

Zibby Garnett Travel Fellowship Report

Textile Conservation Placement

McCord Stewart Museum, Montreal, Canada

21st May – 2nd August 2024



Catriona M M Rigby

MPhil Textile Conservation 2023-2025

University of Glasgow

Table of Contents

Table of Figures	3
Introduction	5
About me.....	5
Intended Learning Outcomes	5
Financial Breakdown	6
Report	7
About Montreal.....	7
McCord Stewart Museum Montreal	9
Conservation Department at the McCord Stewart Museum.....	10
Project 1: Cradleboard	11
Project 2: Turban.....	14
Project 3: Dye Project	17
Project 4: Outdoor Sculpture	18
Project 5: Totem Pole.....	19
.....	20
Museum events	20
Leisure time	24
Conclusions	28
Acknowledgements	29

Table of Figures

All images belong to the author unless otherwise stated

<u>Figure 1. Map of Canada © Google Maps</u>	7
<u>Figure 2. Map of Montreal © Google Maps</u>	8
<u>Figure 3. McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	9
<u>Figure 4. Treating the tears in the hide on the cradleboard, M22315 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	11
<u>Figure 5. Tears in hide before treatment, M22315 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	13
<u>Figure 6. Cradleboard before treatment, M22315 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	13
<u>Figure 7. Tears in hide after treatment, M22315 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	13
<u>Figure 8. Cradleboard after treatment, M22315 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	13
<u>Figure 9. Inspecting the condition of the metal threads and fibreglass under a microscope, MMQ1993.07.19 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	14
<u>Figure 10. Turban after treatment, MMQ1993.07.19 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	16
<u>Figure 11. Turban before treatment, MMQ1993.07.19 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	16
<u>Figure 12. Turban after protective lining inserted, MMQ1993.07.19 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	16
<u>Figure 13. Fibreglass plume fill</u>	16
<u>Figure 14. Dye samples and recipe sheets created</u>	17
<u>Figure 15. Making up dye stock solutions</u>	17
<u>Figure 16. Cleaning the outdoor sculpture, M992.112.1.1-2 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	18
<u>Figure 17. Totem pole, ACC2971 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	20
<u>Figure 18. Inspecting the construction of the totem pole, ACC2971 with permission from McCord Stewart Museum Montreal</u>	20
<u>Figure 19. Entrance to Portraits and Fashion exhibition</u>	21
<u>Figure 20. Outdoor sculpture walking tour</u>	22
<u>Figure 21. Rue Victoria on Musical Wednesdays</u>	23
<u>Figure 22. Montreal Metro map © STM</u>	24
<u>Figure 23. Knitting in the park</u>	25

Figure 24. Spending an eveing in the park 25
Figure 25. A Montreal craft shop 25
Figure 26. A Montreal craft shop 25
Figure 27. St Jean Baptiste Day concert in the park 26
Figure 28. Jazz festival performance 27
Figure 29. Jazz festival performance 27

Introduction

About me

My name is Catriona M M Rigby, I am a 24-year-old Scottish student studying on the 2-year MPhil Textile Conservation at the University of Glasgow. In 2025, I will graduate from the course with a Masters in Philosophy in Textile Conservation. I am currently at the end of my first year and have just completed my mandatory textile conservation placement.

Previous students from my course had been recipients of the Zibby Garnett Travel Fellowship, which had allowed them to undertake placements abroad, despite the financial burden this may have placed on them. Realising the fantastic opportunity of a placement abroad could be possible with the help of the fellowship, I began compiling an application in the hopes it would be successful.

I hoped that this opportunity would allow me to experience a new country, culture, and approach to conservation, providing me with experiences I may never have again in future.

Intended Learning Outcomes

The overarching aim of my placement was to gain experience as a textile conservator in a professional environment.

My placement was held by the Conservation Department at the McCord Stewart Museum, Montreal, Canada. The museum is situated at 690 *Rue Sherbrooke Ouest*, Montreal, QC H3A 1E9, from 21st May to 2nd August 2024.

The placement required me to set myself three Individual Learning Outcomes. Which were:

Personal

Improve my French language skills through exposure and use in a native French-speaking region, so that I am able to follow conversations between colleagues and in meetings.

Practical

Develop knowledge and practical skills for working with and treating composite objects, increasing the scope of materials and objects I am competent working with. This will be possible due to the First Nations objects I am likely to be working on during the course of my placement.

Professional

Compare the approaches when working on Eurocentric and non-Eurocentric objects in Canada with my previous experience.

Financial Breakdown

The total cost of the trip was £4,416.26 and I was awarded £3000 from the fellowship. The rest of the funds were raised by applying to other funding bodies. Other grants were awarded by the University of Glasgow GoAbroad Fund and the Beatrix Whistler and James McNeil Whistler Travel Scholarship.

Report

About Montreal

My placement was undertaken in Montreal, Canada, which is in the province of Quebec.



Figure 1. Map of Canada © Google

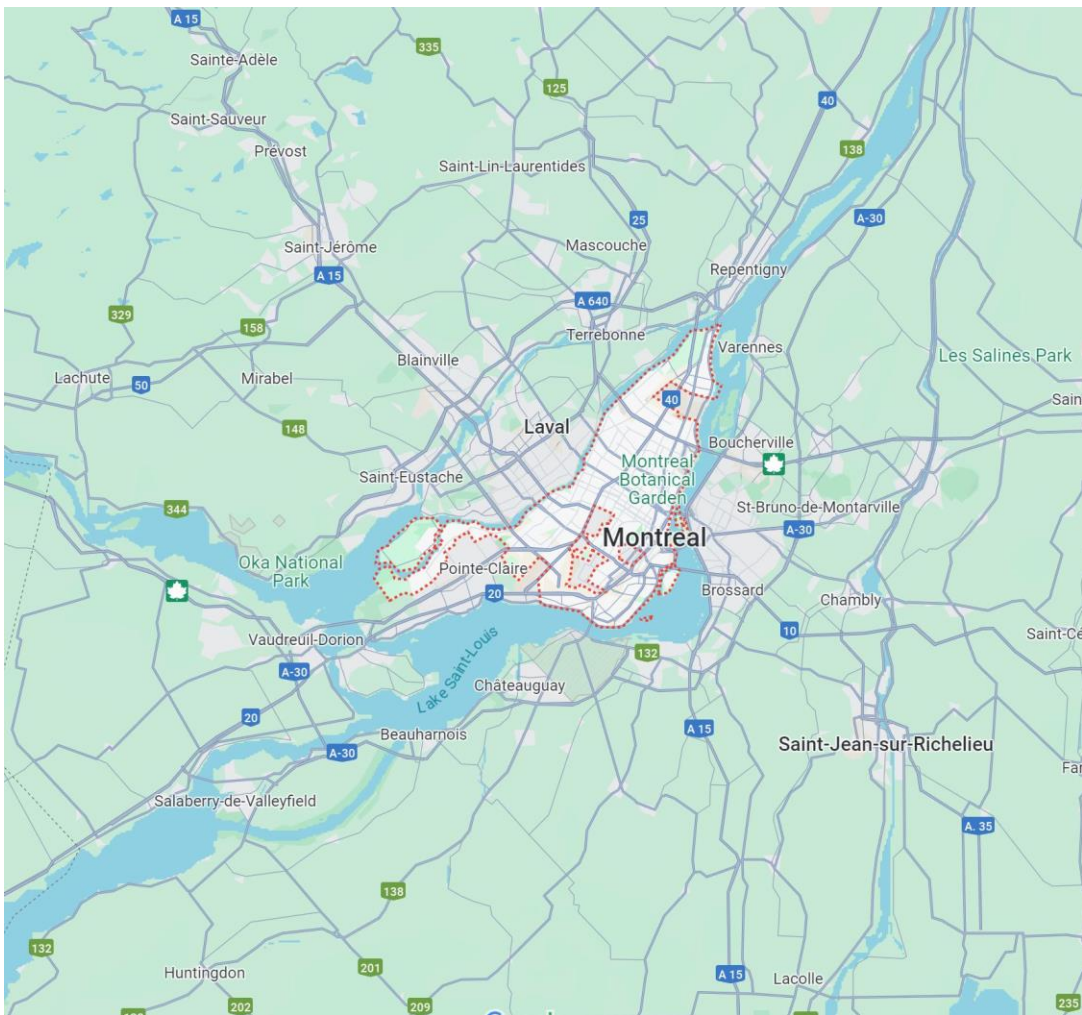


Figure 2. Map of Montreal © Google Maps

Quebec is a francophone region of Canada and so its official language is French. Signage and the majority of the text is firstly written in French, but most is also translated alongside in English. Though many people are at least bilingual, French is the preferred language of many.

McCord Stewart Museum Montreal

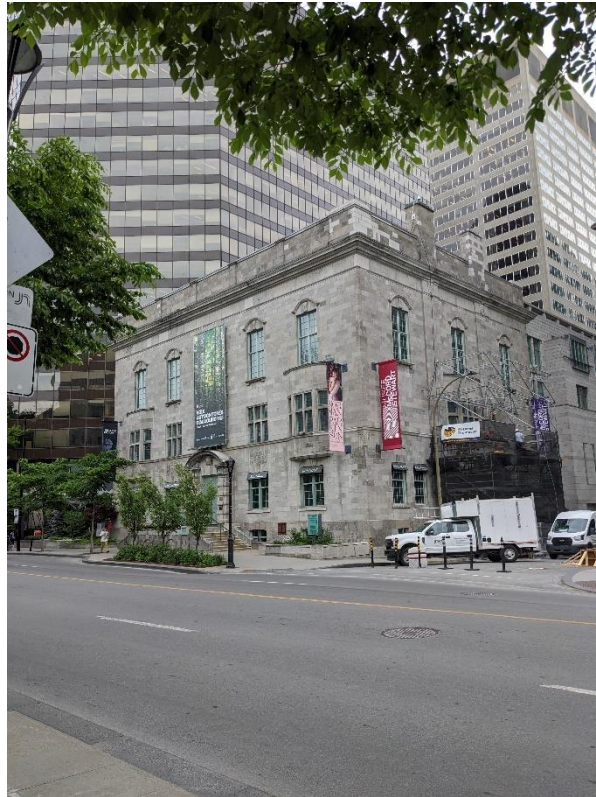


Figure 3. McCord Stewart Museum Montreal

Musée McCord Stewart, McCord Stewart Museum, is based in Downtown Montreal and is housed partially in the original McCord Museum building, along with a 20th-century extension at the back.

Originally the McCord Museum opened in 1921 and was the collection of David Ross McCord, who wished his museum to shed light on the history of Canada and act as a unifier of its communities.

The museum has since incorporated the collections of the previous Stewart Museum, the collection of David Macdonald Stewart opened in 1955, in 2013 and the Fashion Museum in 2018, into its collection. The museum aims to represent all the communities within Montreal, Quebec and wider Canada and celebrate their ‘vitality, creativity and diversity’. Its mission is to mirror its city and celebrate its past, present and future for all its communities.

The museum is dedicated towards decolonisation/indigenisation and using its exhibitions to promote a 'fairer society' based on equality and understanding. One of their permanent exhibitions, *Voix Autochtones D' Aujourd'hui* (Indigenous Voices of Today), contains testimonies, gathered by a First Nations historian, from a variety of participants from a range of First Nations in Quebec. The exhibition aims to allow a place for First Nations to have access to objects originating from their nations that are held in museums and educate others on the history and lives of First Nations in Quebec and in Canada in general. They wish to serve their community through education, access, cultural experiences and community engagement.

Conservation Department at the McCord Stewart Museum

The Conservation Department is situated in the main museum building in Downtown Montreal. It consists of six permanent team members including organics, textiles and 2D/prints conservators and a dedicated costume mount maker, who work in 2 labs and 2 workshops over 2 floors of the museum.

The Conservation Department regularly host placements and internships over the summer months for current students and recent graduates from a range of conservation programmes. Because of this, they are well-equipped and accustomed to planning for and guiding emerging conservators through mutually beneficial conservation experiences.

During my time at the museum, there was an intern from the Queen's University, Art Conservation course, Emily Claire Docking, completing their final work experience before their graduation from the course. I found having another student there to socialise with, ask for advice and work with, very beneficial and enjoyable.

Project 1: Cradleboard



Figure 4. Treating the tears in the hide on the cradleboard

The main project I worked on while on my placement was the conservation of a First Nations Cradleboard. I was very much looking forward to working on this object as it encompassed two of my Individual Learning Outcomes as it: was made up of a broad range of materials including textiles, hide, glass, sinew and wood and would allow me to gain experience working with composite objects, and it was a First Nations object housed in a Canadian Museum and so I was able to understand how sensitive objects such as these are viewed and cared for within their originating country.

The cradleboard had entered the collection in 1964 and had never undergone any treatment. It was heavily soiled and the hide had been severely damaged by moisture, which had resulted in staining and tears.

A large portion of the removal of soiling was focused on the decorative glass beads. Opportunely, this provided me with the experience of a new material and a new conservation technique. I had no previous conservation experience working with glass

and so this was a great opportunity to undertake research into glass and glass beads and the ways in which they are usually treated within conservation. With guidance from my supervisor, I was able to undertake solvent cleaning, which is something only covered in the second year of my course, on the soiled beads effectively, greatly improving the appearance of the object. This gave me great pride as I was able to quickly and effectively gain a new skill and utilise it beneficially.

The treatment of the tears in the hide was the largest part of the whole treatment. It required me to do a great deal of research on new materials found on the objects but also materials used in conservation. The approach and materials used to treat this issue were all completely new to me. At first, this was very daunting and I was anxious about whether I could develop a skill level that could produce desirable results and ensure the best outcome for the object. After starting this stage of the treatment, it quickly became my favourite task. I quickly acquired new skills and greatly enjoyed the opportunity to experiment with these new materials and techniques before using these newly gained skills to treat the cradleboard. I am extremely happy with the end result of the treatment and the new knowledge and skills I have accumulated.

I feel extremely lucky to have been given the chance to work on this object and be given the opportunity to broaden my understanding of First Nations objects, practices and approaches to preservation. The perspective I have developed through this experience of how conservation and originating communities can work together and share knowledge and practices is one that I wish to bring forward into my practice throughout my career in the textile conservation field in the UK. I feel much more open to the broad range of possibilities of approaches to preservation than before my placement, and I hope that this will strengthen my practice in future through my ethical thinking and problem-solving skills.



Figure 5. Cradleboard before treatment



Figure 6. Tears in hide before treatment



Figure 7. Cradleboard after treatment



Figure 8. Tears in hide after treatment

Project 2: Turban



Figure 9. Inspecting the condition of the metal threads and fibreglass under a microscope

In the autumn of 2024, the McCord Stewart Museum is opening an Exhibition called *Bal Costumé* (Costume Ball), which will display costumes worn at costume balls held in Montreal for the high society, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One of the items that will be on display is a metallic silver and gold turban, made as part of an ‘Indian Maharaja’s’ costume. The treatment of the turban to facilitate display was assigned to Emily Claire and myself. I was in more familiar territory with this project as the Turban was primarily created from textiles and some aspects of its treatment required more traditional textile conservation techniques. The outer materials were created from silver and gold threads woven into a fabric, the lining was made of silk, now fragile and splitting, and the centre front was decorated with a metallic patch and plumes of fibreglass. This was an interesting collaborative project with me with a background in costume construction and textile conservation and Emily Claire with a background in

chemistry and object conservation working together, sharing knowledge and skills and learning from each other's experience.

Emily Claire took the lead when chemical analysis techniques were utilised to determine the materials and technique used to create the metal threads that made up the silver and gold materials covering the majority of the exterior of the turban. Under their guidance, I was able to develop an understanding of the production of metallic threads and the skills to undertake analysis of their materials, things that I had previously read about but had never had the chance to test in practice.

The roles were reversed when it came time to create and insert a lining to protect the fragile silk lining of the turban. My experience in pattern drafting and cutting and stitching allowed me to confidently make decisions and guide Emily Claire through this stage of the treatment. We were very fortunate that the project had been assigned as a collaborative one as the delicacy of the decoration of the turban, made of fibreglass, made any work on the interior extremely challenging. As a solution to creating a mount to hold the turban steady while still allowing access to the inside could not be found, the new lining was stitched while the other person held it in place. This project was given to the two of us as there seemed no obvious solutions to many of its problems and so the conservators had held off undertaking the treatment for as long as possible. Because of this much thinking 'outside of the box' was required, which prompted us to employ a great deal of problem-solving skills, throughout the treatment which I believe was very beneficial for the both of us, reminding us that there are always multiple ways to tackle the same issues.

As I wished to gain experience working with new materials, other than textiles, this project was very beneficial towards my Practical Individual Learning Outcome. I took on the task of creating a fibreglass fill to fill in an area of loss in the decorative fibreglass plumes at the front of the turban. I had never worked with fibreglass before nor had I ever come across it on an object in a collection. It was extremely interesting undertaking researching and experimenting with this new material which I had not considered as something I would ever be faced with. I very much enjoyed the experimentation side of

working with a new material and investigating what different effects could be produced with it.

The final results of the turban after treatment were very rewarding as the conservation actions undertaken created a much more visibly pleasing object and one that would be much safer both on display and in storage.



Figure 10. Turban before treatment



Figure 11. Turban after treatment



Figure 12. Turban after protective lining inserted

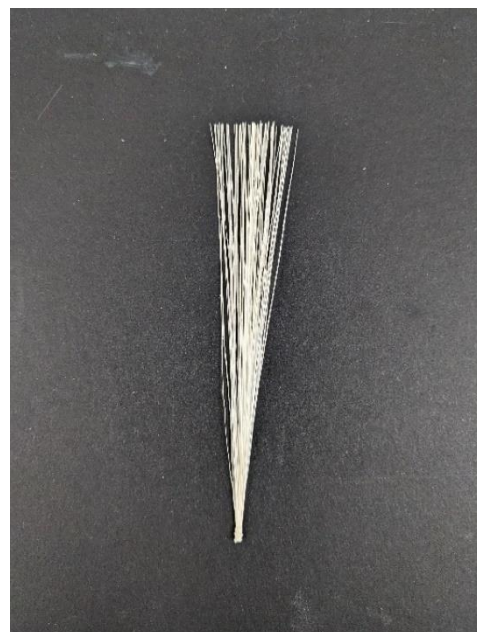


Figure 13. Fibreglass plume fill

Project 3: Dye Project

Dyeing support or lining fabrics for textile conservation is a common task, which is made considerably easier when there are references to work from. The Conservation Department wished to create a dye recipe book so that a better understanding of their dyes could be gained and to make dyeing in future easier as there would be samples and recipes to base others on. One day of every week of my placement was dedicated to dyeing and contributing to the dye book, which was also a collaborative project with Emily Claire. Having experience with this type of dyeing in the past, I was able to comfortably begin this project. Throughout I was able to gain a much better understanding of colour theory and the effects of each additive used in the dyeing process, building upon and solidifying knowledge I have gained over the past year on the Masters course. The project also allowed me to collect many more dye recipes and samples for my own dye book which will prove very beneficial in my future practice when I am required to create new recipes, as I will have previous recipes and samples to reference.



Figure 14. Making up dye stock solutions



Figure 15. Dye samples and recipe sheets created

Project 4: Outdoor Sculpture

This placement was also a great opportunity for me to undertake treatments that are likely not to be very common in my future practice, but which provide skills which can be transferable to my future textile conservation practice. I have gained some previous experience with metals through textile conservation with metal threads and sewing notions such as zips and poppers, however, objects made primarily of metals are usually not under the domain of textile conservators. Yet, when asked if I would be willing to assist in the conservation cleaning of a metal and glass outdoor sculpture I considered it a unique opportunity which could prove beneficial. It was quite a novelty in my conservation experience to spend the day outside and it was very enjoyable working in the Montreal sun. This project allowed me to see how different specialisms approach cleaning techniques and the requirements of outdoor objects. More importantly, this project gave me experience working within a team, coordinating work around the public, and planning and undertaking treatment on large objects. These skills are easily transferable to textile conservation where large heavy objects, such as tapestries, are not uncommon. It was a very interesting and enjoyable experience which was heightened by the delight of the conservation team with the results of their often-overlooked by the staff, the public and funding sculpture.



Figure 16. Cleaning the outdoor sculpture

Project 5: Totem Pole

This project, the planning of the annual conservation cleaning of a Totem pole, again is not one directly linked to textile conservation, but required many skills which can easily be transferred to textile conservation in ways similar to the previous project, due to its size and location in a public space. Additionally, this project prompted personal research into the construction and purpose of Totem poles in First Nations in Canada. Objects often used in pop culture I had previous assumptions about this type of object but through research I found the need to completely change my understanding of them. Totem poles are often created to depict a story of a particular person, family or event, by carving large pieces of wood, which stand upright outside. Many First Nations beliefs revolve around the balance of nature and the circular nature of life, in this instance focusing on the fact that everything must have an end. Part of the natural life cycle of Totem poles is that they will eventually fall. They were not made with the intention of lasting forever. This creates many issues in a museum context. My responsibility as a conservator is to preserve the heritage under my care, however, I felt rather uneasy contributing to an upset in the belief system of the originating community. This Totem pole has travelled through many hands throughout its lifetime and unfortunately, its originating community is no longer known.

The McCord Stewart Museum prioritises communication and collaboration between First Nations and staff members caring for First Nations objects. This leads to many conservation practices being altered to better align with the belief systems and approaches to conservation of First Nations. Although, since the originating community of this object is unknown and so it has been disconnected from its attribution, there is no one to communicate with on how best to approach the Totem pole. As a result, the museum has taken the stance to continue to reduce the amount of change to the Totem pole, providing access to all who visit the museum, and giving representation to First Nations crafts and customs.

This project allowed me great insight into how Canadian museums approach the preservation of First Nations heritage and how much more effort could be made across

the world to appropriately care for objects from other cultures and countries which may hold different approaches to the preservation of their heritage.



Figure 17. Totem pole

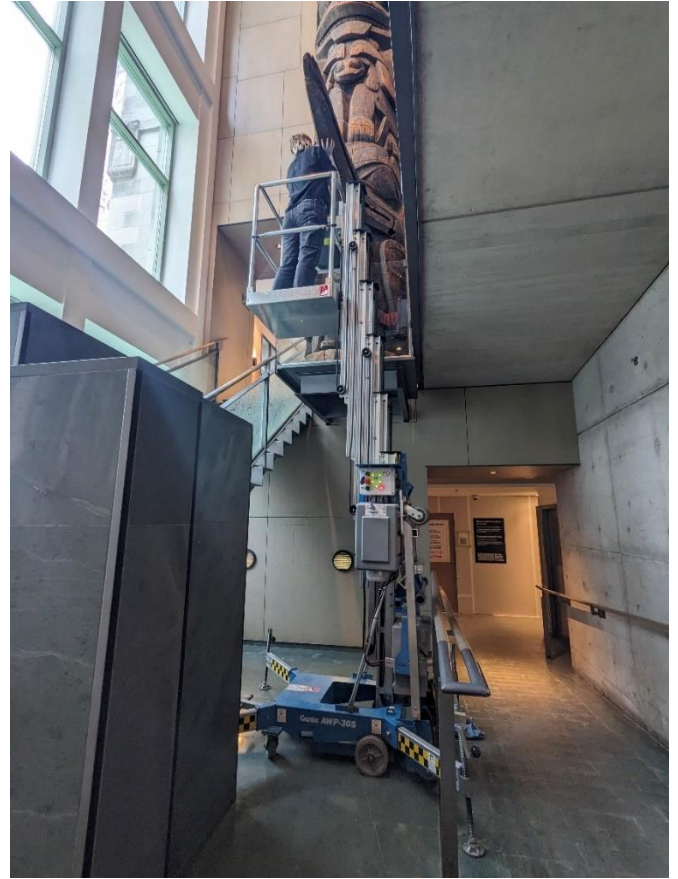


Figure 18. Inspecting the construction of the totem pole

Museum events

Throughout the summer months, the museum had a number of events planned that I was able to participate in. Their new fashion photography exhibition ‘*Portraits et Mode*’ (Portraits and Fashion) opened in June and before it was opened to the public, museum staff were taken on a tour of it led by the curator. It was nice to feel part of the museum team and be involved in activities such as this and get a chance to see the exhibition that had been in construction since I arrived at the museum. The tour was very interesting, although, as the museum is primarily French-speaking and the curator was from Quebec,

the tour was undertaken in a very strong Quebecois French accent. I found it quite challenging to follow the conversation in its entirety as the pace was fast and the accent one I am less familiar with and so there was little time to try and catch words and phrases and translate them in my head.



Figure 19. Entrance to Portraits and Fashion exhibition

Other instances where I was able to take part in museum-wide staff activities and become more accustomed to the Quebecois accent and practice my French listening skills were staff meetings and a walking tour of the outdoor sculptures in the surrounding area. Both these activities were great opportunities to improve my language skills and I found them easier to follow as there were multiple speakers at each and greater context given about the conversation through visual prompts and expressive actions.



Figure 20. Outdoor sculpture walking tour

The alleyway next to the museum, in which the staff entrance is, (*Rue Victoria*) is often decorated in the summer months and used as a seating area for staff members and the public. This summer it was decorated as a typical Montreal alleyway between houses which are often used as meeting places, party spaces and by children to play in. This is where myself and fellow intern Emily Claire spent most of our lunch breaks, once its construction was complete. Every Wednesday, Musical Wednesdays would be held on the street. A different local Montreal band would get the opportunity each week to put on a musical performance in the alleyway which drew in crowds of workers on their lunch breaks and tourists, filling the street with music and chatter.



Figure 21. Rue Victoria on Musical Wednesdays

The final notable event hosted by the museum was a First Nations ceremony on National Indigenous Peoples Day. As I arrived at work in the morning a crowd had already gathered around a fire, band and group of First Nations dancers as a speaker was talking to the crowd. Speeches were made, dances and music performed and the crowd invited to take part. The First Nation that this group belonged to had objects originating with their community within the museum and were invited to perform this ceremony as part of the preservation of the intangible heritage of their community. It was an amazing experience to be able to witness this ceremony and see the strong bonds that the museum has managed to form with Indigenous People of Quebec. No photography or filming was allowed to show respect for the ceremony so I am unable to offer visual representation of it, but the mix of the crowd gathered, the traditional costumes worn and the smoke from the fire created an incredible atmosphere of respect and love.

Leisure time

Much of my leisure time was spent exploring the city by metro and foot. The metro system in Montreal covers most of the major areas in the main city and was very easy to use and so I took advantage of it to get to and from the museum to my apartment and constantly over the weekends when I would hop on and off to explore different neighbourhoods. Montreal is said to be made up of many neighbourhoods and so each stop of the metro would lead to very different areas all offering a wide variety of sites, shops and attractions.



Figure 22. Montreal Metro map © STM

In my spare time I frequented the many parks in the city to enjoy the sun, have picnics, and do some knitting, which is a craft I decided to pick up again from childhood while I

was in Montreal after coming across some fantastic yarn shops. The city also offered a fantastic range of fabric and craft shops which I visited many times to admire what was on offer.



Figure 23. Spending an evening in the park



Figure 24. Knitting in the park

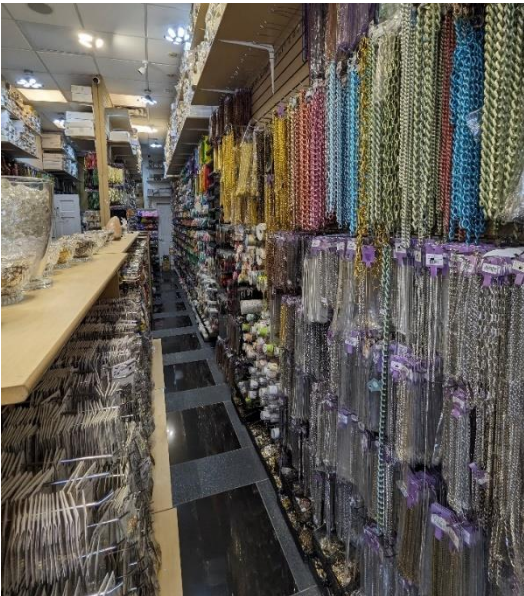


Figure 25. A Montreal craft shop



Figure 26. A Montreal craft shop

Montreal is an incredible mix of cultures as its residence hail from all across the world. This, for one thing, has resulted in a wide variety of food being available in the city. I took full advantage of this by trying poutine, pogos (corndogs), soup dumplings, Montreal bagels (from both Fairmont Bagels and St-Viateur Bagels) and Tim Bits from Tim Hortons, to name a few.

Throughout the summer months, Montreal comes alive with a string of festivals and activities across the city. *St Jean Baptiste* Day is celebrated throughout Quebec, much as the 1st of July is celebrated in America, with everyone taking part in celebrating their culture and heritage. I joined in on the celebrations and went to Parc Maisonneuve for an entirely free concert, celebrating the French language and Quebec music artists.

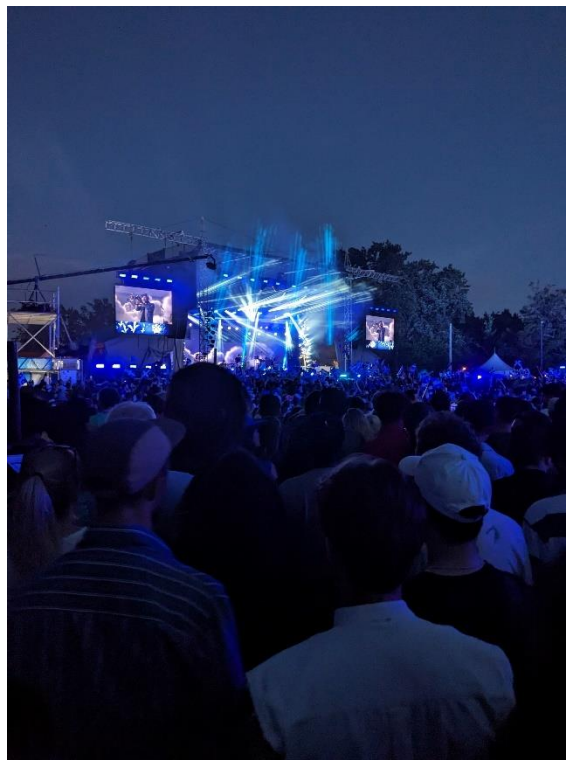


Figure 27. St Jean Baptiste Day concert in the park

I also attended two performances at the Jazz Festival held across Downtown Montreal in July, which also had many free performances during its run.



Figure 28. Jazz festival performance

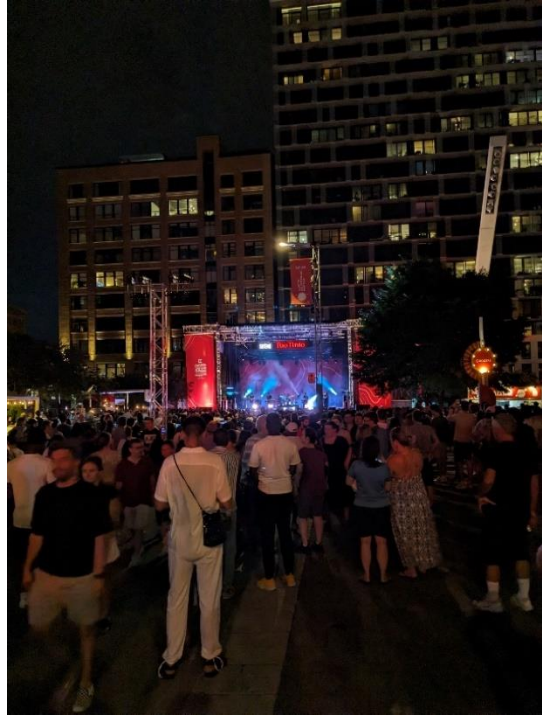


Figure 29. Jazz festival performance

Conclusions

I am so incredibly thankful for the opportunity I was given this summer. In regards to my conservation practice, it has offered me a wonderful chance to experience a different way of viewing and undertaking conservation treatments and has allowed me to gain and solidify a host of skills I will use throughout my future career. Most significantly it gave me the chance to see how other countries approach caring for First Nations objects within museum collections. It is a topic widely debated around the world in the heritage sector and one in which much work is being undertaken to try and create a more inclusive and thoughtful approach. I was able to experience a very different approach to that commonly taken in museums in the UK and I hope to incorporate this approach into my own practice in my future working in the heritage sector in the UK.

On a personal note, this experience has allowed me to do something I have always wished for but was uncertain as to how it could come about and whether or not I was confident enough to undertake it. For many years it had been a wish of mine to travel to another country, independently, to practice my French language skills. This placement gave me the perfect opportunity to make this wish a reality and I am so thankful to all those who made it possible.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the McCord Stewart Museum and everyone in the Conservation Department who facilitated my placement and made the experience incredibly rewarding and enjoyable. I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor at the McCord Stewart Museum, Sara Serban, who provided great guidance and created a welcoming and supportive environment throughout my placement.

I would also like to thank my placement supervisor at the University of Glasgow, Joanne Hackett, who supported the planning and academic aspects of the placement.

Finally, I would like to give thanks to the organisations who kindly contributed funds to enable me to undertake this amazing opportunity. These organisations are the Zibby Garnett Travel Fellowship, the University of Glasgow GoAbroad Fund, and the Beatrix Whistler and James McNeil Whistler Travel Scholarship.