

Architectural plans at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts or the Preservation of Rolled Works

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To preserve a collection of large-sized graphic works, there is sometimes no other solution than to store them rolled up on shelves. The École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts of Paris has some 45,000 architectural plans rolled up in this way. The vast majority of them are works consisting of several elements (plan, section, elevation), presented by young architects for the major architectural competitions (Prix de Rome, Prix de Construction, etc.). The width of the scrolls varies from 1m to 2.5m, and the diameter from 8 to 18cm. In the course of a recent inventory and reconditioning, we observed the first 600 Prix de Rome, dating from 1720 to 1968. They provide an interesting testimony as regards the evolution of papers chosen from the 18th to the 20th centuries for these large-scale productions.

The storage, preservation and handling of large-size rolled-up works result in specific types of deterioration, of which we compiled a list. As work went on, we noticed that certain plans had been mounted on canvas at different times. These historic mountings, sometimes dated, show us the evolution of this technique and of the materials used. Today we can compare their ageing over time and their effectiveness in the preservation of plans. We studied each canvas, determining its thickness and density, and identifying the nature of the fibres. The composition of each lining paste was analysed, and the thickness of the layer evaluated. We also tried to reproduce its method of implementation (sewing systems, edges folded over, tension after mounting). Finally, we picked out the typologies of deteriorations associated with each mounting technique.

The last part of our work consisted of looking for packaging adapted to the dimensions of the scrolls as well as to the furniture in which they are stored. We compared all types of specific boxes proposed by suppliers from the points of view of price, quality of materials, weight and ergonomics. The difficulties lay in the heterogeneity of lengths of the rolled-up plans and the necessity of allowing the institutional agents to transport plans protected in boxes during

requests for consultation in the reading room, outside the storerooms.

This systematic study on this large collection of oversized works enabled us to first apprehend a system of preservation that is little studied, the scroll, than observe the evolution of paper techniques and historical mounting methods. Finally, we had to look for and evaluate a mode of packaging adapted to these objects, unusual owing to their number, size and system of preservation.

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