



Emerging
Conservation
Professionals
Network

Each month, ECPN is proud to introduce one of our amazing Specialty Group Liaisons. Specialty Group Liaisons are volunteers who serve as an intermediary between emerging conservation professionals who are interested in or part of the specialty group they represent. To learn more about ECPN liaisons, contact the ECPN Outreach Officers at ecpn.aic.outreach@gmail.com or visit ECPN's website.

For our September Liaison Highlight we welcome the new Book and Paper Group (BPG) Liaison, Alexa Machnik.

Alexa is a conservation technician at the Yale University Library, where she works with books and library materials in Yale's general and special collections. Alexa holds a BA in Art History and East Asian Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and participated in a summer pre-program internship in rare book conservation at the University of Washington. She has also received conservation-related training at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries, Yale Peabody Museum, and Ritsumeikan Art Research Center in Kyoto, Japan.

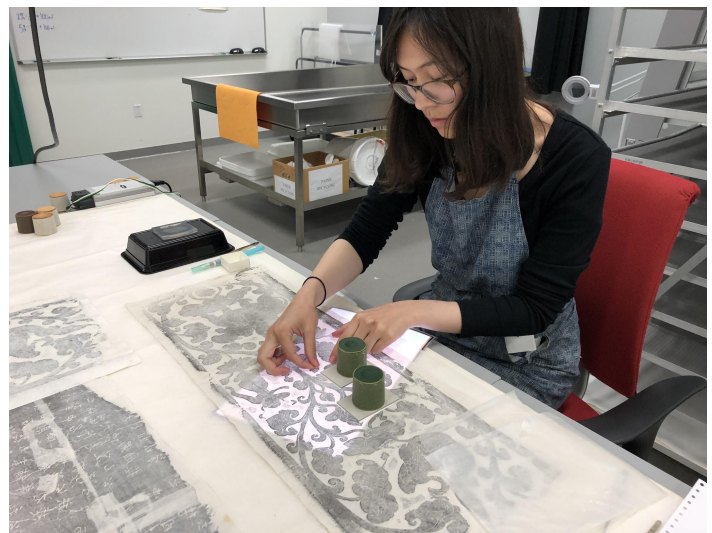


Photo: Alexa Machnik using pre-coated materials to mend loss on a Chinese stele rubbing at the University of Washington Libraries Conservation Center, where she was a pre-program intern in the summer of 2018.

1. Of all the specializations, why did you decide to pursue book and/or paper conservation? Do you lean towards one of the specializations, or prefer to do both?

For me, this is a tough question, one that has been weighing on my mind recently as I'm planning for graduate school. I've always been very drawn to paper—it is an incredible material with so much versatility, variety, and history. I think that it was my initial curiosity towards paper and its impact on the historical developments of written and print culture that led me to books. When I decided I wanted to pursue conservation, the library seemed like the right place to start. Since then, I trained in various research libraries in both the US and Japan and have really come to enjoy working with both books and paper, though in different ways. I find the complexities and rich context that surround the creation of books compelling, and my fascination with how the book itself is an object of inquiry is a topic I would love to explore in a research context. On the other hand, I find the process of working through the

particular questions and issues surrounding the conservation of works on paper very satisfying and creatively challenging. Perhaps I gravitate slightly more towards paper conservation, but this is a decision I'm hesitant to make at the moment. This may explain why I've returned to the library for much of my pre-program experience, the mixed collections and materials in the library provide ample opportunity for me to embrace both specialties.

2. Are there any particular skills that you feel are important or unique to your discipline?

Patience! This may ring true for other disciplines, but patience is a skill I am constantly practicing when working with paper. From my experiences so far, paper has the capacity to be extremely resilient and fragile, often at the same time. When carrying out a treatment on paper, whether it is surface cleaning or adhesive removal, one impatient swipe with your eraser or spatula can exacerbate the damage, or even lead to new problems. It's important to take the time to listen to the object, by placing careful attention on how it responds while you work. Even if that means you need to slow down or stop altogether, that recognition is key, and I think it starts with a high level of patience.

3. What has been your favorite treatment within your specialty?

There are many favorites, though I'd have to say working with the Chinese stele rubbing collection at the University of Washington Libraries Conservation Center has been one of my most meaningful experiences. As an intern a few summers back, I was tasked to identify a two-fold treatment and rehousing plan for the East Asia Library's large collection of Chinese rubbings. By the end of the internship, I identified and thoroughly tested a repair solution on one of the rubbings using pre-coated materials, which I carefully selected after trialing a variety of different paper/adhesive combinations on mock-up rubbings. In addition, I also worked closely with the staff to propose a two-tiered housing strategy that addressed the varied preservation needs of the collection. This experience offered me a rigorous insight into the project management side of the job. It also challenged me to work strategically within the budget and space parameters of the library while devising a process-oriented strategy optimal for treating a large number of fragile paper-based materials.

4. Do you have any advice for someone interested in specializing in your discipline?

Look for opportunities to get to know the paper and book community, both within and outside of conservation. Some of the most valuable things I learned came from places outside of the lab. This discipline, especially with books, relies heavily on traditional techniques and practices, and any opportunities to connect with other conservators, bookbinders, and papermakers will only strengthen your knowledge of materiality and methods of making. At least this has been my experience. I feel more confident saying this after recently attending Paper and Book Intensive (PBI), a two-week workshop intensive in Saugatuck, MI. While the workshops were wonderful and instructors top-notch, I really gained the most perspective from being curious and engaging in conversations with the diverse group of artists and conservators there. I left PBI with a newfound sense of community, shared ideas, and inspiration to improve my craft and understanding of books and paper through making.

