

NEWSGRAM

News in brief from the Conservation Center

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The Dedalus Foundation Fellowship: A Twenty Year Anniversary

The Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art Symposium, October 24, 2019



From left to right: Jennifer Hickey, Megan Randall, Kate Moomaw, Christine Haynes, Taylor Healy, Lindsey Tyne, and Deborah LaCamera (photo courtesy Hannelore Roemich)

FOR TWENTY YEARS, THE DEDALUS FOUNDATION HAS PROVIDED GRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE CONSERVATION CENTER OF The Institute of Fine Arts, New York University with fellowships to support their education of and training in the conservation of modern and contemporary works. In celebration of the Fellowship's 20th anniversary and the continued relationship between the Foundation and the Institute, a symposium in October 2019, entitled *The Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art*, was organized to highlight the work accomplished by select past fellows. Discussions included the complexity of modern materials, various conservation approaches, and the daily challenges faced by conservators today.

Jack Flam, the President and Chief Executive Officer of The Dedalus Foundation, kicked off the afternoon of talks and panel discussions by introducing the Foundation, founded in 1981 by the artist, Robert Motherwell, to support and advocate for modern works and modernism. Michele Marincola '90, Chair and Sherman Fairchild Distinguished Professor of Conservation, then spoke about the Institute's gratitude for the Foundation's support in the education of past, current, and future graduate students in conservation.

The first session's presentations on individual treatments of modern and contemporary art works was moderated by **Amy Hughes '14**, Paper Conservator at The National Gallery in Washington, DC. She introduced the first speaker, **Christine Haynes '18**, who is the Assistant Objects Conservator at Preservation Arts, a California-based private practice. Christine illuminated the efforts to conserve Po Shu Wang's 2005 *Ghinlon/Transcope* outdoor sculpture, commissioned by the San Francisco Arts Commission for the Octavia Boulevard Streetscape Project. Public artworks, especially those located in busy cities, pose obvious challenges for preservation, such as pedestrian safety when interacting with the art, exposure of materials to a changing and unmonitored environment, looting, and compliance with city health codes and budget constraints. The conservators at Preservation Arts treated issues of corrosion, graffiti, and degradation of the individual components, which include glass, metals, adhesives, and rubbers. The project involved thorough documentation, partial refabrication, and stockpiling spare materials in the case of future conservation. Conservators at Preservation Arts helped to return structural and aesthetic integrity to the object,

despite the unique challenges of its siting at a busy intersection, and provided a risk assessment as well as recommendations for future maintenance so that *Ghinlon/Transcope* can remain an interactive part of the San Francisco landscape.

Next to speak was **Taylor Healy**, currently a third-year student at the Conservation Center specializing in time-based media (TBM). While a graduate intern in The Barbara Goldsmith Preservation and Conservation Department at NYU's Bobst Library, she carried out an extensive research project on one of David Wojnarowicz's rubber-based head molds from his work, *Metamorphosis* (1984). This project involved archival research in the David Wojnarowicz papers at NYU Fales Library and instrumental analysis for material identification. She also devoted time and resources towards preventive conservation, for which she 3D-scanned the head mold and used CNC routing to construct an improved archival housing for the object. Taylor's use of traditional as well as more technologically advanced methods to answer questions about the head mold was very compelling and will allow for future research into an aspect of the artist's practice.

Megan Randall '15, Associate Objects Conservator at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, was the first session's last presenter. She shared the conservation treatment of Larry Bell's 1967 glass and chrome sculpture *Shadow*. In 2018, after a museum visitor backed into the sculpture in MoMA's galleries, causing it to fall to the ground and shattering two of the four glass panes, conservators Megan Randall and Ellen Moody weighed the options of how to treat this object. Looking into the object's file, it was revealed that the object had been treated in 1992 and Larry Bell had provided replacement panes for the damaged sides, along with two extra panes to keep in storage. However, the replacement panes retrieved from storage were cooler in tone and lighter than the original panes. Had the glass changed over time or was this inconsistency a result of the manufacture? X-ray fluorescence was performed to understand the composition of the metal vapor deposited on all extant glass panes, which revealed that the 1992 replacement panes had a different chemical makeup from those made in 1967. After discussions between the conservators and the artist, Larry Bell made replacements for the two broken glass panes using the same 1967 technique, which were then incorporated by the conservators into the piece. In the end, the conservators were able to honor the visual and material properties of the artwork. This project demonstrated the importance of maintaining the visual and material properties of an artwork and highlights a positive collaboration with a still-living artist and the fruitful discussions that can evolve from these relationships.

A panel discussion followed. Challenges that conservators today are facing with the archival storage of treatment files, both analog and digital, in an increasingly paperless world and navigating new technologies in research projects were some of the topics covered. Megan Randall elaborated on Larry Bell's involvement in the treatment of *Shadow* and reinforced the importance of collaboration. Although it was certainly a privilege to be able to consult with the artist and lay out treatment options with him, the final decision for treatment was a combination of input from the artist, conservators, curators, and other stakeholders.

The second session focused on broader methodologies and developments in the field of conservation, and was moderated by **Isabelle Duvernois '03**, a conservator of modern and contemporary paintings at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The first speaker was **Lindsey Tyne '10**, Associate Paper Conservator at The Morgan Library & Museum. Lindsey presented two documentation methodologies involving collaboration with living artists of modern and contemporary works of art on paper. The first method is an artist questionnaire that the conservator sends to the artist to fill out in order to probe information about their materials and techniques. The second method involves informal conversations between conservators, curators, and the artist, which are documented by the Morgan in the form of sound recordings and personal communications, to further understand their practice at large. Lindsey illustrated the broad range of responses that these questionnaires have produced, especially in terms of the level of specificity that artists provide. These two methods of documentation have not only helped conservators and curators in their work, but also the museum's docents, cataloguing efforts, and the inclusion of more detailed descriptions of the works on the gallery text panels and on the museum's online platforms.



Jack Flam visits the Conservation Center in 2016 while Christine Haynes was still a conservation graduate student (photo courtesy NL Roberts)

Second to present was **Kate Moomaw '07**, Associate Conservator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Denver Art Museum (DAM). Although trained as an objects conservator at the Conservation Center, Kate felt that there was a pressing need for someone to address the growing collection of time-based media works in DAM's collection, and she took it upon herself to learn about this growing field of conservation to help support the collection. Her presentation outlined a history of time-based media (TBM) conservation, including mentions of the Moving Image Archiving and Preservation training program at NYU, the Center's recent funded conservation curriculum in TBM, the growth of the American Institute for Conservation (AIC)'s Electronic Media Group (EMG), and DAM's Variable Media Working Group. She mentioned major strides in the field including positions in conservation labs that concentrate on TBM works and grants that DAM has received to continue the efforts that have already been made.

The last presentation was given by **Deborah LaCamera '00**, who is Co-Owner and Senior Conservator at Studio TKM Associates, Inc., a Boston-based private studio specializing in works of art on paper. She was the first recipient of the Dedalus Foundation Fellowship in 1999. Her talk detailed various projects, exhibitions, and treatments that she has been involved in since the start of her graduate career. She bore witness to the growth of analytical techniques throughout her career, the application of which has helped to evolve the field and our understanding of materials and artists' practices. She also maintains a strong passion for working with historic materials and processes, which led her to go on paper-making tours in Korea and Japan.

Following these talks, the three speakers engaged in a panel discussion where they spoke about the growth of technology, the migration of TBM artworks to confront obsolescence of software, interactions with artists from the perspective of a conservator in private practice, and sharing information gathered from artist questionnaires and interviews with other museums and the wider public.

All six speakers were invited to join the overall panel discussion, which was moderated by **Jennifer Hickey '11**, Paintings Conservator at The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and a board member of Voices in Contemporary Art (VoCA). She asked the speakers to discuss their multi-faceted responsibilities as conservators of modern and contemporary art. Megan mentioned the role of project manager as a crucial component of a conservator's job, especially when projects involve collaboration with manufacturers, distributors, and fabricators. Jennifer raised the conservator's role as archivist, and the panelists discussed prioritizing accessibility and re-discoverability of documentation as well as consistency in vocabulary and formats in report-writing. Documentation of performance art was also discussed, which proved that this field is ever-growing and still faces challenges with situations that are not straight-forward. Margaret Holbein Ellis '79, Eugene Thaw Professor of Paper Conservation at the Institute, asked the panelists how they identify themselves professionally in terms of specialty and how they found themselves treating these types of art objects. The panelists mainly identified themselves as conservators of specific media as defined by

their specialties, but with a passion for and a focus on modern and contemporary art. They highlighted the fact that they use the same crucial problem-solving skills regardless of the material. It was clear that they all share an excitement for the constant developments in the field as well as the philosophical and theoretical challenges that modern and contemporary art poses to conservators today.

Amongst the speakers and attendees throughout the night, there was a strong undercurrent of complying with the AIC's Code of Ethics when taking on the role of caretaker of any historic or artistic work, and remembering that we, as conservators, are in a privileged position to speak for the work of art, and that any treatment is singular and requires thoughtful and educated consideration. Ultimately, this was a dynamic and engaging night of presentations and discussions between conservators, historians, and the public, and really brought attention to the amazing work that conservators and students are doing through the support of The Dedalus Foundation and its collaboration with the Conservation Center of the IFA, NYU.

Natasha Kung

Natasha is a second-year graduate student specializing in photograph conservation and was the 2018 recipient of the Dedalus Foundation Fellowship.

20 YEARS OF DEDALUS FOUNDATION FELLOWS

1999	DEBORAH LACAMERA '00
2000	MEGHAN GOLDMANN '02
2001	ISABELLE DUVERNOIS '03
2002	MONICA GRIESBACH '04
2003	COREY D'AUGUSTINE '06
2004	KATE MOOMAW '07
2005	CAMILLE MOORE '07
2006	AIMÉE DUCEY '10
2007	LINDSEY TYNE '10
2008	AIMÉE DUCEY '10
2009	JENNIFER HICKEY '11
2010	KRISTEN WATSON '12
2011	SOPHIE SCULLY '13
2012	SOPHIE SCULLY '13
2013	AMY HUGHES '14
2014	MEGAN RANDALL '15
2015	ANNIKA FINNE '16
2016	CHRISTINE HAYNES '18
2017	LIA KRAMER '19
2018	TAYLOR HEALY
2019	NATASHA KUNG
2020	SARAH MONTONCHAIKUL



From left to right: Michele Marincola, Isabelle Duvernois, Jennifer Hickey, Megan Randall, Jack Flam, Kate Moomaw, Peggy Ellis, Taylor Healy, Christine Haynes, Lyndsey Tyne, Deborah LaCamera, Amy Hughes, Natasha Kung, and Sarah Montonchaikul (photo courtesy Hannelore Roemich)