

The strategies of Documentation in the Department of Paintings: National Museum, New Delhi

Indra Vats
Research Scholar (Museology)
National Museum Institute
Assistant Curator (Education)
National Museum
New Delhi

Documenting an antiquity is actually provides life to that object which gets its identity after getting a proper title and prior information after huge research. The basic fundamental of documentation is to spread exact information and education to the visitors who looks forward to know about the history and culture.

Documentation or preparing record is a main feature of any museum as they are educational institutions who extend information for the nation's integrity. It is also considered a best idea to keep the collection carefully and accurately. The methods of keeping record can be different in every institution as it can also depends upon the collection which requires the record for future references, but the base actually meant by the UNESCO and all the museums follows the same. The record can be manual or digital or may be both, but should be authentic and informative which can be used for future references. The purpose of the same would be to keep the heritage and culture alive for long time. The existing record should also be in the reach of the general public to make them aware from the art and culture of nation. The collection of every museum is different and presents their importance according to its functioning. The present paper is about to brief the strategies of preparing valid record in the Department of Painting of the National Museum, New Delhi. The National Museum established in the year 1960 in present building but originated with the exhibition on Indian art sent to London in the winter of year 1947-48. Earlier there were only five departments but slowly and steady the collection grew and reached at the place where it is today. The painting department of the National Museum contains more than 17,000 miniature paintings. Apart from paper the collection includes Ivory, Wood, Cloth, Leather and Mica. The collection is very delicate and very famous worldwide, therefore it always attract the attention of researchers and art historians as well. For proper accessibility, department

maintained the collection properly from its acquisition to its post accessioning actions. The process can be divided into three parts, they are:-

1. Entry Registers
2. Classified Accession Register (CAR)
3. Post-Accessioning actions

The documentation is also depends upon the nature of the object. Miniature paintings have different themes and stories painted by different artist from India and abroad. One can find paintings on subjects of mythology, fantasy, literatures, epics, divine love-stories, etc. here. All are purchased from different people or art connoisseurs by the system of Art Purchase Committee (APC) of the National Museum where the team of experts set together and purchased antiquities with fully satisfaction of its authenticity and originality. The record of sellers of art pieces can also be seen in the register entries. The main point in this area is the size of the painting. The paintings are kept not by accession no, provenance, style or material but by the Size of the painting. The purchasing of art work used to happen every year and different objects have been purchased altogether therefore the accessioning took place as per the Tripartite Method in which the accession number prepared by the year, lot and serial number i.e. 47.110/40 means 1947 is the year of acquisition 110 is lot and 40 is serial number. The department contains paintings of different sizes as they all are placed according to size not by the year or serial number except the paintings which are in series like Bhagwat Puran, Rasikpriya, Baramasa, Geet-Govinda etc. The department is custodian of 30-35 series of paintings which are of similar sizes and in good condition therefore these paintings are stored together. The Registers which was handled by curators are hand written and they have apiece information regarding the particular object.

Entry Registers

The department maintained various registers for various information related to the objects. As the collection is not placed according to accession number but the sizes so it is really important to know the location of particular painting which require at a time.

- Master Register

The department has a Master Register in which information regarding the location and placement of paintings exists. The register is very much essential for the department in fact one can find out a statement written over it which is “Life Life Line of the Painting Department”. The statement depicts the values of that record. (Plate.I). The registers contain information from the year 1947 onwards.

- Stock Register

Stocks register another useful key for the department. It contains the basic information of the painting like Acc. No, title, location as well as the number of Classified Accession Register (CAR) and page number where the detailed description exists. It also contains the negative no. which gives an idea that the department also maintained the regular photography of the objects. (Plate.II). The register not only gives a glimpse of CAR but also gives information about the movement of objects outside the museum as one can find out the entry from red pen which says that the painting has been gifted to some other museum.

Classified Accession Register (CAR)

Classified Accession Register (CAR) is another important record after General Accession Register (GAR) which is prepared by the keeper and it is always available for referencing at the time of using paintings. The GAR is a legal record which is always kept in a safe and it is difficult to take that out continuously. Therefore, the CAR works at that time. The National Museum Painting Department has 73 Classified Accession Registers and all contain detailed descriptions of each painting starting from 1947 till 1997 approximately. The keepers also paste photographs of the paintings here as they can identify the paintings without difficulties. (see Plate.) The register has nine different columns for filling up different information. They are as follows:

1. Date Acquired
2. No.
3. Accession No. (also Previous and/or Excavation No. etc.)
4. Source

5. Short Description
6. Date or Period
7. Locality
8. Remarks & References
9. Location (Room, Case, Shelf)

All the registers are kept in a steel almirah for easy accessibility. (Plate. III)

Post Accessioning Actions

The department also maintained records apart from CAR and Master register which are useful to know very basic information of paintings. The catalogue cards, Index cards are some example of post accessioning are utilized when researchers, art students, historian etc. arrive to have glimpse of paintings which are not on display and very rarely comes out for general public. These cards contain a very basic introduction of paintings.

- Catalogue Card

This A4 size card holds little less information to the Classified Accession Register. It has information which only can useful for the reference if some outsider ask for. The card has detailed description of painting along with the photograph pasted of the same. These cards are separately kept into the file. The card includes information as below:-

Title

Accession No.

Provenance

Period

Dimension

Description

Picture/Photograph

Negative No.

(Plate.IV)

- Index Card

For an uncomplicated and immediate accessibility to the paintings, the department maintained index cards of every painting whether for the use of researchers/outsideers or for the department itself. The card includes initial brief information which is as below:-

Title

Accession No.

Dimension

Provenance

Period

Picture/Photograph

Negative No.

(Plate.V)

- Digital Documentation

Now the Ministry of Culture, Government of India launched/ developed a software called JATAN designed by C-DAC to provide valid information regarding the collection of museums to the public where general public can get an amazing experience and knowledge of art, culture and heritage of the country. The software has system of image processing, watermarking, and also the images cannot get copied from it, therefore it is informative as well as educative. Ten museums in India are getting advantage of this software to digitize their collections including National Museum, New Delhi. The department of painting does regular photographs for making entry in the Jatan Software. The software has different level of entries i.e. Operator, Curator and Director. All the entries have been checked by the Curators and Director then only it is appear for the general public, so no invalid information could reach to the public. (Plate.VI)

Storage System

Five storages come under the department of painting where all the paintings are placed size wise which is already mentioned earlier. The storage has three types of almirahs to keep the collection. 1) Wooden Almirah, 2) Steel Almirah, 3) Steel Shelf.

Wooden almirahs made by teak wood which are insects proof and protects the paintings. It has cabinet's boxes inside and paintings kept in these boxes, wrapped in cotton cloth and covered with butter paper. One almirah have twenty boxes and each box have capacity of putting 50 – 60 paintings. The almirahs having particular number signifies that which size of paintings are kept inside. For example 1-S stands for almirah no. – 1 for small size paintings, M – 4 stands for almirah no. – 4 for medium size paintings and same for large size paintings. (Plate.VII).

The paintings which are constantly moves for temporary exhibition are usually kept in the steel almirahs to avoid time consumption and the paintings with frames are kept in the steel shelves as these paintings cannot be placed with the frames inside the wooden cupboards. Each almirah having keys with is number and size initial. (Plate.VIII)

Challenges

The department has a perfect recording system starting from entry register till indexing but still faces lots of challenges. Keeping the collection of more than 17,000 paintings is itself a challenge but also an owner for the nation as it is finest collection of miniature paintings worldwide. As the collection is placed by sizes so it is very difficult to find out the required painting sometimes. Because the registers are maintained year wise and location of paintings are size wise. In this situation only the acting keeper can reach to the collection as he memorize the exact location due to his many years work experience in the department which is obvious. It is difficult for the keeper as well to search for each painting as it is time consuming. But this can only be deal by the acting keeper of the department to solve this problem; otherwise the record system here is as good as it should be. It can be rectified with the help of co-worker in the department who can keep the data of location and year wise placement. The wooden cupboards can be labeled with the caption and another register can be maintained with the details of each box and painting with not only the location of almirah but also with number of box.

References

1. Bhatnagar, Anupama. Museum, Museology and New Museology. Sandeep Prakashan, New Delhi. 1999.
2. Ed.Gary Edson. Museum Ethics. Routledge, London. 1997.
3. Edson, Gary. David Dean. The Handbook of Museums. Routledge, London. 1994.

4. Nigam, M.L. Fundamentals of Museology. Navhind Prakashan, Hyderabad. 1966.
5. Dwivedi, V.P. G.N. Pant. Museums and Museology, New Horizons. Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi. 1980.
6. http://cdac.in/index.aspx?id=mc_hc_jatan_virtual_museum

Acknowledgement

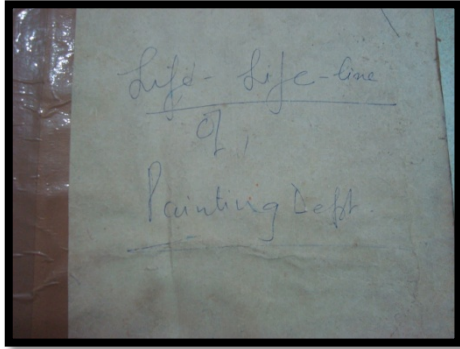
Dr. V.K. Mathur Curator Lecturing & Education/Painting, National Museum, New Delhi

Dr. Daljeet, Former Curator Paintings, National Museum, New Delhi and Consultant, UPSC, New Delhi.

Shri Arvind Singh and Shri Prakash Singh, Computer operators and helper in department of painting, National Museum, New Delhi.

Plates

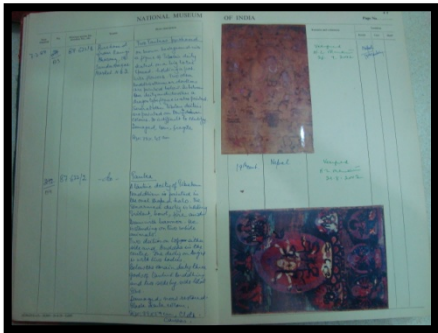
I.



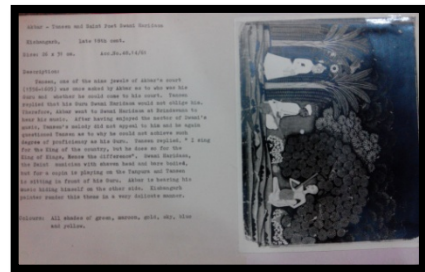
II.

No.	Description	Value
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

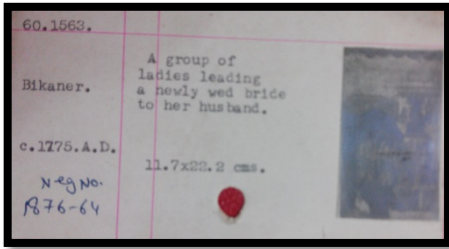
III.



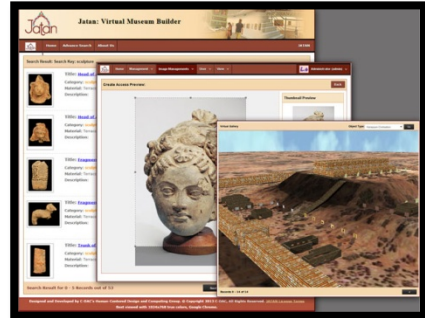
IV.



V.



VI.



VII.



VIII.

