

# Hard Hats Required:

## Rehousing a Basketry Collection During the Yale Peabody Museum's Renovation

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### The Project

- The Yale Peabody Museum's ongoing renovation project required the complete evacuation of all items from the museum during 2018-2021. This provided the opportunity to assess the condition of the entire collection.
- This work considers a case study of 813 basketry artifacts from the Anthropology collections, housed in an overflow storage area with limited accessibility.
- This collection had not undergone an audit in decades and was slated for upgraded rehousing at Yale's West Campus.

### The Collection

- The basket collection consisted primarily of material collected by Yale scholars from Southeast Asia and Oceania, including folded and rolled mats, containers, and hats.

### Considerations

- The overflow room was a metal-floored mezzanine accessible only via a narrow metal stairway in the security closet, with a total headroom of less than 6 feet.
- Concrete beams crossed the ceiling with a headroom of about 5 feet, marked with red fluorescent tape.
- The room had no temperature or relative humidity controls.
- As the mezzanine directly abutted the Great Hall, many items had been moved weeks prior during emergency work for the deinstallation of an oversized fossil slab containing a skeleton of *Xiphactinus* bolted to the opposite side of the East wall, and some database locations were thus inaccurate.

### Methodology

- A general assessment was conducted by the head conservator prior to removal. Items were treated with pesticides and required handling with gloves and mask.
- A hard hat was provided to prevent head injury due to the low height of the ceiling.
- A database list with historical locations was created. The room was evacuated tier by tier following geographic provenance, and objects audited and tagged with barcodes.
- All items were surface HEPA vacuumed before removal.
- Technicians moved items down the narrow stairs in a pair, through the security closet and towards an assessment area in a former exhibit gallery.

*Right: Mezzanine storage: inadequate shelf locations, no identifiable catalog numbers*



*Above: Storage in the mezzanine; note low ceilings marked with fluorescent hazard tape.*



*Above: Overview of mezzanine access.*



*Above: Individually bagged mats - audited, vacuumed, barcoded, and ready for packing.*

*Above Right: A packed metrocart. Peanut pillows added for stability, all items individually wrapped, ready for shipment.*



*Above: Storage at Yale's West Campus*

*Below: Installation and evaluation of items for future conservation projects.*



### Shipment

- As physical evacuation was the topmost priority, on-the-fly artifact triage was required to evaluate items stable enough to move at present but requiring treatment in the future.
- Items were stabilized with ethafoam and volara wedge supports, peanut pillows, and "snakes" of HDPE-wrapped cotton batting.
- Blue board trays were made for items requiring additional support.
- Items were placed on metro carts wrapped with shrink-wrap, and shipped via truck between Yale campuses, undergoing a freezing cycle upon arrival.

### Results

- During assessment, 82 items more than expected were discovered, all previously without a database location. These included smaller items found within larger ones, likely due to space constraints. Others were folded, stacked, or rolled together in bundles.
- Many presented in a friable condition due to the lack of environmental controls.
- Evacuation triage allowed collection assistants to mark items for priority consideration, such as 50 folded sleeping mats from the Solomon Islands, candidates for a batch conservation treatment to allow for rolled storage.
- Moving the collection with an eye towards future conservation needs allowed for proper space planning and reflects museum-wide initiatives for increasing collection accessibility and modernizing storage systems.

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