

Recommended considerations for best practices in the examination, preservation, and interpretation of visionary, eccentric, or traditional folk art sites and related collections

A careful, personal examination of a folk art site or collection by a skilled folklorist and a resulting thoughtful and detailed report of findings and recommendations can create the basis for the successful preservation, interpretation, and management of the folk art site and related properties.

1. The site examination should be conducted by the folklorist in the company of a person or persons who have direct knowledge of the personal history of the artist who created the site; who are familiar with the evolution of the site's creation and development; who are familiar with the current state of ownership, management, and access rights to the site; and, if possible, who represent the community in which the site is located and of which the artist was a part.
2. Prior consent must be obtained from the owner, custodian, or authorized agent of the property before a site visit and examination is conducted. The examiner should take care not to alter the property in any way or to remove any part of it from the premises without specific permission from the owner of the property or its authorized agent. If any material is removed from a cultural property (i.e., paint or mortar samples, etc.) then only the minimum required should be removed, and a record of the removal must be made and retained. When appropriate, the material removed should be returned to the site after it is examined by a conservation specialist, along with a report of the conservator's findings.
3. Declarations of the age, origin, or authenticity of a site or any of its component parts should be made only when based on sound evidence.
4. The site examiner should recognize the importance of preventive conservation as the most effective means of promoting the long-term preservation of a cultural art site. The examiner should provide the owner or authorized agent with sources from which an understanding can be gained for the responsible use and care of an art site;

recommendations of the appropriate environmental conditions for storage and exhibition; and instructions for the proper procedures of handling, packing, and transport should removal of any part of the site or collection become necessary.

5. The site examiner should only recommend or undertake treatment that is judged suitable and necessary to the preservation of the aesthetic, conceptual, and physical characteristics of the specific property in question. When nonintervention best serves to promote the preservation of the cultural arts property, it may be appropriate to recommend that no treatment be performed.

6. The site examiner has an obligation to produce and maintain an accurate written and pictorial report based on personal examination of the art site and property. The kind and extent of the documentation may vary according to the circumstances and the nature of the site or collection to be documented. The purposes of such documentation are:

- to establish the condition of the property at the time of the site visit;
- to add to the general body of knowledge about the site;
- to aid the owner, custodian, or authorized agent, and society as a whole, in the appreciation and use of the cultural property by increasing understanding of its aesthetic, conceptual, and physical characteristics; and
- to aid any future work at the site by conservation professionals through providing documentation that reflects the condition of the art site at the specific point in time of the examination.

7. Copies of reports of examination should be given to the owner, custodian, or authorized agent of the art site, who should be advised of the importance of maintaining these materials with the cultural property. Copies may also be shared with any other legitimately interested persons or agencies. The report created should identify the cultural property, its location, the date of examination, and the name of the examiner. The report also should include the following components, as

appropriate:

(a) an **introduction** explaining the purpose of the site examination and a statement identifying the sponsoring agency or agencies of the site visit;

(b) a general description of the **structures, materials, and pertinent history** of the site. Such documentation is an invaluable part of the history of a cultural property and should be produced and maintained in as permanent a manner as practicable;

(c) a description of the current state of **site accessibility and the structural condition** of the art site, to include the general condition of the site in its entirety and of its various components. Note should be made of the ongoing effects, if any, of weathering, pest infestations, structural damage and weaknesses, vandalism or theft, environmental and climate control systems or the lack thereof, encroaching vegetation, any site specific problems of ownership or restrictions in accessibility, and any other observable adverse conditions or effects that may exist;

(d) recommendations for **site upkeep and management** including information that will be useful to the owner in locating and contracting with preservation architects, specialized art conservators, curators and registrars, structural engineers and materials specialists, and other preservation specialists as may be deemed appropriate. Likewise, recommendations and guidance should be provided regarding the creation, operation, and management of a non-profit organization, including organizing, fund-raising, and management;

(e) a **concluding statement and recommendations for use** of the art site including long-term planning for its ownership, its restoration and conservation, its management and operations, staffing, support facilities, interpretation, community involvement, and its financial support;

(f) and a **listing of resources** for the planning, development, and operation of non-profit organizations, for the restoration and conservation of artistic and cultural

resources and sites, for funding preservation, interpretation, and operations, and for any other considerations pertinent to the restoration, conservation, interpretation, and operation of the specific art site in question.

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*NOTE: Several of the above recommendations are based on the standards for professional conduct and practice in treating cultural properties as adopted by the **American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC)** and published on its web site at <http://www.conservation-us.org/>*