



MUSEUMkids

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



**BEHIND
THE SCENES
AT THE MET**

Winter
1999

What happens

Unlike many offices, The Metropolitan Museum of Art is closed on Mondays. But that doesn't mean it's closed to the people who work here—just to the public. If you pass by the Museum on a Monday, you may wonder what is going on in the building when no visitors are allowed inside. Here's what different staff members had to say about what they do when the building is closed to the public.

Herb M
Chief

Mr. Mosko
worked at t
twenty-seven
the moveme
in and out

**Robert Williams,
Assistant Buildings Manager,
Section D, Cleaning Staff**

Mr. Williams supervises
the cleaning staff. Before he
worked at the Museum, he
was in the Marines.

Monday is the biggest cleaning day for us, because there's nobody in the galleries. We do weekly tasks, such as cleaning the front steps. We use a power sprayer—like you'd find in a car wash—that's portable. It uses water sprayed at high pressure. It takes four people to clean the steps—we can do about half the steps in a day. It takes a long time because there's a lot of stuff like gum and spilled drinks.

It takes us two days to clean the marble floor in the Temple of Dendur in the Egyptian Galleries, using big automatic scrubbers. We have to clean the Astor Court in the Chinese Galleries during the day, because we use rigs—they're about thirty feet high, and require two men and someone to supervise them.

We also get ready for exhibition openings on Mondays by doing a thorough cleaning. We shampoo the carpets and dust and vacuum the baseboards. Sometimes we have worked until 4 AM to get the restaurant carpets cleaned. We have about eighty-one people who work in this area.

One time we had to clean around some fashion models who were doing a shoot outside. Everyone wanted to make sure that area was clean!

*Sculpture being lifted by crane onto the
Roof Garden.*



ns on Mondays

Moskowitz,
of Registrar

Moskowitz, who has
at the Museum for
ten years, oversees
ment of all artwork
t of the building.

In some ways, Mondays are like the other weekdays for us.

However, if we have

an enormous painting or piece of art to move into the Museum we would do it on a Monday. We make the arrangements and work with the Buildings department and the riggers (people who help move large pieces of artwork and do heavy lifting and loading work around the building).

Some pieces are so heavy

or large that they cannot fit into an elevator, and have to be carried up the front steps. One time, we had to open up the part of the American Wing courtyard that faces Central Park and bring a bronze sculpture in through there. With the recent exhibition of sculptures of Ellsworth Kelly (in the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden), we had to use a crane to lift them onto the roof.

Sometimes my day starts as early as 5:30 AM. Shipments can arrive on cargo planes in the middle of the night, and I have to be here when the artwork arrives. Once a piece is unpacked and checked for condition, it becomes the responsibility of one of the Museum's seventeen curatorial departments. We handle between five and ten shipments a day starting at 8:00 AM, and sometimes not ending until late at night. Large special exhibitions are especially demanding, as we also have to make hotel reservations and provide money for daily expenses to couriers accompanying each shipment.

The unpacking is done in the Registrar's storeroom—that's the first stop when artwork from other institutions arrives here, and the last stop for artwork leaving the Museum to go to other places. Every piece of art that leaves here is accompanied by someone from the Museum. Once we sent two paintings to the Pushkin Museum in Russia. Someone flew with them to Helsinki, Finland, and then went on a twenty-hour truck ride to the museum.

I like the challenge of my job, the negotiating, the interaction with different people, and the travel. There's always something new.



Chris Giftos arranging the flowers in the Great Hall.

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When the Museum

Chris Giftos, Manager, Special Events

Mr. Giftos has worked at the Museum for twenty-eight years. He is in charge of coordinating all the special events, such as dinners and parties, as well as arranging the bouquets of flowers in the Great Hall.

People love the idea of fresh flowers. Some people come in just to see the flowers—they don't even go to the rest of the Museum. Lila Acheson Wallace, who gave the gift that pays for the flowers in 1970, wanted to say to visitors, "We're expecting you—welcome." Some people don't realize the flowers are real.

Every Monday at 7 AM, four gardeners come in.

They pour out all the water from the vases in the Great Hall and put in fresh water. Then they wait for the flowers to come in from the 28th Street flower market between 9 and 10 AM. The flowers come from all over the world—Holland, France, Puerto Rico and Hawaii, for example. The gardeners separate the flowers into five bundles—one for each of the urns, and one for the Information Desk. Then I climb up the ladders and arrange them. It takes me four or five hours. I like it because I can be left alone to create what I want to create.

Evening events are often held on Mondays. They can be for 500 to 1000 people. I take off my dungarees and put on my black tie attire for those. I orchestrate the events, which means I'm in charge of everything! We choose the flowers, select the menu, and even select the plates and tablecloths. We have had many famous people here—presidents and first ladies, the Emperor of Japan, even celebrities like Sting and Whitney Houston and Madonna. When presidents attend an event, everyone, even the guests, have to go through metal detectors.

My favorite part of my job is putting on the event—but not pulling it down!

Theresa King-Dickinson, Art Handler/Technician

Theresa King-Dickinson is responsible for changing paintings in the Department of European Paintings; she also oversees all the paperwork related to that position for the department. She has worked here for fourteen years.

Monday is a big day for moving works of art so that photography, conservation, and gallery changes can be done. We do it on Mondays so we don't have to close a gallery or interact with the public, which could endanger a work. Here's how we take down paintings: We hold the frame with our bare hands and we prop up the painting against the wall so it doesn't slide.

When we're ready to take it out of the frame, we put the painting on the floor and lay it face down on either carpet-covered blocks or pads. We use a screwdriver to unscrew the frame. Then we take the painting to the Photography Studio, Conservation, or wherever it's needed. When they're done, we reframe the painting and hang it back up on copper wires.

When we work, we're almost always in a pyramid shape with one person up in a rig (kind of like a big box that's cranked up by a pulley, on wheels), and one person on each side. The person in the rig lifts the wires, and the two other people lift the painting. There are a lot of decisions to be made. We need to figure out how high to hang the paintings, decide what weight

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wire to use, what hardware. There are a lot of logistics.

We also move a lot of things around, and unpack works of art for new exhibitions. I know so many things that are going on. I get to see so many things that most people never see, and I get to meet so many people. One time we met Paul McCartney while we were working, and there were paintings and tools everywhere. We thought we'd miss him because we were in the middle of a big project. Luckily, we were working in one of the galleries, and the person who was giving him the tour introduced him to us. He was very gracious and said, "So you're the fine people who do this!" It was nice because most people never think of who does this.



Cleaning the windows outside the Museum.

**Janice Barnard,
Chairman,
Volunteer Organization**

Mrs. Barnard oversees the Volunteer Organization, which means making sure that everything runs smoothly. She gave high school tours for ten years before becoming Chairman.

The Museum has nine hundred volunteers who work in all departments, from Curatorial to Education. Out

of those, about three hundred and sixty people give tours, to both children and adults. My job is to see that the program runs smoothly. The Volunteer Organization is thirty years old, and the structure is set. I deal with issues that need to be resolved, like changing the name of a tour or discussing a new tour.

On Mondays there is volunteer training. There's training for new volunteers, and ongoing training for everyone. That means learning about objects in the collection (so they can be discussed during tours). The people doing the training are either curators (people who take care of the objects) or educators. There may be assignments or research papers or presentations for the volunteers, but no one is told what objects to use. Before you "go to the floor" and lead tours, you may have training for a year.

The training is done in the auditorium, where we listen to lectures, and in the galleries, where we observe and discuss the works of art.

All the preparation is worth it, because doing the tours is great. If we find one child who wants to come back, we have done our job for that day.



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