

## 2. BRIEF GUIDE TO THE MANUAL MARKING OF OBJECTS

### INTRODUCTION

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The museum personnel must put an accession number on the objects in the collection for identification purposes. The method varies according to the type of object. While bearing in mind the recommendations that follow, judgment and common sense should be used and the rules adapted to the specific cases that arise.

### GENERAL RULES

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#### Handling

Putting a number on an object requires touching it and moving it. Before moving any object, it must first be examined with a view to ensuring that it can be safely handled. Particular attention should be paid to objects consisting of a number of separate parts. **Both hands must always be used** when lifting or carrying an object.

#### Criteria for the numbering of objects

1. The numbers written on the objects should be **permanent**. They should be put somewhere solid that cannot become detached and where they will not be erased by use and successive handling.
2. They should be written **legibly**.
3. They should be **easily accessible** in order to avoid unnecessary handling. If possible, they should be put in the same place for all objects of the same type (e.g. for sculpture in the round: at the bottom, behind; for paintings, on the frame, bottom right-hand corner, etc.).
4. For **aesthetic** reasons however, they should not be too obvious.

#### Positioning and applying the number

It is important to examine the material the object is made of, as well as its structure and any weak points, in order to find the best place to write the number.

- **Directly on the object.** When the number is written on the object, it should be placed between two layers of varnish. The first layer insulates the ink from the object, preventing it spreading into the material, and the second layer protects the number. Before applying the base layer of varnish, the position chosen should be dusted so as to improve adhesion. There is no need to use varnish on a label, parchment, or a cotton or linen ribbon.
- **On a label.** If the number cannot be written on the object due to insufficient space, or because the material is too fragile or absorbent, a label, preferably made of acid-free card or parchment, is attached to the object. Ordinary cardboard quickly deteriorates and can damage the object by giving off acid vapor as it ages.
- **On a ribbon.** For fabrics, the accession number is written on a cotton ribbon, which is then sown onto the fabric.

#### Practical advice

- ❖ The numbers are most often written in black India ink. But on dark objects, white ink is preferable even though it is more difficult to apply.
- ❖ Avoid placing the number beneath a flat-based object: it can quickly be obliterated by friction or by the action of insects. Moreover, doing so requires turning the object upside down to read its number, which risks damaging the object or, in the case of heavy objects, is difficult to do.

- ❖ An object comprising several separate and detachable parts should have an identification number on each part, e.g. a knife and sheath, or a box and its lid.
- ❖ For objects made of two attached parts that may become separated (e.g. a pipe consisting of a bowl and a stem), it is advisable to write the number on both parts (the bowl and the stem of the pipe).
- ❖ As a general rule, labels should only supplement a more permanent system, since they tend to become detached or torn and can therefore be lost.

## REQUISITE MATERIALS

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It is strongly recommended that you test the material before using it and use only appropriate brands. This is particularly the case for varnishes, since some types of varnish tend to obliterate the ink, especially when the second layer is applied. Other varnishes tend to flake off as they age, taking the number with them. Yet other varnishes become opaque as they age and hide the number.

### For writing the number...

- Pigment pens (with India ink) such as DR Pilot, Pigma (fine point 0.2 or 0.1) or Rotring: available at good stationers and art supply stores.
- Pens and penholders: available in some supermarkets and at stationers. In humid climates, pens rust very rapidly. After use, it is advisable to wash them carefully in alcohol and to dry them with absorbent paper (Sopalin, Kleenex, etc.).
- Black and white India ink: available at stationers and art supply stores.
- Pencil (HB) and rubber.

### For varnishing...

#### Types of varnish

- Acryloid®/Paraloid® B72 acrylic varnish (to be dissolved in a solvent) or Soluvar® (ready-to-use mixture). These acrylics are noted for their stability and tend not to become opaque as they age.
- Fine varnish for gouache (Lefranc et Bourgeois): to be avoided as far as possible because its stability is not known.
- Transparent nail varnish: to be avoided as far as possible because its exact composition and stability are not known. It may contain ingredients that are harmful to the objects.

#### Solvents

- 90° alcohol, acetone or mineral essences to dissolve Acryloid®/Paraloid®. It is important to first make sure that the solvent used will not dissolve the pigmented layers on the object itself.
- Acetone if fine varnish or nail varnish are used.

#### Brushes

- Fine, and made from pig bristles since these are stronger (preferably no. 2 for a flat brush, otherwise no. 4 is recommended).

### For labeling...

- Acid-free card or parchment hang tags, which you can make yourself.
- Fine string to attach the labels.
- White cotton serge (preferably no. 5) available at dry goods stores or tailors, otherwise pieces of sheet cloth or white cotton ribbon, preferably unbleached.
- Scissors.
- Black and white cotton or linen thread.
- Needles.
  
- Cotton wool.

## PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR SOME STANDARD CASES

Type of object	Materials to use	Where to place the number	Recommendations
Weapons	India ink /pigment pen and varnish.	The least visible place.	Write the number on the object between 2 layers of varnish.
Jewelry	India ink /pigment pen and varnish or label.	On the back or inside (for bracelets).	Write the number on the object between 2 layers of varnish or on a label if you cannot write the number directly on the object.
Leather	India ink /pigment pen and varnish.	Inside the object or on the least visible part.	Write the number on the object between 2 layers of varnish. Use a label for soft porous leather.
Masks	India ink /pigment pen and varnish.	Inside the mask.	Write the number on the object between 2 layers of varnish.
Photos, unframed paper documents	Pencil.	On the back, lower right-hand corner.	Don't press too hard.
Photos, pictures, and other framed documents.	India ink /pigment pen and varnish.	In the lower right-hand corner, on the back of the frame.	Write the number between 2 layers of varnish.
Pottery	India ink /pigment pen and varnish.	On the base, behind. Avoid writing the number on the handle only, because it may become detached.	Write the number between 2 layers of varnish.  Write the number on the pot <b>and</b> on the handle.
Unpainted sculpture	India ink /pigment pen and varnish.	On the base, behind.	Write the number between 2 layers of varnish. If the base of the sculpture is weak, write the number elsewhere.
Polychromatic sculpture	India ink /pigment pen and varnish or label.	On any part that does not have pigment on it. Otherwise, use a label.	Write the number between 2 layers of varnish.
Basketwork	India ink /pigment pen between 2 layers of varnish for basketwork with very large weave (rattan)  or  on a parchment, cardboard or sewn cotton label for fine-weave basketwork.	Least visible part.	Don't make holes in the basketwork. Use the existing spaces between the fibers. Regularly check the label to make sure it is still in place.

Clothing and woven or textiles made from woven or beaten fibers.	India ink /pigment pen and cotton/linen ribbon.	The ribbon bearing the number is sewn onto the back of the garment, preferably on a reinforced part such as the neck, hem, buttonhole, lining, etc.	For items made of fabric (grass skirts, rugs), sew the number onto one corner so that it is visible without unrolling or unfolding the fabric.
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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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