



QUESTIONS

for Jungohk (Theresa) Cho

CCAHA Senior Book Conservator / Education: B.F.A., Printmaking, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ; M.F.A., Book Arts / Printmaking, The University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA; M.A., Conservation, Camberwell College of Arts, London, UK / **Years at CCAHA:** 10

Have you always had an interest in book arts?

Growing up in Korea, my dream was to be an artist. I was so envious in middle school and high school when I would see someone carrying an art supply box because it meant that they were an artist or art student. But at the time, I couldn't go to art school. Instead, I got a job at a bank. I was the vice president's secretary for three years, and for five years I did branch work.

When did you move to the US?

In 1993, my brother's daughter was diagnosed with leukemia, so my brother decided to come to this country for her treatment. He asked me to come, too, because he wanted me to help my sister-in-law. My niece was treated, and after three years, the family returned to Korea, but I stayed. I started ESL [English as a Second Language] classes at a community college in New Jersey. Once I passed levels one, two, and three, I could take regular classes there. Eventually I transferred to Montclair State University. I started out painting, but then I took a semester of printmaking studies. I really liked the step-by-step process.

Because it's difficult to get a job with a printmaking degree, a friend encouraged me to go to graduate school. She and I stayed late at school every day, working together on our portfolios in the printmaking room. She went to Rutgers for painting and I went to The University of the Arts for book arts and printmaking.

How did you get into book conservation?

At the time, my favorite professor, Hedi Kyle, was the head of book conservation at the American Philosophical Society. I did a two-semester internship there, and I fell in love with conservation. Then I volunteered at CCAHA once a week for the last semester. At the end of the semester, I asked Rolf [Kat, then CCAHA Lab Supervisor], "Can I get a part-time job here?" and then maybe one or two weeks later, "Can I have a full-time job?" It worked! I stayed at CCAHA for five years and then went to Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library to work as a conservation assistant.

While at Yale, I decided to go for a conservation degree at Camberwell College of Arts in London. On the weekends, I had helped a Yale co-worker in her private conservation studio, and she introduced me to a friend, Susan, who had a paper conservation studio in London. And Susan introduced me to her friend, Elizabeth, a conservator at the Tate Museum. At the end of 2006, Elizabeth asked me to go with her and two other conservators to The Library of Deir al Surian in Egypt. For three weeks, I treated *The Gospel of St. John*, an early 12th-century manuscript on parchment. It was a wonderful experience.

I completed my M.A. in Conservation in July 2007, and Glen [Ruzicka, then CCAHA's Director of Conservation] contacted me to offer me a position if I wanted to come back. And I did.

So that's my path. I never knew which way I would go, but at each important time, people helped me. I learned so much from Glen and Rolf. Glen* was a special person for me, and I often think about him while I'm working.

What do you find most rewarding about this work?

I enjoy my job so much. An old, fragile book comes in, then it passes through my hands, and it leaves as a beautiful book. It's reborn through my hands. I'm Dr. Cho! At Yale, they called me Dr. Cho. When I left, my co-workers gave me a white lab coat with "Dr. Cho" embroidered on the front as a goodbye present.

Have you continued to create prints?

When I graduated from Montclair State, the graduate department bought several of my prints. And when I graduated from The University of the Arts, the library bought one of my books for its permanent collection. I later received a commission from the Philadelphia Art Alliance, so my prints are at PNC Bank and a number of other places throughout the city. I was a pretty good printmaker!

But these days, after working a full day, I'm too tired to practice art. I recently bought a watercolor pad, though, so I'm going to try to get back into my artwork.

—KATHERINE MAGAZINER

* Glen Ruzicka passed away in November 2010.