

In Memoriam

Antoinette King (1933-2014)

The Conservation Center community notes with deep sadness the death on February 21, 2014 of Antoinette Chevigny King, former Conservator of Prints and Drawings and Director of Conservation at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) from 1968 until her retirement in 1996. Among her numerous treatments of well-known artworks, she considered her work on Picasso's studies for *Guernica* to be a highpoint. Also an expert on the unique conservation challenges of collages, her appreciation of different and unusual papers, especially ephemeral ones such as newsprint, informed her approach which evolved continually. She was among the first to debate the ethical issues surrounding the "cleaning" of aged papers.

Antoinette served as an adjunct faculty member at the Conservation Center from 1977 to 1998, where she taught paper conservation treatment courses in partnership with Norman Indictor, Norbert Baer and Masako Koyano. She also led six colloquia, open to both art history and conservation students, on the conservation of twentieth-century art, the first ever offered on the technical and material aspects of modern and contemporary art. Of this course, Rachel Danzing '92 observes, "There was a lively discussion of various treatment issues using case studies, including some of her own past treatments. She was able to present the ethical issues of treatment as such a natural part of the thought process in a subtle but interesting way. She showed how integral these considerations are to treatments, but also how we have to keep asking the questions because we don't always come up with the same answers." Ann Baldwin '98 also remembers the colloquium, "Today, I remember Antoinette's presentation of the treatment of a Picasso collage. As she spun her cautionary tale, she revealed so many complex issues in conserving/preserving/restoring collages—ranging from the intrusive nature of the detachment and re-attachment of collage elements, to differences in expansion coefficients of machine-made and rag papers, which complicated registration and re-attachment. Although the decision to treat the collage was made in concert with curators at MoMA,



Antoinette seemed to wrestle with aspects of this treatment years later. Any time I treat a collage, I am reminded of the gravity of the lessons Antoinette imparted that day over twenty years ago."

Antoinette mentored over twenty budding paper conservators, who remember her with great fondness and respect. Reba Snyder '86 credits Antoinette with being a memorable teacher and exceptional influence, noting, "She read extensively about artists and their working methods and used her knowledge as she studied the works themselves, looking for physical evidence of the artists process. This was fairly rare in the 1970s. Her hand skills were quite extraordinary and she seemed able to successfully treat artworks by barely touching them."

Antoinette's practice of intense looking was repeatedly mentioned by her former students, including Caroline Rieger '89 and Mindy Friedman Horn '85. The looking phase was often followed by re-evaluation. Daria Keynan, reminds us, "I thought she was a remarkable teacher, always re-evaluating her thinking, her approach and her old treatments. Teaching us to look at every treatment in many ways. Probably the most important thing I learned from her is to think through a complete treatment before

even testing a work. She taught us a kind of open thinking process by which we would come up with ideas for treatment and reject them until we clarified and distilled the problem and solution. I'm finding that over the years, as the pieces I work on get more complex, I return time and again to this methodology." Rachel Mustalish '97 recalls, "I remember her great passion for art. She would often pull me aside during my independent study at MoMA to look at or discuss a fascinating or complex issue she found in her own treatments and to learn about some creative problem solving in dealing with modern art." Ann Craddock Albano '91 echoes Antoinette's habit of engaging students in philosophical conversations, "Whenever a work of art on paper at MoMA that Antoinette had treated was put on view, she would take me down to see how it was "faring" and would carefully explain to me the dilemmas of its materials and construction and the treatment that she had finally settled upon. We would then start an open-ended debate about the pros and cons of her approach and the possible final outcomes for the aesthetic "life" of the piece. The effect of her impingement through a conservation treatment upon a work of art was always uppermost in her mind."

Antoinette was known for her personal reserve, elegance and calmness: "She was very fashionable, if you remember, and loved beautiful clothes and beautiful objects." She exuded the quality of mindfulness—a critical aura for a role model of harried young graduate students. Paula Volent '88 says, "I always remember that Antoinette and I were washing a delicate drawing when we heard that the space shuttle had exploded. The quintessential professional, she lifted the drawing out of the bath and then sat down stunned."

Antoinette's insistence upon intense looking and continual evaluation of treatments—past and future—made students realize that solutions to conservation problems were not formulaic. Because every artwork is unique in its materiality, facture and spirit, the approach to its preservation must be individually designed. We were fortunate to have been guided by Antoinette King, whose quiet voice will remain forever with us. •

—Margaret Holben Ellis '79

Peggy is the Eugene Thaw Professor of Paper Conservation at the Conservation Center and Director of the Thaw Conservation Center at the Morgan Library & Museum

—Karl Buchberg '84

Karl is Senior Paper Conservator at MoMA

Donations to the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation (FAIC) Professional Development Fund for Grants and Scholarships may be made in her honor.

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