Towards a conservation management tool for working objects

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Objects Conservator
Shelburne Museum
• 40 acres with about 20 gardens, hundreds of lilacs and apple trees
• 28 exhibition buildings, including a steamboat, locomotive & rail car
Examples of working objects:

• Works of art or artifacts displayed outdoors
• Artifacts that perform a function, either original or imposed
• Artifacts that need to function, at least in part, for preservation purposes
About 20 collection outdoor objects, many more “in-use”
Permanently collection & gardens


Collections monitors & documents

Maintenance shared between Collections & Buildings Preservation and Landscape departments.

Checking the plumbing and addressing the cause of the iron staining to the granite base on *Turtle Baby*.
Winter protection for some Turtle Baby under cover
Yearly outdoor sculpture loan exhibition since 2016


Dan Snow, *Fantasy Topography* (stone and wood, 2019, courtesy of the artist) in 2019
Preservation of intangibles


Rolling stock needs to roll for preservation purposes.
Why a Conservation Management Tool?

- Clarification of objectives & various roles
- Articulate skills required
- Risk assessment
- Budgeting time & money
- Facilitate succession & re-assessment

Birdbath by Edith Barretto Stevens Parsons in April and October
Some sources of inspiration

• Henry Ford Museum’s rubric for operating and maintaining artifacts

• National Railway Museum (UK) policy paper

• Joanna Barr’s thesis

So what’s this conservation tool?
• 3 planning phases
• 2 implementation phases

A few works from Rodrigo Nava’s Expanded Form series, 2014-2016, (courtesy of the artist) in 2019.
Planning phases

• Curatorial request
• Conservation assessment
• Institutional impact

Danby Fountain emptied of its garden for conservation assessment
Implementation phases
• Undertake treatment
• Execute lifecycle

Danby Fountain base before treatment & after application of Rust-o-leum Rust Reformer