

ARCS 2023 Conference Session Review

Session: “When the Wrecking Balls are Coming: Relocating 100,000 Works on Paper”

Speakers: Sarah Newby (Associate Collections Manager) and Catherine Burce (Senior Associate Collections Manager) from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Written by: Jenny Modzel

The session presented at the ARCS 2023 Conference by Collections Management staff at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) focused on the relocation of the museum’s works on paper collection as part of a larger collections move. The move was carried out in preparation for a construction project and was preceded by a multi-year inventory. Sarah Newby and Catherine Burce discussed the overall project, the relocation, which took place in 2019 and was completed in March 2020, as well as the planning process, temporary storage solutions, obstacles encountered, and lessons learned. The goal of this session was to provide insight for institutions planning similar, large-scale projects.

I currently work as Collections Manager for History Associates Inc. (HAI), a company that offers archival, collections management, and research services. Since my main role at HAI involves collections management projects, a session geared specifically towards the planning and execution of a collections move is beneficial for my growth with the company and as a collections professional in general. While I am skilled at inventories and cataloging, I have yet to work on a large-scale collections move, so I feel this session gave me the tools to be successful when this type of project inevitably arises. More generally, the project management experiences shared by Newby and Burce will be helpful for any task where long-term project management is involved.

While I have attended previous presentations on similar topics, it was impressive how much information the speakers were able to fit into a thirty-minute presentation. Instead of

merely a broad overview of the project, Newby and Burce included charts, diagrams, and several images detailing their process and practical solutions to challenges their team faced. I also appreciated their mention of the amount of stress a project of this magnitude and duration can cause on everyone involved, and how the effects like burnout and illness do not end just because the project is over. Most collections managers will face a collections move at some point in their career, and the information shared in this session can serve as a good jumping-off point for planning, but it is also a great resource to reference throughout the process for practical advice and solutions.