



# QUESTIONS

for Jillianne Wilcox

**CCAHA Senior Conservation Assistant / Education:** Certificate in Painting from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania / **Years at CCAHA:** 24

**You've had a life-long passion for the arts. What sparked your interest in art conservation?**

While I was in high school, I volunteered at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's Ban Chiang Lab. I was assigned a huge bag of pottery shards from Southeast Asia, and I was supposed to put the pots back together. It was extremely tedious. A week could go by and you wouldn't have found a single piece that fit, but when you finally found that piece, everyone would clap. It was great. I was in a sense doing the early stages of basic conservation, and I found it fascinating.

Several years later, when I was graduating from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, I wasn't sure that I wanted to support myself with my artwork. I had an amazing teacher, Peter Paone, who suggested that I visit the Winterthur paper lab because he felt that the detail I put into my artwork would lend itself to the precision needed in paper conservation. After visiting the lab, I immediately applied to the undergraduate conservation program at the University of Delaware and was accepted. But I was, admittedly, very nervous. I thought that I should have had more hands-on paper conservation experience before coming into the program, and I wanted to be sure this was the route I wanted to take. So I came back home to Philadelphia and returned to the Penn Museum as a volunteer, cataloging and photographing Eskimo artifacts in the North American section.

At the same time, Joyce Hill Stoner, Assistant Director of the University of Delaware undergraduate program, told me that CCAHA happened to have a project coming up with the New Jersey State Archives. I had an interview and was hired for the project, and the rest is history. I've been here 24 years now! I love being here, and I have had opportunities to work on so many objects: flat paper, wallpaper, photos, daguerreotypes, tintypes, glass plate negatives—it's been an amazing learning experience.

**You and M. Louise Baker both worked with archaeological artifacts at the Penn Museum. Do you see similarities between her work and yours? What is it like to conserve the Baker archaeological illustrations currently at CCAHA?**

When the Ban Chiang department head realized I was an art student, she asked me to document the pots with pencil drawings, drawn to scale so we could use the drawing of a pot as a reference for placing additional fragments. So conserving the Baker watercolors definitely took me back to the Penn Museum, because in the simplest way, both Baker and I used our art skills to document artifacts. But Baker was at a different level. Many of her drawings were meant to be published, so she had to get the detail. She was able to get the right color to give you the exact impression of an incised line. The pottery was clay and not contemporarily glazed, but she got the right patina. In areas of loss, she knew enough about the culture and style that she could do these brilliant fabrications. When I was doing my pencil drawings, what was hardest

was getting the three-dimensionality. In Baker's drawings, the artifacts seem to float above the paper surface. It's just phenomenal. I would definitely prefer to have one of her watercolors—even a reproduction of her watercolors—over a photograph. It's a spectacular collection.

**What other artifacts stand out from your years at CCAHA?**

I'm not sure where to begin! But there was one piece in particular—a wall sculpture by Bryan Hunt called "Means IV," which looked like a dirigible, pointy on both ends and very slender. It was silk paper on a balsa wood frame, and someone had accidentally punctured it. I couldn't mend the hole from the outside because it had this perfect finish, so I had to create an invisible join from the inside and use suction to pull the mend up so that it was flush with the surface. That was one of my favorites, because it was three-dimensional and so fragile, and I like projects that are challenging. I like thinking about how I should approach the treatment to make it work in a way that is invisible, reversible, and beautiful.

One treatment I recently assisted with was an original layout, called *Illustrations for Poems of Cabin & Field*, by Paul Laurence Dunbar. What was amazing was that my grandmother gave me the final book, *Poems of Cabin & Field*, when I was a child, and she would read it to me every other weekend. I still have it! It was touching to actually see—and treat—the original photos for a book that I so treasure.

—KATHERINE MAGAZINER