

questions *for* Anna Yates Krain



Conservation Assistant

Education:

Certificate in the Fine Arts
Pennsylvania Academy
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Philadelphia, PA

B.F.A.

The University of the Arts
Philadelphia, PA

At CCAHA since 1987

1. You were formally trained as a printmaker at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. What brought you to conservation?

That was serendipity. My work-study in the museum at the Academy was down in the vault working with Helen Mangelsdorf. At that point, the archives at the Academy had a lot of drawers with loose prints in need of filing. My job was to put them in folders and catalogue them into a card file and location notebook system.

Near the end of my senior year, the Conservation Center contacted the Academy archives to let them know about a one-year project treating materials for the NJ State Archives. Another Academy graduate—Jilliann Herrick—was hired for the project, too. We worked as a team under the skillful guidance of Lois Price, a senior conservator at the Center. We dry cleaned, we washed, we mended, we flattened...and when the project was over the Center decided to keep us both and we are both still here. So, I guess you could say I went from working in an archive, to working on an archive. It was a pretty smooth transition.

2. You still do art at home and you're still an artist who has the occasional show. Does your work at the Conservation Center influence your art in any way?

Sure; it gives me ideas. The Dacron lining process opened my eyes to many collage possibilities. I began to see beauty in the deteriorated condition of a treated object and the paper's memory of every violation of time and circumstance. Once, this spawned my idea to capture the fragility of our ideals recorded in paper by taking words from the Constitution and putting them onto a potato chip (one of the copies of the Constitution was being treated at the Center at the time). I transformed the words "We the People" onto very thin Japanese paper and adhered that with wheat starch paste to the surface of a potato chip. From there it expanded into some interesting housing challenges, and eventually a show.

3. You are a yoga instructor and practice yoga fairly regularly. Do you find this practice influencing your work as a conservation assistant?

At the Conservation Center, you are working on such valuable objects that you have to stay conscientious and aware of every move you make. Yoga is the union of body, mind, and health in practice. It fine-tunes your awareness and keeps you focused on the present. If events become stressful in the process of working on something, I can step back and use my breath to maintain my balance.

In terms of the physical aspect, if I've been on my feet all day and I'm feeling fatigued, I've got no problem dropping down on the floor and bring my knees into my chest to release tension in my spine. I've lost all my inhibitions because of yoga!

4. Is there an artifact you worked on—in either housing or paper—that stands out in your 17 years? And how was it conserved?

The first one that leaps to mind is an Elf mask. It was a paper mask made in Germany and belonged to a private client. What an amazing transformation! It arrived completely flattened. I humidified it several times using balloons and supports made of matboard strips to gradually open it up. I fixed the nose and lips, using shaped, kneaded erasers as molds to layer the Japanese paper ones. Inpainting brought the reconstruction together and the mask back to life. I had the satisfaction of treating and constructing the housing for this family treasure—and received a personal note of thanks from the owner. Those three-dimensional artifacts are interesting and challenging.

When you look at the potential of what paper can become, what it holds, what it reveals, you can't help but feel a certain reverence for this material.

—Keltie Hawkins

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