

An Interview with the FAMSF Conservation Interns

<http://famsfconservation.wordpress.com/>

Name: Tegan Broderick **Email:** tegan.theora@gmail.com **Date:** January 27, 2011

Dates of internship: January 24, 2011 to February 24, 2011

Undergraduate university: University of New South Wales

Degree: Bachelor of Fine Arts **Date of completion:** 2006

Post-graduate education (for grad school prep): University of Sydney

Degree: Bachelor of Arts (Advanced Honours), History, Heritage Studies (one year completed)

Graduate university: University of Melbourne

Degree: Master of Cultural Materials Conservation **Date of completion:** Expected 2011

Q: How did you decide on conservation as a career and what steps did you take before applying to conservation programs?

A: *My introduction to conservation was a fairly recent event. I had always planned to pursue a museum or art gallery career to supplement an income derived from artistic pursuits, but always pictured myself in a curatorial, collection management or technician role. In 2008 I attended a lecture at the Australian Museum in Sydney about conservation practice within the museum, and upon leaving decided that a career in conservation would be ideal. The combination of art, history and science involved interested me greatly, as well as the hands on nature of the profession.*

The pre-program system does not exist in Australia, so I started the Master's course without any practical conservation experience. I was fortunate that the University of Melbourne offered an intensive chemistry bridging course to prepare me for the chemistry side of the field. Prior to applying I had worked at several galleries doing front of house and installation work, which had introduced me to certain common conservation issues.

Q: What attracted you to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco?

A: *My conservation interests are quite varied, but include ethnographic objects and decorative art objects, both of which are widely represented within the FAMSF collection. I wanted to intern in the US, mainly because there is such a large network of conservation professionals here who are very dedicated to education and training within the conservation field, and I heard very positive things about the objects conservation department here. Having lived in San Francisco previously, the opportunity to come back to the city was also an attraction.*

Q: What challenges did you face in coming to San Francisco for your internship?

A: *Despite coming here from the other side of the world, the transition has been relatively challenge free. I am lucky to have US citizenship, removing what I understand to be a long and tedious visa process, and was able to organize somewhere to live close to the de Young before arriving. Also, I know the city quite well from living here previously, which has helped.*

Q: Compare and contrast your experience at FAMSF to your previous museum experience.

A: *My previous museum experience has included work at a major institution in Melbourne, and several positions with smaller museums/galleries working both in conservation and front of house roles. Every position I have had has been a completely different experience based on the size of the institution, the role of the conservation within the institution, the nature of the collection, and the exact position I have held. One consistent concern within the conservation field overall appears to be the role of funding and the status of the conservation departments within a larger institutional organization. Despite the importance of conservation work within collections, it seems that it often gets overlooked in favor of other institutional objectives.*

Q: What projects are you focusing on during your internship?

A: *Primarily I will be working on the Olmec: Colossal Masterworks of Ancient Mexico exhibition installation. In addition to this I have been assisting in, and undertaking, several smaller projects: making furniture shrouds with textile conservation department volunteers, dusting objects on open display, compiling environmental data, and extracting an ochre based pigment from a Hawaiian soil sample.*

Q: What is one interesting or surprising thing you have discovered about doing conservation in a museum setting?

A: *This is the first time I have worked solely within a large conservation department for an extended amount of time, so it has given me an opportunity to see how all the theoretical knowledge I have been studying for so long is put into practice. It is always interesting to see how conservation fits within a museum overall, and the level of importance placed on conservation as a discipline within a museum.*

Q: What do you find rewarding about working in conservation?

A: *Being able to work so closely with artifacts and artworks. Not many people have the opportunity to see the range of objects you encounter behind the scenes in a museum, and even less people get to work on them. Coming from a fine art background, I am particularly interested in manufacturing and fabrication techniques of objects. However, I am also interested in their history and the cultural context of their production and use. Working in this field facilitates an ongoing education in these areas. I also enjoy the varied tasks that the position involves; no one day is the same.*

Q: What do you plan to do after your internship?

A: *My internship is the last component of my Master's degree, so I will graduate soon after its completion. I plan to remain in the US and either work or undertake further internships and/or fellowships to further develop and refine my conservation skills.*

Q: In the future, do you hope to continue working at a museum, or do you plan to have an independent practice?

A: *Initially I would like to continue working at a museum. Working and interacting with other conservation staff would give me a wealth of knowledge I would be unable to obtain working independently, especially at this early stage of my career. However, at some point in the future I would like to have my own independent practice, most likely in addition to a museum based position.*