



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 October Liaison Highlight we welcome the new Object Specialty Group (OSG) Liaison, Tatiana Shannon.

Tatiana is a Pre-Program Conservation Intern at the Sculpture and Decorative Arts Conservation Services LLC in Somerville, MA. She is currently involved with an assortment of projects in the studio and at the Somerville Museum. These projects include the consolidation of 17th century glass window panes, cleaning of various wooden artifacts, and various collections management efforts at the Somerville Museum, to name a few.

Photo: Tatiana Shannon conducts a hot wax treatment done at Central Park in the summer of 2017 on "The Tempest" by Milton Heband.



1. Of all the specializations, why did you decide to pursue object conservation?

While wrapping up my bachelors in Fine Arts and American History at Hampshire College in 2012, I discovered the field of art conservation and it seemed like a very good fit for someone with a passion for history and a fine arts background. After a series of discussions with my Division III committee, it was determined that my academic interests are well suited for a career as a museum professional. From this, I knew I wanted to pursue art conservation, but didn't have the hours of experience required by most of the internships I could find. In my last year of college, Smith College's Museum offered the Frame Conservation Program, run by William Myers and David Dempsey, which was designed as a training program with beginners in mind. As it was open to all students in the five college system (Hampshire, Amherst, UMass Amherst, Smith and Mount Holyoke), it was a good opportunity for me to start building experience while staying local. I was lucky in that my family lived in the area and so I was able to live with them, work part-time and dedicate the rest of my spare time to the internship program.

The broad range of media that fall under the umbrella of objects conservation is what kept me pursuing this specialty. I love working in a specialty where I can go from assisting in the treatment of pre-Columbian pottery to colonial grave markers in the course of one day. There's always something new to learn.

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

In-painting is definitely at the top of the list. It's not unique to objects conservation, of course, as it's a highly necessary skill in a number of other specialties, but objects treatments often require not only the ability to match finishes and colors, but also to simulate a wide range of surfaces. The materials and techniques required for filling and in-painting can also vary quite a bit depending on the material history of the object in question, how and where it will be displayed or stored, and the resources of the lab.

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

A couple of years ago I was a technician on a team that treated the bronze sculptural components of "The Angel of the Waters" – a memorial fountain designed by Henry Bacon and Daniel Chester French located in the Boston Public Gardens. Several decades back my grandmother, Mary Shannon, as executive secretary of the Boston Art Commission, helped spearhead the fundraising efforts and a program of restoration for Boston's public art – including "The Angel of the Waters". As my grandmother died when I was fairly young, I very much enjoyed the chance to work on a monument that had been personally and professionally important to her – as well as meet people, former coworkers, and the like, who had known her when she worked for the Boston Art Commission.

I have worked on outdoor monuments conservation projects before and since the "Angel of the Waters" project, including a summer working for Central Park Conservancy and assisting on two historic cemetery preservation campaigns. However, the "Angel of the Waters" project came under increased public scrutiny that conservators needed to account for when working on the highly visible monument over a relatively lengthy period of time of two weeks. As the treatment included the use of dry ice blasting as a method to remove a failing protective coating, a considerable portion of my responsibilities on site included interacting with the public and explaining the processes being used.

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

At the risk of sounding like a stock broker – diversify your portfolio! Objects conservation is such a broad field, I think it's important to explore as many aspects of it as possible, particularly if you're pre-program (as I am). My first three years of internship experience were almost exclusively focused on the treatment of picture frames. By stepping out of my comfort zone, I developed a broader range of knowledge of materials and preventive conservation. This also helped clarify my professional aspirations. I am currently working with a local objects conservator in private practice who specializes in sculpture and decorative arts. Over the past year I have had the opportunity to assist with the treatment of several ceramic pieces including a set of 19th c. china plates and several pre-Columbian ceramic objects. Prior to being involved in these treatments, I had worked

on very few projects that required in-painting skills. While it has been a challenge, I am happy to have been put in a position to develop this crucial skill set. I am looking for a local watercolors class that will work with my schedule as a way of refining those skills.

Additionally, the cultivation of technical skills in studio art is important in the development of your skills as an objects conservator. You don't need to be a master potter to treat ceramics or a master sculptor to treat a monument – but understanding the technical limitations of a material or what techniques might have been used to craft a specific object is incredibly useful when deciding the safest and most effective way to approach treatment.