

CONSERVATION

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As the Museum moved into the second year of the Gallery Enhancement project, the activities of the conservation staff continued to revolve around the gallery renovations. One of the major new activities this year centered on the painting of five of the Museum galleries. Conservation was kept busy working with the Museum team to de-install display cases and prepare the galleries for painting and electrical work. In order to protect the freestanding sculptures from paint and fumes, the entire Museum worked together to get them under cover (fig. 1a-b). During a point in time when the Persian Gallery had three scissor lifts in play simultaneously, the Gallery became the setting for a mechanical ballet of construction equipment moving delicately among the sculptures and display cases.

Work continued over the course of the year with the de-installation of display cases, carefully removing the objects to allow for their condition assessment in order to determine if



Figure 1a-b. E14088, statue of Tutankhamun, wrapped in plastic in preparation for painting of the Egyptian gallery (left) and during cleaning by museum staff after removing protective plastic layer (right)



Figure 2: Museum staff de-install objects from cases in preparation for painting of the Egyptian gallery walls

conservation treatment would be required before their return to display (fig. 2). Work also continued on the identification of materials in the collection. The use of the Oriental Institute’s handheld x-ray fluorescence spectrometer continued to play a significant role in the non-destructive testing of artifacts in the collection, allowing for material identification and often correcting decades of misidentification (fig. 3). This issue is not unique to our institution. Before the advent of non-destructive testing techniques, most museums were in the same situation and had limited ability to carry out sampling on their collections.

Since our new Chief Curator, Jean Evans, took the helm of the Museum in the fall, the pace of the Gallery Enhancement Project has picked up exponentially. In recognition of the increased burden on conservation, the lab will gain a new staff member to help maintain the project’s momentum. Stephanie Black, the new Assistant Conservator for the Gallery Enhancement Project, will be joining the conservation lab in July. She has been working for the last four and half years as conservator and laboratory technician for UCL Qatar’s MSc Conservation Studies training program. Stephanie is a graduate of the UCL London-based conservation-training program and has a BA in conservation from the University of Delaware. We look forward to her arrival.



Figure 3. E7177; cartonnage head cover is analyzed using the Bruker Tracer III SD XRF spectrometer as part of the Gallery Enhancement Project

Alison Whyte, Associate Conservator, has had another busy year. She continued to serve as Lead Conservator for Special Exhibits and spent a good portion of the past year assessing and preparing objects for the upcoming fall exhibit *The Book of the Dead: Becoming God in Ancient Egypt*. She was also hard at work carrying out testing of all the new materials that will be used in both the renovated and new display cases, including fabrics, paper-based products, and adhesives.

Alison took part in several projects and courses during the year. She presented at the University of Chicago's career Lunch & Learn program, providing a lunchtime lecture to university students about the profession of conservation. She also developed and taught an OI adult education course in the fall: *Art and Science of Museum Conservation*. In October, Alison attended a weeklong glass conservation workshop at the Canadian Conservation Institute in Canada for which she was able to obtain external funding with two successful grants. In January, Alison traveled to Kabul, Afghanistan, for a week to assist the Lead Conservator, Fabio Colombo, with the initiation of a new venture at the National Museum of Afghanistan — the Hadda Sculpture Conservation Project. In June, Alison presented a paper, co-authored with Simona Cristanetti, at the 2nd Vatican Coffin Conservation conference in Rome on the ARCE-funded treatment of the painted wooden coffin of Ipi-ha-ishutef.

The press of work for the Gallery Enhancement Project did not allow for as active a loan program as in past years. The Oriental Institute contributed a small group of ceramics to Morag Kersel's exhibit at the Neubauer this past spring: *The Past Sold: Case Studies in the Movement of Archaeological Objects*. Conservation staff prepared condition reports, packed and couriered the objects to the Neubauer Collegium, providing the same level of care as an external loan to another museum.

Last year was also a busy year for the CT scanning facilities on campus. As part of a larger project to properly image all of our human remains, we brought two adult mummies over to the hospital to take advantage of their full body CT scanners. One of the "patients" was the female mummy (OIM E271) soon to be on display in this fall's *Book of the Dead* special exhibit. She is extremely fragile and required extensive packing by Terry Dowd, a fine arts packer, and a conservation staff, in order to prepare her for the trip. An independent researcher also requested permission to CT scan several of our bird mummies for her research. One of the bird mummies was small enough to fit inside the chamber of the UChicago PaleoCT high resolution scanner. Alison prepared a custom mount for the mummy that snugly held it in position throughout the two-hour scanning procedure (fig. 4a-b).



Figure 4a-b. E119, bird mummy, in its custom made mount (top) and inside the PaleoCT high resolution scanner at Biological Sciences Division (bottom)

Two conferences were held in Chicago this past year that were of interest to conservation: the Synchrotron Radiation and Neutrons in Art and Archaeology (SR2A), and the 2017 Annual Meeting of the American Institute for Conservation (AIC). Conservation was pleased to be able to attend both conferences. The SR2A conference, held in Chicago for the first time in its history, brought together researchers from all over the world who use synchrotron radiation in the study of cultural heritage. The papers covered a wide range of topics, ranging from studies of hidden texts and inks in rolled papyri, corrosion products and pigments to an experimental Flemish-Dutch tabletop synchrotron light source for conservation science. Laura served on the planning committee for the conference and chaired the session on pigment degradation. She also attended an all-day workshop on lighting at the annual AIC meeting that presented information on new types of museum lighting and their attendant implications for the preservation of collections. Laura spent two days at a seminar at the Smithsonian Institute on the mechanics of art materials and their future in heritage science which covered a variety of topics including a study of environmental parameters for different types of collections, potential energy sources for climate-control systems, and research that scientifically measured the stresses that artifacts undergo as they travel on loans between museums.

This past year has flown by as we were all kept busy keeping up with the flow of work. Particular thanks go to Alison for her assistance with this report. We are looking forward to the start of the arrival of the new display cases next year as the galleries are slowly transformed.
