

VIRGINIA CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION



January 2021 | Volume 30 | Issue 3

The Virginia Conservation Association (VCA) promotes the care and preservation of cultural materials. The VCA offers education and training for those involved in conservation and provides a forum for discussion of pertinent issues and new developments in the field.

The VCA is open to anyone with an interest in the care and preservation of art and historic artifacts.

virginiaconservationassociation.org

Next Virtual Member's
Meeting

Thursday, January 21
6:30pm

Submission Deadline for
the March Newsletter

February 17, 2020

Letter from the President

We survived what can charitably be described as an unpleasant year. It is easy, and can even feel like human nature, to focus on the horrible things. I am sure that we all have done plenty of *that* this past twelve months. It takes more work to find good things that happened.



Kate Ridgway, VCA President

Beginning at the end, the COVID-19 vaccine is one of the best things to be created all year. Not far behind is the artwork and graffiti created on the Robert E. Lee monument in Richmond, which was acknowledge on the cover of a special issue of National Geographic. The trials of this year in many ways brought out the best in us. We found ways to be compassionate and to help each other make it through the year.

As for conservation, some of the best and most meaningful conversations about conservation ethics have happened during 2020. They were fascinating and sometimes overwhelming, but they ultimately helped to create a deeper and clearer understanding of how conservators can work with communities to protect art and history and to create kinder and friendlier community spaces. Conservators now have better tools for including ourselves in community conversations and for being effective communicators for history and art because of 2020. In the New Year and beyond, it is our job to continue this work, keeping conservation relevant to society and continuing to make positive moves to modernize conservation ethics.

2020 brought many great changes to VCA as well. While they were not the kinds of changes I was planning or had even really thought of, they solved issues that had been brought to the Board's attention for years and 2020 gave us the dynamic we needed to create that change. We have always been geographically spread out and social distancing made it clear that we couldn't put off a solution any longer. Video meetings have made it easy to meet as a Board and have allowed more people to attend meetings from further away than had previously been possible. I know that we all can't wait to meet in person, but now we have a way to attend meetings in the future even if we can't go to them, which is fantastic! Here's hoping 2021 is a better year for us all and for society.

Stay positive and stay healthy everyone!

Upcoming VCA Meeting



The next VCA meeting will be on Thursday, January 21st at 6:30pm via Zoom. Jackie Peterson-Grace will be speaking about her involvement with the ongoing textile conservation project at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, the

memorial site of the S-21 interrogation and detention center of the Khmer Rouge regime located in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The museum's collection includes the buildings, artifacts related to detention and interrogation, paper and photographic archives, and clothing that was collected after the fall of the regime in 1979. The textile conservation project, begun in 2017, has aimed to provide collections care training for the museum's staff, to catalogue and rehouse the textile collection, and to emphasize preventive conservation practices for the collection as a whole.

Programming for the rest of 2021 is still in the planning phase. If you have specific requests or an idea for an event, we would love to hear from you. Feel free to email the Programs Committee anytime at [programs.vaconservation@gmail.com!](mailto:programs.vaconservation@gmail.com)

VCA Member's Meeting

Date: **Thursday, January 21**

Time: **6:30pm**

Look for an email with a Zoom link to attend!



VCA Meeting Summary November 19, 2020

Jackie Peterson-Grace

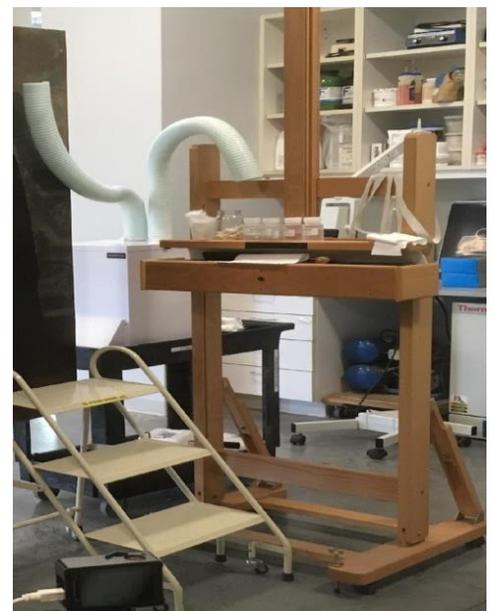
The November virtual meeting included a brief business meeting to announce that VCA activities will slow down for the holiday season, and resume in the new year. Following that announcement, VCA held a "tips session" meeting during which members presented tips and tricks on a wide range of topics, from making the most of lab equipment to managing information and treatment-related considerations. The following is a summary of each of the presentations and contact information for the presenters!

Alternative Uses for Easels

Elizabeth Robson, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

erobson@cwf.org

Elizabeth shared two alternative uses for easels usually used to hold paintings. The first was a handy tip for converting an easel into a mobile workstation that can be raised and lowered, particularly useful when working across the surface of large objects. Elizabeth shared a time lapse video of a treatment she carried out on a large canvas painting in which she used an easel to hold her treatment materials, including solvents that were stored in plastic bottles to limit the chance of broken glass if they should fall. The easel was raised and lowered as she worked, which resulted in a much more ergonomic workstation. Elizabeth's second tip was to use a small, tabletop easel to aid in documenting treatments with time lapse videos. The small easel can be used to hold a smartphone or other device that captures video. The easel is a steady support for holding the device and provides an ideal angle for capturing video that can be used in presentations and for social media outreach.



Easel in use as a workstation. Image courtesy of Elizabeth Robson, taken at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.

Location Maintenance Tips

Mike Saul, *The Mariners' Museum*

msaul@marinersmuseum.org

Mike shared tips for keeping up with the daily task of managing object locations for a large and constantly moving collection. He suggested marking identifying information like accession numbers on both the object and the housing, including all four sides of the box and the lid, and labeling the housing with the permanent storage location to ensure that it will be returned to the same location. He also recommended keeping a stack of paper location change sheets in multiple locations so all staff have easy access, as it's easier to fill them out as the object is moved than it is to try to remember to do so later! He stressed the importance of keeping both hard copy records and digital files for object locations, in case one set of records is damaged or lost. And finally, Mike reminded us that keeping records up to date is a daily task and recommended putting aside a few minutes each day to keep up with the process.

Adhesive Techniques for Composite Objects

Heather Hodge, *Colonial Williamsburg Foundation/SUNY Buffalo*

hhodge@cwf.org

Heather discussed the use of substrate-free adhesive films for treating fragile composite objects and shared the recent treatment of heavily embellished buttons on an 18th century waistcoat. The buttons were composed of a wooden core wrapped with silk threads before additional metal spangles, foil, and threads were stitched to the silk wrapping. Several buttons had areas of partially detached metal foil and metal-wrapped silk threads. The fragility of the silk wrapping made traditional textile conservation techniques like stitching impossible, and Heather determined that an overlay would have obscured the decoration to an unacceptable degree. Ultimately, a treatment technique was developed to target the detached areas of embellishment. Heather cast small drops of Lascaux 498HV, diluted to approximately 70% (weight/volume in deionized water), onto polyethylene and when the adhesive was dry she cut small pieces of the adhesive film to secure the metal embellishments to areas of the exposed wooden button core, or to other areas of metal embellishments. The adhesive films were handled with fine tweezers and reactivated with a small heat tool through silicone release Mylar. This technique successfully secured the fragile elements of the buttons, making the waistcoat safe to handle and mount for exhibition. It could be easily adapted to suit other treatments by varying the dilution of the adhesive, the thickness of the adhesive film, or any other number of factors.



Detail images of the treated buttons. Images courtesy of Heather Hodge, CWF accession number 1960-708

Painted Paper for Loss Compensation in Textile Conservation

Jackie Peterson-Grace, *Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*

jpeterston@cwf.org

Jackie described several textile conservation treatments in which she used painted paper for loss compensation. She described how the working properties of toned Japanese paper fills can be advantageous over traditional textile fills like dyed silk or cotton and highlighted that painting loss compensation materials can be faster than custom-dyeing. Paint also presents greater flexibility for mimicking mottled textures or colors than dyeing does. She described the treatment of a printed cotton quilt in which painted medium-weight Japanese tissue was easily slid through losses to limit visibility of damage due to inherent vice (see image), and the



Detail images of applique on the quilt. Images courtesy of the author, CWF accession number 2014.609.1

treatment of a silk banyan where thin Japanese tissue was used to fill in distracting losses in the weave structure. Painted tissue fills were stitched to a padded board to passively disguise losses in a needlework sampler, and a painted fill was used to visually compensate for a loss in a printed handkerchief. In each treatment, painted fills offered distinct advantages over the more traditional approach of textile fills for loss compensation and stabilization.

Recording Weights During Freeze Drying

Lesley Haines, *The Mariners' Museum*

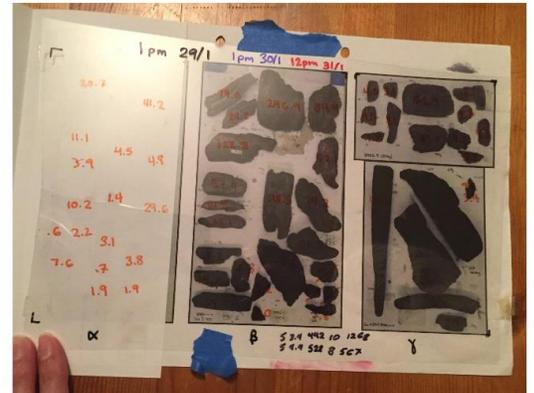
lhaines@marinersmuseum.org

Lesley described the technique she has developed for recording the weights of waterlogged archaeological objects as they undergo the time-sensitive process of freeze drying, which aims to sublime water within an object from a frozen state to a gas to avoid the damaging liquid phase. This process requires that the weight of the objects be recorded regularly. Lesley described the time-saving technique of taking an image of the group of objects and overlaying the printed image with a sheet of Mylar. The weight of each object can then be written in dry-erase marker directly on the Mylar map, either erasing the total after it has been entered into a spreadsheet or alternating colors for different days. This technique is especially useful for groups of objects that all look the same or groups of objects that do not have individual accession numbers. It is also a great option when working with a team; the visual process of matching the object with its image on the Mylar template makes it easy for colleagues to take measurements and virtually share information.



Recording Weights during Freeze-Drying

1. Take a photo of the tray
2. Tape Mylar on top of print out
3. Write directly on Mylar cover. Erase and replace OR track weights in different colors



Mylar template used to record the weights of objects as they undergo freeze-drying. PowerPoint slide courtesy of Lesley Haines.

Card Sleeves

Perrine LeSaux, *Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*

perrine.lesaux.art@gmail.com

Perrine spoke about a product that she has found to be very useful for her work in paper conservation. She has been using polypropylene sleeves, marketed for use with cards in board games, to temporarily store fragments of objects. The sleeves are made of a very thin polypropylene (approximately 2 millimeters) and provide a useful alternative to polyester Ziplock bags. They are very low cost and available from retailers like amazon.com. Perrine has been temporarily storing object fragments in the bags, allowing her to directly annotate the exterior of the bag with information about the object within. She has found that the annotations can be cleaned off after use so each bag can be reused. Perrine cautioned that she has yet to research the presence of plasticizers or coatings on or in the polypropylene sleeves but hopes to do so soon.



http://www.conservation-wiki.com/wiki/Oddy_Test_Results:_Case_Construction_Materials

Card sleeves in use to temporarily hold object fragments. Images courtesy of Perrine LeSaux.

Wheat Starch Paste

Jill Deiss, *Cat Tail Run Hand Bookbinding*

info@cattailrun.com

Jill described her inadvertent discovery of a new way to prepare wheat starch paste. She follows the initial, manufacturer supplied steps of preparing paste by mixing the powder and water in a 1:4 ratio, followed by constant mixing on a magnetic stir plate at 190F for approximately one hour. The paste is then poured out into a flat surface like a plastic egg carton, silicon baking mat, or muffin tin to cool and dry. When dry, the paste can be broken into chunks. The chunks of paste are then ready to be re-hydrated when just a small amount of paste is needed. Jill puts a piece of dried paste into the microwave with a small amount of water and heats it with 3 second bursts until it is reconstituted as a paste. She and her team have not noticed any difference between the paste prepared following manufacture instructions and the paste prepared in this way. This method allows for quick preparation of small amounts of paste as needed!

#AskAConservator Day

Perrine LeSaux, *Post Graduate Fellow in Paper Conservation at Colonial Williamsburg*

On November 18th, conservation staff at Colonial Williamsburg participated in AIC's Ask a Conservator Day. Ask a Conservator Day is an annual social media event that is held at the beginning of November in remembrance of the 1966 Florence Flood. The event highlights our field to promote the spirit and advancements of conservators by engaging with the public about the important work we do. Individuals and institutions all over the world participated by creating social media posts with the hashtag #askaconservator. The whole conservation team at CW helped to gather content on the various aspects of our job we wanted to share. Staff were given temporary account access by the Colonial Williamsburg outreach team to do an Instagram takeover to answer questions posed by our followers on Instagram Stories. Stories is a feature on Instagram that allows one to post a sequence of photos or videos that can be shared and allows followers to interact. Our Story was viewed by nearly 5000 people on Instagram. You can view the story from both this year and last by following @Colonialwmsburg on Instagram and clicking on the round Conservation 'highlight' at the top of the page (see the image below).



Screen shot of Instagram Stories question-and-answer layout.



For those of you who are new to Instagram, you need an account to use Instagram. Instagram and Facebook are linked, so if you have a Facebook account you can easily sign up for Instagram. Touching the screen while watching a story will pause the slide so you can read the captions.

Opportunities and Resources

7th International Mountmakers Forum

The 7th International Mountmakers Forum was held virtually October 26-29, 2020. The four day event included talks on displays and conservation and seismic mounts and earthquake zones over the first two days. The third day was textile and mannequin-focused, and the final day include talks on a wide range of topics. Virtual tours of mountmaking labs and studios were also included in the program. Additional information about the conference and the organization can be found on their website: <https://www.mountmakersforum.net/7th-international-mountmakers-forum>

The conference was recorded and has been uploaded to the International Mountmakers Forum YouTube channel! [Visit this link](#) or search “International Mountmakers Forum” on YouTube to access the presentations.

Texas Historical Commission Webinars

The Texas Historical Commission has created a series of webinars on a wide range of museum-related topics, from navigating fundraising to managing a professional social media presence. These webinars are offered for free, and archived webinars can be accessed for free at any time.

Visit their website to view upcoming webinars and see archived content!

<https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/museum-services/webinars>

American Institute for Conservation (AIC) / Society for Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) Joint Virtual Annual Meeting

The 2021 meeting will be held virtually May 10 to June 24. The tentative schedule can be seen [here](#), and registration is now open!

The Materials Testing Symposium

AIC’s Materials Working Group is dedicated to selecting and evaluating materials for use in collections care. The first Museum International Materials Testing Symposium was held in November 2019 with presentations that detailed recent developments in materials selection methods. Recordings of these presentations are available on the website of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, [accessible at this link](#).

Additional resources for choosing materials for storage, exhibition and transport of collections can be found on the AIC wiki page [here](#) and information about the Materials Working Group can be found [here](#).

Professional Advocacy through Museum Unionization

The Philadelphia Area Conservation Association (PACA) and AIC’s Emerging Conservation Professionals Network (ECPN) hosted a two-part virtual program on current unionization movements within cultural institutions. The first program featured three speakers who have been involved with recent and ongoing unionizing efforts. The second part consisted of a panel discussion in which conservators shared their experiences as union members. Both events were recorded and are available for free on YouTube and can be accessed by searching “Philadelphia Area Conservation Association” or clicking [the link here](#).

Courses, Lectures and Workshops

A list of courses and events on topics related to cultural heritage preservation and upcoming lectures and workshops is regularly updated here: <https://www.culturalheritage.org/resources/career/events-from-allied-organizations>



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VCA Student Scholarship

VCA offers two annual scholarships of \$250 each to be used for furthering education in the field. Use of funds may include conference or class fees or other professional-development expenses. Applicants must be VCA student members to apply. Applications are accepted throughout the year and will be evaluated during the April and December Board meetings.

To apply, submit a one-page proposal for use of funds that specifies how the scholarship will assist in the pursuit of a career in conservation or a directly related field. To apply, email our Education Committee Co-Chairs or mail paper applications to the VCA, P.O. Box 7023, Richmond, VA 23221

Contact Us

Virginia Conservation Association

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www.virginiaconservationassociation.org
www.facebook.com/VaConservation/

Contribute to the Newsletter!

Are you working on an interesting or challenging treatment? Have you made exciting research discoveries, come across valuable resources, or attended an inspiring professional development event? We want to hear from you!

Our all-volunteer publishing team regularly calls for content and any VCA member is welcome to contribute. If you are interested in writing for the newsletter but would like some advice and guidance, please get in touch with our Publications Chair to discuss your ideas.

The deadline for the March Newsletter is **February 17**