

Aesthetics and acceptability of indoor dust

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Dust deposits have a significant aesthetic impact on interiors, and lead to the loss of the evidential value of objects and surfaces. Increasing emphasis on open display has led to the greater monitoring of dust deposition on objects and surface. However, the means of assessing the impact on visitor perception are less developed. We have used questionnaires to collect over five hundred responses from seven properties (Chastleton House, Calke Abbey, Osterley Park, Eltham Palace, Brodsworth House, Hampton Court Palace, Kensington Palace) run by three different institutions (National Trust, English Heritage, Historic Royal Palaces) as a way of exploring public responses to dust deposition on objects within specific display contexts. Visitors were asked to characterise rooms according to darkness, historicity, dustiness, cleanliness, cosiness, beauty, and level of furnishing. These responses were related to visitors' perceptions of objects and their desire for further cleaning. Light coloured, shiny objects such as ceramics and giltwood were perceived to be clean despite evident dust deposits, whilst dark or textured objects such as textiles or unpolished wood were judged to be dirty, even though the level of soiling was light. This has revealed that the nature of the displayed material has a dominant influence on whether the public perceive it to be dusty or not, rather than the level of dust deposits. When the public were asked to decide which objects within a set required further cleaning, they felt most did not. However, for this remaining group, visitors still desire more cleaning. Conservators did not always agree with this ranking, thus leading to a difference between conservation needs and public satisfaction point of view. This paper will suggest that public opinion should not necessarily be the dominant influence on the frequency of cleaning.

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