

IS THIS A LIBRARY OR A MUSEUM?

Preserving Mixed Collections At The National Library Of Trinidad And Tobago

Danielle J. Fraser, Library Conservator, NALIS

INTRODUCTION

The National Library and Information System Authority of Trinidad and Tobago – NALIS – is the country's coordinator of all library and information services. One of its key responsibilities is to promote and preserve national heritage information. Though the National Library has a comprehensive collection of paper-based items and electronic audiovisual media there is particular emphasis on materials with national and Caribbean origin, focus and authorship. The Heritage Library Division helps NALIS fulfill the goal of acquiring, promoting and preserving national heritage information.



The National Library Building in downtown Port of Spain, Trinidad.

Special collections acquired by or donated to the Heritage Library Division, consist of mainly “traditional” library items created by or of interest to a significant person or organization of Trinidad and Tobago. One would not be surprised to find within these collections books, newspapers, pamphlets, photographs, letters, film and audio recordings. However, within several collections housed in the Rare Books Room of the National Library there is an eclectic mix of items often labeled “memorabilia”.



A view of the Preservation and Conservation Laboratory of the Heritage Library Division, NALIS.

This poster explores how the Library Conservator along with the staff of the Preservation and Conservation (PAC) Laboratory and the Heritage Library Division approach the challenges of preserving, exhibiting and housing these mixed collections.

THE APPROACH

1. Exterminate Pests

Often the original storage conditions of heritage collections acquired by NALIS are unknown. To ensure that pests are not brought into the Library, all incoming collections are insect exterminated. At NALIS, we use controlled low temperature treatment or freezing to help eradicate insects in our collections. Through the use of the **Wei T'o Book Dryer and Insect Exterminator (BDIE)** [Pictured Right] we can safely treat our library collections. The Wei T'o BDIE is an electrically and mechanically reconfigured commercial freezer which uses low controlled temperatures to kill insects without the use of fumigating chemicals. Insects are exposed to sub-zero temperatures at which their body fluids crystallize.

Considerations:

If components of a heritage artifact are made of a material which can be affected by insects and the item is able to withstand sub-zero temperatures without damage, then the item is selected for insect extermination using the Wei T'o BDIE. Otherwise the item is isolated for an extended period of time to be sure it is bug free before adding it to the Collection.



Danielle Fraser is the Library Conservator at the National Library and Information System Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (NALIS). She manages all the activities of the Preservation and Conservation Laboratory of the Heritage Library Division. Through a NALIS scholarship, Danielle completed her studies in the Book and Paper Conservation Program at the School of Information, the University of Texas at Austin in 2009. Following her third-year internship at the Library of Congress, Danielle returned home to begin her work of preserving and treating some of Trinidad and Tobago's treasured heritage materials.

2. Clean

Dust and dirt can contribute to the deterioration of collection items. The hygroscopic quality of dust can lead to conditions ideal for pests and mold growth. Also the solid particles of dust can abrade and scratch surfaces of an artifact.

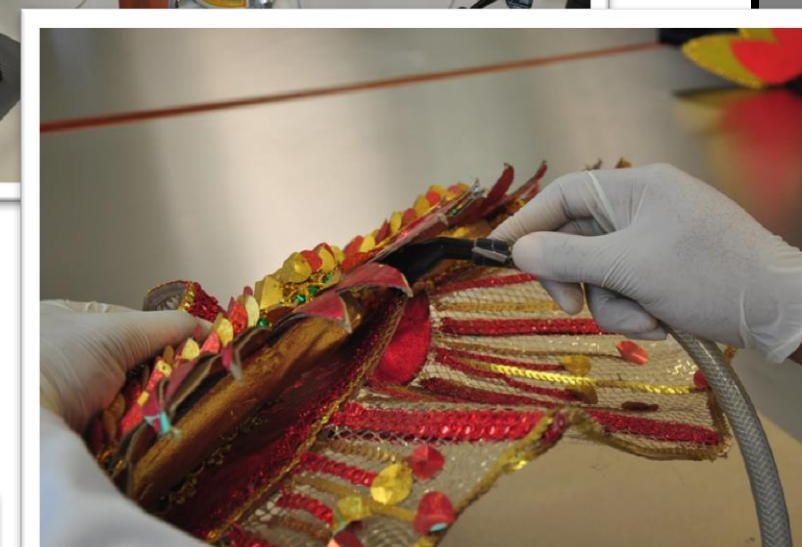
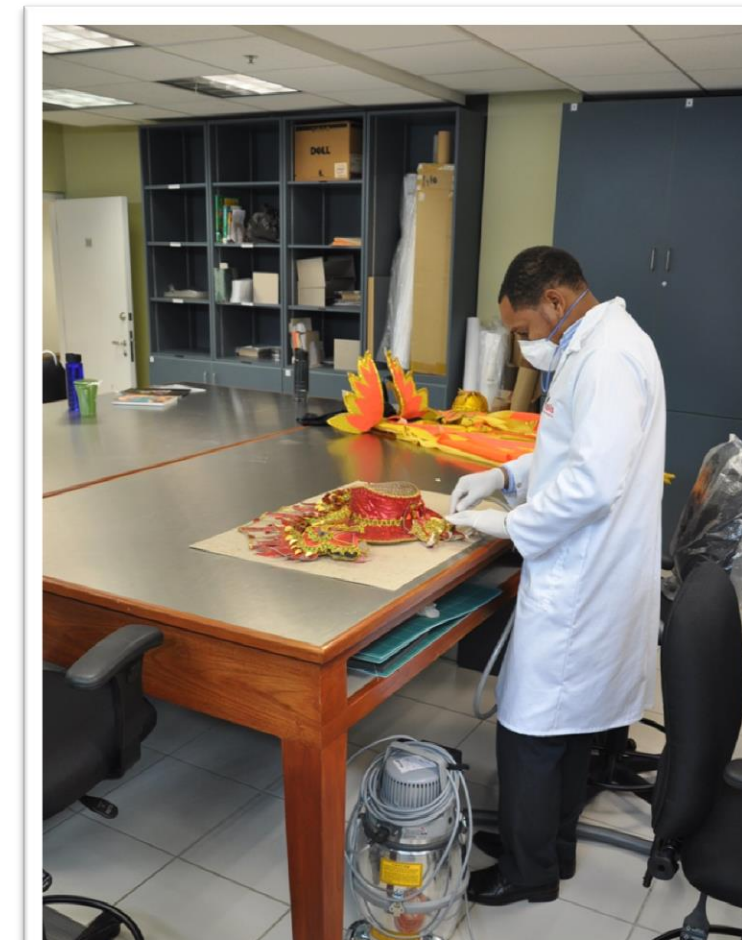
Considerations:

Gentle cleaning methods are selected to reduce the abrasion to the surface of the artifact. The options considered range from using a **Nilfisk HEPA-filtered vacuum with micro-attachments to dry or damp cotton swabs to microfiber cloths or soft brushes**. A spot test under magnification is conducted to see the effectiveness of the cleaning method.

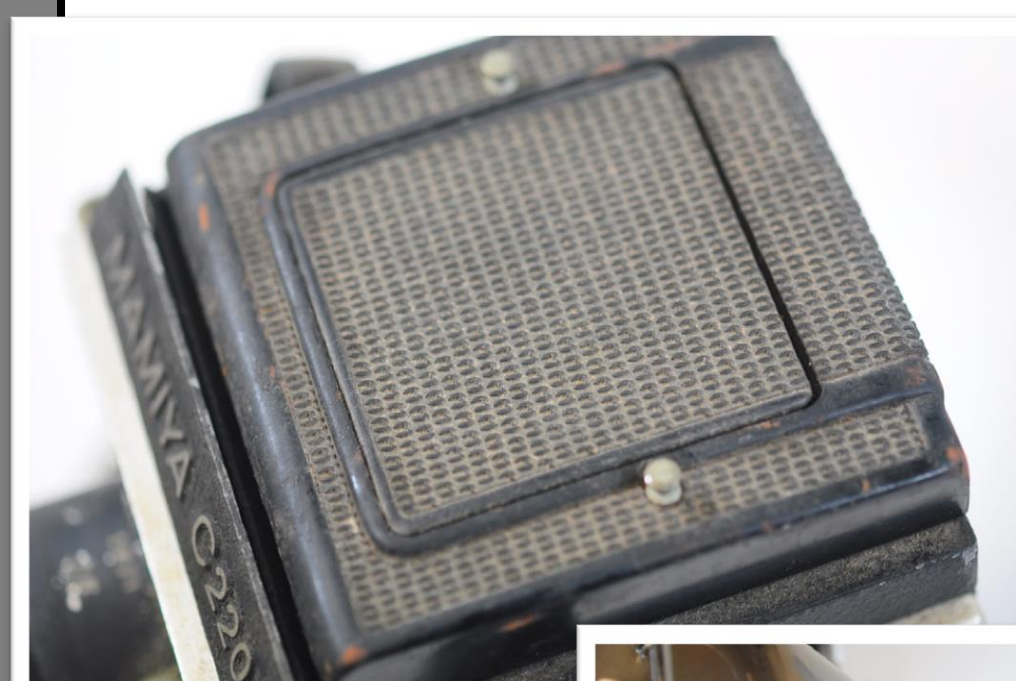
Afeshia Blackwill, Assistant Library Conservator, cleans ties using the Nilfisk vacuum.



Vishal Pudhan, Library Assistant II, Special Collections, uses a soft brush to clean the exterior and interior of a clock.



Kareem De Suza, Library Technical Assistant cleans a Carnival costume with the Nilfisk vacuum.



Kareem De Suza, Library Technical Assistant gently removes the dust from the surface of a camera with a damp cotton swab.



3. Stabilize

Considerations:

If an item needs to be stabilized, the first directive given to staff is to research current best practices or recommendations from conservation experts in the field. The aim of any treatment is to do more good than harm to the object.

The Library Conservator's expertise is within the field of book and paper conservation. She takes a minimalist approach to treating non-paper based objects. So far the only treatment carried out on these artifacts has been cleaning as described above. Fortunately their conditions have not deemed it as urgent for interventions beyond cleaning.

4. Exhibit

One of Heritage Library Division's mandates is to facilitate public use and access to cultural heritage materials. Staging public exhibitions to showcase NALIS' diverse collections is one popular way to fulfill this objective.

Considerations:

Staff must balance the aim to produce an awe-inspiring display with ensuring optimal care of the artifacts being exhibited. Specifications for exhibitions include:

- ✓ Use of non-damaging conservation quality mounts and supports
- ✓ Restrict duration of exhibitions (average 3-6 weeks)
- ✓ Reduce direct lighting where possible

Kareem De Suza, Library Technical Assistant inserts cricket stumps into a plank of Ethafoam® for display in an exhibit case.



The ties are displayed in a sink mat of conservation matting board.



5. House & Store

Unique and important heritage collections are stored in the Rare Books Room (RBR) of the Heritage Library Division. The RBR is a secure space with independent environmental control and fire suppression systems. It is equipped with compact powder-coated steel shelving and map cases. Special Collections Staff are responsible for monitoring the RBR.

Considerations:

Artifacts often require custom-made housings due to their odd shapes, sizes and conditions. PAC Staff have prepared adequate housings using conservation quality materials. On some occasions existing housings are retrofitted to accommodate the artifact.

Gaylord® Archival E-flute Corrugated Board is used to create custom-housings for the cricket stumps.



NEXT CHALLENGE

A former Prime Minister collected several souvenir matchboxes over his years of travel. As his collection grew he placed them in a large glass bottle which was acquired along with other traditional items to make up the Prime Ministerial Collections to be preserved by NALIS. Over 700 matchboxes were carefully emptied from the bottle and are temporarily boxed until their next treatment step, which is currently being researched by PAC Staff.

Considerations:

Staff must consider the flammability of the matches. How should the large bottle be displayed to show its original use?

Do you have a suggestion for this preservation challenge? Email us at fraserd@nalis.gov.tt.



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