



TIP SHEET

Travelling Exhibition: Handling, Packing, and Crating for Tour

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Shipping

When touring an exhibition of artefacts, proper packing and crating is an essential component to preserving the condition of the objects. Fine art shipping is expensive, even more so between small communities. Freight shipping can be an affordable option. If you pursue freight shipping with a commercial shipper, you will need to ensure that the objects are extremely well packed and crated. Always request non-cubed weight measurement. A cubed charge means that they will round up your shipment to 1000 lbs and charge you accordingly. You can request a non-cubed shipment, but will want to check your invoice to make sure the request was met.

You will need to fill out a bill of lading or waybill. This will be provided by the shipping company and will include information like shipper address and contact information, receiver address and contact information, number of pieces, dimensions of pieces, the weight of individual pieces, and the total weight of the shipment. It will also indicate who is to pay the cost of shipping. Make sure to request a tailgate pickup if you do not have a loading dock. Make sure the recipient institution will also have a tailgate upon delivery if need be.

A dolly or furniture moving cart (or even a pallet jack) will be needed for moving the crates around your facility and to the truck. You can purchase them from companies like Uline,¹ or you can easily make your own dolly/cart using a board, scrap carpet, and casters.

Crating

Wood crates are the standard for long tours and freight shipping. You can commission local preparators to produce crates for your tour or build them in-house if you have the facilities and skills. Wooden crates should be lined with a thick rigid foam, and then a layer of corrugated plastic (known commercially as coroplast); both the foam and coroplast are available at most home building stores. The most likely form of damage that will occur during shipping would be a puncture to the outside of the crate by a forklift. Multiple layers of protection are key to preventing the external arm of the forklift from penetrating the crate and damaging the objects.

Determine the number and size of crates required by surveying your touring objects and all supplementary materials like installation supports, didactic panels, catalogues, labels, etc. Add extra dimensions to your objects to accommodate the multiple layers of packing materials, coroplast dividers, and rigid foam. It is always easier to add more layers of foam (or other packing materials) than to fit objects into a crate that is too small.

Your crate should be clearly labelled with your institution's contact information as well as crate number (1 of 4 for instance), fragile contents signage, and proper orientation (which side is up). Clearly indicate the lid and where the screws should be removed to open the crate. You can also use hinges and metal locks.

The inside lid of the crate should include packing and unpacking instructions. Create a step-by-step document that outlines the order to remove and pack the objects. Include pictures. Make it as simple as possible for the person that opens the crate. Each object package should be clearly numbered and labelled. As well as any dividers or spacers to ensure appropriate placement during repacking. Instructions should identify which object is packed in which numbered package.

The following is an example of packing instructions that includes a crate with three-dimensional objects and framed two-dimensional objects:



Scissor Cuts

Crate #1 of 1

Packing Instructions



All four are packed and slid into the boxes on their sides.

#18 is the ONLY one that is stood up to travel. The others MUST remain on their sides.



In the back left corner, put the TV (inside the coroplast box). Text should be upright.

In the back right corner of crate, stack the three horizontal boxes (#16, #17, #19).

In front of these place the blue spacer; #18 will sit on top.



Scissor Cuts

Crate #1 of 1

Packing Instructions



Add the last box (#18) in the front right corner.

Now arrange the framed works as follows. Framed works sit face to face and back to back. A piece of coroplast is between each one.

Works #1 - #10

Works #11 - #14, and #20 - #21 (these sit in groups of two, next to each other between the coroplast.)

Work #15

Leader Panels





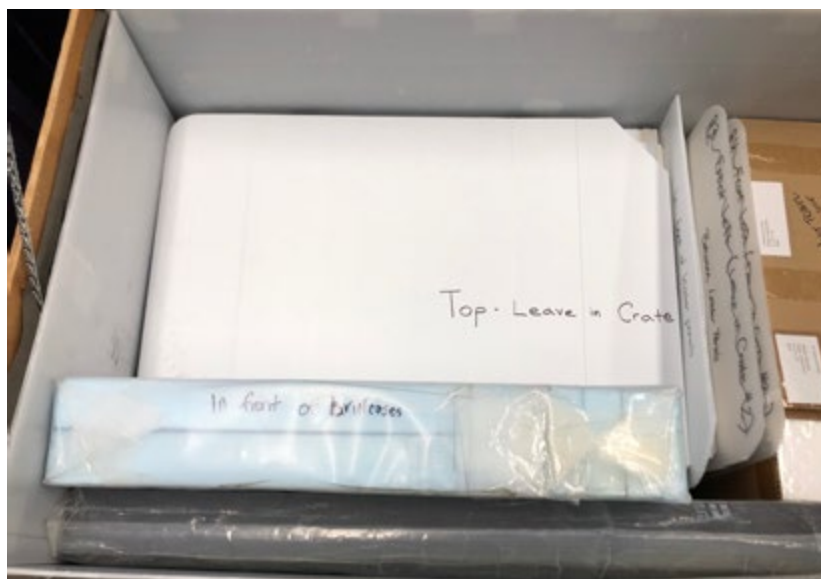
Scissor Cuts

Crate #1 of 1

Packing Instructions



Add the top piece of coroplast on top of the smaller framed works.



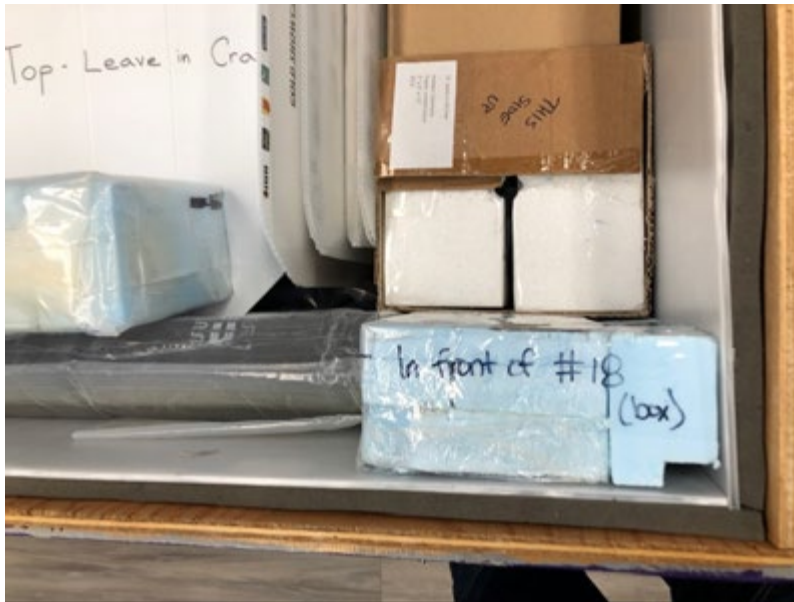
Add this blue foam spacer to the front of the coroplast, in front of Work #15.



Scissor Cuts

Crate #1 of 1

Packing Instructions



Add this blue foam spacer to the front right corner.



Place the two briefcases on top of the coroplast.

Include dividers in between the objects, and packing pillows or foam inserts wherever there is space between objects. Any movement has the potential to cause damage. All objects should be snug in their packaging, and the packaging should be snug within the crate. Label your dividers and foam inserts for easier packing. Always wrap cut rigid foam in polyurethane plastic as the cut edge can flake easily and is extremely frustrating to clean up. Polyurethane plastic can be purchased in large rolls from home building stores, usually located in the insulating section of the store. You can also purchase polyurethane plastic bags in various sizes from companies like Tenaquip.²

Packing

Your packed crate should remind you of an onion, layer upon layer of protection. The first layer of protection will depend on the material of the object. Fibre or textile objects should be wrapped in plain cotton muslin or tissue paper and then placed within a polyurethane plastic wrapping or bag. This protects the surface from rubbing against itself, and the plastic protects it from potential water damage and pests (this is especially important for textile pieces). The next layer would be a coroplast or archival cardboard box. If the object has a three-dimensional shape, use soft foam to support the shape of the object. Create a cocoon for the object. This can be done by layering soft foam up around the object by stacking each layer, tracing the shape of the object, and then cutting the negative from the foam. Clearly label the box with the contents and how to repackage the object.

Include an image that demonstrates how the object should be handled and placed within the foam and box. This is an example of ceramic objects packed within layers of foam, within a coroplast box:





Boxes should be closed securely with Velcro tabs or elastic straps. If the box is quite heavy, you may want to install handles on the outside of the box. Indicate on the outside of the box how it should be removed from the crate (i.e., two people required, pull-up using straps, etc.).

At this point, the objects have eight layers of protection. Tissue/cotton, polyurethane plastic, foam, coroplast/cardboard box, coroplast dividers, coroplast shell, rigid foam shell, and finally the wooden crate. More may be required if the object is extremely fragile. Use your best judgment, but always err on the side of caution. Packing supports are lightweight so they will not be adding much weight to the overall shipment.

Handling

Always wear gloves when handling objects. Nitrile or cotton gloves with a bevelled surface are ideal as they grip the surface of the object. The oils in our skin are extremely corrosive to some surfaces. (Touch the surface of your glasses or sunglasses to see how easy it is to deposit debris onto the surface of an object.)

Keep your work area free from extraneous debris, food, and drink. Try to keep your packing area clean and tidy; it is so easy to trip on a box or piece of debris and drop your object when moving it throughout the space. Never stack objects. When creating the supports within your crate always place the object back into its storage area, then confirm the fit after the packing material has been cut, glued, or taped.

Clearly communicate handling requirements to anyone else who will be handling the objects. An object handling document is a good idea, especially if some objects require extra care.

Condition Reports

Condition reports are completed for every object upon arrival in the facility and again prior to packing for shipment. Condition reports are essential for insurance purposes. They will note the name of the person reporting, the date, and where they have arrived from. There should be an incoming and outgoing condition report completed by each institution. They will note any structural or surface damage. There should be an area for photos to be included. The MAS website has an excellent condition report template that you can modify for your purposes.³ If any damage occurs during the tour, your insurance company will want to see the condition reports before and after the damage has occurred in order to process a claim.

Additional Resources

Snutch, D. and Marcon, P. "Making Tirwall Containers – Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) Notes 1/4". Canadian Heritage. 1997. Accessed 14 December 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes/making-triwall-containers.html>.

Marcon, Paul. "The CCI Channel Crate: Making a Lightweight, Reusable Crating System – Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) Notes 20/1". Government of Canada, Canadian Conservation Institute, 2020. Accessed 14 December 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes/lightweight-reusable-crate.html>.

Marcon, Paul. "Foam Corner Pads – Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) Notes 20/2". Government of Canada, Canadian Conservation Institute, 2021. 14 December 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes/foam-corner-pads.html>.

Marcon, Paul. "Features of Effective Packaging and Transportation for Artworks – Technical Bulletin 34." Government of Canada, Canadian Conservation Institute, 2020. Accessed 14 December 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/technical-bulletins/effective-packaging-transport-artwork.html>.

Marcon, Paul. "Five Steps to Safe Shipment – Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) Notes 20/3". Government of Canada, Canadian Conservation Institute, 2021. Accessed 14 December 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes/five-steps-safe-shipment.html>.

Province, Adrianna. "Handlin' It: Techniques and Materials for Artifact Packing and Transport". Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, 06 November 2020. Accessed 14 December 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhbVzvUy9oM>.

Footnotes

- 1 Uline. Accessed 14 December 2022. <https://www.uline.ca>
- 2 Tenaquip. Accessed 14 December 2022. <https://www.tenaquip.com>
- 3 "Condition Report." Museums Association of Saskatchewan. https://www.saskmuseums.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Condition_Report_FINAL.docx

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