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ABOA VETUS & ARS NOVA, HAM HELSINKI ART MUSEUM, HELSINKI CITY MUSEUM, MUSEUM OF TECHNOLOGY,  
TAMPERE ART MUSEUM & THE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS OF THE TAMPERE MUSEUMS

# DEACCESSIONING

Sharing Experiences  
from Finland

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**HELSINKI 2016**

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VAPRIIKKI

ABO A VETUS  
ARS NOVA

HAM



TAMPEREEN  
TAIDEMUSEO  
TAMPERE ART MUSEUM

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# The Museums Participating in the Project

**HAM – HELSINKI ART MUSEUM** is in charge of the art collection of the residents of Helsinki, containing over 9,000 works. The main venue of the museum's exhibitions is the Tennispalatsi building in the centre of Helsinki. Most of the collection is located in parks, streets, city offices, health-care centres, schools and libraries. Public works of sculpture, numbering some 200 pieces, are the most visible items of the museum's collection. HAM's latest document on collections policy was drawn up in 2012 and further specifications of deaccessioning policy became topical when a number of public works of art in poor condition were removed from the collection.

**HELSINKI CITY MUSEUM** collects and documents the material and immaterial cultural heritage of Helsinki and its residents. The collections include items ranging from gingerbread cutters to hospital beds and trams. The museum has actively applied deaccessioning as a means of collections policy since adopting its first deaccessioning policy in 2001. Owing to the relocation of the museum's collections centre, more deaccession decisions have been made than normally. Because of the number of deaccessioned items, and for ecological reasons, the museum has had the need to develop methods of disposal and to permit recycling and sales of deaccessioned material.

**TAMPERE ART MUSEUM** and the Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums are stored in a shared collections centre. During the course of this project, the museums jointly examined whether collection objects and audiences would benefit from collection transfers. Although deaccessioning has not yet been carried out in Tampere Art Museum, it would be important to develop the procedures of receiving material and to lay down the terms of deaccessioning before items are included in the collections. In addition to its own museum collection, Tampere Art Museum manages the art collection of the City of Tampere. This concerns a total of over 14,000 artworks.

**THE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS OF THE TAMPERE MUSEUMS** are part of the city's museums services. The museums' activities regarding their collections focus on documenting and collecting the cultural heritage of Tampere and the Pirkanmaa region. The collections contain almost 400,000 objects, a significant part of which consist of large collections related to technology and industrial history. A system of value classification has been applied to the collections since 1994, permitting deaccessioning in the manner indicated by museum-ethical guidelines. Deaccessioning is regarded as part of the normal, documented lifespan of objects.

**ABOA VETUS & ARS NOVA** is a private museum of history and contemporary art operating in Turku. The museum's collections consist of archaeological finds, the art collection of the Matti Koivurinta Foundation and documents. The art collection contains over 600 works dating from the 20th century to the present day. The museum's work regarding its collections is being developed in accordance with its collections policy in a direction that explicates and develops the collection processes. The acquisition process, the documentation of contextual and provenance information and the processes of the lifespan of a collection are central areas of dynamic museum work.

**MUSEUM OF TECHNOLOGY** is a national specialised museum focusing on the industrial cultural heritage, with a collection of 60,000 objects and other items. A considerable proportion of the collection was gathered by volunteers in the 1970s. After the initial years, the collection has grown via donations. Deaccessioning is an important tool for improving the quality of the collections; the museum's deaccessioning policy was approved in 2013. Deaccessioning has mainly been carried out as transfers to other museums and by destroying objects.

# Preface

**D**EACCESSIONING is a topical issue in the museums sector. The background of this publication is a project carried out in 2014, in which Helsinki City Museum, the Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums and the Museum of Technology discussed the philosophy of deaccessioning and the various procedures associated with it. We aimed at the first Finnish overview of how material is deaccessioned in Finnish museums of cultural history<sup>1</sup> and how this process could be developed on the basis of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums. We soon noticed that many questions were worth considering together with art museums. As a result, a further project was launched in 2015 involving three art museums, HAM – Helsinki Art Museum, Tampere Art Museum and the Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova museum of history and contemporary art in Turku. Finnish Museums Association published two reports of the project in Finnish.<sup>2</sup> Issues of deaccessioning were also addressed in some twenty professional seminars and training events in the museums sector. The related discussions in-

creasingly pointed out that these issues are shared by all museums, although solutions can differ. We therefore want to make Finnish discussion on these matters available to international readers.

Our project was launched at a stage where collections-related work has been developed in highly active ways in Finnish museums. Various procedures and tools have been developed in recent years that will also be useful for developing deaccessioning practices. During the 2010s, museums of cultural history in Finland have created a network for collection management collaboration (Finnish acronym TAKO), within which museums agree to a nation-wide division of tasks in collecting. Financial support for the project was provided by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and the National Museum of Finland, but actual division of tasks was largely carried out by the participating museums. The related agreement with the National Board of Antiquities on collecting and documenting has been signed by over a hundred professionally managed Finnish museums. There are over 1,000 museums in Finland, 151 of which are professionally managed and partly funded by the state, which means that the network can truly coordinate the accessions in professionally run Finnish museums. A well-functioning network can increase knowledge of the actual contents of collections in various museums and the ways in which they wish to develop them. These aims are also served by the FINNA portal of all

Finnish memory organisations<sup>3</sup>, through which both the public and museum professional can study the cultural heritage collected and stored by museums, archives and libraries. The significance analysis tool published in 2015<sup>4</sup> is, in turn, an aid for museums in assessing and evaluating individual objects and whole collections. All these initiatives have led to increased discussion within the museums sector, developed skills in networked activities and expanded our understanding of cultural heritage preserved by museums.

Collaboration is a source of strength. We express our thanks to the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture for funding the initiative and the Finnish Museums Association for including our publications in its web publications series. We are grateful to the Cultural History Collections of the National Museum of Finland, the Finnish National Gallery and the TAKO network for participating in our work and providing their support in the steering group of our project.

The steering group has also included the directors of the museums in the project, the Development Unit of the National Board of Antiquities and the Finnish Museums Association. Guidelines are currently being drafted with the TAKO network for

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<sup>1</sup> Museums of cultural history refer in Finnish praxis to museums with mainly ethnographic and historical collections. Some of them have the duties of national specialised museums in their specific areas.

<sup>2</sup> Kokoelmapoistojen hyvät käytännöt, Västi & Sarantola-Weiss (eds.) 2015 and Kokoelmapoistojen yhteiset käytännöt, Västi & Sarantola-Weiss (eds.) 2016.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.finna.fi/?lng=en-gb>. Cit. 1.6.2016.

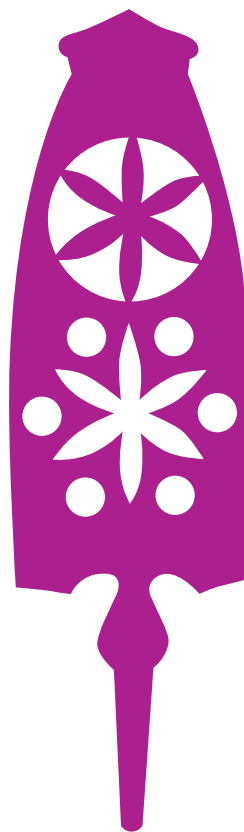
<sup>4</sup> The Finnish significance tool: Häyhä, Jantunen & Paaskoski 2015; On international examples, see e.g. Russel & Winkworth 2009; Reed 2012; Assessing Museum Collections 2014.

a web-based collections transfer forum that would operate in the manner of the Find an Object service in United Kingdom and the Herplaatsings database in the Netherlands. We have also had the opportunity to collaborate with the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and Lusto – The Finnish Forest Museum in the significance analysis method project and the MUSEO2015 collections management project of the National Board of Antiquities. We extend our warmest thanks to all museum professionals and researchers who have participated in our work by responding to our survey and to all who have shared their experiences and views of deaccessioning in other ways during the course of the initiative.

We particularly wish to thank all the museums that have participated in the project and the contributors to its two publications in Finnish. Texts were provided by Klas Fontell, Eeva Holkeri, Marika Honkaniemi, Merja Honkasalo, Elina Kallio, Johanna Lehto-Vahtera, Silja Lehtonen, Elina Leskelä, Kirsi Ojala, Tiina Paavola, Piia Pietarinen, Minna Sarantola-Weiss, Aki Silvennoinen, Tapio Suominen and Emilia Västi. All these texts are used in the present publication in English.

HELSINKI, 9. 11. 2016

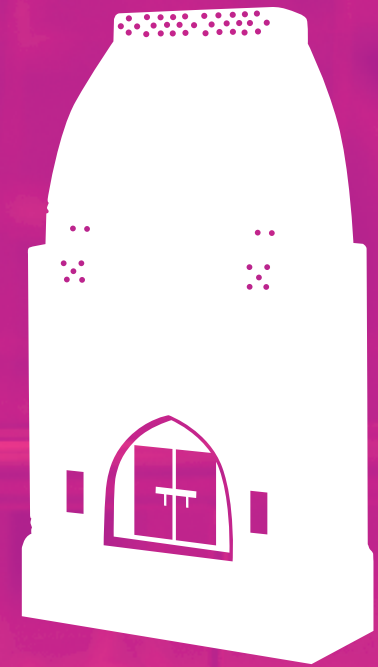
**Minna Sarantola-Weiss and Emilia Västi**



*These issues are shared by all museums, although solutions can differ. We therefore want to make Finnish discussion on these matters available to international readers.*



# 1 STARTING POINTS OF THE PROJECT



# 1. Starting points of the project

## 1.1. STARTING POINTS AND AIMS OF DEACCESSIONING

**DISCUSSION ON DEACCESSIONING** and especially methods of disposal are topical issues in museums in the 2010s. Despite this, the term ‘deaccession’ still has a slightly negative tone, being often associated only with disposing of material by destroying it. We disagree and maintain that the most important aim of deaccessioning is to develop museum collections. Instead of just reducing collections, the process refines them. The goal is to create collections that are abundant and full of significance to be used and developed methodically and in various ways together with the communities that own them.

Deaccessioning is thus considered as part of collections management and the work of developing the quality of collections. We proceed not only from the point that deaccessioning is the end of the museum lifespan of an object, but also from the position that considerations of deaccessioning should already be present when acquisition decisions are made. When museums receive donations or make other additions to their collections, the related processes should take into account the lifespan of the items in the museum’s collections. What does this specific example of the cultural heritage require in terms of collections management and care – not only at the time of acquisition but also in the future, possibly in the distant future? And in particular what significance and meanings are collected for the future along with the object?

The project began with a comparison of the deaccessioning policies and processes of the participating museums. The aim here was to create from them an overall framework for the process and procedures to serve as a basis for practice in Finnish museums. In the initial stage, the project’s core group consisted of three museums of cultural history, all of which had experience of deaccessioning.

Helsinki City Museum’s first deaccessioning policy was already adopted in 2001. It was mainly based on the corresponding policy of Stockholm City Museum in Sweden. The principles and operation of the policy were tested when the museum’s whole collection was moved in 2005–2006, but new relocations of collections, which began in 2015, called for a reappraisal of the process that steers the implementation of deaccessions, especially with regard to methods of disposal.

The Tampere museums have developed and applied a value classification system in their historical collections since the mid-1990s. Deaccessions are part of value classification. The relocation and launching of the new collections centre for the museums in 2012, and the preceding collection inventories and deaccessions showed that related policy needed to be updated.

The deaccessioning policy approved by the Museum of Technology in 2013 was the most recent and most comprehensive policy of this kind among the museums of the project. It, too, proceeded from vacating storage space in poor condition as one of its starting points. Prioritisation and deaccessioning were necessary in the collections, because the mu-

seum’s area of collecting and the focuses of its collections had changed over the past decades. Owing to the broad range of collected material, the division of collecting tasks among other museums is central to the museum’s deaccessioning policy.

Courses of action for deaccession are also outlined in the collections policy documents of all the art museums that participated in the continued stage of the project. Apart from individual principles, the deaccessioning project has not been recorded in broader terms for the time being at these museums. HAM – Helsinki Art Museum, however, specified the details of its related process in connection with the project. Although the possibility of deaccessioning is mentioned in the collections policies of art museums, there has not been any major need for it so far. When our project began, there had been only a few deaccessions in Helsinki in connection with the loss and destruction of artworks. The Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova Museum in Turku had experience of replacing parts of works, and in Tampere measures related to deaccessioning had thus far been anticipatory and proactive.

Previously in Finland, the problematic of deaccessioning from art collections has been approached with regard to lifespan issues, from the perspectives of both conservation and art history. A few years ago, Finnish researchers took part in the EU-funded Collections Mobility project<sup>5</sup>, focusing on improving

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<sup>5</sup> Pettersson et al. 2010.

the mobility of artworks with international loans of material while also referring to deaccessioning. Art historian Nina Robbins discusses deaccessioning from Finnish art museums from the perspective of museum value in a recent study.<sup>6</sup>

Deaccessions from the collections of cultural-historical museums proceed in a considerable number of cases from the needs of storage facilities in one way or another: relocation, unsuitable ambient conditions or the need for more space. At the same time, grounds for deaccessioning with reference to facilities are almost always also of an economic nature. The importance of economic considerations in deaccessioning decisions is a difficult issue, which nonetheless needs to be explicitly discussed. The updating of collections policy and changes and specifications to it are another important point of departure for deaccessioning. The national collecting and documenting scheme urges the re-evaluation of collections policies and overlap in acquisitions. The aim of functioning deaccessioning policy is to permit acquisitions and the allocation of resources (working hours and storage space) in accordance with collections policy. Above all, however, the goal should be a developing museum collection of high quality and easy accessibility that will serve both its users and owners well.

Our work took as its departure the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, the first version of which was drawn up in 1986. The most recent Finnish translation of the code is from 2005. The code defines the minimum requirements for the work of museum professionals and also provides a good starting point for considering deaccessioning. At the same time, how-

ever, it is of general scope and open to interpretation and does not consider, for example, copyrights or the need of museums of the 2010s to engage their communities in participation.

The most important practical model was the Disposal Toolkit web publication of the Museums Association of United Kingdom. Its first version came out in 2008, followed by a revised version in 2014. The focuses and definitions of the Disposal Toolkit, however, differ from the line followed here. It does not, for instance, list as methods of disposal transfers within a museum for educational purposes. On the other hand, some of the main themes of the British discussion, such as the need for deaccessions to always aim at the best possible public accessibility of the collections have not yet emerged in an equally prominent manner in Finland.

## 1.2 DEFINITIONS OF DEACCESSIONING

**DEACCESSIONING** concerns museum objects<sup>7</sup>. The present publication mainly discusses the deaccessioning of physical museum objects, whether cultural-historical objects or works of art. The model process presented in Chapter 3 was mainly developed for cultural-historical museums, but it can be equally applied to deaccessioning from other types of museums and collections.

There are terminological differences between museums and publications concerning deaccessioning and related terms. In this web publication, we use the term ‘disposal’ when referring to the physical re-

moval of an object from the premises and possession of a museum for example in the transfer of a collection or to be destroyed. ‘Deaccessioning’, on the other hand, means an administrative procedure by which a museum object is removed from a museum collection, thus implying a change to its status.<sup>8</sup> Transferring an object for museum-educational purposes is an example of the latter.

We maintain that subsuming the change of status of a museum object and internal transfers of objects within a museum under deaccessioning will make collections-related processes more fluid. Since the change of status within the museum influences the subsequent treatment and use of the object in the museum – i.e. to be used in hands-on collections or modified for use as museum props – this stage is primarily the one that should be subject to a joint decision and ratified in accordance with the museum’s model of administration.

## 1.3 THE OUTLINE OF THIS PUBLICATION

**THIS WEB PUBLICATION** covers four themes. Chapter 2 presents the survey carried out at the beginning of the first stage of the project to chart the views of Finnish museums on deaccessioning procedures and their main problem areas. Following the survey, the museums in the project analysed their own deaccessioning and disposal processes and studied examples from abroad, after which we prepared a process framework that museums can apply to their own needs if so desired. An integral part of this involves the criteria for

<sup>6</sup> Robbins 2016.

<sup>7</sup> On the definition of a museum object, see van Mensch 1992; Ekosaari, Jantunen & Paaskoski 2014; Häyhä, Jantunen & Paaskoski 2015.

<sup>8</sup> On the various definitions of deaccessioning, see Robbins 2016, 98–101 and e.g. Davies 2011, 21 and Weil 1997.

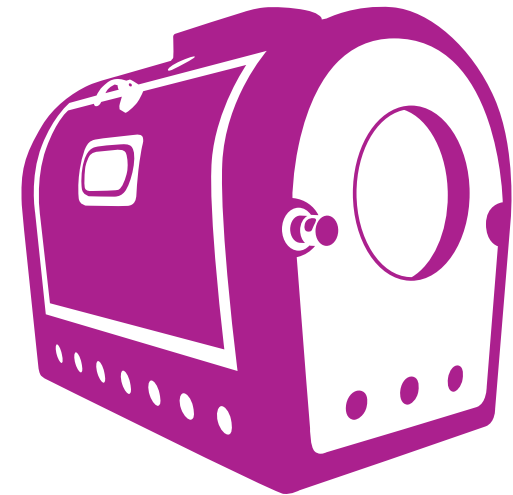
assessing the museum value, ethical aspects and legality of suggested deaccessioning and for planning deaccessioning processes. The criteria are discussed in Chapter 3.

The first stage of the project and the model process were based on the needs of museums of cultural history. We wanted, however, to start discussion on how the criteria of assessment would suit the needs of art museums. Therefore, the second stage of the project included discussions with art museums on the special features of deaccessioning from art collections and whether they have any need in general to deaccession material from their collections. A particular distinction between cultural-historical collections and art collections are issues of copyright and the fact that most cultural-historical collections in Finland are highly relevant from the cultural heritage point of view but are of only limited commercial or monetary value. Despite these and many other differences, the participating art museums felt it was important to develop deaccessioning policy also in their sector, and it was noted in discussions that the majority of assessment criteria and methods of disposal can also be applied to artworks and that the framework of the deaccessioning process is largely the same. The model process developed in this project could serve as a starting point. At the end of Chapter 3, Tapio Suominen, head of collections at Tampere Art Museum comments on the thematic of deaccessioning and the model process from the perspective of art museums. Suominen assumes that the need for deaccessioning will most likely grow also in the art museum sector. Although at present the size of art museum collections and their need for space cannot be compared to the problems faced by museums of cultural history, they, too, will pose a challenge to museum resources before long.

It can be readily assumed from the perspective

of cultural-historical museums that art museum collections could be more strictly delimited and of more easily recognisable museum value than the collections of cultural-historical museums that can represent an unbounded variety of object types. Our discussions, however, revealed that not all decisions have always rested with the experts of art museums and that objects that do not fit the collection profile have occasionally been entered and catalogued into their collections. It is also obvious that even in the future the needs for deaccessioning will not concern all parts of collection to an equal degree. Tampere Art Museum, for example, assumes that deaccessioning will primarily concern the art collection of the City of Tampere, which is deposited in public facilities, as these artworks are subject to wear and will become unsuited to their purpose with changes to their setting and function. This way of thinking finds a parallel in value classification familiar from museums of cultural history.

During our project, the participating museums carried out several collection inventories and made deaccession decisions, experiences of which were applied in drawing up the model process. Chapter 4 contains brief accounts of deaccessioning projects and experiences of them. We hope that they will also encourage other museums to address deaccessioning issues boldly.



*The goal is to create collections that are abundant and full of significance to be used and developed methodically and in various ways together with the communities that own them.*



# 2 DEACCESSIONING IN FINNISH MUSEUMS

## 2. Deaccessioning in Finnish museums

**T**HE ATTITUDES of museums to deaccessioning are indicated by their publicly announced collections policies. Some of them discuss the deaccessioning principles briefly and some give the deaccessioning process in a separate appendix. Deaccessioning is not explicitly prohibited in any of the collections policy documents that we have studied. Our study, however, did not directly answer the question of how and where deaccessioning was actually carried out.

We therefore decided to gather information on deaccessioning and disposal practices in Finnish museums with a web-based survey announced on the nationwide Museoposti (Museum Post) email list in June 2014. The survey charted what was felt to function well in deaccessioning, what was found to be problematic, what was felt to require solutions and how our project could provide help in these matters. The questions of the survey are listed in Appendix 1.

### 2.1. THE RESPONDENTS OF THE DEACCESSIONING SURVEY

A TOTAL OF 65 REPLIES were received to the survey. The majority of the respondents had some kind of connection with deaccessioning, as 59 of them noted that deaccessioning had been carried out in their museums during their careers there. While the respondents were not required to have any personal experience of deaccessioning, individual experience

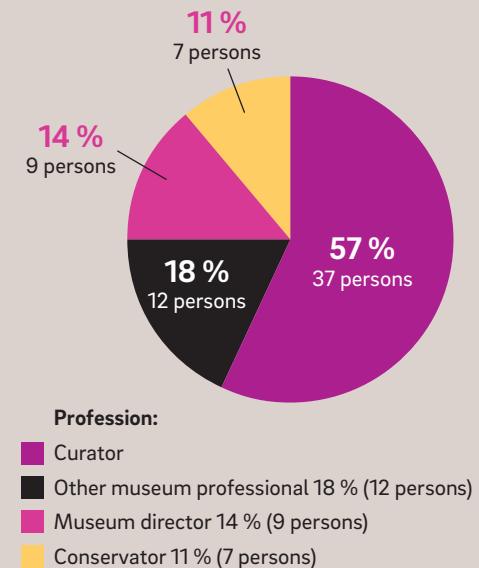
of deaccessioning could have influenced the way the respondents were selected. The proportion is thus not a direct reflection of the commonality of deaccessioning in Finnish museums. 82% of the respondents worked with cultural history collections. The survey reached the personnel of museums of different size and different administrative organisation and was also representative in regional terms.<sup>9</sup>

Forty-six persons said that their museums had a deaccessioning policy or process recorded in writing. Almost all the deaccessioning documents had been taken into use during the past ten years, particularly in 2008–2011. There were also several cases of deaccessioning instructions recorded in recent years.

The results show that the deaccessioning policies and processes laid down in writing are relatively new in the museums sector. Many of the respondents whose museums did not yet have a documented deaccessioning policy felt that it was necessary to draw up such a policy. Further comments also underlined the need to update, specify or reassess a deaccessioning process that had proven to be complex in practice.

#### RESPONDENTS

N = 65



<sup>9</sup> For a closer itemisation of the material, see Västi & Sarantola-Weiss 2015, 7–8.

## 2.2. DEACCESSIONING ASSESSMENT AND DISPOSAL METHODS IN MUSEUMS

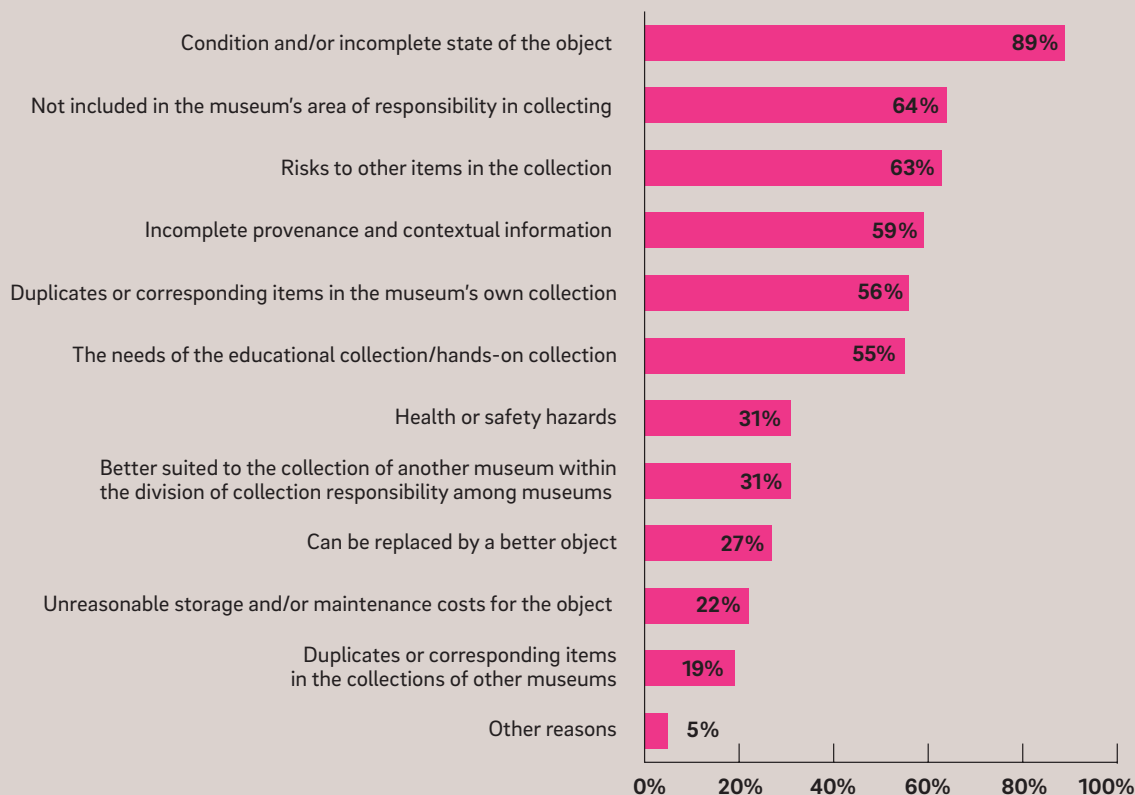
THE RESPONDENTS gave various arguments that were used in deaccessioning evaluation (Diagram 1).

Comments emphasised the importance of an overall assessment: *“In almost all cases the deaccession decision was based on several reasons on the list”; “Deaccessioning is based in most cases on an overall assessment”*. It is true that a single reason for deaccessioning, such as the needs of the educational collection, is rarely sufficient grounds for such action. The existence of similar objects in other collections was quite seldom cited as a reason, which shows that for the time being national division of collecting tasks still have only little influence on the collections policies and deaccessioning in museums.

The methods of disposal applied in museums were similarly surveyed (Diagram 2). The method that was mentioned most often, by over 90% of respondents, was to destroy the items. The commonality of destroying is not surprising. It is natural not to seek a new location for an object that has reached the end of its lifespan. Various kinds of transfers are also carried out to a great deal, the most common ones mentioned being internal transfers. Almost 80% of the respondents mentioned internal transfer to the museum’s educational or hands-on collection as the deaccessioning method, and over half mentioned transfer to serve as exhibit props.

Approximately half (48%) of the respondents’ museums had practical experience of transferring deaccessioned objects to a professionally run museum. The professional status of the recipient was important, as the transfer of items to a non-professional museum was considerably rarer (9%). It was more common to donate objects to other use in the

DIAGRAM 1 WHAT REASONS FOR DEACCESSION HAVE BEEN APPLIED AT YOUR MUSEUM?



the public domain (38%). This may partly be due to the ethical standards of professional museums. The undefined nature of the acquisition principles of non-professional museums can lead to the unconsidered reception of material and later problems, and

professionally run museums do not wish to contribute to creating such problems.

Finnish museums rarely deaccession objects by selling them, and the possibility and restrictions of sales aroused a significant number of questions.

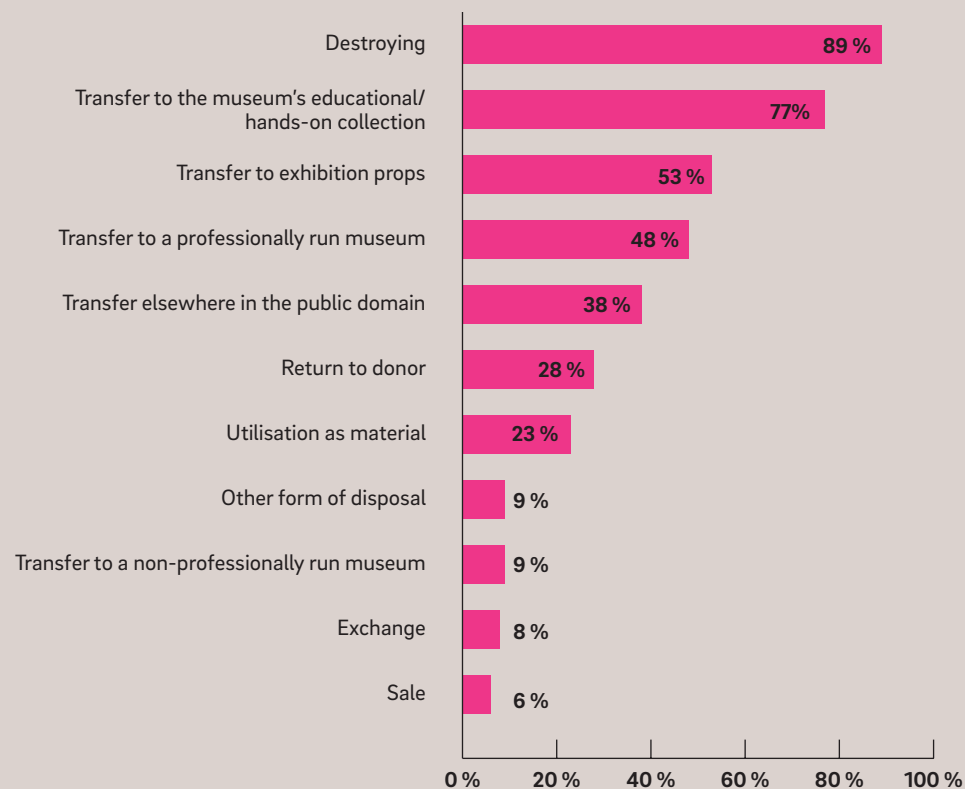
There was obviously need for discussion on the ethics of selling objects, elucidation of related contractual rights and the sharing of practical experiences of deaccessioning.

### 2.3. ATTITUDES TO DEACCESSIONING

WHILE DEACCESSIONING aroused many questions in the survey, the respondents usually had, at the least, a cautiously positive attitude regarding it. Discussions within the project underlined the fact that in the museums sector deaccessioning was felt above all to be a generation issue. It appears that the younger generation of museum professionals more readily accepted deaccessioning, regarding it as part of collections management. Moreover, deaccessioning has not yet been addressed for any longer period in education for museum work.

Critical views are also important, because deaccessioning is of course not without its problems, requiring, without exception, assessment specific to the case at hand. The replies to the survey expressed wishes for discussion on the preservation of the cultural heritage as the task of museums, and noted as a risk of deaccessioning that the work of museums is turning into “short-term one-off activity” in keeping with other contemporary trends. We have sought to take these risks into account in our model process of deaccessioning. The assessment criteria of deaccessioning procedures that we have compiled (see Chapter 3) urges a total assessment and also takes into account the criteria of the significance analysis method. Our set of assessment criteria seeks to be neutral and to assess the condition of objects in general, not just poor condition, and the quality of contextual information, not just the lack thereof. Our aim is that the

DIAGRAM 2 WHAT METHODS OF DISPOSAL HAVE BEEN APPLIED IN YOUR MUSEUM?



assessment also describes what an object contains and not only what it lacks.

The replies indicated concern over the fact that pressure from outside museums could lead to wrong decisions and skewed collections when parties from outside the field lack knowledge of the principles and stages of managing museum collections: “Cutbacks

are being made to the funding of museums, but despite this, there can still be pressure to receive, for example, collections even though they do not belong to the museum's area of collection responsibility. It seems as if the museum itself is not in charge of decisions that concern it. In strained situations orders concerning deaccessioning, receiving collections and



lending them for use can come from surprising parties and the museum can be at a loss what to do when, for example, the top-level leadership of the municipality demands something that is against the museum's regulations." It is felt that improving information on deaccessioning by museums will prevent the wrong image of them: "Deaccessioning still arouses suspicions in the museums sector, while speaking about it may pass on the wrong image to outsiders who make decisions on the funding of museums. There is the risk that museum collections begin to be regarded as something that can be, for instance, sold. There are already examples of this. Perhaps the project could therefore also consider how deaccessioning should be described to people outside the field. The spread of correction might also alleviate concerns within the field."

There are concerns within the museums sector about deaccessioning which could be avoided, for example, by defining the concept in a consistent manner. Deaccessioning is often regarded above all as destruction, which, however, is only one possible method of disposal. This may be due to the lack of any established definition of deaccessioning in the Finnish context and the fact that museums have traditionally carried out mostly administrative deaccessions of destroyed, lost or stolen objects.<sup>10</sup>

We wish to stress that deaccessioning should be understood above all as a means of collections management and care.<sup>11</sup> Transferring an object to another collection can ensure better opportunities for it to be on display and better conditions than previously for its preservation. When objects prone to risk are re-

moved from collections, resources can be focused on acquisitions for the museum's core collection and the remaining collection can be ensured better care and secure conditions. The safety of museum staff involved with the collection and museum visitors will also improve. It is also worth bearing in mind that the cultural lifespan of a deaccessioned object will not end with its physical removal. According to the present museological view on this, objects will remain remembered or documented past their physical lifespan.<sup>12</sup>

#### 2.4. DOES DEACCESSIONING WORK?

**MANY OF THE RESPONDENTS** consider deaccessioning to be a useful tool. Situations with distinct reasons for deaccessioning were regarded as the most smoothly managed ones. Cases where the keeping of objects involved risks were mentioned as the simplest "... Obvious cases (posing risk for other objects and health)", and ones where a single assessment criterion was regarded as decisive for deaccession: "With objects in truly poor condition there is no need to consider what to do with them."

Freeing up storage space in concrete terms was an impetus for deaccessioning: "Freeing up space for objects truly worth saving is rewarding when work becomes more efficient and safer for both objects and personnel". The respondents also recognised the benefits of deaccessioning for the remaining collections: "The quality of the collection improves, its management and care become easier when, for example,

space is freed up for what remains. When the objects of the thematic area in question are properly studied as the basis of a deaccession proposal, the situation for the whole group of objects is slightly better."

Transferring objects to another museum as a means of deaccessioning was commended in the survey. In this case, the positive effects of the TAKO network's agreement on collecting responsibilities were particularly noted: "The respective responsibilities for collecting within the TAKO scheme make life easier: I have donated material from our museum that does not belong to our area of responsibility, offering it to museum where it would belong according to TAKO or for regional reasons. The parties involved have been very satisfied."

The respondents urged their colleagues to invest effort in jointly developing the deaccessioning processes and practices of their own museums. The replies urged resoluteness and boldness in decision-making, assuming agreement on the principles of deaccessioning assessment and that the parties stipulated in the museum's organisation and administration have approved the use of the process. "When the deaccessioning process is recorded in the collections policy, its use becomes 'permitted'." Comparisons of the deaccessioning process with the museum's other processes, in particular the acquisition of material, is regarded as important. The respondents stated that problems arising in deaccessioning have led to revising the acquisition process and a practical reminder of how an increasingly critical attitude is needed in accessions to the collection. In practice, the processes

<sup>10</sup> Heinonen & Lahti 2001, 86.

<sup>11</sup> On improving the quality of collections with the means of deaccessioning, see e.g. Kostet 2007, 157–160; Pulkkinen 2013, 129; Vilkkuna 2000, 92.

<sup>12</sup> Van Mensch 1992; Ekosaari, Jantunen & Paaskoski 2014; 15, Robbins 2016, 98–101.

of receiving and deaccessioning material are always linked to each other.

## 2.5. THE ETHICS OF DEACCESSIONING AND THE FINALITY OF DECISIONS

THE ETHICAL and moral aspects of deaccessioning were considered to a great deal in the replies. It was asked whether museums are entitled in general to deaccession, what grounds are given for the related decisions and who are entitled to make these decisions in museums.

Particular causes of uncertainty were the finality of deaccessions, promises to keep material that were given to donors and the fear of losing the trust of the public, of even future generations. One of the respondents described the problematic nature of deaccessioning as follows: *“The fact that we make decisions having a bearing on the future and influencing future generations. What if we dispose of something that future generations might have found interesting and valuable? Values, as we know, are changing all the time.”* The fear of losing trust and the desire to avoid conflicts particularly emerged in situations where the donors were known closely. This was common in local museums, where *“donors or their family are known closely. As a result, there is no courage to make deaccessions that would lead to altercations”*.

Problems of donation terms were also mentioned. *“...There is also the problem that our older material acquisition forms do not mention the museum’s right to deal with the material as it chooses (to deaccession or to pass on to third parties). In these cases, we should, in principle, have the donor’s permission for deaccession.”* The replies show that museums do not have any definite arguments for a situation in which

donors or their heirs might enquire about a deaccessioned donation. On the other, the replies do not mention the eventuality of such a scenario. We may ask to what degree respect for the opinions of earlier owners/donors of material is an obligation created within the field itself, which is felt to be stronger the more recent the acquisition in question happens to be.

Some museum professionals were afraid of being marked in this respect in professional circles or in their own working community: *“Deaccessioning has to be argued for much more than acquisition, even to one’s own colleagues. It is still regarded as a failure, loss or unprofessionalism”*.

## 2.6. THE CHALLENGES OF THE DEACCESSIONING PROCESS

THE SURVEY SHOWED that the clearly largest number of challenges related to deaccessioning concerned its ethical dimensions, but the replies also pointed to the challenges of the deaccessioning process. Finding agreement and “emotional attachment” were mentioned as obstacles to deaccessioning decisions: *“Emotional attachment. Researchers and conservators find it hard to give up objects even though their value for the collection is not obvious. The same is true of the general public”*. It was also suggested in the replies that deaccessioning can make collections reflect the perceptions and wishes of an individual member of the museum staff.

Some respondents felt that the deaccessioning process was hindered and slowed by the difficulties of obtaining information on the collections of other museums. Problems of acquiring information concerned situations where transfer to another museum was considered for an object slated for deaccessioning, but also

cases where the mutual correspondence of collections were to be ensured at the national level. This may reflect the fact that the Museo 2015 scheme, the FINNA information search service and the division of tasks in collecting and documenting between museums are all relatively new processes and tools which have not yet become established in all museums.

Several respondents mentioned deaccessioning being made difficult or directly prevented by not being able to allocate sufficient resources for them. Deaccessioning decisions are made amidst the conflicting requirements of smooth progress in work and thoroughness, and the lack of available working hours and funds was regarded as having occasionally halted the deaccessioning process: *“A thorough and slow deaccessioning process will have the result that deaccessioning needs will be recorded somewhere but there will be no time to carry out deaccessioning. It is of course important to be thorough so that the deaccessions have definitely been considered”*. The deaccessioning process can be streamlined up to a point. It is, however, important that the museum personnel, management and funding parties understand that the appropriate deaccessioning process will always require resources and that there are no free quick solutions. Occasionally, deaccessioning process remains unfinished: *“... The deaccessioning decision can require much more time than cataloguing an object. In addition, problems arise from the fact there is still some way to go from the deaccessioning decision to actual disposal. In other words, objects consigned to be deaccessioned will remain lying about in the museum”*. Practical problems in the deaccessioning process were also caused by measures carried out after the disposal decision, especially the methods of disposal: *“What are the museum-ethical / sufficient / environmentally friendly / reasonably feasible ways*

to dispose of various materials?” Also this discussion is necessary when deaccessioning practices are developed with regard to special features of the museum’s own collections.

## 2.7. HOW CAN PROBLEMS BE SOLVED?

**THE SURVEY SHOWED** the lack of contextual information on an object to be both a reason for deaccessioning and an obstacle to it. The ethical problem involved in deaccessioning decisions based on insufficient information was summarised well in the comment: *“Contextual information on an irretrievably deaccessioned object can subsequently emerge that would have made it a highly important collection piece. This risk cannot be completely eliminated, and this will happen sooner or later.”* In principle, new information that would have altered the significance of the deaccessioned object is possible in all cases of deaccessioning and this risk must be jointly recognised and accepted regardless what is decided in a deaccessioning case.

The ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums calls for ‘full understanding’ of the significance of an object. It is important for each museum to define what this means, with its own starting points in mind. It is obvious that the significance of an object has to be assessed in the appropriate manner. Investigations, however, do not always lead to results, and significance changes over time. It is important to keep the extent of investigation in relation to available re-

sources and to define what information is essential for the object in question. One must also be able to decide when investigation has to be ended and whether or not to dispose on the basis of available information. As a solution, the Disposal Toolkit suggests assessing the risks of disposal (ethical issues, negative publicity, problems of resources etc.)<sup>13</sup>, which we regard as an excellent idea.

Emphasised in the replies was concern over how museum audiences, future generations, colleagues, donors and their heir will react to deaccessioning. Up-to-date policies on collections and deaccessioning and its related process that have been jointly approved by museums are the tools for responding to these questions. They give museums better means to argue for deaccessioning decisions and in connection with this to take an expert role in the management of collections and deaccessioning.

The avoidance of deaccessioning is also challenged in the replies: *“I feel that it is immoral to refrain from deaccessioning if the matter at hand calls for it.”* A passive attitude is a choice that has influence. If an object endangers the rest of the collection or is not clearly suited to the museum’s collections policy, avoidance of disposal is ethically problematic. It is important to bear in mind, however, that acquisitions of material for collections are also ultimately based on subjective choices. The mission of museums has been defined as the preservation of cultural heritage for future generations. That, however, is a different matter than keeping everything.

*Up-to-date policies on collections and deaccessioning give museums better means to argue for deaccessioning decisions and in connection with this to take an expert role in the management of collections and deaccessioning.*

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<sup>13</sup> Disposal Toolkit 2008; Disposal Toolkit 2014.



# 3 THE DEACCESSIONING PROCESS

## 3. Deaccessioning process

**R**EPLIES TO THE SURVEY and the experiences of the museums of the project particularly point to five themes that should be taken into account when a museum assesses the limitations and realistic possibilities of deaccessioning. They are the museum's collections policy, existing agreements and legal considerations, the motives and conditions for deaccessioning, decision-makers and resources. Internalising the principles of the themes and establishing related lines of policy within the museum organisation as a whole are preconditions for carrying out deaccessioning. These are of course also related to case-specific deaccessioning assessments. Articles 2.12–2.17 of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums also address these matters. In this chapter, we first comment on the above five themes on which a museum should take a stand before launching its deaccessioning process. This is followed by a presentation of the model deaccessioning process, a synthesis of the deaccessioning processes of the museums participating in the project, complemented with material from the Disposal Toolkit web publication. The model encompasses the whole process from the moment when the deaccessioning of an object is first considered to the point where deaccessioning decisions in keeping with the museum's administrative procedures have been approved and the item is transferred to other use within the museum, to another museum or to recycling, or is sold or destroyed. Following the presentation of the model, Chapter 3.3. discusses the criteria for assessing the value of an object in a museum

collection. Finally, in the end of this chapter, Tapio Suominen, Head of Collections of Tampere Art Museum discusses the deaccessioning process from the perspective of an art museum.

### 3.1. LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES OF DEACCESSIONING

#### Collections policy

Article 2.15 of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums states that all museums *should have a policy defining authorised methods for permanently removing an object from the collections through donation, transfer, exchange, sale, repatriation, or destruction, and that allows the transfer of unrestricted title to any receiving agency*. The museum should have a duly approved collections policy defining the particular focuses of its collection work on which deaccessioning decisions can be based. In the Finnish context, decisions are also influenced by the way the museum has defined its collection responsibilities at the national level (the TAKO scheme). It is advisable for the museum to draw up a separate deaccessioning policy and process and to include them in its collections policy or as an appendix to it.

#### Agreements and legality

No museum can promise to preserve all its collection

items indefinitely, which is why agreements on donations or deposition of items to museums should note that the museum can deaccession the object. It is important to clearly record the right of deaccession in agreements in order to maintain trust between the museum and donors and as part of proper and appropriate collections management.

The first sentence of Article 2.12 of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums reads: *Where the museum has legal powers permitting disposals, or has acquired objects subject to conditions of disposal, the legal or other requirements and procedures must be complied with fully*. The museum abides by donation agreements. Depositions and loans that are not included in the deaccessioning process are set apart from the material that is reviewed in this process.

Potential problems are noted later in Article 2.12: *Where the original acquisition was subject to mandatory or other restrictions these conditions must be observed, unless it can be shown clearly that adherence to such restrictions is impossible or substantially detrimental to the institution and, if appropriate, relief may be sought through legal procedures*. The term 'legal procedure' here means dissolving an agreement with a donor or redefining it. If the donor or his or her heirs cannot be reached through any reasonable effort, or no documentation on any restrictions is available, the museum can act as a party with full and undeniable rights of ownership.

Donation or deposition agreements can occasionally contain the requirement of keeping material or

## ICOM ON REMOVING COLLECTIONS

### 2.12 Legal or Other Powers of Disposal

Where the museum has legal powers permitting disposals, or has acquired objects subject to conditions of disposal, the legal or other requirements and procedures must be complied with fully. Where the original acquisition was subject to mandatory or other restrictions these conditions must be observed, unless it can be shown clearly that adherence to such restrictions is impossible or substantially detrimental to the institution and, if appropriate, relief may be sought through legal procedures.

### 2.13 Deaccessioning from Museum Collections

The removal of an object or specimen from a museum collection must only be undertaken with a full understanding of the significance of the item, its character (whether renewable or non-renewable), legal standing, and any loss of public trust that might result from such action.

### 2.14 Responsibility for Deaccessioning

The decision to deaccession should be the responsibility of the governing body acting in conjunction with the director of the museum and the curator of the collection concerned. Special arrangements may apply to working collections.

ICOM Code of Ethics 2013

### 2.15 Disposal of Objects Removed from the Collections

Each museum should have a policy defining authorised methods for permanently removing an object from the collections through donation, transfer, exchange, sale, repatriation, or destruction, and that allows the transfer of unrestricted title to any receiving agency. Complete records must be kept of all deaccessioning decisions, the objects involved, and the disposal of the object. There will be a strong presumption that a deaccessioned item should first be offered to another museum.

### 2.16 Income from Disposal of Collections

Museum collections are held in public trust and may not be treated as a realisable asset. Money or compensation received from the deaccessioning and disposal of objects and specimens from a museum collection should be used solely for the benefit of the collection and usually for acquisitions to that same collection.

### 2.17 Purchase of Deaccessioned Collections

Museum personnel, the governing body, or their families or close associates, should not be permitted to purchase objects that have been deaccessioned from a collection for which they are responsible.



*The museum should have a duly approved collections policy on which deaccession decisions can be based.*

other stipulations concerning or even prohibiting disposal. In practice, it may prove to be difficult or impossible to follow the special terms of a donation agreement if the museum lacks the resources for the keeping and conservation of the object, if the material of the object has reached the end of its lifespan or if there are risks involved in preserving the object in the museum's collections. It is also possible that there is no written agreement concerning the donation, or that it has been lost. In this situation, we feel that the museum should carry out a risk analysis as suggested in the Disposal Toolkit. If there is no donation agreement, the museum is entitled to make decisions regarding the object owned by it, and if necessary to dispose of it.

## Motives and preconditions

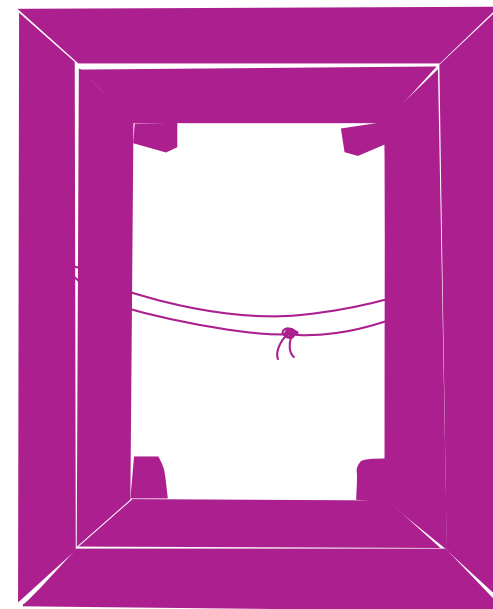
Article 2.13 of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums requires prior to the removal of an object or specimen full understanding of the significance of the item, its character (whether renewable or non-renewable), legal standing, and any loss of public trust that might result from such action. Acquiring 'full understanding' is difficult both as a concept and in practice. We feel that sufficient full understanding can be achieved when all the matters recorded in the deaccessioning process and influencing removal are considered.

Article 2.15 lists a number of methods of disposal, which require further instructions: *Each museum should have a policy defining authorised methods for permanently removing an object from the collections through donation, transfer, exchange, sale, repatriation, or destruction, and that allows the transfer of unrestricted title to any receiving agency.* Responsi-

bility for defining and authorising instructions rests with the museum, and none of the above-mentioned methods of disposal are prohibited outright. The article, however, underscores the primary nature of transfers to another collection but does not take into account the fact that, in practice, the poor condition of an object is one of the most common justifications for deaccessioning. There is no reason to offer an object in poor condition to another museum.

While the ICOM Code of Ethics does not forbid the sale of museum objects, it takes a strict view of the motives for selling and the use of revenue from such sales: *Museum collections are held in public trust and may not be treated as a realisable asset. Money or compensation received from the deaccessioning and disposal of objects and specimens from a museum collection should be used solely for the benefit of the collection and usually for acquisitions to that same collection* (Article 2.16). The restriction given Article 2.17 of the Code concern buyers: *Museum personnel, the governing body, or their families or close associates, should not be permitted to purchase objects that have been deaccessioned from a collection for which they are responsible.*

According to the ICOM Code of Ethics, generating revenue cannot be a motive or grounds for deaccessioning. If deaccessioning is arrived at upon other grounds, the sale of items can be a method of disposal if primary means of doing so have been examined. The sale of museum objects is rare in Finland, and museums have reservations about it. There are, however, a few positive examples of this. On the other hand, in United Kingdom, for example, the economic motive is already included, with certain provisos, among grounds for deaccessioning. Sales of items have also been considered in the present project, as discussed further in Chapter 4.4.



*Acquiring full understanding is difficult both as a concept and in practice. We feel that sufficient 'full understanding' can be achieved when all the matters recorded in the deaccessioning process and influencing removal are considered.*

## Decision-makers

Article 2.14 of the ICOM Code of Ethics states: *The decision to deaccession should be the responsibility of the governing body acting in conjunction with the director of the museum and the curator of the collection concerned.* The decision of the collections staff and approval by the museum director are usually sufficient for the deaccessioning decision. This is standard procedure in the museums involved in this project. Procedures may, however, vary depending on the administrative model and management regulations in question. For example, museums maintained by associations may require these decisions to be approved by their governing bodies.

The ICOM Code of Ethics does not define the groups of professionals that should participate in deaccessioning assessments. It is, however, regarded as important in the museums sector that deaccessioning decisions are based on assessments jointly drawn up by museum professionals. This means that the decision and its preparation involve the person responsible for the collections (usually the head of collections, head curator or museum director) along with other members of the collections personnel (curators, conservators, museum technicians etc.) where permitted by the museum's organisation. In a small museum where decisions are in the hands of one person, professional assistance for deaccessioning decisions can be obtained, for example, from a specialised museum of the field in question. In Finland, regional museums are under the obligation, also laid down in law, to provide consultation in these matters. If the condition of the object is the reason for deaccession, it is recommended that a conservator's assessment of its condition should be included in the related decision.

## Resources

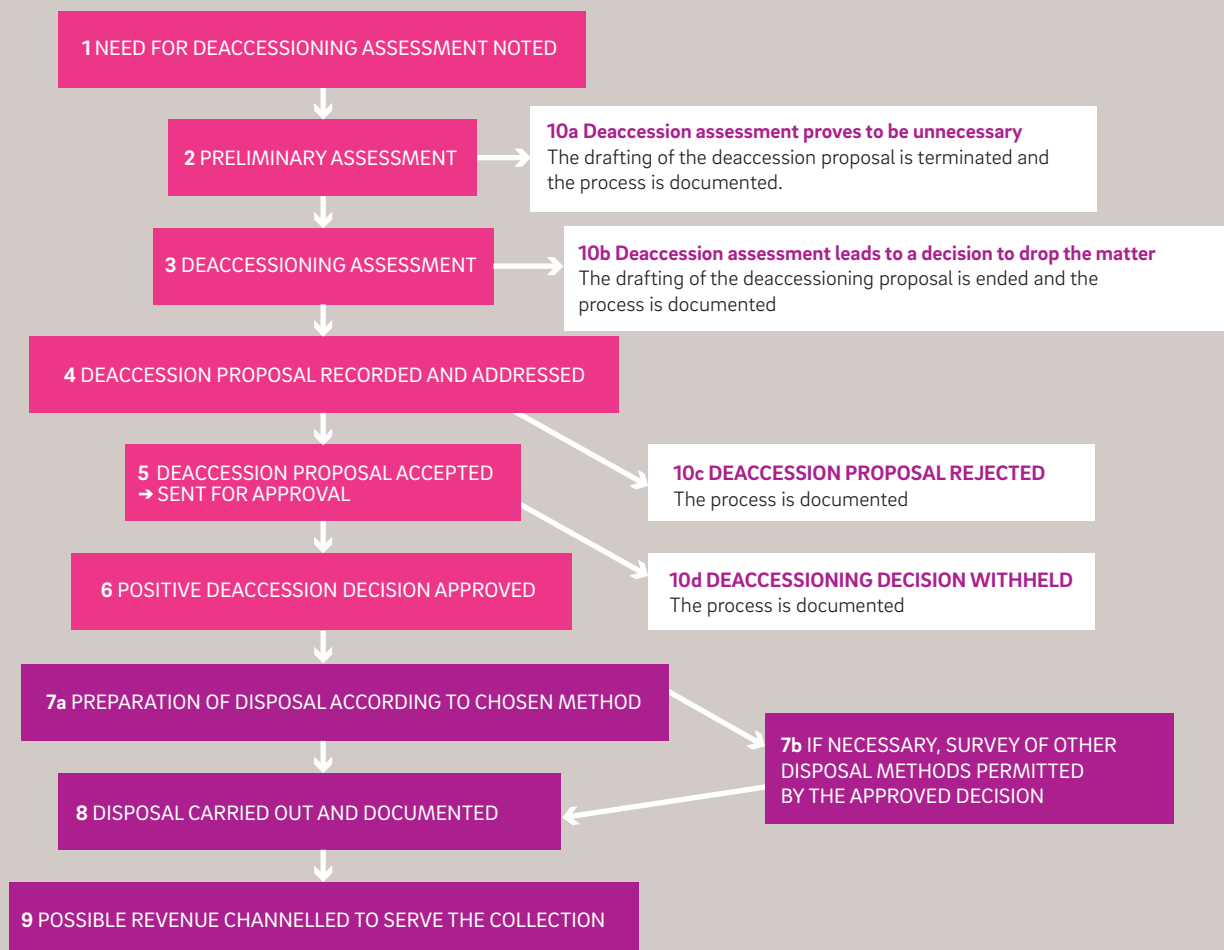
While deaccessioning will improve the quality of collections and save resources over the long term, we must remember that time, personnel and funds are needed for carrying a proper deaccessioning process. A process carried out in the correct manner requires careful documentation of information on deaccessions.

Resources are needed for carrying out investigations and for additions to the cataloguing of the object, assessment rounds, the archiving of information and carrying out deaccessioning, including the work and costs of the transfer and handling that follows the deaccessioning decision. The proper handling of a deaccessioning process requires sufficient resources for it and their need must be assessed with regard to all its stages. The need for resources in this connection must be recognised from museum management down to the grassroots level.



## THE DEACCESSIONING PROCESS

### LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR DEACCESSIONING INTERNALISED



### 3.2. A MODEL FOR THE DEACCESSIONING PROCESS

**THE PROCESS BEGINS** from the moment when a member of the museum's staff notices the need for a deaccessioning assessment and notifies about it (Point 1). A preliminary assessment is first drawn up, checking the acquisition and catalogue information of the object and agreements that may concern it (Point 2). If the documentation of the object is incomplete, additions are made to the catalogued information and the object is photographed. The basis for deaccession is assessed in casu, particularly taking into account the museum's collections policy, motives and conditions for deaccessioning, related agreements and legal considerations and available resources. The preliminary assessment may reveal reasons for not continuing the deaccessioning assessment. The process is halted for example in the case of a loan or deposition and the matter is taken up in association with the lending or depositing party.

The actual deaccessioning assessment (Point 3) investigates in further detail the contextual information and provenance of the object and any agreements and their limitations that might apply to it. The object is assessed with the related criteria for deaccessioning. If the removal of the object from the collection appears likely, the possible methods of disposal are considered. It is also possible to carry out a preliminary survey of possible practical measures (such as the receiving party of a transfer from the collections) prior to the deaccession decision.

If the methods of disposal are unclear in the assessment stage or changes are possible, it is worthwhile to consider which methods could be possible in view of streamlining disposal. In practice, it can, for example, be decided that an object is removed only

if a transfer to another museum is possible, or that an object has to be destroyed and cannot be recycled because of risks related to it.

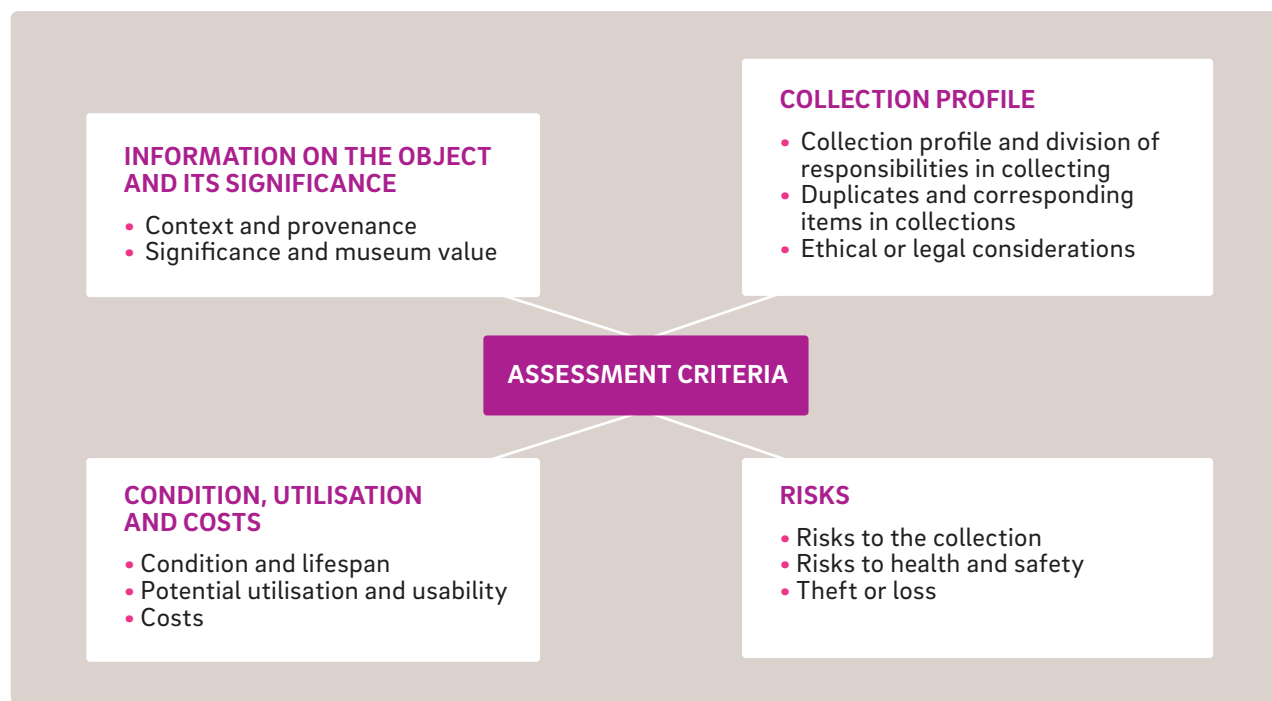
In deaccessioning assessments it is both worthwhile and necessary to consult and involve other parties: experts in matters of content and substance (colleagues, other professionals and experts, communities and amateurs) and legal experts. This is particularly the case when collections policy or correspondence between collections are the grounds for deaccessioning. The need for consultation and support is underscored in small museum where collections management and related decisions are in practice the responsibility of only one person. Regional (provincial) museums or specialised museums also provide consultation.

Possible contact with donors or their representatives can be needed if the related agreement or the planned method of disposal is considered to require it and if it is realistic with regard to the museum's resources. Involving the community creates a commitment for its members for both acquisitions to the collections and deaccessions. Open interaction is an aid for managing information and publicity related to deaccessioning.

Deaccessioning assessments may require risk analysis for deciding whether work is continued on the case at hand if the context and provenance information on the object is unclear regardless of investigations, related agreements are not found, or if it is not possible to contact the donor or his or her representative.

### 3.3. DEACCESSIONING ASSESSMENT

**EVEN WHEN SOMETHING** might at first sight appear to be a reason for deaccession, there is always cause to draw



up an overall assessment during the deaccessioning process taking into account the essential points in favour of and against deaccession. The poor condition of an object, for example, cannot be the only criterion for deaccessioning and instead it is advisable to compare it with realistic opportunities for conservation and potential museum use prior to the decision to deaccession. The objects need to be compared, where possible, with the rest of the museum's collection, or a part of it, and possibly with similar objects in other museums.

We have classified the criteria for assessing disposal or deaccessioning as follows: 1) information on

the object and its significance, 2) the profile of the collection, 3) risks, and 4) condition, potential use and costs. The significance analysis method was used as an aid for formulating the criteria.<sup>14</sup> Each deaccessioning decision is unique, and we did not feel it was sensible to aim at a point-scoring system. It is worthwhile to include in the documentation of a deaccessioning case (in the collections management system and deaccessioning protocol) the main grounds pertinent to the assessment result.

<sup>14</sup> Häyhä, Jantunen & Paaskoski 2015.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE ANALYSIS METHOD

Developed for Finnish museums and published in 2015, the significance analysis method is a method of defining the significance and museum value of museum objects and collections. It is based on the Australian Significance method and other international examples. The criteria for assessing significance can also be applied to museum value, for example in decisions on accession and deaccession and the care or use of collections, or to define a value category without preparing a written statement of significance for the object of analysis.

The criteria of the method are:

1. Representativeness
2. Authenticity
3. Historical and cultural significance
4. Experiential significance
5. Community-related significance
6. Ideal state
7. Potential utilisation and usability

Häyhä, Jantunen & Paaskoski 2015.

## 1 INFORMATION ON THE OBJECT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

### CONTEXT AND PROVENANCE

The lack of contextual information may decrease the museum value of an object and lead to deaccession especially when the collection contains similar objects with better context. The definition of essential contextual information varies according to the collection profile of the individual museum. Depending on the museum and the collection, important consideration can be, for example, locality (of the user or manufacturer), owner, manufacturer, a historical turning point reflected by the object, or the object's principle of operation.

### SIGNIFICANCE AND MUSEUM VALUE

The museum value of an object, i.e. its value in a museum collection, can be assessed, for example, with the criteria of the significance analysis method.

## 2 COLLECTION PROFILE

### COLLECTION PROFILE AND DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES IN COLLECTING

An object has to be assessed in relation to the museum's collections policy and the responsibilities of the museum with regard to collecting and documenting at the national level. It may also be necessary to consider the similar responsibilities of other museums.

### DUPLICATES AND CORRESPONDING ITEMS IN COLLECTIONS

A survey of duplicates and similar items in relation to objects in collections may result in the deaccessioning of items assessed to be of lesser museum value. When evaluating the corresponding items that would replace the object to be removed it is also necessary to take into account the collections of other museums.

### ETHICAL OR LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Museum collections may contain objects whose keeping in a museum is ethically unsound according to present views (human remains, illegally acquired items etc.). A request for returning an object, for example, may lead to a deaccessioning assessment.

## 3 RISKS

### RISKS TO THE COLLECTION

An object may pose a risk to the preservation of the rest of the museum collection in cases where the decomposition of material leads to hazardous breakdown products or pests, mould etc. are observed in the object.

### RISKS TO HEALTH AND SAFETY

Objects may contain substances, breakdown products or structures that can be dangerous or hazards to health or safety. Ammunition and weapons may also cause risks.

#### THEFT OR LOSS

Depending on specific museum practices, the noted loss or theft of an object may be a criterion for carrying out the deaccessioning process and for administrative deaccessioning.

## 4 CONDITION, UTILISATION AND COSTS

#### CONDITION AND LIFESPAN

The poor condition of an object, or the end of the lifespan of its material may lead to deaccessioning. On the other hand, the condition and preservation of an object in poor condition can possibly be improved in the future with conservation measures. This, however, is not possible for a destroyed object, or one at the end of its lifespan. When assessing the condition of an object, it is necessary to define its ideal state, with which its condition is compared.<sup>15</sup> The ideal state is the historical state of the object in which its meanings and significance are felt to be expressed best. The original condition of a piece is not necessarily its ideal state in the museum context and incompleteness can also be part of the ideal state.

#### POTENTIAL UTILISATION AND USABILITY

If an object is not considered to be of use for research or display, or cannot be utilised because of its large size, for example, or conditions required by the object, or there are other reasons for deaccessioning, then the latter can be considered. Potential utilisation and usability can come into consideration as grounds for deaccessioning also when the museum regards the piece to be necessary for educational purposes or its collection that is in use. This normally requires the existence of corresponding pieces in the museum collection and as such it is not a reason for deaccessioning.

#### COSTS

It may be very expensive to restore an object to its ideal state, and the storage and upkeep of a piece can lead to considerable storage costs. Nonetheless, costs cannot be the only grounds for deaccessioning. Instead, they need to be related to other criteria in assessments, particularly to the potential utilisation of the item at the time of assessment and in the future.



*There is always cause to draw up an overall assessment during the deaccessioning process taking into account the essential points in favour of and against deaccession.*

<sup>15</sup> On the notion of 'ideal state', see Appelbaum 2007; Ekosaari, Jantunen & Paaskoski 2014.

# Deaccessioning in art museums

## A COMMENT ON THE PROCESS PROPOSED BY MUSEUMS OF CULTURAL HISTORY

**Tapio Suominen**

Tampere Art Museum

BY THE TIME OUR MUSEUM was included in the deaccessioning project, the publication *Kokoelmapoistojen hyvät käytännöt* had already appeared, discussing in broad perspective the practices and models of deaccessioning in museums of cultural history. These considerations are in many respects also valid for art museums, which, however, have traditionally had more reservations about disposal and deaccessioning than cultural-historical museums. The majority of art museums do not deaccession actively and they are in no way at the stage where deaccessioning policy would be regarded as an important means for developing collections.

In the following section, I discuss the reasons for the reluctance of art museums in this respect. Does art have some added value that would pose particular obstacles for deaccessioning or obligations? My overview of the topic is by no means comprehensive, being instead based on individual observations concerning the model process presented in this publication.

My discussion of deaccessioning here concerns only collection material that has been originally intended to be kept permanently. The trend of contemporary art to underline the temporary, the momentary and site-specificity obviates or alters the

problems of preserving and storage. With this kind of art and even when it could be included in a permanent collection, it is important to agree on issues related to lifespan and disposal and the rights and responsibilities of the partners to the agreement. This problematic is discussed in chapter 4.2. herein and in descriptions of individual cases.

## Deaccessioning and the artist

The functioning of an object or thing as a work of art requires the presence of the artist (and the viewer) in the process. The ICOM Code of Ethics applies of course in the same way to all types of museums, but its articles do not directly note the role of the artist in deaccessioning. The code has been drawn up from an institutional perspective with more focus on the rights and public image of owners and donors rather than artists or their interests, unless the caveat of loss of public trust also applies to the risks incurred by artists.

Is it possible that deaccessioning would decrease the appreciation of artists? This, of course, happens only when it is initially beneficial for works of art to be in a public collection. Many artists, especially the Futurists already in the early 20th century, have denied the importance of museums, interpreting museum collections as the cemeteries of art, mass graves full of bodies unknown to each other. According to another, more common, view, the inclusion of an artwork in a

TAMPERE ART MUSEUM/ JARI KUUSENAHO 2014



The intervention of artists Nabb + Teeri in the Tampere Art Museum collection momentarily took forth packaged and stored works as the material of a new, temporary artwork.

museum collection is a sign of merit, strong institutional acceptance, and of reinforcing the status of art.

In any case, the art museum is no longer a neutral actor in the field of the arts. Copyright as such does not form a legal obstacle to deaccessioning. Private individuals and institutions are entitled to dispose of their property, unless there are specific contractual obstacles to this. Deaccessioning, however, may have the result that the artist can no longer enjoy personal droit d'accès to his or her piece, which in turn could be necessary for creative work. It is also necessary to recognise the effects of deaccessioning from the perspective of the artist's right of respect. A work of art may not be altered in a way that transgresses its artistic value or uniqueness, and disposal or deaccessioning is certainly a concrete intervention, though not the alteration of an artwork as implied in copyright law. Should then the deaccessioning of works of art falling under copyright law be avoided outright if all the consequences are not under control or to be anticipated? At the least, it is necessary to discuss deaccessioning with the artist whenever this is possible.

It is thus necessary to take into account the possible effects of deaccessioning on artists. By the same token, there must be awareness of how the artist's presence, copyright and intentions affect the manner of being of an art object in comparison with other artefacts. An artwork expresses what the artist wished to say in an original and creative manner, and in one that meets the criteria of a work of art. The relationship of an artwork to its maker is thus different from, for instance, that of a pair of skis to its manufacturer, whose primary aim is not to express anything with skiing gear, even though the manufacturing methods might involve creativity and originality. What the artist has wished to say is bound to the visual properties of the artwork and cannot be expressed without

them. Therefore, a work of art can still be of interest after it has been received from the artist. A pair of skis, on the other hand, is stored out of sight after use. Associating content with how it is expressed serves to reinforce the impression of the unique and irreplaceable nature of a work of art – and accordingly of its need to be preserved.<sup>16</sup>

### Natural disposal or the end of the lifespan

The least problematic grounds for deaccessioning in all types of collections is so-called natural disposal, the poor condition of an object or the end of its lifespan. But even in these cases deaccessions are not carried out directly except in situations of risk where objects are considered to be hazardous to people or to the rest of the collection. Examples are locations with mould which in the worst scenarios can lead to the demolition of buildings and the destruction of all moveable items.

A highly typical form of natural disposal for public works of art is one where the setting of a work integrated with a given place becomes unsuitable to the piece. This is not rare, since renovations of buildings and urban space are not always carried out with their works of art in mind. Milieus change at a growing pace, with new development and the demolition of old structures; buildings acquire new functions, colour schemes change and graffiti begins to appear.

Although artworks in public buildings and urban space are often managed by art museums, they nonetheless have a different role than in museum collec-

<sup>16</sup> Routila 1986, 77.

TAMPERE ART MUSEUM / MIKKO MARJAMÄKI 1988



Pack Ice – Mirror of the Sea by Timo Sarpaneva had been in its place over the entrance to Koskikeskus in Tampere since 1988. Renovation in 2013 changed the premises to the degree that no room was left for the work and in 2014 it was necessary to dispose of the large supporting framework of the piece, since it could no longer be kept.

**NEXT PAGE:** Originally attributed to Angelica Kaufmann, this painting has been known as Historical Scene in the collection of Tampere Art Museum. It depicts the scene from the Old Testament in which Esther faints before King Xerxes of Persia.



tions in the sense that no permanent assurances of preservation are given for them in the first place. The works of collections to be thus placed are subject to wear and will become unsuited to their purpose as their settings and their function change. The projected lifespan of a museum collection kept in controlled circumstances is much longer.

### Deaccessioning based on incomplete contextual information

The survey carried out in the deaccessioning project shows incomplete contextual and provenance information to be the most common reason for deaccessioning in cultural-historical museums in addition to the condition of objects. Incomplete information decreases the museum value of objects and can lead to deaccessioning especially if the collection contains corresponding pieces with information of better quality. What contextual information is regarded as important varies according to the approach to acquisitions. Local identity, for example, can be important.

An object can be considered as part of a series of various stratified contexts some of which are more important to be preserved and displayed than others. However, it is hardly possible in an art museum that works of the collections are displayed as curiosities, i.e. objects of unknown origin and function without information on why they are in the collection, or why they exist in general. Even if this was done, the objects would presumably be given an aesthetic dimension in the viewing situation and attempts, at least, would be made to read them as art. A work can be of incomprehensible form, but the concept of art will necessarily protect everything that is associated with an art collection. As part of an art collection it will perforce be

positioned within the auspices of the notion of art, however difficult this might be to define.

Art museums may have become accustomed to thinking that the umbrella concept of art provides a valuable upper-level context that will protect artworks from disposal or deaccessioning. When a piece is accepted in a collection, its classification in terms of values has been done and its role is secure. The status of art is thus not the kind of contextual information that would generally be lacking for a work in a collection. Nonetheless, it is rarely asked why it should consistently follow from the state of being an artwork that the said piece should not be disposed of or deaccessioned. Even if an object is art, why should it be preserved for ever and without restrictions?

Despite different notions of art, artworks are almost always considered first as individual items and only secondarily as parts of a system, a thematic entity, exhibition concept of collection. This content-based and personal relationship to art is an incentive for permanent keeping especially when the viewer finds the work to be interesting – as museum professionals often do. The loss of the individual identity of works of art was also in the background of critique from the Futurists when they opposed museums with their sharp rhetoric, even though their conclusions regarding museums were the opposite.<sup>17</sup>

When a work of art is included in a collection, it becomes part of a larger entity, of an art-historical continuum. In relation to the collection, it can represent a property that is important for the collection profile: style, local identity, technique, subject matter or period. Within this broad context, artworks can be

evaluated in relation to each other and an individual piece can, in principle, be replaced by another one that expresses the required meanings better. On the other hand, there can be no replacement with regard to the identity of an individual artwork.

Philosopher and aesthetician Arto Haapala classes contextual information on art as primary and secondary when defining the ways in which an artwork falls into its various contexts. Primary contexts are important for identity, understanding and interpretation of an artwork. Secondary contexts, such as collections or exhibitions, change and are more random and they do not have a permanent influence on the identity of an artwork.<sup>18</sup> In their publication on significance analysis, Häyhä, Janhunen and Paaskoski<sup>19</sup> distinguish in similar fashion individual contexts related to the story of the piece itself and broad contexts telling of the more general connections of the item.

The primary context contains, for example, information on the artist and his or her cultural background and a general idea of the historical and cultural situation in which the objects was created. This information is important and it deepens understanding and interpretations. But is the primary context so necessary that the lack of it would be sufficient cause to remove a piece from a collection? We must hope that art will also survive on its merits, for at least the collections of Tampere Art Museum include many works that have been catalogued with only minimum information. I am afraid that the situation is similar in many other small art museums without the resources for research to produce contextual information on collections.

Fortunately, it also appears that artworks are more

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Pettersson 1999, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Haapala 1999, 38.

<sup>19</sup> Häyhä, Janhunen & Paaskoski 2015.



independent in relation to their contexts than utility objects. Important information on the work may be lacking, the piece may even be 'unauthentic' and yet it can function satisfactorily as art. An example of this is a painting in the collection of the Tampere Art Society, which has been attributed, because of its signature, to the German Romantic artist Angelica Kaufmann. It was not, however, painted by Kaufmann but by an unknown, presumably Austrian, artist. The painting was bought by the businessman and industrialist Emil Aaltonen, most likely in the 1930s. Its earlier history of ownership, however, is unknown. Its date, 1770, is also based on a questionable marking. The primary context thus has quite a shaky foundation, but it would seem unwise to remove the painting from the collection on these grounds. The piece may also be interesting as such and its fascination does not necessarily depend on its painter being unknown, a pseudonym or possibly someone else whose name will nonetheless not mean anything to us. From the deaccessioning perspective, the situation would, of course, change if it were discovered that the painting is a forgery. Because the public display of art forgeries is a copyright violation, not to mention a violation of the economic and moral rights of artists, the destruction of the work would in that case seem called for.

The immediate and aesthetic impact of art is not without importance. It is most likely often in the background of decisions on acquiring works and plays an important role when assessing the positive features and quality of works of art.

### Quality as a criterion of deaccession

In the model process, museums of cultural history are urged to assess the issue of disposal or deaccession

in relation to their own collections policies and responsibilities for acquisition at the national level. It may also be necessary to take into account the collections profiles of other museums. Among Finnish art museums, the division of tasks in collecting and documenting is still in its initial stages and involves special issues that are not discussed here.

The acquisition of works for art collections has traditionally been based on their evaluation on an axis of good–bad. Evaluation is in some way in-built in the logic of the art world. Items are acquired for collections as examples of the best possible art, and only secondarily to represent a broader phenomenon, such as local origin or a style. Programmes of collections policy most often mention quality as the main criterion of acquisitions, which means that other acquisition principles are more or less subordinate to the artistic level.

In most Finnish regional art museums, the local perspective is an important guiding principle in acquisitions for collections. On the other hand, it is also a good example of the problematic nature of a secondary context. The local aspect, or lack thereof, as a criterion for acquiring art –and accordingly as contextual information providing grounds for deaccessioning – is noteworthy in two respects. First, this concept is readily associated with a deprecatory tone, as if it would erode the status of the artist. On the other hand, in a globalising world delimiting art in local terms does not seem to be very appropriate even from the perspective of context. Every work of art is always created somewhere.

The notion of locality is also interesting from a purely evaluating perspective. If a local Finnish artist creates a masterpiece that becomes a classic according to all possible standards, will it then become national in character and should it thus be more appropriately

kept in the collections of the Finnish National Gallery? In this hypothetical case, the high quality of the artwork would, paradoxically from the perspective of a national division collecting tasks, be a reason for removing it from the collection of a local museum.

If artistic quality is the main criterion of keeping and deaccessioning, only poor works will be deaccessioned, i.e. the wrong choices of colleagues. There is, however, a high threshold to questioning the decisions of predecessors, for how is one to distinguish without fail between good works of art and ones that are less so? Even legislation is of no avail here: with regard to copyright even poor art is always art. Evaluation is subjective and tastes change over time. Conceptions of art are historical, and art-historical evaluation changes continuously. Who then would ultimately have the universal and timeless knowledge that would facilitate deaccessioning decisions?

Defining the value of art, however, is not ultimately completely subjective and based solely on personal preference. Although we cannot point to features of artworks that would make all of them either good or poor, there are sub-categories, such as an artist's oeuvre, within which evaluation can be done with considerable agreement. Even a collection as a whole can be subdivided into hierarchies. Susanna Pettersson has presented the classification of works in art collections into three groups: exceptionally good (best), sufficiently good (average) and documentary (neutral) artwork.<sup>20</sup> Although this division is of an evaluating nature, museum staff could probably easily reach consensus concerning its content. This classification for the needs of collections analysis and management would thus provide a tool also for

<sup>20</sup> Pettersson 1999, 18.

considering deaccessions in view of the kind of collections profile that is to be reinforced or emphasised.

The fact that the group of documentary works is probably the largest in all museums suggests that, in practice, acquisitions for collections are not based on content or individuals, or always oriented towards the highest quality, to the degree that is assumed in art museums. In large measure, collections grow through donations and Tampere Art Museum, for example, has received through major donations material that really should not be in the collection, but has been accepted for reasons of courtesy in order to receive a prime work included in the donation. There have not been, however, any active measures to deaccession or dispose of this material.

For the time being, art museums have proceeded from preserving every work of art unless proved otherwise. The need for deaccessioning assessment has not been as great as in cultural history museums

whose body of material in collections is considerably larger. The fact remains, however, that art museums face the same cumulative problems: collections grow but funds allocated for their upkeep do not grow proportionally. At some stage it will be necessary to remove a few works, and this should be done in a controlled manner. Is it consistent – in a forced situation – to argue for disposal from the ontological perspective that a work of art exists in order to be seen? If the collection contains works that have never been on show and will never be shown, according to the evaluations of experts, there is cause to ask why resources are invested in keeping them.

On the other hand, if deaccessioning only aims at improving a collection and if each generation does it anew, we will arrive at some stage in a situation where the content of the collection has changed completely. This would require quite a fundamental redefinition of the whole concept of an art museum.

*Despite different notions of art, artworks are almost always considered first as individual items and only secondarily as parts of a system, a thematic entity, exhibition concept of collection.*

A vintage car, possibly a Volvo 460, is shown in a dark, semi-transparent overlay. The car is parked in front of a corrugated metal wall. A large white tire icon is overlaid on the right side of the image. The text '4 ACCOUNTS OF DEACCESSIONING' is overlaid on the car's body.

# 4 ACCOUNTS OF DEACCESSIONING

## 4. Accounts of deaccessioning

**D**EACCESSIONINGS BY THE MUSEUMS of the project and analyses of deaccessioning processes are an important part of both projects and central to both related publications in Finnish. The summaries published here describe the main aspects of deaccessions from collections. Our themes are the reasons of collections policy for deaccessioning, lifespan concepts in deaccessioning and various methods of disposal. We hope that sharing our practical experiences will help in defining these practices in museums and that our statements will open up discussion on addressing deaccessioning in the museums sector.

### 4.1. DEACCESSIONING IMPROVES THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIONS

**THE DEACCESSIONING PROJECTS** of the first theme share starting points in collections policy. In accordance with the assessment criteria that we propose they consider the significance of the objects in question in the museum collection and in relation to the museum's collections policy and nationally agreed responsibilities in the acquisition of materials. The Museum of Technology in Helsinki has managed to find a new museum collection of a more suitable profile for many of its deaccessioned objects. It has been possible to assess large bodies of material in Helsinki and Tampere and it has been possible to transfer the removed objects to serve the work of museums with the public or to be recycled. Incomplete objects and ones in the

process of becoming destroyed have also been boldly disposed of. As a result of all the deaccessions and disposals, the collections have gained a more distinct profile, with increased understanding of the significance and value of the remaining objects.

We want to underline the importance of cooperation. There is a more solid basis for decisions when a wide range of expertise is made to serve deaccessioning assessment. An example of combined expertise in the present publication is a joint assessment of artworks carried out by the Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums and Tampere Art Museum. As a result of the project, objects deaccessioned from the collections of the Historical Museums were transferred to the Tampere Art Museum. A different perspective on cooperation is provided by the deaccessioning assessment concerning trams in the collection of Helsinki City Museum. In this connection the significance analysis tool was tested together with tram enthusiasts. The article on the lifespan of objects touches upon matters such as the way in which the views of artists, their heirs and art experts from outside the museum context have been investigated both in an anticipatory way and during the deaccessioning process. Also the administrative aspects of deaccessioning often call for a great deal of collaboration across the boundaries of organisations and among different owners.

There is an interesting difference between the ways in which cultural-historical and art museums deaccession objects. An item deaccessioned from a cultural-historical collection can be used, for exam-

ple, for museum-educational purposes or as props in an exhibition. In some cases, parts or samples of a removed object can be saved for conservation needs or material studies. In other cases, the object is removed from the museum premises. If it remains in the museum, something has clearly gone wrong in the process. Our discussions show that it is more common in the art museum sector to ban the display of an artwork because of its poor condition or content, or suspected forgery, while the piece is still kept in the collection. The prohibition on display can also be temporary. The destruction or other means of disposal are avoided and the deaccessioned work or parts of it are often stored in the museum even after it has been decided to deaccession it and destroying works is approved as a disposal method in the museum's collections policy.

Museums of cultural history challenge art museums to consider why deaccessioned objects are readily kept in museums. Is this a question of caution? What are the grounds for keeping works, or their parts, and for whom or what are they kept? Where the resources of art museums permit this and deaccessioning does not pose risks for the rest of the collection, there may not be any actual problems, but is it worthwhile to keep the items even in that case? The keeping of a deaccessioned object cannot be argued for at least with reference to the artist's interests, if the core idea of the work is no longer realised. What if the item is not really a work of art at all but only a document on the work that has remained in keeping if the object itself is incomplete or removed from its original context?

## 4.2. LIFESPAN

IN ART MUSEUMS, the deaccessioning cases that were regarded as the most acceptable and most likely ones were those in which the artworks were assumed to have a short lifespan, for example because of their materials. The use of increasingly complex techniques and materials in art increases the number of predictable and unpredictable changes in them. These changes can have decisive impact on the nature of the piece or a part of it, and the upkeep of the work often requires considerable resources. Therefore, many museums agree already at the acquisition stage on a time-limit on keeping works of this kind. In addition, there can also be an agreement on what is to be done to the piece at the end of its lifespan. Naturally, evaluating the condition of an artwork in relation to realistic conservation measures also applies to works executed in more traditional techniques.

The lifespan perspective was also underlined in the case of public works of art owned or maintained by art museums. Changes in materials and wear on structures can create safety risks for the public, and it has occasionally been necessary to remove public works of art owing to changes to the townscape or buildings. HAM Helsinki Art Museum describes its experiences of justifying the deaccession and documenting the sculpture *Kasvu* (Growth) by Kain Tapper. Occasionally, structural change may concern only parts of an artwork, as in the examples cited by Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova. The examples from Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova and HAM present the range of things that should be asked of the artist and recorded in the documentation of artworks.

Museums of cultural history are also required more and more to consider the lifespan of objects. Tiina Paavola, Head of the collections centre of the

Tampere museums, points out that the challenges of preserving modern materials, rubber and plastics, are similar in museums of different kinds and that it is necessary to accept the limits of an object's lifespan also in museums of cultural history. There are things to be jointly learned in procedures and models for solutions.

## 4.3. FROM MATTER TO MEDIA

THE CHANGING FORMAT and display techniques of media art pose considerable challenges from the perspective of traditional preservation and keeping in museums, and these challenges are also mentioned in the collections policy documents of some art museums. The Collections Policy of HAM Helsinki Art Museum notes that only recently problems have begun to be recognised and solutions begun to be sought. If the form of recording and keeping a work of art has become outmoded, its technological format may have to be altered to ensure preservation. In this connection, the artwork may lose some of its characteristics. These matters should be taken into account in agreements on acquiring works of media art.

Possibilities for storing digital culture have also begun to be discussed in cultural history museum sector, as activities, experiences and culture in general increasingly involve interaction with a virtual environment. How can an immaterial phenomenon of the present day be recorded by preserving objects? What, for example, do switched-off displays and games in museum collections tell about playing games? The phenomenon can be captured only with the aid of several physical documents and successful documentation calls for museums to have new working methods. Broadly speaking, artworks or games do not exist if

the experience that they produce is not passed on to viewers or researchers at a later time. As objects, a work of art and a video game can be completely secondary, in which case the preservation of their physical character, or remains thereof, cannot be the primary or only goal.

The potential for cooperation in the long-term archival storage of media art and other digital culture is mentioned in international and Finnish contexts alike. In Finland, these matters have been furthered by AV-arkki association of media artists<sup>21</sup> and the National Digital Library projects, among others<sup>22</sup>.

In this publication we shift the question from the formats of media art to the physical manifestation of the art work. Where are the boundaries of a work of art that is to be preserved? To what degree is the display technology a part of the work that needs to be preserved and to what degree is it only a medium facilitating the actual work? Should a replaceable part be preserved as a document of an artwork in order to understand it? The case from the Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova Museum refers to these questions.

## 4.4. EXPERIENCES OF THE SALE OF COLLECTION ITEMS IN FINLAND

ATTITUDES TO THE ETHICAL NATURE of various means of deaccessioning vary in different countries. In Finland, a fairly common method of disposal is to destroy deaccessioned objects and to recycle them as material. The Disposal Toolkit publication, however, states that only hazardous objects should be removed by destroying them. An alternative is to sell

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.av-arkki.fi/>, cit. 10.1.2016.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.kdk.fi/en>, cit. 10.1.2016.

items, which for the time being has been regarded in much more negative terms in Finland. The replies to the survey in our project show, however, that the Finnish museums sector has also begun to discuss whether the sale of an object would be a more ethical means of disposal in a situation where it has reached the end of its lifespan in a museum but could still have other value for use with regard to its condition.

Sale as a means of deaccessioning aroused considerable discussion during our project and it was a prominent theme for further consideration in the feedback. There seems to be a need for sharing the practical experiences of museums despite the varying attitudes of different museums to sales in the museum context. Here, we discuss the sale of objects as a method of disposal mainly from the perspective of cultural history museums. In the given examples, the items on sale are mass-produced everyday objects, not unique works of art. In both cases, there were reasons of collections policy and the use of storage space behind deaccessioning.

Tiina Paavola describes how the Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums already decided some years ago to try to sell vehicles deaccessioned from their collection instead of having them scrapped. She notes that the revenue was small in relation to the number of working hours reserved for the process and that the most important result was that the vehicles went into practical use. Since sale is, to be precise, a method of disposal and not its motive, something else than monetary gain is primarily sought from it. However, limited resources make it necessary to consider the meaningfulness of the time-consuming sales process. At KUHMU (The Kuopio Historical Museum) a well-argued and well-planned deaccessioning process was positively received by the museum audience and showed in practice how the

transparency of the deaccessioning process is to the benefit and not the detriment of the museum. The sales experiment was not part of our project, but it succeeded so well that we wanted to include an account of it in this publication.

For the art museums of our project group or for other Finnish art museums, sale as a disposal method is an alien concept for the very reason that generally speaking, for reasons of collections policy, they do not regard deaccessioning as timely measures for their own collections, as already pointed out above. Before engaging in sales, art museums should carefully consider the possible consequences of selling works over the short and long term from the perspectives of artists, the art field and the museum collection.

On the other hand, inventories of corporate art collections have occasionally led to auctions. The procedures developed for this work, especially the adoption of value classification, could possibly be applied in art museums. It must be remembered that principles of museum ethics are not binding for those who manage corporate art collections, and procedures can even be completely opposite. The ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums clearly states that museum staff may not purchase deaccessioned objects. In the sale of material from corporate collections, however, personnel have sometimes been offered removed works at the auctioneer's starting price before a public auction.

Finnish museum collections do not contain large numbers of objects that would be of considerable market value yet of negligible museum value. Significant market value may, however, be a temptation for stretching the boundaries of museum ethics. If the related decisions cannot be completely justified they can arouse opposing views both within and outside the museums sector. As is well known, this

happened recently in United Kingdom, where the Arts Council decided to revoke the accredited status of the Northampton Museum, which was regarded as having deaccessioned and sold on improper grounds an Egyptian statue donated to the museum in 1870. The statue was sold for over £15 million. It is obvious that a situation will more easily get out of hand in the case of a Fifth Dynasty Egyptian statue than with a mass-produced household object. Nonetheless, the museum value of an object should always be the starting point for decisions to deaccession.

The Disposal Toolkit regards the sale of items as a possible method of disposal if the motives for deaccession are clearly other than acquiring revenue and if primary means of deaccession have first been considered. In exceptional cases, deaccession motivated by sales revenue can be accepted.

In practice in United Kingdom, the sale of collection items for the purpose of acquiring finds calls for careful consideration and the reporting of the case at hand to the Museums Association. The organisation arranging the sale must be able to prove that the sale is allowed by existing agreements and that the object in question is not a core item representing the museum's established collection profile. It must be proven that the sale aims at long-term benefits for the public and the collection and that alternative ways of acquiring funds have been carefully investigated and found not to provide results. Improving a budget deficit, for example, through a single sale is not an acceptable reason. Sales should be arranged in an equal manner and museums should have the opportunity to express interest in the items before they are sold outside the museums community. The Disposal Toolkit includes a separate appendix for cases of this kind, discussing the various stages from considering sales to the documentation of the process.

For the time being, there are no jointly accepted instructions for deaccessioning in the Finnish museums community, nor is there a body that would monitor the ethical nature of deaccessioning via sales from collections. As there are no detailed nationally approved instructions, particular responsibility and careful consideration are required from Finnish museum professionals in deaccessioning evaluation and the choice of disposal methods. Responsibility, however, should not be avoided. Although deaccessions

are not necessary for developing all museum collections, this does not mean that deaccessioning policy, including the sale of objects, should not be addressed and developed. What, for example, should be done, if a museum faces outside pressure to deaccession for economic reasons? Is it necessary to prepare for this? The critical questions of decision-makers need to be answered if necessary, and museums must be able to present coherent arguments for their core operations in order to safeguard their collections.



*As there are no nationally approved instructions, particular responsibility and careful consideration are required from Finnish museum professionals in deaccessioning evaluation and the choice of methods.*

# SIGNIFICANT COLLECTIONS





# Justifications for deaccessioning decisions with reference to collections policy

## HELSINKI CITY MUSEUM'S 74 TILED STOVES

Elina Kallio

Helsinki City Museum

HELSINKI CITY MUSEUM began an inventory survey of tiled stoves for the purposes of conserving space required by the relocation of its collections centre. While the ethical dimensions of the resources argument can be debated, it has nonetheless become an integral part of collections management in the 2010s. Space for exhibitions and storage, the width of doorways and the load-bearing capacities of floors have an effect on the utilisation value of objects, and floor area that is made available permits future acquisitions. As a result of the inventory, it was decided to keep 30 tiled stoves in the collections and to dispose of 31, out of a total 74 stoves. The question marks were 13 tiled stoves whose preservation or deaccessioning required further investigation.

As objects, tiled stoves tell of housing among different classes of society, methods of heating and related innovations, interior design, and the history of styles. In accordance with its collections policy, the City Museum documents the activities and life of municipal organisation, local businesses and residents of Helsinki. The inventory survey considered



HELSINKI CITY MUSEUM 2014

Ornamental tiles with plant motifs from tiled stove made by the Turun kaakelitehdas tiled-stove factory (XLVI-249). It was decided to remove the stove from the collections of Helsinki City Museum, because the Turku Provincial Museum documents and acquires the products of the Turun kaakelitehdas factory.

the question what the museum's collection of tiled stoves should tell about Helsinki and local businesses.

The primary criteria of the collections classification and the deaccession decisions were the makers of the tiled stoves and the places where they were in use. The stoves were also considered from the per-



HELSINKI CITY MUSEUM 2014

**NEXT PAGE:** Building conservator Petra Heinonen and museum technician Jonas Haili at the beginning of the inventory of a tiled stove. Shredded paper from the Paperinkeräys paper collection company was used as padding after the inventory. One aim of the survey was to improve the standards of storing conditions.



spectives of art history and the history of styles. All the stoves that were to be kept in the collections were of significance in more than one sense with regard to collections policy.

The condition of the tiled stoves was a secondary criterion subordinate to the other considerations. In practice, however, the poor condition of the objects and the difficulty and cost, and often the almost completely infeasibility, of conservation, were arguments that often overrode considerations of collections policy.

The deaccession decisions were made following proposals from the museum's chief curator and building conservator. The inventory survey did not enquire about the views of the public. This was a failing which may reflect the unestablished nature of a

participatory perspective in collections management. On the other hand, the survey did not reveal any interested community that would have had a self-evident connection with tiled stoves.

After the deaccessioning, the collection of tiled stoves became a representative entity in accordance with the collections policy of Helsinki City Museum. Tiled stoves in poor condition or incomplete ones were disposed of as mixed waste. Achieving this goal also required a decision on how to dispose of the stoves in good condition that were not received by other museums. Helsinki City Museum's deaccessioning policy was amended in 2015 to permit the recycling or sales of donations from other parties than private individuals. Some of the deaccessioned tiled stoves remained to await being sold.

*All the stoves that were to be kept in the collections were of significance in more than one sense with regard to collections policy.*

# Participatory involvement of tram enthusiasts in deaccessioning decisions

Elina Kallio and Minna Sarantola-Weiss

Helsinki City Museum

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT** is one of Helsinki City Museum's four national areas of collecting responsibility. The focus is on commuter traffic and of means of transport involving buses, trams and the metro. The collection does not include a metro carriage yet, but there are seventeen trams and four city buses, which were a significant reason for choosing public transport as an area of collection responsibility.

Although Helsinki is Finland's only city with trams, they have been over-represented in Helsinki City Museum's collections in comparison with buses. The museum tested the significance analysis method in association with the City Transport Department and local tram enthusiasts for the purpose of deciding on the deaccessioning of two trams because the museum is preparing to add a metro carriage to the collections. The aim was to gain the approval of stakeholders, in this case the tram enthusiasts in Helsinki who have an active local association, Raitiotieseuura (Tramways Society) for the deaccessions and to find a functioning way of carrying them out. The open and participatory procedure also sought to avoid the negative publicity possibly resulting from deaccessioning.

The analysis of significance related to trams was carried out in two workshops where the analysis

## SIGNIFICANCE ANALYSIS OF HELSINKI CITY MUSEUM'S TRAM COLLECTION

### WHAT DO YOU REGARD AS MOST IMPORTANT IN THIS SPECIFIC TRAM?

#### Typicality of the tram

- How typical is the tram among contemporary tram carriages?
- Is it ordinary or special?
- Does it have a special innovation of some kind?
- Does the collection include several similar trams?

#### The significance of the tram for residents of Helsinki

- How long has this tram been in the streetscape?
- Was there something new for passengers in this model?
- Are there many similar trams in the city?

#### The significance of the tram in the history of the Helsinki City Public Transport Department

- Is the tram associated with some important stage in the history of tramway traffic in Helsinki?
- Are there many similar trams in the collection?

#### The significance of the tram for you personally?

- Why do you find it interesting?
- What memories does it arouse?
- Is there a specific tram carriage that is more important to you?
- Do you have a story about a tram that you would like to tell?

#### Could this tram or its parts be used elsewhere than in a museum exhibition?

HELSINKI CITY MUSEUM 2015

**ABOVE:** Significance analysis questions used at the meetings of the parties interested in trams.

**NEXT PAGE:** Passengers in the Karia motor tram carriage on its first day in traffic, 13 May 1955. The auxiliary carriage made by the Karia company in 1958 will be deaccessioned from the museum's collections.



served as the starting point for assessment and discussion. Representatives of Raitiotiesseura provided a great deal of technical information on trams that was either completely new to the museum's researchers or whose significance had not been recognised previously. The information enhanced the museum value of the trams that were to be kept in the collections.

Considering each tram individually with the criteria of significance analysis showed in objective terms that not all trams were equally representative and that there was overlap in the collection. The requirement of the ICOM Code of Ethics for full understanding of the significance of an object would not necessarily have been met without this discussion. Following the discussion, the analysis led to a unanimously drawn up list of six (sic!) trams that were to be deaccessioned.

The six deaccession proposals, however, were influenced more decisively by the fact the city transport

department's tramways section stated that it would receive all the deaccessioned tram carriages. It was decided to place some of the trams in storage, to use some of them as spare parts for museum trams in traffic and possibly find buyers for some of the trams. In this way, the trams dear to residents of Helsinki could continue to exist outside the museum collection – at least partly in traffic which is a cherished aim for tram enthusiasts in Helsinki.

It is neither possible nor justifiable to assess all objects in the collections as thoroughly as the trams. The experience of this project show that participatory significance analysis is suited to assessments of objects or collections that have their own local or source community in whose special area the researchers of a cultural history museum do not have thorough expertise.

*The museum tested the significance analysis method in association with the City Transport Department and local tram enthusiasts for the purpose of deciding on the deaccessioning of two trams*

# Emphases of assessment criteria

## EXAMPLES OF THE DEACCESSIONING PROCESS OF UTILITY TEXTILES IN THE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS OF THE TAMPERE MUSEUMS

**Merja Honkasalo**

Tampere Museums

OVER THE DECADES, museums receive different donations of highly varying content from private donors. Sometimes museums themselves buy large consignments of material of unknown original contexts from flea markets or second-hand stores. This time, the deaccessioning process concerned ordinary everyday utility textiles of this kind.

Deaccessioning from the Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums is based on a process of value classification. In this particular instance, some 700 dresses and 600 curtains from the early 20th to the 21st century were classified. The material consisted on the one hand of typical period products and on the other hand of items of secondary value. The condition and/or contextual information of the latter was at best no more than fair upon their coming to the museum. Many of the assessed objects were extremely worn and soiled or yellowed, faded and fragile.

The relative proportions of objects from different decades in collections affect their museum value. The aim was to reduce the number of items in order to preserve the material essential for the cultural her-

itage and to ensure for it the conditions laid down for preserving museum textiles. At the same time, there was the aim of developing the hands-on collection into a meaningful and comprehensive entity. Objects of a particularly poor level with regard to their condition and/or context were to be removed completely.

Each object was assessed via several questions: Why and how had it been included in the museum collection? What was its contextual information? If it had been bought, why? What other objects of similar type were there in the collections? How did the object typically represent its period? Was there something special about the object, such as its manufacturing technique? What was the condition of the object? Could the object serve in the hands-on collection for museum-educational purposes or as a prop in an exhibit? What would be a suitable number of dresses or curtains to represent different styles and fashions, everyday life and special events and different classes of society and minorities?

A total of 673 dresses were assessed. 270 objects were deaccessioned, 102 of them to the hands-on collection and 160 were destroyed. Of the curtains, 253 objects were deaccessioned, 102 to the hands-on collection and 189 were destroyed. It has been the museum's practice to destroy deaccessioned textiles by shredding them to be unusable and to send them to a rubbish dump. Opportunities for recycling material, however, are surveyed to give museum textiles yet a "third" life by being recycled.

*There was the aim of developing the hands-on collection into a meaningful and comprehensive entity.*

TTM 7174:1-2



TTM 7176:1-3



TTM 7182



TTM 44349:1-4



TTM 44350



TAMPERE MUSEUMS

**ABOVE:** Five so-called Tyrolean curtains/curtain sets of similar type from the turn of the 1950s and 1960s that were typical of their period were assessed. Three of the curtains (TTM 7174:1-2, TTM 7176:1-3 and TTM 7182) belonged to the estate of the original inhabitant of an apartment from 1973 in the Amuri museum of Workers' Housing.

Curtains TTM 7174:1-2 were almost unused, while the others were highly faded because of original use and from being mounted on display in the museum for several years. Curtains TTM 44349:1-4 and the fabric TTM 44350 had come to the museum from the same private donor. Their condition was good or fair due to turning yellow in places. It was decided to keep curtains TTM 7174:1-2 because the estate of the original inhabitant of the working-class museum's apartment was a unique and valuable entity owing to its authenticity. On the other hand, the most faded and fragile curtains had come to the end of their lifespan. They could no longer undergo conservation nor be used as exhibits. In view of their related cultural heritage, it was considered sufficient to document them by photographing and recording specific information and to take samples of the fabrics for keeping in the museum collection.



# The joint evaluation of art by an art museum and a historical museum

**Merja Honkasalo**

Tampere Museums

**THE COLLECTIONS** of the Tampere Museums and Tampere Art Museum are located in a shared collections centre, which has provided many benefits of synergy for acquisitions of equipment and the collection logistics. Cooperation is also made more fluid by the fact that the Art Museum and the Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums are within the same organisation, known as the Tampere Museum Services.

It is generally assumed that the collections of art museums contain 'real' art, while historical museums keep works of primarily cultural-historical significance. The Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums include paintings and drawings numbering some 400–500 objects, whose value has mainly been regarded as cultural-historical. The deaccessioning project considered the differences in evaluating art between the art museum and the historical museums. As a result of the project, 36 paintings were deaccessioned from the historical museums to the art museum, fourteen were transferred to the hands-on collection and two watercolour collages were removed to be destroyed. The transfer of the works to the collections of the art museum ensured better storage conditions and expert care for them.

Kaarlo Vuori: Portrait of Mrs. Holmberg (HM1291:2) from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The work of Kaarlo Vuori, known as Tampere's first artist, self-evidently belonged to the Art Museum's collection. The quality of the works was also a decisive factor. This painting of Mrs. Holmberg is a milieu portrait typical of Vuori in which the artist emphasises the model as both an individual and a representative of her class.

The art museum's primary criterion for acquisitions is artistic quality, the artist's intention and skill. Does the artist need to express something else than documentary information and how well is s/he able to do it? This principle was also followed in transfers from collections. A secondary criterion for selection is how the work in question would fit into the collection as a whole. Nonetheless, it is difficult to draw a line between artistic and cultural-historical values; such a boundary is inconstant and time-specific. The main criterion of transfers was the well-known name of the artist. Most of the selected paintings, such as urban milieu scenes and portraits are associated with local history.

The majority of paintings and drawings in the Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums are

**NEXT PAGE:** As a result of the project, Landscape from Sicily (1901) by Werner von Hausen underwent conservation and was chosen to be mounted in an exhibition that opened in 2016 at Tampere Art Museum.



TAMPERE MUSEUMS/ MERJA HONKASALO 2015



TAMPERE MUSEUMS/ MERJA HONKASALO 2015



*The transfer of the works to the collections of the art museum ensured better storage conditions and expert care for them.*

the work of unknown semi-professional and amateur painters whose artistic standard does not meet the requirements of a work of art. The most typical themes are landscapes, motifs from nature and still-life paintings of fruit and flowers.

There are many works of this kind in people's homes and they are an important element of cultural history. What criteria do we apply when evaluating these items, which we can call paintings but not works of art? Some of the pieces were added as examples to the collections of the Historical Muse-

**ABOVE:** Copy by R. Malm of the Angelus by J-F. Millet (TTM 39310). The Angelus by Jean-François Millet is one of the most widely copied works of world art. The artist's signature here shows that this piece was not made as a forgery. It was decided to transfer the painting to the hands-on collection, where it can be used, for example, in interiors.

ums. The others were transferred to the hands-on collection where we felt they had more opportunities to be displayed and used in various ways, for example as props for exhibitions.

# Donation terms as thresholds in discussion on deaccessioning

## THE DEACCESSIONING ASSESSMENT OF THE MINTING AND MONEY PRINTING COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF TECHNOLOGY

**Emilia Västi**

Museum of Technology, Helsinki

**THE MUSEUM OF TECHNOLOGY** has a collection of items from the Mint of Finland and the Note Printing Press of the Bank of Finland on the minting of coinage and the printing of money. The oldest machinery of the collection had already been in use in the 19th century.

While the minting and printing of money is a socially significant and interesting area of technology, it was almost impossible to display the large machines because of the costs of moving them. This also meant that the objects could not be lent to other museums. It was planned to deaccession the minting and money printing collection from the Museum of Technology to the Bank of Finland Museum, which has better opportunities to maintain and display it. Before the deaccessioning could be carried out, the actual owner collection had to be identified.

The documents on the forwarding of the collection showed that it was in fact deposited and not do-

"Money laundering" was part of the process of minting coinage. In the washing drum in the collection of the Museum of Technology, metal oxides were removed from coin blanks in a solution of sulphuric acid and water.

nated. The Mint of Finland was, if necessary, entitled to take the deposited objects back into its own use. Despite this, the items had been treated as donations from the very beginning. They had been given the collection inventory numbers of the Museum of Technology and had been recorded in the journal and catalogued like all other donations received by the museum.

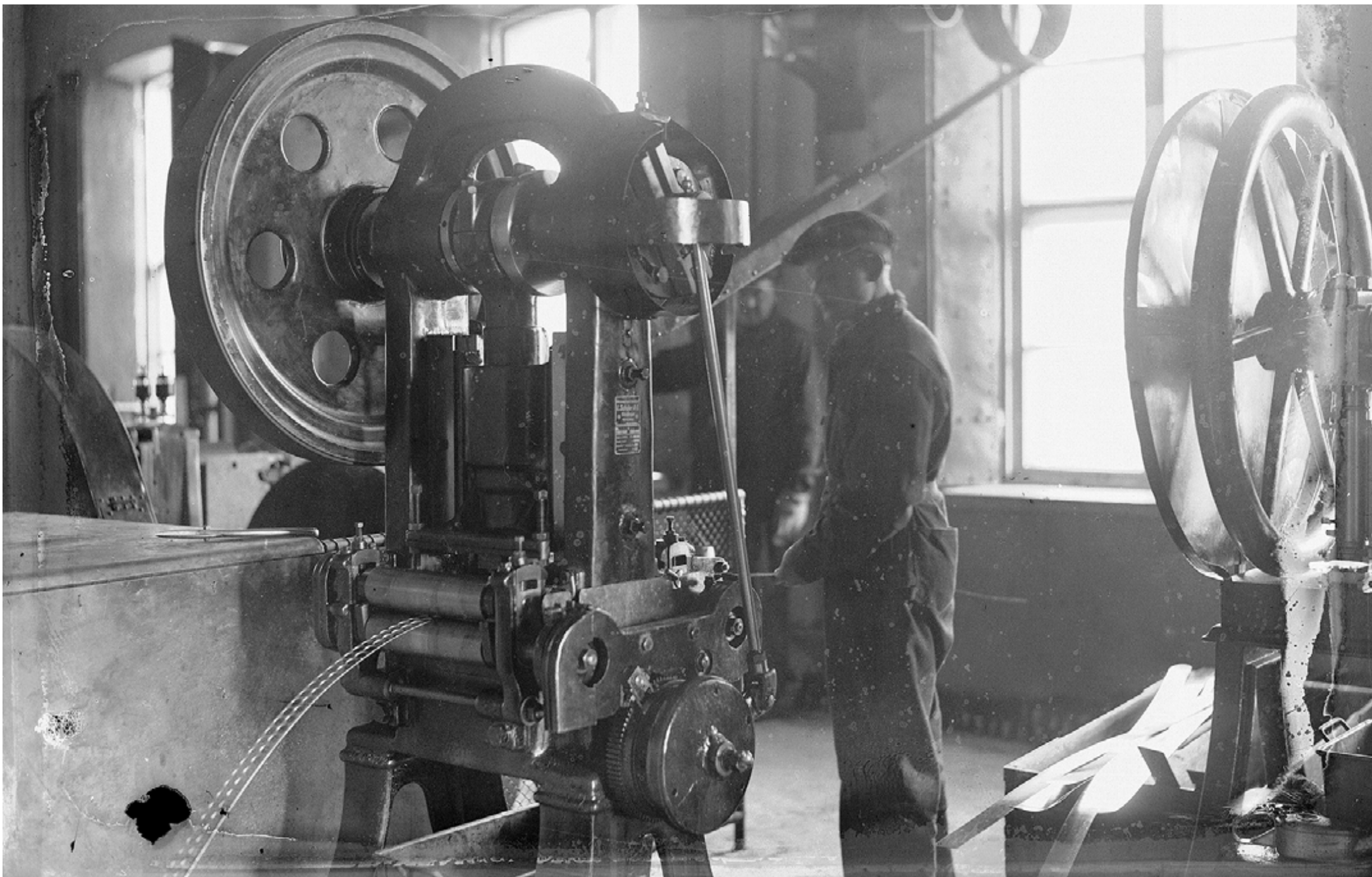
The deposition protocol drawn up by the Mint of Finland restricted the use of the collection in various ways. The Museum was not entitled sell, lend, donate or destroy the material without permission from the Mint. The material was to be preserved, structurally and functionally, in the condition in which it was deposited.

Following these criteria, the Museum of Technology has succeeded well in preserving the collection. The storage space was suited to it, and nothing had

**NEXT PAGE:** Coin press run by a main axle at the Mint of Finland in Katajanokka, Helsinki in 1930. The machine was used for die-cutting coin blanks from sheet metal. At present the machine belongs to the collections of the Museum of Technology.



MUSEUMS OF TECHNOLOGY 2014



been disposed of, donated, sold or lent without permission. The collection, however, had never been displayed to the public.

Fortunately, the party to the agreement, the Mint of Finland, still existed and it was possible to transfer the collection to the Bank of Finland Museum. Things are not always as fortunately arranged as this. Companies close down, government offices are merged and contact persons change. This should be taken into consideration in the donation stage, since various stipulations may be hindrances to the later use of the donation. It should also be possible to dissolve agreements if the transfer of a collection is of importance to its condition or opportunities to display it. Museums have the right and the obligation to reassess matters.

*It was planned to deaccession the minting and money printing collection from the Museum of Technology to the Bank of Finland Museum, which has better opportunities to maintain and display it.*



# LIFESPAN



# Easy to use, hard to preserve

## MODERN MATERIALS AND THE LIFESPAN CONCEPT OF OBJECTS IN THE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS OF THE TAMPERE MUSEUMS

**Tiina Paavola**

Tampere Museums

**THE COLLECTIONS OF BOTH** cultural history and art museums contain growing numbers of objects made of so-called modern materials, i.e. rubber and various plastics. Not even originally made to last, they are therefore problematic in museum collections. The objects are destroyed of their own accord and may destroy other collections. Evaporating hydrocarbon compounds (VOC) can also be hazardous to museum staff.

This group of objects poses a challenge. A collection of rubber and plastic items requires continuous care and monitoring, the changing of packaging materials and maintaining ambient conditions. Could these resources be put to more productive use for the benefit of the collections?

The Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums have begun to develop lifespan concepts related to rubber and plastic objects, because of their sizeable collections of these materials. The agreed national tasks in collecting objects of this type pose the challenge of developing optimum storage conditions. All objects have the beginning and end of their lifespans, and it is sought to identify the end already when an

Rubber Duck by Villu Jaanisoo in the collections of Tampere Art Museum is an example of the lifespan concept. Acquired in 2011, the piece is estimated to have a lifespan of 15 years.

item is included in the collection. The upkeep, storage and documentation required by objects are planned with this starting point in mind. High-standard documentation is carried out immediately when an object is included in the collection and there is also the aim of ensuring the long-term storage of the item.

There is sometimes, however, the desire to prolong the lifespan of objects for as long as possible. The Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums engage in research in this area with the Tampere University of Technology.

TAMPERE MUSEUMS/ ANTTI SOMPINMÄKI 2014



**NEXT PAGE:** The collection of car tyres is kept in a space with controlled ambient conditions at the collections centre of the Tampere Museums.





# The disposal and documentation of Kain Tapper's sculpture *Kasvu* (Growth)

Klas Fontell & Elina Leskelä

Helsinki Art Museum

**ARTWORKS IN PUBLIC SPACES** are exposed to wear and damage. The settings of site-specific artworks may change so much that a piece has to be removed or relocated. Kain Tapper's concrete sculpture *Kasvu* (Growth) from 1969 in Kulosaari in Helsinki is an example of carrying out deaccessioning.

Kain Tapper designed his sculpture as part of a complex of buildings consisting of a primary school built in 1966, a library and a children's day-care centre. It is a good example of Tapper's work in concrete, and in other respects of a basic type of public artwork of the 1960s. Reinforced concrete was the basic building material of urbanising Finland and the artwork was designed to be in a dialogue with the surrounding buildings.

In 2011, it was decided to tear down the school, library and day-care centre because of indoor air problems, and the demolition was carried out immediately in the summer of the year. This required the relocation of the sculpture for the duration of the work. A detailed investigation revealed that it was in very poor condition and damaged in several places. There were missing pieces and the rusted rebars were visible. The monument's period of use had come to

*Kasvu* (Growth), ca. 1980s. The basic elements of the artwork are the space between its two vertical elements and its undulating texture.

an end, and the space for which it had been originally designed no longer existed.

A deaccession proposal was presented to the board of the Helsinki Art Museum, which in turn decided to propose the destruction of the piece. A requirement for this, however, was proper documentation of the work to permit its reconstruction in a new location if necessary. The estate of Kain Tapper approved of the plan, after which the work was carefully documented and then destroyed by crushing. Information on the disposal of the piece was entered into the museum's collections management database and posted on its webpages. The webpages often provide feedback on sculptures and interest in public works of art is clearly increasing.

**NEXT PAGE:** The damaged sculpture, detail.

HAM HELSINKI ART MUSEUM





# Lifespan or authenticity?

## THE EFFECTS OF CHOICES OF MATERIAL AND LIFESPAN ON THE DEACCESSIONING PROCESS

Eeva Holkeri, Marika Honkaniemi & Silja Lehtonen

Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova Museum, Turku

**SOME WORKS** of contemporary art are doomed to disintegrate owing to the obsolescence of techniques or the incompatibility of materials. Unstable objects, synthetic polymers and new technologies have led to the care of museum collections changing from proactive to unpredictable.

A work of art is not necessarily subject to even wear. How many individual parts of a work can be repaired or completely replaced before it ceases to exist? Is an artwork a concept and a narrative rather than a material-based entity? Should the replacement material be completely the same as the original, or is similarity enough? The artists' views should be central to all these measures, but it is not always possible to ask the artist.

Jan-Erik Andersson's (born 1954) installation sculpture *The Romantic Painter Caspar David Friedrich Sitting on an Iceberg, Trying to Capture the Magic Triangle on His Canvas after Having Thrown His Painting 'The Wreck of the Ship Called Hope', 1821, in Ice-Cold Water (1986) in the Stroke of Colour collection exhibition at the Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova Museum in the autumn of 2015. The materials of the work consist of, at least, plywood, chipboard, steel tubing, chicken wire, rope, glass, artificial fur, wire, foam rubber, cotton fabric and acrylic and spray paint.*

ABOA VETUS & ARS NOVA/ JARI NIEMINEN 2015



It may be necessary to dispose of a destroyed work of art. Sometimes only a part of it is removed. The concept of partial removal refers to conservation measures in which a hazardous or damaged part or material, or one that has changed over time, is removed and possibly replaced with a new one. After how many treatments will the work still be “genuine”? At some stage, the replacing of parts will begin to affect the authenticity of the piece. In addition, the opinions of curators, conservators and artists change.

The format and equipment problems of media are of a similar nature. How many parts can be replaced without the piece becoming unrecognizable? How can we ensure the realisation of the artist’s intention especially when the artist is deceased or cannot be contacted?

Careful documentation is one solution to this. All important information should be documented and archived immediately when the artwork is acquired. Display instructions, updates of equipment, lists of replaceable parts and, where necessary, a written agreement with the artist on the lifespan of the piece will help ensure in the future that the party that keeps the collection will be independent of the artist and that the work will always be on show faultlessly and in the manner intended by the artist.

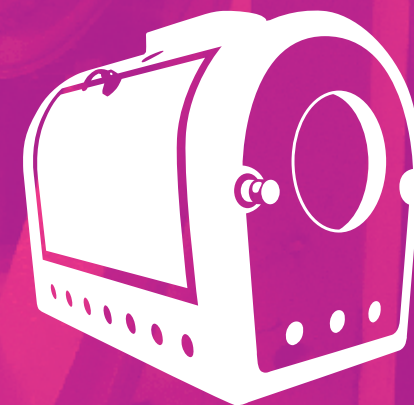
ABOA VETUS &amp; ARS NOVA 1995.



**ABOVE:** Nam June Paik: Cage in Cage (India) (1994), iron, plastic mat, plastic birds, paper grass, plywood, video monitors, 95 x 84.5 x 88.5 cm.



# METHODS OF DISPOSAL



# Transfer to another museum as a method of disposal

## THE ROLE OF EXPERTISE IN THE DEACCESSIONING OF CINEMA-RELATED OBJECTS AT THE MUSEUM OF TECHNOLOGY

Piia Pietarinen

Museum of Technology, Helsinki

THE MUSEUM OF TECHNOLOGY has an extensive collection of cinema-related material, which however did not belong to the museum's area of collecting as defined in its present collections policy. Nor is the museum responsible for collecting and documenting in this area within the national scheme for cooperation in collecting and documenting. Neither does it have sufficient expertise in this special area of technology, as cinema-related collection is the task of the Museum for Motion Pictures, a specialised museum maintained by the National Audiovisual Institute. The Museum for Motion Pictures was asked if it was interested and able to receive cinema-related objects. When the inventory of this material was launched, the Museum for Motion Pictures had agreed on a preliminary basis to the transfer of the collection from the Museum of Technology.

The inventoried objects were chosen for inspection not only for the above reasons of collections pol-

One of the objects that was transferred to the Museum for Motion Pictures was the lamp chamber of a Bauer film projector.

icy but also because of their clearly poor condition, incompleteness and poor contextual information. It was obvious from the outset that the expertise of the staff of the Museum of Technology alone was insufficient for an inventory survey of the cinema-related collection, and assistance from the Museum for Motion Pictures significantly speeded the inventory work. Through expert assistance, hazardous substances in the objects, such as asbestos, which was used for fire-safety reasons in early film projectors, could be identified at the Museum of Technology.

The assistance received through consulting gave us the confidence to make decisions leading to the disposal of the objects. The main reasons for disposal by destroying were the extremely poor condition of the objects, their lack of parts and the existence of similar items in the collections of the Museum for Motion Pictures. Some objects or their parts were deaccessioned as workshop materials for the Museum of Technology. Approximately one hundred objects were deaccessioned to the Museum for Motion Pictures through collection transfer, and the Museum of Technology decided to keep three of the cinema-related items in its own collections.



# The use of deaccessioned objects as hands-on material

## EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS OF THE TAMPERE MUSEUMS

**Merja Honkasalo**

Tampere Museums

**TRADITIONALLY, THE DISPOSAL** of textiles in museums has been carried out by shredding them among mixed waste. The Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums have positive experiences of the use of textiles samples in museum activities involving the public.

The textile industry is one of the national areas of collecting responsibility of the Historical Collections of the Tampere Museums, since the city has been Finland's leading locality of this industry. The museums' collections of industrially produced textiles are very large and were obtained mostly through donations from textile mills. The largest donations of this material are from the 1970s and 1990s. Most of the textiles still remain to be catalogued and they have been inventoried when permitted by available resources.

A set of terrycloth samples from the Finlayson company was assessed for value classification in 2007–2008 and a set tablecloth samples also from Finlayson was similarly assessed in 2010–2011. The consignments of material contained samples of the Finlayson Mill's output from the 1930s to 1986. There were hardly any samples from the 1940s and

relatively few even from the 1950s. There were 121 plywood boxes – approximately 15 cubic metres – of terrycloth samples and 50 plywood boxes of tablecloth samples.

The aim of these projects was to catalogue a comprehensive selection of fabric samples with data on their models of pattern, size and colour and product information for the Siiri collection management database. There was also the aim of transferring duplicates to the educational collections and samples of poor quality to the disposal category.

In museum terms, the fabric samples were a highly homogenous part of an entity that is of both national and international significance. The samples had been originally in the Finlayson company's production archives and had already been selected there to be donated to the museum. Each pattern with its respective models of colour was selected for the museum collections. Duplicates and samples in relatively poor condition were removed to the educational collection or material reserve. The classification also took into account the smaller number of samples from the 1940s and 1950s, and relatively more of them were included in the collection than samples from later decades.

Of the approximately 6,000 samples in the tablecloth project, 560 were deaccessioned to the educational collection and some 2,500 to the material

reserve. Of the roughly 3,500 terrycloth samples, approximately 2,500 were catalogued into the museum collection, 150 were transferred to the educational collection, and the remainder were transferred to stores of material for museum-educational purposes.

The store of industrial textile materials was utilised for the first time in the Tampere Museums workshop project for promoting the well-being of the elderly in 2010–2011. This project was led by a textile designer, crafts advisers of the city's service centre and treatment facility and the museum's textile researcher.

Community art textile pieces for various parts of the textile mill were made together with the elderly participants. In addition, bean bags were made from terrycloth samples to be used for recollection and activity sessions by elderly persons in institutional care. The deaccessioned tablecloth samples were used for making batches of fabric samples for the museum's Open textile archives, where they can be freely studied by the public. They also provide a cross-section of the Finlayson Mill's tablecloth production from over the decades.

**NEXT PAGE:** Visitors to the Tampere Museums' collections centre on Museum Night in 2014. The fabric sample batches are on the clothing rack in the rear corner.





# Putting a museum object up for sale?

## THE PROBLEMS AND ASSESSED PRACTICES OF SELLING MOTOR VEHICLES FROM MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Tiina Paavola

Tampere Museums

IN 2007, THE TAMPERE MUSEUMS decided to test a new method of disposal. In connection with an inventory of motor vehicles, it was decided to sell five automobiles, two motorcycles and a scooter that had been deaccessioned. The process took a long while, as museums of cultural history in Finland had not previously sold objects from their collections and there was no model of procedure that could be followed. The ethical dimension of sales was also a source of concern, but it was finally resolved that selling the motor vehicles to interested enthusiasts would continue the lifespan of these objects and serve the concept of sustainability better than having them scrapped. The sales were carried out in 2009. The long time-lag between the decision and its implementation reflects the extent of the problems that the museum had to address.

At first the vehicles were deaccessioned from the museum collection through the decision of the official in charge, with sale defined as a possible means of disposal. The owners of the vehicles were then identified from the population register authorities. The donors or their heirs were asked if they wanted their old vehicles

A Triumph motorcycle made in the late 1950s was bought for the Tampere Museum of Technology in 1976. Its history of use is not known and there are parts missing from it. As a result, it was deaccessioned in 2007. The deaccession process and sale of the item was facilitated by its original method of acquisition of being bought for the collections of the museum.

back, since they would no longer be kept in the museum collection. All the donors or their heirs agreed to the sale of the vehicles, after which an advertisement regarding the sale was posted in a magazine for vintage automobile enthusiasts. There was less public interest than expected, but ultimately all the vehicles were sold at a price that was acceptable to the museum.

The revenue from the sale of the vehicles were small in relation to the time and effort required by the process of selling. The main benefit of the project was satisfaction over having found buyers for the objects and use for the vehicles. It was finally possible to remove objects slated for deaccession that had been lying in storage and the long process could be brought to an end. On the other hand, the museum still receives contacts and enquiries about spare parts concerning the sold vehicles. The objects thus still occupy the museum even after deaccessioning, because the public trusts the museum to be an 'information bank' even with regard to deaccessioned objects. The only effective way to prevent deaccessioned collection items from returning to the museum's sphere of influence appears to be their destruction. Two other automobiles from the Tampere Museums' collection were sold later.

TAMPERE MUSEUMS/ MATTI LEHTONEN 2005



**NEXT PAGE:** Instead of being sold, deaccessioned vehicle can be restored to use. This deaccessioned 1951 Chrysler Windsor De Luxe was restored for official representation purposes for the City of Tampere. Timo P. Nieminen, Mayor of Tampere 2007 –2012, stepping into the car.

TAMPERE MUSEUMS/ REETTA TERVAKANGAS 2011



# Why and how should the sale of objects be discussed in public?

## A CAREFULLY CONSIDERED CASE FROM KUOPIO

Emilia Västi

IN THE AUTUMN OF 2015, the Kuopio Museum sold twenty tiled stoves and the sale of objects from Finnish museum collections was noted as news for the first time by the Finnish Broadcasting company.

The tiles of over thirty stoves recovered from houses demolished in the 1970s and 1980s were in storage in the museum's premises. It was unlikely that all the dismantled stoves would be used for museum purposes and the storage space was needed for other use. As the result of an inventory and investigation carried out in the summer of 2015, the museum decided to keep twelve of the dismantled stoves, and twenty were offered for sale. The sales process proceeded well. Instead of economic revenue, the most important aspects were the collection of information for the inventory survey and the presentation of the museum's core mission and care of its collections to the public.

Sufficient resources were important. The process was launched when the museum was able to hire a building conservator and the museum's other collections staff were able to concentrate on documentation, information and the arrangements of the sale.

The deaccessioned objects could have been donated free of charge. Sales were chosen for the reason that if the stoves had been donated outside the museums sector, some other party could have profited from them at market prices. The revenue that was now gained could be used to finance the inventorying of the stoves.

The prices of the stoves were defined in accordance with their market value. Ultimately, money was not the main factor: stoves were sold even when the asking price was not reached in all cases. Some of the sold tiled stoves went to buildings under official protection.

The project focused effort on information. The tiled stoves were inventoried during the summer in the museum's courtyard, where a bulletin board presenting the project was erected, permitting visitors to the museum and the museum café to follow the work in progress. Visitors were clearly informed that some of the stoves would be deaccessioned and sold. The museum staff was prepared for negative reactions, but instead the public was enthusiastic: people recalled and noted with horror the years when wooden houses were torn down, but felt it was positive that museums preserved marks of the past even after deaccessioning some of the objects from the collection.

The opinion of the public regarding deaccessioning or sales as such was not enquired. Instead, people

were introduced to museum work and were given an opportunity for discussion and for dispelling misconceptions. An official information bulletin on the sales was published later, but in the inventory stage the focus was above all on less formal information in social media.

**NEXT PAGE:** Shelter for the tiled stove inventory work erected in the courtyard of the Old Kuopio Museum.



# Emptying storage facilities

## PRACTICAL ISSUES OF DEACCESSIONING IN EMPTYING STORAGE AT THE MUSEUM OF TECHNOLOGY

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**WITH ALL ITS STAGES**, the deaccessioning process can require more time than adding an object to a museum collection. It is often the case, however, deaccessioning has to be undertaken within a hurried schedule when storage space has to be moved. The Museum of Technology faced this situation in 2012, when its landlord suddenly cancelled the rental agreement for one of the museum's storage facilities. The space in question was partly in poor condition and the objects that had been placed there were also in poor condition, with incomplete information on their content.

Approximately half of the 500 objects finally had to be disposed of with various methods. The objects selected for removal included, among others, a countless number of electric motors for which no reasons for storage could be given, owing to similar material in other collections, incompleteness or poor condition. There were also unidentified objects whose lack of related information called for storage for the time being. A few items were transferred to other professionally run museums.

Owing to the large size of objects in the collections of the Museum of Technology and the difficulty

of moving them, transport and moving arranged by the museum often requires an outside party with the necessary equipment and expertise for carrying out the work safely. The emptying of the storage space required a forklift truck, a telehandler and five persons from outside the museum. There was also museum staff on hand for supervision and instructions from the perspective of museum work. It took five days to move the objects.

It was decided to use some of the objects for workshop material and exhibition props. A significant portion of the deaccessioned objects were returned to their donors.

Professional experience shows that it is important that deaccessioned objects are given to other parties than professional museum only when the deaccessioning museum understands and accepts the fact that it cannot have any effect on the subsequent stages of objects that are removed beyond the sphere of professional museum practice. Recommendations can be given, but special provisions should be avoided in deaccessioning agreements if they cannot be monitored.

Designations identifying the item and referring to the museum were removed from the deaccessioned objects. There have been cases in the museums sector where a deaccessioned object goes on a new round, resulting in display in unsuitable connections or even being offered again to the museum that originally deaccessioned it. For example, when selling objects for waste metal it is important to find a reliable and professional partner that will handle the items as ma-

terial for recycling and not, for example, sell them as such.

Hazardous substances such as PCB oil were disposed by a recycling company and costs of handling were subtracted from the revenue from the sale of metal.

The Museum of Technology has sold deaccessioned machinery and equipment for waste metal. The museum regards this as an ethical sustainable practice, since the compensation that it receives is for the proper recycling of material, not profit from sales. The objects removed from storage space in Vantaa produced fourteen tonnes of waste metal, and the compensation received in this connection covered part of the moving costs of the objects remaining in the collections. The amount received as compensation, however, was not significant in relation to the overall budget for relocating the stores.

**NEXT PAGE:** The objects were investigated and assessed individually for the deaccessioning decisions.



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# Appendix 1

## QUESTIONS OF THE DEACCESSIONING SURVEY OF THE PROJECT, 2014

### 1 WHAT KIND OF COLLECTIONS DO YOU WORK WITH?

- Cultural history
- Art
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

### 2 ARE YOU?

- a conservator
- a museum technician
- a researcher (curator / chief curator / etc.)
- a museum director
- other museum professional, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

- museum volunteer

### 3 HAS YOUR MUSEUM DEACCESSIONED DURING YOUR WORKING HISTORY THERE?

- Yes
  - No
- Further information: \_\_\_\_\_

### 4 DOES YOUR MUSEUM HAVE AN OFFICIALLY RECORDED DEACCESSIONING POLICY OR PROCESS?

- Yes, adopted in \_\_\_\_\_
  - No
- Further information: \_\_\_\_\_

### 5 IF YOU WISH, PLEASE TELL MORE ABOUT THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF DEACCESSIONING PRACTICES IN YOUR MUSEUM

#### 6 PLEASE NOTE THE REASONS FOR DEACCESSIONING CARRIED OUT IN YOUR MUSEUM:

- the object does not suit the museum's tasks in collecting
- the object is better suited to the collection of another museum in the division of tasks in collecting between Finnish museums
- duplicates or corresponding items in collections (commonality in the museum's own collections)
- the condition and /or incomplete state of the object
- incomplete provenance and contextual information on the object
- the deaccessioned object will be replaced (e.g. with a similar item in better condition)
- the object poses risks to the rest of the collection (pests, mould etc.)
- The object poses health and/or safety hazards
- the object will be included in the museum's educational / hands-on collection
- the object requires excessive storage / maintenance costs
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Further information: \_\_\_\_\_

### 7 WHAT METHODS OF DISPOSAL HAVE BEEN APPLIED IN YOUR MUSEUM?

- transfer to a professionally run museum
  - transfer to a non-professionally run museum
  - transfer to the museum's educational hands-on collection
  - transfer for use as exhibition props
  - donation elsewhere in the public domain
  - return to the donor
  - sale
  - exchange
  - utilisation as material
  - destruction
- Further information: \_\_\_\_\_

### 8 WHAT IS THE MOST PROBLEMATIC ASPECT OF DEACCESSIONS / YOUR MUSEUM'S DEACCESSIONING POLICY AND/OR PROCESS?

### 9 WHAT FUNCTIONS BEST IN DEACCESSIONS / YOUR MUSEUM'S DEACCESSIONING POLICY AND/OR PROCESS?

### 10 WHAT SHOULD THE PROJECT ADDRESS?

### 11 PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR MOST SPECIAL, SUCCESSFUL OR MOST DIFFICULT EXPERIENCE IN DEACCESSIONING AND/OR GIVE A GOOD TIP ON HOW TO CARRY OUT DEACCESSIONS.