

questions for Ingrid E. Bogel



Executive Director

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Years at CCAHA: 15

1. When you were starting out, did you ever imagine yourself as the executive director of a regional conservation center?

Art has always been my first love, my passion. So I'm not surprised to find myself working in the arts. It took some time to get here though—I worked in business for a while and then at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in their conservation department—but I never imagined I'd be the director of a regional conservation center; there just aren't that many of them in the country. And, in fact, now the Center has grown to be the largest nonprofit art conservation center in the country. It's been really exciting to witness that growth and be a part of it.

2. There are many working artists on staff at the Center. What do you see as the benefits of this?

Many conservators have a background in studio art, and I think almost every one of our technicians is an artist in their own right. Working at the Center is their day job but they also pursue their love of the arts in their private work. The Center is very fortunate that some technicians have been on the staff nearly 20 years. I think that loyalty is partly due to the daily opportunities to use their creativity and their talent treating very unique and often beautiful artifacts.

In addition, being artists means that they bring fabulous hand skills to the work that they do here. And I think having an artist's sensibility translates into true appreciation and respect for the things that they're working on, whether it's a rare manuscript or a Degas pastel.

3. You are an artist yourself. What do you do?

I don't get to create as much as I'd like to. I no longer make ceramics, which was the focus of my Master's, but I still draw upon occasion. If I go on vacation, I'll take a sketchbook and watercolors. It's not something I share with people, but it's for me and it helps maintain some dexterity. My hope is that someday I'll have more time for the creative process.

4. You have lots of beautiful little objects on your desk. Is there a theme that unites them? An aesthetic you're drawn to?

I tend to arrange still lifes everywhere. I do that at home, too. I just like to surround myself with beautiful objects, especially those with a personal connection. For instance, Jill Rawnsley (CCAHA Director of Preservation Services) brought this little Fra Angelico box back from Italy (he's one of my favorite artists); here is a sea urchin from an island in Maine; this lacquer box Steve, my husband, brought back from a trip to Vietnam; the painting behind me is done by my best friend's son; the painting to my right is by Anna Yates Krain (CCAHA Conservation Assistant); and pottery. I collect ceramics.

Whether the objects are manmade or whether they reflect the natural world, I just think reminding oneself of beauty in the world is important.

5. You are a world traveler and have seen many of the world's great cities. Are there any cities that you love for its architecture?

I've come to architecture late. Although I've been interested in the arts, it's been mostly 2-dimensional art that has spoken to me. But through working here and seeing the architectural drawings that we've conserved, I've really fallen in love with those watercolor renderings. These drawings started to open my eyes to the architecture around us. I read somewhere that art shows us how the world might be, but that architecture actually changes how we experience the world. Architecture has a strong impact on our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

As to cities, in the United States Chicago is exceptional; and of course I love the obvious cities of Paris, Rome and Venice. But personally, the city that has spoken to me most has been the small city of Marienbad (currently Mariánské Lázně) in the Czech Republic, right over the German border. Marienbad was a resort town. It was a place that in its heyday was a mecca for artists. Tolstoy and Kipling visited, as did Wagner. Chopin spent time there courting a woman he loved, and Goethe spent three years writing there. Historically, it was an amazing place. It is also where my mother was born and lived until she was 16 years old. A few years ago, I was able to travel there for the first time with my mother and to view that city through her eyes. I'd seen photographs and I thought 'oh, it's really beautiful,' but when I saw it for myself, it reminded me in a way of Paris. The architecture is baroque and art deco but it's nestled in a valley surrounded by the Bohemian forest. So you have this wonderful juxtaposition of nature and the astounding architecture, plus many natural springs.

6. What makes you want to come to work everyday?

To relate to the theme of architecture, I think we work in a beautiful space. There are high ceilings and a lot of natural light—there is just something uplifting about having that much daylight around you. I think when people visit the Center they relate very strongly to the space. We're not locked into cubicles and we don't feel isolated from one another.

And of course in addition to that, I feel the work we do is so important. It's the foundation of our cultural heritage. We are just incredibly fortunate every day to walk in and see exquisitely hand-colored Audubon prints; a Picasso drawing; an Atget photograph; or a Whistler watercolor. The list goes on and on. Everyday we face new challenges in terms of the treatment work that we do, but at the same time we have this luxury of being able to handle and to see these items first hand. There are few people who have such a personal, tactile experience with these objects. It's a very compelling place to work, surrounded by staff who share my enthusiasm and love for this work. I would be hard pressed to find another position that would fulfill me or satisfy me as much.