



CCI Notes

10/6

Condition Reporting – Paintings. Part I: Introduction

Introduction

The foundation of any collections care program is an initial written and photographic record that illustrates and describes the physical condition of each piece. This record, referred to as the **Condition Report**, becomes essential when evaluating any subsequent deterioration or damage.

Although a painting may remain stable for many years, it is not unusual for deterioration to accelerate suddenly. Monitoring the collection regularly to determine changes in the condition of works can help to minimize the effects of deterioration. For example, should a work in vertical display or in storage exhibit an unstable paint surface (e.g., curling or lifting paint), it could be placed immediately in a horizontal position, thus avoiding paint loss.

A record of a painting's physical condition prior to, during, and after travel is also necessary. This will help to determine whether it has maintained a stable condition and to identify any new damage caused by handling.

Examination Records

It is important to establish a standard, systematic method of examination and reporting so that examination records can be easily interpreted by everyone.

There are three types of examination records: the **Condition Report**, the **Inspection Report**, and the **Cumulative Condition Report**.

Condition Report

A record of condition should exist for every painting in a collection. New acquisitions should be systematically examined and condition-reported as they are acquired. Where there is a backlog of works collected before condition reporting was part of the acquisition procedure, first examine the works at highest risk (i.e., those required for exhibition or requested for loan) and then methodically go through the paintings in storage that are seldom put on display.

Once this initial record has been completed, future examinations (Inspection Reports) only need to record changes in condition, and can be carried out in regular, brief examinations *in situ* (e.g., while a painting is hanging on display).

Inspection Report

Inspection Reports should be carried out at regular intervals — once a month or every six months to one year, depending on the resources of the museum. Their purpose is to detect changes in the condition of a painting. Minor changes are recorded for future reference, while major

changes alert staff to the need for conservation treatment. Inspection Reports should indicate the examiner, the date, and brief observations on any changes in condition (see Sample Report 1).

Cumulative Condition Report

For travelling exhibitions, changes in the condition of a painting are recorded in a Cumulative Condition Report. This report is completed by each institution when a work arrives, and again before it is re-packed for travel. The Cumulative Condition Report usually consists of an initial Condition Report for each painting, completed by the lender, with space for additional "incoming" and "outgoing" reports by each institution exhibiting the painting.

Photographic Documentation

A photographic record of the condition of a painting, both front and back, is as important as the written record. A high-quality image of the work taken when it is acquired can be used for comparison with the painting at a later date to determine whether damage has occurred or progressed since the work entered the institution's care. This is particularly important for contemporary paintings where elements of the artist's technique, such as the deliberate exposure of raw canvas, may later be mistaken for evidence of damage.

To be most effective, negatives 4" x 5" or larger should be used with a low-speed, fine-grain, black-and-white film. The image on 35 mm negatives cannot be significantly enlarged; specific details and information such as the length or aperture of cracks will therefore not be evident. Large-format cameras can be purchased second-hand (see CCI Notes 16/6, *Processing Contemporary Black-and-White Photographic Films and Papers*).

Condition Report Format

Condition Reports can be written in prose, in point form, or on preprinted forms (see Sample Reports 2 and 3).

Whereas the prose format imposes no restrictions on vocabulary or length, it does not offer specific prompts to ensure that the examination is complete. Although a well-designed, preprinted form is easy to read and ensures that every aspect of a painting's structure is considered, it may be restrictive where unusual or extensive damage occurs. Whichever format is selected, the information recorded should be consistent.

The Condition Report should contain detailed information about both the construction and the condition of a painting. Because paintings can be very complex, it is customary to concentrate on one element of the structure at a time. Consequently, the Condition Report should be broken down into the following sections:

- (1) Identification of the work
- (2) Paint layer
- (3) Surface coating
- (4) Ground layer
- (5) Support and auxiliary support (where present)
- (6) Frame

CCI Notes 10/7, *Condition Reporting — Paintings. Part II: Examination Techniques and a Checklist*, provides guidelines to the types of information required for each section. CCI Notes 10/11, *Condition Reporting — Paintings. Part III: Glossary of Terms*, aids in identifying and describing damages.

Using a systematic approach ensures that each Condition Report is consistently thorough and detailed.

Describing Damages

Nature

Describe the damage using the Glossary as a guide (e.g., tear, puncture, etc.). Where no word in the Glossary describes exactly what is seen, the damage should be reported as clearly and accurately as possible in the examiner's own words. Unless the cause of the damage is known beyond a doubt, definite statements should be modified by words such as

"appears", "seems", or "may" followed by a question mark (e.g., brown liquid residue, appears to be coffee?).

Extent

Describe the extent of the damage in parentheses immediately following the description of the nature of the damage, for example:

tear (3.5 cm long).

Give measurements for the length of tears and the diameter of holes and paint losses. Where damages are too small (less than 1 mm x 1 mm) or too numerous and/or widespread, a verbal description can be used, for example:

tiny paint losses (scattered overall).

Sight edge

When the painting is still in its frame, measurements are taken from the inside edges of the frame, called the sight edge. This fact should be clearly indicated in the Condition Report.

Location

Give the location of damage using co-ordinates measured from the top (T.) or bottom (B.) and left (L.) or right (R.) sides of the painting, whichever is closest.

These figures should always follow the description of the nature and extent of the damage, and should be given in centimetres to the nearest millimetre. Vertical (T. or B.) measurements always appear first (Figure 1), for example:

tear (3.5 cm long) T. 4.5 x 2.3 L.

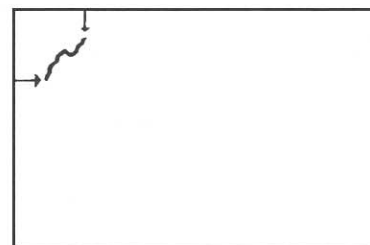


Figure 1. Describing the location of damage.

As an aid to examination, the surface of a painting can be squared off in an imaginary grid: four sections for smaller paintings (i.e., less than one metre square), and nine sections for larger paintings. For very small paintings, the grid system is usually not necessary.

When using the grid system, report the damages according to sections. For example, with the painting divided into four sections, each is called a quadrant:

upper left quadrant

paint loss-ground exposed

(2 cm x 2.2 cm) T. 3.2 x 8.0 L.

puncture (1 cm x 1.2 cm) T. 4.7 x 16.2 L.

lower left quadrant

tear (18 cm long) B. 5.2 x 21.6 L.

On a nine-part grid, sections are described as Top left, Centre left, Bottom left, Bottom centre, Centre, Top centre, Top right, Centre right, Bottom right.

If the damages and image lend themselves to a clear description, the location of damages can also be described in relation to the image (e.g., the proper left ear of subject, the base of the large tree).

Diagrams or photographs with clear plastic overlays on which damages are indicated can be very useful in combination with the written record.

Copies are also available in French.

Texte également publié en version
française.

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Cat. No. NM95-57/10-6-1987E
ISSN 0714-6221

Sample Report 1

Inspection Report

Acc. No. _____ Title or Subject _____ Attribution _____

Height _____ cms _____ inches Technique _____

Width _____ cms _____ inches

Thickness _____ cms _____ inches

Date	Examined by	Inspection Notes	Date	Treated by	Treatment Summary

Sample Report 2

Condition Report — Paintings on Canvas

Artist:
Title:
Media:
Owner:
Acc. No.:

Signed(?):
Dimensions:

Auxiliary Support

Type (Stretcher/Strainer):
General Condition:

Joints:
Bevel:
Keys Secured?:

Support (Canvas)

Description (Fiber/Weave):
General Condition:

Tension
Distortion(s)/Bulges:
Tears/Punctures:
Fasteners (e.g., nails, staples):
Edge Protection:

Paint Layers

General Condition:

Cracking:
Cleavage:
Retouching:
Surface Dirt:

Varnish

General Condition:

Discoloured:
Surface Dirt:

Frame

Description:
General Condition:

Corner Joints:
Liner:
Attachment in Frame:
Backing Board:
Glazing (Separated from painting?):
Padding:

Recommendations

Special Requirements for Handling/Display/Storage:

Treatment Required:
Preventive Conservation — Framing:
Minor/Major Conservation Treatment:

Examined by:

Date:

Sample Report 3
Condition Report — Paintings on Rigid Support

Artist:
Title:
Media:
Owner:
Acc. No.:

Signed(?):
Dimensions:

Auxiliary Support

Type:
General Condition:

Support (Rigid Support)

Description (Material):
General Condition:

Defects in Plane:
Splits:
Checks:
Mechanical Damage:
Biological Damage:

Paint Layers

Media:
General Condition:

Cracking:
Cleavage:
Retouching:
Surface Dirt:

Varnish

General Condition:

Discoloured:
Surface Dirt:

Frame

Description:
General Condition:

Corner Joints:
Liner:
Attachment in Frame:
Backing Board:
Glazing (Separated from painting?):
Padding:

Recommendations

Special Requirements for Handling/Display/Storage:

Treatment Required:
Preventive Conservation — Framing:
Minor/Major Conservation Treatment:

Examined by:

Date: