



Alaska State Museums Bulletin 67

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Transforming Galleries with Paint

By Jackie Manning, Curator of Exhibits, Alaska State Museums



David Rosenthal's "Landscapes," 2012 Solo Artist Exhibit

At the Alaska State Museum we display ten to twelve temporary exhibits a year. With an exhibit team of two and a small budget we often ask ourselves:

How do we reinvent our gallery space to give our visitors a new experience when they come in the door?

Using paint to transform galleries has been very effective and meets our requirements:

- Inexpensive
- Can be done quickly
- Design relates to the exhibit/augments the story

Wall color is often used to convey a particular time, place, or culture. If the right color is chosen, it can highlight the art and artifacts without competing with them. The choice of wall color can influence how a museum visitor experiences the exhibit, so this process is crucial to the presentation. Color can make a bold statement in a show. It can create an emotional response to a piece in an exhibition, or instigate an emotional response to a group of works. A warm color can make people feel comfortable in a space whereas bright colors can make a space and work feel contemporary. Darker colors make an environment feel theatrical and focuses the viewer's attention on a piece instead of the space.

The goal when choosing color for an exhibit is to make the art and artifacts the focus of any room.

Do you want to create historic context?

Enliven the space, give it a sense of theatricality?

Drop everything else away and give the object center stage?

For David Rosenthal's exhibit, *Landscapes*, we used Eagle Rock Gray. Our most popular color for temporary exhibits, this neutral gray allows most artwork to take center stage.



Dan DeRoux's "History of Alaska," 2012 Solo Artist Exhibit

For Dan DeRoux's "*History of Alaska*" exhibit, the artist chose a variety of colors for the gallery. The colors chosen allowed for the artwork to be highlighted individually or as a groups. As seen in the photograph, Bermuda Blue brings out the warm brown colors in the painting *Cribbage Walrus*.



Nicholas Galanin's, "The State of Being, Displaced" 2013 Solo Artist Exhibit

Stripping away the architecture by pushing it back creates a sense of limitless space. This can sometimes be done with white. Other times it can be done with dark colors as seen in Nicholas Galanin's solo exhibit, *The State of Being, Displaced*. We painted the forward wall a dark charcoal color, Black Jack. This allowed the artwork to come forward and the power of the piece to be center stage.

Once you have chosen the general colors you want for the gallery, test a range of those colors under gallery lighting. Colors can appear different under gallery lighting compared to natural light or bright lights. Test the colors by painting swatches on the wall or on a board you can place in the gallery. If possible, it is also helps to place the art or object in front of the color swatch under the gallery lighting to see the effect that will be created by the color chosen.

Grids, Projectors, and Pounce Patterns



We took colors for this design taken from WWII ship paint colors. The colors helped to activated the space set the mood for the exhibit.

Going beyond flat wall colors in the gallery requires a few tools. Depending on the design that will be incorporated into the exhibit, grids, projectors, and pounce patterns can help simplify the process. For the exhibits, *When "Over There" Was Here: World War II in Alaska* and *Kiska: A WWII Battlefield Landscape*, we used grids to paint the

designs on the walls. We derived design ideas from razzle dazzle camouflage painted on WWII ships, and the mountain range of Dutch Harbor. We laid the designs out on the computer and used a simple grid system to draw out the designs on the gallery walls, placing the grid on the walls with a snap line and using painter's tape to hand-draw straight lines.



Razzle Dazzle camouflage



Razzle Dazzle camouflage laid out on the computer to fit the gallery.



Dutch Harbor silhouette laid out on the computer to fit the gallery walls.



The color chosen for this gallery was designed to highlight the photographs taken of the battlefield in Kiska.

For Ray Troll's *Sharkabet* exhibit in 2005, we used projectors to transform the gallery. We painted every wall for this exhibit in order to set the stage for the artwork. We selected a light blue for the wall and plinth colors, and black and white to create line drawings on the wall. Some walls were dominated by one design, allowing the design to be a center stage while other walls were painted with multiple illustrations, allowing them to become a textured backdrop for the work to be displayed on.



Designs printed on transparencies and projected onto the wall were then traced and painted.



Ray Troll's "Sharkabet," 2005 Solo Artist Exhibit

The Ravenstail Lightning pattern became a prominent theme for Kay Parker's exhibit *Playing with Lighting* this summer. This exhibit encompasses an amazing array of ravenstail weavings from robes to medicine bags. The weavings are displayed on mannequins, stages, and mounts throughout the gallery.



Ravenstail Design

To pull all of the work together and capture the space as a single exhibit, we painted the lightning pattern around the gallery. This pattern is a very intricate design that consists of two layers of colors and a pattern that inverts every-other-one. To lay out this design, we used a combination of snap lines, painters tape, and a pounce pattern made by a local printing company. There are also tools that can be purchased to make your own pounce pattern. A pounce pattern consists of small holes in paper that, when chalk is applied over the top, allow for the pattern to be transferred onto the wall.



Pounce pattern demo on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSK7rmQ4Rnc>

Ever since Alfred H. Barr Jr. of the Museum of Modern Art in New York designed the “White-Cube” aesthetic in 1930, white walls have had a prominent place in museums. There are times when white walls are the best way to display an exhibit, however this does not apply for all exhibits.

At the Alaska State Museum we have found paint to be an effective way to set the stage for an exhibit.



Yellow, black and white are traditional colors for Ravenstail weaving; however, when tested, the black and white were too high of a contrast and would have competed with the artwork, so we selected a light gray to use instead of the white, and a dark gray in place of black to create a more subtle design.

At the Alaska State Museum we use zero VOC and odorless paint in the galleries.



Ask ASM

Question: My historic house museum is looking at installing UV filter film screens to the outside windows of our museum as a way to deter natural sunlight from damaging the museum's interior collection. I was wondering if you might be able to recommend a good UV filter film product which would meet or surpass the proper protection standards for a museum collection.

I also have a second question that has to do with light bulbs and light bulb filters. I have read that a good museum light program must be able to protect against harmful outdoor and indoor light sources. I was wondering if you could recommend a good artificial indoor light source filter or light bulb brand that would dramatically slow down the negative effects of light damage to our museum's collection. As of right now, our museum employs a large quantity of standard type light bulbs that one would normally find within a typical residential home. Most of our light bulbs are small 40 watt candle style bulbs that install into a series of hanging chain chandeliers. We also have one long fluorescent type bulb that installs into a wall display cabinet.

p.s. We just acquired a light meter that measures in foot candles.

ASM: There are UV films that will adhere to the glass or hang on the inside of your windows. Since your museum is in a historic house, there are always concerns about how these films will affect the look from both the inside and outside of the building. I prefer the ones that hang loose on the inside of the window frame like a shade and are somewhat hidden by curtains or sheers. These seem to be the least disturbing to the historic look of a place. These can also be changed easily if necessary and do not run the risk of damaging original glass.

As to your second question about light bulbs, actually, the 40 watt tungsten bulbs are not that bad as long as the light levels are appropriate for collections (as measured with your new light meter) and if they do an adequate job of lighting for your patrons. You don't really have to switch them out if they satisfy those two requirements. The good thing about tungsten is that the UV content is low, lower than fluorescent and much lower than daylight. The appropriate light levels for light sensitive objects should be between 5 and 10 foot candles. That long fluorescent tube in the wall display cabinet you mention could be a problem though. Fluorescent bulbs are more efficient but they do emit UV. I would see if you can eliminate this light altogether or at the very least purchase a UV blocking sleeve for it. They make special sleeves that fit over the bulb itself. Again you will have to check with your light meter to make sure the light levels are appropriate for the artifacts displayed in that case. You may have to move artifacts around in the case or replace them entirely with artifacts that are not light sensitive.

What you should really keep in mind though, is that removing the UV is only a small part of the problem. Even with all the UV removed from the light there still could be way too much light for sensitive objects.



Here is a photograph of an experiment I did a while back. I put a piece of blue paper in the window of my office. I covered a third with foil so no light would get through, a third with a UV filter and a third had no cover or filter. As you can see the there was a lot of fading in just 60 days of exposure to daylight. But what is also interesting is that the difference between the filtered and unfiltered is not that great. There is still a lot of fading to the part that had UV protection.

So what that tells me is that you could spend a lot of time and resources on UV filters for all the windows and in the end it will only solve a small part of the problem. What you should do first is determine what is original to the house and what is a replica or exhibit prop. Of everything in the house, what would really affect your mission if it were to fade or deteriorate due to light? Then see if you can move things around a bit to get the most

important artifacts to areas of each room where they will have the least exposure. Use your light meter to determine where the least amount of light is falling. You will need to do this at various times of day and during different seasons of the year. Eventually you will be able to get a sense for where the areas of least exposure are in each room. If you can't move important items, see if they can be replaced with replicas or similar items that are expendable or cover them with expendable items to block the light. There are lots of different ways to solve the problems (too many to keep listing here). The important thing is that you work towards reducing the total light exposure for the artifacts that you are caring for in perpetuity.

Shaking the Money Tree

Conservation Assessment Program (CAP)

Deadline: December 02, 2013

Application: For application information and examples of how this program can benefit your institution, please visit the Heritage Preservation Web site. <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/CAP/>

To be notified of the availability of the 2014 application, please email us cap@heritagepreservation.org

Heritage Preservation Contact:

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1012 14th Street, NW, Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20005
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Program Overview:

The Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) is supported through a cooperative agreement between IMLS and Heritage Preservation. Through CAP, professional conservators identify conservation priorities by spending two days at your location and three days writing a report about your museum's collection, environmental conditions, and site. The report can help your museum develop strategies for improving collections care and provide a tool for long-range planning and fund-raising.

CAP offers a maximum of two assessors per institution. Most museums are provided a conservator to assess the museum's collections. If you have an historic structure (a building more than 50 years old), you may also qualify for a historic structure

assessment. Zoos, aquariums, nature centers, botanical gardens, and arboreta can be provided a zoologist, botanist, or horticulturalist to assess living collections.

Spotlight on Grant in Aid



The Alutiiq Museum, housing more than 250,000 items representing the history and culture of the Alutiiq people for the last 7,500 years, was working with a climate control system that seemed almost as old. After receiving their Grant in Aid funding, The Climate Control Restoration Project was put into action.

Work began in October of 2011 under the firm Alaska Integrated Systems, a well regarded climate control company. With system maintenance work completed in the gallery, the staff noticed an immediate improvement in the stabilization of the climate. After a slight contractor delay, additional ductwork was installed in the collections room. Museum staff was rewarded with increased humidity and stabilization in this room as well.



Happy Registrar Marnie Leist

Daily readings of the climates by museum staff have shown that since the completion of the project in March of 2012, improvement has been consistent insuring protection of the valuable legacy of the Alutiiq culture.

Alaska Museums in the News

Alaska's first Jewish museum opens in Anchorage

<http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-News/Alaskas-first-Jewish-museum-opens-in-Anchorage-320524>

Alaska City Has First Sunset In Months, Residents Don't Care

<http://www.inquisitr.com/887220/alaska-city-has-first-sunset-in-months-residents-dont-care/>

Planning underway for museum's new home in the Cordova Center

<http://www.thecordovatimes.com/article/1330planning-underway-for-museums-new-home>

Kodiak museum receives \$35,000 grant for weaving exhibit

<http://www.adn.com/2013/08/08/3014345/museum-receives-35000-grant-for.html>

Jonrowe to be inducted into Musers' Hall of Fame

http://www.frontiersman.com/news/jonrowe-to-be-inducted-into-mushers-hall-of-fame/article_9f9171d4-edde-11e2-98f7-001a4bcf887a.html

Jilkaat Kwaan groundbreaking ceremony

<http://jilkaatkwaanheritagecenter.org/videos>

Hope Alaska, a peaceful town with a colorful gold mining past

<http://www.ktuu.com/news/ktuu-hope-alaska-a-peaceful-town-with-a-colorful-gold-mining-past-20130816,0,3001423.story>

House screen returns to Alaska

<http://www.krbd.org/2013/08/07/tlingit-house-screen-returns-to-dog-salmon-clan/>

100th science on a sphere celebrated (Alaska State Museum's own Sarah Lee can be seen at around 1:15)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6BKr8dZHME>

Prominent anthropologist joins Burke Museum

<http://dailyuw.com/archive/2013/07/30/news/prominent-anthropologist-joins-burke-museum#.UhP5q5LvTo>

Clarke Named New Director at the Lost City Museum

<http://mesquitecitizen.com/viewnews.php?newsid=5366&id=70>

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Professional Development/Training Opportunities

Heritage Preservation

Registration Open For Free, Online Collections Care Courses

[Registration](#) is now open for three new online courses in the *[Caring for Yesterday's Treasures—Today](#)* series. The series, launched in January 2013, offers free online courses focused on the preservation of archival and historical collections. Tailored to fit the needs and schedules of staff and volunteers at libraries and archives, each course includes four to six 90-minute, interactive webinars presented by preservation experts.

Registration is free. Simply click [here](#) to sign up. If you've participated in a previous course, please register with us again.

Course Schedule:

[Fundraising for Collections Care](#) – September 23, 25 and October 1, 3 (10-11:30 am AKST)

[Caring for Audiovisual Materials](#) – October 16, 21, 23, 28, 30 from (10-11:30 am AKST)

[Outreach Activities for Collections Care](#) – November TBA

Participants will earn a certificate of completion if they attend all the webinars in a course and submit simple homework assignments. Courses are conducted through the [Connecting to Collections Online Community](#) and participants will be able to continue the conversation with instructors and classmates in the Community once the course has concluded. Participants are encouraged to [submit](#) specific questions about collections care to ensure that the courses are directly relevant to their needs.

Since its launch in January, five courses on a range of topics have been offered, and more than 1,500 certificates of completion have been awarded. All previous courses have been archived on the [Online Community](#) where webinar recordings, associated handouts, and resources can be found. Past topics have included [collections care basics](#), [risk evaluation](#), [writing a disaster response plan](#), [caring for digital materials](#), and [caring for photographs](#).

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Professional Time Wasting on the Web

Update on the use of Ethafoam in collections

<http://collectionsconversations.wordpress.com/2013/08/20/ethafoam-update/>

Why the DMA's New Conservation Program May Be More Important to the Museum Than Free Admission

<http://frontrow.dmagazine.com/2013/08/why-the-dmas-new-conservation-program-may-be-more-important-to-the-museum-than-free-admission/#.Ug45AkOSg5I.email>

When a city sells its museum collection to pay its debt

<http://www.npr.org/2013/07/19/203295773/pa-city-tries-wild-west-auction-to-rope-in-cash?sc=tw>

Fire at the Umista Cultural Center

<http://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=975763>

Burma Shave inspires signs at St. Jones Reserve

<http://engagingplaces.net/2013/07/30/burma-shave-inspires-signs-at-st-jones-reserve/>