that the artwork is authentic and was acquired by its owner lawfully, and not the subject of theft, colonial theft, or cultural looting.

Owing to the value of the artworks and risks in their transportation and public display, exhibition insurance can be prohibitively expensive. If appropriate, the NGV will also apply for insurance funding from The Australian Government International Exhibitions Insurance (AGIEI) Program [7].

SCENARIO

IN CONVERSATION WITH A PRIVATE ARTWORK COLLECTOR

The curatorial team are developing the checklist for a mid-career retrospective of a living artist based in Melbourne. One section of the exhibition will be dedicated to a very early period in the artist’s career. The curatorial team have successfully guaranteed loans on several works related to this period and have identified one more artwork which would link together the room. The private owner of the work has never lent to an exhibition before and isn’t familiar with the loan process.

- Imagine you are the curator in conversation with the owner:



3 EXHIBITION DESIGN

The way artworks are presented in a gallery space influences the viewer’s interpretation or experience of the work. Exhibitions are carefully designed to emphasise the narrative or story they are aiming to tell.

DESIGNING AN EXHIBITION

The Exhibition Design team redesign and modify the physical aspects of the gallery space to enhance the audience experience of artworks. The physical and ambient design of the space creates a structure for a narrative to unfold, emphasising the thematic placement of works. Design modifications can be **aesthetic or structural**.



Figure 3.1 Exhibition design factors

FACTOR	EXAMPLE
Theme	Each theme may have a dedicated room or space with specific audio-visual materials, structural materials, graphics, or colours employed to enhance the audience's understanding of the theme.
Artist's intention	Artist's intentions often inform and influence exhibition design. Sometimes artists provide instructions about how they intend their work to be displayed, hung or framed. For example, an artist may have intended for their series of paintings to be densely hung with minimal plain space on the walls or they may request that no other artworks are hung near their artworks. In cases where communication with the artist not possible, the curator's knowledge of the artist and display precedents may inform exhibition designers' decisions.
Sightlines	Sightlines are the long views between exhibition spaces that visually link them. Structural features like corners, corridors and openings are commonly used to create connections between works and emphasise meaning. Specific attention is given to particularly significant artworks, to ensure they occupy prominent sightlines.
Colour	Colour creates connections or distinctions between spaces, along with the placement of works along sightlines, it is often used to emphasise and signpost the flow of the exhibition.
Scale	When designing an exhibition, the scale of the artworks needs to be considered. For example, large artworks need to be in spaces which suit their scale, often in rooms with high ceilings.
Multimedia	Projectors are positioned discretely to obtain an uninterrupted path of light to the gallery walls. Artworks with sound also influence the spatial design of an exhibition. They must be positioned with consideration to their impact on the interpretation of works nearby.
Lighting	Lighting designers are experts at lighting exhibition spaces to protect the artworks, to highlight specific works or areas, to create a mood, and to guide the viewer. Lighting can include wall washes, grazing, spotlighting, specially lit display cases or directional lighting.
Conservation factors	Environmental factors need to be considered when designing an exhibition to ensure the conservation of works. For example, textiles, photographs and works on paper are sensitive to light and need to be kept in areas with lowlighting. Sculptures made from bronze or stone are less sensitive to light so are more likely to be placed in areas with brighter light. (Read more about conservation in section 4).
Contractual Requirements	For artworks which have been lent to the exhibition, the owner may stipulate specific display requirements to keep their artwork safe. For example, on a plinth or in a glass case.
Budget	In addition to the exhibition design, the exhibition budget is divided across insurance, transportation, security, marketing and other operational expenses.
Branding and marketing	Defining features of the exhibition branding and design, such as the exhibition masthead, hero images, key colours, or typeface often run through the exhibition space, retail and ticketing areas to create a cohesive look and feel wherever the audience may interact with the exhibition.
Audience journey	The arrangement of physical space impacts the audience journey and flow of people through the exhibition. Bottlenecks can appear at the start or in popular sections, which need to be pre-empted with larger viewing spaces and wide corridors.
Health and safety	As well as the safety of the artworks, much consideration is given to the safety and comfort of the audience. The size and placement of labels, the placement of plinths and barriers to avoid accident and injury, ventilation, entry and escape points, emergency management are all considered in the design process.
Disability access	Exhibition designers consider physical access requirements, like ramps and spaces for wheelchairs or appropriate seating in the exhibition space.
Audience participation	In many large exhibitions, and where possible, the team design specific opportunities for audience engagement, including through social media.
Kids spaces	Specially designed exhibitions for young children to encourage participation and engagement from all audience sectors

While this table provides a general summary of the varied and complex considerations accounted for by exhibition designers, each exhibition is unique and requires a different approach to the challenge of balancing decisions and considerations.



Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3



Figure 3.4

Figure 3.2
Glass display cases protected the terracotta warriors and horses in *Terracotta Warriors: Guardians of Immortality* | Cai Guo Qiang: *The Transient Landscape*. Mirrors allowed the viewer to see the object from all angles and created the illusion of more figures. Custom made supports inside the cases ensured the objects were firmly supported. Contemporary artist Cai Guo Qiang's work *Murmuration (Landscape)*, 2019, consisted of 10,000 porcelain birds which were suspended individually from the ceiling. The installation juxtaposed a contemporary voice with the historical works to create a dialogue between the past and present and served as a wayfinding device to lead visitors through the exhibition. [8][9]

Figure 3.3
Adequate seating is important for visitors to rest, view key artworks for longer periods or complete activities such as this example in *Keith Haring* | *Jean-Michel Basquiat: Crossing Lines*.

Figure 3.4
Installation view Ron Mueck's *Mass*, 2016–2017. Artist Ron Mueck worked with curators, conservators and the exhibition design team selecting wall a colour and lighting to highlight his work and an arrangement that considered the safety of viewers and artworks, as well as the effect and message of the work. [10][11]

EXHIBITION LAYOUT AND DESIGN

NGV exhibition designers use two different software programs; for 3D visualisation of the space they use the program SketchUp and for 2D drawing (artwork plans & elevations) and documenting the exhibition for construction ArchicCAD is used (Figure 3.5). These are used to experiment with the layout and to communicate ideas to the various Gallery teams working on different aspects of the exhibition. Previously, curators and exhibition designers used exhibition models which were scaled versions of the exhibition space and contained scaled images of the works. Sometimes, for larger exhibitions physical prototypes of details and objects are still made to assist with design (Figure 3.6). Although similar to a 3D model, these prototypes consist of only a small section of the exhibition space. This helps give a sense of scale and perspective of how things may look in the Gallery.



Figure 3.5
Exhibition artwork plan prepared by NGV exhibition design.

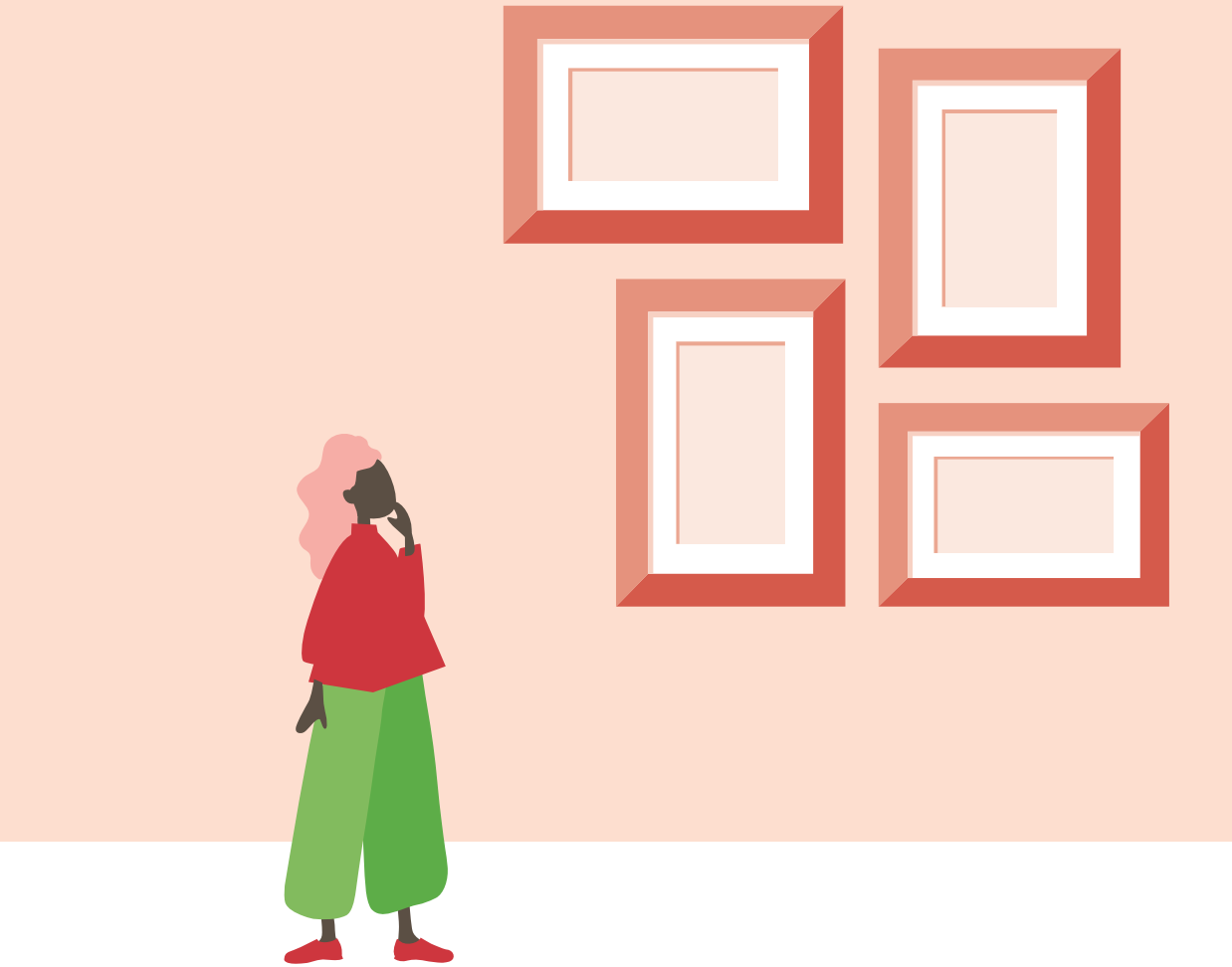
Figure 3.6
Figure 3.6 Exhibition models (usually made at a scale of 1:50) and visual checklists are central to planning an exhibition.



IN THE GALLERY

When you are visiting an exhibition, take a moment to consider the aesthetic qualities of the exhibition space itself.

- What is your first impression of the look, feel and mood of the exhibition space?
- What clues do you see as to theme or idea of the exhibition and the spaces within it?
- What individual elements work together to create the ambience?
- In what way do these design elements reflect the ideas and intentions of the artist? How does the quality of light in the space affect the atmosphere? How does the lighting relate to the themes or ideas in the artworks?
- Describe the aesthetic qualities of any physical structures supporting the artworks, for example plinths, walls or shelves. Why do you think they have been designed in this way?
- What further evidence can you find of decisions made by exhibition designers? What was the reasoning behind the decisions?
- How does the exhibition space influence your visiting experience and your interpretation of the artworks?



DIDACTICS AND LABELS

Didactics are sections of explanatory text which help the visitor to understand the grouping of artworks in the exhibition. Often, these didactics reflect the exhibition themes. They are written by curators and are typically highly visible in the exhibition space. Didactics are usually written on the wall but sometimes appear on **floor-risers** to maximise the exhibition hanging space. Curators also write **labels** for individual artworks which usually appear to the left of an artwork. They include the title, creation date, artist's biographical information, materials used, and information about ownership/ provenance. Curators may write **extended labels** which enrich the viewer's interpretation and understanding of key works. Usually limited to 100 words, extended labels provide further biographical, historical or conceptual context or draw the audience's attention to noteworthy features of an artwork. The language used in the extended labels is accessible so that a wide range of visitors can understand the meaning.

Figure 3.6 This is a wall didactic from *Collecting Comme*. The text helps communicate key information and ideas about the artworks in the space.

Collecting Comme Rei Kawakubo (born Japan 1942), founder of Japanese fashion label Comme des Garçons, is considered one of the most visionary and influential designers working today. For nearly five decades Kawakubo has defied convention to redefine fashion. Her designs have subverted the norms of garment shape and function, reframed ideas of beauty, and proposed a new relationship between body and dress. In her endeavour to make clothes that, as she says, 'did not exist before', Kawakubo deconstructs clothing and creates it afresh. Collecting Comme examines the radical concepts and design methods that have informed Kawakubo's practice since 1981, the year she first presented her garments in Paris. Key collections and recurrent themes in Kawakubo's work are explored through more than sixty-five examples. These are drawn from the NGV's significant holdings of designs by Comme des Garçons, generously gifted by Takamasa Takahashi, and supported by additional key loans from the collector's archive. The exhibition also features designs by two of Kawakubo's protégés, Junya Watanabe (born Japan 1961) and Tao Kurihara (born Japan 1973) from the NGV Collection. Collecting Comme is testament to Takahashi's profound appreciation of Rei Kawakubo's work, and considers the designer's powerfully original contribution to contemporary fashion and her continuing influence. Exhibition ebook available at ngv.melbourne/collectingcomme



Figure 3.7 This is an extended label from *Collecting Comme*. The text guides the viewer's interpretation of the work. [12]

Comme des Garçons, Tokyo
fashion house
Japan est. 1969
Rei Kawakubo designer
Japan born 1942

Cape, shorts, socks and boots
2014 *Blood and Roses* collection,
spring–summer 2015
cotton, polyester, synthetic leather,
nylon, plastic, elastic, rubber

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

After fifty years in fashion, Rei Kawakubo remains one of the most radical and visionary designers working today. In September 2013, she began a ten-season project that sought to, as she put it, 'break the idea of clothes' with increasingly abstract and inventive forms. This outfit from the *Blood and Roses* collection incorporates recurring elements in Kawakubo's work – flowers and the colour red. The collection is symbolic of war and conflict, and its visceral palette and unorthodox volumes are expressive of Kawakubo's pursuit of creative freedom.

KIDS LABELS

The NGV aims to make art accessible to as wide an audience as possible. For this reason, specific labels are also written for kids. Curators work closely with the Kids team to craft labels which communicate information in clear and friendly language to spark children’s curiosity. Kids labels sit beneath the main label at a child friendly height.

IN THE GALLERY

AN INVESTIGATION OF A LABEL

Choose an artwork in the exhibition which has an extended label:

- What information does the label include? How does it inform your interpretation of the work?
- What clues does the label provide about the exhibition theme? And how this work serves to support it?
- What tone or voice is coming through on the didactics and labels? What kind of language has the curator used?



VIRTUAL TOURS

The Gallery has documented a range of existing exhibitions for online access. These **virtual tours** replicate the physical space of existing exhibitions so that they can be experienced remotely. These 3D scans of exhibition spaces are supplemented by audio guides and multi-media content. They differ from **online exhibitions** which are designed to present artworks digitally in a virtual space, with no physical counterpart. Go to www.ngv.vic.gov.au/virtual-tours/ to explore the virtual tours currently on offer at NGV.

SCENARIO

A RADICAL DESIGN APPROACH

The NGV team is preparing an exhibition of a designer who has revolutionised the field of fashion for over 30 years. They aim to present an exhibition in the spirit of the designer’s wildly inventive creative processes and bold pieces. Some of the team’s initial discussions have highlighted the intentional wear and tear featured in the clothes and the celebration of manufacturing errors in their production. The deadpan glamour of early 90s catwalk shows has also been mentioned as a source of inspiration. Given the constraints of the modestly sized gallery space, the exhibition design team will also need to be creative in a design which can accommodate the large number of works intended for display.

Imagine you are an exhibition designer:

How would you create the atmosphere of a catwalk show and capture the spirit of the fashion designer in the design of this exhibition?

How might the single gallery space be modified to accommodate the large number of works?

What other exhibition design factors would you have to consider in your design approach?

Consider the addition of moving image, sound, paint, and lighting.

How might your design approach impact the audience’s experience of the exhibition and understanding of the designs?



4 CONSERVATION

Conservation is the process of caring for cultural material such as artworks. Conservation includes examination, documentation and research, as well as **preservation (preventive conservation)**, and **restoration** (treatment) of artworks [13][14]. The guiding principle for Exhibition Conservators is to return an artwork in the same condition that it was lent and prevent deterioration or damage to artworks through preventive conservation. This includes ensuring appropriate environmental conditions; handling and maintenance procedures for storage, exhibition, packing, transport and use; integrated pest management; planning for emergencies; and reformatting or duplicating material where appropriate.

THE CONDITION REPORT

Before an artwork travels and upon its arrival at the gallery, a **conservator** or lender will closely inspect the work's physical condition and fill out a baseline **condition report** (Figure 4.1). For a painting on canvas, the condition report would document all surface marks, accretions or scratches or larger structural damage like dents or warping (Figure 4.2). Conservators will look for any movement in the canvas caused by environmental changes, such as overall slackness or bulging in the corners. Conservators also take lots of photographs of the work as evidence to support the findings of the report. At the end of an exhibition, conservators will check the condition against the incoming condition report and detail any changes which occurred during the exhibition.



Figure 4.1
An exhibition conservator inspects the physical condition of a work against the condition report.

Figure 4.2
Cracks and marks are measured and documented.



Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2

HANDLING, STORAGE AND TRANSPORTATION

HANDLING AND INSTALLATION

Art handlers assist with the installation of works in the gallery. Like conservators, they have been specially trained to carefully handle artworks. They usually move artworks one at a time, often using trolleys or A-frames, and avoid doing this more than once in the exhibition space. When hanging, suspending or mounting works, handlers will carry them from their strongest points with clean hands, or cotton or nitrile gloves depending on their materials [15].



Figure 4.3 Artworks are supported when they are being handled and gloves are worn to minimise the transfer of dirt and oils

STORAGE

At any time only a fraction of the NGV Collection is on display. Most works spend the majority of their time in storage. The NGV has various storage areas and facilities specially designed to house the Collection, with systems for collection storage and management.

Light sensitive materials like prints, drawings and photographs are stored and transported in **solander boxes** (Figure 4.4). Within these hardcover boxes, works are stacked horizontally in acid free mounts. The hinged lid attached to the base of the solander box clamps shut creating an airtight, darkened and PH neutral microclimate. Larger flat works are framed and stored in either sliding racks - vertical screens which move on guide rails (Figure 4.5) – or rigid timber slots in crates called tills.

Fashion and textiles items are stored flat, wrapped or cushioned in archival boxes (Fig 4.6) or in drawers, or in custom storage units or supports. Large or complex sculptural works require custom made storage solutions [16].



Figure 4.4 Solander boxes in the photography storage area



Figure 4.5 Sliding screens are used to store large, framed 2D works

TEMPORARY STORAGE

Before they are presented for an exhibition, artworks loaned from other locations must be acclimatised to NGV conditions. Artworks are taken to the gallery space and left in their travelling crates to gradually acclimatise over a period of at least 24 hours. After this period of acclimatisation, works may be safely unpacked and displayed.



Figure 4.6 Fashion and textiles items stored in archival boxes

TRANSPORTATION

Packing and shipping artworks to and from the NGV, whether locally, nationally or internationally, is a carefully managed process. Artworks are generally couriered with a custodian, either a representative appointed by the lender or commonly a conservator or another NGV staff member. This can include travelling on trucks, both cargo and passenger planes or ships to monitor and ensure the work's safe travel and delivery.

Artworks travelling a long distance are packed in specially designed wooden crates with internal insulation, cushioning and bracing designed to minimise any internal movement and withstand climatic changes. Works travelling internationally must be cleared by Australian Customs and Quarantine. The NGV has special arrangements so that works arriving internationally can be cleared by customs and quarantine officers on site, with conservators on hand to note any treatment requirements.



Figure 4.7 Insulated travel cases for paintings

Figure 4.8 Conservation considerations for packing and shipping artworks

Media	Considerations
Paintings	Paintings are generally transported upright in custom made crates that are sealed and insulated. The crates contain internal supports including conservation quality (chemically inert) materials like foam to support and protect the painting from vibration and shock. Double crating (a crate within a crate) gives further protection for international travel. Paintings are wrapped and sealed before crating. Crates are secured with screws, rather than nails to minimise the vibration to the work and damage to the crate.
Works on paper	Works on paper, if framed, travel upright but otherwise are ideally transported stacked and flat in archival boxes, mounted in archival quality mounts, with a protective layer of glassine paper or tissue. The work should be adequately supported; protected against vibration and impact; and protected against climatic extremes and fluctuations.
Textiles (e.g. rugs)	Textiles and garments often require custom padding to protect them and prevent movement in transit. Costumes that are very old or fragile, need to travel flat. Large 2D textiles like banners or rugs are usually rolled around a large diameter tube.
Artworks with multiple parts	Works made up of multiple pieces often must be disassembled and put back together at either end of the journey.
Large and heavy works	Artworks which are large or heavy to transport may need to be partially dismantled and reconstructed inside the gallery walls. For example, <i>GONE</i> , a 7 ½ metre bronze sculpture by New York artist KAWS was shipped in multiple pieces direct from a Seattle foundry to the NGV and reconstructed in the Gallery for an exhibition in 2020.
Toxic materials	Some materials used in artworks that were once thought to be safe are now known to be hazardous, such as mercury, lead, nickel, cadmium, and chromium – metal compounds used in paint – and arsenic which was used to make green dyes and pigments, but also as a preservative for natural specimens. Objects may also have been subjected to past fumigation treatment and have residues which may be hazardous. Conservators are responsible for labelling potentially hazardous works and ensuring they are appropriately handled and stored.
Biological and organic materials	Sometimes artworks are composed of “high risk” biological materials or organic matter. Conservators must ensure that these works can be legally imported under Australia’s strict biosecurity laws. Customs and quarantine officials work closely with conservation and registration staff to ensure incoming works meet the stringent requirements.

SCENARIO

RESPECTING THE OBJECT, RESPECTING THE ARTIST

A private owner has agreed to lend their work to the NGV for a forthcoming survey show of a Melbourne artist. The artwork was originally synthesized in a laboratory from the same composite of metals found in rocks from the moon. It is brittle and has many parts varying in shape and size. Though the private owner had this work displayed in an enclosed case in their home, the exhibition’s curator is aware that the work was presented quite differently at the commercial gallery when it was first shown.

Based on what you’ve learnt so far about exhibition preparation and conservation:

What might the conservation team do in order to ensure this artwork’s safe passage?

Why do you think it is important to preserve artworks in their original state?

The many parts of this artwork mean it could be displayed in potentially infinite ways.

How might the curator ensure that the artist’s intentions were honoured?



EXHIBITION CONDITIONS

Creating the right conditions in the Gallery helps to prevent change and deterioration in the artworks. NGV staff take great care to ensure that galleries are kept clear and clean to deter pests and that they meet agreed conservation standards related to the climate in which artworks are stored and displayed.

TEMPERATURE AND RELATIVE HUMIDITY

The best gallery climate for maintaining works of art has as little fluctuation in temperature and humidity as possible. If the humidity level is too high (too much moisture in the air), mould can grow and speed up the process of deterioration. If humidity is too low, materials like paper and wood may split, warp or become brittle.

Optimum temperature and humidity conditions for different materials vary considerably. When many different materials are on display together a compromise is reached that minimises risk to most material types. Amongst art conservation experts, it is generally agreed that a temperature of approximately 20 degrees Celsius +/- 2 degrees, with a **relative humidity** (RH) of 50% +/- 10% is the most suitable to accommodate the conservation needs of different materials and the comfort of staff and visitors [17].

Temperatures and humidity across the NGV Galleries and storage spaces are monitored and logged using a Building Automated System that can adjust for seasonal variations in climate and weather. Entrance points to the Galleries are designed to minimise dramatic fluctuations in temperature for the works on display.

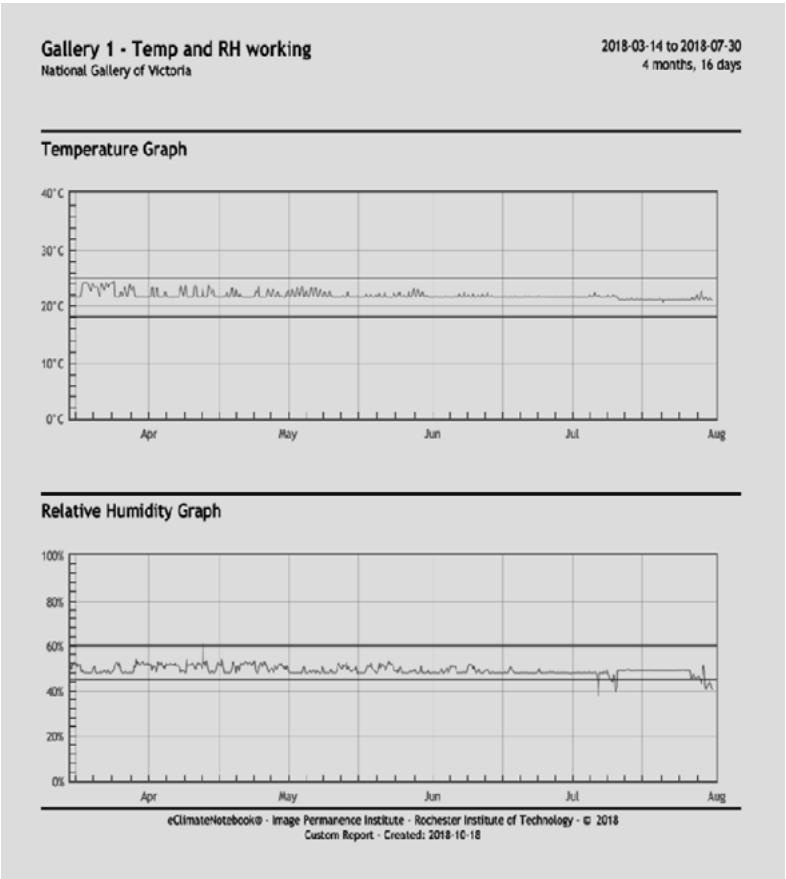


Figure 4.9 Graphs showing the temperature and relative humidity of gallery spaces.

LIGHTING

Although we need light to view art, exposure to light can adversely affect artworks causing discolouration, deterioration or permanent damage. Light levels are measured in **lux**. The maximum lux level for the display of an artwork is dependent on the materials it is composed of:

- works on paper, photographs and textiles are highly **light-sensitive** and prolonged light exposure can cause fading, brittleness and discolouration – 50 lux
- paintings are less light sensitive – 250 lux
- ceramic, glass, metal and stone - significantly higher lux levels [18]

To protect artworks, technicians limit the light exposure to ultraviolet (UV) and infrared (IR) parts of the spectrum. Light exposure can be reduced using UV filters on glass cases, and framing and lights with reduced UV such as LEDs, incandescent or tungsten lights, instead of lights such as fluorescent lights which emit high levels of UV radiation. Sensors and timers reduce unnecessary light exposure and works can also be covered when not being viewed. [19]

When positioning works in exhibition spaces, consideration is given to the appropriate light levels for each work. Works placed adjacent to each other usually have similar light level requirements. Works on paper may need to be swapped during an exhibition so that individual works can be 'rested' away from exposure to harmful light.



Figure 4.10 Installation shot from *Marking Time*. In this example, works with similar lighting requirements have been grouped together to unify and highlight thematic groupings.



Figure 4.11
Lighting in the gallery space for *Japanese Modernism*. Focused lighting illuminates specific objects in cases or on plinths, while direct lighting is avoided for the textiles which are light sensitive. The recessed wall display of decorative glassware is lit brightly to emphasise the translucent colour, shape and pattern of each glass.



IN THE GALLERY

CONDITION REPORT

Find an artwork in the exhibition space.

- Write the name of the artist, artwork title, and date.
- Evaluate the placement of the artwork in the exhibition from a conservation standpoint: what are the potential threats and hazards and what measures have been taken to protect/support the work?
- What other physical structures are supporting the safe presentation of the artwork? For example, framing, plinths, transparent protective surfaces like glass.
- Imagine you are writing a condition report for this artwork. Detail the condition of its surface and structure. What else would you put in the report?



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FURTHER RESOURCES

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APPENDIX: MATERIALS CONSERVATION

MATERIAL/ MEDIUM	LIGHT LEVELS/ TEMPERATURE/ RELATIVE HUMIDITY	ISSUES	HAZARDS	TREATMENTS	PREVENTION
WORKS ON PAPER (photography, prints and drawings, books)	50 lux 20°C ± 2°C. 50–55% RH	• Tears, punctures • Swelling • Warping • Cockling – wrinkling or puckering • Foxing – brown discolorations or spot stains • Fading • Soiling • Staining • Grazing– surfaces eaten by insects such as silverfish and booklice. • Bleaching • Bleeding • Skinning: removal of the top layer of a material (e.g. paper) due to physical action such as the removal of sticky tape. • Brittleness	• Humidity • Light • Dirt • Dust • Insects and Pollutants • Chemical instability • Chemical damage • Impact • Human factors such as poor handling, storage	• Surface cleaning • Reduction of creases • Repair of tears and holes • Reinforcement of paper supports • Replacement of mounting materials, tapes and adhesives • Stabilisation of paper through washing • Reduction of stains and foxing • Consolidation of flaking materials using conservation adhesives. Retouching / repair to areas of loss	• Display and store works in a cool, dry environment. • Restrict dust, insects and pollutants by using storage boxes and frames that provide a good seal against the environment. • Use archival quality, acid-free framing and storage materials. • Minimise light exposure: • Display works in low light levels, minimise natural daylight and strong light sources. Install UV filters on fluorescent tubes, windows and glazing in frames. • Use lighting which filters out UV to display works • Reduce the exposure time by: • changing displays regularly, • turning pages of books regularly • fitting curtains to display cases • fitting time-switches and/or movement sensors on room or display case lighting • excluding all light when the museum is closed
PAINTING	250 lux 20°C ± 2°C. 50% ± 5% RH	• Flaking, lifting paint • Tears • Damaged support • Cracking • Discolouration • Yellowing and darkening of varnishes • Discolouration of pigments • Blanching – clear varnish becoming white	• Temperature fluctuations • Humidity • Light • Dirt • Dust • Insects and Pollutants • Chemical instability • Chemical damage • Physical vibration and impact	• Stabilisation • Repair • Consolidation • Cleaning • Varnish removal • Restoration	• Minimise natural daylight and use light which filters out UV to display works • Maintain stable environmental conditions • Restrict dust, insects and pollutants
FASHION AND TEXTILES	50 lux 20°C ± 2°C. 50% ± 5% RH	• Stains • Mould and mildew • Fading • Discolouration • Degradation/deterioration of fibres • Tears • Holes • Shredding – chemical deterioration making the fabric brittle and prone to crumbling or severe damage caused by light exposure or insects, resulting in similar losses.	• Mould • Mildew • Moisture • Insect and pests: moths, silverfish, rodents • Ultraviolet radiation • Chemical deterioration • Bodily secretions: oils, sweat • Wear and tear	• Brush vacuuming • Stain removal • Dry and wet cleaning • Securing of loose threads • Patches • Repairs to tears and seams • Stabilisation/lining prior to cleaning or storage • Preparation of display/storage mechanisms	• Store items using acid free, archival quality materials and systems that provide a good seal against the environment. • Use padded hangers or specially constructed mannequins/ supports to support garments and minimise damage during storage or transit. • Handle textiles using gloves • Display and store works in a cool, dry environment • Restrict dust, insects and pollutants • Display works in low light levels, minimise natural daylight and strong light sources. Install UV filters on fluorescent tubes, windows and glazing in frames. • Use lighting which filters out UV to display works

MATERIAL/ MEDIUM	LIGHT LEVELS/ TEMPERATURE/ RELATIVE HUMIDITY	ISSUES	HAZARDS	TREATMENTS	PREVENTION
METAL	Unrestricted lux Less than 50%RH (eg. Bronze from antiquity needs low RH) 20°C ± 2°C	• Oxidation • Incrustation • Mineral deposits • Tarnishing • Pitting • Discolouration • Blooming • Corrosion • Breakages • Dents • Scratches • Brittleness	• Pollutants • Animals • Metal polishes • Gaseous materials Chemicals • Mishandling • Impact	• Repair of breaks • Consolidation • Application of protective coatings • Cleaning	• Store and display in chemically inert environments • Handle with gloves to avoid the transfer of oils
PLASTICS	50–100 lux 30–50% RH 20°C ± 2°C	• Chalking (outer surface oxidises and becomes dry and powdery, reducing the surface lustre or sheen) • Buckling • Warpage • Dimensional changes • Cracking • Surface deposits, • Discoloration • Variations in gloss. • Shrinking • Compression • Embrittlement • Distortion • Stickiness • Malodour	• UV light • Chemical exposure	• Repair of breaks • Consolidation • Application of protective coatings • Cleaning	• Store plastics with adsorbents (a material which will allow a liquid, gas or dissolved solid to adhere to its surface) • to slow degradation by adsorbing either gases that initiate degradation or those that accelerate breakdown • Store in reduced light and temperature
WOOD	150 lux 40–60% RH	• Boring (insect holes) • Drying and shrinking • Rotting • Mould growth • Cracking, splitting • Discolouration • Dirt stains • Water damage • Wear and tear • Breakage • Warping	• Insects/pests • Low relative humidity (dry air) • High relative humidity (damp air) • Exposure to ultra-violet radiation • Impact and stress	• Stabilisation • Repair • Consolidation • Cleaning • Varnish removal • Restoration	• Minimise fluctuations in temperature or relative humidity • Reduce direct exposure to light • Display and store works in a cool, dry environment. • Restrict exposure to dust and pollutants • Establish a pest management system Monitor for insect activity – frass/exit holes left by insects.

MATERIAL/ MEDIUM	LIGHT LEVELS/ TEMPERATURE/ RELATIVE HUMIDITY	ISSUES	HAZARDS	TREATMENTS	PREVENTION
FILM and DIGITAL MEDIA	50 lux 15°C ± 5°C 30–50% RH	- Physical deterioration - Data loss - Technical obsolescence - Softening (due to exposure to sunlight, electric light) - Vinegar syndrome – a condition of acetate film decay characterised by shrinkage, embrittlement and the generation of acetic acid vapour, which smells like vinegar.	- Poor handling - Badly maintained or malfunctioning equipment sub optimal storage - Heat - Humidity - Light - Pollutants and chemical damage	- Duplication: re-recording of film or audio-visual material onto another carrier of the same format. Creation of a replica copy for preservation or access purposes. - Migration: movement of the recorded content to a different format for preservation purposes. This could be a digital migration e.g. the digital transfer of content from its original hardware/software to a new file format, or a physical migration, such as the digitisation of motion picture film. - Emulation: the re-creation of the obsolete technology or hardware on a new operating system, simulating an experience of the original media. This is often used for the conservation of early video games.	- Duplication, migration and emulation of content to preserve it. - Protect from UV light and exposure to pests and pollutants. - Display and store works in a cool, dry environment. - Minimise fluctuations in temperature or relative humidity.

For museums such as the National Gallery of Victoria, responsible for collections containing diverse material types, it is not always feasible to create specific display and storage environments with ideal conditions for each specific material. Environmental sustainability and the cost of maintaining the collection are also important considerations. International conservation experts have agreed to guidelines for the safe display of objects within general museum collections. The NGV adheres to these guidelines with

- Relative Humidity: 50% ± 5 with no more than 10% change in 24 hours
- Temperature: 20–24°C ± 2°C. (Set point 21.5 °C) with no more than 4°C change in 24 hours

For areas that are not frequented by staff and/or visitors (such as storage areas), the temperature may be kept lower, but works are always given time to acclimatise gradually between areas of different temperature to limit any stress and fatigue in different materials caused by dramatic fluctuations in temperature and humidity.

GLOSSARY

Aesthetic: A theory or idea of what is visually, and materially appealing.

Catalogue raisonné: An annotated list of all the known works produced by an artist.

Checklist: A document which catalogues the name, materials, dimensions, and owner locations of artworks intended for display in an exhibition.

Chronological grouping: When artworks are arranged in order of the time in which they were made.

Collection display: An exhibition which showcases works from a galleries' collection, grouped to highlight ideas, eras, styles or themes.

Condition report: A document which records the present physical condition of an artwork.

Conservation: The process of caring for cultural material such as artworks including examination, documentation, research, preservation, restoration, treatment and preventive conservation of artworks.

Conservator: A person who is responsible for the care, restoration and repair of artworks and artefacts.

Curator: A specialist who oversees the collection, interpretation and presentation of artworks and artefacts. At the NGV, there are curators who specialise in different areas of the collection such as Contemporary Art, Textiles, and Indigenous Art.

Curatorial rationale: The curator's explanation of the works selected and how they are arranged in an exhibition.

Didactic: The explanatory labels that provide information which helps the viewer understand the grouping of artworks in the exhibition.

Exhibition model: A scale model of the exhibition space, often constructed from foamboard, which is used as a planning tool by curators and exhibition designers.

Exhibition theme: The story that unfolds through the arrangement of artworks in the gallery space.

Extended label: In addition to the standard label information, extended labels include interpretive commentary about the work

Label: A small text label placed to the left of an artwork which details the artwork title, creation date, artist's biographical information, materials used, information about ownership/provenance.

Light-sensitive: Vulnerable to the effects of light.

Loan agreement: A formal contract between a lender of an artwork and a borrowing institution.

Lux: A single unit of illumination.

Online exhibition: Exhibitions which present artworks digitally in a virtual space, with no physical counterpart.

Plinth: A freestanding base or surface upon which artworks are displayed.

Preservation: Prolonging the existence of an artwork or object by minimising chemical and physical deterioration and damage.

Preventive conservation: Aims to prevent deterioration or damage to a work by controlling its environment.

Provenance: The history of ownership of an object or artwork

Relative humidity: The ratio of the amount of water vapor present in the air to the greatest amount possible at the same temperature

Restoration: Treatment or intervention to enhance the interpretation of an artwork. Restoration may involve reassembly of broken components, cleaning off extra material, or re-integration using new materials.

Retrospective: A generally comprehensive exhibition, compilation, or performance survey of the work of an artist over a span of years

Sightline: A line of sight between the audience and the artwork in the gallery space. Exhibition designers and curators pay close attention to how one artwork relates to the other in the line of sight.

Solander box: A protective often leather-covered and book-shaped case for artworks usually with a slide-on top that completely covers the contents

Thematic grouping: When artworks are arranged according to specific themes or groups of ideas.

Virtual tour: 3D scans which replicate the physical space of existing exhibitions so that they can be experienced remotely.