

How to Manage Without the “Real Thing”

How do we integrate replicas of collection items as permanent collection items themselves? Anthropology, natural history, and art collections all encounter the need to deal with replicas, casts and molds, and reproduced copies of museum objects. These are not educational copies, 3D prints, or a digitized version of a collection item, but replicas that are treated in (almost) every way as a permanent collection item. This could be because the original was lost, is fragile, or is likely to degrade quickly. Every museum and collection will deal with this situation differently, but a good place to start is by asking some essential questions.

Poster by Jesse Dutton-Kenny
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ASK:

Paleontology: CU Museum of Natural History

- The collection has about 9000 casts and molds that are mostly very small casts of teeth
- We use materials like resin, plaster, clay, and “dragon skin”
- The process of making is to first make a mold, then an “original cast,” and then several other casts that serve as backups that can be loaned
- The original cast does not get loaned and is made in a different material
- About 75% of our specimens are BLM or from federal land so we still need to get permission to even make a cast and mold of them
- We indicate on the accession form that it is a cast or mold when we get a replica from another institution, but it is not a separate process
- In-house made replicas of our items are tracked but not accessioned
- We do loan replicas to other institutions - they get distributed
- Loans of replicas would be treated formally like any loan
- The casts and molds made in-house get the same number as the original collection item. They do not get accessioned and are maintained as a different collection with its own separate internal database
- To number physically, we can either carve or use a B72 method on the bottom
- Original items that have had replicas or made of them is tracked in the database
- We do not record who made the replica and when, but we could
- We would not “publish” information about replicas in a public view
- The cast and mold collection made in house lives separately from rest of regular collection, easier to keep track of and better for protecting the environment
- When another institution gives a cast, it gets cataloged and lives with the rest of the permanent collection so that all originals or stand ins live together
- Essentially we keep track separately and house separately those replicas we make and those we receive



Replicas in museum collections bring up complex notions of “authenticity” and “value.” If standing in for the original, are they as “valuable”? What kind of “authenticity” do they take on?

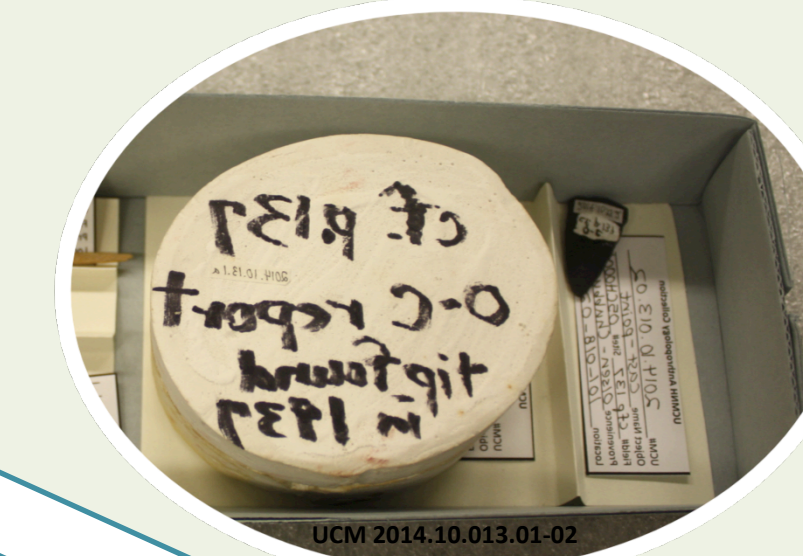
Furthermore, if these replicas go on display, how does that change or not change the experience for the visitor? For example, is it more powerful to see a replica of a whole Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton or the original bones and fragments out on trays?



- ☐ Why do we have/need this replica? Why is it necessary?
- ☐ What materials and/or mediums will be used?
- ☐ Do we need to consider permits or other permissions to make or have this replica?
- ☐ How much of the permanent collection is replicas?
- ☐ How or will replicas be accessioned? What kind of paperwork do we need?
- ☐ How will we number these types of objects both in the database and physically?
- ☐ Will we document if collection items have had replicas or made of them?

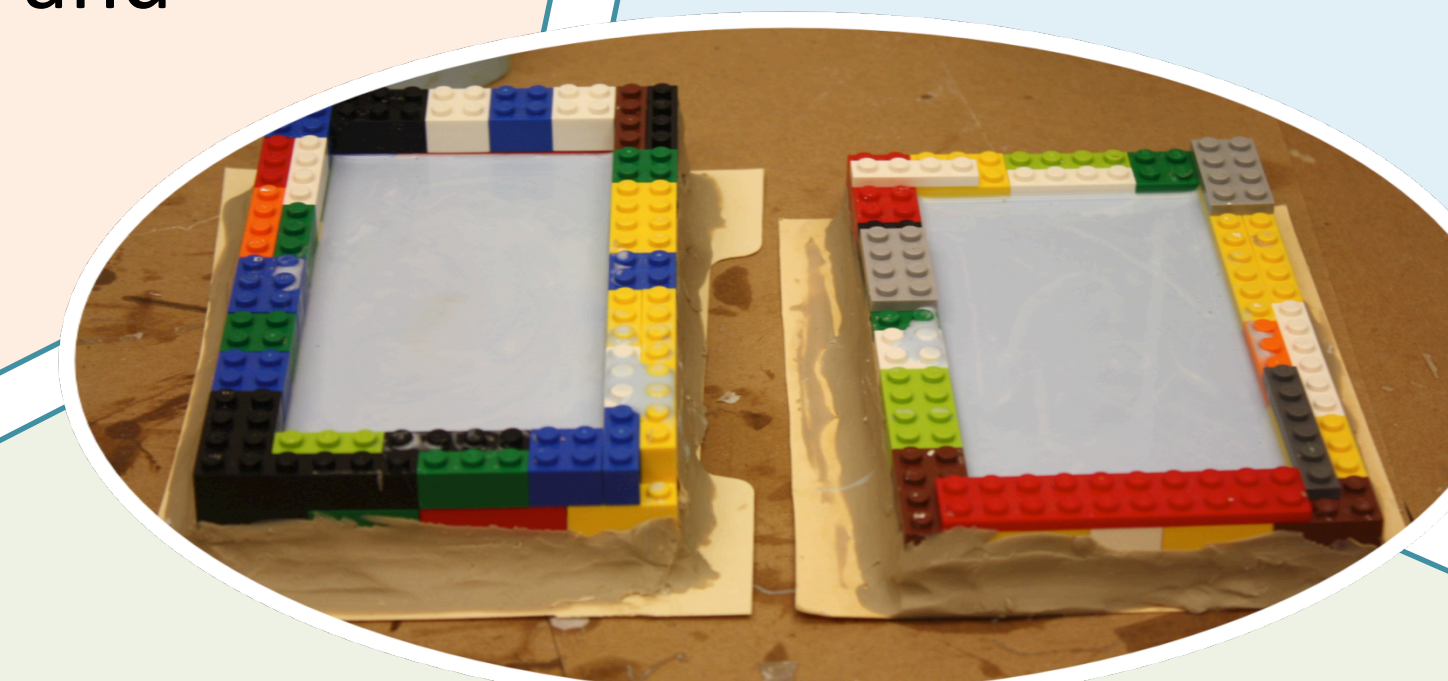
Archaeology: CU Museum of Natural History

- We recently found 100+ casts and molds of lithic points whose original objects had been deaccessioned
- We accessioned the collection and kept the mold and two casts of each lithic point
- For the paperwork we created a category called “replicated materials” instead of gift, donation, purchase, etc.
- When assigning catalog numbers we decided to use a “set numbering” system
- For example, the accession was 2014.10 and then the first set (a mold and two casts belonging to the same original) was 2014.10.01, and then the first object in that set (the mold) was 2014.10.01.001 and so on
- In the object name, each piece was noted as both lithic and cast or lithic and mold
- We also noted in the records of the casts and mold which original object they were affiliated with
 - Because every replica is telling the story of the original and its own story, we recorded in the replica’s record as much information as we knew about it *and* the original – carefully differentiating
 - Were we to publish records online, these records would likely go up with the appropriate notations
 - As it stands they are the only record of significant lithic points, and researchers will want to know
 - Exactly what material they were made out of was a mystery, but we know it was a plastic
 - We decided to go with a Filmoplast™ method for numbering the replicas
 - We ended up storing them with other artifacts from this dig



- ☐ When cataloging, will we give the replica its own record?
- ☐ Will we “publish” information about replicas in a public or “web-ready” view of collections record?
- ☐ In terms of storage, are there any constraints for replicas?
- ☐ In terms of ethics, how will we consider dealing with artists, land managers, and outside communities as we create or house replicas?

If you are dealing with replicas in anthropological and art collections you will also want to be considerate of the ethics in dealing with artists and their work or source communities and their beliefs around replication. They may think differently about the process of replication beyond the practical purposes from a collections care perspective.



Art: Denver Art Museum

- Replicas are a very low percentage of the collection here
- Digital art items (not photographs of collection items) can be a challenge
- With multimedia artworks that involve video components, if granted permission, we would typically accession the original piece and then any extra physical backups we made would become “related accessories” (RA)
- These duplicated items would be numbered with a modifier, for example, “RA.1998.1, RA2.1998.1, etc.” RA records would be “related” or linked to the original object record
 - However, if the artist created the duplicate, we consider that an original part so it would get a number suffix (for example 1998.01.01) as opposed to an RA number
 - We would capture all possible information: who made the replica, when, and for what reason
 - For publishing data, at DAM “related accessories” in the collection are strictly internal. Sometimes though, these types of objects prove very useful in exhibition – so long as everything is clearly labeled
 - We would physically number replicas in the same way as the originals, and they are stored in the same way
 - Storage would usually be with the original item



How to Manage Without the “Real Thing”:

How do we integrate replicas and copies of collection items as permanent collection items themselves? These are not educational copies, 3D prints, or a digitized version of a collection item, but replicas that are treated in (almost) every way as a permanent collection item. Every museum will deal with this situation differently, but a good place to start is by asking some essential questions.

By Jesse Dutton-Kenny, Graduate Student (Museum and Field Studies, University of Colorado, Boulder). 2015 CWAM Annual Meeting.

Questions to Ask Yourself / Your Institution:

- ☐ Why do we have or need this replica?
 - Are we going to make one, if so why? Was it a request for an object we cannot loan? Is it for research? Is the original too fragile to be handled? Is it a back up - the original is degrading?
- ☐ What materials and/or mediums are we going to use?
 - How will these materials degrade, and how in relation to the original?
- ☐ Do we need to consider permits or other permissions to make replicas of certain collection objects?
- ☐ How much of the permanent collection fits into this category of replicas?
- ☐ How or will replicas be accessioned? What kind of paperwork do we need?
 - Is it any different than a normal procedure? Do we need different processes for in-house made?
- ☐ How will we number these types of objects both in the database and physically?
 - Are they to be given a catalog number just like all the rest or do they get a “modifier?” Will we number with B-72, etching in, or with a different technique?
- ☐ Will we document in the original records if collection items have had replicas or copies made of them (that is, if you still have the original collection item)?
- ☐ When cataloging, will we give the replica its own record?
 - Will we record information about the original in the record of the replica? How to differentiate? Will we record who made the cast/mold/replicas and when and where it was made?
- ☐ Will we “publish” information about replicas in a public or “web-ready” view of collections record?
- ☐ In terms of storage, are there any constraints for replicas?
 - Will they be stored separately from the permanent collection or integrated? Do copies live with the original in storage or separately? Does the material of the replica affect this choice?
- ☐ In terms of ethics, how will we consider dealing with artists, land managers, and outside communities as we create or house replicas?
 - Does it matter if this is an in-house created replica, one provided by the artist/maker, or one given by another institution?
- ☐ If these replicas go on display, how does that change or not change the experience for the visitor?



Photo by Jesse Dutton-Kenny, courtesy of CUMNH

Questions or comments, please contact jesse.duttonkenny@colorado.edu.