



# NEWSGRAM

News in brief from the Conservation Center

Issue 21, January 2013

INSTITUTE of FINE ARTS  
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

## Conservation in the Wake of Natural Disaster

*Conservation Center Students Volunteer in Hurricane Sandy Relief Efforts*

The faculty and students of the Conservation Center are committed to helping in the recovery from Hurricane Sandy. Artists' studios, archives, art storage facilities, galleries and conservation firms in low-lying areas of Chelsea, Brooklyn and Long Island City have been adversely affected by the surge of contaminated brackish water from the storm, and we have been mobilizing to assist in the stabilization and recovery of works of art and archives.

Many of our students have stepped up and offered their time and services in disaster recovery efforts all across the city. In between classes and during their free time our students have offered invaluable support and knowledge to those so deeply affected by the storm. Here are a few of their projects, drawn from our Hurricane Sandy Response [web page](#):

Late in the afternoon on Monday, November 5, one week after the devastating landfall of Hurricane Sandy, a call for emergency response reached NYU. Historian John Ridge, President of the New York Irish History Roundtable, suffered major flooding in his Gerritsen Beach residence located in Hurricane Evacuation Zone B. Mr. Ridge's basement had taken on brackish water up to the ceiling. The flooding damaged several boxes of archival material related to Irish American history including books, paper documents, works of art on paper, panoramic photographs, sheet music and medallions.

Mr. Ridge had long planned to give his collection to the [Archives of Irish America](#) at NYU's Tamiment Library. However, the extent of the damage to his collection caused him to reach out to Marion Casey, professor at NYU's Gluckman Ireland House, earlier than he'd originally planned. Professor Casey carried out the on-site salvage and packing and contacted staff from NYU's [Barbara Goldsmith Preservation and Conservation Department](#) at Bobst Library to complete the disaster recovery at the University's conservation laboratory.

Conservator Laura McCann led a team of conservation staff, including Lou Di Gennaro, Assistant Conservator for Special Collections, and Conservation Center graduate students Maggie Wessling and Amy Hughes, in the emergency response. The team reacted quickly and

### DISASTER RECOVERY RESOURCES

[The American Institute for Conservation \(AIC\)-Collections Emergency Response Team \(CERT\)](#)

AIC-CERT responds to the needs of cultural institutions during emergencies and disasters through coordinated efforts with first responders, state agencies, vendors and the public. Volunteers can provide advice and referrals by phone at the number above. Requests for onsite assistance will be forwarded by the volunteer to the AIC-CERT Coordinator and Project Director for response. Less urgent questions can also be answered by emailing [info@conservation-us.org](mailto:info@conservation-us.org).

[AudioVisual Preservation Solutions](#) is a consulting firm that provides resources needed by content caretakers to preserve, access, and distribute their audiovisual assets. We provide effective individualized solutions for collections of moving image and sound regardless of size, variety of formats, or budget range. Our broad knowledge base and extensive experience will help you to achieve success in your preservation and access efforts.

[Studio Protector](#) is the first product of the Coalition for Artists' Preparedness and Emergency Response, a new national task force that was formed in 2006. Dedicated to ensuring a national safety net for artists, and the organizations that serve them, before, during and after disasters, the Coalition is a consortium of local, state, regional and national arts agencies, artist service organizations and foundations. The Craft Emergency Relief Fund and Artists' Emergency Resources ([CERF+](#)) is the lead sponsor of the Coalition, and also, the creator of the Studio Protector.

[Museum of Modern Art](#) resources for recovering works of art damaged in Hurricane Sandy.

Heritage Preservation's [Alliance for Response, NYC](#) is a local organization focused on connecting emergency responders with representatives of the cultural heritage community. Our goal is to strengthen mitigation and response capabilities through training exercises, development of local planning efforts and improved dialogue and partnerships. The organization is composed of staff from cultural institutions (security, facilities, health/safety, collections/conservation, and administration), first responders (NYPD, FDNY, OEM, FEMA) and related industries (insurance/risk management, recovery companies).

air-dried photographic materials, oversized works of art on paper and archival documents to mitigate any mold growth. Saturated, bound volumes were prepared for freezing and then placed in the department's freezer for later treatment. The emergency response stabilized the objects to ensure that Mr. Ridge's collection will be available to researchers and historians in the future.

Over the next several weeks, three Conservation Center students, Amy Hughes, Quinn Ferris and Maggie Wessling, will help prepare the water-damaged items for accession into the Archives of Irish America. Treatments will include surface cleaning to remove heavy accumulations of sandy dirt, washing, mending tears, humidification and flattening.

—Amy Hughes

*Amy is a third-year paper conservation student*

**The Better Image®** is a private photograph conservation laboratory based in Milford, NJ, with a second location on 34<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan. Co-founder Peter Mustardo has been coordinating and overseeing efforts to recover and stabilize photographs damaged recently in the flooding from Hurricane Sandy. Assistant photograph conservator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Katie Sanderson '11, and current graduate student in photograph conservation, Maggie Wessling, assisted Peter Mustardo in salvaging a collection of family photographs that were retrieved from a damaged home on the New Jersey coast. The collection arrived at the studio in Milford in individual plastic sleeves within a ring-binder and still wet with salt water from the flooding. Salvage consisted of cutting away the plastic sleeves, rinsing the photographs in successive baths of clean, cold water and finally placing the photographs on blotters to absorb the excess water and allow them to air dry. The gelatin emulsion is extremely sensitive during this process and it is important that nothing dries in contact with the surface. Once dried, the photographs were loosely stacked, counted and packed in boxes to return to the owner. Further treatment may follow to flatten the photographs, depending on the owner's desires.

—Margaret Wessling

*Maggie is a third-year photo conservation student*

**Eyebeam**, a not-for-profit art and technology center located in Chelsea, was hit particularly hard by the surge from Hurricane Sandy. In addition to damage to the facility and equipment, parts of their media collection, including magnetic tape and optical media, were submerged in dirty, brackish water. On November 6, Conservation Center students Melissa Tan, Desirae Peters, Saira Haqqi, Kari Rayner and Brian Castriota, under the guidance of Judith Praska Visiting Professor Christine Frohnert, responded to a call for volunteers to offer help.

Based on previous emergency assistance, provided by AudioVisual Preservation Solutions and students and faculty from the NYU [Moving Images Archiving and Preservation Program](#), the group documented and cataloged approximately 200 optical media discs and organized the cleaned magnetic tape for drying. Although the precise condition of the media will be unknown until the content is viewed, there is hope that the majority of the optical media could still be playable. Given the special circumstances of the emergency situation, the whole collection looked much more under control by the end of the day.

—Christine Frohnert

*Christine is the Judith Praska Distinguished Visiting Professor*



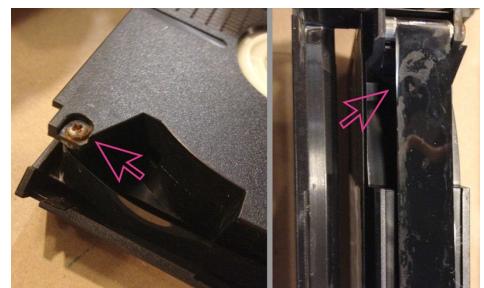
*Kari Rayner (left), Desirae Peters and Melissa Tan at work at Eyebeam in Chelsea, NYC*



*Amy Hughes, Lou Di Gennaro, and Maggie Wessling examine flood-damaged photos from the Archives of Irish America*



*Maggie Wessling lays freshly washed photographs, recovered from a New Jersey coast home, out to air-dry*



*Areas damaged by salty water, including rusted screws and dirty magnetic tape*

Chelsea galleries are getting back on their feet; dumpsters filled with rotting drywall no longer line the streets and while the hum of generators is still noticeable, the neighborhood looks like it is recovering. Gallery owners can now turn their attention to next steps for artworks they pulled from the water a few days ago.

On November 8, Professor Michele Marincola '90 took Conservation Center students Desirae Peters, Margarita Berg and Melissa Tan to Chelsea to help one such gallery, [Lennon Weinberg Gallery](#). Two large acrylic paintings by French artist Frédérique Lucien, *Simple Temps Blanc Diptych II NY* (2009) had been stored rolled in the gallery basement, and one end of each roll had become wet when fresh water backed up into the space. The gallery had hung each part of the diptych on cleats on the wall to dry, but the ends of the long canvas wrapped around cardboard tubes were still wet. The afternoon was spent carefully unrolling each painting completely and laying them on blotting paper to absorb the moisture. Once the paintings are fully dry, the gallery can re-roll the paintings on the new tubes we prepared, so they can then safely be transported to a conservator's studio for treatment.

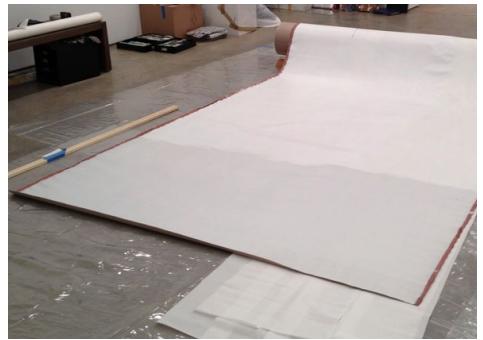
—Michele Marincola

*Michele is Sherman Fairchild  
Chairman and Professor of Conservation*

Greenwich Village landmark [Westbeth](#) has provided affordable Manhattan housing to artists since 1970, and is now home to scores of emerging and well-established painters, photographers, sculptors, musicians, choreographers and more. The immense basement storage housed innumerable artworks from its residents, which were submerged in water after the space was flooded during Hurricane Sandy. The inability to access the basement for several days all but quashed hopes of recovering many works, but once access was granted the efforts of several residents and volunteers resulted in a heartening number of salvaged pieces. Resident Lawrence Salemme and conservator Carolyn Tomkiewicz worked tirelessly with the assistance of AIC-CERT members, Chris Stavroudis, and other volunteers to extract and treat water-damaged works. Paintings, photographs and sketchbooks by artists including John Dobbs, Martha Graham, Barbara Rosenthal and Arnold Wechsler were treated with isopropanol to prevent mold outbreaks. Third-year paintings conservation student Caitlin Breare assisted in drying dozens of sketchbooks of John Dobbs as well as confronting problems with the paintings. Lifting and flaking of paint often occurred as the paintings dried, which were addressed by facing the problem areas with tissue. Myriad works have been dried and packed for storage, but are in need of further treatment. Still others, unfortunately, remain in the basement. •

—Caitlin Breare

*Caitlin is a third-year paintings  
conservation student*



*The unstretched painting has been partially rolled onto a new tube, and the damp section rolled out to dry*



*Desirae Peters (left), Melissa Tan and Rita Berg prepare dry blotters for the stabilization treatment*



*Paintings drying in the Westbeth courtyard*



*Caitlin Breare faces a water-damaged painting*

*photo credit: Caitlin Breare, Brian Castriona, Christine Frohnert, KATU VIPIR weather system, Michele Marincola, Ben Moskowitz, Katie Sanderson '11, Carolyn Tomkiewicz*