

# who are the conservators in your neighborhood?

Conservators usually work behind the scenes, but southeast Michigan is home to many conservation professionals. Here are just a few.



**John Steele**, Conservator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts, Detroit Institute of Arts  
**What kind of objects do you work on?** I work on everything three-dimensional in the DIA's collection, so the scope of materials I treat is quite large. It includes sculpture and decorative arts made of stone, wood, metal, ceramic, glass, plastic, and more.  
**What is the most difficult object you've ever worked on?** When the DIA was renovated about five years ago, one of my responsibilities was to lead a team of museum colleagues and specialists

in moving an 18th-century French room from one location to another within the museum. The paneling, floor, ceiling, and fireplace consisted of more than 1,000 pieces that had to be taken apart, numbered, and then reassembled.

**What object is on your bench at the moment?** A German Expressionist terracotta sculpture by Wilhelm Lehmbruck that I'm cleaning. The DIA is sending an exhibition of German Expressionist paintings and sculpture to the Frist Museum in Nashville, Tennessee.



**Leyla Lau-Lamb**, Senior Conservator for Books and Papyrus, University of Michigan Library  
**What kind of objects do you work on?** I work on the largest papyrus collection in the Western hemisphere, over 10,000 papyri, and on rare books. These include Western and Islamic manuscripts and printed works bound in leather, vellum, and paper.  
**What do you enjoy most about your job?** The Library has diverse holdings, and I like the enormous variety of material that goes through my hands. I also like the collaboration with my coworkers and

conservators in other fields and other institutions. I enjoy teaching papyrus conservation to conservators, scholars, papyrologists, and Egyptologists.

**What is the most interesting project you've worked on?** The most interesting object was a fragmentary papyrus which was a manifest for a merchant ship. I had to do conservation on many small fragments and, with the papyrologist Paul Heilporn, align the small fragments so that the text could be deciphered. For me, it was one of the most interesting collaborations between a papyrologist and a conservator.



**Suzanne Davis**, Associate Curator and Head of Conservation, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology  
**What kind of objects do you work on?** I work on archaeological objects, both at the Kelsey Museum and on the Kelsey's excavations in Egypt and Israel.  
**What do you enjoy most about your job?** I like a lot of things about my job. I like working with my hands, I like working in teams with other people and with students. I love conservation fieldwork on excavations, and I really like the fact each day is different. In conservation, you always have new

problems to solve.

**What is the most interesting project that you have worked on?** Wow, this is a tough question. In my previous job, for the U.S. Navy, I worked on Antarctic explorer Admiral Byrd's hut, including the hut itself and all of its contents. His sleeping bag and a lot of his fur-lined clothes and boots had been eaten by bugs. They were totally disgusting, but it was satisfying to work on a complete collection like that, and I had to treat a lot of different materials, including skin, fur, metal, wood, etc.



**Clara Deck**, Senior Conservator, The Henry Ford  
**What kind of objects do you work on?** At The Henry Ford, I have worked on all kinds of objects from mechanical musical instruments, to furniture and toys, to stoves, automobiles, a horse-drawn street car, and steam engines.  
**What is the most difficult object you've ever worked on?** The most difficult objects at The Henry Ford are the ones that have to operate; it is an ethical and practical challenge to maintain them in working

condition and also preserve them for posterity. An example of this is a rare tin-foil phonograph designed by Thomas Edison in 1878 and used in our daily program in Greenfield Village.

**What object is on your bench at the moment?** We are working on our historic typewriter collection, as well as Edison patent models. The most exciting project in my lab right now is a plaster bust of George Washington made by the great French sculptor Jean Antoine Houdon in 1785–1790.



**Thomas Hogarth**, Senior Conservator, University of Michigan Library  
**What kind of objects do you work on?** Mostly bound volumes from the rare book collections. This may include volumes bound in paper, cloth, leather, or vellum. I also work on single paper items such as documents and photographs. I specialize in the conservation of 19th-century photographs.  
**What is the most interesting project you've worked on?** One project that sticks in my mind is the treatment of the Peter Pan Portfolio, by Arthur Rackham, containing twelve signed prints from Peter

Pan in Kensington Gardens. Arthur Rackham is one of my favorite artists, so I had a personal interest in the treatment of this volume. The vellum case was in terrible condition and the matted prints were in pretty rough shape. I put many hours into that volume: repaired all of the vellum, disassembled all twelve mats, removed, deacidified, and repaired the plates, and hinged them into the original mats. Extreme caution had to be used at all times in order not to alter Rackham's signatures on the prints. Whenever I see this volume, it always brings a smile to my face. For me it was a labor of love.

# conservators in your neighborhood



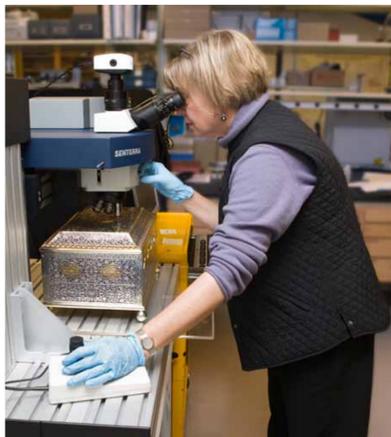
**Claudia Chemello**, Senior Conservator,  
Kelsey Museum of Archaeology

**What kind of objects do you work on?** I work on archaeological objects, both freshly excavated objects and those from the Kelsey Museum's collection. This includes everything from coins to mummies.

**What do you enjoy most about your job?** I like the challenge of dealing with archaeological artifacts because they can be made from all kinds of materials and have added problems from being buried in the ground. I especially like treating freshly excavated objects, which sometimes don't look like real artifacts

until after they've been stabilized and cleaned. I really like looking closely at the surface and trying to understand how an artifact was made. I also like being part of a team that prepares artifacts for exhibition, often items that have never been seen before.

**What is the most difficult object you've ever worked on?** One of the most challenging projects I've worked on was to excavate and lift a deposit of extremely fragile wood and textile artifacts at the site of Abydos in Egypt. These artifacts had been extensively eaten by bugs and could hardly be touched without breaking apart.



**Cathy Selvius DeRoo**, Research Scientist,  
Detroit Institute of Arts

**What kind of objects do you work on?** The objects I study include paintings, drawings, sculpture, ethnographic objects, photographs, manuscripts, ceramics, jewelry, textiles and more.

**What do you do as a research scientist for the DIA?** In order to analyze the materials used to create objects in the collection, I use a variety of analytical tools. These analytical tools help to identify a broad range of artists' materials, including mineral-based and synthetic pigments, metal alloys, binding media,

fibers, photographic processes, glasses, and ceramic glazes. This information supports the art historical understanding, care, and exhibition of objects in the DIA's collection. Analysis of materials and techniques also informs our attribution of a work of art.

**What object is on your bench at the moment?** I'm currently working on a large study project of the DIA's collection of Renaissance majolica ceramics, on pigment analysis of German Expressionist paintings, and on a collaborative project to determine whether a painting in the collection is truly a 12th-century Spanish wall painting or a fake.



**Howard Sutcliffe**, Textile Conservator,  
Detroit Institute of Arts

**What kind of objects do you work on?** All kinds of textiles from flat ones like flags and tapestries to three-dimensional textiles like costume and upholstery. I also work on materials that are used to decorate and functionalize textiles, which can be anything from glass beads and feathers to plastic zippers and metal buttons.

**What is the most interesting project that you have worked on?** I just finished a challenging project working on a 52 ft. x 17 ft. painted theater curtain in Bay View, MI. Not only was the size and condition

of the curtain challenging, but I was also overseeing a team of ten local volunteers who worked with me to complete it. It definitely took me out of my comfort zone but was a lot of fun and ultimately very successful (see photo).

**What do you enjoy most about your job?** Working in a museum, I like the variety and quality of the objects. In private practice, I like working with people who bring in objects that they have a personal connection with. I have always really liked transforming an object that could not be exhibited into something that can be displayed and enjoyed by an owner or museum visitor.



**Caroline Roberts**, 2011–12 Samuel H. Kress  
Conservation Fellow, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology

**What kind of objects do you work on?** Lately I have focused on the conservation of ancient artifacts, including glass and ceramic vessels and figurines, metal jewelry, basketry, and objects made of a combination of materials like textile and paint.

**What is the most interesting project you've worked on?** The most interesting project I've worked on is the Terenouthis stela at the Kelsey Museum. Developing solutions for the numerous, overlapping condition

problems the stela face has been challenging and rewarding. Plus I love stone as a material category.

**What is the most difficult object you've ever worked on?** The most difficult object I have treated is a model boat from the ancient city of Ur belonging to the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. It is made of a mix of bitumen (an asphalt-like material), sand, and plant fibers, and it was extremely brittle before I treated it. I spent 100+ hours injecting it with minute quantities of adhesive to make it stable.



**Kewei Wang**, Senior Conservator of Asian Art,  
University of Michigan Museum of Art

**What kind of objects do you work on?** I work on Japanese and Chinese hand scrolls, prints, and hanging scrolls.

**What do you enjoy most about your job?** I like seeing the works go through the conservation process and seeing the final result. It makes me very proud because I feel as though I give the paintings a new life.

**What is the most interesting project that you have worked on?** I worked on a calligraphy hand scroll from the Seattle Art Museum that had rodent

damage, and a lot of the paper on the edges was torn and eaten away. After I completed the scroll, you would have never known that it had been damaged. The clients were very pleased.

**What is the most difficult object you have ever worked on?** The most difficult thing that I have ever worked on was a Japanese hanging scroll that was painted on very thin silk, and the pigment went through the silk onto the lining paper. Between the silk and the lining there were bubbles that needed to be removed, but it was very difficult because I had to treat the damage differently for each material, going from front to back and back to front.