

# Action sheet A

## What do you keep?

There are some things which people get very attached to, which they keep and store forever, even if those items are no longer used. Some of these things are already a little deteriorated; others acquire additional-wear over time.



1. DO YOU OWN ANY ITEM THAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT TO YOU OR PARTICULARLY VALUABLE TO YOU?

2. WHAT CONDITION IS THIS OBJECT IN? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? IS IT USED OR NEW?

3. WHAT DO YOU DO IF THE OBJECT IS DAMAGED OR WORN? DO YOU LEAVE IT AS IT IS OR REPAIR IT?



Write down your reasons ...  
e.g. "signs of use show an object's history" or "the original condition is the most beautiful one"

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## Info sheet

# Forms of Preservation Part 1

### THE SHIP OF THESEUS – AN OLD STORY OF PRESERVATION

“The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned from Crete had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their places, insomuch that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same.”

Plutarch (46–125 AD)

Theseus is a hero of ancient Greek mythology. He used a ship to travel on his adventures. Because all of his heroic deeds were successful, it is said that the ship always safely carried the hero and his crew back home. That's why this fortunate ship was to be preserved as a monument. But wood is an organic material and decays over time. The broken wooden planks were therefore removed and replaced with new, stable ones. The paradox consists in the inability to say conclusively which is the real ship of Theseus: Only the ship in the beginning? Or also the one where some of the wood had been replaced? Isn't the ship in which all the wood had been replaced also the ship of Theseus?

## Info sheet

# Forms of Preservation Part 2

### CONSERVING, RESTORING, RECONSTRUCTING

If something seems valuable, it should also be preserved in the best possible condition at all times. At first, this sentence seems completely self-evident. But what exactly does it mean? If an object is preserved exactly as it is at this time, this is referred to as conservation. There is no intervention in the substance, only a safeguarding that the current condition won't change. Restoration refers to a careful kind of intervention in an object: Strictly speaking, restoration even includes sewing loose threads in a carpet on to a subsurface in a barely visible way to prevent the carpet from unravelling further. The preservation method that has recently been discredited is reconstruction, meaning the creation of a different condition. This is because it leads to many questions. Which condition is the best possible one that should be (re)produced? Is there even sufficient knowledge of what an object might have looked like several hundred years ago? Aren't the traces of time which provide information on its use, storage or destruction part of the object's history? And if so, then what is the best possible condition of an object?



# Action sheet B

## In what condition should objects be preserved?

Objects can be preserved in a variety of ways (see Forms of Preservation info sheet). There are often debates about what is closer to the original: the object with missing or damaged parts or the renewed object. Here is a thought experiment:

### 1. SCENARIO

You own a rare old bicycle that belonged to your grandfather. The bike has always been in the family's possession. It was regularly serviced at a repair shop. Over time, rusted and worn parts were replaced with new ones. In over 50 years, the entire bicycle was thus replaced piece by piece. Is the completely renewed bicycle still the same?

### 2. SCENARIO

Imagine that the repair shop had kept all the old parts that were replaced over the years. Now someone decides to assemble a new bike from the old pieces. It works. Now there are two bicycles: the one that you're using, which has been created from the old one over time, and the one in the repair shop, which consists of all the genuine parts of your original bike. Which one is the authentic "old" bicycle?

Possible answers:

- a) the new one (this is supported by the continuity, d. i.e. the consistency);
- b) the old one (this is supported by the identity, d. i.e. the concordance of the parts);
- c) neither (because the question can't be settled conclusively);
- d) both (because the two objects are nearly identical).

Talk about the problems and questions that arise in the thought experiment. Share your opinions and make sure that you always substantiate them!

## Info sheet

# Dragon Carpet Part 1



Object	<b>Dragon carpet</b>
Inventory no.	KGM 1881,1018
Period	Second half of the 7th century AH / around 1600 AD
Place	Armenia or Azerbaijan
Material	Wool
Size	originally 572 x 268 cm

## THE CARPET

The dragon carpet was an outstanding example of Caucasian rug art. Acquired by Wilhelm von Bode in Paris in 1881 AD, it was displayed in the museum collection from the start. The dragon motif was already slipping into obscurity around the time of its creation around 1600 AD. The dragons can only be identified with a lot of imagination. It must therefore be assumed that the highly stylised, boldly coloured flower shapes were emphasised and valued. The Museum of Islamic Art owns two other dragon carpets (Inv. no.: I. 2 and I. 3). They help people to imagine what the now fragmented carpet must once have looked like.

## Info sheet

# Dragon Carpet Part 2

### AFTER-EFFECTS OF THE WAR

In 1881 AD, the dragon carpet was acquired as a large, interconnected piece. Today it is largely destroyed. What happened? Towards the end of World War II, the allies bombed Berlin to defeat National Socialist Germany. The city's museums tried to protect their objects as much as possible and partially warehoused them in places that were considered safe. Many carpets from the Museum of Islamic Art went to the Reich National Mint in Berlin. This building, where coins were minted, was thought to be particularly safe. On 11 March 1945, a bomb struck the building and set it on fire.

### TRACES OF WAR

The dragon carpet was destroyed in Berlin by a bomb hit and subsequent fire. This can be detected on the carpet by means of the increasingly large missing sections. If one looks closely, it's also apparent that the carpet was rolled up when it was devoured by the flames: the side turned away from the fire is preserved, for better or worse.

The other half of the rolled-up carpet was burned. Even starting in June 1945, restorers tried to conserve and repair the preserved fragments as much as possible. The dragon carpet was not refurbished until 2004 for the exhibition on the 100-year anniversary of the Museum of Islamic Art. This was the first time it had been on public display since the war, in the condition depicted here.

