THE ZIBBY GARNETT TRAVELLING FELLOWSHIP

Report by Emily Baker Derse

Paper Conservation
At The Asian Arts Museum, San Francisco, USA

10 August – 18 September, 2009
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My name is Emily Derse, I am a twenty-five-year-old student working towards my masters degree at the University of Northumbria in Newcastle, specializing in works of art on paper. In August of 2009 I started a six-week placement at the Asian Arts Museum in San Francisco, California U.S.A. The study trip was made possible with the generous support of the Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship.

I first heard about the Zibby Garnett traveling fellowship from a fellow student at Northumbria, Jessica Crann. Jessica had received help from the fellowship the previous summer to attend an internship in Australia and encouraged me to apply for a grant as I had plans to pursue an internship abroad.

The masters programme at University of Northumbria, provides students with a good balance of theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of conservation. Eastern methods and materials have proven important in Western paper conservation and professors at Northumbria bring their own experience of working on Eastern objects to the studio, making an effort to integrate materials and techniques into their teaching. Students have the opportunity to learn hand skills by working both on artificially aged ‘mock-ups’ and also a number of original artworks displaying different conservation problems. Objects are sourced locally from institutions and private clients in Newcastle and the surrounding counties, this gives the students the opportunity to work on objects in a variety of media from the 18th century to the
Though the breadth of the coursework is broad, unfortunately, during the course there is no chance to work directly on Eastern artworks. During the summer break between the first and second year of the course students are encouraged to pursue internships to gain practical experience. With this time I was interested in learning specifically about the conservation of Eastern objects firsthand.

With the help of my tutors I was able to secure an internship at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco working with Shiho Sasaki conservator of paintings on paper and silk. The trip was extremely rewarding for my development as a conservator. After graduation I hope to work in a museum with a collection including objects from all over the world. My experience at the Asian Art Museum has given me greater confidence in my ability to work on Eastern objects and also many of the skills necessary to do so. This report is intended as both a record of the trip and also for reference as to work carried out at the Asian Arts Museum.
Asian Arts Museum

The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco is one of the largest museums in the Western world devoted exclusively to Asian art. It holds one of the most comprehensive collections of Asian art in the world. Spanning 6,000 years, its scope and breadth enables the museum to provide an introduction to all the major traditions of Asian art and culture. Well-known in the scholarly world, the collection contains rare and exceptional objects which are often referenced in journals and textbooks.

The collection includes approximately 17,000 objects ranging from tiny jades to monumental sculptures, paintings, porcelains and ceramics, lacquers, textiles, furniture, arms and armor, puppets, and basketry. About half of the objects in the museum’s collection were donated by Chicago industrialist Avery Brundage in the
1960s, serving as the impetus for the museum's founding. His contribution includes some of the museum's most celebrated objects—including a gilt bronze Buddha dated 338—the oldest known dated Chinese Buddha in the world and often cited as a textbook example of Chinese Buddhist art.

The museum's collection galleries on the second and third floors feature more than 2,500 artworks and offer a comprehensive introduction to all the major cultures of Asia. The collection galleries are divided into seven geographic regions: South Asia; the Persian World and West Asia; Southeast Asia; the Himalayas and the Tibetan Buddhist World; China; Korea; and Japan. Winding through all the galleries are three major themes: the development of Buddhism; trade and cultural exchange; and local beliefs and practices.

Upon my arrival at the Asian Art Museum I spent my first day becoming acquainted with the collection and the building layout. As it was a Monday, a day when the galleries are closed, I had the opportunity to wander through the empty museum alone.
Conservation at the Asian Art Museum

The conservation laboratory at the Asian Art Museum is situated on the ground floor of the museum along with the storage facilities, the museum exhibition preparation studio, and security offices. The space devoted to conservation is large and well fitted; lab space is divided between the different disciplines: objects, paintings, screens and scrolls, mounting, there is a separate office for administrative staff.

Objects laboratory. Shiho Sasaki mounting a photograph.

Staff in the department includes Katie Holbrow, head of conservation specializing in objects, Mark Fenn who also works with objects, Setsuko Kawazu trained in traditional Japanese screen and scroll mounting, Denise Migdail textiles, Shiho Sasaki, paintings on paper and silk, Heather Brown a pre-program intern, and Aron Cohen assisting technician.

I found the staff extremely inviting and knowledgeable. It was valuable to work closely with conservators from different disciplines as their input pushed me to look beyond the normal course of procedure for paper conservation that I have become accustomed to at the University of Northumbria. Though I consulted other conservators on staff and kept abreast of their work I worked most closely Ms. Sasaki throughout my time at the museum. Before deciding to become a conservator Ms. Sasaki trained as a woodblock printer in Japan; she earned a degree in paper
conservation at Camberwell in London and a masters at the Victoria and Albert specializing in the conservation of Japanese woodblock prints, she has also held fellowships at the Freer Sackler gallery in Washington and the Midwest Conservation Center in Ohio. Shiho’s unique background helps her to bring an uncommon blend of knowledge and skills to her work at the Asian Art Museum. For this reason among others, I found working with her extremely edifying and helpful to my own professional development.

My practical work at the Asian Arts Museum followed three main purposes: preparing for exhibitions, working towards gallery rotations, and improving the conditions of less frequented parts of the collection. My main projects were backing removal and rehousing of a collection of Chinese pith paintings, toning and filling of losses in a number of Thai paintings, and backing removal, tape removal, and rehousing of a collection of Japanese prints. In addition to the aforementioned projects I carried out a number of small tasks, assisting in lining consolidating thai paintings, changing hydrothermographs for environmental monitoring in the museum and conservation lab, mounting photographs for gallery rotation, and condition
reporting Japanese folding screens, Tibetan thankas, and Indian miniature paintings for loan requests.¹

¹ For examples of condition reports see Appendix.
My first major project was to begin the rehousing of a group of Chinese pith paintings. Painted in watercolor and gouache, Chinese pith paintings were created exclusively for the export market. Most popular in the 1830's and 40's, these small paintings depicted images of Chinese culture; typically showing landscapes, harbor views, market scenes, and colorfully costumed natives, ranging from street beggars to likenesses of the imperial family. Because of its thinness, delicate, translucent appearance, and velvety surface, pith is often mistakenly referred to as rice paper. However, pith is actually unprocessed plant material cored from the stem and branches of a shrub native to regions of Taiwan and Southern China.

To make the paper the white pith is pushed out from the plant stem and then placed inside hollow sections of bamboo where it swells and moulds itself as it dries into a cylindrical baton. Later the baton is removed and sheets of pith paper are made by hand turning the long side of the pith cylinder against a sharp thin knife to produce
Painting of a Chinese man.

Photomicrograph detail showing the structure of pith.

A continuous sheet. One can often see vertical lines that correspond to turns of the blade or reel of pith. After cutting, the sheets are pressed flat and trimmed to size.

Unlike manufactured paper made from macerated and matted fibers, the internal order of pith resembles the honeycomb structure of a wasp's nest. This complex cellular structure makes pith highly reactive to moisture. When paint is applied to the paper's surface, the cells swell, causing the painted image to take on a three-dimensional appearance with a jewel-like brilliance.
The Asian Art Museum has a number of lovely pith paintings in its collection, which are displayed in the Chinese gallery. As these paintings can be susceptible to light damage their display is restricted and pieces are rotated often. In preparation for an upcoming gallery rotation a number of pith paintings, which had not been cared for since their arrival at the museum, were reassessed and treated. My role in the conservation of the paintings was to carry out a careful condition report and to remove the unsuitable backings so that they could be further treated at a future time.
Treatment

Both layers of paper backing were removed mechanically with the aid of tweezers and a spatula. The degraded pith paper was extremely brittle and could not be flexed or touched with any tools. Paper was carefully peeled back taking care to keep the paper flush with the object so as to minimize the amount of movement felt by the pith.

In areas where the image was completely adhered to the backing paper the backing was peeled in such a way as to skin the backing leaving part of the paper on the verso of the pith; these areas could be revisited at another time. Other areas where the image was adhered to the backing and fractures were such that the losses were separated from the rest of the object were removed entirely, bagged, and stored with the object. Unfortunately, in most cases losses were already completely gone.

Due to the added vulnerability of the paintings after the removal of the backing paper they were stored with a sheet of blotter (temporary backing) wrapped in silicone release paper.
References


Hooker, William Jackson. "Some account of the substance commonly known under the name 'Rice Paper''* Botanical Miscellany (1830) Vol. I


Thai Paintings

When I arrived at the Asian Art Museum preparation was well underway in the conservation department for the upcoming special exhibit Emerald cities. Emerald Cities, which opens in late October, is the first major exhibition in the West to explore the rich but little known arts of Siam and Burma from the 19th century. Many of the stunning artworks—including gilded ritual vessels, mother-of-pearl inlaid furniture, colorful paintings, manuscripts, exquisite textiles, delicate ceramics, and more—were recently acquired by the museum from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and are on display for the first time.

The efforts to stabilize, clean, and repair the more than one hundred vulnerable art objects in this exhibition have been going on for more than five years. The rare kinds of Burmese, Shan, northern Thai, and Siamese artworks shown, even though they may not be more than a century or two old, have often not survived in good condition. There are many reasons: the tropical climate of their homelands; the fact that some of these types of artworks were made for short-term use and no particular effort was made to preserve them later; and—for Burmese objects—the multiple wars
of the last two hundred years. The paintings in the exhibit presented the biggest challenge; because they are of a rare, little-studied type, special treatment methods had to be developed. All of the paintings needed to be stabilized; by adhering flaking paint, removing active mold, and, in some instances, applying a lining to the back. By the time I came to the studio the paintings were in the final stages of a long conservation process. My role in the treatment of the paintings was to tone and fill all major losses on the eight large-scale works. I was also able to assist in the lining of two paintings, consolidation, and the mounting of many of the paintings.
Toning & Filling Losses

Eight of the large-scale paintings had significant losses to the cloth support overall. The paintings were all to be mounted on a coroplast backing covered in neutral toned velveteen. Because a majority of the paintings had been lined with off-white Japanese paper losses appeared bright white against the brown and yellow tones of the aged cloth of the paintings. My task was to infill these losses in order to keep them from being visually distracting.

Time constraints called for a method which was efficient and aesthetically pleasing. With the help of Shiho, I came up with a simple infilling method with toned Japanese paper. First, each shape was traced onto mylar. Tengujo paper, toned with acrylics, was then needle cut exactly to size. The excess hairs were trimmed and the fill was set down with methyl cellulose and locally pressed. Each fill had at least 2 layers of Japanese paper, larger fills required inpainting with powdered pastels. The entire process was carried out on all eight large paintings over a period of five weeks.
Losses before infilling.

Losses after infilling.

Example of mounted Thai painting.
Japanese Prints

My final project was the rehousing of a number of Japanese woodblock prints which had been stored and displayed in an unsuitable manner from before their acquisition. All of the prints were mounted onto acidic board either with pressure sensitive tape or animal glue. In each case, mount and adhesive were causing damage to the object. It was my task to release the objects from their mounts. Once separated, the mounts were discarded and the objects were placed individually into acid-free tissue folders; folders were then stored in an archival box.

Each object required unique treatment. All objects were first carefully examined and a plan was made for separation. In some cases treatment was a simple matter of trimming hinges in others it was a labor-intensive mechanical backing removal with a scalpel. In total fifteen objects were treated and rehoused.

Another aspect of this project was to practice different methods of pressure sensitive tape removal. As an exercise, I was given an object from the study collection on which I could try different techniques. The object was a book jacket from an early
edition of *Anna and the King*. The jacket was extremely embrittled and discolored, there were a number of tears losses and creases. All of the edges and tears had been reinforced previously with pressure sensitive tape. Over time the adhesive had migrated into the paper discoloring it and making complete removal difficult. A number of methods including use of a hot air tool, hairdryer, and heated spatula were
attempted for removing the carrier\(^2\). The most effective aid was the hot air tool, this was followed by gently removing the adhesive with a rubber cement pick-up eraser.

\(^2\) Pressure sensitive tapes have a number of components: the carrier or backing, the release coat, the primer coat, and the adhesive mass. The carrier is the ‘non-stick’ onto which the adhesive is placed; it is generally made of plastic, paper, or cloth.
I was fortunate that during my time in San Francisco I was able to meet a number of Conservators working in the bay area. In the second week of my placement Aron, Heather, and I went on a lab tours at the DeYoung museum and the Legion of Honor.

The DeYoung museum, located in Golden Gate park, has beautiful labs located in Hamon tower. During our visit we were shown a number of projects in the paintings, objects, and textile conservation labs.

The Legion of Honor is a beautiful museum and the site for all of the paper conservation work for both the DeYoung and its own collection. The visit was especially exciting as their lab has a number of innovative adjustments that have been made over the years by visiting interns and staff. The head of the department, Debra Evans, encourages her staff to integrate a lab or collection improvement project into
their time at the museum. Projects included anything from a wall with built-in suction for photography to organization of their extensive historic papers collection.

A few weeks later Ms. Evans also graciously invited all of us to her annual San Francisco Conservators Beach party. I was able to meet many of the museum and private conservators in the area.
Life Outside of Work

San Francisco is a vibrant city and though it is fairly small it has a great deal to offer culturally. I was extremely fortunate to meet wonderful generous people who helped me to fill my time and enjoy the city. Some of my outings included museum visits to SF Moma, the Legion of Honor, the Academy of Sciences where I heard a talk by Maya Lin on her new extinction project, and the DeYoung museum where I saw the King Tut exhibit. I was also able to tour Napa Valley with friends and spent some time at the beach and in Golden Gate Park.

My view of San Francisco was also quite shaped by my lodgings. As a direct result of receiving help from the traveling fellowship I was able to seek accommodation other than the couch offered by a friend living outside of the city. Through another native San Francisco friend, Peter Bridgeman, a wallpaper conservator, I was able to rent a room in a refurbished Victorian home within walking distance of the museum.
San Francisco is renowned for its Victorian architecture. Though the city is full of houses built in the late 19th century, the Brune-Reutlinger house is one of only a handful of Victorians in the city that have been restored to their original character both inside and out. The house was designed by Henry Geiffuss and built in 1886 by C. H. Weiss for Henry Brune, a saloon owner and liquor wholesaler. The three-story Italianate house has a double parlor, a formal dining room, a conservatory, a ballroom,
a Turkish parlour and a number of bedrooms. In 1965, Richard Reutlinger bought the house, which was by then desperately in need of repair, and set about restoring it to its former grandeur.

Though he rarely rents rooms Mr. Reutlinger generously shared his house with me for six weeks. I stayed in the ‘Anglo-Japanese’ room, a room dedicated to the orientalizing fad of the Victorian era.
Conclusions

I enjoyed my study trip to San Francisco immensely. At the museum I gained practical skills and saw new techniques that I would not have encountered anywhere else. It was a rare opportunity and I am extremely grateful to have worked with the team at the Asian Art Museum. I learned such an enormous amount and gained a real sense of how conservation works within different institutions and the various roles of the conservator in an art museum from condition reporting, acquisitions and installing / de-installing exhibitions. The new conservation techniques I have learnt will be invaluable and because Shiho encouraged self-learning and testing. I have certainly gained skills and knowledge that I will use throughout my career.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship and all the trustees as I have had a truly amazing experience, which would not have been possible without the generosity of the fellowship. I would also like to thank the Asian Art Museum for taking me on and making the placement such as great experience. This experience will undoubtedly help me in my future career.
### Costs of trip

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*Alcatraz, Napa valley, Baker beach, SF Moma, Academy of Sciences nightlife, De young tutankamun.

Total £ 2114.26
ASIAN ART MUSEUM
CONDITION REPORT AND TREATMENT PROPOSAL

ACCESSION NUMBER: De-accessioned; Study Collection.

OBJECT: Chinese Pith Painting, Portrait of a Man
CULTURE/PERIOD/CENTURY: Ca. 1830-40
Colors on pith paper
12 9/16 x 9 11/16 (32 x 24.5 cm)

DESCRIPTION:
The object, a painting of a Chinese man in traditional dress on pith paper, was originally part of an album including paintings of birds, flowers, and traditional Chinese dress. Four paintings from the album are now part of the study collection. Though there is no binding present, loose sheets are recognizable as a set due to the mounting; primary supports are adhered with a light blue linen tape along the edges to off-white sheets of paper.

CONDITION:
Overall the object is in fair condition. The vulnerable pith paper has a number of losses; there is a large loss at the top left, smaller losses at the lower right and left corners and to the left of the figure near the bottom edge of the purple jacket. There are also a number of small tears, and one large tear near the lower edge at the center. Punctures and scratches are present overall. The media appears to be in stable condition.

The off-white secondary support is discolored and embrittled, there is surface dirt overall. The sheet is torn and creased along all four edges. Water staining is present along the top edge and bottom right corner of the sheet.

The blue ribbon attaching the primary and secondary support is beginning to lift at the top edge and lower right corner, corresponding with the water damaged areas.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDED TREATMENT
It is recommended that conservation treatment is carried out to physically stabilize and to help prevent future chemical degradation of the object. The following treatment steps are proposed

PROPOSED TREATMENT:
1. Document present condition in writing and photos.
2. Separate primary and secondary support.
3. Realignment of tears through slight humidification if necessary.
4. Mending/infilling.
5. Conservation mounting and housing.

**Conservator:** Emily B. Derse **date:** 3 September 2009

This proposal was prepared for the internship of E. Derse. Treatment was carried out under the supervision of Shiho Sasaki, Conservator of Paintings on paper and silk.
ACCESSION NUMBER: F2005.35.7

OBJECT: Manuscript Page with Calligraphy
CULTURE/PERIOD/CENTURY: India; 1800 - 1900
Colors on paper
11 ¼ in x 6 7/8 in. (28.6 x 17.5 cm.)

DESCRIPTION:
The primary support is a thin sheet of light brown handmade paper (primary support extends only to the red line just inside the decorative blue trim). Fibres of the primary support are matted giving a smooth surface appearance; this was possibly achieved by applying starch to the surface of the paper and varnishing and/or burnishing. The secondary support, a thin sheet of light brown paper is decorated with a hand painted border (series of lines in black, white) there are separate blue decorative border strips adhered to the secondary support which extend just under the primary support on this layer. The tertiary support is three layers of similarly thin light brown paper.

CONDITION:
The object is in fair condition. There is a good amount of surface dirt/grime present overall. It is likely that the primary support was taken from its original format and remounted in its current setting. The edge of the primary support (to the red border line) shows roughed fibres. The primary support is slightly discolored and embrittled. Some small staining is present from moisture. There are a number of accretions present in the image area. Crumbly areas of white and black of an unknown substance are scattered throughout. The accretions lie on top of writing – in some areas accretions show distinct shapes or lines, in some areas resembling script. This suggests that the accretions may be offset writing/painting media from an adjoining manuscript page.

The writing and painting media is in fair condition; overall areas of ink, gold, and pigment are slightly abraded.

The current mounting shows signs also of having been trimmed down, possibly having been cut from a manuscript or album. The right and left edges are roughly cut, a pencil guideline is present along the right edge. There are five significant tears in the secondary support, …. two of these were previously repaired from the front- the repair has since been removed leaving a shadow of discoloration. There is some reddish powder present near the right edge of the object (concentrated at the margin bottom right)- the powder has also caused the discoloration of the white line in the border decoration on the left side. There are losses to the hand colored border, concentrated in the wide blue band which also shows some staining.
All support layers are beginning to delaminate along the edges. Secondary and tertiary supports are also discolored and embrittled. There are signs of mould growth on the verso of the tertiary support (dark reddish brown blooms)

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDED TREATMENT
It is recommended that conservation treatment is carried out to physically stabilize and to help prevent future chemical degradation of the object. The following treatment steps are proposed

PROPOSED TREATMENT:

1. Document present condition in writing and photos.
2. Surface clean non-image areas of the verso using vinyl erasers and soft brushes.
3. Repair tears and infill losses.
4. Address delamination of supports.
5. Conservation mounting and housing.

Conservator: Emily B. Derse date: 18 August 2009

This proposal was prepared for the internship of E. Derse. Treatment was carried out under the supervision of Shiho Sasaki, Conservator of Paintings on paper and silk.
ACCESSION NUMBER: 1998.2.12

OBJECT: Indian Miniature; Man on a horse
CULTURE/PERIOD/CENTURY: India; 1760 – 1770
Former kingdom of Kishangarh; Rajasthan state
Colors on paper
10 1/8 in x 8 ¼ in. (25.7 x 21 cm.)

DESCRIPTION:
The object, a painting of a man on a horse, was executed on a sheet of light brown paper. A ground layer, white in color, is present overall followed by pigments in a water-based binder. The painting is very finely drawn with very delicately rendered details. Gold paint was used both in the border decoration and in the painting for the saddle and smaller decorative elements (only traces are remnant).

CONDITION:
In general the object is in poor condition. Its original format has been reduced, being heavily trimmed on all four sides (most notably at the bottom where only a small portion of the border decoration is still visible). The edges are heavily fragmented, large losses are present in all four corners and along all edges. There are also a number of small losses present within the image including two small round holes possibly due to insect damage. Scratches, tears, and creases are present throughout the object and the primary support is beginning to delaminate in the lower right corner. Overall the primary support is discolored and embrittled. There are a number of small stains from water damage (showing distinct tide-lines) throughout the object. Tape/adhesive residue present at lower right, left and top right corners; residue is dark and hardened there is skinned cream colored paper present in the residue at the lower right corner and traces in the upper right corner. Small black and dark brown accretions are present on both the recto and verso; also a finger mark at the top left.

There is a great deal of pigment loss overall; water damage, abrasion, and loss of primary support have resulted in considerable damage to the media. Most losses extend through both the paint and priming layer exposing the primary support. Losses have exposed the underdrawing near the horse’s front legs. Pigment that is still present appears to be stable. Losses to pigment in the red saddle appear to be inpainted with an unknown substance. Both the reigns and saddle show painting with two shades of red, a darker outline color and a lighter tone for the fill color; a third color more orange in tone and considerably thinner and chalky in appearance is present where losses extend to the primary support. At the tip of the shoe of the man there is a large mauve fill.
The secondary support is a thin sheet of light brown laid paper, there is an inscription present on the verso which is incomplete owing to the losses in the upper right and left corners.

The object was previously treated as evidenced by tear repairs visible on the verso of the secondary support (Japanese paper strips to reinforce tears and deep creases).

**SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDED TREATMENT**
It is recommended that conservation treatment is carried out to physically stabilize and to help prevent future chemical degradation of the object. The following treatment steps are proposed

**PROPOSED TREATMENT:**

1. Document present condition in writing and photos.
2. Consolidation of flaking media by applying an appropriate consolidant with a fine brush under magnification / as a form of fine mist
3. Surface clean non-image areas of the verso using vinyl erasers and soft brushes.
4. Remove paper tape remnants and reduce adhesive residues using appropriate methods.
5. Address the delamination of the lower right corner.
6. Inlay with appropriate paper, of a thickness and tone which will visually reconstruct the original format and confer stability so that the object can be appropriately mounted, this method will also ensure that the verso of the object holding the inscription can still be read.
7. Conservation mounting and housing.

**Conservator:** Emily B. Derse **date:** August 18, 2009

This proposal was prepared for the internship of E. Derse. Treatment was carried out under the supervision of Shiho Sasaki, Conservator of Paintings on paper and silk.