

ROBBEN ISLAND MUSEUM: OLD POWER STATION [ca. 1941 to 1991]

PRELIMINARY REPORT No. 5: ARTEFACTS RISK ASSESSMENT.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In July 2011 SAHRA was requested to provide an advisory regarding the re-use of the Old Power Station [OPS] for housing the RIM artefacts on the island. In addition to the supporting documentation to accompany a Section 27 permit application SAHRA requires:

“It is further recommended that the proposal/motivation address the types of collections to be stored and if the proposed interventions/alterations and improvement of the power station will be favourable and risk management associated with the relocation of the collections.” [SAHRA e-mail dd 1 July 2011]

This report is compiled from observations [general and specific] made, correspondence, photographs and general discussions over the period February 2011 to February 2012.

It is not intended in this report to identify specific items and their specific risks but to identify types of materials and their risks. Metal objects would be subject to corrosion for instance.

The report is not a Risk Management Plan.

The report is broadbased and some matters may have been inadvertently excluded.

A comprehensive survey was not undertaken of all the potential storage spaces on the island, nor has a comprehensive inventory been made.

## **CATEGORIES OF ARTEFACTS**

Two areas of the artefact collection can be identified. This relates to the artefacts, which Robben Island Museum already has in use in exhibitions and secondly, artefacts in storage or scattered around the island.

### **Artefacts already in exhibitions**

Some exhibitions such as that in the Sobukwe Complex and some prison cells in the MSP on the island have a number of artefacts of various materials ranging from wood to paper, to cloth, to metal. No risk assessment of these has been made as each exhibition must have its own assessment.

### **Artefacts not in exhibitions**

There are five categories of artefacts not in any exhibition for which Robben Island Museum is responsible in conjunction with, the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape and the Department of Public Works viz.:

1. Artefacts held by Mayibuye on the mainland at UWC.

These consist of a variety of materials but the collection is small and reasonably risk free as they are housed in the controlled environment of the Mayibuye Archive. They consist mostly of personal items on loan from Ex-Political Prisoners or their families.

It is not certain at this stage if these will be removed to the new OPS facility.

2. Those that are currently housed in parts of the Maximum Security Prison.

The armoury, some cells, the kitchens and section E currently house a large collection of artefacts, some accessioned and others not.

Some artefacts have only recently been collected for safe storage in the MSP. Most of these are in an advanced state of deterioration.

3. Artefacts housed in various places across the island.

A number of artefacts are housed in scattered places across the island. Lean to's, garages and the armoury near Ou Tronk have been identified as storage facilities for discarded objects. All the sites visited had their doors off their hinges with the concomitant invasion by birds and animals, as well as severe corrosion and weathering.

The significance of the artefacts is not known and an inventory will need to be drawn up.

4. Artefacts that have been or will be removed and housed temporarily when a structure is renovated.

A number of artefacts are stored in the MSP when renovations were started in notably the Club House. Artefacts still extant on the OPS will need to be removed and stored before building starts. Similarly with other projects in the pipe line.

5. Fixtures, fittings and machinery as part of a structure.

Some fixtures such as the clock mechanism and bell in the Garrison church, the boilers and cooking pots in the MSP kitchen, as well as the Rolls Royce generator set currently used as back up to the MSP; amongst others, need to be inventoried.

6. Artefacts removed with decommissioning of infrastructure.

This relates to future decommissioning of infrastructure, notably the Rolls Royce generator set currently used as back up plant for the MSP.

## **TYPES OF ARTEFACTS**

The collection in the MSP has artefacts made from the following materials:

Wood, metal, steel, stainless steel, vinyl, cloth, leather, sisal, paper,

## **CURRENT STORAGE FACILITIES**

### Risks

The following risks have been identified where the artefacts are currently stored:

#### Fire

Fire safety measures notably in the MSP are not adequate for a number of the artefacts. The wooden and sisal artefacts particularly are at risk. The risk to artefacts scattered across the island is very high as dead dry vegetation is infrequently cleared. There is no mobile fire fighting equipment on the island.

#### Corrosion

Artefacts in the MSP are still susceptible to corrosion but not to the extent as those suffered by artefacts scattered across the island.

#### Weathering and the weather

Artefacts in the MSP are relatively free of risk from water, wind or storm damage. There is, however, no implementation of basic maintenance, such as clearing of gutters and roof inspections, which poses a risk from damage by water should leaks occur and not be stopped in time. Artefacts scattered across the island have a high risk from weathering. Certain artefacts such as the bell on the Garrison Church are at extreme risk from weathering and the weather.

#### Theft

Artefacts in the MSP in the armory and section E are relatively less at risk from theft. Certain artefacts in the MSP in the exhibition spaces in cells are at risk. Artefacts scattered across the island are at extreme risk if not too heavy to remove.

#### Vandalism

There is some risk of vandalism, especially with artefacts on exhibit in the MSP.

#### Visitors, contractors and staff

- damage when moving artefacts
- removal for scrap during building and clearing up operations.

#### Pests

Most of the artefacts are made from materials that are at high risk of insect or fungal infestations. There is no facility at present for fumigation or other methods of pest control.

## Climate change

It has not been possible to assess the risk to artefacts because of climate change as this is a long term response.

## Animals

Birds especially have invaded certain sections of the MSP, notably the kitchens and what restoration efforts were made in 2006 are at high risk. Artefacts scattered across the island are at extreme risk, such as the dog kennels removed from the Sobukwe Complex.

## Plants

Plants are not a direct risk at the MSP. Dead vegetation and alien plants are either not controlled or the control is haphazard in other areas and pose a high risk of fire.

## **PROPOSED STORAGE FACILITIES**

The proposal is for the OPS to be a sealed humidity and temperature controlled environment. Artefacts would be stored in a secure facility with spaces in which specific materials would be housed at the optimum climate for that type of material. Artefacts would be housed and cared for in conditions according to international standards and norms.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

A Risk Assessment must be made and a Risk Management Plan must be drawn up for all exhibitions following ICCROM guidelines as a matter of urgency.

An interim Risk Management Plan [RMP] must be drawn up for items in the MSP.

A survey must be undertaken locate artefacts scattered across the island. Artefacts should then be inventoried, their significance established and then moved to the new facility.

An interim RMP must be drawn up for artefacts scattered across the island in various places and a storage facility must be found for them.

An inventory must be made of artefacts scattered across the island and be assessed for significance.

An interim RMP must be drawn up and a storage facility must be found for artefacts from structures that are to be renovated.

A policy guideline should be in place for artefacts that would in future become part of the collection if any infrastructure on the island is decommissioned.

An RMP must be in place for fixtures, fittings and machinery currently extant in buildings.

An RMP must be drawn up and in place for the new storage facility in the OPS before artefacts are moved there.

## CONCLUSION

Artefacts are at extreme risk in most cases in their current position.

The new storage facility will significantly reduce the over all risk to the artefacts on Robben Island.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

Four locations with artefacts have been identified for this assessment

Maximum Security Prison

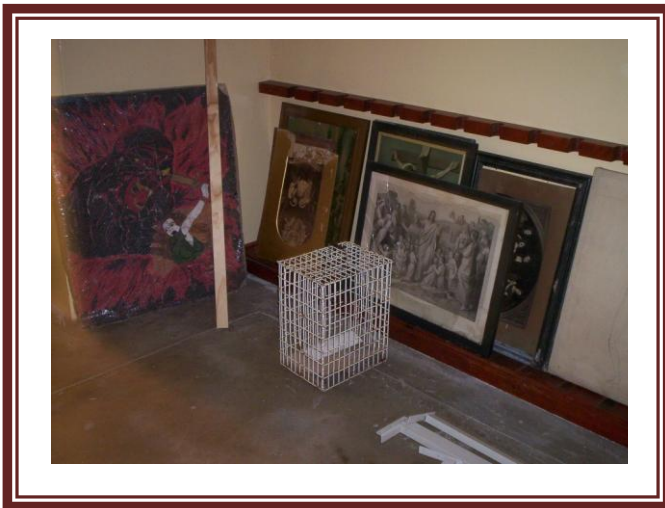


Fig.1. Artworks, Armory



Fig.2. Boxed collections, Armory



Fig.3. Boxed collections, Armory



Fig.4. Trophies Armory



Fig.5. Section E-benches



Fig.6. Section E –chairs [ex-club house]



Fig.7. Section E- hospital equipment



Fig.8. Section E- Implements



Fig.9. Section E- prison beds



Fig.10. Section E –sisal mats





Fig.11. Section E – small wooden benches



Fig.12. Prison utensils, Armory



Fig. 13. Trophies, Armory

### Workshop



Fig. 14. Lister diesel gensets ca 1968



Fig.15 Dog kennels ex Sobukwe complex

Armory WWII [near Ou Tronk]



Fig.16. Entrance to Armory WWII ou Tronk