

# **THE ZIBBY GARNETT TRAVELLING FELLOWSHIP**

**Report by Samantha Cawson**



**Paper Conservation Internship at Teylers Museum  
Haarlem, Netherlands**

**31<sup>st</sup> August – 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014**

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## **Introduction**

My name is Samantha Cawson; I am a 26-year-old British citizen and recent graduate of conservation from the University of the Arts, London. In order to ease the transition between education and employment I decided to arrange an internship abroad, which would allow me to gain an in depth insight into working within a museum setting full time, extend and build upon my existing knowledge as well as making contacts and possible opportunities for my future career. I was very interested to intern within a museum that performed a lot of exhibition conservation, as this was an aspect that I believed I needed to improve upon. After writing to the conservation department of the Teylers Museum in Haarlem, I was welcomed to join the team during the month of September. I was thrilled to learn that I would be undertaking research into charcoal and pastel drawings by the artist, Blanche Douglas Hamilton, as well as helping with a new acquisitions exhibition and upcoming major exhibition, *At first sight*.

I found out about the Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship from a peer at Camberwell College of Arts, and decided it would be a great way to help pay for my living costs whilst away from London for one month. The total cost of my trip was £850.00. I was awarded £600 from the Zibby Garnett fellowship; my part time job and QEST scholarship assisted me with further expenses.

## **Study Trip**

Haarlem is a beautiful city, which has a rich history dating back to pre medieval times. Situated in the province of north Holland located on the river Spaarne, Haarlem lies on a thin strip of land above sea level known as strandwal, which connects Leiden to Alkmaar. Haarlem is about 12 miles west of Amsterdam, near the coastal dunes and is within easy access to other cities within the Netherlands via the transport system.

I was extremely lucky to find a room to rent in Heemstede, which is a short cycle ride from Haarlem and with excellent transport links when visiting nearby cities. I stayed with a lady called Marjon and her golden retriever, Hasse. Marjon made me

feel very welcome and helped me find my way around as well as lending me a bicycle and an Ov-Chipkaart (payment card for the transport system).



Map of the Netherlands highlighting Haarlem.

Teylers Museum, where I would be working for one month under the guidance of head paper conservator, Robien Van Gulik is situated in Haarlem along the river Spaarne, and is on the top 100 Dutch heritage sites list compiled by the Department for Conservation in 1990. The museum is the oldest in the Netherlands and was founded by Pieter Teyler van der Hulst in 1784. Dedicated to scientific artefacts, books, and works of art, the museum displays an eclectic collection of fossils, minerals, scientific instruments, medals, coins, drawings, and paintings. The collection of Teylers Museum is most famous for its extensive collection of old master's prints and drawings, including 25 works by Michelangelo - among them preliminary studies for the frescos on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and important works by Raphael, Guercino, and Claude Lorrain. Similarly, the museum contains nearly the complete graphic works of Rembrandt and Adriaen van Ostade.

The museum is mostly lit by daylight, which evokes the atmosphere of a distant past when the exhibition rooms would have to close early on a dark winters afternoon because visitors could no longer see the artworks on display! Today the exhibition rooms have some external lighting for such occasions, however the conservation staff undertake weekly environmental monitoring to keep an eye on the temperature and humidity caused by the uncontrollable natural lighting and heat that penetrates through the glass skylights. The museum has seven exhibition rooms; the oldest part of the museum is the Oval Room, which was designed to accommodate all parts of the collection. However the more modern wings, which contain temporary exhibitions, are still very much in keeping with the older parts of the museum complex.



Teylers Museum, 2014



The Oval Room dates from 1786

I arrived in the Netherlands on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> of August and spent the first two days discovering a little of the Netherlands; I practiced my cycle route from Heemstede to Teylers Museum and located my nearest grocery store. As I was to start at Teylers on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> I took the chance to pop into Amsterdam on the Monday to visit The Rijksmuseum and FOAM photography gallery, taking in a little of the Dutch culture and way of life.

On Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September I began my internship at Teylers Museum. I cycled to the museum for an 8:30am start, which over the month I really came to enjoy, especially on a beautiful warm morning. I was firstly introduced to the conservation team, which consists of head paper conservator, Robien van Gulik, paper conservator, Nadia Kersten, books conservator, Ewout Koek, and conservation assistant, Erik Fabian. I was given a tour of the Teylers Museum, as well as being introduced to the various other departments of the museum including the curatorial department, which works very closely with the conservation team. Over time I became very familiar with most of the staff at Teylers, as the museum has a welcoming and intimate atmosphere where tea and coffee breaks are a time to gather and socialise.

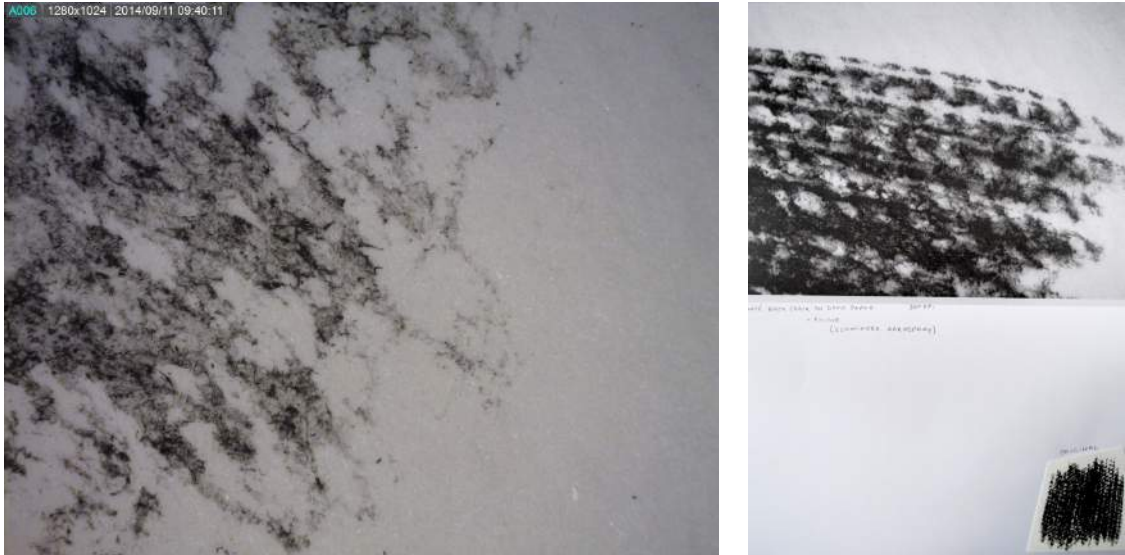


The conservation team: (From left to right) Ewout Koek, Erik Fabian, Samantha Cawson, Robien van Guilk and Nadia Kersten.

After the formalities of introductions and tours I was given my first set of objects to conserve and mount. I was encouraged to undertake my own research activities, as well as organising visits to other conservation studios in the Netherlands, which I embraced, creating a busy schedule for my four weeks in the Netherlands.

## Conservation Projects

As a personal project I was given four Blanche Douglas Hamilton charcoal drawings to conserve and remount. As I had little experience working with charcoal and chalk drawings it was decided that I should undertake some research into the media using a digital microscope. Experimenting with charcoal, black chalk and water I created a variety of investigations, which I could use as a point of reference in the future.



Charcoal and water experiments using a Dino-Lite digital microscope.

Experiments included drawings with charcoal on damp paper, or dipping charcoal into water before drawing to better understand how the drawing was constructed and in what conditions. I found these experiments very interesting, and was later able to distinguish methods used by Blanche Douglas Hamilton when she sketched with charcoal and chalk using these results.

Teylers Museum has specific condition report guidelines to follow and for each object I conducted a thorough documentation using photography and diagrams, as well as creating three types of treatment proposal; minimum, medium and high intervention, before choosing the most suitable treatment for the object's purpose and well being. As well as undertaking my own projects, Robien discussed conservation case studies with me on a regular basis in order to further my understanding of her thought process and decision-making when working with museum objects. I was advised to use Barbara Appelbaum's treatment methodology value guidelines, which

I used extensively to help with my own treatment proposals and found them to be very helpful when initially looking at an object before any research had been conducted.

## **Blanche Douglas Hamilton**

My main goals for my internship at Teylers were to gain further experience of mounting and exhibition conservation. Because of this I was given four chalk and charcoal drawings to conserve and remount. These drawings were by a relatively unknown English artist called Mrs Blanche Douglas Hamilton; the condition of the drawings was good, with only a few small losses, tears and some slight discolouration and disfigurements to the corners caused by a cross-linked adhesive.



Before: Mrs Douglas-Hamilton black chalk drawing in an old mount.



Before: Mrs Blanche Douglas-Hamilton charcoal drawing (note the discoloured corners) in need of backing removal.

After fully documenting the drawings I carried out condition reports and created treatment proposals. Most of the drawings needed some small paper repairs and for false margins to be attached before being remounted for storage. However one of the drawings, a large charcoal drawing, which had been backed onto poor quality board needed backing removal as the corners of the thin transparent paper were discoloured and causing stress to rest of the object due to the adhesive. Because the drawing was adhered only at the corners it was felt that the backing removal should be undertaken from the front, using a flat knife for better visual control and to save time.





Backing removal of Douglas Hamilton charcoal drawing.

Once I had completed the backing removal and paper repairs I created four different false margin systems for the different drawings. The primary supports of the four drawings were of different thickness and size and so the paper selected to create the false margins and the technique differed for each one. A false margin is adhered around the edges of an artwork in order to assist with handling and when adhering hinges for display. The selected paper is adhered using methylcellulose, which is a slightly weaker adhesive and allows the margins to be removed easily without moisture. I was able to experiment using four different techniques; standard, windmill, overlapping and the French method, and was capable of choosing the correct weight of Japanese tissue or western paper to best suit the object's needs.



An example of a windmill false margin technique.



Application of MC to the edge of the drawing.

The false margins allowed for better handling and so I was then able to calculate the correct measurements for mounting. Teylers Museum use a wall mounted mount cutting machine, which I had never used before and so I spent many hours practicing to achieve the correct amount of pressure on the blade and to understand the measuring system. I found this machine to be rather challenging, however after many attempts I was able to measure and cut accurately. The style of mount at Teylers is to show the entire object and so the mount should be slightly larger than the artwork, which should be taken into account when making your calculations. Also with a thick or raised object, the window should be necessarily elevated by using two or three boards. During my time at Teylers I was asked to create a range of mounts not just for the Douglas Hamilton drawings but also for objects going back into storage or being put onto display; I became proficient and quick at the process.



Blanche Douglas Hamilton charcoal drawing after conservation and remounting.



The wall mounted mount cutting machine.

## Loans

One of my duties at Teylers was to condition check objects coming in for the upcoming major exhibition “*At First Sight.*” This exhibition required objects from various other museums and so on a daily basis new loans were arriving to Teylers. I unwrapped the objects and created a condition report then prepared the object for storage before being put onto display. Additionally objects were being returned to Teylers from exhibitions elsewhere. In this instance I was asked to remove the object from its display frame, cut and peel away the Japanese tissue hinges and remove the artwork from the display mount. Once this was done I undertook a thorough condition report to check for any changes whilst the object was in the care of another institution, noting anything different or worrying.



A returned loaned painting to Teylers in a display frame.



Removing hinges and display mount.

## New Acquisitions and Exhibition Work

I was lucky enough to intern at Teylers during a time of an exhibition turn around. The New Acquisitions wall which changes every few months usually displays around four new objects that have been donated to Teylers and needed to be updated. Objects chosen for display were charcoal and chalk drawings by Jacobus Van Looey, a celebrated 19<sup>th</sup> century artist from Haarlem. One drawing in particular was backed onto a piece of chipboard wood. In this instance I had to find a frame deep enough to display the drawing, as well as create a mount that would hold the object securely. To do this, I layered and adhered pieces of mount board around the drawing to its exact depth. Once this was done I measured and cut the window for the mount and attached it from the inside using PVA and a piece of cloth.



Layering pieces of mount board for the Jacobus van Looey drawing that was adhered to wood.



Completed window mount ready to be framed and put onto display.

Once I had created new mounts and fitted the drawings into matching frames it was time to begin the installation. A curator and gallery carpenter joined me in this process and for a while we discussed the best layout of the drawings and began measuring the walls for hanging. To prevent dust from spreading throughout the museum a vacuum cleaner was used to catch the powder when the walls were being drilled. Object handling skills are especially important during exhibition installations as the frames are heavy and need to be transported on a trolley from the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the museum down to the exhibition halls. I had to be very aware of my surroundings and work as a team when lifting the frames for hanging.



Installation of New Acquisitions exhibition.

## **Pests, Environmental Monitoring, and Disaster Management**

Like most museums Teylers suffers with pests and environmental issues. Luckily the museum does not have any major pest concerns, however traps are laid in the corners of the collection stores, which are also kept cool and relatively dry to prevent pests such as, paper-and silver-fish. The real concerns are the gallery spaces in the older part of the museum, which have natural lighting and limitations to environmental controls. Once a week I accompanied Erik whilst he undertook a detailed regime of environmental monitoring in regulated spots around the museum.



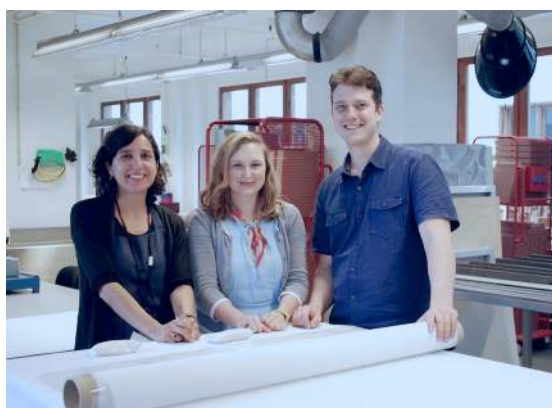
Environmental monitoring of the museum.

The beginning of my second week started with a nasty surprise in the Teylers Museum basement; a leaking pipe had lead to a flood during the night. Luckily only old exhibition display cabinets, chairs, and unused frames are stored in this part of the museum and so there was not much need for panic. However, I assisted staff with the clear up of the water damage and drying of furniture, using dehumidifiers in order to prevent mould growth, as well as checking the humidity levels throughout the basement for the next couple of weeks. This experience whilst unfortunate and unexpected was a good example of teamwork and disaster management within a museum, and I was pleased to be able to learn from professionals during such an event.

## Visits and Opportunities

As head paper conservator, Robien van Gulik took Fridays off from the museum it was thought that this would be a good day to take the opportunity to visit other conservation studios within the Netherlands, as well as to meet other conservators and make contacts. On my first Friday I took a trip to Amsterdam to visit the Stadsarchief (city archives). Greeted by paper conservators, Joachem Kamps and Christina Duran Casablanco, I was given a tour of the studios and collection stores. The City Archives is the historical documentation of the city of Amsterdam with 35 kilometres of archives, a historical-topographical collection with millions of maps, drawings, and prints, a library and extensive sound, film and photo archives. The building, which had once been a bank, also exhibits temporary exhibitions as well as a permanent collection that is displayed within the old vaults in the basement.

I was asked to assist with a project during my visit, and so spent the morning helping to humidify and press architectural drawings. This work was fast paced and fiddly, as you had to make sure that any adhesive from old tape was removed before humidifying using mars and crepe rubber, as well as timing the treatment simultaneously. At the end of my visit I was invited back for the following three Friday mornings, and I gladly accepted the offer to further help with the project.



Christina, myself and Joachem at the Stadsarchief conservation studio.



Humidifying architectural drawings.

After my additional work on Friday mornings at the Stadsarchief I then visited other studios at various institutions, these included: The Rijksmuseum, Stedelijk Museum, the Nederlands fotomuseum in Rotterdam and a private photographs conservator, Clara von Waldthausen. These visits were really important for me to view and compare conservation studios and storage systems, as well as meeting and talking with the various conservators and gaining an insight into the work they achieved. Perhaps most importantly these visits allowed me to become involved with various institutions and I gained requests to assist not only at the stadsarchief but was also offered freelance work with the Nederlands Fotomuseum and with the private photographs conservator, Clara. These freelance projects shall enable me to gain further experience of photographs conservation, a specialism that I am passionate about.

## **Leisure**

As Haarlem is so close to the beach, with wooded areas and only a short train ride to Amsterdam and Leiden I decided to spend my spare time exploring these local areas. In the evenings after I had cycled home from work I usually did a long walk in the Heemstede woods, or walked the dog, Hasse who belonged to my landlady. I loved doing these beautiful evening walks as they gave me time to think over what I had been taught during the day and appreciate my new surroundings.



Enjoying a sunny day off in Leiden.



Walking Hasse, the Labrador in Heemstede woodland.

At the weekends I tried to experience the buzz in the city of Amsterdam. During my first weekend in the Netherlands I was able to experience the Amsterdam fringe festival seeing three excellent theatre productions in different locations. This was a brilliant way to explore Amsterdam on foot and by the end of the weekend I felt familiar with the layout of the city. Additionally, I visited various art galleries and especially enjoyed visiting FOAM photography gallery, which I have always wanted to visit since studying photographic arts for my undergraduate degree. I was also lucky to be in the Netherlands during the UNSEEN photography festival, which takes place at Amsterdam's Westergasfabriek, a large former 19th century gasworks site consisting of several different venues, where I spent more than 3 hours wondering around!

Whilst living in the Netherlands I tried to absorb myself in the Dutch language and culture, and spent a few evenings with my landlady, Marjon learning basic Dutch words and sentences. I found that I could pick up the language quite easily, however it was difficult to learn extensively as everybody speaks such excellent English. Yet, I tried my best to include myself where possible and found that I very much enjoyed the cultural delicacies such as salted herring, pannekoek (Dutch pancakes) and apple pie. Dutch chips are also very tasty, and I found myself occasionally buying some with a large squirt of mayonnaise on my way home from work.



Apple and blueberry pannekoek



## **Conclusion**

My time in the Netherlands and interning at The Teylers Museum was such a wonderful experience in so many ways. I had believed that this placement would help bridge the gap between education and employment and it felt gratifying to achieve this by being offered freelance work whilst still in the Netherlands.

Additionally, it was a great experience to work with Robien, and by the end of the internship I felt that we not only became work colleagues but friends during my short time working in the conservation studio. Robien gave up a lot of her time to teach me, find suitable projects for me to work on and include me in every aspect of her day and for that I am so grateful for her attention, patience, and enthusiasm. I am exceptionally pleased that I managed to grasp the exhibition and loans conservation work that I had set out to learn and I felt proud to be able make decisions and work independently whilst mounting and framing; an aspect of conservation in which I had previously lacked confidence and skill.

I have gained self-confidence by working abroad, by finding an internship, funding, a place to stay and then living in an unfamiliar place and meeting new people. These experiences have been a real eye opener to the opportunities that are out there, and waiting to be fulfilled. I wish that I had undertaken an internship abroad sooner, as the experience was so beneficial to me on an educational and personal level, changing my approach and perspective on life in general. I am now a keen cyclist, with a positive and excited approach to new experiences and accepting opportunities to work aboard again in the future. I am now excited to learn more about photographs conservation at the Nederlands Fotomuseum and with Private photographs conservator, Clara von Waldthausen, opportunities that would not have been presented without the financial help from the Zibby Garnett Travelling Fellowship.

## **Appendix A- Study Trip Diary**

**31.08.14:** Flew from Gatwick airport to Amsterdam Schiphol Airport. I was met by my landlady, Marjon and driven home to Heemstede. I cycled into Haarlem and explored the city and local area.

**01.09.14:** I took the train to Amsterdam. Visited the Rijksmuseum and FOAM gallery.

**02.09.14:** First day at Teylers Museum. I started at 8:30am and was given tours of the museum and formal introductions to staff. Presented with Mrs Blanche Douglas Hamilton drawings. Met my landlady's daughter, Lisa in Amsterdam for a beer.

**03.09.14:** I documented Blanche Douglas Hamilton drawings.

**04.09.14:** Undertook condition reports for Blanche Douglas Hamilton drawings. Began charcoal and chalk research with digital microscope. Assisted Erik with environmental monitoring. My boyfriend arrived for a short visit.

**05.09.14:** I went to the Stadsarchief conservation studio in the morning. Assisted with architectural drawings project and invited back. In the afternoon I visited the Rijksmuseum conservation studio. In the evening I watched a performance at the Amsterdam Fringe Festival.

**06.09.14:** I took a trip into Amsterdam to visit the Stedelijk Museum and a performance at the Amsterdam Fringe Festival.

**07.09.14:** I took a trip to Leiden in the morning and then on to a performance in Amsterdam at the Amsterdam Fringe Festival.

**08.09.14:** Teylers Museum had a small flood in the basement. I assisted with the disaster management and rescue of furniture.

**09.09.14:** I undertook environmental monitoring of the basement. Continued with condition reports and chalk and charcoal research.

**10.09.14:** Started to create false margins for the Blanche Douglas Hamilton drawings. De-framed returned loaned objects and put them back into storage.

**11.09.14:** Created false margins for the Blanche Douglas Hamilton drawings. Continued with microscopic research of chalk and charcoal. Practiced using the wall mounted mount cutter. I assisted Erik with environmental monitoring.

**12.09.14:** Started work at the Stadsarchief at 9am. Assisted with tape removal, humidification, and pressing of architectural drawings.

**13.09.14:** Walked in the woods and along the dunes.

**14.09.14:** I took a trip to Amsterdam and a ferry to north Amsterdam to visit a large flea market and watched a film at the *Eye* cinema.

**15.09.14:** Undertook backing removal of a Blanche Douglas Hamilton drawing.

**16.09.14:** Environmental monitoring of the basement. Measured and cut new mounts for Blanche Douglas Hamilton drawings.

**17.09.14:** Created false margins and mounts for Blanche Douglas Hamilton drawings.

**18.09.14:** Tried different types of hinging techniques for Blanche Douglas Hamilton drawings. Learnt about paper/silver fish and photographed some examples under a microscope. Finished mounting Blanche Douglas Hamilton drawings and placed them back into storage. Assisted Erik with environmental monitoring.

**19.09.14:** Volunteered at the Stadsarchief in the morning. Visited the Stedelijk Museum's collection store. Met with private photographs conservator,

Clara von Waldthausen at her studio in Amsterdam. I was offered freelance work for November and December 2014.

**20.09.14:** Two friends came for the weekend to visit me. I showed them around Amsterdam for the day. We tried a pannekoek and salted herring. We visited Marseille Huis photography gallery.

**21.09.14:** I spent the day in Haarlem with my two friends. I give them a tour around the Teylers Museum.

**22.09.14:** Practiced making different styles of mounts for different depths. Practiced cutting mounts by hand. I undertook condition checks for loaned objects for upcoming exhibition.

**23.09.14:** I began hinging and making mounts for new acquisitions exhibition featuring Jacobus van Looy.

**24.09.14:** I created new mounts for new acquisitions exhibition. De-framed returned loaned objects and put them back into storage. Chose, cleaned and waxed frames for new acquisitions exhibition.

**25.09.14:** Assisted Erik with environmental monitoring. Hinged and created mounts for new acquisitions exhibition.

**26.09.14:** I took a trip to Rotterdam to visit the Nederlands Fotomuseum conservation studio. I was offered freelance work for November 2014.

**27.09.14:** My mum came to visit me. We visited the Corrie Ten Boom house.

**28.09.14:** I took my mum to Amsterdam for the day. We visited the *Van Loon House Museum*.

**29.09.14:** We hung new acquisitions exhibition.

**30.09.14:** I had a goodbye lunch with Teylers staff. De-framed returned loaned objects and put them back into storage. De-framed and removed Japanese tissue hinges from objects taken off display. Placed objects back into storage.

**01.10.14:** I had a leaving breakfast with Marjon. In the afternoon I flew from Amsterdam Schiphol airport to London Gatwick airport and returned home.