

POTENTIAL TIMELINE

PHASE 1 – PREP AND PLANNING

1 year

Phase 1 Tasks

- Organized and develop goals of the project
- Coordinate with the curatorial and registration department
 - See “*Questions for Other Departments*” document
- Conduct initial investigation of a select number of known plastic objects (*details below*)
- Discussions with contracting software company to design a database for the survey (*details below*)
- Applying for a CCPF grant

Connect with:

- Initial meeting and introduction to the project
- Ideas for outreach
- Outreach ideas may be valuable for funding and grants
- Registration
 - Initial meeting and introduction to the project
 - Get list of objects known to contain plastics and condition issues
- Curatorial
 - Initial meeting and introduction to the project
 - Get list of their priority objects
- Kellyn Hoffman
 - Initial TMS search for “mixed media” “plastic*” and other known, general terms
 - Tips and tricks to create list of above searches

PHASE 2 – SURVEY

1 – 1.5 years

Phase 2 Tasks:

- Conduct survey
- Identifying objects where housing may be causing deterioration and immediate rehousing
- Analytical identification of objects with severe or immediate condition issues and not identifiable visually

Funding Needed For:

- New hires: conservator, registrar, photographer
- Packing and rehousing supplies
- Budgeted time to edit and alter the database and a monthly contract with the company
- Analysis of samples

PHASE 3 – SURVEY FOLLOW UP

1 – 1.5+ years

Phase 3 Tasks:

- Treat and rehouse objects identified in Phase 2 survey as needing immediate action
- Analytical identification of plastics not identifiable visually, lower priority than those analyzed in Phase 2
- Begin to address registration and curatorial goals outlined in Phase 1

Funding Needed For:

- New hires: Conservator and registrar
- Packing and rehousing supplies
- Analysis of samples

FURTHER ACTIONS

1+ years after Phase 3

- Survey additional plastic objects located after Phase 2
- Follow up with any objects identified in Phase 2 or 3 that need additional attention
- Continue rehousing and treatment
- Continue implementation of registration and curatorial goals
- Finalize documentation
- Create/implement monitoring program
- Discussions generated by survey
 - Monitoring program, exhibition guidelines, cold storage, etc.

DETAILS

The following notes derive from discussions in the summer of 2020 held by Emily Brzezinski, Ariel O'Connor, and Leah Bright. They may serve as a starting point for future planning and may be altered as needed.

Phase 1 initial investigation of a select number of known plastic objects

- Can serve as pilot group, to develop the survey form/format, decide what information we want to collect, see how long it takes and what resources are required
- This information can be used to write a better grant for the whole collection
- Methods to generate list:
 - Walk through storage by Ariel and Leah
 - Deteriorated plastic objects already known by registration
 - Initial TMS search
 - Search for general terms “plastic”, “mixed media”, etc
 - Look at digital photos for plastic elements
 - Priority lists from the following curators:
 - Sculpture
 - 1980s-present - Melissa Ho

- 20th century - Sarah Newman
- Folk and self-taught art - Leslie Umburger (?)
- Renwick gallery - Nora Atkinson and Mary Savrig

Database/Data Gathering

- TMS
- FileMaker Pro
- Excel document
- OneDrive
 - Custom form that can be created and updates?
- Custom database
 - Custom database such as Agile, created by contracted tech company such as RedLevel consulting firm with the goal of assembling, editing, and gathering the data in one place
 - Ideally would create a database compatible with the Office 360 Suite that can be uploaded with TMS
 - Could include the plastic ID flow chart from AIC 2020 talk (*see Annotated Bibliography*)?

Photography

- Studio photography should be taken of each object surveyed
- A contracted photography may be needed in each phase to accomplish this
- Photos may be stored on S:Drive and/or I:Drive, DAMs if needed

Outreach and grant writing

- Images, plan, and the information generated from the Phase 1 “pilot survey” will substantially inform the grant application
- Could collaboration with Laura’s outreach help with funding?

What is conservation hoping to learn from this survey?

- What plastics do we even have? How many, and where are they?
- What is their current housing and environmental conditions?
- Outcomes:
 - Monitoring/preservation plan/photography
 - Are there problems we could prevent with rehousing?
 - Perform treatment needed
 - Rehousing objects as needed

General things to keep in mind:

- The survey will need dedicated time and/or personnel
- There are more way plastics in the collection than we think.
- This will generate a huge amount of data. This data will be useless unless it is well organized and accessible by the people who need it.
- A survey is a jumping off point for treatment, research, rehousing, and other actions.
- The survey is a good opportunity for inter-department collaboration, or generate public interest (other institutions stated this as an unexpected, but positive, outcome)

RECOMMENDATIONS for PHASE 2 SURVEY

The following recommendations come from discussions that Emily Brzezinski had with objects conservators at other institutions that conducted extensive plastics surveys prior to summer 2020.

Use Consistent Terminology for Polymers

- Use consistent and clear terminology for polymers in the survey database
- Database could include pre-established, but editable, terminology to select from
- This terminology should be codified and used for future surveys, acquisitions, or TMS edits
- Discuss with curatorial/conservation/research how identification should be recorded
 - Should the records be updated to reflect new/corrected information?
 - What language should be used?
 - i.e., maybe “plastic” is more helpful in the entry so it is locatable in the future or easily found by non-experts, or is the specificity of “polymethylmethacrylate” more helpful?
 - How do people approach their research
 - “rigid plastic” and “flexible plastic”?

Analyze Environmental Conditions

- Check the environmental data for the collection spaces as part of the survey
- Build in time and intention to do this at the same time as the survey
 - Are rooms different? Will there be microclimates? Are these already known?
 - This might help you flag objects to check later, explain condition issues, inform rehousing, or a future monitoring program
 - IE high humidity area, check the cellulose nitrate/acetate in these areas
 - More helpful for ranking the risk or priority
 - Do you need to restore/rehouse/move things?

Use Consistent Descriptions of Condition Issues

- Have a glossary of condition terms that has been discussed and established, similar to the terminology for polymers. This will create consistent descriptions that will let the data be searchable and usable
 - Ideally this includes photos and verbal description
- Simple condition ranking would make the collection generally searchable, and allow for easy quantification, for example, “40% of our objects were marked ‘stable’, 10% ‘highly unstable’ “
 - 1-4 POPART condition ranking has been used successfully by other institutions
 - Should include description and key

Photography

- Take a photo of each object surveyed. Verbal descriptions are never as helpful as an image, especially with a material that degrades as rapidly as plastic. These images can serve as condition references, especially if the object has not been examined in many years
- Even snapshot, or informal photos will be helpful if a contract photographer of higher-end camera is not possible
- Overall photos

Build in Time to Follow Up the Survey

- There may (very likely) be additional time needed to finalize reports, organize photography, or edit the database after the survey is technically complete.

- Make sure database/data gathered is organized and accessible, or else it will not be used
- Build in a monitoring program to repeatedly examine sensitive objects
 - This might include:
 - Flagging important, at risk, problematic plastics, or deteriorated objects to be more heavily monitored
 - Created a monitoring plan that SAAM has already discussed
 - Smaller scale survey of flagged items examination after 1-5 years to assess condition of the plastics (good opportunity to reassess housing monitoring plan, or conduct research – intern or fellowship possibilities)

DISCUSSION POINTS – DESIGNING the SURVEY

Overall Goals

What are you hoping to learn?

Does it have plastic?

Identify plastics with significant condition issues or trends

What information needs to be in TMS

Identification of plastics? Condition? Location? Sheer existence?

If identification is a goal, will scientific analysis be necessary?

Object Surveyed

How many objects will the survey focus on?

Object by object, or a general audit?

Surveying both storage and exhibition?

How will you decide what plastics to focus on, if you need to focus?

Where will you choose to start?

Greatest curatorial priority? Most commonly exhibited?

Most degraded?

By storage location?

Accessible?

Curatorial department with the greatest quantity of plastics?

Database Choice

TMS? FileMaker Pro? Custom?

Will this be stored with the existing object info, or elsewhere?

Does the database of choice allow you to add the information you want? Does it allow photos?

Who has access and editing power in the database?

Documentation

Condition/Identification/etc

Is a survey form required?

Is it required for each object? What if an object has dozens of plastic components?

Where will you record the information (see “Database Choice”)

What information will be recorded (see “Overall Goals”)

Photography:

What photographs are needed?

Where will the photos be stored?

Will they be accessible with this storage plan?