

MUSEUM

Jean Evans

The staff of the Oriental Institute Museum had a productive year of activity increasingly focused on realizing the aims of the Gallery Enhancements Project (GEP), which is on schedule to be completed for the celebration of the 2019 centennial of the Oriental Institute. I began my position here last September, jumping into the prototype display case phase of the GEP, which had been proceeding apace under the leadership of Jack Green, until his departure in December 2015, and afterwards in the able hands of Kiersten Neumann and Emily Teeter. Many thanks to everyone for such a warm welcome to the Oriental Institute Museum. It is an honor for me to lead the Museum, both to curate its renowned collection and to consider as my colleagues so many talented individuals. I am grateful to all of them for bringing me up to date on this amazing project. As a result of the GEP, we have reduced activities in some of our main areas, including special exhibitions and object loans. The results, however, will be well worth these present sacrifices as we prepare the galleries for the next century in the life of the Oriental Institute.

Museum Attendance

The total number of visitors to the Museum in the past fiscal year (July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017) was 54,186. Although our number of visitors remains steady, essentially having recovered from the large dip that had occurred in the 2014 fiscal year due to the closing of the 58th street between Woodlawn and University Avenues and the resulting restricted access to our main entrance. The total number of visitors this past year was about 2% less than the 2015–2016 fiscal year. In reality, however, our number of visitors remains steady. While annual reports earlier in the decade often remarked on the total number of visitors hovering around 50,000, it is more accurate to say in the last couple of years that our numbers hover around 55,000 annual visitors. Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand whether the lack of a new special exhibit this past year had an effect on visitor numbers since it had been decided to hold over *Persepolis: Images of an Empire* for a second year in the special exhibitions gallery. At the same time, the reception of the exhibition has been overwhelmingly positive, and the difference in visitors is small enough to defy quantification. Many thanks to Adam Finefrock for recording and circulating visitor numbers to Museum staff. Our thanks also to Victor Cruz who succeeded Adam as Director of Visitor Services and Security.

Gallery Enhancements Project

In 2014, the Oriental Institute Museum initiated the Gallery Enhancements Project, the principal aim of which is to improve the visitor experience in the galleries through updated displays, improved lighting, and the replacement of free-standing cases, many of which date to the 1931 opening of the Museum in its current location — and earlier. The project has been made

possible through the generosity of an anonymous donor — our “Gilgamesh” — with additional funding to be raised.

Upon my arrival this past September, plans were well in place for realizing the enhancements now on view in much of the Nubian Gallery as well as in some of the cases in the Egyptian Gallery. I would like to thank Emily Teeter for coordinating the efforts of the team consisting of Kiersten Neumann, Erik Lindahl, Josh Tulisiak, and Erin Bliss with support from Conservation and Registration and the expertise of Bruce Williams.

This past year, we placed our order for new display cases with Helmut Guenschel, Inc. While other vendors had been considered, the consensus was that Guenschel offered superior craftsmanship and fundamentally understood our aim to have cases that would wed modern advances such as those in glass technology and lighting with our intention to preserve the 1931 aesthetic of our galleries as a historical space.

The placement of the order officially marks the end of the prototype display case phase of the Gallery Enhancements Project. Some fifty-five cases were ordered based on the designs produced by Elizabeth Kidera, exhibit designer and architect, initially in collaboration with Kiersten Neumann, Emily Teeter, and Jack Green. The display cases will be divided into five deliveries beginning this winter and continuing through early 2019. We received the first technical drawings from Guenschel this past summer.

Upon my arrival at the Museum, the GEP entered another phase of planning. With many of the matters regarding the design of the cases themselves resolved, it was necessary to turn to a consideration of how the objects should be displayed inside them. It was therefore necessary to build upon a graphic hierarchy established during the earlier phase of the project. The design team is in place. Elizabeth Kidera continues as our Exhibition Designer, and I have also hired Franck Mercurio as Exhibition Developer and Lori Walsh as a senior Graphic Designer. All three individuals have backgrounds that overlapped at various professional points at the Field Museum. Lori still works there, with contributions most recently to the special exhibition entitled *Specimens: Unlocking the Secrets of Life*.

The main focus of the GEP this past spring was in the Henrietta Herbolzheimer, M.D. Syro-Anatolian Gallery. Kiersten Neumann and I provided curatorial expertise, working with the design team on establishing in that gallery certain standard features that we could then implement in each of the Museum galleries. For example, we developed a new gallery orientation area panel (fig. 1). We standardized its features so that every gallery will have a general

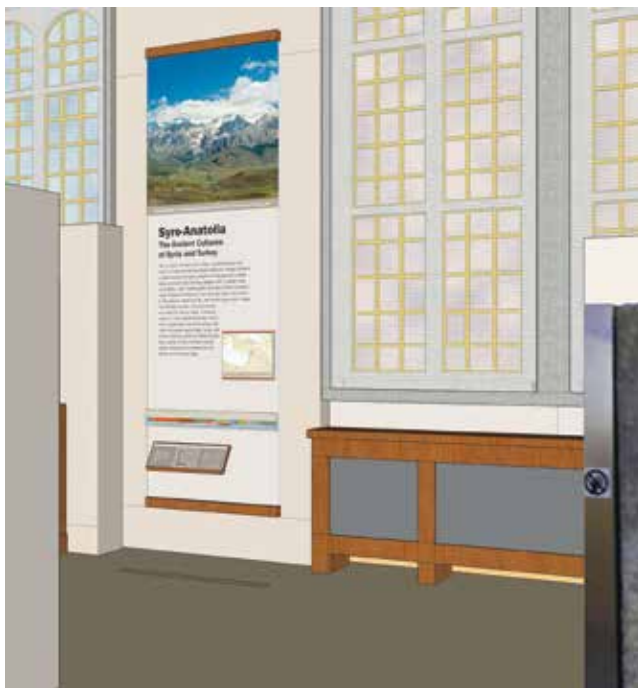


Figure 1. Newly developed gallery orientation area panel



Figure 2. Stone cleaning and painting in the Joseph and Mary Grimshaw Egyptian Gallery this past January

introduction with floors plans indicating for the visitor both their overall location in the Museum as well as the layout of the individual gallery and the theme of each of its cases. A map includes sites mentioned in the gallery, and a timeline will give an overview of the region.

Similarly, Kiersten and I introduced other features that will recur throughout the Museum, such as the OI Excavates panels highlighting the history of Oriental Institute archaeology. The elimination of graphic repetition and the consolidation of graphics have also been a focus of our work. New display case designs were realized for the existing cases and are being produced in anticipation of the new case deliveries. Aspects of the Syro-Anatolian gallery were also replanned, including most significantly the new Tayinat monuments area. All these enhancements were completed in time for the 10th International Congress of Hittitology. We thank all our Syro-Anatolian experts for their enthusiastic participation in our efforts to improve the galleries, including Theo van den Hout, Petra Goedegebuure, James Osborne, Richard Beal, and Oya Topçuoğlu.

Work also continued on a general level. The Joseph and Mary Grimshaw Egyptian Gallery was briefly closed this past January for stone cleaning and painting (fig. 2). The Robert and Deborah Aliber Persian Gallery, the Dr. Norman Solhkhah Family Assyrian Empire Gallery, the Syro-Anatolian Gallery, and the Haas and Schwartz Megiddo Gallery were closed in June for painting, the installation of track lighting, and other electrical work. While the Persian and Egyptian galleries remained the same color — a credit to these hues having aged well aesthetically — the other galleries were painted in new colors that are calm and muted, harmonizing well with the stone walls, terrazzo floor, and painted ceiling of our historic 1931 gallery spaces.

Rob Bain joined us this past February as our new Lead Preparator, replacing Erik Lindahl. He has settled in and is doing a great job, leading Prep Shop in the new construction work for the Syro-Anatolian gallery and other installation projects. Rob brings some twelve years of experience as Chief Preparator at The Renaissance Society to this position. Without a Lead Preparator as experienced and talented as Rob, we would not be able to realize many of the aims of the GEP. Also in the Prep Shop, producing our exhibition mounts, most recently Olivia Gallo joined Josh Tulisaiak, Erin Bliss, and Kate Cescon, and Andrew Talley. Josh Tulisaiak continues to ably lend his talents to our overall graphic design needs. We also have a group of graduate students, including Alexandra Erichson, Nisha Kumar, and Catie Witt, as well as our

volunteer, Gaby Cohen, working on label research. Emilie Sarrazin is our exhibition mapmaker working out of CAMEL lab, and Shannon Martino has been drawing and inking ceramics for our label graphics.

The Conservation Laboratory plays a prominent role in the GEP, checking the condition of objects destined for exhibition, performing treatments when necessary, and advising on mount requirements and other proper display techniques. The movement of ancient artifacts for installation work would not be possible without the oversight of Registration led by Helen McDonald as our Registrar and Susan Allison who this past year became an Associate Registrar.

In particular, thank you to Laura D'Alessandro, Head Conservator, who has brought a renewed rigor to our labeling in the galleries, indefatigably providing the accurate identification of the materials of the objects on display using a combination of handheld x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy and chemical tests and with the assistance our Conservator Alison Whyte. Our new GEP Assistant Conservator, Stephanie Black, began in July. Stephanie is a graduate of the University College London MSc program in archaeological conservation and has been working at University College London's campus in Doha, Qatar, carrying out analysis, practical training, and laboratory supervision for the past four years.

We also thank Rich and Sue Padula for providing us with the Encurate Content Management System that has allowed us to create the first ever mobile app for the Oriental Institute Museum (fig. 3). We currently have a highlights tour available on the app as well as a special tour in which our OI volunteers talk about their favorite objects. We look forward to developing the content of our Encurate app and seeing its possibilities. Thank you to Nancy Harmon for coordinating our use of the app and patiently teaching us all about it.

Finally, thank you to so many of members of the OI community who have shared their enthusiasm for the project with us. It is both a privilege and an awesome responsibility to oversee the Gallery Enhancements Project, and I hope you will continue to be delighted by the ongoing changes over the next two years.



Figure 3. First ever mobile app for the OI Museum

Museum Acquisitions

On May 10, 2017, the Oriental Institute Voting Members approved the following acquisitions policy for the Oriental Institute Museum:

The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago purchases on the market only infrequently and will only acquire items that can be shown to have left their country of origin before 1972, the year the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property entered into force, or to have been otherwise legally exported from their country of origin and legally imported into the United States. Legally-exported items include, but are not limited to, those that are part of a state-sponsored division (partage), scientific samples (faunal remains, carbon, plant, soil and wood, among others), and

study collection materials, for which an export license has been granted by the country of origin or is not required under the laws of the country of origin.

In cases where the national ownership laws of an object's country of origin can be shown to predate 1972, objects must have been exported before the date of that country's law. The term "country of origin" here refers to the country within whose boundaries, as recognized by the United States Government, the object was discovered in modern times.

The provenance of acquired items shall be a matter of public record. Once an object has been vetted and approved by the Acquisitions Committee and it is accessioned into the collection, the Oriental Institute will publish an image and any associated provenance information related to acquisition in the Annual Report and on the Collections section of the Oriental Institute's website.

I would like to thank Morag Kersel for contributing her expertise towards the drafting of our Acquisitions Policy.

The Museum acquired one item this past year — a ceramic pot (A180969) donated by David and Ina Woolman (fig. 4). The pot has an interesting history. It had been excavated at Megiddo by the Oriental Institute and presented as a gift to David's parents, Janet and Laurence Woolman. Laurence had been an architect hired by the OI to design and supervise construction of the expedition house, among other work, at Megiddo. The pot was gifted in recognition of the Woolman's contribution on the occasion of their departure from the site in June 1930.

Collections Research Grant

We were honored to be able to continue the Oriental Institute Collections Research Grant programs in 2015–2016 thanks to the generous support of O. J. Sopranos. Three applicants were funded to carry out research on the collections:

Kathryn Bandy (PhD Candidate, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago, project entitled "The Stela of the Chief Lector Priest of Edfu, Ibi, at the Oriental Institute [OIM E9346]"), Rachael Dann (Associate Professor, Egyptian & Sudanese Archaeology, Department of Cross-Cultural & Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen, study entitled "Original materials from the OINE excavations at X-Group Period Qustul and Ballana"), and Magnus Widell (Senior Lecturer in Assyriology, Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology, University of Liverpool, study entitled "Oriental Institute Ur III Tablet Project").



Figure 4. Ceramic pot A180969, the only acquired item by the Museum this past year

Other Projects and News

An all-Museum highlights volume edited by myself, Jack Green, and Emily Teeter was completed and will be on sale this fall.

Kiersten Neumann spearheaded a project to establish permissions procedures for outside researchers to both our object collections as well as our Archives.

This past November, Anne Flannery joined the Museum as Head of Museum Archives and Digital Content Specialist and, in December, John Larson retired after thirty-six years of service as our Archivist. We send John every thanks for his service and all our best wishes, and we welcome Anne to the position. Anne brings ten years of experience working in libraries, archives, and digital services and was most recently the IMLS-funded Project Manager for the OI Integrated Database Project under the leadership of Foy Scalf.

I leave you with one final exciting event to report. In May, Google Cultural Institutions who visited our galleries in order to collect data to create a Street View. We expect this to be available in the coming year, allowing anyone interested to visit our Museum and enjoy and learn from our collections, wherever they may be.
