



COLLECTION POLICY

Collecting is at the heart of the Witte Museum's mission and must be done with clear purpose and well articulated guidelines. The museum's Collection Plan provides the guidelines for what the museum will collect. The Collection Policy sets forth the professional standards and responsibilities for the care and management of collections as required of an accredited museum. The Collections Department Procedures Manual covers procedures for implementing this policy.

This policy should be reviewed every five years or as necessary to reflect changes in staff, strategic plan, Collection Plan, or museum practices at large.

I. MISSION Statement

The Witte Museum sets the stage for lifelong learning in South Texas.

II. VISION STATEMENT

Through innovative programs in history, science, and culture the Witte Museum enriches lives, promotes a quality of life for all South Texas people and generates a legacy of knowledge.

III. TYPES OF COLLECTIONS

The Witte Museum shall possess three types of collections: accessioned, educational, and expendable. The Witte shall designate at the time of acquisition the collection category to which material is assigned. The assigned category may change as the priorities and collections of the Witte evolve.

Accessioned Collections

Items in the Accessioned Collections shall relate directly to the Mission Statement of the Witte and shall be used solely for exhibitions, research, publications, exhibition loans, education, and Witte branding and merchandising.

Education Collection

Items designated to this category will not be a part of the Witte's accessioned collection although records of their receipt and disposition will be maintained. These items will be used solely for education and research purposes. Items in this collection are not subject to the restrictions and standard of care afforded the accessioned collection.

Expendable Collection

Items in this category shall be used for expendable, trade, or sale purposes. Items in this collection are not subject to the restrictions and standard of care afforded the accessioned collection. Records of their receipt and disposition may be maintained.

IV. SCOPE OF COLLECTIONS

The Witte's Collection Plan serves as a road map for staff, museum consultants, and trustees to make informed decisions regarding accessioning and deaccessioning. In providing a guideline for such decisions, the museum staff and trustees recognize the importance of a consistent policy for collecting and believe that the collections will be strengthened by the application of a consistent set of guidelines as formulated in the Collection Plan.

The Witte's collections include artifacts from the following areas as outlined in the Collection Plan:

- Anthropology
- Archives
- Arms & Armor
- History
- Military History
- Natural History
- Texas Art
- Textiles

V. ACQUISITIONS FOR PERMANENT COLLECTION

The Witte Museum shall acquire objects and specimens for the permanent collection through gift, bequest, purchase, exchange, field collection, or any other transaction by which title to items is transferred to the Witte.

Only those items that meet the mission, goals, and Collection Plan will be accepted into the permanent collection. The museum will not accession items with the intention of deaccessioning them.

All permanent collection acquisitions (except field collections) must be presented to the Collections Committee, comprised of the Collection and Curatorial staff, the President and CEO, members of the Board of Trustees, and other members of the community as needed. The Committee makes recommendations for acceptance to the Board of Trustees. Only when the Board has approved the recommendations, will the accessioning process begin.

Once the item has been approved for acquisition a deed of gift will be sent with confirmation of delivery. If a deed of gift has not been signed and returned to the museum within 60 days, the transfer of title to the museum will be deemed complete if all three of the following provisions have been fulfilled:

- Offer of the item as a gift has been approved by the Collections Committee and Board of Trustees
- The museum has physical custody of the item
- An acknowledgement letter has been sent to the donor.

Once title to an item has been transferred to the Museum, the Registrar's office begins the process of accessioning creating a permanent documentary record of an addition to the museum's collection. An annual report of all accessions will be provided to the Board at the end of the fiscal year.

A. Considerations for Acquisitions

If the Witte Museum is offered or becomes interested in acquiring certain items for its permanent collection, the following should be considered:

- Is the item consistent with the mission and goals of the Witte Museum?
- Does the item fit within the museum's Collection Plan?
- Can proper care be given to the item or will it require additional expense for conservation and maintenance?
- Is it intended that this item become a part of the collection for as long as it remains useful for the purposes of the museum?
- Is the item encumbered with restrictions imposed by the donor?
- If the item is being offered for sale, might it or a comparable item be obtained as a gift or bequest?
- Can valid title to the item be conveyed to the museum?
- Is acquisition of the item consistent with all applicable state, national, or international laws (e.g. NAGPRA, CITES) or conventions protecting the rights of artists, cultural patrimony, or endangered species?
- Has the Senior Management Team reviewed the acquisition for presentation to the Collections Committee?

B. Authority to Acquire

The President and CEO may delegate authority to the curatorial staff to purchase items within the limits set by the Collection Plan. No staff member may obligate the museum to the purchase of any item not in keeping with the mission, goals, or Collection Plan of the Witte Museum without written permission of the Collections

Committee. Under extraordinary circumstances if the Collections Committee cannot be timely convened, the President and CEO may exercise this authority without Collections Committee approval.

C. Rights of Refusal

The Witte Museum has the right to refuse items if:

- It is known that the collecting of said objects/specimens involved the illegal destruction of historical or archaeological sites, or harmed endangered or protected species/habitats.
- They are known to have been collected or transported illegally from their country of origin.
- Restrictions are placed on their use or disposal.
- They are not consistent with the Collection Plan of the Witte Museum.

D. Means of Acquisition

Gift

Additions to the permanent collection shall be approved by a majority vote at a Board of Trustees meeting. Any and all encumbrances shall be stated clearly in an instrument of conveyance, shall be made part of the Witte's permanent record, and shall be observed by the Witte. In the absence of an indication to the contrary, the Witte shall assume that all donors are sole owners and shall have no responsibility for confirming ownership.

Bequest

The Witte reserves the right to accept or refuse any bequest of collection material, or any part thereof, made to it. In reviewing a bequest, the Witte shall follow the same policy as for donation.

Purchase

With the prior approval of the President and CEO and prompt notification of the Collections Committee, purchases for the collection of up to a total of \$50,000 may be made without Board approval provided there are no encumbrances upon the proposed purchase. Such purchases shall be reported to the Board at the next meeting. The Board of Trustees shall approve in advance all other purchases by majority vote.

Exchange

To enhance the collections, at the recommendation of curatorial staff, the Board may authorize the exchange of items in the collection for materials deemed to be in the best interest of the Witte or as otherwise appropriate. Such exchanges are limited to institutions recognized by the state or federal government and are exclusively for the purposes of research, education, or exhibition. The terms of an exchange shall be set forth in writing and all relevant documents shall become part of the Registrar's accession files.

Field Collection

With the approval of the President and CEO, curatorial staff may acquire field collections. Field collections must be reported to the Registrar's Department and the Collections Committee as they come into the museum and go through the standard accessioning process.

VI. FOUND IN COLLECTIONS AND ABANDONED PROPERTY

Items that are in the museum's possession that are not supported by any documentation or sufficient evidence to prove museum ownership shall be handled through the following process:

Assign a temporary number

Temporary numbers beginning with the prefix for the collection area the item was found in followed by a sequential number will be assigned allowing the item to be documented.

Documentation

The date the item was found, its location, condition, measurements, physical description shall be noted, and item photographed.

Determine Status

Staff shall consult museum records to determine the status of the object. The following list of resources may provide relevant information:

- Accession, loan and exhibit files
- Inventories
- Collections Committee and Board of Trustees minutes, annual reports
- Newsletters and newspaper articles
- Current and former staff members who may recall the object

Gain Clear Title

If clear title to the object cannot be determined by a thorough review of the resources listed above, the museum will follow the provisions of Chapter 80 of the Property Code of the State of Texas and other applicable statutes to gain legal title. If the item is deemed to be a hazard to the collection or the people who care for it, it may be disposed of immediately.

Disposition

Once clear title to an item has been established the museum may

- Accession it to the permanent collection
- Add it to the Teaching or Education Collection
- Remove it from the museum's possession following the same procedures used for deaccessioning.

VII. PRESERVATION

The museum strives to preserve the collections in its care and limit deterioration by mitigating risk and using preventative conservation. Strategies for preserving the collection include:

- Monitoring and regulating the museum environment
- Integrated pest management
- Proper storage
- Safe handling and moving
- Safe exhibition techniques
- Proper documentation
- An Emergency and Disaster Plan

VIII. INVENTORY

The permanent collection and items on loan to the Witte Museum shall be inventoried on a rotating basis or as needed. The Collections Department will develop a schedule of inventories to ensure that all items will be inventoried and an accurate record kept of location. Random spot checks of selected items shall be conducted regularly.

IX. INSURANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT

The security and preservation of the items in the collection and on loan to the museum are a primary consideration when planning exhibitions, activities, transportation, or storage of these items. The Witte Museum shall procure adequate insurance coverage for the collection, exhibitions, and items on loan. The amount of insurance carried shall be reviewed annually by the President and CEO, Chief Financial Officer, and Director of Administrative Services.

X. ACCESS TO COLLECTION

The Witte Museum provides access to its collections through exhibition, open storage, educational programs, publications, visual resources, and collection records. Access to the collection is at the discretion of the President and CEO, Collections Manager, Curator, or designated staff member. The museum seeks to balance its preservation goals with the use of the collection for exhibition, education, and research purposes.

Requests for access to the collection must take into consideration:

- Risk to the object
- Location
- Security
- Intended use
- Copyright/Artist's rights
- Human and financial resources available

Physical Access

Access to non-public areas of the museum is restricted and visitors will be escorted and observed by appropriate staff members at all times. Individuals requesting access must state the purpose of their inquiry. Access will be limited to legitimate and legal inquiry and will be granted by appointment only.

Records Access

All catalog, accession, and archival records will be treated as public information within the following restrictions:

- Requests for anonymity by donors and lenders will be honored.
- Individuals requesting access to records must state the purpose of their inquiry. Access will be limited to legitimate and legal inquiries.

Photography, Film, & Video

Requests to reproduce images of items in the collection or intellectual property created by the Museum such as exhibitions or publications in print, film, or electronic media are handled by the Collections Department. Reproductions of works of art or images in the Witte Museum collection may not be cropped, flipped, enlarged, or edited in any way without specific written permission. The reproduction of any image is limited to what has been specifically approved in the written agreement. Fees for providing reproduction images and their use will be charged in accordance with the Museum's fee schedule.

Unless otherwise posted visitor photography is permitted within the following restrictions:

- Tripods or other equipment to steady a camera may not be used.
- Additional lighting may not be used.
- Images are for personal or educational use only. Images may not be sold or used for personal gain.

Requests for photography and filming for news or promotional purposes should be addressed to the Public relations and Marketing Department. When these requests involve collection items, the Collections Department shall be consulted.

XI. DEACCESSIONING

Deaccessioning is the formal process used to legally and permanently remove an object from the collection. The Witte Museum may deaccession items not in keeping with its mission, goals and Collection Plan. Donated items must have been a part of the museum's collection for a minimum of three years before deaccessioning can be considered. Deaccessioning shall not be initiated for the sole purpose of acquiring funds. All items selected for deaccessioning must be reviewed by the Collections Committee and will go through the same internal review and approval process required for acquisitions. The committee will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees for approval.

Exempted from committee and board approval are:

- Items that pose a serious and immediate threat to the collection due to inherent vice or vermin
- Items that are in such a condition that repair or restoration is not possible
- Items valued at \$100 or less

All items exempted from approval, must be reported to the Board of Trustees.

A. Criteria for Deaccessioning

Objects or specimens considered for deaccessioning must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- It is not in keeping with the mission, goals, and Collection Plan of the Witte Museum.
- It is not useful for research, exhibition, or educational programs in the foreseeable future.
- Its condition prevents its use or poses a threat to other items in the collection or the people who care for them.
- It cannot be adequately stored or cared for.
- It is a duplicate or there are better examples of identical or similar items in the collection.
- It lacks authenticity or is so lacking in documentation that its value for scholarship or public education is compromised.
- Deaccessioning and repatriation are required in fulfillment of the requirements of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and any other relevant governmental laws or acts.

Any item for which a possible encumbrance exists, such as donor restrictions, state or federal regulations, or lack of clear title, shall be referred to legal counsel.

B. Procedure for Deaccessioning

Documentation

Items must be recommended for deaccessioning by the curatorial staff. Written justification, including an estimate of value, must be prepared by the appropriate curator and approved by the President and CEO and the Collections Manager. If the value is deemed to be over \$1000 for an item or \$5000 for a group of related articles, an outside appraisal will be sought. In cases where the approval of the Collections Committee and the Board of Trustees is required, approval shall be reflected in the respective minutes. Copies of all documentation shall be retained by the Registrar's office for inclusion in the permanent accession files. A complete and open file of all deaccessioned material shall be maintained by the Witte and an annual report compiled by the Registrar's office for distribution to the Collection Committee and Board at the end of the fiscal year.

Donor Relations

The Witte Museum will attempt to contact the donor at the last known address, or their heir(s), if they can be determined, to advise them of the intent to deaccession or to notify them of action that has been taken in the case of items posing a serious and immediate threat due to inherent vice or vermin. Deaccessioned items will not be returned to donors or their heirs. Once an item has been donated to the museum it is held in trust for the people of the State of Texas. Once an item has entered into the public trust the museum has a responsibility to keep that item in the public trust if possible. However, if the item(s) is offered for public sale the donor shall not be precluded from purchasing the item(s) at the current fair market or appraised value.

C. Methods of Disposal

In deaccessioning, the Witte shall give preference to retaining in the State of Texas or the United States any material that is part of the artistic, historical, cultural, technological or scientific heritage.

Transfer to Education or Expendable Collection

Deaccessioned items may be transferred to the Education/Programs Department, or the Expendable collection within each curatorial area, for use in public programs.

Exchange

If an item is of unusual cultural or scientific value, the preferred method of disposal may be by exchange with another institution whose collections might benefit from the addition of the item. An exchange may be arranged if an institution has items of equivalent value that are appropriate to the Witte Museum's collecting plan.

Donation or Transfer

Where exchange of material is not feasible, the Museum may donate the deaccessioned items to other non-profit educational or scientific institutions. Such transfers are limited to institutions recognized by the state or federal government and are exclusively for the purposes of research, education, or exhibition. Should there be competing institutions the Witte shall consider the best interests of the item in making its decision.

Sale

Deaccessioned items may be sold. The goal of the sale is to realize the best possible profit for the museum within the boundaries of board-approved policy. The preferred type of sale, whenever an appropriate price can be obtained, is to another museum or similar nonprofit institution where the item will continue to be held for the benefit of the public. If this is not possible, then the sale should be by public auction or to the public market in a manner that will best protect the interests, objectives, and legal status of the museum. No Witte Museum employee or trustee may directly purchase deaccessioned items. The Museum will not sell any items that might appear to support illegal marketing or trading.

Destruction

Destruction is defined as the final disposal of an item by physical or mechanical means, including destructive analysis. Deaccessioned items designated for destruction must in fact be destroyed and not kept by staff members or given away.

D. Application of Proceeds

When an item has been deaccessioned and objects or monies have been received in exchange, the Witte shall attempt to keep the intention of the original donor in mind when acquiring replacement material, and shall transfer the original donor's name to the newly-acquired material, when practical. After costs associated with deaccessioning and sale have been deducted from the revenue, all monies received from the sale of deaccessioned items shall be placed in a fund restricted for direct care of the collection or acquisitions to the permanent collection. Proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned items shall never be applied toward salaries, general operating expenses, or capital improvements.

E. Repatriation

The policy of the Witte Museum is to collect, care for, and interpret archaeological and ethnographic materials in a manner that respects the diversity of human cultures and spiritual beliefs. It is the Museum's intent and policy to comply with all applicable laws, treaties, and international conventions ratified by the United States of America. Requests for repatriation will be considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the established process with consideration for the museum's legal, fiduciary, and ethical responsibilities. The Museum will not release any collection for

reburial or for any other purpose which removes it from the public trust until it has been fully documented by the appropriate museum staff.

F. Forgeries

Deaccessioning of an object determined to be a forgery requires special consideration. Whatever disposition is made of the object, care must be taken to identify the forged work for what it is and to provide the most accurate identification possible in order to preclude further misrepresentation.

XI. LOANS

The Witte Museum will accept and initiate loans only from or to institutions and organizations for purposes consistent with the goals of the Witte. Only the President and CEO, and the Curatorial, and Collections staff of the Witte has the authority to negotiate loans.

A. Incoming Loans

Loans from individuals will be accepted only for exhibition or study purposes. The Witte shall not accept loans for storage. Only the President and CEO, and the Curatorial, and Collections staff of the Witte has the authority to accept incoming loan items.

Criteria:

- The loan is in the best interests of the Witte Museum, the public it serves, and the public trust it represents in owning the collections.
- All risks of damage and loss must be justified by the merits of the loan.

B. Outgoing Loans

The Witte reserves the right to specify the conditions under which a loan is granted. All loans shall be reported to the Collections Committee and the Board. The President and CEO shall have the authority to approve loans based on the recommendation of the Collections Manager and the appropriate curator. Outgoing loans are also reviewed by the Senior Management Team.

Criteria:

- The borrowing institution is represented by staff properly trained in collection care.
- The item(s) to be loaned is/are not needed by Witte staff for research or exhibition during the loan period.
- Trained staff exists to ensure proper handling of the loaned items. In the absence of trained staff, a designated Witte staff member may accompany the loan and an hourly fee may be charged for this service.

- The items requested are not exceptionally fragile or rare.
- The institution requesting the loan will honor future loan requests from the Witte.
- The borrowing institution has adequate facilities for the loan item(s) to ensure proper storage, handling, security, and a controlled environment.

C. Documentation

The loan of collection items is undertaken only according to the terms of a written loan contract between the lender and borrower. A standard contract specifying the terms and conditions of the loan is to be used for all incoming and outgoing loans.

Loans are made for a negotiable period of time, as determined by their purpose. The length of the loan must be clearly stated in writing when the loan agreement goes into effect. All loans are reviewed annually and may be renewed.

A condition report and photographs for the record must be on file before the release of the item(s) from the Witte Museum.

D. Loan Costs

Packing and transportation costs will be paid by the borrower. A processing fee will be charged to cover the cost of staff time and the preparation of paperwork. For loans of multiple items or items involving special handling an additional fee will be charged. Alternative arrangements may be negotiated at the discretion of the President and CEO at the recommendation of the Collections staff.

E. Insurance

Insurance for outgoing loans must be in force before the material is sent. A confirmation letter or certificate of insurance must be received indicating that the loan items are insured wall-to-wall against all risks and naming the Witte Museum as a loss payee. When necessary, the borrowing institution will take out a special insurance policy or they will be billed for coverage granted under the Witte's policy. With the approval of the President and CEO, the Registrar may waive the borrower's insurance requirements and the Witte will provide insurance coverage. The Registrar must specify the insured value of each item on the loan form. If the borrower is unwilling to provide the specified insurance coverage, the loan will not be made.

When required, the Witte will insure incoming loans for all risk coverage at the value agreed to by both parties.

F. Staff Responsibilities

The Registrar or Collections Manager must be notified of any plans to remove items temporarily from the collection for any reason. No item should be removed from an

exhibition without a written record being made by the Registrar, Curator, or a designated assistant. The Registrar and Assistant Registrar will be responsible for creating and maintaining all loan correspondence and documentation, and for the packing and shipping of loan items. The Registrar with the Curator(s) will ensure that insurance coverage is adequate for outgoing loans of collection items. Collections staff will review all loan records on an annual basis, and an annual report will be compiled by the Registrar's office for distribution to the Board at the end of the fiscal year.

G. Temporary Custody

Items may be left at the Witte Museum on a temporary basis for consideration as a donation, for identification, or for research. Conditions of deposit are detailed on the Temporary Custody Receipt which should be filled out for each transaction with (1) copy to the depositor, (1) copy to the Registrar's files, and (1) copy retained with the item(s).

If the offer of a gift has been declined or when the Witte has notified the depositor that its examination of the item(s) has been completed, the depositor may reclaim their property. If the property is not reclaimed within (30) days, the Witte may request, in writing, the withdrawal of the deposited item(s) within (30) days of the date of the request. If withdrawal has not been made at the end of this (30) day period, the Witte's responsibility for the safety of the item(s) shall cease. Any deposited object not withdrawn within one year after the date of the Witte Museum's first written request for withdrawal and concerning which the Witte has made at least one additional written request for withdrawal via registered mail, shall become the unrestricted property of the Witte Museum.

H. Disposition of Unclaimed Loans

Disposal of unclaimed loan items shall follow the guidelines for items in temporary custody and Chapter 80 of the Property Code of the State of Texas.

XIII. OBJECT RETURN / NATIONAL PATRIMONY

The policy of the Witte Museum is to collect, care for, and interpret archaeological and ethnographic materials in a manner that respects the diversity of human cultures and spiritual beliefs. It is the Museum's intent and policy to comply with all applicable laws, treaties, and international conventions ratified by the United States of America. Requests for repatriation will be considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the established process with consideration for the museum's legal, fiduciary, and ethical responsibilities.

XIV. DESTRUCTIVE ANALYSIS

Destructive analysis is a procedure that destroys or alters all or a portion of an item. While the Museum recognizes that significant results that can be obtained by the use of destructive

analysis, it seeks to balance the loss caused by sampling with the potential of the proposed research. Requests for destructive analysis will be considered by the President and CEO, Collections Manager, and Curatorial Staff under the following conditions:

- The purpose of the sampling must be in keeping with the museum’s mission.
- Requests for destructive analysis must be made in writing.
- It is legal, ethical, and advisable for the object to be subjected to destructive analysis, and reasonable alternatives to destructive analysis have been considered.
- Researchers must agree to provide a written report of all findings, and any published reports must include a credit line for the Witte Museum.

XV. ETHICS

No member of the staff or Board shall personally receive, directly or indirectly, any favor, promise, or thing of value which could or appear to induce, discourage, or influence a recommendation, decision or action affecting museum accessions, deaccessions, exhibitions or activities.

No member of the staff or Board shall compete with the museum for the acquisition of items and shall refrain from personal collecting in any manner that conflicts with the interests or credibility of the institution and its policies. No staff or Board member shall use their connection to the museum to further their personal collecting goals. No member of the staff may provide written or verbal appraisals of monetary value for donors, lenders, board members, or the general public. When asked for a monetary appraisal, the museum will refer individuals to public resources for locating an appraiser. The museum will not recommend specific appraisers.

In addition to the provisions listed above, members of the staff and Board must adhere to the Witte Museum Employee Handbook, Witte Museum Statement of Ethics for Trustees, and established codes of professional ethics such as those published by the American Association of Museums and its standing professional committees and the International Council of Museums.

DEFINITIONS

Accession

Accessioning is the act of formally recording and processing an item into the permanent collection.

Acquisition

An acquisition occurs by obtaining legal title to an item.

Collection item

A collection item is an item that has been or is in the process of being accessioned into the permanent collection. Throughout this policy, the term “item” will be used to indicate either an object or a specimen.

Collection Management

Collection management encompasses the preservation, accessibility, and utility of museum collections and associated data by collection managers, registrars, curators, and administrators.

Collection Manager

One who oversees the stewardship of the collection by insuring the proper care, preservation, and security of all collection items in adherence to accepted best practices in museums.

Conservation

Conservation is the use or application of techniques for maximizing the endurance of or minimizing the deterioration of an item through time, with as little change to the item as possible.

Deaccession

Deaccessioning is the formal process used to remove an item from the collection permanently.

Deterioration

Deterioration is the change or degradation of an item or material's physical or chemical state.

Direct Care

Direct care encompasses all activities that relate to the preservation, conservation, stabilization, or immediate care of items in the collection. Examples of direct care include but are not limited to the following activities:

- Re-housing artifacts in archival quality containers such as acid-free boxes, folders, and mats
- Creating a mount to provide long-term stabilization while on display or in storage
- Establishing a micro-climate for the preservation of an artifact or group of like artifacts
- Conservation or stabilization of an artifact

Field Collection

An item collected in a field research project or archeological excavation. Field Collections should be accompanied by complete field notes of their collection.

Permanent collection

The permanent collection is the collection of items that has been formally accessioned.

Loan

Loans are temporary assignments of items from the Museum (outgoing loans) or temporary assignments of items to the Museum (incoming loans) for stated purposes such as exhibition, research, or examination for possible donation or purchase.

Preservation

Actions taken to retard or prevent deterioration or damage to collection items by carrying out repairs or treating damaged materials, creating a safe display or storage environment, or any other action taken to prevent or delay deterioration and to maintain them as nearly as possible in an unchanging state.

Registrar

One who organizes and maintains orderly forms, legal documents, files, and retrieval systems associated with the acquisitions, accessioning, cataloging, loans, packing, shipping, inventory, and insurance of the permanent collection.

Stabilization

Treatment of a collection item or its environment in a manner intended to reduce the probability or rate of deterioration and probability of damage.