

SILVER STUDIO PORTFOLIO COLLECTION – HOUSING AND CONSERVATION PROJECT

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Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, December 2010

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INTRODUCTION

In autumn 2010, a ten-week Conservation Internship, funded by The Mayor of London and MLA Renaissance London, was conducted to surface clean, document and house art portfolios from the Silver Studio Collection. The portfolios are primarily from the late 19th and early 20th century. These portfolios are inherently unstable due to the use of poor grade materials and wood pulp paper. Many portfolio bindings are failing or present historical repairs that have caused damage to the covers and textblock. Additionally, the build up of surface dirt at the edges of the pages and on the covers has made these works unavailable for access.

The aim of the project was to provide protective housing for this part of the Silver Studio Collection prior to the museum move in 2011. The project was conceived as part of MoDA's broad conservation strategy which focuses on preventive conservation techniques in conjunction with museum documentation. This enables both physical and informational access by researchers.

BACKGROUND TO THE COLLECTION

The Silver Studio was founded by Arthur Silver in London in 1880 and the design studio closed in 1963. The collection includes more than 40,000 original designs, and the significance of the Silver Studio collection was acknowledged in 2008 when the collection was granted the Designated Collection status by the Museum, Library and Archives Council (MLA).

The Silver Studio had a reference library that consisted of art portfolios, books and periodicals which form the art portfolio collection. This special collection was unaccessioned and needed to be documented and housed for the planned museum move in 2011.

It is understood that these resources were used for reference materials when creating designs. A number of the portfolios in this collection show evidence of their use in the working design studio, including having original designs and magazine clippings found in pages, mechanical damage from handling, historical repairs and labels, paint splatters, ink stains and in one instance, a paintbrush was found inside the portfolio.

Photographic evidence of historical working practices found in the collection



acc. # SM130
Handwritten SS label, a reminder of the context of the reference collection.

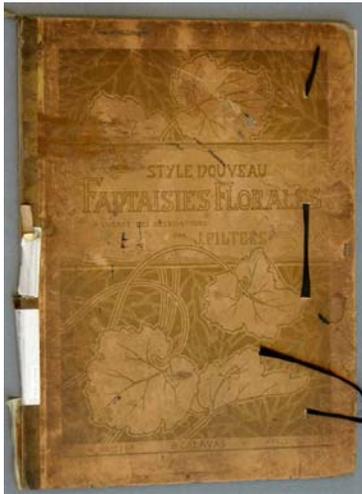


acc. # SM217
Paint brush found inside book.



acc. # SM229
Paint splatters in a published portfolio.

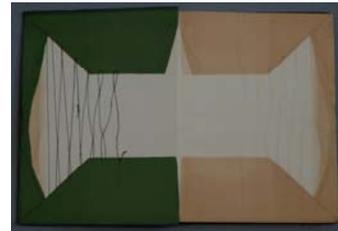
Photographic examples of binding structures and characteristic damage found within the collection



acc. # SM175
Art Nouveau floral portfolio with prevalent collection features including handwritten paper labels, cloth ties and mechanical damage to the spine.



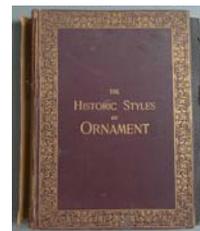
acc. # SM200
Spine damage with tape repairs.



acc. # SM127
Discoloration from covering material.



acc. # SM168
Book with red rot and detached spine fragment and covering board.



acc. # SM204
Book with severe mechanical damage to the spine.

COLLECTION SURVEY

After discussions with Emma Shaw, Preventive Conservator, and consultation with Julia Foster, Preservation Assessment Survey Advisor at the British Library, a survey was conducted. Each item was assessed to establish the nature of the collection and to develop a timetable for project completion. Sample survey techniques were not appropriate for a collection of this size as they would not provide an accurate assessment of the collection.

Preliminary survey fields in the documentation spreadsheet allowed for classification of items according to the following criteria:

- Description:
 - Title; subject; dimensions
 - Physical structure: book/ printed portfolio/ bound volume/ sketchbook/ scrapbook/ periodical
 - Object description: materials; binding
- Value to the collection and curatorial context:
 - This assessment was based on the relevance of items within the context of the Silver Studio Collection and perceived uniqueness of individual items within the context of National Museum and Library Collections.
 - Items were flagged as special interest during documentation, and this was considered when making recommendations for treatment.
- Preservation requirements:
 - Surface cleaning procedures and housing methods were recommended and time estimates provided.
- Overall accessibility:
 - Items were categorized using the museum traffic light system: (Green: accessible / Amber: limited accessibility / Red: not accessible). Accessibility was assessed with consideration of: degree of surface dirt present, physical damage, and environmental degradation.

Classification of the objects

301 items were surveyed, and after consultation with Zoe Hendon, the objects were classified. The objects fell into a few distinct categories:

1. MoDA Design Collection of Books:
 - 4 bound volumes were integrated into this collection and catalogued with the university library.
2. Silver Studio Portfolio Collection:
 - 157 objects were added to this collection and prioritized by Zoe Hendon for documentation and treatment. These items included rare and limited edition fine art portfolios and items that were considered to have individual significance, national significance, or importance to the Silver Studio.
 - The objects were accessioned with a prefix of SM, further documented, photographed and were prioritized for surface cleaning and housing treatments. Keywords such as 'textile,' 'art nouveau,' 'decorative art,' were established to be used in the object catalogue records to make these objects intellectually accessible.
3. Scrapbooks; periodicals; textile sample books; and original Silver Studio sketchbooks.
 - 140 items comprised these collections. These materials were sorted into appropriate groups in consultation with the curatorial team and were housed in archival boxes.
 - The objects were catalogued in an archival manner according to general topic and area of interest.

Assessment of projected time needed for treatment

The survey results were assessed in consultation with Emma Shaw. Planning was conducted for the treatment and housing of the 157 prioritized items in the Silver Studio Portfolio Collection.

- The total time estimated to thoroughly surface clean the selected 157 priority items was 610 hours.
- The total time estimated to house objects in enclosures inside archival boxes box was 93 hours.
- At the completion of the survey, there were only 245 hours remaining to complete the project.

DOCUMENTATION

An important element of this project was creating a documentation format that would appropriately capture the information necessary to understand the object structure, curatorial importance, condition, accessibility and conservation and preservation requirements of the entire collection.

This documentation process provided the tools to:

- Capture and compare data.
- Enable effective planning and time management of the preservation project in hand.
- Provide documentation for planning of future conservation and cataloguing.
- Enable further research into the practices of the Silver Studio, and also into wider fields of study such as turn of the century reprographic techniques, design publishing practices, import and export of ideas and materials, manufacturing histories and the international design community of the period.
- Enable Zoe Hendon (Senior Curator) to conduct preliminary research into the availability of some publications in U.K. research repositories confirming the rarity of some items in the collection.

Documentation procedure

- An Excel spreadsheet was designed to allow the previously undocumented, unaccessioned materials to be imported into MoDA's research database, Musims Index Plus.
- The Excel spreadsheet was used throughout the project and allowed for the management and interpretation of the data collected.
 - The first phase of the spreadsheet was developed for the survey
 - Survey documentation provided the information required to prepare the collection for transit, storage and conservation treatments.
 - It also allowed for the prioritization treatment of 157 items according to the potential intellectual value, perceived physical needs, and time available to the project.
 - The second phase of the spreadsheet was developed for additional documentation of the 157 prioritised objects. From the initial survey, additional documentation areas were developed and incorporated into the existing spreadsheet. (e.g. more detailed physical descriptions and catalogue data, individual condition reports, conservation recommendations, documentation of surface cleaning, housing and updated accessibility rating.) The data from the excel spreadsheet was linked with an MSWord template to create individual documentation forms that allows the data to be more easily read.

An example of a completed documentation can be found on the following page.

Housing

Though there were a number of items that were the appropriate size to be housed directly into archival boxes, the majority of items required custom housing enclosures. Housing the portfolios was challenging as many portfolios had pages larger than the covering boards, broken portfolio ties, damaged portfolio boards, degraded spines, and extensive paper damage including stains, tears, creases, ingrained dirt, and paper loss.

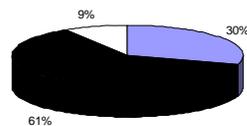
Ready made archival boxes in six sizes were obtained from Conservation by Design. The portfolios were grouped according to sets, size, and subject matter or format, as appropriate, and approximately two items were housed in each box. This allows the collection to be more manageable and will protect the objects during transit. In order to protect the portfolios from abrasion and mechanical damage within standard sized boxes, individual wrappers were devised where necessary.

- 47 objects were housed in 4-flap enclosures made of 1000-micron board, 650-micron board and Manila depending on the weight and size of the object. 4-flap enclosures protect these multi-part portfolios from moving around inside archival boxes.
- 96 portfolios and periodicals were housed in Mylar. Mylar enclosures and wrappers provide protection to the edges of protruding sheets of paper and prevent the portfolios from moving around inside archival boxes.
- 14 items were housed directly into Conservation By Design boxes as they did not require further protective wrapping.

Photographs of the portfolios before and after housing



Portfolios prior to rehousing



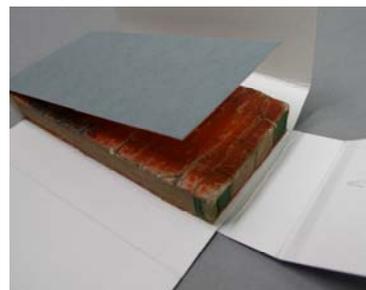
- Housed in conservation manila/board enclosure in archival box.
- Housed in Melinex enclosure in archival box
- Housed directly in archival box



Portfolios housed in archival boxes



acc. # SM151
Portfolio in 4-flap.



acc. # SM137
Japanese book in 4-flap.



acc. # SM120
Portfolio housed directly in archival box.

CONSERVATION DOCUMENTATION ANALYSIS

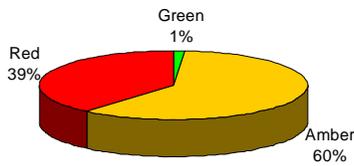
In the documentation process

- Recommendations were made for future treatments.
- Items were given a conservation priority rating for future collection care planning.
- Items were given an updated accessibility rating of green, amber, or red.

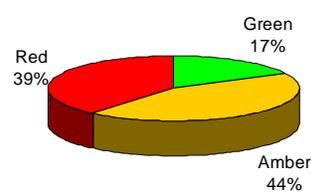
Improved physical accessibility of the collection

Prior to the rehousing of the objects, only 1% of the objects were fully accessible, and that increased to 17% on completion of the project. With surface cleaning some of the amber items would also become fully accessible, but due to time constraints this was not possible. As the spines are degraded on so many of the portfolios, this means that many portfolios will not be green for access until conservation work is conducted.

Initial accessibility assessment from survey documentation

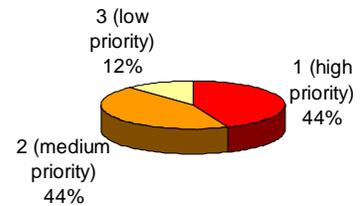


Accessibility assessment at the project conclusion



Conservation priority rating system

When determining conservation recommendations for the objects, accessibility rating was taken into consideration. For items that were green for access, further conservation was not recommended although many require further surface cleaning of ingrained dirt and sometimes extensive paper repairs. Another consideration that was taken into account was the objects' perceived significance. From this criteria, it was determined that 44% of the 157 objects were high priority for requiring conservation, 44% medium priority and 12% low priority.

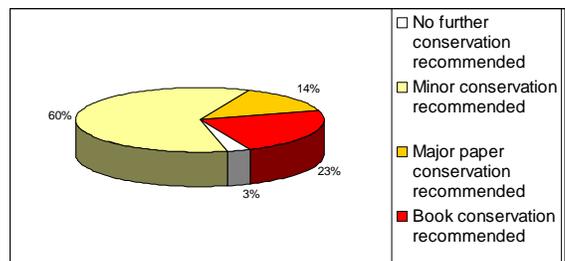


Key to conservation priority rating system

1. High priority: Have access limitations or major conservation required or is of national importance or significance to the collection
2. Medium priority: Have access limitations or conservation required
3. Low priority: accessible. Item is in stable condition.

Conservation recommendations for future treatments

As there was not time for detailed individual conservation reports for each multi-part object, conservation recommendations are general. It was assessed that 60% of the collection requires further surface cleaning and minor conservation including cleaning of ingrained dirt and paper repairs. 37% require major conservation or book conservation in order to be accessible in the future.



CONCLUSION

All items are now housed adequately for transit and storage at the new museum site. Their physical and informational accessibility has been significantly improved through the sorting process, documentation, cleaning and protective wrapping.

The project has necessitated a close working relationship between the museum's curatorial team and conservation team and enabled the museum to better integrate 301 items into the Silver Studio Collection. This was achieved through the sorting, physical documentation, and catalogue research that took place using the Excel spreadsheet to organize data. The process revealed that a potentially unique collection of rare books forms part of the MoDA collection. These publications on decorative arts, art nouveau design, textiles and floral inspiration also reveal much about the design studio's working practice, signs of which were verifiable in focused observation and documentation during the course of the project.

This ambitious project was completed successfully by the deadline because of the planning enabled by the survey and the fact that information was transferrable to each phase of the project – from the survey to the full documentation stage, recording treatments, and then compiling information and finally for analyzing data and report formulation. The use of a spreadsheet allowed for sorting the objects during documentation and for conducting keyword searches for items of similar subjects or with the same publisher. In the compilation of this report, the spreadsheet enabled data analysis and the creation of pie charts of the change in accessibility ratings. The Excel list will be reformatted and imported into the museum's MuseumIndex+ collection database. The information and data management systems developed in the project will provide useful guidance for planning of similar projects in the future.

The information generated on the physical condition of the objects will be used in forward planning of documentation and preservation/conservation projects and may be useful in seeking additional funding.

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Description of the collection

The collection clearly demonstrates the variety of printing processes in use during the late 19th and early 20th century in fine art publications. The collection primarily consists of portfolios and publications containing collotypes, lithographs, photographs and prints that were not identified due to time constraints. The collection also has a few portfolios containing engravings, hand-colored prints and stencil hand-colored prints (pochoirs and aquarelles).

This project was the first opportunity to sort through the portfolio collection in any detail. Many objects in the collections are not dated, but the dated materials range from the 1870s to 1920s. There is a wide variety of subject matter including art nouveau and many different types of botanical studies. There are a number of books on textile designs on subjects including Japan, India and the Renaissance. Though some publications were from England, there are a large number of French and German publications.

Below is a summary of the objects in the collection:

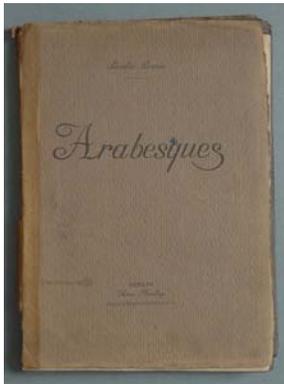
Authors, editors, and publishers found in the collection:

- 65 French language publications including: Albert Lévy publications (quantity: 4); Henri Ernst publications, Paris (quantity: 5); A. Calavas publications, Paris (quantity: 13); Armand Guérinet publications, Paris (quantity: 21); and Adolphe Picard (quantity: 3).
- 40 German language publications including Christian Stoll publications (quantity: 5); Georg Hirth publications (quantity: 6); Julius Hoffman (quantity: 6); Emil Kumsch (quantity: 3); and Bruno Hessling (quantity: 2).
- 10 books on Japanese subjects including: books by photographer Kazumasa Ogawa (quantity: 3); Japanese mon books (quantity: 2); and books and portfolios on Japanese design, ceramics, kimono, katagami, and textiles (quantity: 5).
- 43 English language publications including E.J. Ellis. (quantity: 1); Percy Macquoid, published by: Lawrence & Bullen (quantity: 4); published by B.T. Batsford, London. (quantity: 4).
- 3 Italian language publications by Bestetti E Tumminelli.
- 4 portfolios that consist of no printed text, but merely images that were used for visual inspiration.

Object Types with Photographic Documentation

In the initial assessment survey, objects were roughly sorted into the following object types: portfolios, periodicals, and books. The collection contains a large number of printed portfolios, silver studio assembled portfolio, scrapbooks and special interest periodicals. The photographic images below show the variety of material in this collection and the richness of visual imagery. The majority of portfolios in the collection have hard covering boards and cloth ties added to them by the Silver Studio.

Photographs of object Types



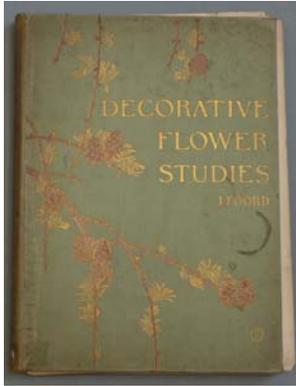
acc. # SM200
Soft-case paper portfolio.



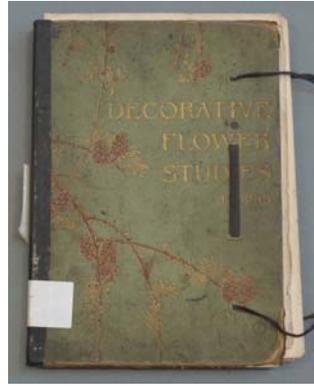
acc. # SM194
Hard-case portfolio with paper covering material and paper quarter back spine.



acc. # SM184
Hard-case portfolio with paper covering material textured to look like fabric and fabric half back spine.



acc. # SM125



acc. # SM126



acc. # SM173

The above volumes are hard-case portfolios with decorative cloth covering material. The spine of the volume on the right, SM126, has been mended with thick black tape and cloth ties have been added by piercing holes into the cover and back boards. A common problem with these historic repairs is that the spine is often no longer deep enough for the text block to fit properly within the portfolio case.

Some portfolios, like the above, were created using a ready-made portfolio that is not original to the object.



acc. # SM217



acc. # SM138 acc. # SM137
Books with Japanese style bindings.



acc. # SM170

4-flap portfolio. While the majority of portfolios in the collection are folio style, some had multiple flaps.



acc. # SM232

Some portfolios were compiled by the Silver Studio. The above portfolio contains printed and photographic images from different sources.



acc. # SM221



acc. # SM240



acc. # SM218



acc. # SM239



The above are periodicals of a variety of styles that were founded in the reference portfolio collection. The top right volume, acc. # SM239, consists of periodicals that were historically bound together and had their pages trimmed.



acc. # SM241

A scrapbook with clippings pasted inside.



acc. # ST4303

Textile sample books from Lincoln Mills.



acc. # SE2400

Portfolio containing original Silver Studio designs sorted into folders by category.

Images in the Collection



acc. # SM126
Pochoir from Art Nouveau flower book by J. Foord.



acc. # SM226
Collotype hand-painted with opaque white paint.



acc. # SM170
Colour engraving reproduction of paintings by 17th century artist, Jean Baptiste Monnoyer.



acc. # SM231
Platinum photographs of flowers by Henry Irving of Kent.



acc. # SM176
Collotype floral images by A. Calavas.



acc. # SM121
CMY 3-colour halftone lithographic prints.



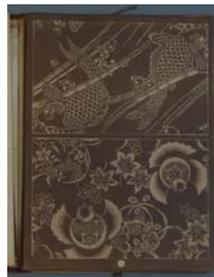
acc. # SM190
Albumen photographs mounted on board from portfolio of antique textiles by Armand Guérinet.



acc. # SM179
Hand-colored collotype from book of Japanese silk textiles by Henri Ernst.



acc. # SM163
Photolithograph from Art Nouveau decorative art annual Der Moderne Stil.



acc. # SM193
Print of Art Nouveau Katagami stencil.



acc. # SM232
Albumen photograph from a portfolio containing images of furniture.

Reproductive Techniques in the Collection

Distribution of image types as found in the 157 item portfolio collection		Quantity of image types sorted by process	
b&w/monochromatic prints	42	b&w/monochromatic prints	53
hand-coloured b&w/monochromatic prints	3	hand-coloured b&w/monochromatic prints	3
pochoirs and b&w/monochromatic prints	2	pochoirs	2
colour engravings	2	colour engravings	2
colour lithographs	2	colour lithographs	2
colour print and b&w/monochromatic prints	2	colour prints	19
colour Prints	17	3 or 4 colour prints	11
3 or 4 colour Prints	5	collotypes	52
b&w/monochromatic prints and 3 or 4 colour prints	6	hand-coloured collotypes	7
b&w/monochromatic prints and hand-coloured Collotypes	1	photolithographs	7
hand-coloured collotypes	2	carbon prints	1
collotype and hand-coloured collotypes	4	albumen photographs	10
collotypes	47	photogravures	2
photolithographs & collotypes	1	platinum photographs	1
carbon prints and albumen photographs	1	monochromatic P.O.P. photographs	1
albumen photographs	9	objects containing text only and no images	1
photolithographs	6	Total	174
photogravures	2		
platinum Photographs	1	Objects containing paste mounted images rather than images printed directly onto the page of the portfolio, book or publication.	18
monochromatic P.O.P. photographs	1		
objects containing text only and no images	1		
Total	157	Items with hand-colouring (including pochoirs)	12