

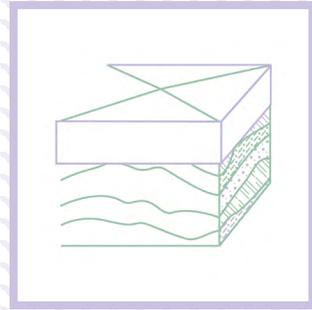


Groundwerk

Art Handling and Packing

Seamus Gough

In 2017 I ran an art handling and packing workshop at Turf Projects. I've worked as a technician, studio assistant and art and furniture fabricator. Here are some tips I've picked up along the way.



Top Tips ✂

If working in art handling and transportation my top tip would be to learn how to tie a version of a quick release knot. When transporting artworks it is important to be able to securely fasten artworks to any fixing rails or brackets you have in your vehicle (typically a van). A quick release knot, such as an 'Evenk Hitch', will allow you to do this efficiently and you will be able to generate a sufficient amount of clamping pressure to secure the objects you are transporting.

My second top tip is to take any opportunities available to install artworks or objects in homes or galleries, when first starting out. This can give you valuable experience and confidence that may lead to working on museum installations which can be interesting work, particularly if you are a practicing artist.

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A Basic Art Handling Technician's Toolbox

- A good spirit level (large)
- Tape measure
- Carpenters pencil
- An awl
- Combi drill (18v with spare battery at least 4.0 ah)
- Masking tape
- Sharp masonry & wood drills
- Handsaw
- Gloves
- Pozi, Phillips & flat head drill bits
- Headtorch

Holding and Handling Artwork

- Always wear protective lint free gloves when handling artworks, these will prevent any chemical reaction or damage your body oils may make to the artwork/document.
- If moving framed works be careful of the edges of the frames.
- If moving gilded frames hold work at the rear and be careful to not knock any of the gild off (easily done!)
- Do not carry more than one object at a time; you could damage your own body as well as the artwork.
- Do a recce of the environment you will be delivering to before you start moving any artworks, and have a plan with your colleagues on how to avoid any hazards and navigate any awkward spaces.

Packing for Transportation

Examples of packing crates



Fig 1.

An Image from the Turf workshop – the participants assembled and boxed up some hypothetical artworks in a typical removals box used in art handling and transportation. Labelling and protective packing was stressed as being very important!

We used a flatpack box for our demonstration but it is likely that, whether you are working for an art handling firm or transporting your own work to an exhibition, you will construct your own packing boxes. These can be fairly crude and the joinery does not need to be fancy, but

they do need to be stable and made with enough care that your work isn't going to get damaged and they are safe to carry – for example, no protruding screws or nails.

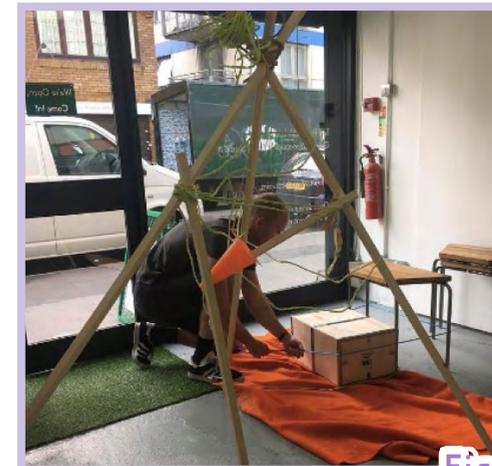


Fig 2.

The image below shows a typical packing crate with external bracing. I find an easy way to make these is using sheet materials (MDF or Ply) and internal subframe out of timber batten; The beauty of doing it this way is it is easy and the subframe can be easily adapted as an added support too if transporting an unwieldy sculpture. This is also a good way to quickly make plinths.



Fig 3.

Constructing a packing crate for a simple artwork/sculpture

Step 1

Decide how big the box/crate needs to be, this does not need to be super accurate but needs to comfortably house the object, with enough room for protective insulation and padding, this would typically be Styrofoam, and you need to account for the size of the subframe you use.

Step 2

Cut 4 sides at the decided dimensions. A circular saw with a straight edge is the best tool for this.

Step 3

Measure thickness of sheet material and mark an offset line of that measurement from the around the entire inside face of the 4 pieces. For example, if the MDF is 18mm, set a combi square to 18mm and scribe.

Step 4

Cut the batten to the scribed

measurements and attach to the sheet material, making sure the top edge of the batten is on the marked line. You only need to do this on two pieces, but make sure the two pieces are the same dimension and the largest. Use screws so the box is easily dismantlable and reusable.

Step 5

Offer up the sides to those with the subframe and attach with screws to the batten. They should sit flush with one another due to correct attachment of batten. To make sure you are screwing into the batten, you could quickly mark with a ruler on the face of the box. For example, if MDF is 18mm and the batten is 30mm make a mark at 33mm so you are screwing into the middle of the batten.

Step 6

Measure the internal dimensions of the top and bottom and cut. Do these separately as there may be some discrepancy.

Step 7

Attach the bottom, and then load the crate with packing materials insulation. Then you can place your wrapped and secured artwork in the box. Depending on

the substrate of artwork, it may pay to line box with a damp-proof membrane so artworks are not affected by any changes in humidity.

Step 8

Continue to pack out the box with Styrofoam to eliminate any movement, and use packing tape if you need to.

Step 9

Attach the top. If you have any offcuts these could be used to screw in to sides and top for easy transportation. If additional support is needed, external bracing can be added.

Step 10

With a permanent marker, clearly mark the "TOP" with arrows and also write "FRAGILE". An attached note with an image of the artwork along with maker, date, and title would make for a professional finish.

How to tie an Evenk hitch knot (also known as a Siberian hitch knot)

This is a useful knot you can tie with gloves on and offers quick release for speedy loading and unloading of artworks.



Step 1
Pass the rope over your hand.



Step 2
Pass rope around the artwork and through any racking or fixing bar and back across your hand.



Step 3
Then pass the rope under your hand, over both ropes...



Step 4
...and back under both ropes.



Step 5
Tuck a bight between your fingers. A bight is a curved section or slack part between the two ends of a rope.



Step 6
Pull this bight through the loop.



Step 7
Tighten.



Step 8
The knot should become a tight figure of 8 knot.



Step 9
Finally pull the knot tight against the artwork and make sure all fixings are secure. IT IS NOW SAFE TO DRIVE!

Further Reading and Resources

- [Working in Art Handling](#), Tate.
- [Art Technician Job Description](#), Contemporary Visual Arts Network.
- Philippa Hobson and Creative Choices, [How to become a gallery technician](#), The Guardian, 2012.
- [Museum and Galleries Technician Profile](#), Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education, 2019.
- David Gossling, [How to... be an art technician](#), Arts Professional, 2015.

Image Credits

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Fig 1: Groundwerk 1.1 // Art Handling and Packing - a workshop led by Seamus Gough for Turf Projects, 2017

Fig 2: Groundwerk 1.1 // Art Handling and Packing - a workshop led by Seamus Gough for Turf Projects, 2017

Fig 3: Example packing crate

Seamus Gough has a background in art handling and packing, working with galleries and museums for 5 years. Seamus has a BA from Camberwell, and a PgDip from Chelsea. He now lives and works in Cornwall where he grew up and spends his spare time making furniture and working on building projects.

Founded in 2013 by Croydon locals, Turf Projects is the first entirely artist-run contemporary art space in Croydon, South London. A registered charity (#1160527), Turf has supported the work of over 400 artists to date through a programme of free public exhibitions, workshops and events.

turf-projects.com // [@turfprojects](https://www.instagram.com/turfprojects)



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