



V&A

CONSERVATION JOURNAL SUMMER

2002

No
41

£2.50 @ point of sale

Contents

V&A Conservation Journal No.41

- 3 Editorial**
Jonathan Ashley-Smith, Head of Conservation
- 4 Tiaras – Mount Making and Installation**
Joanna Whalley, Metalwork Conservator
Roy Mandeville, Associate Director – Exhibitions, Plowden and Smith
- 6 Sharing Museum Skills Millennium Awards**
Jonathan Ashley-Smith, Head of Conservation
David Howell, Conservation Scientist, Historic Royal Palaces
Ticca Ogilvie, Conservator of Antiquities, Bristol Museums & Art Gallery
Sarah Gerrish, Furniture Conservator, National Museums of Scotland
- 9 Training Matters:**
My Experience in the Paintings Conservation Section
Sharon Tager, Intern, Paintings Conservation
- 11 Developing a Collaborative Approach to the Conservation of Lacquer**
Shayne Rivers, Senior Furniture Conservator
- 13 Preservation of the Satyajit Ray Paper Archive: Fieldwork January 2002**
Mike Wheeler, Senior Paper Conservator
- 16 A Japanese Scroll Painting Conservation Course**
Catherine Rickman, Independent Paper Conservator
- 17 A Review of Adhesives Today – Exploring Current Options and Application Techniques**
Jacinta Loh, Intern, Textiles Conservation
- 18 The Observed Object: The Distance Between the Studio and the Gallery**
Panayota Malkogeorgou, MPhil Research Student, RCA/V&A Conservation
- 20 The Importance of Being Less Earnest: Communicating For and About Conservation**
Helen Jones, Deputy Head, RCA/V&A Conservation
- 23 New Staff**
- 24 Staff Chart**

Editorial Board

Jonathan Ashley-Smith
Head of Conservation Department

Charlotte Hubbard
Head of Sculpture Conservation

Helen Jones
Deputy Head, RCA/V&A Conservation

Mike Wheeler
Senior Paper Conservator

Sophy Wills
Metals Conservator

Designed by the V&A Print Unit
Cover Design by Mike Wheeler

Photographs are credited individually

All enquiries to:-
Conservation Department
Victoria and Albert Museum
London SW7 2RL UK
Telephone +44 (0)20 7942 2133
Fax: +44 (0)20 7942 2092
e.mail conservation.journal@vam.ac.uk

The V&A Conservation Journal is an informal publication and references in articles are discouraged. Readers may contact authors for further information via the email address above

Cover Image: Dudley, 3rd Baron North (P4-1948);
Photography by: V&A Photo Studio

Editorial: Reaching out

Jonathan Ashley-Smith
Head of Conservation

This is probably my last editorial for the Conservation Journal. The notion that the Head of the Conservation Department should write the introduction for each issue started with the first number in 1991. Thirty of the subsequent forty editorials have been written by the Head of Department. Since I have given up that position, it seems reasonable that I should be relieved of the burden of having to think of something to say that is succinct, topical and relevant to the subjects of the articles. The theme of this issue is outreach, and the following contributions describe a few examples of the many ways in which the Department interacts with people who are not members of the Museum staff. The Journal is itself a very successful and cost-effective way of reaching thousands of people around the world. Despite a couple of false starts, we are now very close to making the Journal available on the Web which will further increase its readership and our outreach.

The management restructuring at the V&A, which began three years ago, places the Conservation Department in an organisational grouping of departments whose joint remit is to provide the necessary services that will ensure the delivery of major projects designed to enhance the visitor experience. This renewed emphasis on delivery of gallery and exhibition projects makes it more important to stress that there are ongoing demands from outside the Museum for the skills and expertise of the conservation staff of a National Museum. The Conservation Press is full of encouragement to develop public awareness and public involvement. The criteria for the Conservation Awards make active participation with people other than curators of the conserved object a specific requirement. Yet the number of Museum projects continues to increase and the number of in-house conservation staff continues to decrease. It is far from certain that conservators will feel empowered to develop and strengthen links with interest groups outside the Museum when the pressure of successive deadlines forces them to use up the time they had set aside for this.

I have negotiated my own personal way of achieving greater outreach. After nearly twenty five years as Head of the Conservation Department I have moved to the Research Department at the V&A. My obligations there are to write and to teach. I have a book to write and have teaching assignments in Europe and beyond. I will write articles for future issues of this Journal. So I should be able to contribute to the variety of ways in which Conservation at the V&A reaches the widest possible audience.

Tiaras – Mount Making and Installation

Joanna Whalley, Metalwork Conservator

Roy Mandeville, Associate Director - Exhibitions, Plowden and Smith

'Tiaras' is an important temporary exhibition at the V&A which displays a glittering array of approximately 200 tiaras. The range is diverse and comprises not only the more traditional materials of precious metals and gemstones, but also the more unusual such as carved horn and even fish scales.

The V&A's designer for the show, Catherine Byrne, wanted the tiaras to appear to 'float in space'. With this in mind, three companies were invited to provide samples of mounts in both acrylic and brass. Materials specifications were provided by Conservation.



Figure 1: Inserting the mount into the backboard

Plowden and Smith Ltd were appointed as the mount makers for the project. The company developed a generic mount style in metal that suited most objects in the exhibition. Although acrylic is often the preferred choice of material for mounting museum objects, the thickness of acrylic required to support a tiara was found to be obtrusive, and its reflective, light channelling properties were distracting. In contrast, the fine brass mounts offered both strong support for the objects and were visually unobtrusive.

The mounts for the show consist of a brass ring or part ring fitted to the internal diameter of the tiara, with a straight central rod returning to the back wall of the showcase for fixing. Brass is very malleable when annealed which enables accurate shaping, and strong soldered joints can be achieved at reasonably low temperatures. The internal ring has brass 'u'-shaped attachments at intervals to give the object support where required (see illustrations). Oxyacetylene equipment was used for the work as it gives a controlled, finely adjustable, hot, clean (carbon-free) flame.

In order to ensure that the fittings were precise, each tiara had to be offered up onto its mount during fabrication. However, handling was kept to a minimum and the mount makers worked with extreme care. Prior to installation mounts were sandblasted to remove grease and flux and then coated with an acrylic formula spray paint. The support armatures were coloured to suit the object and the fixing rods were coloured to match the showcase panels. Where mounts came into contact with the objects, they were lined with clear heat shrink tubing, and where this was not practical a polyester lining felt was applied.

The mounts were installed by drilling the backboards of the cases to the same diameter (usually 5mm) as the rod to be inserted, and friction fitting the mount into the drilled hole. To enable this system to work, the case panels were manufactured in ZF MDF sealed with 3 coats of Dacrylate acrylic lacquer. The fabric covering was

attached to the case panels using a neutral PH adhesive, and this prevented any snagging when the panels were drilled.

As a result of the detailed planning and meticulous execution of the design brief, the visitor is afforded an unobstructed view of the entire object, and the tiaras appear to be supported effortlessly.

Acknowledgements

Andrew Rush and John Baxter, Plowden and Smith Exhibitions.



Figure 2: The tiara installed

Sharing Museum Skills

The Sharing Museum Skills Millennium Awards was a scheme organised by the Millennium Commission (which is supported by the National Lottery) to provide professional development for individuals and to improve the quality of museums, archives and library special collections for their users. The scheme provided grants to enable staff and volunteers working within these organisations to share, learn and apply new skills through paid secondments. Some 246 grants were awarded. Two conservators and one conservation scientist chose secondments to the Conservation Department at the V&A.

David Howell

Conservation Scientist, Historic Royal Palaces

In Autumn 2001 I was given a "Sharing Museum Skills" award to spend six weeks working with Jonathan Ashley-Smith, looking at current understanding of risks to textiles on display, and to identify gaps in our knowledge. The idea was to consolidate Jonathan's knowledge and experience with risk with my practical and experimental expertise with historic textiles. By strange coincidence my first full day dealing with risk was 11th September 2001.

One aim was to develop a research strategy that could be carried out in a reasonable timeframe at Hampton Court Palace to facilitate structured and co-ordinated investigations. The first stage was to describe the state of the art regarding what is already known about risks to textiles. Much has been done at Hampton Court to do with humidity and light. Research is currently underway on the effects of dust on textile objects and some work has been done on pollution levels and acidity.

Several gaps in knowledge were identified. The first area of interest was determining a baseline rate at which textiles will degrade no matter what 'ideal' conditions they are in. The second area that is little researched is the comparison of risks to objects when putting up and taking down a display and the gains from rotating display objects in terms of light dosage etc. The third area of interest is a risk assessment concerning pollutants, especially low levels of organic acids. It is not really known how the low concentrations of these substances affect textiles in museum or historic house environments. The fourth factor that was felt to be relatively unexplored was risk associated with cleaning objects rather than leaving things dirty.

On this basis several research proposals have been designed and will be implemented over the next few years.

Visits to other institutions.

As part of my application I had included visits to other historic houses displaying textiles. The houses chosen were: Brodsworth Hall, Hardwick Hall, and Chatsworth. These three were chosen because of their geographical location (they are all quite close to each other), the different organisations that run them (English Heritage, The National Trust, and Chatsworth Trust), and the different display options chosen.

One of the most interesting aspects of the visit to Hardwick Hall was Jonathan's perception of the condition of some of the tapestries which he had last seen some twenty years ago. At that time he remembered them as 'nearly falling off the walls' because they were in such poor condition. In the intervening period these tapestries have had no conservation treatment, but his opinion was that they now appeared in much better condition! The objects must be in the same or poorer state, but in twenty years Jonathan's experience and knowledge has changed. Proper condition reports, preferably backed up with scientific assessment of damage, are essential if we are to make real observations on changes to objects.

I regard my secondment as a total success, and I am very grateful to Sharing Museum Skills Millennium Awards for making it possible.



Photograph courtesy of Historic Royal Palaces

Figure 1 David Howell examining dust as part of his research into risk assessment for historic textiles on display

Ticca Ogilvie

Conservator of Antiquities, Bristol Museums & Art Gallery

Sharing Museums Skills brought me to the V&A for six weeks to investigate strategies and decision-making in lacquer conservation.

I wanted this chance to get to grips with lacquer partly because it is a famously *difficult* material, and partly because the collection of oriental lacquer and European japanned objects at Bristol City Museum is now in serious need of conservation. The general practitioner education most object conservators get provides theoretical, but rarely practical, training in this material. The stimulating discussions I had with Shayne Rivers (V&A Senior Furniture Conservator) when she came to advise about our collection made me think that the V&A could provide the sort of experience I was seeking.

I came at a good time. The British Galleries project was finished but still fresh in everyone's minds, and conservators were very willing to share their insights into the organisational processes behind it—what had worked well and what hadn't. I had a good opportunity to investigate Concise, the conservation management tool created for the British Galleries project. A strong aura of project management seems to pervade conservation activities at the V&A, and this is particularly impressive to one from a local authority museum where time for effective time-management seems an unaffordable luxury.

It felt very luxurious to be able to spend so much time focused on objects. I began the secondment by conserving four panels from a Japanese shrine



photography: Shayne Rivers

Figure 1 Author consolidating lifting lacquer surface on shrine panel, Blythe House conservation labs

required for the Art Deco exhibition in 2003. The enormous quantity of dirt that can sink into a lacquer surface came as a surprise to me. Removing this while retaining soot and heat marks left by candles used in the shrine was a familiar challenge, but using cam-action clamps in consolidating the lifting lacquer surface was a skill I had to learn.

I also worked on several of the exquisite Japanese lacquer objects for the Toshiba Gallery rotation. Many of these had had previous treatment and I learned to recognise the various historic and traditional techniques used.

What I also got from the secondment, of course, was all sorts of less categorisable information through observing how another organisation works, and a renewed sense of proportion in my observation of my own institution.

Towards the end of my time at the V&A we began work on a Chinese red lacquer chair damaged by a water leak in store. The damage made it the ideal candidate for applying some traditional Japanese techniques of lacquer conservation, in particular, cleaning with water and consolidation with *urushi*. For raw lacquer to polymerise, high ambient humidity is required. I was able to share some of my specialist expertise in creating a controlled humidity workspace within which the conservation could take place. In turn, I was introduced to the tools for and techniques of Japanese lacquer, which Shayne has brought back from her annual training visits to Japan.

The strongest impression I retain of the V&A is the very positive, central place conservation appears to hold there still. Amidst the chasing of too many agendas with too few resources it was enormously refreshing to renew my acquaintance with a world where surface energy interactions between consolidant and substrate appear still able to hold their own against audience advocacy and benchmarking exercises.

Sarah Gerrish

Furniture Conservator, National Museums of Scotland

My personal aim for the secondment was to become more proficient in the conservation of decorative surface finishes. Working as furniture conservator at the National Museums of Scotland (NMS) and previously at the National Museums and Galleries of Wales I mainly conserve vernacular furniture and was looking for an opportunity to enhance my skills to enable me to work on furniture with highly decorative surface finishes. My intention was to use the skills I learnt during my secondment to conserve the European furniture collection held by NMS.

Albert Neher, Head of Furniture Conservation at the V&A, was my mentor during my six weeks in the Furniture Conservation Studio. I was overwhelmed by the willingness of the Section to share their knowledge and skills; everyone was very generous with their time, friendly and kind. The first object I conserved was a 19th century *bouille* inkstand (Lost 263). Although the decision was made not to replace the missing brass as part of the treatment proposal, I was shown how to make templates and practised cutting brass that would have replaced that which was missing.



Photography by Sarah Gerrish

Figure 1. Cleaning a lacquer writing box (W2.191.7)

I worked with Shayne Rivers for three weeks conserving lacquer objects for rotation of displays in the Toshiba Gallery (figure 1). Shayne made me aware of many articles published on different aspects of lacquer conservation as well as

demonstrating cleaning and consolidation procedures. Fi Mallinson and Christine Powell introduced me to general good practice for working on gilded surfaces, I was able to practise these skills working with Fi on a daybed by J.B. Tilliard (W.5 - 1956) destined for an exhibition about Madame de Pompadour at Versailles.

My six week secondment was extremely informative and enjoyable. It is always an experience and of great benefit to meet new colleagues, exchange thoughts, ideas and work practices. I think the scheme is an excellent way for professionals to further their knowledge in a very immediate and direct way. It is far more useful to be able to identify exactly what areas of expertise you would like to expand and to be able to identify who could provide you with that knowledge, than to enrol on a non-specific course which may not particularly be tailored to your requirements.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Conservation Department at the V&A, particularly Furniture Conservation for hosting my secondment. I would like to thank the NMS for allowing me the time to complete my secondment. Finally I am grateful to the Millennium Commission for my generous award.

Training Matters: My Experience in the Painting Conservation Section

Sharon Tager

Intern, Paintings Conservation

For the past ten months, I have been fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to treat one of Britain's national painting collections. After completing an MA in 20th century art and theory from Goldsmiths College in 1997 and receiving my diploma in the conservation of easel paintings at the Courtauld Institute of Art in 2001, I was keen to gain further practical and theoretical experience in a museum environment. During the past three years, I have spent my summer vacations working for private painting conservators in London and volunteering for three months at the Tel Aviv Museum conservation department. My internship in the V&A, lasting for ten months, has allowed me to be involved in a variety of activities and responsibilities related to the collection. These are both practical and theoretical, and include a research project as well as the care and treatment of paintings.

Arriving in October 2001, I was fortunate to observe – and indeed participate in – the last (but very hectic!) few weeks of preparation leading to the opening of British

Galleries. Treating gallery paintings as part of a large team, responsible for the preservation, documentation and presentation of these historic and aesthetic objects, was very exciting. Working in a museum environment enabled me to discuss treatment options not only in relation to the object's physical stability, but also in terms of its presentation within the Galleries' context, an aspect lacking in most treatments done in the private sector. Among other objects, I contributed to the very last stages of treatment of a 17th century full-length portrait of 'Dudley, 3rd Baron North' (P4-1948), aiding with over-paint removal, filling losses and retouching.

This object is of particular interest to me, since it is also the focus of my research project. The research is an important and integral part of the internship, and usually occupies one day a week. This project is concerned with the attribution and history of presentation of this full-length portrait by an unknown artist, via the technical investigation of its materials and techniques. The identification of materials and techniques and their use in



Photography by V&A Photographic Studio

Figure 1. Unknown artist, Dudley, 3rd Baron North, early 17th century (P4-1948); after conservation treatment



Photography by V&A Photographic Studio

Figure 2. Unknown artist, Dudley, 3rd Baron North, early 17th century (P4-1948); before conservation treatment

technical art history is of particular interest to me, and is an aspect I hope to further pursue in the future. The painting (figure 1) dates from c.1610-18 and is one of the best examples in the Museum's collection of full-length Jacobean portraits. Nevertheless, the fact that it is not signed, and that it has gone through some major changes in its appearance, prompted the investigation of its history of production and presentation. The use of x-radiography, infra-red photography and the identification of pigments and layer structure via microscopy is the core of the current research. The enlargement of the composition, repainting of the floor and the figure's garters and the addition of a canopy at the top of the composition are all later interventions (figure 2). While the decision to restore the painting to its original proportions had been painstakingly taken by Nicola Costaras and Fran Griffin, who restored the painting during 2000-2001, the current research is concerned with the dating and historical context of these changes, and the attribution of the painting to an artist or studio. In order to achieve this, we collaborated with Museum professionals, notably Lucia Burgio from the Science Section, who kindly analysed all cross-sections with Raman spectroscopy, and outside sources, primarily Sarah Cove, independent painting conservator, and the Department of Conservation and Technology, Courtauld Institute of Art.



Photography by Sharon Tiger

Figure 3. Infrared reflectography detail of John Linnell, *Halt by the Jordan*, 1849 (1845-1900); two figures in the river that cannot be seen with the naked eye

The final, but primary, aspect of the internship in the painting conservation studio is the practical conservation work. Usually, interns are given one major treatment project to work on, and other smaller-scale treatments. My experience is slightly different, since the studio's main project at present is the examination, preparation and subsequent treatment of 45 19th century British paintings, travelling to an exhibition in Japan due to open in August 2002. An exhibition of this magnitude is a good opportunity for the studio, and myself as an intern, to survey a large section of the collection. This is done as systematically as possible in order to determine whether the painting is safe to travel (for example, is it flaking?), its aesthetic appearance (is varnish removal necessary?), its documentation and its history of treatment and production. The survey also allowed for some interesting technical discoveries: for example, an examination with the infra-red vidicon of a painting by John Linnell entitled 'Halt by the Jordan' (1845-1900), and dated to 1840 and 1849, revealed that the artist has chosen to change his baptising scene nine years after the composition was initially completed (figure 3). Linnell himself was originally a Baptist, but later in life abandoned all religious denominations, preferring to rely on his own personal interpretation of the scriptures. Perhaps this shift in faith can be held partly responsible for his pentimento of the figure of Philip baptising the eunuch.

The variety of paintings included in the Japan loan has enabled me to familiarise myself with the different British painting styles in the 19th century, and with their diverse conditions and subsequent treatment options. Treatments included consolidation of flaking paint, several strip-linings, local canvas repairs, surface cleaning, varnish removal, retouching and frame fittings. It is the practical experience of performing these treatments, in the context of museum-standard preventive conservation, together with the constant advice and guidance given by my peers – that has made this internship professionally and personally gratifying.

Developing a Collaborative Approach to the Conservation of Lacquer

Shayne Rivers
Senior Furniture Conservator

Background

In 1999, a proposal was made for the treatment of the Mazarin chest as part of the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs' (Bunkacho) Conservation of Japanese Treasures in Overseas Collections programme. The chest was to be shipped to the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (Tobunken) where it would be expertly treated using traditional materials and techniques.

The Mazarin chest is one of the foremost examples of an oriental lacquer (*urushi*) object designed and made in Japan in the early seventeenth century for export to the West. Although much of the lacquer made for export was mass produced and of poor quality, a few articles of exceptional quality were produced in the 1630s. The V&A has three of these exceptional pieces, one of which is the Mazarin chest (412-1882). The chest is decorated with scenes from the *Tales of Genji*, a Japanese novel dating from AD 1000-1025, and also a range of other pictorial scenes.

Although the chest is in a fairly stable condition and is not actively deteriorating, many areas of decoration are loose or poorly adhered. This loose decoration is very vulnerable to damage and further loss when the chest is transported or otherwise handled. Shrinkage cracks in the lid are the result of a long history of low relative humidity (RH) in the Museum and its stores, combined with the original cleated construction techniques. There has been some loss of lacquer decoration along the splits and the surviving lacquer in these damaged areas is at risk of further loss.

After much discussion, it was agreed that it would be preferable to treat the Mazarin chest in the UK. Firstly, there is the risk factor involved in transporting such a heavy and fragile object to and from Japan. Secondly, there are many thousands of lacquer objects in the V&A's collections, and it seemed appropriate to develop skills within the Museum so that these could be used to benefit both the Mazarin chest in particular, and the lacquer collection as a whole.

Western vs traditional Japanese treatments

As a broad generalisation, approaches to the conservation of lacquer in the West and in Japan are quite different. Throughout the development of conservation ethics in the West, reversibility (or more recently retreatability) has been a key concept. With this in mind, there has been a long-standing desire to use materials that do not cross-link, so that conservation treatments can be removed in the future, if necessary, without damaging original material.

In contrast to this approach, the conservation of lacquer in Japan still largely relies on the use of traditional materials. These materials are based on *urushi*, the material originally used to create oriental lacquer objects, which cross-links as it dries. Freshly-cured *urushi* is considered by some to be a super-durable material, as it is impervious to solvents and barely affected by extremes of pH.

The earliest dialogue between conservators in Japan and in the West was accompanied by a degree of horror on both sides, as the differences in approach to the treatment of lacquer were revealed. More recently, some Japanese conservators have adopted the use of synthetic materials, while some Western conservators

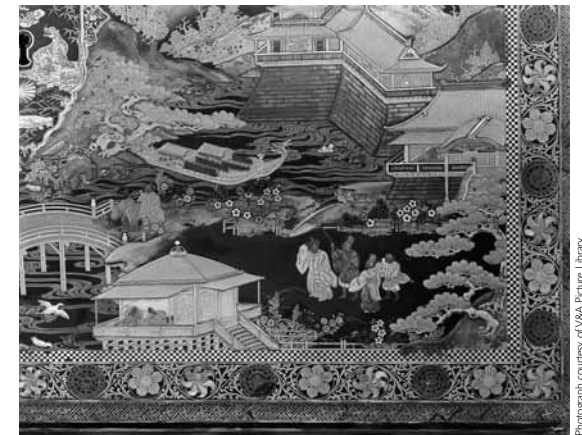


Figure 1. Detail of decoration on the Mazarin chest (412-1882)

Photograph courtesy of V&A Picture Library

have received training in Japan and choose to make use of traditional materials. The Tobunken is keen to further mutual understanding between Western and Japanese conservators of lacquer.

In early 2000, I was invited to Japan for six weeks to study the history and conservation of lacquer. My visit was sponsored by the Japan Center for International Co-operation in Conservation. I spent one month at the Tobunken observing and discussing conservation treatments and making sample boards, ten days visiting sites relevant to the history and development of Japanese lacquer and ten days participating in the conservation of lacquer objects in the studio of Kazumi Murose, a lacquer artist and restorer.

In late 2001 I was invited for a second visit of one month, during which I undertook the first stages of a traditional treatment of a nineteenth century red lacquer tea table, decorated with *chinkin* decoration. The processes used on the tea table could be used in a traditional treatment of the Mazarin chest.

Transferring knowledge and practice back to V&A and the UK

Almost immediately after I returned from Japan, Furniture Conservation hosted two participants in the Sharing Museum Skills Millennium Awards scheme. Dr Ticca Ogilvie (Antiquities Conservator, Bristol Museums) and Sarah Gerrish (Furniture Conservator, National Museums of Scotland) are responsible for the care of lacquer items in their respective museums.



Figure 2. Using flexible sticks (*shimbari*) to apply gentle pressure to consolidated flakes of lacquer

One of the key issues raised in reference to the conservation of the Mazarin chest in Japan was the need to ensure suitable storage for the Mazarin chest after a traditional conservation treatment. Traditional lacquer treatments require an RH of 60-80% to ensure the

lacquer-based materials cure properly. An area of concern was the possible effect on the chest of the changes in RH necessitated by a traditional treatment. The chest has had a long period of acclimatisation to a comparatively low RH in London (35-45%), but would be treated traditionally and at a comparatively high RH (60-80%) before being returned to the much lower RH in London. The timing of the Sharing Museum Skills secondments was particularly fortuitous. Ticca Ogilvie had conducted extensive research into the design of humidification systems as part of her doctoral research on the moisture sorption characteristics of wooden objects. She was able to offer comprehensive advice on a humidification and monitoring system for the storage of the Mazarin chest.

What happens next

The V&A will be continuing a collaborative approach to the treatment of lacquer objects in our collection. We are developing research projects that will be undertaken at the V&A (with Brenda Keneghan, Polymer Scientist) and at the Tobunken (with Wataru Kawanobe, Head of the Restoration Material Science Section). Possible avenues for research include assessing cleaning treatments, comparing Japanese and Western consolidation and surface treatments, and assessing and adapting traditional fill materials.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Jonathan Ashley-Smith and Albert Neher for their generous and continuing support for this project; the Japan Center for International Co-operation in Conservation for sponsoring my visits; Hiroshi Kato and Yoshihiko Yamashita and their colleagues at the Tobunken and beyond for making my visits to Japan such fruitful exchanges.

Oriental lacquer web links

http://www.tobunken.go.jp/index_e.html

website of the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties

http://www.isei.or.jp/Urushi_Museum/Urushi_Museum.html

describes traditional materials and techniques used to make lacquerware

Preservation of the Satyajit Ray Paper Archive: Fieldwork January 2002

Mike Wheeler
Senior Paper Conservator

During January 2002 I spent four weeks working in Kolkata (Calcutta) on a preservation project centred around this collection of paper-based materials associated with the artist and film-maker Satyajit Ray. My involvement with the project began in 1995 when I visited the Ray family home where the archive is situated and did an initial survey of the paper-based materials. On my return to England I wrote a report listing an action plan and a proposed budget for the conservation materials required. In 1995 I had only seen a small portion of the collection and so had only been able to carry out a sample survey of a small cross-section of the total number of items. Follow-up visits in 1996 and 1997 helped to formulate plans for a future project and to draw up a budget with a view to raising funds.

The most valuable part of this collection from the point of view of the history of cinema, and also the largest single component (totalling over 10,000 pages), is the *Khero Khata* or 'Red Books'. Averaging two for every full-length feature and one for every short film, they include scripts in various stages of development including the final shooting scripts detailing each scene and shot. There are also detailed sketches, diagrams and designs. Other 'treasures' include screen plays, music notation sheets, designs and sketches for costumes and sets, production stills, drafts of Ray's own fiction, advertising and book designs, correspondence, over 1000 personal photographs, examples of his early drawings and sketches, typographic and calligraphic designs, diaries and personal scrapbooks.



photography by Mike Wheeler. Copyright: Ray Family

Figure 1. Page from one of the *Khero Khata* showing design drawings as well as textile samples pinned through pages.

The focus of the current preservation project by the Ray Society is this collection housed in the Ray family home – a large apartment in central Kolkata. The conservation part of this project was inextricably linked with a subsequent programme to digitise the material, currently underway. From the initial 1995 survey information a proposal was put together for the conservation materials required to carry out essential first aid on the archive, as well as sufficient funds to purchase storage boxes and storage furniture for the collection. Funding received from the Ford Foundation (New Delhi) and the India Foundation for the Arts (Bangalore) in 2000 allowed the purchase of significant quantities of conservation quality materials and paid for my travel to India.

The task of preserving this archive is complicated by the fact that the collection is integral to its current location – the Study in the home where Ray lived and worked. This factor dictated that any new storage methods introduced had to fit in with the existing family furniture. The Study in which Ray worked has been left exactly as it was at the time of his death. The desire to interfere as little as possible with the original layout of the room led to the planned creation of a small storage area just off the Study, sufficient to accommodate plan chests and a system of shelves to hold Solander boxes and other conservation enclosures.

On arrival in Kolkata one of my first tasks was to look at the different areas of the collection in detail, as well as accurately measuring all of the paper-based materials with a view to making or ordering enclosures. Working within the Ray family house was a unique experience which required some period of adjustment. As well as fitting into the family's own timetable, I also had to find a way of working within their home in somewhat makeshift circumstances in a manner that was not intrusive. The working conditions within the house were obviously very different from those under which I normally work in the V&A Paper Conservation Studio. It was quite testing at times, especially when the electricity failed in the middle of lining a poster, or when trying to reassemble a highly damaged document. Completing the work by the dim light of a low wattage bulb powered by an emergency generator was, at times, both stressful and challenging.

Initially the intention had been to buy most of the conservation materials in England and send them out in advance of my visit to await my arrival. However, I soon realised that my knowledge about the extent and condition of the Ray collection was far too limited and that I might waste precious funds on buying and importing unnecessary, expensive specialist materials. After some thought I decided on a compromise – to take a small amount of vital materials with me, but to defer the major purchases until after I had seen and measured a cross-section of everything in the archive. The costs of air-freighting equipment are high, so it was important to source as many materials as possible in India as funds were limited. The essential conservation supplies I brought from England were looked at with interest – and in some cases bewilderment – by the Indian Customs & Excise Department on landing in Kolkata. In many instances it was possible to use materials available in India for conservation purposes without compromising standards. Papers for folders and interleaving as well as lining and repair are available from suppliers in India and Nepal. Acid-free mounting card was already being imported from the UK by a company in Chennai (Madras).

High levels of airborne dust made the use of boxes and enclosures highly desirable as a preservation measure for a wide range of the paper-based materials. A considerable amount of time was spent measuring books and photographic albums with a view to providing phase storage boxes at a later date. Some experiments have already been carried out using locally available buffered mounting card, which is considerably cheaper than the imported folding box board. The phase boxes used by the National Art Library at the V&A provided a basis for the types of boxes used for the Ray collection.

A collection of several hundred movie posters relating to Ray's films were examined on an item-by-item basis. These had been stored rolled up in a trunk in Ray's study in the apartment. The paper was very discoloured and fragile and many items were torn and creased. The first job was to go through the objects, unrolling them and compiling a condition survey. Progress was slow as many of the items needed surface cleaning in order to give an accurate assessment of their condition. After some experimentation, it was decided to line all of the damaged posters with a thin, hand-made Nepalese paper using methyl cellulose adhesive. Both of these materials were available in Kolkata. Sustainability of the project was deemed to be a very important factor, so using local products wherever possible was always preferred over using imported goods. This technique was an adaptation of the lining technique currently employed at the V&A for preservation of posters.



photography by Mike Wheeler. Copyright: Ray Family

Figure 2. Surface cleaning one of the movie posters.

Before beginning any conservation work, the photographs were sorted into two categories – those relating to the Ray family and images whose principal connection is with the films. Initial treatment of these materials included surface cleaning of album pages and loose photographic prints, as well as helping to organise the photographs according to the films to which they relate. In this respect it was invaluable to work alongside two Bengali colleagues who had in-depth knowledge of the films. The most common problems with these



photography by Mike Wheeler. Copyright: Ray Family

Figure 3. Pages from a Ray family photograph album

photographs, which were adhered to album pages, were surface soiling and staining of the emulsion caused by rubber cement adhesive applied to the verso. Album pages were first brushed to remove surface dirt and the photographs were cleaned by wiping the surface of the emulsion with a solution of ethanol to which a small amount of distilled water had been added. In future it is intended to interleave all of the album pages with thin tissue and to keep the photographs on the album pages within purpose made phase boxes.



photography by Mike Wheeler. Copyright: Ray Family

Figure 4. Glassine negative sleeves were replaced with polyethylene equivalents

Negatives relating to each of the films were removed from acetate and glassine sleeves and re-housed in polyethylene negative enclosures which I had brought from England specifically for the purpose.

The notebooks (*Khero Khata*) containing the original scripts and shooting directions had been identified as being of primary importance to the collection and were targeted as a priority for conservation. These were all surface-cleaned and placed in phase boxes which I had made in England prior to my departure. These enclosures supplemented similar boxes made in India from locally available, alkaline buffered mounting card. These notebooks have already been photographed as part of an earlier project to make the entire archive available in digital format so that researchers need not handle the originals.

An important part of this project has been working with and helping to train two conservators in Kolkata who have been continuing the preservation work. Mr Subir Dey and Mrs Rahki Bali have been working hard to complete many of the preservation initiatives. Together we have established priorities for conservation and drawn up a work programme. Currently they have been completing work on the collection of movie posters.

Further training and visits will take place and advice will continue to be given concerning the suitability and purchase of appropriate materials through this ongoing collaborative project between the V&A Paper Conservation Section and the Ray Society in Kolkata.

Acknowledgements:

Ray family, Aditi Nath Sarkar

A Japanese Scroll Painting Conservation Course

Run by the Institute of Paper Conservation and V&A Paper Conservation Studio.

Catherine Rickman
Independent Paper Conservator

Introduction

Two years ago, I was asked to repair a Japanese scroll painting. I knew that my theoretical knowledge of the skills, tools and materials in this area of conservation was superficial and my practical knowledge virtually non-existent. I needed some tuition. Having missed previous courses organised by ICCROM and the British Museum, I asked The Institute of Paper Conservation (IPC) if they could do something similar. Pauline Webber (representing IPC) said she thought the V&A might host the course, and Philip Meredith (Head Conservator, Far Eastern Conservation Centre, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, Netherlands) was keen to tutor a small group of experienced conservators.

The Course

In February 2002, 10 conservators from the UK, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, Sweden, USA and the Netherlands met at the V&A. Pauline and Philip, with the help of colleagues Merryl Huxtable, Mike Wheeler and Simon Fleury, had transformed the Mounters' studio into an ideal tutorial space, with ample space and light, together with the Department's specialist tools, materials, and audio-visual equipment.

Philip's course had a good balance of demonstrations and practicals. I now have a sense of the subtleties of scroll mounting; how the qualities of the different materials are reconciled by the careful choice of papers and how the consistency of the starch paste adhesive used to join them is tailored to each material; how the various different tools are used and how common structural damage can be repaired.

During the course we also looked at slides and films on related subjects, which revived memories of visits to paper-making villages in Japan some years ago, and helped to make sense of the miscellaneous information I still had from that time. The range of tools and papers I acquired on that trip have now come into their own, with my new confidence to choose correctly.

The other very useful aspect of the course was the handling, display and storage of scrolls. Simon Fleury explained about storage boxes, and we practised the precise techniques of unpacking and re-rolling scrolls from their boxes and hanging them up.

Conclusion

I found Philip Meredith a most inspiring teacher: his skills and knowledge are obviously outstanding. We were extremely lucky to have the run of the studio at the V&A, with Pauline's extensive knowledge and other staff to make everything go smoothly. The presence of a curator from the Far Eastern department, with objects from the collection to handle and discuss, added to this valuable experience. Judging by the close attention paid by the other people on the course, they got a lot out of it too. For me, there was also the pleasure of working with former colleagues again and reminiscing about my formative years of employment at the V&A in the 1980s.



Figure 1. Squaring up silk mount on a newly mounted Japanese scroll

Acknowledgements

Sponsorship was gratefully received from Japan 2001 and the work of the IPC Office and Meetings Organiser, Sabina Pugh, is much appreciated.

A Review of Adhesives Today – Exploring Current Options and Application Techniques

Jacinta Loh,
Intern, Textiles Conservation

The *Adhesives Today* workshop, 22-26 April 2002, was jointly organised by the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Canadian Conservation Institute and the British Museum.

Who came?

20 Textile conservators came from the United Kingdom, Italy, United States, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland and Singapore.

What did the participants get?

Free flow of coffee started each day, in preparation for the incredible amount of information and knowledge to be gained at every session. Lectures covered adhesives from the past to the present, their applications and techniques. Current adhesive research and findings were also reported, including customised adhesive formulation and a study of adhesive treatments. Issues of reversibility were discussed and case histories were shared through key speakers' lectures and participants' talks, creating a wealth of information and expertise exchange. Some textiles that had been treated with adhesive were brought in for close examination. A walk around the museum highlighted displays that had been treated with adhesive. These treatments largely involved the use of Beva 371, Mowilith DMC2, Lascaux 360/498 and Klucel G.

What did the participants do?

The workshop was very well organised. Participants used the adhesives and techniques that were discussed during the earlier parts of the day. It was real-time experience, with the specialists a smile away. Participants were shown the role of microscopy in adhesive treatments and the preparation of substrates and support fabrics. They tried several application techniques, with a session on the application of adhesive support to the textile using spatula, vacuum hot table and solvent reactivation. Cold lining techniques, microwave pastes and paper repair technique were also demonstrated. On top of that, participants tried adhesive removal techniques. These covered vapours, gels, poultices, mechanical, heat, swabs and immersion approaches. And at the end of each day, participants and organizers shared the day's experience in a wrap-up session.

What did everyone take away?

Some people came with adhesives experience while others had comparatively less, but this did not create an obstacle. Instead, it was key to the workshop as it created the chance to share and exchange. It did not matter if one was a lecturer or an intern, everyone was a student once more. Though everyone has gone their separate ways, they have been bonded by the adhesives workshop. Not only have they gained new knowledge, they have also been empowered with the zeal to consider and to use adhesives in their work. And they have formed a new bond of friendship, too. Each has walked away with much, but I must highlight two other important mementoes that were given to everyone – the file of notes and the file of adhesive samples. They are not merely files; they are a fractional reflection of a team of dedicated people caring for the development of their peers.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Lynda Hillyer, Head of Textiles Conservation for this invaluable opportunity to do an internship at the V&A and to participate in this workshop. Many thanks too to Zenzie Tinker for a wonderful and fruitful learning experience.



Photography by Jacinta Loh

Figure 1. Using the vacuum hot table for application of adhesive

The Observed Object: the Distance Between the Studio and the Gallery

Panayota Malkogeorgou

MPhil Research Student, RCA/V&A Conservation

"The observer infects the observed with his own mobility...so whatever the object, our thirst for possession is by definition, insatiable."¹

Samuel Beckett's study of Marcel Proust here describes a very different kind of object from those found in a museum. Nevertheless, it offers a good starting point and a stimulation for thinking about how we perceive the object and what its interpretation might involve. As such, it is directly relevant to us working in the conservation field. The "thirst for possession" which Beckett refers to in relation to the object, I regard as not so much the physical sense of having and holding onto, but rather as understanding. That is how I want to discuss it here. It is in this way of "possessing" an object that I see conservation as having a major role; one which comes before anything else.

This particular role that conservation has to play is always in need of being defined and redefined, exactly because there is an infinite possibility in the relationship of the observer and the observed object. That, of course, might mean that the observer then would also have to be understood. But the observer is never static. He or she moves both in time and in place. This mobility is an aspect which, sadly, is usually discussed in a historical context within the conservation profession. Conservators very often and for a variety of reasons, have to remove old interventions from objects. This has led to an assumption that old restorations are relics of a past profession not comparable to today's practice. While at the same time, and it would seem at this point only natural, decisions to alter past interventions represent a declaration of present achievements.

Seemingly liberated from a past where decisions directly reflected the prevailing aesthetics, old interventions would be described as "being revealing about the sensibilities of the time rather than the artist's intent"² for example. Here, quite arbitrarily, is an apparent presumption that the importance of artistic intent in today's western society is something different to the *sensibilities of the times*. What is it then, if not a reflection of the way we place value on objects? Of where we stand, in the here and now

when the object's significance is assessed? From this perspective the context within which we, as conservators, evaluate our own work would then automatically create a certain space for any type of *mobility* of the conservator-observer and the variety of cultural influences on the approach to preserving the object firmly set in the past.

And so, despite the importance of cultural influences, or perhaps because of their complexity, in the way the object is read by the conservators in the various fields, this still remains the most elusive of things to investigate: the impact the mobility of the observer has on the observed object. It is almost like a secret garden, which although concealed, you know is there, but there is no map to follow in order to get to it. In museum studies, for example, a lot of research and literature has been developed over the last few years, on the role of the museum audience, actual and potential, and the audience's ever-changing impact on the understanding of the object. The conservation profession has been happy to disregard its own mobility.

Instead, since the early days, the profession developed according to what was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, *the modern life* and corresponded to the idea of natural science. Typically *modern life* then was described by Georg Simmel in his theory of fashion as "the calculative exactness of practical life which had brought a transformation of the world into an arithmetic problem, fixing every part of it by mathematical formulas"³. It was the reduction of qualitative values to quantitative ones and this was a line that conservation followed as it moved towards becoming a discipline in its own right. But this *becoming* did not happen in a smooth and linear continuum, in the way we find it often described in conservation literature. Rather, because of the embodied memories of a vulnerable past, and choices placing conservation in an ambiguous present, the conservator has emerged as the professional advocate for the rights of the object and its well being in the face of physical change. In an effort to regain some of the lost sense of security found predominantly in technical fields,

conservators are taking a "scientific stance with an associated ethic of impartial detachment from issues of taste and discrimination."⁴ A never ending and exhausting striving for the objective approach to conservation, whether this involves treating the object or controlling its direct environment, is at work. A tradition has been created in the conservation field of focusing on the behaviour of materials, mechanisms, possible interventions and long-term efficacy of treatment, physical condition and causes of deterioration. With the distinct idea that ethics are unrelated to aesthetics, conservation has largely favoured a deterministic approach of cause and effect.

In the search for this impartial detachment, conservators profess a non-involvement and a non-subjective approach for the benefit of a greater truth, one which lives inherently within the object. One that is always there, fixed in the material of the object, ready in its totality to project towards the future. However, truth, said Kierkegaard, is subjectivity. And the mobility of the observer implies subjectivity. As Jonathan Ashley-Smith observed: "it is we the human beings that have the needs, the desires and rights not the objects. It is we who create the values."⁵

As the observer is mobile, so the object observed cannot be a static embodiment of a culture with a fixed meaning. And in this sense its preservation is a complex and continual process that recreates its product. Mobility and change are inevitable, and are bound together as the observer and the observed are. And while "conservation is not really a bridge between science and art anymore than bakery is"⁶, I believe it to be part of what we call the human science and it is worth regarding it as such. Popular culture, fashion, trends and values cannot then be seen as something irrelevant to conservation and the context within which it operates. A simple source or a single interpretation of the object is a misguided one and further research in the way conservation decisions influence the understanding of objects and the dynamics that influence those decisions, are avenues that need exploring within the conservation field and by conservators.

Acknowledgements:

I am grateful to Professor Sandra Kemp, Jonathan Miles and Yve Lomax from the RCA and to Helen Jones and Metaxia Ventikou from the Conservation Department of the V&A.

References:

- Beckett, S., (1949), *Proust And Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, John Calder Publisher London, 1999, p 17
- Heuman, J., *Material Matters: The Conservation of Modern Sculpture*, Tate Gallery Publishing, London, 1999, p 13.
- Simmel, G., (1900), *The Philosophy of Fashion*, In D. Frisby and M. Featherston (eds), *Simmel on Culture*, Sage, London: 1997, p 179.
- Drysdale, L.,... *The Eternal Triangle: Relationships Between Conservators, Their Clients, And Objects in Preprints for the UKIC 30th Anniversary Conference, 1958-1988*, UKIC, London, p 19.
- Ashley-Smith, J., *Risk Assessment for Object Conservation*, Butterworth-Heinenman, Oxford, p 11.
- Ashley-Smith, J., *Science and Art: Separated by a Common Language?*, *V&A Conservation Journal* 36., p 5.



Fig 1 Sculpture conservator preparing an object for moving.

Photography by V&A Technical Services

The Importance of Being Less Earnest: Communicating Conservation

Helen Jones
Deputy Head, RCA/V&A Conservation

"...there is a failure on the part of conservators to make their profession sexy enough!"

So says Tim Schadla Hall, Reader in Public Archaeology at University College London. In an address to conservators, published in *Museum Archaeology News* (No. 33, Autumn/Winter 2001), he demonstrates "the relatively low esteem in which conservation is held". He suggests that this is due at least in part to conservators' anxiety to convey their professionalism and protect their exclusive knowledge at the expense of being interesting and at the risk of being sidelined. We need to loosen up a bit and open up a lot; to be much less earnest in our interactions with our colleagues and with the public.

It is not novel to point out that conservators need to be able to communicate well about their profession if they are to secure resources and achieve their objectives of stable, accessible collections. The importance of good communication, especially with the public, is acknowledged in several recent initiatives and publications; e.g. the Museums & Galleries Commission's resource pack *Ours for Keeps?* (1997), the criteria for the Conservation Awards and IIC's Keck Award. Elizabeth Pye included a whole chapter on 'Communicating Conservation' in her recent book *Caring for the Past* (2001, James & James), in which she clearly makes the case for improving our skills in this area and Simon Cane considered the issue in a recent article for *Conservation News* (Issue 78, May 2002).

So why write about it again? Well, because it seems to me that many conservators are not really convinced either that it is worth doing or that they have anything to say. In particular, this article was prompted by recent remarks made by Conservation colleagues. The first occurred in a discussion about the Conservation Department's contribution to setting and achieving performance measures for the Museum. It was pointed out that only one performance measure related to conservation – the one describing the proportion of the collections housed in adequate environmental conditions. The second example arose while talking about the Conservation Department's participation in public events and outreach activities; someone said

"Shouldn't we just get on with conserving the objects?" I understand the latter viewpoint since there is an increasing amount and variety of things that conservators have to do. Although most of us entered the conservation profession because we enjoyed working with objects, it always seems to be treatment of objects that is sacrificed.

However, it is clear that conservation today is about much more than 'just' treating the objects, and even more than treating the objects plus controlling the climate. Conservators have to develop professional and political skills, not for their own aggrandisement but in order to do their jobs properly. The current preoccupations in museums, led by the Government Department for Culture, Media & Sport, are access, learning and social inclusion. All of these tend to add weight to the access side of the care/access scales, whereas Conservation is usually seen as on the care side and, therefore, in opposition to access. This is not necessarily correct since most of the V&A Conservation Department's work is about enabling access through exhibition and loans, but it is an entrenched view. If we identify **ourselves** solely with treatment and protection of objects, we are in danger of portraying ourselves as technicians, undermining our carefully cultivated professional status, and as obstructions to progress. Thus we could cut ourselves off from the influence and consequent resources that will enhance the conservation process.

The comments described above jarred because they go against prevailing professional trends. In the case of the performance measures, there are many areas other than environmental control in which we can claim a contribution, not least in the levels of visitor satisfaction. Access to objects is not only made possible, but significantly enhanced by conservation; even a rapid tour of the V&A's British Galleries demonstrates that the objects look fantastic and that information obtained through conservation educates and entertains the visitors. Through the RCA/V&A Conservation programme of postgraduate training and research, as well as through numerous internships, exchanges and work placements, we contribute directly to the Museum's objectives on learning and also to working with the regions. If we

are slow to claim these things for ourselves, it is not surprising that they are not recognised by others, and then we feel taken for granted. Communication requires effort and it is up to us to make the running and not wait to be asked.

V&A conservators and scientists already help the Museum to fulfil its remit to provide an excellent public service, through its core conservation role and also by providing successful lectures, visits and demonstrations for a range of audiences. Public events, though, tend to occur on an ad hoc, reactive basis and to be fitted in as a necessary but sometimes uncongenial duty. Even when there is enthusiasm, it is hard to find the time. An analysis by the author in 2000 of the V&A Conservation Department's communication activities concluded that we are very good indeed at talking to other conservation professionals, but less so with the wider world, including Museum colleagues and Trustees as well as visitors. Yet it also noted that we could have most to gain by focusing on the visitor because this would also attract kudos within the Museum. It follows that we could do even better by appealing to people who are currently non-visitors, though this is more difficult to do.

Kudos is hollow, though, if it is not translated into power. Perhaps power is an unpalatable word to the stereotypical conservator, or any person of liberal persuasion, but effectiveness demands it. In the past, conservators have tried to base their power on control: on claiming an unassailable right of veto. Our specialist expertise is a good basis for power, but if it is wielded too defensively, too often or without justification, it is ultimately self-defeating: very often, the objects won't fall apart – not immediately, anyway – and, like the boy who cried wolf, we may be ignored. If the objects **are** damaged, we will not only have been ignored – we will have failed. More effective power can be earned through adding to the institution's success, **and being seen to do so**. By sharing our expert knowledge, opinion and skills more widely, our power is founded on consensus achieved through mutual understanding, respect and confidence, not blind obedience (which we never had anyway).

It can only be to our advantage to seek further opportunities to engage directly with the public and to incorporate this into our strategic planning, supported by management practices and resources. This means training in relevant skills, setting aside time to plan and execute activities and recognising achievements. It is easier to say than do, especially when the Museum has such a busy programme, but we are making progress, e.g. by generating stories

for the V&A website and making sure the Learning & Visitor Services Department know how we can contribute to public programmes in varied ways.

Getting more involved with the public need not be an exercise in cynical pragmatism nor mere bandwagon-jumping, though. There are at least two further reasons why we should embrace outreach activities.



Photography by the author

Figure 1. Panel from an RCA/V&A Conservation display that emphasised explaining conservation to visitors.

The first is that we can learn a lot ourselves. Another recent trend in conservation research, including in RCA/V&A Conservation, is consideration of the fundamental purpose of conservation and its role in society. Our concepts of what constitutes an object's significance and by whom it is conferred are expanding. It is more explicitly acknowledged that objects embody multifarious values and that conservation decisions are subjective. The public constitute major stakeholders and it is common to invoke 'what the public wants'. However, there is no single public, but a rich variety of people with diverse opinions and needs. Research into what they actually do want is limited. We could do more to find out what it is the public like (or don't!), how our decisions affect them and how they can contribute to the process. If they do not want what we are offering, we cannot simply set out to change their minds but should re-examine what we do. Conservators, myself included, feel compelled to proselytise; to explain and justify conservation and convert others to our cause (figure 1). There is a place for this, but we could concentrate more on demonstrating what conservation adds to the understanding and enjoyment of objects, and on communicating the

excitement and pleasure we ourselves often feel. Experience and anecdote at the V&A strongly suggest that our visitors do indeed enjoy engaging with conservation. This is borne out by Krysta Brooks's research for her BA dissertation, *Do Not Touch* (City & Guilds of London Art School, 2000). To build on this, we can learn from other professionals in the communication sphere (e.g. education, design, marketing) in order to get our message across in stimulating and effective ways while being open to debate and differing opinions. Conservation-generated material should be integrated throughout the Museum's public activities so that the message, while more subtle, is put before audiences who may not visit the display or web-page with a 'Conservation' headline. An example is a recent display mounted by conservators at the V&A about the discovery of sacred objects inside a Buddha sculpture, which focused on the object, but addressed conservation decision-making.

V&A New Staff



Susan Catcher
Senior Paper Conservator

Initially trained in textiles, it took a while to decide it was paper conservation I wished to specialize in. The idea of a career in conservation had been in embryonic form during school but teenage angst, a period of 'finding myself' in Africa, (I was a VSO for three years), and subsequent world travel left me pregnant. Some career change! Two children, one MA and fifteen years later I am sitting here in the Victoria & Albert Museum on a job share with Victoria Button, who wisely sorted out her career first.

I have had a few jobs on the way including in-situ book conservation at the Royal Society of Medicine, the Freemasons and the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies. Immediately prior to joining the V&A, I did some freelance conservation work at the Natural History Museum. These assignments have all reinforced my belief that conservation is my thing, so bring on the next object...

V&A New Staff



Stefania Signorello
Book Conservator

I have always been attracted by books since I was a child. I loved going to the little library of my village, and I remember spending many afternoons in its reading room, just looking out of the windows and enjoying the slightly acidic scent surrounding me. Magici!

I studied music and art for many years, between the ages of 10 and 21. I have a Diploma in Applied Art (major in Textile Arts) and a Degree in Fine Arts (major in Decoration). Later I studied conservation: I went to Florence – Istituto per l'Arte ed il Restauro, Palazzo Spinelli – and in 1991 I gained a Diploma in Conservation of Books, Drawings, and Prints. After that I did many internships and short courses in Italy, Austria, Czech Republic, and finally in London. I spent almost two years in Milan, where I worked on 16th to 18th century books, parchment documents, prints, drawings, archival materials and objects from private collections and from the main libraries and archives of many Italian regions. In September 1997 I undertook a three month internship here at the V&A in Book Conservation. Immediately after that I was offered my first short contract that was renewed a few times. When my last contract ran out, I became a book conservator at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. This gave me opportunities I relished: to work with many other book conservators and to work on books of the Duke Humfrey's Library, surveying the collection and conserving high priority volumes. It was a great experience but nearly three years of commuting by coach was tiring.

Now I am happy to be back at the V&A, finding it exciting and very challenging. I am doing all the exhibition work and looking after the Book Conservation Studio while Jane Rutherford and Bridget Mitchell are on maternity leave.



Fiona Campbell
Personal Assistant to Head of Conservation

I have been fascinated by Ancient History for most of my life, and consequently have degrees in Classical Studies and Classical Archaeology. I have also tried my hand at archaeology, including a dig in Cyprus with Dr Alison South; and at curatorship, when I was lucky enough to get a job at the British Museum as a junior curator; both of which are highlights of my life. I became aware of Conservation as a discipline in its own right only whilst I was at the British Museum, and often wish I had known of it previously, as it is my favourite aspect of museums and the art world (except possibly the Egyptian collections!).

Unfortunately, as I am sure most of us are aware, archaeology (and museology!) does not really pay, and I was forced to 'sell out' to the commercial world for a time. At the time I thought that would be the end of 'a career', but blessings often come disguised and I learnt a great deal, including website design, while I was out being mercenary. I initially learnt website maintenance for my job, but continued designing as a hobby and now, having completed courses in the subject, count it an important part of my CV and something I love to do. Hopefully Jonathan Ashley-Smith's website will reflect this!

I am extremely happy to be back in the museum world, and feel very lucky that it should be as part of the Conservation Department. I am looking forward to contributing to the smooth-running of the Department as well as gaining a much better understanding of periods of art history that I was previously unfamiliar with. I am already addicted to the Departmental seminars and Museum lectures. Please excuse me though, if I nip upstairs every now and then to gaze with awe at Tutankhamun's burial wrap!

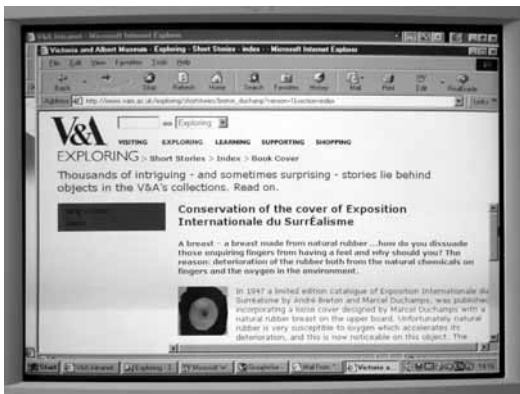


Figure 2. A conservation 'Short Story' by Jane Rutherford on the V&A website describing the preservation problems of a latex breast on a surrealist book cover.

The second reason is very compelling but is frequently too low on conservators' agendas: we could enjoy ourselves!

Photography by the author

Conservation Department Staff Chart Summer 2002

Head of Conservation

Jonathan Ashley-Smith

Fiona Campbell

Science

Graham Martin
Boris Pretzel
Brenda Keneghan
Richard Kibaya
Lucia Burgio

RCA/V&A Conservation

William Lindsay (RCA)
Helen Jones (V&A)
Alison Richmond (V&A)
Alison Bracker (RCA)
Joanna Baden (RCA)

Administration

Tim Carpenter
Rhonwen George

Textiles

Lynda Hillyer
Marion Kite
Val Blyth
Albertina Cogram
Frances Hartog
Zenzie Tinker
Susana Hunter
Lara Flecker

Furniture

Albert Neher
Tim Miller
Christine Powell
Nigel Bamforth
Shayne Rivers

Ceramics & Glass

Victoria Oakley

Paper

Pauline Webber
Elizabeth Martin

Stained Glass

Drew Anderson

Metals

Diana Heath
Simon Metcalf
Joanna Whalley
Donna Stevens
Sophy Wills

Mounters

Danny Norman
Simon Fleury
Chris Gingell
Christian Russell

Sculpture

Charlotte Hubbard
Metaxia Ventikou

Books

Jane Rutherford
Bridget Mitchell
Stefania Signorello
Anne Greig

Paintings

Nicola Costaras
Frames

Katharine Donaldson

Students

Computer Visualisation

Nicholas Frayling, *PhD*
Hugh Halpin, *MPhil*

Furniture

Nanke Schellmann, *MA*

Stained Glass

Sherrie Eatman, *MA*

History, Ethics & Management

Nicky Ingram, *MPhil*
(with English Heritage)

Pip Laursen, *MPhil*

William Lindsay, *PhD*

Panayota Malkogeorgou,
MPhil

Maria Troupkou, *MPhil*

20th Century Materials

Fotini Koussiaki, *PhD*
(with Tate)

Harriet Standeven, *PhD*

Sculpture

Camilla Schaper, *MA*

Neil Wressell, *MA*
(with Tate)

Social History Objects

Kirsten Kruse, *MA*

(with Museum of London)

Books

Elisabeth Carr, *MA*
(Photograph Albums)

Conservation Science

Kathryn Hallett, *MA*
(with British Museum)

Surface Studies

Pedro Gaspar, *PhD*

Charis Theodorakopoulos,
MPhil

Marie Vest, *PhD*

Historical/Technical Study

Victoria Doran, *PhD*

Magdalena Kozeira, *PhD*

Allyson McDermott, *MPhil*

Publication of the Victoria & Albert Museum Conservation Department

ISSN 096702273