

Conservation in Gallery 6

In February, Hazel Basford (archivist) suggested an 'Open Cupboards' day – an opportunity to have a look in all storage areas in the galleries, and all the display cases to check for any potential conservation issues. We were looking for any damp spots, mould, and even pest infestations, for example clothes moth, or carpet beetle. These housekeeping tasks are really important because they can help identify areas of concern and prevent further harm coming to the collection.

One case in Gallery 6 displays interesting and beautiful objects from countries such as Somalia, Nigeria and Angola (see below).



It is positioned on an external wall, so damp can be a recurring issue which needs to be monitored. We discovered there was evidence of mould on the back of the case, which is made out of barkcloth. This is an organic material, so is prone to moulding.

Mould was also on the objects themselves. Quick and decisive action was taken, and using soft brushes and cotton cloths we were able to carefully clean away any mould and dust which was affecting the collection. We also hoovered the back of the case thoroughly with a small 'conservation hoover' to remove the mould.



What may seem like an unpleasant job was great fun and some interesting discoveries were made along the way. We paid a lot of attention to objects we often overlook as we see them in the display case daily. Joy Fowkes, volunteer, tackled a particularly fine ivory horn which still makes a splendid noise when blown.



Mike Cobb
and Sue
Lynch clean
two ebony
figures

One particularly interesting piece and one of the worst affected by mould was an example of Banana Leaf artwork from Zaire (now Democratic Republic of

Congo). Here you can see it in its full glory after being cleaned. Banana leaf painting has been popular in African art for centuries.



Pictures are created by artists who cut, paste and weave tiny slices of banana leaves together to form a collage. When the banana leaf dries, the pigments change and the colours begin to alter. At various stages in the drying process the artist will cut the leaf so

it remains a certain colour. The leaves can also be dyed to create a more interesting effect.

Paintings include a variety of subjects; many feature wild native animals or scenes of daily life, like this fine example. Women here can be seen completing their chores in a bustling image of everyday life.

Overall, it was a successful day's work. We removed the mould, and we all came away with a renewed appreciation of the objects in the displays. We are looking forward to our next scheduled day to look more closely at the collection and invite you to have another look at the fascinating objects we have in Gallery 6.

Beth Wilkey, Curatorial Assistant.