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## Annual Meeting Abstracts

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*The 2007 WAAC Annual Meeting was held September 15-17 in Denver, Colorado. The papers from the meeting are listed below along with summaries prepared by the speakers.*

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### **Don't Scare the Horses: Small Museum Development in New Mexico**

M. Susan Barger

Since the fall of 2001, there has been an effort to improve the infrastructure and skills in the small museums of New Mexico. First, this was an IMLS funded program under the auspices of the New Mexico Association of Museums and the Museum of New Mexico Traveling Exhibitions Bureau, TREX. When the federal money ran out, private funds kept the program going as the Small Museum Development Project until 2004. At that time, the state decided not to continue the program.

The needs of small museums did not go away, and Museum Development Associates was formed as a non-profit in 2005 to continue the work. This paper will discuss the history of the program, its successes and failures, and what has been learned about delivering services and training to small museums in New Mexico - the fifth largest state, the state with the fourth highest poverty level and the largest rich-poor gap in the nation, and a state that is known for its cultural resources.

### **The Removal and Restoration of Three Allen Tupper True Murals at the Graland Country Day School**

Carmen Bria

In 1994, the Georgia Nelson Building on the campus of the Graland Country Day School in Denver was scheduled for demolition as its replacement was being built. Murals by renowned regional painter, Allen Tupper True, were known to be under numerous coats of wall paint in the "Little Theatre." The murals were painted directly on the plaster walls. This talk describes the collaboration with on-

site construction specialists to remove the walls that contained the murals and their subsequent restoration. The restoration included the removal of the over-paint to reveal the extant murals done by the artist, the remounting of each mural, and the re-installation of the murals in the new facility.

### **Conservation and Restoration of the John Thompson Murals, Margery Reed Hall "Little Theater," University of Colorado**

Lisa Capano

In 1929, John Thompson was commissioned to paint murals decorating the proscenium of the Margery Reed Hall "Little Theater" Stage at the University of Denver. He chose to paint themes of Shakespeare plays. The mural was completed circa 1930-31 and was then painted over. This decision was made by the then department head of the theater, against Thompson's wishes. Since then, the proscenium has been overpainted at least 4 times, in some areas even more. The ongoing conservation and restoration will probably go on for another 3 years. The author and a team of interns from the D.U. program are cleaning the mural, consolidating weak areas, filling losses, and inpainting.

### **The Neptune Fountain of Palos Verdes Estates at Malaga Cove**

Steve Colton

Many great Italian piazzas have as their focal point a fountain of some kind. One was called for in the turn of the 18th-century Italianate city plan of the fledgling city of Palos Verdes Estates. A suitable fountain was available and adopted for the city's plaza at Malaga Cove.

For all of their public beauty, and the immense joy and pride they provide to the city, there really is no such thing as an easy to care for a fountain that is open to the public. Vandalism and pranks, natural aging of materials aided by human design, the ups and downs of care and neglect due to political agendas, and the world economy all work to take their toll on fountains. These can have very serious consequences on aesthetics and

civics. Aspects of all of these factors came into play in the treatment of the Neptune Fountain. Considerations in treatment design and its four-year successful execution will be presented and discussed.

### **Emerging Issues of Accessible Collections**

Ann Cunningham

Passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act has opened the doors to new audiences with diverse needs. Now museums are concerned with providing meaningful programming for these audiences. One of the most challenging needs is to accommodate people who benefit from tactually accessible exhibits. This fall the Metropolitan Museum of Art will host the second International Art Education for the Blind Conference and bring together many museums interested in developing these kinds of exhibits. Ann Cunningham will talk about museum programs already taking place and outline some of the new directions they are taking. This discussion is an opportunity for WAAC participants to share ideas about policies that could contribute to the success of these programs.

### **Raising the Stakes: Caring for SAM's Collections During Expansion and Beyond**

Nicholas Dorman

The presentation will be an account of our experiences of simultaneously preparing for the construction of two new Seattle Art Museum venues: the Olympic Sculpture Park on the Seattle Waterfront and the new SAM downtown museum.

During the presentation and the following discussion a number of subjects will be considered, all of which potentially have a considerable impact on the preservation and conservation of collections:

- Preparation: whether to remove the art from the building during construction.
- Are pre-existing staff structures up to the job or do they need to be rethought.
- Budgeting and planning for previously unimagined tasks.
- Project management and risk management during construction.

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- Juggling conservation needs and institutional PR and events requirements.  
- What to do when the museum opens? The challenge of operating and maintaining standards in an unproven environment.

### **Creations of the Mind and Hand: the Conservation of an Ethnographic Treasure**

Brynn Bender

Grand Teton National Park holds a breathtaking, world-class collection of Native American cultural artifacts. They are now getting well deserved conservation attention. This presentation will include an overview of the National Park Service's project to conserve the collection. It will touch on the history of the collection and the process of documentation, analysis, and storage upgrades for half of the collection. Treatment preparation and techniques will be discussed as we work towards the completion of up to 300 treatments by next year.

### **Assessing Collections Materials with a Mideofader**

James R. Druzik, Katie Taylor, Teresa Mesquit, and Mary Reinsch Sackett

Although various individuals had built the capability to fade small areas on artifacts earlier, Paul Whitmore, Carnegie Mellon University, developed the first virtually non-destructive, micro-fading instrument that could be used directly on artifacts in real-time to assess their light sensitivity. Such instruments now exist at the Library of Congress, National Gallery of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Canadian Conservation Institute, and the Getty Conservation Institute, which has two such instruments. Activities are currently afoot to design a more portable and less expensive version for availability to wider collections.

The Getty Research Institute (GRI) uses micro-fading to assess a wide range of objects anticipated for display in its own galleries and requested for loan by other institutions. It also investigates a class of materials of interest to individual conservators. Since a major fraction of Getty materials are of unknown light sensitivity

and come from the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, loan policy and display decisions involving both the conservation and curatorial departments often rides upon the delicate balance provided by GCI input. We'll briefly describe our overall policy and decision processes, followed by a tour of various assessments conducted over the last three years. These will include both works of art and archival documents from Allan Kaprow, Heinrich Schliemann, and a series of black and white Polaroid images from the 1950s. We'll see that in addition to providing preventive conservation lighting risk analysis the microfadeometer also represents a platform for gaining deep insights into materials behavior.

### **Preserving an American Treasure: the Ansel Adams Project at the Center for Creative Photography**

Lisa Duncan and Laura Downey Staneff

In 2005, the Center for Creative Photography (CCP) in Tucson, Arizona was awarded a Save America's Treasures (SAT) grant funding an extensive project to preserve the Ansel Adams archive. A founder of the CCP, Adams is credited with the original idea of the Center's mission, to house not just a photographer's exhibition works but also negatives and archival materials, enabling study and use of a wide array of materials of interest to photographers, scholars, and students of photography.

The multi-component SAT project, scheduled for completion in spring 2008, includes: rehousing approximately 2,500 fine prints in sink mats, conservation assessment and treatment of the fine prints, improved preservation of the archival materials, cold storage for Adams' original film negatives, and renovation of a room used for public viewing of the fine prints.

This paper will focus on the conservation activities undertaken when Lisa Duncan, a graduate student in art conservation, spent her summer work project performing minor treatments on a large number of Adams prints as well as contributing to the preservation of the photographer's archival materials. This included consolidation of prints in the collection and

working with nitrate negatives, autochromes, and even Adams' hat. The project has helped to stabilize this important collection while introducing avenues for new research into photographic materials.

### **Is There Life After Death? Surviving a Museum Expansion Project**

Jessica Fletcher and Carl Patterson

October, 2007 marks the one year anniversary of the Denver Art Museum's exciting new expanded complex. Now that we are open, we have the time to look back at years of planning, teamwork, brilliant ideas, and grey hair that went into this enormous project. It has been a "once in a life-time experience" that we are about to do all over again. What did we learn? Departments like Conservation, directly involved with preparing and installing works of art, were especially heavily impacted. This paper will present the logistics of planning gallery spaces, preparing large numbers of artworks, installing exhibitions simultaneously, and surviving the first year of operation. It will also present solutions to problems never anticipated until the public came through the doors. Both successes and compromises will be discussed for practical application to upcoming expansion projects at other institutions.

### **Laying Good Foundations: Preparing to Design a New Collections Facility**

Kelly Goulette and Jude Southward

The Denver Museum of Nature & Science is on the path toward building a new collections facility. This new facility and all its associated functions falls under our program called the DMNS Collections Initiative. Our aim through this initiative is to achieve current museum standards for natural history collections within the new facility.

How did we start? Our initiative began with a reaffirmation of the institution's mission, vision, and values. Next we all took a trip! DMNS curators, conservators, collections managers, registrars, and senior leadership visited colleagues who have bravely gone before us and built new collections facilities. Additionally, staff attended workshops such as

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the “Buildit and they will come: what you need to know BEFORE you begin museum construction or renovation” by the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections and the Building Museums Conference by the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums.

With all this wonderful information our team completed strategic and master facility planning and then were ready to begin documenting specifications required for collections storage and processing functions. Additionally, we are beginning to discuss creative and innovative ways to provide visitor access to collections. Our next steps will be to update our collection plans, the DMNS Ethics and Collections Policies, and improve physical control of collections through inventory, data clean-up, condition reports, long-range planning, and upgrading storage mounts.

### Mills Novelty Company Gypsy Fortune Telling Machine

John Kjelland

The Mills Verbal Fortune Teller Machine, constructed in 1907 by the Mills Novelty Company, is a part of the historical collection of properties and objects at Virginia City, Montana and managed by Montana Heritage Commission for the State of Montana.

From the benches of many, conservation ideas guided the treatment outcome which was the care of a special fortuneteller, affectionately referred to as the Gypsy. This paper takes the reader through the process, concerns, and technological products solicited from a variety of sources: labs, studios, shops, associations, and individuals; all dedicated to the faithful application of their specialties. Most technicians and consultants contacted were unfamiliar with conservation concerns but accepted the set guidelines and then proceeded in accordance with such. Some, working in cadence to their own experience and perceptions also yielded to conservation concerns, as they could not argue with episodes of the “Antiques Road Show” televised guidance.

The conservation treatment began in September 2004 and concluded in June

2006. Treatment included design and manufacture of electromechanical in-fills, gramophones, mechanical sound reproduction, textiles, paper, gesso/paint coatings, glass, metals, wood, and transparent/painted coatings applied to wood. The recruitment of advisors and practitioners in and outside the field of conservation proved to be a rather successful meld of ideas and activity.

The treatment, though complex and multi-disciplined, began as a challenge and concluded with a sense of accomplishment. The first issues addressed were of functionality: to put a nickel ‘in’ and yield an audible fortune ‘out.’ Once achieved, the decorative and whimsical elements required cleaning, stabilization, and element replacement. Loss compensation offered the most creative aspect of the project.

The treatment objective was to render the gypsy in working order with the overall intervention predicated on the most current philosophies guiding aged objects care found in both the museum and in the discriminating market place. This involves prizing stable original fabric and a standard of minimal intervention. In effect, returning the machine to a minimally compromised configuration – with compassion for the aesthetic of age. At the McFarland Curatorial Center, in Virginia City, the gypsy was disassembled and packed for shipment to the conservator’s bench in Hall, MT.

Once on the bench and dismantled further, individual components received closer attention. To facilitate study and treatment, all of the electromechanical parts were removed from the case and installed onto a proportionately sized external jig platform for ease of access. After studying the animatronics movement and interrelated linkages, speculation began on stabilization to the electromechanical components, component elements, and options for any necessary loss compensation, as the search for identical mechanical movements found no positive results.

The missing component functions led to design and fabrication. The replacement in-fills functioned harmoniously with the existing functional movements once given ample time for adjustment and fine tuning. Treatment proceeded to

the rhythm of “performance and function” then time was given to historic fabric stabilization.

To understand how these components truly work together, one need only to insert a nickel. The machine works and the conservation product supports the maker’s intent. As for fortune predictability, one person’s future is unique and seldom truly understood by its seeker.

### Westward Bound

Karen Jones

Beginning with immigrant binders who fabricated the ledger bindings used to record the proceedings of new state governments, fine binding developed in fits and starts through out the Rocky Mountain West (Colorado, Arizona, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, and New Mexico). Highlights include the fine letterpress and bindery efforts in New Mexico and Arizona; the evolution of library preservation programs in Utah; and a successful effort to utilize bookbinding as occupational therapy for TB patients in Denver. The current burgeoning of interest and skill in the book arts and fine binding in the region is described by focusing on seminal individuals and programs, including the book arts program at the University of Utah and the American Academy of Bookbinding in Telluride, Colorado.

### Protecting Ancient Works of Art in the Getty Museum From Earthquake Damage

McKenzie Lowry, Jerry Podany, B. J. Farrar, and David Armendariz

Since 1984 the Department of Antiquities Conservation at the J. Paul Getty Museum has developed and applied a broad range of seismic mitigation approaches to the protection of its collections from earthquake damage. A recently updated geotechnical study of both the site and the museum building at the Getty Villa, first completed 1983-84, has provided a guide for these efforts of damage mitigation. Approaches include simple static mounts that cradle and secure the objects, as well as the use of isolation mechanisms (decouplers) placed under monumental sculpture and display cases.

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This presentation will provide an overview of mitigation efforts to date, detailing the unique challenges faced by conservators, mount makers and engineers when trying to protect ancient material on display, while also accommodating numerous aesthetic design concerns and limitations.

### The Clyfford Still Museum: An American Treasure Comes to Denver

Dean Sobel

Director, Clyfford Still Museum

In August 2004, the city of Denver announced it would receive the artworks contained within the Clyfford Still estate – some 800 paintings and 1500 works on paper that comprise 94% of the artist’s entire output, most of which has never been exhibited publicly. These artworks will form the collections of the new Clyfford Still Museum, planned to open adjacent to the Denver Art Museum in 2010. Given the significance of Still’s role in American art, coupled with the comprehensiveness of his estate, the opening of the Still Museum will mark a major milestone.

The nature of Still’s technique, the volume of material, the ways in which the works were stored, and the paucity of conservation treatment performed on these artworks poses unique conservation challenges, all of which will be the subject of this presentation.

### Light Degradation, Light Sensitivity and Light Budgeting Program

Christel Pesme

After reviewing the different parameters of light degradation and the characteristics of light degradation, the presentation will focus on the light sensitivity of an artifact. The different parameters of light sensitivity will be proposed, and the different approaches to assess it will be discussed. The advantages as well as disadvantages of microfadometer use will be explained. Then the method for building a light budgeting program for an artifact and/or for a collection will be proposed.

### How Emigrants Crossing the Plains Also Safely Crossed the High Seas

Joan Mast-Loughridge

We contracted with National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, in Oklahoma City, to stabilize the original carved walnut frame for Albert Bierstadt’s painting *On Emigrants Crossing the Plains*. It was to be loaned to the Schirn Kunsthalle Museum in Frankfurt, Germany for an exhibition called “We Love America.” Part of the request was that it be displayed in the original frame.

The frame has a large, carved walnut cove, which was splitting, and part of the forward moulding was warping away from the outside moulding and base. Further, there was a question as to the stability of the frame corners. The museum did not want to loan the framed painting without these conditions being addressed. We knew that the frame had been worked on previously, when the painting was conserved by WCCFA, but that it was primarily cosmetic.

Our concern with stabilizing the existing cracks in the cove was not to constrain them to the degree that, with natural expansion and contraction of the wood, especially with the climate changes during travel, the cove would split elsewhere. We also wanted to make sure that the warping forward cap did not detach, as it was the logical area to hold onto when maneuvering the very heavy framed painting. We used 1mm BEVA-film and B-72 in acetone to make repairs.

### A Tale of Two Headdresses

Julie Parker

This paper will discuss the research and treatment of two Native American headdresses that were worn by the historical figures Chief Sitting Bull and Iron Tail, when they performed in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West shows. The individual stories of these men will be used as an entry point to examine a tumultuous period in the history of the American West, illustrated with photographs from the archives of the Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave. The treatment involved the cleaning and stabilization of a variety of

materials as well as a unique opportunity to restore an object to a configuration from a specific time period based on the evidence of archival photographs.

### Keeping the Life Sculptures of John DeAndrea Alive

Carl Patterson, Jessica Fletcher, Kristine Jeffcoat, and Sharon Blank

The Denver artist, John DeAndrea is best known for producing life sculptures with a startling degree of realism. Unfortunately, many of his polyvinyl sculptures, found throughout American and European museums and private collections, have begun to deteriorate. This paper traces the evolution of the techniques, materials, and stability of John DeAndrea’s sculptures and attempts to predict the reasons for deterioration. The artist’s vision for the care and conservation of his work will be presented, using two of the Denver Art Museum’s favorite pieces as case studies.

### 28 Sculptures in 29 Months: Aspects of the Installation of the Fran and Ray Stark Sculpture Garden at the J. Paul Getty Museum

Katrina Posner

This talk will discuss some of the planning, analysis, treatment, and mount-making steps taken to install the newly acquired collection of 28 modern outdoor sculptures. The sculptures arrived at the museum at the beginning of 2006, and the installation was completed in May 2007. In the interim, the sculptures were prepared for installation by cleaning their surfaces, removing old coatings, and reapplying new coatings. Structural engineering considerations for each piece were analyzed, and all of the sculptures were mounted for seismic stability. Our department was also involved with landscaping planning in order to minimize the impact of sprinkler overspray and chemical fertilizers on the surfaces of the pieces. The installation project was a group effort that included the work of many departments throughout the museum and trust. On-going maintenance efforts will be discussed, as well as potential future research.

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### How Jean Charlot Set My Heart Aflutter

Victoria Montana Ryan

The ultimate path to the complicated conservation treatment of a fresco by Jean Charlot involved a will, a house, and negotiations between five entities and led to a long-term relationship with the Charlot that set my heart aflutter. Charlot, who may be the artistic godfather of the great Mexican muralists, was at the forefront of the 20th-century revival of mural painting. Throughout his long career, Charlot left not only a large body of work, but many mural treasures scattered though numerous countries. The challenging conservation steps, including the use of cyclododecane, to ensure stabilization and preservation of one such treasure are the focus of this presentation.

### Bacterial Removal of Mercury from Museum Materials: A New Remediation Technology?

Lisa Snelling

Laboratory coordinator for the Biology Program at Denver University.

Timberley Roane

Associate Professor of microbiology in the Department of Biology at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center.

Bacteria – capable of detoxifying and, in some cases, sequestering metals – are being investigated in the remediation of contaminated environments such as soil and water and, in this project, the removal of mercury from museum type materials. Mercury on such materials poses a unique remediation challenge because it forms non-degradable, persistent chemicals.

Because mercury-resistant bacteria have the ability to convert mercury into a gaseous form, they may facilitate mercury removal. In the work presented here, a diverse bacterial community was isolated from mercury-treated items; two of the non-pathogenic bacterial isolates were capable of reducing 10 ppm mercury concentrations. One, *Arthrobacter* sp. 2604, reduced the mercury associated with a gelatin medium by 30% and

a paper matrix by 20% within 10 days at 28°C. Another, *Cupriavidus metallidurans* CH34, reduced up to 50% and 60%, respectively. Current work is optimizing the conditions for bacterial mercury removal such as the method of bacterial application and the appropriate food sources for the bacteria during the remediation process.

### The Modular Cleaning Program: An Update and Demonstration

Chris Stavroudis

Another take on the Modular Cleaning Program. This time, we will discuss solvents, solubility theory, and how the MCP can help the conservator in thinking about solvent mixtures. The MCP uses Hansen solubility parameters as the basis for calculations and displays the properties of the solvent mixture on a two part graph. The graph hopefully helps the conservator visualize changes in the solvent mixture's properties as the proportions of solvents are changed.

The next version of the MCP should also be finished and ready for debut at the WAAC meeting. The upgrade is mostly to upgrade from FileMaker Pro 5.5 to FileMaker Pro 8.5. As always, there will be run time versions of the system for both Windows and Mac OS-X which will allow conservators to use the program without owning FileMaker Pro.

With any luck at all, the new version of the MCP will allow Mac users to view Hansen space using the 3D visualization program, Grapher, which is included with the Mac's operating system.

### Rehousing With No House

Rebecca Tinkham

What do you do when your old museum collection storage facility has been demolished and the new one is a hole in the ground? Literally. Meanwhile work must continue, and you have a 2,300 plus collection to survey, treat, and rehouse. A tale of extreme coordination, creative problem solving, and fancy footwork from the Palace of the Governors / New

Mexico History Museum as told by a textile conservator.

The New Mexico History Museum is scheduled to open Memorial Day weekend 2009 providing expanded space for permanent and temporary exhibitions and state-of-the-art storage with environmental controls. Since the new building will be located on the site of the old collection storage facility, the collections had to be moved to an intermediate space during construction. During this transition time, surveys and exams, conservation treatments, training workshops, rehousing projects, and exhibitions continue to happen and constant access to the collections is required.

Limited space in the conservation laboratory and the retrofitted storage facility has led to creative solutions when trying to juggle people, space, and projects. Supply storage is wherever it will fit. Volunteers' projects are often dictated by the day they work to best utilize available space. Rehousing projects may be only partly completed to prevent expansion in a packed storage space. The conservation lab, which has been treating predominately objects on a routine basis, has been occasionally thrown into disarray when a large textile is brought in for treatment or costumes for mounting. Limited lab space has necessitated a wet-clean to be performed in an outdoor, public area of the museum. What has worked, what hasn't, and what is being learned in the thick of it all.

### Investigations into the Preservation of Light-Based Artworks at the Denver Art Museum

David Turnbull

The Denver Art Museum collection includes important light-based artworks by such artists as Dan Flavin, Robert Irwin, and James Turrell, but has had no approach for their long term preservation. The light-based installation *Trace Elements* by James Turrell was removed from display during the summer of 2007, and research into documenting the installation led to assessing exhibition and preservation issues of light-based artworks by other artists in the museum's permanent collection.