Small museums across the country rely heavily on traveling exhibitions to supplement their programs. With the vast number of new museums that have sprung up around the country—some say, a new museum every day—it has become increasingly difficult for them to gather permanent collections of the size and scope required to maintain an interested audience and community support. The circulating exhibition is a necessary way of rounding out their programs and making their museums living institutions.

As part of the Centennial, the Museum wanted to make more of its resources available to other museums here and abroad. A dichotomy immediately became apparent. Although we wished to lend our works of art, we were faced with the difficulty of transporting them safely and efficiently. How could we find better ways of packing, handling, and transporting art, especially for circulating exhibitions? We were concerned not only with improving the methods of shipping a single masterpiece, but also with the recognizably different problems involving many objects making a number of stops. Because we felt it was the responsibility of large institutions like the Metropolitan to lend to small ones, we were determined to make it easier and safer.

As we suspected that this was not a problem exclusive to the Metropolitan, we called three major institutions that have established programs for circulating exhibitions—the Smithsonian Institution, The Museum of Modern Art, and the American Federation of Arts. Our instincts were correct—the problems we had experienced were shared by all three, and in October 1967 a symposium was held here to investigate better ways of packing and handling works of art for traveling exhibitions. At this meeting, we were fortunate in having representatives of the insurance, transportation, and packaging industries, as well as representatives of other cultural institutions. We all hoped that by exploring our mutual requirements and sharing our knowledge and experience, we might be able to find a solution.

The meeting convinced us that there were indeed ways of solving these problems. Those representing industry made it clear that packaging techniques employed for commercial use could be translated for art needs, and that these same procedures could be adapted to suit containerization methods already widely used by the transportation industry. Our insurance advisors were keen on such suggestions as containerization as a means of lessening the incidence of damage, ultimately reducing our insurance rates.

At this point the Metropolitan formally initiated a project to find improved methods for packaging and handling works of art for travel, and the trustees approved funds for research and study. Additional financial and technical support was contributed by individuals and corporations.

The project director's task during the first three months of the study was to research five basic areas: specific problems in the shipment of art objects; current packaging methods and materials being used, including those for transporting delicate instruments; new materials or methods that might be developed; problems in cargo handling of water, land, and air carriers; and the insurance industry's opinions and needs concerning the underwriting of works of art during travel.

During the next six months, many materials were presented and tested. These included heavy-duty corrugated cardboard to replace wooden cases, urethane loose-fill packing materials, a foaming-in-place technique for securing objects in packing containers, and foam sheets of polyethylene, polyurethane, and polystyrene for insulation. Our considerations for all new materials included tests for temperature and humidity control, and for vibra-

The Art Pak as it is used for paintings: the polyurethane corner cushions will be held in place by elastic straps attached to the pegboard backing. Other inside fittings are being developed so that the fiberglass shell can accommodate three-dimensional objects or be used for self-contained exhibitions.
Although we learned a great deal as to which materials might be useful and which we must avoid, we still had to do more.

In the fall of 1969 the Poly-Con Division of the Whitehead & Kales Company in Detroit, which had been working with industrial containerization for some time, expressed an interest in helping us with the project. The Museum established the standards necessary for an art container and Poly-Con then began working on designs to meet these requirements.

The result of this collaboration was the Poly-Con Art Pak—a fiberglass container with an adjustable tray system inside to which the works of art are attached. After exhaustive laboratory observation, we felt that the container was ready to be tested with a traveling show. The Metropolitan's exhibition Prints by Nine New York Painters had left the Museum in traditional wooden crates in February 1970; in August, before the show left Richmond, Virginia, the prints were transferred to the new Art Paks. From Richmond it went to Allentown, Pennsylvania, and then to Jerusalem. At the end of November it left Israel to continue its tour of cities in the United States.

As we use the container we continually find improvements and refinements, and this program may ultimately revolutionize the means of transporting works of art. Most important, we hope that these improved methods of packaging will be used to fulfill the increasingly important educational functions of museums. If exhibitions can more easily be brought into communities, the vast resources of museums can further the enjoyment and education of a greater number of people. This form of decentralization—making museums more accessible—will help to solve some of the problems that face the museums today.

Collage by Joseph Cornell

Joseph Cornell has spent three decades making his well-loved boxes in which fantasy and realism are joined in a shallow, magical space. He deplores the way our culture throws everyday things away without first trying to transform them into something valuable, precious: he finds that a pile of Life magazines can be a gold mine if one chooses elements from its pages and arranges them into works of art.

Cornell’s love of both the ordinary—the popular life of our time—and the extraordinary—great paintings, sculpture, ballet, opera, and poetry—is gracefully expressed in his boxes. This sensibility is equally evident in his collages, some forty of which will go on view in the Museum in December. While small groups of these collages have occasionally been exhibited before, this is the first comprehensive showing. These lovely works, executed in the past five years, continue and deepen many of the investigations into specific themes, such as hotels, constellations, bees, and Renaissance children, that have fascinated the artist for decades.

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