

Ishinomaki Culture Center Art Division Rescue Operations

Murakami Hiroya

Planning Officer, Administrative Office, JCAM/Deputy Director and Chief Curator, NMWA (former Chief Curator)

Abstract

The Ishinomaki Culture Center (referred to hereafter as the Center) is a comprehensive cultural facility housing materials across a broad spectrum of disciplines, from art to history, ethnography and archaeology. The first floor of the Center was damaged by the tsunami, and it was the first facility to be the subject of rescue operations by the Committee for Salvaging Cultural Properties and Other Materials Affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Related Disasters (referred to hereafter as the Rescue Committee). As a constituent member of the Rescue Committee, the Japanese Council of Art Museums (referred to hereafter as JCAM) participated in the rescue operations in cooperation with the Ishinomaki Board of Education (the manager of the Center), the two offices that administered the rescue operations, namely the Agency for Cultural Affairs Fine Arts Division and the Rescue Committee's administrative office (located in the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo), and such local participants as members of the Miyagi Board of Education and the Miyagi Museum of Art.

1. The rescue of the Center's art department began in the last week of April with the removal of the artworks stored in the tsunami-inundated storage areas on the Museum's first floor. The works in the 2nd floor permanent collection galleries and storage areas, along with the sculpture remaining from the 1st floor, were removed from the building in November and December, 2011, for a total of 231 artworks and materials consisting of approximately 800 items. Currently those items are being temporarily stored and undergoing conservation work in several facilities, namely, the Institute for Conservation of Cultural property of Tohoku University of Art and Design (Yamagata city); the Conservation Course Oil Painting Laboratory of Tokyo University of the Arts; Miyagi Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, Hayama; and the National Museum of Western Art. The following is a list of the main activities that have occurred in the two years following the beginning of the rescue project.

2011

April 7: The JCAM administrative office contacted the Center's temporary office by phone and received their rescue request.

April 20–22, 26: Rubble was removed from the Center's 1st floor carry-in entrance and storage area antechamber, and some of the artworks were removed from the art storage areas. This operation was conducted by the Ishinomaki Board of Education, Miyagi Board of Education, Miyagi Museum of Art, Tohoku History Museum, Sendai History Museum, Agency for Cultural Affairs and National Institutes for Cultural Heritage. JCAM's participation began on April 26th.

April 27–29: 212 artworks from the 1st floor art storage area were recorded, wrapped and transferred to the Miyagi Museum of Art, where they were stored in the external storage area. The organizations involved in the pre-April 26 process coordinated with the JCAM team.

April 30 – May 28: The works at the Miyagi Museum of Art were given emergency treatment and rewrapped. This operation was carried out with the cooperation of the Tohoku University of Art and Design staff, private sector conservators and the Tohoku University Art History Department.

June 6 –7: Seven Nihonga paintings and 43 sculptures whose emergency treatment had been completed were transferred to the Tohoku University of Art and Design.

June 17: The sculpture-related materials discovered in the rescue of the Center's Ethnography department were taken to the Miyagi Museum of Art. This meant that a total of 214 artworks were under the museum's care.

June 28 – 30: 22 sculptures whose emergency treatment was completed were transferred to Tohoku University of Art and Design, while 89 paintings, drawings and related materials were taken to the NMWA. The Miyagi Museum of Art took in an additional 53 sculptures.

October 11: NMWA transferred 32 paintings to the Conservation Course Oil Painting Laboratory of Tokyo University of the Arts for restoration.

November 16–18: Sixteen sculptures in the galleries and storage areas on the Center's 2nd floor were transferred to Tohoku University of Art and Design via the Miyagi Museum of Art. This brought the number of artworks in care from Ishinomaki to 230 items.

December 1: One disaster-affected bronze sculpture from the Center's first floor was transferred to Sakurai Art Bronze Casting (Tokyo). This brought the number of artworks from Ishinomaki under care to 231 items.

2012

March 16: Thirteen paintings were transferred from NMWA to Museum of Modern Art, Hayama, for restoration.

September 25: Their conservation work completed, 50 sculptures were transferred from Tohoku University of Art and Design to Miyagi Museum of Art.

September 29, 2012 – April 14, 2013: Miyagi Museum of Art held a small exhibition titled *Takahashi Eikichi*. This exhibition displayed 20 sculptures that had either been restored or were being stabilized at the museum.

October 12: Sakurai Art Bronze Casting completed the bronze sculpture's restoration and the sculpture transferred to the Miyagi Museum of Art.

November 6: Fifteen of the sculptures stored at Miyagi Museum of Art were transferred to Tohoku University of Art and Design for restoration, while six works at TUAD whose restoration was completed were transferred to the Miyagi Museum of Art.

2013

January 26 – March 24: The Museum of Modern Art, Hayama, opened an exhibition titled *Works from the Ishinomaki Culture Center: A Report on Conservation Treatment of Disaster-affected Works from the Great East Japan Earthquake*. The exhibition included 12 paintings whose restoration was completed and one painting that was mid restoration. (Description of work after this date is omitted).

2. From Information Gathering to Rescue Team Dispatch

JCAM established a Communications Head Office on March 11, 2011 and contacted member museums in the disaster zone by email and telephone to confirm the effects of the disaster on their facilities and staff. Breakdown in telephone and internet communications in the area meant that contact could not be made with the Ishinomaki Culture Center, and we were not able to get an overview of the damage until we received information from the Agency for Cultural Affairs Fine Arts Division in late March.

On April 7th, the Ishinomaki Culture Center's temporary office contact information was listed on the Ishinomaki city website, and a phone call from JCAM that day to the Ishinomaki Board of Education member Sasaki Atsushi gave us a detailed understanding of the situation and confirmed that the facility needed rescue operations. And yet, clearly the amount of damage involved meant that the operations could not be conducted solely by JCAM. That same day we contacted Asaka Hiroshi of the Agency for Cultural Affairs' cultural properties department, who had visited Ishinomaki. He expressed the opinion, "The Center's rescue will require assembling a team of specialists in different disciplines from various organizations." As a result, over the next two weeks we shared information with the Countermeasures Headquarters formed by JCAM member volunteers, and began to prepare for JCAM's participation in the rescue as the Rescue Committee began operations.

On April 10th, after the major meeting organized by the Art Museum Management System Study Group, the Response Main Office instituted for disaster response cooperation held its first meeting and discussed the Ishinomaki rescue. Because the Countermeasures Headquarters members were scattered around the Kanto, Tokai and Kinki regions, the ongoing exchange of information was carried out mainly via email. Mr. Asaka of the Agency for Cultural Affairs was also in contact with Okada Ken (NRICPT), deputy director of the Rescue Committee's administrative office formed on April 15th, and Arikawa Ikuo of the Miyagi Museum of Art and others as they planned the coordination of the Rescue Committee and local rescue participants.

However, one unresolved issue was the delay in appealing for core participants for dispatch to the disaster zones. While the JCAM administrative office sent participation requests to all member museums on April 19th, the next day we received information from Asaka that they wanted to start artwork removal at Ishinomaki on April 27th. As a result we immediately appealed to Countermeasures Headquarters members and interested curators to find people to send to Ishinomaki. Fortunately this rapid appeal was able to gather a six member dispatch team in a day or two. We also received the heartwarming support of our supporting member, Katolec Corp., which agreed to provide three workers and a 2-ton truck setting out from Tokyo. The author set out on the 24th for Sendai, while the team members who were to begin work on the 27th were in mutual contact, as they loaded the massive amount of equipment and packing materials into the 2-ton truck and their own cars, and began other preparations. The day before my departure, the 23rd, I received a copy of the Center's artwork catalogue from Mikami Mitsurô of the Miyagi Museum of Art, which proved to be very helpful in preparing materials for the rescue and identifying works on site.

3. Rescue of Works in Ishinomaki

The Rescue Committee's operation at the Center began with rubble removal on April 20th through 22nd. The large amount of rubble that had accumulated around the storage areas on the first floor, and the massive amount of paper pulp that had flowed into the area from the nearby papermaking plant meant that difficult preparatory work had to be carried out before art works could be extracted from the building. This operation was performed by participants from the Agency for Cultural Affairs and National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, along with local participants, including those from prefectural and city Boards of Education and the Miyagi Museum of Art. On April 25th, the author attended the meeting held at the Sendai City Museum that was acting as the disaster head office, and began participating in rescue operations at Ishinomaki on the 26th. The doors of the 1st floor art storage areas were destroyed and the traces of seawater inundation extended to near the ceiling. The rubble that had flowed into the storage area had been removed the previous week, but a thick accumulation of mud and melted paper pulp

remained on the floors, and the floorboard warping caused by the inundation and the wet debris meant that we were unable to move the painting storage racks (fig. 1) . After we used shovels to dig out the mud, approximately ten participants were needed to pull out a single rack, and the artworks could then be extracted.

From April 27th through 29th, the JCAM team was integrated into the ongoing work group, and a total of approximately 20 team members removed the artworks from the site (fig. 2). The object of the operations were the sculptures and related materials by Takahashi Eikichi, an early Shōwa-era wood sculptor born in Ishinomaki, modern and contemporary wooden sculptures, and paintings and drawings by local artists. A total of

212 items were rescued. The artworks were carried out through the loading dock entrance, as much adhering mud and pulp removed as possible, artwork data recorded, and then they were wrapped. Each object's serial number and artist name and object title (as clearly as could be determined) were written on an A4-sized white board. That white board was then photographed with the art work (fig. 3). The Ishinomaki Board of Education member Kogure Ryō suggested the use of the whiteboard. While this method is commonly used on archaeological sites, it was an eye-opening method for the author, who had envisioned writing the data on a small label. Given that a rescued objects list could not be made until sometime after returning from the rescue operations, prints of these photographs were used to create the artwork logbook for use during the emergency treatment operations in Sendai that followed the rescue.



Fig.1
Debris Removal in 1F Art Storage Areas
(April 26, 2011, photo: author)



Fig.2
Recording and Wrapping Art Works in Front of the Museum
(April 27, 2011, photo: Teraguchi Junji)



Fig.3
Example of a Record Photograph of a Rescued Object
(April 29, 2011, photo: author)

Artwork handling and processing at the rescue site was kept to a minimum given time limitations. However, the late Tanaka Chiaki (Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Art) decided that immediate attention would be paid to the approximately 10 oil paintings that conservators thought might lose pigment from the soaking and drying process they had endured in the disaster. They were removed from their frames at the rescue site, and a thinned Yamato glue and tissue paper layer was attached to each work to stabilize their front surfaces (fig. 4). They were given cardboard front and back backings and wrapped tightly in polyethylene film to prevent warping of the unframed drawings and materials as they dried. However, such wrapping could give rise to mold



Fig.4
Surface Covering for Oil Paintings Applied Onsite
(April 29, 2011, photo: Teraguchi Junji)

if left intact for a long period. Thus those works which could be in danger of such mold development had the word “urgent” marked on the outside of their wrapping, indicating that their handling took priority when they reached the emergency treatment site.

Bubble wrap was the primary wrapping material used when they were removed from the disaster site, given that all of the works were water-soaked. We had also prepared thin paper and brown wrapping paper, but these materials were used later in the process, for re-wrapping after emergency treatment in Sendai. Small items were wrapped in bubble wrap and then placed in cardboard boxes, but plastic trays and boxes were used instead of cardboard for those drawing bundles and photograph albums that were to be transported in their still wet condition. To the greatest degree possible we used plastic trays and boxes available onsite in Ishinomaki. While normal art museum practice does not include transport of artworks in such plastic boxes, considerable numbers of these plastic crates had to be used at various sites during the Great East Japan Earthquake-related rescue operations.

Over the course of April 28th and 29th, two batches of artworks and materials were dealt with in this process of recording, partial emergency treatment, and wrapping. They were then transported in the 2-ton Katolec truck and the 4-ton Yamato Logistics truck to the external storage area at Miyagi Museum of Art.

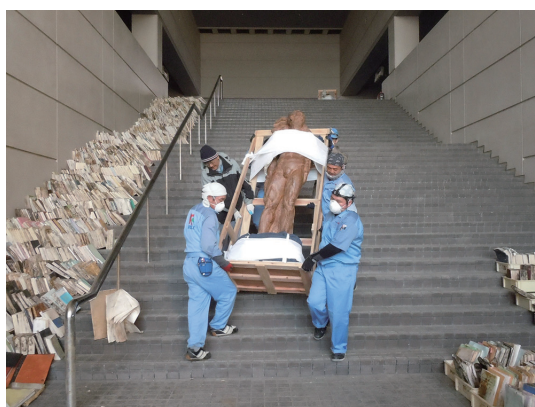


Fig.5
Removing Sculpture from 2F Galleries
(November 16, 2011, photo: author)

The artworks in the Center’s 2nd floor galleries and storage areas escaped damage from the earthquake and tsunami and thus were not part of the rescue operation conducted in April. However, the worsening of the environmental conditions in those spaces due to lack of climate control systems meant that the 16 sculptures that remained on the 2nd floor were taken out and transferred to the Tohoku University of Art and Design (fig. 5) from November 16th through 18th. The bronze statue in the lobby that had been knocked over by the tsunami was particularly heavy, so was not included in the April work. Rather, on December 1st it was removed from the building and transferred to Sakurai Art Bronze Casting in Tokyo under the direction of Mikami of the Miyagi

Museum of Art. After restoration in Tokyo it was returned to Miyagi Museum of Art in October 2012. The author considers that given that the condition of this sculpture was understood at the time of the rescue, further thought must be paid regarding the decision to postpone its handling.

4. Emergency Treatment at the Miyagi Prefectural Museum of Art

As noted on pages 34-39 of *The Compilation of Reports of JCAM’s Rescue Operations*, the greatest difficulty that arose in this cultural properties rescue process was where to store and treat the great amount of cultural properties damaged by the tsunami. It was also hard to find a transfer location for the materials rescued from Ishinomaki. Mr. Arikawa of the Miyagi Museum of Art’s offer to receive the works was accepted at the onsite main office meeting held on April 25th. The museum kindly prepared all of the different types of spaces needed for the works removed from Ishinomaki, including the external storage area for their immediate receipt, the garage space on the museum campus that could be used for emergency treatment, and the climate controlled gallery preparation room for the drying and storage of works after treatment was completed. The rescued works would take about two months to reach a stabilized condition after the emergency treatment and natural drying process, and it is thanks to the full cooperation of the Miyagi Museum of Art that this process was a success.

Given that the destination of the rescued works was not known until immediately before the rescue operations began, it was first determined that their emergency treatment after transfer would be carried out after the Golden Week holidays. However, a meeting of rescue-related personnel leaders was held at the Miyagi Museum of Art on the evening of April 28th. During that meeting, Tanaka Chiaki strongly urged that rather than waiting

for the post-holiday period, emergency treatment should begin immediately after the works were transferred to Sendai. The meeting concurred with this advice and Mr. Tanaka and Oshima Tetsuya (Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art) of the Ishimaki team remained in Sendai. The transfer of works from Ishinomaki to Miyagi Museum of Art was completed on the 29th, and on the 30th, genre-specific teams began emergency treatment, with Mr. Tanaka heading the painting team, Fujiwara Tôru (Tohoku University of Art and Design) heading the sculpture team, and Yokota Naoko (Hyôgo Prefectural Museum of Art) heading the drawing team. The author gave the prints of the object photos taken in Ishinomaki to Mr. Tanaka and left Sendai. I then made a list of the rescued objects, and based on object-related information received by fax at the office, began to arrange for staff members to be dispatched to the emergency treatment site.

The emergency treatment at the Miyagi Museum of Art took approximately one month without breaks, from April 30th to May 28th. The Tohoku University of Art and Design sent more than ten conservation specialists, including faculty members, alumnae and students. The holiday period meant that not enough staff was available. Thankfully, an introduction from Miyagi Prefectural Board of Education member Kodani Ryûsuke meant that a further dozen or so professors and students from the Tohoku University art history department volunteered their time. Given that there are so few conservators working in art museums, the participation of private sector conservators was also an essential element of the teamwork. In spite of the demands of their own busy work schedules, the participating conservators were each able to stay in Sendai for about five nights. Itô Yumi (Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama) of the rescue operations' Countermeasures Headquarters organized the interchange of conservators to ensure continuity of process. The administrative office organized the rotation of curators and other staff members, and one staff member from the National Art Museum remained on site for the entire process. A total of 39 individuals from 19 institutions participated in the rescue of works from Ishinomaki through to the emergency treatment process.

Regarding the emergency treatment process conducted, each of the different genre specialists have provided their reports, which follow this report. However, while it goes without saying that the presence of conservation specialists in the rescued works storage location was essential, it must be emphasized that other types of work were also needed on site. In particular, fluctuating temperatures and insects could be expected to influence the works in the external storage area where they were stored prior to treatment. Thankfully, conservation science specialist Nagaya Natsuko (Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art) and her team were able to take various temporary measures to improve the storage environment. In addition, there was a huge amount of normal curatorial work involved, from the photographing of works during the treatment process, record management, transfer of works post-treatment, wrapping and location management and materials provision. The dispatched staff members divided these tasks amongst themselves, and the overall team effort at the Miyagi Museum of Art proceeded smoothly. Needless to say, topics for future consideration and revision include how delayed record photography organization later complicated organizational work. And yet, the overall month-long work period can be seen to have followed a logical flow, with artwork treatment and record accumulation focused in the early stages, environmental improvement and later management planning in the middle stage, and a shift to record organization and preparation for dismantling operations in the late stage.

5. Second Transfer, Restoration and Long-Term Management

When JCAM emergency treatment began at the Miyagi Museum of Art on April 30th, plans had not yet been finalized for how the works would be managed after treatment completion. Originally the Rescue Committee's role was seen as extending from the emergency evacuation through stabilization phases. Once the artworks removed from disaster-affected facilities were stabilized from further worsening through the emergency treatment process, the basic concept was that the entrusted works would then be returned to their owners. However, in the case of the Center, the Ishinomaki owners of the works were not in a position to receive those artworks post-process. Further, as implied by the term emergency treatment, the wounded artworks were initially disinfected and wrapped, but the majority of

the affected artworks required further full restoration and conservation work. Questions remained about who would bear the labor and costs involved in such a process. At the same time, the Miyagi Museum of Art that provided the emergency treatment site was scheduling its full facilities reopening for July, and this meant that the air-conditioned interior space was only available for the storage of the Ishinomaki materials until the end of June. This meant decisions were needed regarding the management of the works from July onwards.

Based on this situation, a meeting was held on May 20th at the onsite main office located at the Sendai Municipal Museum. The meeting consisted of the Ishinomaki City Board of Education, the Miyagi Prefecture Board of Education, the Rescue Committee, and the JCAM administrative office. At that time JCAM was asked to continue to be responsible for all of the rescued works after the completion of emergency treatment. And in addition, that JCAM organize the remaining restoration work required on the objects through the cooperation of its member museums and related organizations, and that JCAM should also manage the storage of the works until such time as Ishinomaki city was able to accept their return. The meeting participants, including Ishinomaki city, agreed to this proposal.

In line with this plan, the works that had been stabilized by the emergency treatment and drying process at Miyagi Museum of Art were then divided up and transferred to institutions where they could be restored. The first dispatch was to the Institute for Conservation of Cultural property at the Tohoku University of Art and Design, who had provided major assistance from the emergency treatment stage onward. On June 7th, seven Nihonga paintings and 43 sculptures were sent to TUAD, followed by a transfer of 22 sculptures on June 29th. Then on June 30th a total of 89 paintings, drawings and materials were sent to the NMWA. A total of 53 sculptures remained in external storage at the Miyagi Museum of Art. On October 11th, 32 paintings were sent to the Conservation Course Oil Painting Laboratory at Tokyo University of the Arts. On March 16, 2012, 13 paintings were transferred to the Museum of Modern Art, Hayama. Works were later transferred as needed for their ongoing storage. The following list indicates the cooperating storage sites as of the end of fiscal 2012.

Tohoku University of Art and Design -- 47 items (Nihonga and sculpture)
Miyagi Prefectural Museum of Art -- 95 items (sculpture)
Tokyo University of the Arts -- 32 items (paintings)
Museum of Modern Art, Hayama -- 13 items (paintings)
National Museum of Western Art -- 44 items (paintings, drawings and materials)

From the summer of 2011 onwards, each of the storage institutions observed the status of each work, and where necessary carried out fumigation, and then gradually proceeded with full restoration process as necessary. The costs involved in the transfer and treatment of these works were paid for by the funds collected through the JCAM Rescue/Assistance Appeal. The majority of the rescued works were sculptures, and once conservation work was completed at TUAD, the works were transferred to storage facilities at Miyagi Museum of Art. Those which had been placed in external storage at Miyagi Museum of Art were in turn transferred to TUAD for conservation work. This ongoing circulation of works through the process continued and the plan was that in the end all of the sculptures would have been restored at TUAD and then stored in the Miyagi Museum of Art storage areas. Information on the cultural properties involved in the rescue operations in Miyagi prefecture was summarized at a conference organized by the Miyagi Prefecture Damage Cultural Properties, etc., Preservation Council organized by the Miyagi Board of Education, Miyagi Museum of Art and other organizations within the prefecture. Information on the location and treatment history of the Ishinomaki Culture Center artworks under the care of JCAM was also shared at this same conference.

In 2013, the Ishinomaki Culture Center building was demolished. The materials that had been stored up until that time on the 2nd floor of the Center and at various facilities outside of the city were gathered at a temporary storage facility arranged in 2013 through the renovation of an abandoned school building. However, serious consideration must be made about the storage of the artworks. As well, the completion of all necessary conservation work on the artworks will require a considerable amount of time. We will maintain our agreement with Ishinomaki city until the Ishinomaki Culture Center is rebuilt all while working on the necessary plans for the best possible preservation and management of the rescued artworks.