

NEWSGRAM

News in brief from the Conservation Center

Issue 49, October 2021



Conservation Center Recipients of the American Academy in Rome Prize



IT'S TIME TO RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE OUR THIRTEEN WINNERS OF THE ROME PRIZE IN Conservation and Historic Preservation. Our Fellows of the American Academy in Rome (FAARs) are listed below along with their dates of their residencies, research topics, and some personal thoughts on their time spent at the American Academy in Rome (AAR).

MARGARET HOLBEN ELLIS '79 (FAAR 1994)

The Care of Prints and Drawings, Revisions and Updates

As the first Fellow in Conservation and Historic Preservation to join the AAR community, I felt a bit out of my depth, but quickly realized that everyone was committed to making the most of their precious time in Rome both in terms of their research and making new friends. As for research, I only needed to walk down the Janiculum to ICCROM, where I spent my day surrounded by conservation professionals from around the world. Ironically, revisions to *The Care of Prints and Drawings* were put on the back burner, as the luxury of uninterrupted time led down different paths related to paper conservation, with a few unexpected and fruitful detours. Ultimately more fulfilling, however, were the many late-night conversations I had with other Fellows in all branches of the arts, which put the important role of cultural heritage preservation into a broader and more relevant perspective. Thanks to the intervention of Alice Waters, the meals enjoyed by today's FAARs are vastly improved!

GEORGE WHEELER '81 (FAAR 1997)

The study of marble conservation in Italy

I was richly rewarded in pursuit of this topic as there are so many examples of conservation treatments of works in marble in Rome and beyond, as well as having the opportunity to be in contact with the conservators and scientists who performed and participated in that work. I did not anticipate what the contact with other fellows from the many disciplines that the Academy supports and encourages would bring. My colleagues' depth of knowledge and the willingness to share that knowledge and their genuine curiosity about my own work was the most rewarding part of my time at the Academy.

ERIC GORDON '80 (FAAR 1997)

A Comparative Study of Italian Retouching Techniques

Short-term (positive): How important/beneficial it is to get away from your day-to-day job for an extended period of time.

Short-term (negative): How difficult it was to live at the Academy with a family. At that time, the Academy had a philosophy and policy that discouraged the presence of family, especially children. Since then, significant changes have been made to accommodate families—proving that one can concentrate better when family is not at a distance...

Long-term (positive): The realization that getting away and concentrating on a singular project in an incredible environment amongst really interesting/smart people is the best way to focus and accomplish a research goal. (Was able to follow up with a Fellowship at *I Tatti* in 2012.)

Long-term (negative): Not being able to apply again. Once there, you're spoiled for good.

SHELLEY FLETCHER '73 (FAAR 1998)

A Technical Investigation of the Engravings Attributed to Andrea Mantegna

"The American Academy in Rome provided the invaluable gift of time, which allowed me to think and change my mind," from "A Closer Look at Mantegna's Prints," *Print Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 1, March 2001, p. 3.

WILL SHANK '82 (FAAR 2005)

A book on "How to Paint a Mural"

Will's work in mural conservation—and the dynamic role of murals in contemporary art, is long-standing: he received the AIC's *Advocacy Award* for his passion in 2010. He was instrumental in organizing "Approaches to the Conservation of Contemporary Murals", a two-day workshop that was held during the 2017 AIC Conference in Chicago. He writes, "... we were able to bring together a fairly cohesive look at an important community of American muralists with a focused group of conservation professionals, all of whom viewed Chicago's finest community murals from the 1970s to the present. But we all saw different things. There was at first an almost audible biting of tongues amongst conservators as they listened to stories of artists working with the Chicago Public Art Group to collaborate on mural 'restoration' projects. Eventually the artists came to understand the vocabulary and the philosophy of the conservators."

PAMELA HATCHFIELD '86 (FAAR 2007)

Contemporary Artists Using Architecture: Exploring the Relationship between Architecture, Contemporary Art and Conservation

In addition to her research topic, other related areas of interest developed at the Academy included: the nature of graffiti, ubiquitous in Rome, and its relationship to wall drawings in or on historic structures (Sol LeWitt, David Tremlett); projections (Jenny Holzer, Pipilotti Rist), and the selective removal of graffiti and grime from urban architecture (Kristin Jones); also the transmutation of art and architecture/artist and architect, inspired in part by the opening of Richard Meiers' controversial new structure around the *Ara Pacis*.

The year was a time of exploration for me; I arrived burdened with several existing research and writing projects and the commitment to do some additional work related to my position at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. However, the Academy provided many extraordinary opportunities to explore and understand Rome and sites elsewhere in Italy; I was encouraged by the President and CEO of the American Academy in Rome, Adele Chatfield-Taylor, to "sit back, relax, and let Rome work its magic. I explored photography and presented some large format work in open studios at the AAR and at an exhibition at the gallery *Progetto Arte Biagiotti* in Florence. I also spent some time working with Italians developing tech-

niques for the use of lasers in the conservation of cultural heritage. I focused on developing relationships with conservators and others in Rome, some of whom remain friends and colleagues to this day.

ROSA LOWINGER '84 (FAAR 2009)

Art Vandalism: A Comprehensive Study of its Causes and Effects, With an Emphasis on Conservation of Contemporary Public Art

I worked at the AAR library finding amazing old books that showed protection of works of art during the world wars. I also got a desk at the ICCROM library to work on my project. My topic was broad ranging and I looked at it more as a writer/artist than an academic. This year it has paid off in my ability to have a broad perspective on contested heritage and the removal of offensive images.

At AAR, I also wrote the first draft of a novel. It's a Western; the title is *Caballero*. It's a classic good vs. evil story with a twist about moral ambiguity. I pepper it with historic buildings. It has not found its publication home yet, but it's been through about twenty edits.

I loved the academy. The only bad thing I can think of is that conservation is often the stepchild of the process. No one knows what we do and we don't seem as hip and glam as the artists or the scholars. I am working on changing that with a new book I'm writing.

ANNA SEROTTA '09 (FAAR 2015)

The Documentation, Analysis and Replication of Tool Marks on Ancient Stone Sculpture

The most unexpected thing I learned at the Academy is that conservation is not neutral. I was at the Academy during the second wave of the Ferguson Uprising; the conversations sparked by those events were also happening in the Academy. For me, the space to think big really began an important reckoning with my own privilege and with the biases that inform my work.

JOANNIE BOTTKOL '11 (FAAR 2019)

An Exploration of the Preservation of Roman Fascist Monuments

In the United States in 2018, conservators and communities alike were having discussions about whether confederate monuments should be valued as art or as history, or whether they should simply be stripped of value and buried in storage or destroyed. In Rome, many fascist monuments are deeply physically embedded in the city in the form of buildings and roads still used extensively today. These cannot be so easily dismantled as our confederate monuments featured in town squares and city plazas across the US. So, how are fascist monuments in Rome valued today versus at the time of their erection? How are they being stored, displayed, narrated and conserved today versus previously? How have and how do conservators approach the preservation of difficult, politically charged art objects—especially individual objects which may represent multiple values? These are the questions I asked myself during my year at the AAR as I studied the history of the conservation of fascist works in Rome.

My year at the AAR was both utterly wonderful and deeply exhausting—wonderful and exhausting in part because I brought my three kids (at the time aged 3, 6, and 8) along for the year! The

schedule, the expectations, and the community were all unlike anything I had experienced in my daily life and work at home. I learned to think and operate in a looser, more flexible way, to pivot more readily, and to attempt what would normally have sounded impossible. All of these skills, developed at the AAR, came in handy when the coronavirus pandemic arrived so many months ago, and regular life and ways of doing things were turned upside down.

At the AAR I gained a community of bright, devoted friends and memories to carry with me into the future. I gained an understanding of my research topic, which I would never, ever have had time or resources to develop at home or at work. I came to know Rome in a way I never would/could have as a visitor. And I feel that my work there resulted in important personal development, in new confidence in my ability to pull off the impossible, and in my ability to say no when something isn't right for me. And importantly, my three kids became citizens of the world as well as of the communities of the AAR and Rome. They learned so much about life, community, and diversity—the year changed and shaped them as much as it did me, and now there are three more aspiring Rome Prize applicants out there.

JEAN DOMMERMUTH '96 (FAAR 2021)

Sixteenth-Century Florentine Canvas Painting

My project was to study sixteenth-century Florentine canvas painting, especially works that were not originally conceived of as independent paintings but rather as parts of elaborate, multimedia productions. The goal was to visually examine as many as possible to look at canvas weights, seaming, and evidence of stretching—with neither special access nor sophisticated tools—to look for patterns and trends.

The most unexpected thing was the covid pandemic. I had applied for the fellowship in October of 2019 and interviewed for it on February 25, 2020. We all—full and half term fellows—finally arrived on January 11, 2021. And here we found an incredible library (with incredible librarians) and—a revelation for most of us—a space to work where you can spread out papers and books and whatever and leave them to think about tomorrow. And many, many steep and/or twisting steps leading down to (and back up from) Trastevere. And every day, canon shot to mark noon. And a cohort of fellows who knew nothing about my field and thus made me rethink many of my own assumptions.

This year's Rome Prize winners are:

SARAH NUNBERG '97 (FAAR 2021)

Advancing Sustainable Practices in Cultural Heritage Preservation

As one of three principal directors for a National Endowment for Humanities grant awarded to FAIC, Sarah Nunberg is creating a carbon calculator and library of case studies, Sustainability Tools in Cultural Heritage (STiCH), based on life cycle assessment (LCA) that enables cultural heritage professionals to make educated choices to lower their environmental impact by easily incorporating sustainable practices into activities ranging from treatment to stor-

age and use of exhibition materials. The software program will be free and available on AIC's website in January 2022. For her Rome Prize, she will develop a curriculum to teach and disseminate use of the STiCH to help cultural heritage professionals integrate LCA into their work and advance the 17 sustainable development goals outlined by ICCROM and the United Nations.

ELLEN PEARLSTEIN '82 (FAAR 2021)

Conservation Consultation Around Indigenous American Materials—the View from Europe

My scholarship and teaching focus on conservation of indigenous materials from the Americas within a collaborative framework. I am proud to be in a position where my research into innovative conservation practices with indigenous materials and with community collaboration can be shared with graduate students who build on these concepts. My American Academy in Rome Prize will enable me to interrogate the ways in which museums that are distanced from communities whose cultural materials they hold—such as European institutions with collections from the Americas—are negotiating these distances to achieve culturally appropriate care. Two museums located in Rome and with major American indigenous holdings, and with significant investments in redefining colonial museum practices, are the Vatican Museum, and the “Luigi Pigorini” National Prehistoric Ethnographic Museum. My Rome Prize research activities include working with both of these museums to explore whether sharing digital surrogates, or reaching out to diaspora communities of local cultural descendants, or other practices, have offered viable alternatives to in-person sharing about conservation decision making and consequent museum representation. As will be discussed, diaspora community involvement has been utilized by the Pigorini for exhibitions, but how did this translate into how collections were conserved? What are the material and cultural translations that occur when digital surrogates and diaspora community consultations are substituted for in-person and in-place meetings?

CAROL MANCUSI-UNGARO IFA '70 (FAAR 2021)

Artist/Conservator Nexus

I intend to explore the salient synergy between an artist and conservator in a book on the artist, Cy Twombly. I will experience the complexity of time, a shared interest with Twombly and a bedrock of art conservation, in Rome where the young artist spent his formative years and eventually chose to live. The crucially important rapport between an artist and conservator has propelled my professional discourse, and I will expand on that experience through sustained contact with artists at the Academy.

Our FAARs strongly encourage members of the IFA/CC community to apply and are standing by to answer questions and offer their support.