

NEWSGRAM

News in brief from the Conservation Center

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The Class of 2023

Erin Fitterer

Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Time-Based Media Art Conservation

EVER SINCE I WAS LITTLE, I HAVE BEEN INTERESTED IN ancient history and art. As a child, I created models of Roman villas and copied plans of medieval castles. I spent long summers painting watercolors of animals and imaginary cities while taking classes at the local art school. After college, however, my first few jobs concerned analytics and programming. I did not learn about art conservation until I attended Rutgers University for my M.A. in Art History. The more I learned about conservation, the more the hybrid of science and art resonated with me.

I have been working towards a career in conservation for the last four years. My pre-program experience included work in libraries, an archaeological collection, and fine art museums. I spent the last year at the National Gallery of Art (NGA) in Washington, DC. At the NGA, I have had the opportunity to work with contemporary works of art, including outdoor sculpture and Time-Based Media (TBM). Though much of my previous academic and conservation experience focused on older materials, I have found myself drawn to the unique challenges of working with contemporary works of art. Further, the field of TBM allows me to draw upon my previous experience of working with Artificial Intelligence software. Working in a lab fills me with a deep sense of purpose and fulfillment. I derive immense satisfaction from working with my hands and seeing the physical transformation of the objects. The new materials and challenges I faced over the last year have strengthened my resolve to be a conservator of Time-Based Media.

I am excited to begin my journey at the Conservation Center. In addition to expanding my knowledge of modern and contemporary art, attending the IFA would grant me the opportunity to take specialized courses in Time-Based Media, including coursework in electronics and computer programming. This specialized curriculum addresses the many facets of Time-Based Media artwork while ensuring that there will be conservators in the future who will be capable of treating these objects. By attending the IFA, I hope to position myself to be at the forefront of a new frontier in conservation.



Left: Erin in the Islamic Galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (photo courtesy Leah Marangos)



Right: Ameya in the Objects Lab at NPS Harpers Ferry Center. (photo courtesy Fran Ritchie)

Ameya Grant

National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow in Conservation

CONSERVATION HAS ALWAYS FELT “RIGHT” TO ME—A GOOD fit—from the moment I learned about the field in high school. Originally, I wanted to become an illustrator, but after a semester of chemistry I was so in love with the two subjects that I wanted to find a career where I could utilize the skills of both to solve problems related to an object’s condition. My high school chemistry teacher informed me of conservation; the field was appealing as I could apply the analytical concepts and skills learned in chemistry with the knowledge of an artwork to learn about its materiality, construction, and provenance. I decided then to pursue a career in conservation with an emphasis on the scientific analysis of art, initially as a conservation scientist. It wasn’t until my first pre-program internship at the Metropolitan Museum of Art that I realized I enjoyed the hands-on aspects of treatment (as opposed to just analysis) and would rather pursue a career in objects conservation.

I graduated from SUNY New Paltz in 2018 with a B.S. in Chemistry and a minor in Art History. Pre-program internship and volunteer opportunities were scarce in my area. I was nervous that if I couldn’t find an opportunity before I finished college I wouldn’t be able to pursue a career in conservation. I didn’t want to have experiences solely in art history, but wanted hands-on experience in conservation treatment, analysis, and preservation methods. It was hard at first, but I was able to create a conservation science related Undergraduate Research Project while at SUNY New Paltz. Working with the Ceramics and Chemistry departments, my goal was to determine the glaze com-

position and luminescence properties of Carl Walters' Egyptian blue faience sculptures. From there on I expanded my search for internships that would quench my thirst for the conservation and analysis of ceramic objects, as well as those of objects in general.

After graduation, I interned at the Conservation Department of the Costume Institute at the Met. I worked on creating a reference library of natural, synthetic, and animal fibers analyzed by polarized light microscopy. At that point I thought I would pursue a degree in material science, again with the final goal of becoming a conservation scientist. Working under the supervision of Sarah Scaturro, Head Conservator, I fell in love with the textile conservators' examination and treatment of textiles and garments through the fibers they obtained. I realized I wanted more hands-on experience with art objects instead of analysis. My mentors encouraged me to apply for conservation graduate school programs and the proximity of the Met to NYU exposed me to the program and its extensive possibilities. After talking with current students and professors, NYU became my dream school.

I gained the confidence to apply to graduate schools after interning at the Met. I didn't know how much pre-program experience would be "enough" for graduate school, so I took up as many volunteer and internship experiences as I could to add to my hands-on conservation knowledge. Before submitting my application, I was accepted as an intern at the National Park Service (NPS) Harpers Ferry Center. Working on various objects, books, paper, textiles, and furniture, I've been learning as much as I can about conservation practices and treatments in the hopes that I can apply this knowledge when I begin more rigorous academic study and graduate-level internships.

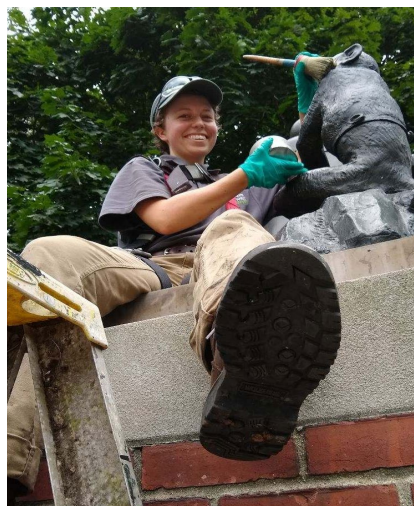
Working as an NPS Conservation Intern, I realized I love the challenges faced by a conservator—no matter the specialization. There are many ways to approach a problem and once a solution is reached it is rewarding. Each day is unique, no two objects are alike, and what may work for one object definitely won't work for another. (For example, removing pressure sensitive tape from a plywood offset printed propaganda sign is very different from removing pressure sensitive tape from brass fenders!)

I've gone through challenging times and wasn't sure if I would continue to pursue a career in conservation. My college advisor knew of my passion for conservation and said, "The worst thing you can do is not try—be confident in yourself," which reminded me that I shouldn't give up on myself. I cannot wait to see what the next four years will bring!

Isabelle Lobley

Heinemann Fellow in Conservation

WHEN I BEGAN AS AN UNDERGRADUATE AT GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, I had a vague notion of pursuing a career in the analytical testing of artifacts. In my Intro to Archaeology course you were more likely to see me on the edge of my seat when carbon-14 was mentioned than about conservation. In fact, I barely knew what conservation was. However, that all changed in the spring semester of my freshman year when I signed up for a class on maritime archaeology. Little did I know this professor, Alexis Catsambis, would alter my life path.



Isabelle working at the Central Park Conservancy
(photo courtesy Netanya Schiff)

On the very first day of class I arrived close to twenty minutes early. It was just the professor and I sitting in the room, which led to slightly awkward small talk. Upon discovering that I was double majoring in chemistry and archaeology, Dr. Catsambis told me that the combination would be perfect for art conservation. The best way to describe my response was lackluster. I most certainly gave him a look to imply 'I'm 18 and I know perfectly well what I am doing with my life, please stay out of my career choices.'

How someone I had just met knew me better than I knew myself still astounds me. Conservation was a substantial component of the class and the more I learned about the subject the more I was intrigued. Whenever conservation was mentioned it seemed like our professor was persuading me to pursue the career. Eventually, the class toured the Washington Navy Yard's Underwater Archaeology Branch, where Dr. Catsambis worked full-time as an archaeologist. On the base was also a small lab with two conservators. The work being done in the lab fascinated me. If I could have pulled on a pair of gloves and started working then, I would have. Less than a year later I was back in that lab as an intern, where I stayed for four semesters and the rest is history.

NYU's program first came to my attention because of my interest in archeological objects. As I began looking further into the program the art history degree, the instrumental analysis courses, and the flexibility of the advanced conservation courses all caught my eye. However, it was really the archaeological resources available to the program that made it my top choice. After one year spent out of undergrad, mostly taking art classes to build a portfolio, I was ready to apply to grad school programs. Ultimately, I decided to take a chance and only apply to NYU. Now that I have been accepted, expect to see me on all the archaeological field expeditions I can manage!

This summer, in addition to moving to New York City and preparing for graduate school, I interned with the Monuments and Preservation department at the [Central Park Conservancy](#). It was very interesting to work on such a large scale and I was able to further my knowledge of copper alloy and stone. So far my primary interest is still in archaeological conservation, working especially with inorganic objects. But, I am excited to start learning about all the other types of conservation and take advantage of everything the program has to offer.

Kayla Metelenis

National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow in Conservation

SINCE I WAS A CHILD, ART—IN ITS VARIOUS AND DIVERSE forms—has played a critical role in shaping my understanding of the world. At first, studio art classes satiated an inherent childish need: to make a mess; but they also provided an instrument for my rudimentary exploration of the acts of creation and destruction, the complexities of critical thinking and observation, of materials, textures, colors, and shapes. With my introduction to the study of art history, I began to experience art as a vehicle for exploration beyond myself. I could explore the diversity and idiosyncrasies of individual cultures and/or time periods while simultaneously and emphatically admiring the universality of human development. With conservation, not only has my understanding and appreciation of art and cultural heritage evolved and grown, but through experiencing the incredible dynamism that exists within the field and the interdisciplinary community that supports it, I have felt empowered to explore different aspects of life and culture with greater scrutiny. It is without question that my experiences within the conservation community thus far have engendered a sense of curiosity and excitement within my personal and academic life to a scale I have never before experienced.



Kayla in Bruges, Belgium, 2018
(photo courtesy Jane Metelenis)

As an undergraduate student at Lafayette College, where I received a B.A. in Art History, I explored and developed my understanding of art, its history, and its conservation in wonderfully diverse and inspiring settings. Of critical importance in my life were the six months I spent studying and interning in Italy—initially in Florence during a study abroad semester where I was first introduced to painting conservation and, subsequently, in Venice, where I interned with a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and conservation of Venetian artistic and cultural heritage, [Save Venice Inc.](#) These experiences not only influenced my decision to write an undergraduate thesis focused on examining conservation procedures in Florence following the 1966 flood of the Arno River, but also (and perhaps most significantly) influenced my decision to pursue a career in art history and conservation.

Having grown up in New York City, I am immensely aware of the invaluable resources and opportunities this city has to offer. NYU

has been an institution I have long recognized as a leading academic center. However, it was when I learned of The Conservation Center and the program's unique offerings—especially the opportunity to continue my formal studies of both art history and conservation—that I began actively taking steps towards becoming part of the NYU community.

From studying chemistry at Columbia University, to my return to Florence, Italy, to study conservation at Studio Arts College International, along with internships focused on outdoor sculpture conservation with the Citywide Monuments Conservation Program of the NYC Parks Department and paper conservation in The Paper Conservation Department of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, I have been immensely fortunate to learn from and work with a diverse range and breadth of materials. But, more importantly, I have been fortunate to learn from and work with professors, colleagues, and mentors, who have not only inspired me with their dedication and passion for their work, but also with their kindness and generosity by sharing their time, experience, and knowledge with me. I am forever grateful for the guidance and abundant support they have shown me as I have wholeheartedly pursued this career.

I am thrilled by the opportunity to continue my formal education at NYU. Receiving my acceptance letter was one of the most significant moments in my life. For me, it marked the culmination of years of focused work while, simultaneously, signaling the start of a tremendous step forward in transforming my goals of becoming a conservator into a reality. Accepting the offer of admission was one of the easiest decisions I have ever had to make. I am so excited to learn from the professors and the conservation community that have come to define NYU, the IFA, and The Conservation Center's outstanding character. I look forward to meeting and working with my classmates and other IFA students—those who have worked so hard, from different paths of life, and who share in my passion—and who will undoubtedly be life-long colleagues and I hope true friends.

Felice Robles

Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Time-Based Media Art Conservation

FAMILY AND SERVING THE COMMUNITY WERE HEAVILY emphasized where I grew up. My siblings and cousins who have also pursued higher education have mostly chosen to work in community medicine, law, environmental protection, and adjacent fields. I believe art also has its place in serving and nourishing people. The art I grew up around is mostly community focused, often in the form of murals, prints, and folkloric or religious arts. I love working with art and historical artifacts for their beauty and the connections they represent to people, both past and present. Understanding an object's chemical and material properties only add layers of appreciation and wonder, and a chance to analyze in a different way. It's for these reasons that I was thrilled to find a field where science and art are so intertwined.

For the last four years, I have been fortunate to be an intern, and then technician, at Gawain Weaver Art Conservation, a photograph conservation studio in Northern California. Gawain '05 encouraged me to research and try new techniques, to make use of study objects where I did not need to be afraid of making mistakes, and gave me opportu-



Felice surface cleans an Ansel Adams print at Gawain Weaver Art Conservation.
(photo credit: Courtney Helion)

nities to work on a range of historical materials. My co-workers, Jennifer Olsen, Brian Gernes, and Courtney Helion, were always there to answer questions and offer support, for which I am forever grateful.

My conservation journey was not always an easy one. I have commuted from Los Angeles to the Bay area weekly for months, lived in a camper in the redwoods for years, bicycled ten miles after my bus commute to an internship, moved on a week's notice across the country, and generally devoted most of my resources to pursuing conservation. I've been lucky to have supportive and patient family, mentors, and colleagues. But it was not always clear it would lead to a program and ultimately a career. Was I simply aiming too high? I would soon find out.

I applied and interviewed with the conservation program at New York University intending to focus on photography from a library and archives perspective. When I received the offer to instead study photographs and time-based media, I was elated for the opportunity to attend NYU and daunted by the idea of doing so in a new conservation area. Although it was unexpected, there was no question of my enthusiasm to attend the program. I do love a challenge and learning new things. Through the varied pre-program internships I have completed—I apprenticed for a short while with Dennis Calabi to learn more about paintings conservation—I haven't yet found an area that I didn't find interesting or would benefit me as an aspiring conservator. After my acceptance to the program, I've spent the summer learning the very basics about video, plastics, and internet and coded art. It's still daunting, but incredibly exciting!

Every society has its art and cultural heritage that shapes what narratives take hold—preservation and conservation play a role in what will be remembered. I hope that in pursuing this field, I will also be serving my local communities and the wider society. I couldn't ask for a more exciting place to begin this journey than New York City.

Abigail Slawik

Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Library and Archive Conservation

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I WORKED AS A PICTURE FRAMER IN Minneapolis. I entertained the idea of graduate studies: an M.F.A. in Printmaking to go with my B.F.A. in Studio Art from NYU, or maybe an M.A. in Art History. However, I put off that decision because I didn't feel like either path quite fit my skills and interests.

The frame shop occasionally sent items to conservators in private practice, which piqued my interest in the field. Coordinating between a client and the conservator the dramatic treatment of a torn Henry Moore etching sealed the deal for me: where do I sign up for this? Conservation appealed to me because of the unique mixture of art history, research, scientific inquiry, problem solving, and the application of fine hand skills—not to mention the ethical debates!

As I considered entering the field, the chemistry requirements intimidated me. I had been out of college for several years, and had never taken a college-level chemistry class. During informational interviews, every conservator I spoke to stressed that competence in chemistry was my first hurdle to clear. When I discovered that I actually enjoyed the subject, and could keep up with the medical school-bound teenagers in my classes, my resolve to become a conservator solidified.



Abby shapes fills on a sculpture in the Kristin Cheronis, Inc. Sculpture and Object Conservation lab.
(photo courtesy Kristin Cheronis)

I later quit my full-time job and traded it in for several part-time positions (including the weekend shift working as a medical device assembler!) and my first conservation internship. I also supplemented my art history knowledge with more undergraduate and graduate-level coursework at the University of Minnesota and St. Thomas University, as well as more specialized studio art instruction at the Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center and the Minnesota Center for Book Arts in Minneapolis. One art history professor impressed upon me a crucial piece of advice: diligently document your own work! Create your own artifacts! This wisdom came in handy especially when putting together applications for graduate programs.

I was fortunate to be taken on as both an administrative assistant and conservation intern at a sculpture and objects conservation firm in Minneapolis, Kristin Cheronis, Inc. Conservators Kristin Cheronis and Laura Kubick proactively included me in the full array of their work: research, treatment, maintenance, documentation, and public outreach.

A year later, I started an additional internship in the Book and Paper lab at the Minnesota Historical Society, supervised by Saira Haqqi, '16. Saira introduced me to the field of Library and Archives conservation, and I realized that this was the specialty for me. I enjoyed the workflow, the complexity, the array of book and paper artifacts, and the historical context to the work in the lab at the History Center. She also included me in her meetings within the Society's structure as a whole, where I witnessed the roles she plays as a conservator outside of the lab.

As an undergraduate at NYU majoring in studio art, I enjoyed access and exposure to as many arts and cultural activities that fit into my schedule. When I learned that NYU's Institute of Fine Arts offered one of the conservation graduate programs in the country, which included the opportunity to simultaneously pursue graduate work and research in art history, I knew where I wanted to complete my graduate studies. After a whirlwind March of finalizing portfolio items and preparing for interviews, I was floored to learn I had been offered a position at the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation. More suspenseful was the message from NYU that I had been waitlisted. I had to wait! Luckily, a spot opened up for the Mellon Library and Archives Fellowship at NYU only a day later. Once I read that email, I knew which way I was leaning. A big investment had paid off, and it felt very surreal. I did take a day to just let things sink in, talk to my mentors, talk to my family, and sleep on it. I asked my partner, "Well, how do you feel about moving to New York?" I couldn't wait to be back!

One aspect of the field of art conservation that I appreciate the most is the AIC's Code of Ethics, and its centrality to the practices of conservators in the United States. I especially value the spirit of education, honesty, and information sharing, which I have found reflected in my interactions with conservators during my entire journey thus far. I feel very excited to be welcomed to the Conservation Center, and look forward to taking in everything I can during this next chapter of my education.

Peiyuan Sun

National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow in Conservation

I GREW UP IN HANGZHOU, ZHEJIANG PROVINCE, CHINA. WHEN I was in kindergarten, my parents let me decide what I thought was interesting to learn. So I took a Chinese painting class at the local Youth Center. During springtime, I would paint plum blossoms under the shadow of a willow tree on Baidi, a narrow causeway on the West Lake. This interest did not die as I grew up. Throughout high school, even while I was studying in a science-oriented track, I thought that I would go to the China Academy of Art.

I began college in the Liberal Studies program at New York University. Like many freshmen, I was searching for my major. I enjoyed the story of art the most. I learned that Empire Qianlong's summer palace was once on the islet that Baidi leads to; I fancied staying up until twilight in the gardens of the Persian poems. During this time I also fell in love with museums. Staying in a quiet corner in the Met and watching people looking at the art is a luxury for me. I thought to myself: how lucky these people are! They could travel back in time and place by walking from hall to hall, shifting their eyes from one

exhibit to the other, their feet as light as feathers. Could I work in a museum? Thinking of having a career in a museum, I switched majors into Art History.

Chemistry was my favorite subject in high school, and because I was unwilling to give up Chemistry in college I took Chemistry and Art History side by side. This strange combination of subjects did not make sense until I discovered the field of art conservation. My interests in both fields turned out to be perfect preparation for becoming a conservator. Thus, I started to prepare for getting into an art conservation program in my Sophomore year.

When I was about to graduate with a B.A. in Art History (minors in Studio Art and Chemistry), my plan was to go back to China. Getting an internship in a conservation lab seemed very hard to me, not to mention that I needed a work permit as an international student. Where should I even start? But nothing is impossible until you try. Putting the cart before the horse, I applied for my Optional Practical Training, a one-year extension of my F-1 status with a work permit. Luckily, I got the permit on time, and soon there was an opportunity for work.



Peiyuan took this selfie with her iPhone at "Escher. The Exhibition and Experience," which ran through May 26, 2019 at Industry City in Brooklyn, NY

In my last semester of college, I took Conservation Controversies, a course taught by Professor Michele Marincola. At the time, it did not occur to me how important this class would be to me, until one day in June 2018, I received an email from Professor Marincola offering me an opportunity to make azurite paint with her and my classmate Elizabeth Wickersham. In five days, we transformed two small pieces of azurite mineral specimens into brilliant midnight blue paint. Our goal was to imitate the medieval Masters and reconstruct the velvety azurite blue paint surface on sculptures. With little indication from medieval recipes on how to achieve a matte surface, we had to experiment. It seems that as we probed deeper into the techniques of these Masters, more mysteries arose.

After the azurite project, Professor Marincola introduced me to Objects Conservator Batyah Shtrum, who taught me how to polish silver Hanukkah Lamps at the Jewish Museum. In July 2018, Professor Dianne Dwyer Modestini kindly hired me to organize and digitize the

conservation records of the Kress Paintings Conservation Program. Leafing through the reports and photo records of paintings is a privilege and a pleasure. Kress fellow Shan Kuang taught me how to differentiate between the stages of paintings conservation in photo records. I also learned to stitch several X-ray film scans together into a composite so they are more legible than puzzle pieces of details. With these experiences, I applied to three graduate programs in Conservation.

In October, I became a Conservation pre-program intern at the Brooklyn Museum. I worked with various conservators, from whom I learned a lot of conservation techniques and skills. Later, in November, I came across a position posted by the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) on Google (yes, Googling works). I began to volunteer in the Anthropology Department early in the new year. Textile Specialist Mary Lou Murillo supervised me in examining, handling, and storing textiles. From this experience I learned that museum collection management is, although inconspicuous or even underappreciated, indispensable and vital. So by the time I was waiting to hear back from the Conservation programs, I was working at three different places while taking two studio art courses at night and on the weekends.

I felt lucky to get an interview with NYU. At the interview, I chose to present on a project that I participated in at the Brooklyn Museum. I talked to Objects Conservator Erin Anderson of the Brooklyn Museum and she calmed me down and scheduled a rehearsal. All conservators who were in the lab that day joined my mock interview. They gave me inspiring questions and advice, which allowed me to improve my presentation.

After accepting the admission offer, my life changed subtly. I paid the rent for the next two months, bought some new books, and took home a petite Mango wood bookshelf that I found on the street. I cleaned and revarnished it and stacked my favorite books in it. Like the second life of this little bookshelf, my journey in art begins again.

GRAFFITI AS DEVOTION ALONG THE NILE: EL-KURRU, SUDAN

Opens Friday, August 23, 2019, at the University of Michigan's Kelsey Museum of Archaeology. The exhibition will run until March 29, 2020.

Northern Sudan is mostly desert, but the Nile Valley in this region was once home to a powerful African civilization called Kush. It traded gold and the products of inner Africa to Egypt and the Mediterranean world beyond.

The current special exhibition at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, explores one part of private religious ritual in ancient Kush—the practice of carving graffiti in important and sacred places like pyramids and temples. This practice began during a time when Kush was ruled from the capital of Meroe (300 BCE to 300 CE), a city located along the Nile about 100 miles north of modern-day Khartoum.

The exhibition *Graffiti as Devotion along the Nile: El-Kurru, Sudan* explores a series of graffiti newly discovered by a Kelsey Museum archaeological field project on a pyramid and in an underground temple at the site of El-Kurru. The graffiti include clear symbols of ancient Kush, like the ram that represented the local form of the god Amun, and a long-legged archer who symbolized Kushite prowess in archery. There are also intricate textile designs as well as animals—beautiful horses, birds, camels, and giraffes. The most common marks are small round holes gouged in the stone. By analogy with modern practices, these are likely the areas where temple visitors scraped the wall of the holy place in order to collect powdered stone that they would ingest to promote fertility and healing.

Through photographs, text, and interactive media presentations, this exhibition explores the times and places in which Kushite graffiti were inscribed. It also presents the “afterlife” of Kushite devotion at El-Kurru, with reference to continuing use of the site as a pilgrimage destination. Part of the exhibition highlights Kelsey conservators’ work to preserve the graffiti. Using a computer interactive, visitors can manipulate images in order to examine the graffiti under a variety of lighting conditions. This type of documentation, called reflectance transformation imaging, or RTI, is one method archaeologists and conservators use to digitally preserve and study ancient, fragile surfaces like graffiti and rock art. The exhibition also includes a photo essay by photographer Ayman Damarany, documenting a modern Egyptian practice of painting a mural on one’s house to commemorate the hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. Although too many centuries intervene between ancient and modern times to suggest a continuous tradition, these images include some striking parallels that illuminate the private representation of religious pilgrimage.

See an online version of the exhibition at <http://exhibitions.kelsey.lsa.umich.edu/graffiti-el-kurru>

Download or purchase the catalog at <https://lsa.umich.edu/kelsey/publications.html>

Curators

- Geoff Emberling is an associate research scientist at the Kelsey Museum and co-director of the International Kurru Archaeological Project
- **Suzanne Davis ‘98** is an associate curator at the Kelsey Museum and director of conservation for the International Kurru Archaeological Project