

From the Gallery to the Archive: Documenting a Deinstall

By Emma Matthews

Once an art exhibition has been installed in the museum, before its doors are opened to the public, the countdown to its deinstall process begins. But what exactly takes place during the systematic deinstallation of an exhibition? This article will take you behind the scenes of the exhibition deinstall of 'Elisabeth Frink: Strength & Sensuality' from start to finish.

On Friday the 9th of January, in the closed and seemingly quiet museum, work had begun preparing the galleries for an exhibition rotation. The first step in reverting the gallery back to a blank canvas involved removing the information labels, placed next to each work, which included context about each artwork. The careful and meticulous removal of the eleven wall-mounted artworks then followed. To conserve the artworks' condition, the framed works on paper were placed on foam bricks whilst awaiting their subsequent transfer down into the Holburne's storage facility. Blu-tack-stained dots and screw holes on the gallery walls were now the only trace of the dismantled exhibition, soon to be covered up by a new coat of paint and new artworks.

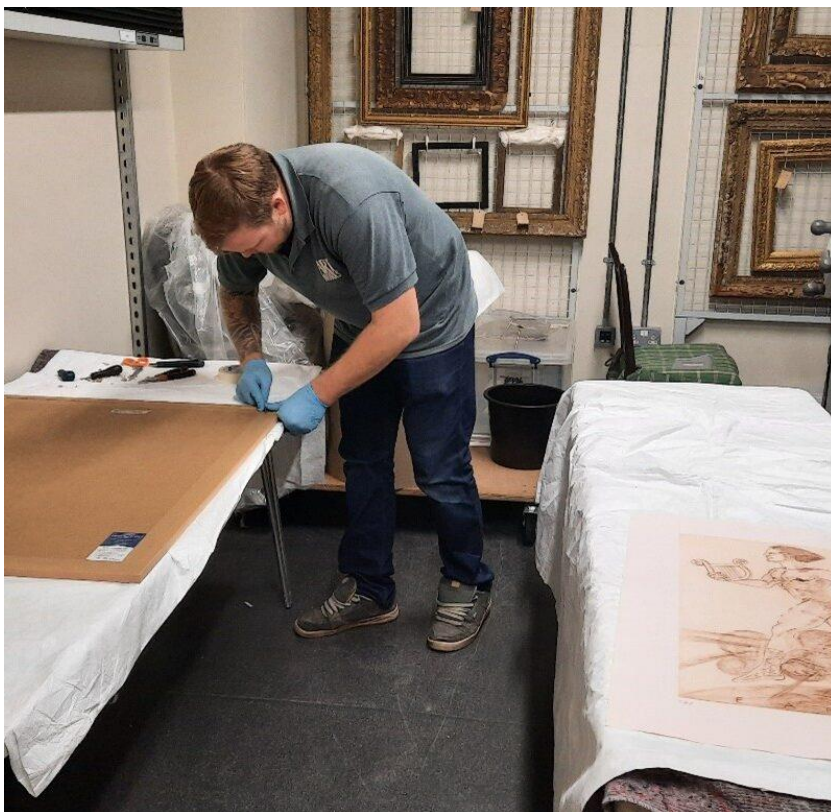


Deinstallation process of 'Elisabeth Frink: Strength & Sensuality'. The Wirth Gallery. Holburne Museum. Emma Matthews 2023

Following Frink's works on paper, her bronze sculptures, which were displayed on the exterior wall of the gallery, were removed along with the plinths which

encased them. During this handling process, the sculptures were held with gloves to protect the bronze from any damage. The gloves also served as a barrier protecting the handlers from any irritation that the sculptures' materials or surface could cause. Ensuring the sculptures' condition would be preserved for any future viewings or exhibitions, they were placed into storage boxes with tissue paper for padding to be stowed.

Down in the stores, the frames enclosing Frink's works on paper were delicately opened one by one, with each one revealing a print inside. Unlike with the sculptures, the works on paper were handled gently with clean hands as fibres from cotton gloves could catch easily on the fibres of the paper, potentially causing a tear on the surface of the artwork. Once they had been removed from the frame, the works were carefully returned to their permanent location in the stores. To protect the works on paper inside the folder, each artwork was layered in between large pieces of tissue paper to preserve and protect the objects. Once all the framed works had been unframed, assessed, and stored the bespoke frames were packaged with bubble wrap to be exported to an external storage facility.



Deinstallation process of 'Elizabeth Frink: Strength & Sensuality'. Holburne Museum. Emma Matthews 2023

Following and documenting the deinstallation reveals how complex and meticulous this journey from the gallery to the store really is. The success of the process depends on the ability of the curators, handlers, technicians, and experts

being able to work simultaneously alongside each other to ensure the artworks remain in their perfect condition throughout. However, once the deinstall is complete and the store doors are closed shut, there is no time to waste as the work to install a new exhibition begins... consequently starting the countdown to a deinstallation process all over again.

By Emma Matthews

Edited by Emily Scarborough