THE ZIBBY GARNETT TRAVELLING FELLOWSHIP

Report by Sarah Benson

Textile Conservation Placement
At le Musée Galliera de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, France

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Introduction

My name is Sarah Jane Benson and I am 27 years old from the United States. Currently I am enrolled in the textile conservation masters programme at the University of Glasgow. I chose this programme because it is the foremost of its kind and is internationally well reputed. The placement is a requirement after the first year of studies and allows the student to pick an institution of their choice. It is meant to give an insight to the industry and broaden the student’s practical skills. After graduation I would like to stay and work in Europe and specialise in costume conservation, which is why I chose le Musée Galliera. My past experience in fashion design has greatly influenced my love for costume conservation.

I was very fortunate to work at le Musée Galliera de la Mode de la Ville de Paris in France for three months May 21 through August 10th. Owned by the city of Paris, the museum specialises in costume, accessories and other objects related to the fashion industry. As Paris is a city full of art, culture and history, I did not have much time to travel far outside the Parisian perimeter. The only other city I went to while in France was Fontainebleau just south of Paris. My study objectives for the trip were to learn more about the different materials used in France, learn the intricacies of costume conservation and objects made of multiple materials, and to do personal research on various fashion and conservation topics.

My tutors at the University informed me about the Travelling Fellowship with Zibby Garnett. The total cost of the trip was £3,005.21 and the Travel Fellowship awarded me £2,000. I also received an internship
stipend from my placement institution totalling £950 for the three months.
Figure 1: Maps of work placement locations

All maps downloaded from https://maps.google.co.uk/maps on 14/09/2012
Body of Report

Paris, France is a city that is difficult to describe, especially since so many people have a preconception of it. Parisians are different compared to other French people, just as Londoners are different from the rest of the English. It is a very international city, with one of the largest populations of tourists in the world. However, I found most people very kind and willing to help when asked. It definitely has a large town mentality, but if you are aware and open it is a very comfortable place. The city is located in the central northern area of France, and the atelier (or studio) in which I worked was in the 11th arrondissement (district) which is on the eastern side of the city. (See Figure 1). The actual museum, however, is in the 16th arrondissement on the west side of the city. It has been closed for quite a few years for renovation and will probably be another couple of years before reopening. I did visit the museum for a retirement party of an accessories curator, and also to conduct some personal research at the fashion and history library. All library materials along with the curators, staff and museum director are located at the museum. Since the main museum site is closed, the exhibits generally take place at other museums owned by the city of Paris or various venues that are interested in costume exhibits. There are also a number of loans going out from the museum, these varied from individual pieces to entire exhibits. For example, the exhibit Madame Grès which was displayed under the Musée Galliera’s control in Paris last year went out on loan to a museum in Antwerpen, Belgium this summer. The current exhibit which was open during my stay was Cristóbal Balenciaga, collectionneur de modes along with a special exhibit of Comme des Garçons White Drama. This
exhibit was at the new museum Docks cité de la Mode et du Design for just over 3 months.
I worked for la Musée Galliera de la Mode, owned by Mairie de Paris (the city of Paris). My status was a stagiaire (or intern) employee of the city of Paris government. My direct supervisor was Sylvie Brun, the sole fully employed textile conservator at the museum. The only other full time conservator is Camille Lallemand, who specialises in paper and leather. I also worked with a freelance textile conservator on a wet-cleaning project. Carine Istria works from home, and does larger piece conservation for the museum at the museum’s studio. There were also several vacataires (or people with short contracts of generally 6 months). There were two textile conservators and one photographic conservator during my stay. This is a common practice in France, as many museums are owned by either the city or nation. Government owned museums do not tend to keep full time conservators, generally for financial reasons. Therefore, most conservators in France work on a freelance basis.

Figure 2: Surface cleaning Balenciaga exhibit
The working environment at Gallieria was very nice and comfortable for the most part. In the UK one of the most important factors of the day seems to be tea time, and I was very pleased to find the tradition is also very strong in France. This gave me the perfect chance to speak to other employees and conservators about conservation and how things differ in France. It of course also allowed for many different French pastries to be tried, and on several occasions other colleagues baked traditional pastries from their home areas such as Brittany. I worked in the atelier de restauration and the wet room which was rarely used for wet cleaning and more for transit purposes.

Something I found very interesting was the French perspective of preventive conservation compared to what I had experienced in the UK. The French on average seemed much more lax with certain aspects, such as the windows in the studio were often open, very few windows had UV protection, the lighting in studios was fairly dim, and there was no climate control which resulted in some studios being overly hot and sometimes humid, while others were very cold and dry. Everyone that I worked with was very open and willing to help and answer questions, and generally everyone was interested in what other colleagues were working on. I found the studio a wonderful place to learn and ask questions as well as try different techniques and talk about different conservation practices.

One of the main reasons my placement was so enjoyable and successful was due to my supervisor Sylvie. From the beginning she encouraged me to ask questions and be aware of what other conservators were working on. She was very easy to talk to about conservation topics and how conservation differs in France from the UK. This was especially an
interest for her as it was her dissertation topic in university. She was very eager to inform me of different French traditions and culture. On the second week of my placement, she took me to see an interesting actor’s interpretation of Camille Claudel at le Musée Rodin. I was always encouraged to find out more about the French cultures and areas, and she also told me about other good textile collections in France where I hope to visit in the future.

Overall the conservation labs at Galliera are efficient and an amazing amount of items are conserved in a short period of time. I was very impressed by the stores at the museum, as they have over 300,000 costumes and accessories in the building. The store is very clean and well organised with custom rolling racks that seem to continue forever. Being a lover of fashion and costumes for as long as I can remember, I was pretty sure I had found my heaven.

**Conservation at le Musée Galliera**

Coming into this placement I was already aware that many
conservation practises and mentalities would be different from that in the UK. As this was a requirement for our master’s programme I prepared the following study objectives, but I also had the goal of networking within the French conservation community in hopes of creating more options for my future employment.

- Materials: to become aware of the choice of materials used and how they differ from choices in the UK.
- Learn the issues of costume conservation and 3-dimensional objects. Become more comfortable working on these objects and understand the conservation techniques that are chosen.
- To improve my understanding of how to conserve objects made of multiple materials or other materials. To learn from watching other conservators in the studio and to remain aware of their varying projects.
- Research the history and techniques used on amazone costume (which means riding habit in French) to benefit the conservation and reports made for the amazone costume I will be conserving.

**Placement Activities**

I performed conservation treatments on three pieces. The first was a partial treatment performed just on the lace trim of a late 19th century coat. The second was a full conservation treatment of an early 20th century amazone riding costume. The last piece was also a partial treatment on the lightweight decorative mousseline sleeves of a fully beaded evening gown from 1912.
Throughout the three months I also performed other small tasks. I aided one of the freelance conservators with the wet cleaning treatment of an 1860s 2 piece garment; helped conduct the bi-monthly vacuum surface cleaning of the currently displayed exhibit Balenciaga; assisted the accessories conservator with some repacking and placement within their new storage location; performed removal of some pest casings on an object being repacked; and I did personal research on amazone costumes within the museum’s library resources. All these projects were very interesting and I really enjoyed seeing the other aspects of how the museum was run on a daily basis.

I performed one new conservation technique that I wasn’t aware of before. For the wet cleaning treatment the conservator decided it was necessary to protect the oxidised metallic hooks and eyes of the skirt against the solutions. We used cyclododecane, which is a non-polar volatile binding substance, as a temporary protective coating. Neither of us had used

*Figure 4: Cyclododecane covered hooks and eyes of 1860s skirt*
cyclo-dodecane before, so she did some quick research as we heated the substance to a liquid state. We found that the stability of the liquid is volatile and returns to a solid very quickly. We used fine paint brushes to coat the metallic parts of the costume and had to work very quickly in order to finish coating the surface before it returned to a solid. The treatment appeared to be successful as it remained intact throughout the wet cleaning and the metallic parts appeared the same after the sublimation of the coating. This treatment was very exciting for me and I found it interesting to hear about some other conservator’s experiences with it on my return to Glasgow University.

Amazone costume conservation

The majority of my time on the placement was spent doing a full conservation treatment of a 1911 amazone (riding habit) costume. I must admit that this was the most dramatic treatment I’ve ever done, and was a bit daunted at first. The area of major weakness of the piece was in the jacket’s weighted silk lining. As silk was sold by weight throughout history, manufacturers added other agents to increase the weight and change the structure and appearance. A popular agent was lead acetate which results in a dramatic increase in the degradation of the fibres.¹ This type of degraded silk is commonly referred to as ‘shattered silk’. (See figure 5). The treatment of shattered silk can be very difficult and subjective. Some conservators may generally only use adhesives to consolidate the fabric, while others never

use adhesives only stitched supports. From my experience it appears to depend upon the country, institution, and the conservator. My supervisor (and most French conservators) does not use adhesives, and therefore I performed a stitched support. However, in order to support both sides of the lining fabric, another fabric had to be inserted between the jacket’s wool face and the lining before covering it with a transparent support fabric. To do this I created a stitched sandwich support, consisting of silk pongee (a medium
weight fabric), the shattered silk lining, and then silk crepeline (a very lightweight semi-transparent fabric) overlay. This entire process was very in-depth, required a lot of patience, a little bit of praying every now and then, and a lot of stitching. The complete conservation treatment took me 30 full working days which was one week earlier than the estimate and I really enjoyed getting the chance to work on something so challenging and to have
A successful treatment.

The main treatment I learned from my supervisor, was the full sandwich stitched support for 3-dimensional objects. This technique is very useful for inserting support fabrics into objects with limited access. The whole procedure involved taking a pattern, preparing and shaping the support fabrics, inserting the fabric into the object with the aid of beading needles and
careful manoeuvring, and then covering the piece with a silk crepeline overlay. My supervisor likes to call the technique of inserting the support fabric the ‘rodeo’, since it involves long threads and harnessing the support fabric into its proper place. Before covering the piece with the overlay, many hours of conservation couching stitches had to be done to consolidate all the areas of weakness and loss in the silk.

This process really gave me an appreciation for the time and diligence required when carrying out large treatments. It also gave me a lot more confidence in my skills and now that I have completely it successfully I feel much more assured about some objects that I may have thought somewhat hopeless before. Overall I was very pleased with the treatment and learned a lot about the conservation of costume and 3-
Figure 10: Stitching on supported sleeve, using tailor’s board and tissue paper

dimensional pieces. One of the most important things I came away with from this particular treatment is that creativity is very important when manipulating and supporting a 3-dimensional flexible object. I used a variety of things to support the piece while I worked, including: a tailor’s sleeve board, calico fabric, tissue paper, and a variety of positions in which to work to gain the best access.
I used this technique on all of the three objects I conserved and found each time, though the technique was the same, the process of the treatment varied greatly. This was because each object had different conservation needs based on their various conditions and materials.

The first piece using this technique was the lace trim of the 19th century coat. The lace was gathered to the sleeves and was a soft, open weave silk lace with a scalloped edge. To fit the shaped silk crepeline support fabric to the lace, I took a pattern of the lace with the scalloped
edges and cut the crepeline flat. To work the support behind the lace, the upper edge had to be gathered to duplicate the shape of the trim. As the fabrics were very supple and didn't have a regular fabric grain, manipulating the support into place proved more difficult than I first anticipated. However, by gathering the crepeline first and aligning it along the scalloped edge it allowed me to work the support into place with running stitches at the two edges and finish with conservation stitching around areas of damage.

The last treatment I performed was the mousseline sleeves of the 1912 evening gown. The pattern of the sleeves was very complex while the fabric was very soft and supple. Each sleeve was cut in one piece that wrapped around the arms and connected together in a point at the back (see Figure 13). The sleeves required a full back support to take the weight of the beading and support the degraded fabric. Taking the pattern of the sleeves was a slow process and required me to work from one end to the other while carefully maintaining the grain lines. The suppleness of the fabric prevented me from working in the same way I did with the amazone costume. I worked progressively from one end up and around to the others, fitting in the support as I worked. I found that if I
tried to pin the entire piece in place and work from a central point, the fabric
did not lie flat and didn't fit into the correct place.

Conservation in France

I was fortunate enough to visit a few other conservation studios while in
Paris. The other institutional studio was at Les Arts Décoratifs, which is the
large museum connected to the Louvre, but they are not owned by the same
institution. I visited the museum with other conservators from Gallieria, and
was given a private tour of their current exhibit Louis Vuitton-Marc Jacobs by
the head of textile mounting Josephine Pellas. I was very lucky to have such
a great opportunity, and I was very excited to see the exhibit from 'behind the
scenes'. It was a very informative tour as we were told exactly what went into
the mounting and display of the items. They used a variety of techniques and
it was interesting to see their use of magnets for holding items in place as we
had discussed this in my university course, but I hadn't seen it before. Since
the design house Louis Vuitton was the sole sponsor of the exhibit, the
company had a lot of input on the exhibition itself. Miss Pellas described
some of the challenges that went into the communication and collaboration
between the company and conservators. Louis Vuitton was very keen on
having the exhibit look more like their display windows with a lot of theatrical
elements. This was very challenging to achieve while keeping conservation
concerns in mind. I believe in the end, the conservators had to make a lot of
exceptions to the general rules for conservation sound displays. However,
the objects were owned by Louis Vuitton not the museum, and it was a
temporary exhibit. It did certainly achieve the theatrical display Vuitton wanted.

It was very informative for me to see other conservation labs in France. At Les Arts Décoratifs the conservator there was working on a variety of textile objects and was using many techniques that are never used at Musée Galliera. The head conservator Fabienne Vandenbrouck was doing solvent cleaning, humidification and some wet-cleaning techniques, as well as different consolidation processes that appeared to use adhesives.
I also visited my friend's part-time studio where she did textile conservation along with a colleague, and there was also two stone conservators based at the studio. Aude Radosevic Mansouri invited me to visit the studio where she was working on a piece for the upcoming exhibit Mode et Impressionnisme au Musée d'Orsay, which includes costumes from le Musée Galliera and impressionist paintings. Miss Mansouri was kind enough to give me some good sources for conservation materials in France. I will use some of these sources to get materials for my dissertation this coming year. I plan to focus on the chemical and physical properties of different thread and support materials used in textile conservation to hopefully get a definitive answer for whether natural fibres work best on natural fibre objects, or if synthetics are just as appropriate. This research will be very interesting for me, especially from having worked in France where only natural fibres are used and in the UK where there are many synthetic materials used in conservation.

Outside the atelier
One of the most fortunate things that happened to me was my wonderful flatmate Béatrice. She needed a short-term flatmate and is a friend of Camille the paper conservator at Galliera. Béatrice is a paintings conservator and has lived in Paris for over 15 years. The flat was a beautiful typical Parisian flat and was very close to the Galliera studio. She had many friends from a range of different conservation disciplines and people with interesting backgrounds. Through her I met a lot of friendly and informative people and some future contacts who might be able to help me find a job after graduation. We both had many similar interests and after having seen that she had a hallway closet full of crafts and materials and that her idea of cooking and cleaning is as minimal as possible, I knew we would get on flawlessly. One of the things we did together was I went along to help set up the decoration for her friend’s Bharata Natyam Indian dance recital. Béatrice is in love with Indian culture and has been to India about five times. It was really interesting to see the beautiful dancing and experience another culture within a culture.

I made many wonderful friends while in Paris. Most were through the studio and we did a lot of cultural things together and had dinner parties at each other’s homes. As they were all French, except for another stagiaire from Quebec, they were very keen to teach me more French, learn the traditional dishes and pastries, and show me the best typical French comedy films. I experienced so much and improved my French incredibly due to their help. Of course they enjoyed my willingness to learn and also make mistakes. Once I wanted to try a new pastry my friend told me about so I ordered it and the shop assistant looked very confused and they all started
laughing. So I did the usual pointing and gesturing to get my point across and asked my friend later what I had said; apparently I had ordered a ‘canary’ bird instead of the appropriate pastry. I did decide that my favourite French pastry is tarte au chocolate, and I can remember how to pronounce it correctly as well.

Some of my favourite experiences were walking around the Louvre with my friend from Glasgow, fabric shopping in the Montmartre district, visiting Fontainebleau with my mother, and going to a hilarious comedy theatre. I also visited about 8 museums, probably my favourite being le Musée de Cluny, which is the museum of the medieval ages and has the famous Lady and the Unicorn tapestries. My mother came to visit me for her birthday and we did a lot of different things together. We went to Fontainebleau for two days one weekend and saw the palace that Napoleon I and III had lived in for some time and enjoyed walking around the little town. The second day was
the national holiday Bastille day, and we were very fortunate to see an adorable parade of the different military forces on horses while we had our morning café and croissant.

I feel I used my time in Paris very well and did many cultural things, but there is still so much that I was unable to do. I plan on returning to Paris in the near future and would love to work in France again. There will always be lots of exciting and wonderful things to experience in France.

Conclusion

Figure 16: Delicious crepe at the Fontainebleau café

Figure 17: Me at the formal entrance to the Château de Fontainebleau
I believe this placement has given me more opportunities for future employment and opened other options for my career as a textile conservator. I made many contacts while in France that will be helpful if I am able to go back to France and work after graduation. As work experience is always a good thing to have when applying for jobs or internships, I now feel much more confident about finding work in the conservation field. In the future I hope to use this experience to expand my interests in costume conservation. I feel that I fulfilled all my objectives and am very pleased with my learning and advancement of practical skills.

• Materials: I became aware of the choices made for materials and how they differed from choices in the UK. Through my object treatments and speaking with other conservators I learnt that material choices in France are in favour of natural fibres as opposed to synthetics in addition to natural.

• I learnt many issues involved with costume conservation and 3-dimensional objects. I am more comfortable working on these objects from treating three complex pieces and having to conserve the layers independently.
• I improved my understanding of how to conserve objects made of multiple materials or other materials by watching other conservators in the studio and speaking to a variety of different conservators such as paper, leather, paintings, and metals.

• I researched the history and techniques used on amazone costumes, but did the research as a personal benefit opposed to having it used with the object I was treating since the curators did their own research and it did not affect the conservation choices.

As a whole I think the most important thing I learnt during the placement was to gain confidence in my skills as a conservator. I now feel
that any conservation project, for the most part, is indeed possible and I have or can find the information to help me complete the task.

This was an amazing experience and I appreciate what a rare opportunity it is to have the chance to work in this type of setting as a foreign student in France. I would highly recommend students in conservation to undertake these types of placements and to take advantage of the possibilities for working abroad. I am extremely grateful to the Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship for helping fund my placement, it has made this wonderful experience possible and allowed me to get the most out of the opportunity.

References

"Musée Galliera," Mairie de Paris, accessed August 18, 2012,

Conservator interviews: