

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

PRELIMINARY REPORT No. 5: ARTEFACTS RISK ASSESSMENT.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In July 2011 SAHRA was requested to provide an advisory regarding the re-use of the Old Power Station [OPS] for housing site-based RIM artefacts. 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.

In terms of the National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999, objects, artefacts, furniture fixtures and fittings form part of the formal declaration of Robben Island as a National Heritage Site in terms of section 27 of the Act. They may not be destroyed, removed, alienated or disposed of in any manner without a permit issued by SAHRA.

It is not intended in this report to identify specific items and their specific risks but to identify types of materials and their risks.

The main risk factors impacting on the island-based collections are related to the natural environment (climate: temperature, humidity), biological pests, dust and pollutants (salt, sand) and the man-made environment such as movement/handling of artifacts, lack of fire fighting services and clearing of vegetation (fire hazard) and security.

The report is not a Risk Management Plan.

The report is not intended to be a comprehensive report 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.

2. 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.

2.1. Artefacts already in exhibitions

While many of the artifacts on display are not part of the site-based permanent collections as they are either 'excess' collections or were 'collected' for purposes of a particular display only they are included as part of this report for information purposes.

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.

A condition assessment and recommendations for artifacts to be put on display is done as part of exhibition planning. The following conservation principle is adhered to: artifacts made of sensitive material, the originals, such as paper based, do not go on display but only replicas/copies. The original material can and should then be preserved in proper storage.

2.2. 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 UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archive viz.:

1. Artefacts held by The Mayibuye Archive 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 of a music collection of LP records, documents and prison registers and personal items donated by Ex-Political Prisoners (the Apple Box archives) or their families which were used by EPPs during their imprisonment on the island as well as loan collections.

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 and section E currently house a large collection of artefacts. A process is underway whereby un-accessioned artifacts are catalogued in order to add context to determine heritage value and to assist in the accessioning process. There are more than 3000 accessioned artifacts which were left by the prison authorities, including prison clothing, workshop tools, kitchen utensils and hospital equipment, items manufactured in the prison workshop, sporting equipment, furniture, items related to village domestic and church life.

The kitchens contain equipment in situ such as the large cooking pots and boilers that need to be taken into the artefact register.

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 temporary storage facilities. 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.

A process is underway whereby these artifacts are listed and photographed in order to determine their significance and a number of these artifacts have been retrieved for safe storage in the MSP.

There is a need to identify additional storage space to accommodate large artifacts and artifacts awaiting assessment of their significance and whether it is feasible to be taken into the permanent collections or not.

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 as and when renovations take place, such as with the village regeneration project, notably the Club House. Artefacts still extant on the OPS will need to be removed and stored before building starts. Appropriate storage space will need to be identified and secured. Assistance will be required as the necessary support in funds, manpower and transport on the island is lacking.

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.

3. TYPES OF ARTEFACTS

The collection in the MSP has artefacts made from the organic and inorganic materials, amongst others:

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

4. ASSESMENT OF RISK AT CURRENT STORAGE FACILITIES

The main risk factors impacting on the island-based collections are related to the natural environment (climate: temperature, humidity), biological pests, dust and pollutants (salt,sand) and the man-made environment such as movement/handling of artifacts, clearing of vegetation (fire hazard) and security.

Current storage does not allow for safe retrieval and access to the collections, nor does it offer maximum protection against dust, corrosion, pests and fire. It also puts collections at risk for loss or damage as the use of space at MSP, for example, is not dedicated collections space and collections have to move location over time as new uses are assigned to some of these spaces.

Fire

Fire suppression measures notably in the MSP do not answer to best practice for collections in storage. 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. Additionally, there is no mobile fire fighting equipment on the island.

Climatic factors

Artefacts stored in the MSP are susceptible to extreme fluctuations in temperature and humidity which may result in accelerated corrosion in metals and warping/shrinkage in wood and paper, to name a few examples. They are also more exposed to bird contamination and dust/grime as the windows are not sealed or cannot close properly. Conservation measures to remove grime and bird contamination requires skills and is time consuming

Although artefacts in the MSP are relatively free of risk from water, wind or storm damage. there is, no consistent basic maintenance of the building, such as clearing of gutters and roof inspections, which poses a risk of floods and water damage. Artefacts scattered across the island and left open to the elements have a higher risk of deterioration.

Theft, loss and damage

Artefacts in the MSP in the armory and section E are relatively less at risk from theft. However, having collections in various spaces makes it more difficult to monitor. The risk here is more a question of loss (and damage) as collections constantly have to move from space to space.

Certain artefacts in the MSP in the exhibition spaces in cells are at risk. Artifacts on exhibition: there are security systems (cameras) in place in these areas, as in A-section for example.

Artefacts scattered across the island are at greater risk if not too heavy to remove. Only relevant staff may move or supervise such moves but adequate manpower and transport is lacking. Visitors are not allowed to move/touch the artifacts.

Pests

Most of the artefacts are made from materials that are at high risk of insect or fungal infestations (mould). There is no facility at present for fumigation in order to prevent the introduction or spread of contamination.

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. Rodents also pose an ongoing challenge to the survival of collections in spite of pest control measures.

5. PROPOSED STORAGE FACILITIES

The proposal is for a permanent, dedicated and consolidated storage space for the permanent collections that offers a controlled environment suitable for the different materials, controlled access resulting in improved preservation and protection as well as better retrieval and accessibility for the potential users of the collection. As such, artefacts would be housed and cared for in conditions according to international standards and best practice

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

An updated Risk Assessment should be made for all exhibitions on the Island.

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.

7. 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.

8. PHOTOGRAPHS

Only photographs of four locations with artefacts are included in this assessment.

8.1. Maximum Security Prison

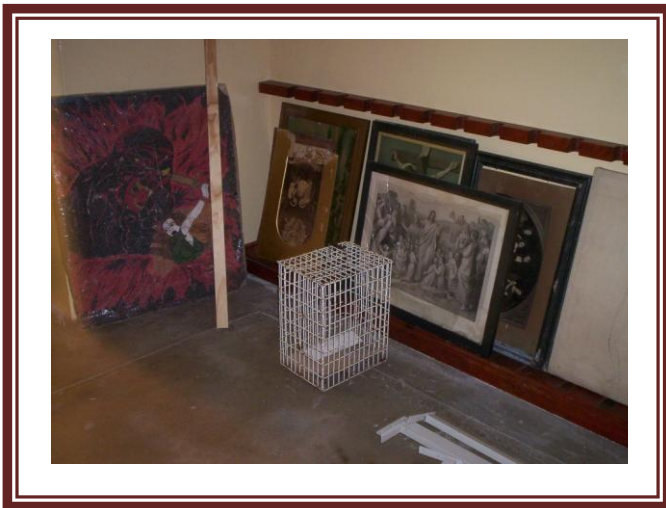


Fig.1. Artworks, Armory



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

8.2. Workshop



Fig. 14. Lister diesel gensets ca 1968



Fig.15 Dog kennels ex Sobukwe complex

8.3. Armory WWII [near Ou Tronk]



Fig.16. Entrance to Armory WWII ou Tronk



Fig.17. Prison doors and sundry items

8.4. Near Medium B



Fig. 18. Entrance to temporary storage



Fig.19. School & sporting equipment inside



Fig.20. Old school desk.