

questions for Jim Hinz



Head of the Book Lab

Years at the Center: 5½

Education:

B.A. in Mass Communications,
University of Minnesota

M.F.A. in Book Arts/Printmaking,
University of the Arts

1. You've been at the Center for 5½ years. What is your conservation background?

Before starting at the Center I interned with Hedi Kyle at the American Philosophical Society working on enclosures, bindings and simple repairs. Prior to that I studied book binding, papermaking and letterpress printing at the Minnesota Center for Book Arts in Minneapolis.

After my first couple years at the Center I went to the Hagley Museum & Library as their Library Conservator and eventually became Head of Library Conservation. After six years I came back to the Center to have more contact with other conservators and to do more bench work.

2. You were also awarded the Pew Fellowship in the Arts for Crafts during the time you were at Hagley, right?

I was. I'd applied six times prior to that and then I got lucky. While Crafts isn't necessarily my specific discipline, I have a strong appreciation for it and it deeply influences my work. My submission happened to include video with music that I composed, and I think the reviewers liked the idea of expanding the notion of crafts to meet the broader practices of the contemporary art world. I also included a couple of quilts and a cigarette box made from parchment and marbled paper with pen and ink calligraphy and drawing.

3. Do you think your outside artwork is influenced by your work at the Conservation Center?

The skills overlap quite a bit as I work with similar materials. I often use leather, parchment, and paper, but also thread and wood and plastics. Many materials common to crafts and handicrafts are familiar to me in both environments.

I'm also influenced by many of the objects we all get to see at the Center, be it fraktur, parchment documents, or any number of the books I work on. The materials alone are compelling, but also, to handle famous works such as Audubon's *Birds of America* or a first edition Freud volume is pretty inspiring....not that I've been making that much art lately! [laughs]

That's another thing I feel lucky for: I don't think I'd be able to touch so many exquisite objects in any other institution.

4. The book format as we know it dates back at least two thousand years. Do you see evidence of prior conservation in your treatments?

I think there has been restoration going on as long as people have been making things and as long they've been attached, sentimentally or otherwise, to those objects. "Conservation" is a relatively new term that has overshadowed "restoration," especially in the United States. So, the repair of objects has definitely been around and we see evidence of that in many of the books we work on. Some prior repairs—a leather reback, say—can be tight, sound, well-executed, and sympathetic to the binding. But sometimes we remove them when they are not.

5. How are online digital archives changing the world of book conservation?

I think the conservation of the original object and the digitization of that object are compatible processes. Both are good for the object and the reader. The digitized copy creates mass accessibility to researchers who primarily need the content of the volume. It also creates an interest in the original. The book itself, though, is the relic that represents a given time—a binding can inform a specific period—and we are constantly reinterpreting the aesthetics and their function, as well as our approach to treating them.

So, I think digitization and conservation work together. Quite possibly some people will choose digitization over the conservation of the object, and I understand that when the book's relevance is its text. Really, first and foremost is the content of the volume. Now, if it's an illustrated volume or one with high intrinsic value or if it has a stellar binding, then that's a whole different story. We go to great lengths to conserve as much of the original as possible.

6. Any favorite treatments you want to discuss?

The Brazil book (*Rerum per Octennium in Brasilia*, 1647) from Bryn Mawr College has been one of my favorite treatments. The artwork is gorgeous, with its hand-colored views of the Brazilian landscape. I also enjoyed working on a 1795 U.S. Army Heritage book. That was a fun challenge because of its size—almost 3 feet. Both of these books are so different—it's nice to see that institutions are still interested in conserving their treasures, no matter what sort of treasures they may be.