



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 August feature, we would like to introduce our Paintings Specialty Group liaison, Blair Bailey. Blair is the Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Painting Conservation at the Detroit Institute of Arts. She is currently conducting a technical investigation and treatment of a portrait by Titian, as well as several canvas painting structural treatments. She graduated in 2015 with a Master of Arts in the Conservation of Fine Art-Easel Paintings from Northumbria University in Newcastle Upon Tyne, United Kingdom.



Photo (right): Blair Bailey uses Evolon CR tissue to remove varnish from the surface of a painting.

Image courtesy of the Detroit Institute of Arts

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

Paintings were what I was drawn to in art history and paint was what I loved most in art classes. All roads seemingly led to paintings conservation for me. However, prior to graduate school, I dutifully tried other specializations to make sure I was not missing out on my true calling. This process ended up feeling like a bit like Goldilocks and the three bears. Objects conservation was too daunting with too many different types of materials at play, while paper conservation did not have enough. Also submerging an object in a container of liquid (bath) made me wildly uncomfortable- it still does. Conservation science felt like I could diagnose issues, but then never fix them. Each exploration led me back to paintings. I love paintings conservation for the moderate diversity of material (paint and supports). I get to diagnose and solve the problem, plus I really enjoy the specialty's long history. Untangling past treatments and their rationale and

working within (and hopefully beyond) the challenges those restorers created for me is something I really enjoy.

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

I do not believe there are skills that are particularly unique to painting conservation. The approach and general skill set in conservation is the same for everything from a 1600s painting to a 2016 plastic shoe. It is definitely important to be passionate and curious about the materials that you will spend the rest of your life advocating for, studying, and treating. I also highly recommend seeking out ways to foster strong personnel and project management skills as conservation is inherently collaborative, especially in a museum setting. Managing people is not always something that comes easily to conservators. However, it is something paintings conservators generally cannot avoid as they frequently occupy head of lab positions within museums, though this is changing. Also, you have to enjoy consolidating and inpainting. Paintings conservators do these two tasks a great deal.

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

This is an incredibly tough question- I cannot pick just one painting/treatment! I love to do structural repairs when needed. The mental puzzle of how damage occurred, how to prevent it from happening again, and how to get the material back into its most appropriate plane really intrigues me. Any time I get to tear mend/apply inserts/mend panel splits/de-line/line/apply a loose lining are always special moments. It is so sad to see a painting with structural issues, but to know that you were able to stabilize it for the near, and hopefully distant, future is very rewarding. Aesthetic compensation can only be so successful if the support is not stabilized and textured appropriately.

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

Conservators, especially paintings conservators, can seem very intimidating and competitive. I would recommend anyone interested in this specialty to find a way to be resilient, curious, and respectfully tenacious. Many initially hear the sirens call of paintings when they first discover conservation, but it isn't their forever specialization. This can create skepticism regarding the seriousness of your desire to follow this particular path. If it is your specialty, keep networking for opportunities- you will not regret it!