

Valery Monahan (**MAC 1992**) Conservator, Yukon Government (Whitehorse, YT, Canada)

Interview by Kaoru Yui

**Q: How did you first get involved in art conservation?**

A: I started out in archaeology and I have an undergraduate degree in anthropology with an archaeology major. I really enjoyed field schools and volunteered on excavation projects in Nova Scotia where I am from. But at the time, the job situation for archaeology in Canada, this was the 1980s, was quite different than it is now and quite a bit more limited. Cultural Resource Management, which is where many archaeologists currently work did not really exist. In Canada at that time, most archaeologists, if they did not work directly for Parks Canada, were essentially academic. Halfway through my undergrad degree, I began to wonder if I really was willing to go all the way through to a Ph.D. in archaeology, and then be an academic researcher and a professor. I was having a bit of 'not knowing what I wanted to do with my life' halfway through that early degree. And at the time, I was volunteering at the Nova Scotia Museum, which is the provincial museum there, and I had a good friend and mentor who was curator, Ruth Whitehead. She suggested, knowing the things that I was interested in, that maybe conservation would be a way to continue to be involved in archaeology: "why don't you consider this?" At the time, she said, and I think it was true, that there were many conservation jobs for newly graduated conservators in Canada, which at the time was a consideration. I knew many archaeology graduate students who are very smart and doing really well, but there was very little employment at the time in archaeology as well. So then, I decided that I would try conservation and looked into different programs. By the time I got into Queen's and then got back out again, the job situation for Canadian conservators had changed. There weren't many jobs for new graduates, but at the time when I was considering to switch to conservation, it looked like it was something that would be interesting and also that there were jobs, which of course changes over time and it was not the case when I was graduating.

**Q: Could you tell me about your career path?**

A: I actually got a full-time job before I graduated. In fact, I left Queen's with my final research project unfinished to work as a conservator at the New Brunswick Museum. I do not recommend doing that. By the way, it is the main reason that my MA graduation year does not match up with my MAC course and lab work, because I left. With a full-time job, I did not actually finish the research project for several years. But it was a great opportunity for a job. I lost that job three and a half years later when the New Brunswick Museum laid off number of staff after expanding their exhibition space. For several years after that, I couldn't get any work in conservation. So, I went back to my archaeology training and worked with heritage consulting firms, documenting archaeological and historical sites along the propose pipeline corridor in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. After that, I got a job working as a conservation technician with Parks Canada at Fortress of Louisbourg in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. I was treating 18<sup>th</sup> century small finds and waterlogged leather shoes and leather offcuts. The Fortress had to dig a new water main through its townsite, and as a result of that, they were

impacting on intact 18<sup>th</sup>-century French archaeological resources, so they had to have conservation for that. I was still working for that job when I applied for the job that I have now with the Yukon government. Basically, I worked at Louisbourg up until the fall of 2000 and I came here in December of that year. I have been with the Yukon government as a museum conservator since. My predecessor was in this position, I think 10 years. Interestingly, it's been one of the most stable conservation jobs in Canada for almost 30 years.

**Q: Why/ how did you decide to go to the Yukon region?**

A: One of my Queen's internship was actually in the Yukon (the second summer internship). I did a three-month internship with Parks Canada in Dawson City, Yukon. When the job here was advertised, I had a sense of what Yukon was like and I had been here before. When I saw the job description, it seemed like a good match for some of the projects that I worked in the past, and also had elements that really spoke to me in terms of working with archaeological materials, working directly with the First Nations communities, so even though I was literally about almost as far away as you can be in Canada, I applied. My husband was convinced that he would probably enjoy Yukon.

**Q: So, you weren't scared at all to relocate?**

A: No, at that time, neither of us had really secure work in the Maritimes. My job at Parks Canada was project-based, and my husband had been doing heritage consulting work in New Brunswick. That also was not secure. Although we loved the Maritimes and both of us are from there, we felt it was worthwhile to take a chance.

**Q: How did Queen's prepare for your career?**

A: I think having the internships is really great. I mean, I think it is challenging in a way because it can be challenging to find one that is paid, and so it can be difficult for students because you are expected to do a full year. That's a lot of work, and that can be financially challenging. But at the same time, it forces you to get practical experience as you're learning, and I think that's very valuable for students. For me, having had the opportunity to come to the Yukon, and it was a paid internship which was very helpful to me, it gave me experience in a place that I would have never visited otherwise and which eventually helped me choose the job I'm now in.

In terms of other things, I think Queen's really taught me to look at very many different materials. As an object conservator, you're expected to understand a variety of things and we're also encouraged with our electives to take coursework in the other disciplines as well. I think Queen's teaches us to look at objects hard, pick up the context, what are they made of, what happened to them, document them, and think really critically about that. And it's a small thing, just even learning how to do a good condition report about an object, but the skillsets that you have for that is very transferable. You need to think critically about why this object is the way it is. It takes experience to make sense of what you see, but looking at it critically is so important. I think in a way that same skillset we use over and over again, even when we are not

doing treatments. If you go into a small museum, or into a gallery space, and you're assessing the safety of the object, again, you're looking at physical things, but you're trying to understand how they relate to each other, you're taking information, and you're trying to come up with an assessment. Is this a safe space to display an object? When you pack things. It's the same kind of thing. It's that looking at objects and thinking about the context in a critical way that is just we replay that process over and over again in small scale and big scale to understand so much about work. I think that's a very important skill.

**Q: Thank you, Valery. We're very interested in your work as a conservator in the Yukon. Could you briefly tell me about your current job? For example, what type of projects do you work on or what does your day to day schedule look like?**

A: My weeks are pretty varied. So, the program that I work with is the Yukon Museum Program, and the program basically provides some direct funding and also services to 18 small and medium-size heritage institutions which are in 9 different communities in the Yukon, including Whitehorse. Eight of those facilities are First Nations Cultural Centres and the rest are community museums of one kind or another, either for or not for profit. First Nations' cultural centres are overseen directly by self-governing First Nation government, and then others are either not for profit or in couple cases, there is a municipality running the heritage institutions. I work with all of those, depending on what they need. I also work with the Yukon government archaeologists and paleontologists. Those are government held collections. They are held in trust for the Yukon public. I help those folks to manage the collections physically, give them advice, and occasionally treat specimens or artifacts from their collections but also help them with preventive care. I also work a little bit from time to time with the Yukon Government Arts Branch who are in the same department as I am. They oversee the Yukon permanent art collection, which is contemporary art. Again, I don't really do treatment for them, but I do help them with some preventive work. In fact, a lot of the work I do is not treatment. I might be helping with designing mounts. I can help them with packing and shipping. I do things like review exhibits case plans. So, in a given week, I might be sitting down with archaeologists to look at few pieces from the collection because they may have been asked to take those artifacts out to a First Nation general assembly for instance, or to a public presentation. Then, I would help them select the ones that are the most stable. I might check the condition of them and help pack them. I might also be working with the Yukon Arts Curator with new artworks that are acquisitioned by the Arts Branch, and the mandate of their collection is that those objects need to be put in public buildings for Yukoners to enjoy. If I'm going to be looking at those objects, I'm going to be thinking about conservation concerns or exhibit constraints to make sure that they understand what these new pieces might need in terms of ongoing care and display. If I'm on a site visit, and I'm out in the communities quite often, so if I'm outside of Whitehorse, I might be in a museum, dusting artifacts on exhibit, dusting taxidermy in a diorama, or I might get First Nation Cultural Centre helping make custom made boxes for [hand carved](#) wooden masks or regalia, and I might be helping the staff to plan for seasonal exhibits. Right now, with the Yukon Government museums colleague, who is the Collection Management Advisor, we are working with two different institutions here on storage reorganization projects. One of the reorganization projects is happening in a community museum that's a 6-hour drive

from Whitehorse, and the other storage reorganization project is in a First Nations cultural centre, that's 2 hours in a different direction. We've got task lists, go through the supply lists, coordinate with staff in both places, and just make sure we get as much as done during our visit.

**Q: Thank you. That's a variety of work that you do. I think you have touched on the next question that I had, but could you tell us more about what types of objects or materials do you work on?**

A: It is a wide variety of objects. Basically, it's archaeological objects, especially archaeological organics. The paleontologist that I work with sometimes has mummified remains. There're actually ancient frozen specimens that include flesh. There are historical objects that are in the museums and Cultural Centres that are from the gold rush era or from the WW II construction of Alaska highway which is another kind of important, sort of benchmark for recent history in the Yukon. There is a lot of historical artifacts that relate to that time period. As an object conservator, I'm pretty comfortable with a wide variety of materials. Again, actual repair treatment or cleaning is not a huge amount of my weekly work and I don't have a really elaborate lab. The other thing that I'm doing sometimes, if there is an object that's very significant but the treatment is going to be very complex or includes materials that are really outside of my experience and we don't have a lot of abilities to work here, sometimes I work on assessment and then, we look to hire a conservator with a specific skill to do contract work. Occasionally, objects get sent out, sometimes a conservator comes up here. That's been part of my work, too. If I can't do the work, making sure that there is a government contract in place so that somebody can do the work. A lot of it is just reports and recommendations on groups of objects for their long-term care.

**Q: What is the most rewarding experience for you to work in Northern Canada?**

A: I think it is important to emphasize that I've actually only worked in the Yukon. I think there are probably similarities across Canadian north, but it is more important to put in context that my Northern Canadian experience is in one of the three territories, and they are pretty huge and they're pretty diverse. So, it's really my Yukon experience as opposed to the Northern Canadian experience. But I would say that there are a lot of rewarding things working in the Yukon. Communities are very interconnected; people are very supportive and very warm with each other. It's actually different. I grew up in the Maritimes and they are very friendly, but it's very different here even than that. People know each other really well. They help out. They really rely on each other across the boundaries of the communities and across boundaries of people's jobs. It's kind of amazing. If I have a project, and I need to get something done, and I need to find a person with a specialized knowledge either conservation or other specialized knowledge or if I need to track down tools, supplies, or materials, mostly I can just make a call and know that people would probably help me, or they'll point me to a direction to find somebody or something that I need. That also means, of course, that I can expect, when I'm sitting at my desk, that people will call me knowing what I do for a living and knowing what my expertise is, they'll call me and expect that I can also help them in some way. It's quite different

than what I think most people's lives are like in their jobs across most of the world. It's hard to explain that nature of the north. It's like everybody is there to kind of help each other and you can reach out, and you'll almost always get help or response regardless of the context. This kind of spirit also comes out as a conservator. I'm a heritage professional, so I'm expected to work with collections, work in the heritage facilities, but when you do these projects with people here, especially outside of Whitehorse in smaller communities, it's just very embracing that people appreciate your effort. They are just very happy to have you in their community. They want to share the community. They want to share their events with you, which you know, there is food and you get invited to do things. It's very warm. It's a very personable vibe here that is not the same in other places. That's really lovely. I'm working on objects that are really interesting to me and the history here is just fascinating and the cultural interrelatedness with different parts of the communities is really amazing. Also, you get this extra thing when you're working with these objects, working with Elders and people, they're just very lovely and it's a lovely kind of experience.

**Q: Thank you so much. You mentioned that what it's like to work in the Yukon and the interconnected and warm relationship between people there. Could you tell me more about what's rewarding for you to work on First Nations cultural objects?**

A: That's a really interesting question, too. Of course, that's a very important part of my job, but I think that part of the reason why I do that is that here in the Yukon, the government program that I work with directly supports them through funding and services and cultural centers that are in self-governing Yukon first nations. It's just expected that if I'm a conservator for these communities, that's the work that I do. They are in the position of having stewardship of their collections and having that curatorial responsibility, so they are asking me to do things that they'd like, or basically as I'm doing my work with them, that's their responsibility to guide that work for me. To me, that has become an everyday thing because these are the collections that I work with. These are the communities who oversee the collections. It's, in many ways, the same kind of work that I do with non-First Nation collections, it's just that some of the decisions are different and some of the final uses of the collections may be little more varied, just because of the way that the communities see the objects in their collections as being more living objects, sometimes as less static. But when you get right down to it, the questions are still the same. Can we make this object ready for display? How can we look after this object? Are we concerned this object is dirty or are there pest issues? Those questions remain the same, but sometimes the way the collection is managed overall, again, is less static than you would expect in a more traditional museum. The challenges up here are very similar regardless; that is, that it's a very big place. It can be quite challenging to get supplies and materials, more than you would expect in a large centre in the southern part of Canada. Here all of that stuff is at least a flight away or several days by road. That's the bigger challenge for me. Projects have to be so carefully scheduled. If you don't have everything set, if you don't have people, the project can just fail because you cannot get materials at the last minute. One of the other challenges is that some of the community museums and First Nations Cultural Centres are highly seasonal in nature. Some of them are not open in the winter at all. For some of them literally, the doors are locked, and the heat is off, and they freeze solid for months. So, the collections are really

inaccessible sometimes. During the summertime, when these places are open, they're working with their own communities, but everybody is also interested in having summer visitors as well. Sometimes you cannot do the collection work at that time of the year either, because the staff are so busy with the summer visitors. Sometimes, you end up doing work in the spring and the fall, and you're literally wearing a parka or heavy boots because the storage or even the exhibit space isn't fully heated. It's not -30 degree, but it's just above freezing. That can be challenging to do the work in the period between frozen solid and too busy summertime, to try to get things done.

**Q: Have you ever confronted any challenges or difficulties when you're working on First Nations cultural heritage/objects that are ceremonial or ritual related?**

A: I wouldn't say it's a difficulty. I guess realistically, I am unlikely to be working with those materials without the guidance of people from the community. It is my responsibility to take the advice and to respect whatever constraints or needs are coming from the community about those objects. What I think would be much more challenging is that if you are trying to deal with objects that you think might be of that nature, but you don't have direct contact within that community or you're working with those materials outside of the construct of the First Nations Cultural Centres where those things are assumed or you can ask those questions or there is literally somebody there who will remind you or tell you what the constraints are going to be. That's I think is more challenging.

Here, most of the time, when I'm working with those materials, it's in the context of the First Nations Cultural Centre. Sometimes, it's a matter of having a discussion with the Director, or the heritage staff about what I think might be a good idea and make sure that it's appropriate. Then, if it isn't, we'll talk about some other ways of doing something. Sometimes, there is a constraint on handling and or, if an artist or artisan has passed away in the community, their work might be covered, or removed, if it is on display or if there is a death in a particular Clan maybe regalia, or Clan symbols might be covered or taken down because it's not respectful to have them out during the mourning period. You know, there are things like that are part of the way that the cultural centres do their work. That's something that I needed to learn when I moved here. If you have a strong relationship within the community, people will tell you what you're supposed to do. That makes it easy because you're working with them and they have knowledge that you can learn, and they have ways of doing things so that they can communicate with you. I think it's much harder if the contact and the communication and the relationships don't exist. It's because if you're a non First Nations person working with those collections, you're essentially working without that knowledge and you don't know whether you're doing things correctly or not.

**Q: When you first move there, was it at all difficult to establish a good relationship with the First Nations communities?**

A: I think that's like everything else when you're working with new people. Sometimes it's very easy to establish relationships and other times it may take a while before there's somebody

within a staff group that you click with. I think one of the things that made it easier for me here is that it was a structural relationship. It wasn't just up to me personally. Although of course, it's very important to have a personal relationship with people that you work with, but it was expected that I would do this work because it was part of my job. That made it easier. There were people within the community who would expect to work with me, and I was expected to work with them. There was experience and precedent for the people from my program to be working with the First Nations communities, so those relationships already existed in a way. I wasn't the first person coming from my program to talk to these communities about heritage. This is how heritage work was already being done here before I arrived.

I think that [establishing a relationship with them] is a challenge for conservators, basically for newly graduated conservation students. If they are not First Nations, they may not have that relationship in their home communities, and they may not have that relationship in the community that they wish to work with or for. That's a challenge if you are going to work for a museum in a traditional sense or a gallery, it's very difficult for you, at a personal level, to do that work alone. Even though, of course, under Reconciliation, all non-First Nations people working in Canadian heritage should be doing that work, but at some level, the institutions that we work for, if we are working in a museum or a gallery, they also have to do that work because we, as employees, can't do all of it. We can do what we can, but it has to be structural, in my opinion. For me, that made it easier because the government structure that I work with has those relationships, kind of baked-in. We can do what we can do as an individual, but it's really important that structure, and that's everything from funding, to how an institution hires, to how they see their mandate, to how they oversee collections. We can affect that, but we can't do all of the work to change it. Some of it has to come from above.

**Q: What are some of your favorite treatments or projects that you have worked on as a conservator in the Yukon?**

A: I would say that the Ice Patch Archaeological Project is probably the favorite. That's a project that started before I arrived. It started in 1997 when people here started finding ancient hunting tools melting out of ice in the mountain in southwestern Yukon. The sites are in the traditional territories of 6 Yukon First Nations: Carcross/Tagish First Nation, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the Kluane First Nation, and the Teslin Tlingit Council. The sites are in all of those First Nations traditional territories. The oldest objects are almost 9000 years old and the youngest ones are very recent, a century and a half. It is essentially large game hunting sites of caribou, thimhorn sheep, so the objects that are found in the artifact lab are arrows and darts for the most part. They are lost over the millennia. They've been lost directly into snow and ice that then lingered and preserved them, so that the reason that they are being found now is definitely a result of the climate change and warming climate in southern Yukon. So, 9000-year-old ice is melting and that's why these objects are being revealed to us because this very old ice is now melting, and things that are preserved which are the artifacts but also biological specimens, dung, animal carcasses, they are all melting out. It is a very wide-ranging project. The most recent work in the last few years: my archaeological colleagues, working directly with heritage folks and Elders

from these 6 First Nations, are documenting hunting blinds and hunting structures that are revealing that this is a managed hunting landscape that's been withdrawn and was used for hunting for, potentially, millennia. In fact, it's the ice patches that are now being potentially nominated for the international heritage status. It's very important to the history of First Nations in the Yukon and to the history of understanding how the people had lived in this part of Canada forever.

The conservation is, there is some cleaning work, but a lot of it has been how to support these objects, how to preserve them and make them available to First Nations communities. For me, there's also been a research and analysis that I've worked on with colleagues at the Canadian Conservation Institute. The projectiles, in addition to having things like wood and sinew and feathers, they also have ancient adhesives preserved and ochre paint. I've been working closely with Kate Helwig and Jennifer Poulin at the CCI. We have done this research over many years, I've sampled objects, they've done inorganic and organic analyses and we published on some of this. It's very exciting work looking at these ancient objects that are so well preserved that the samples that are sent are virtually identical to the modern reference samples that I send in. This ice has preserved some of these objects almost like a time machine. It's very rewarding work. In terms of the conservation aspect, it also involves multidisciplinary researchers, and then most importantly, there's 6 First Nations, and this is their direct ancestors' hunting tools. People from these communities still hunt those animals. There is a great connection for them. People come to visit the objects, and the objects are taken out to the communities as well, when they can be. There is a standing committee of First Nations researchers who basically help direct the project and participate in the fieldwork. So, it's a very rewarding project. And again, it continues to provide new information; recently, there is a new project with new analyses. It started in 1997 and it's still ongoing. It's basically been a part of my career here. There's been a new discovery if not every year, every couple of years. It continues to be an important part of my yearly work here and continues to inspire me.

**Q: I'm so interested in that Ice Patch Project. Do you ever or often go to the site when they are finding the objects from the ice or are the objects mostly sent into the lab directly?**

A: I've been once. Here is the thing, it is not excavation work, the objects melt out on their own. What happens is, that just a couple of weeks every summer, the archaeologists and First Nations researchers go together in a helicopter, because these areas are not road accessible at all. They are essentially on a mountain top and places where the modern road doesn't necessarily take you. For a couple of weeks, they fly a helicopter, depending upon the weather, and look for these objects, basically downstream and around these melting patches. There is an elaborate mapping project to track where they all are, and track how quickly and how thoroughly the permanent ice is disappearing. Some of the patches that were patches in the late 90s and early 2000 are literally gone now in the summer and there is nothing there. There are maybe no artifacts, but there is no ice. So no, I do not participate in the fieldwork. It's very important for the archaeologists and the First Nations folks to be there together. They don't really need me at that point. They are very good about packing things up carefully and bringing them to the lab away from the ice patches because, once they are exposed, they will



deteriorate very quickly over a couple of seasons. So it's important that once they are out of the ice, they'd be recovered. But for the most part, I see them [artifacts] first here in Whitehorse. It's always exciting when there are new materials coming in. Two years ago, there was an enormous, essentially complete 2-meter-long dart that melted out, that was discovered on a Saturday. It was exciting stuff that I got to hold it. They are amazing objects and it's every year or every couple of years, there are new ones. Hard to explain how exciting they are.

**Q: Yes I bet! What kind of condition are they in when they arrive at the lab?**

A: They tend to be quite dirty. The reason that the hunting takes place on these ice patches is that, in the summertime, animals on hot summer days, caribou especially overheat, so they like to hang out on these patches of snow and ice in the summertime on these mountain tops to get away from the heat and also because they're tormented by flies. People would hunt the caribou and also sheep and other animals there. The ice and snow of these patches are also full of animal dung. The objects when they come in, they are often covered in animal dung. They are not waterlogged, in the conventional archaeological waterlogged sense. They get wet, and sometimes they have been wet or sometimes they're sitting in meltwater, but it's not an anaerobic environment. They'll come in with varying amounts of absorbed water. Again, arrows and some of the objects are darts, they are very long so sometimes they're broken off into pieces. So pieces would be in variable conditions and sometimes will be found in different years. As the object melts out, sometimes pieces are broken off, because part of it is out of ice and part of it is not. By the time it's found, it's sometimes in multiple pieces.

Objects that are already clearly exposed and dry are left that way, and when objects come in damp or wet, routinely we put them into a freezer for days or weeks or even a month or two to help remove that any extra moisture more safely. Kind of low-tech freeze-drying. Then, after that, because most of these objects are projectiles, they were never designed to rest flat on a surface. We have to make supports for them immediately so that they can be examined or cleaned because you don't want them resting like if they have fletching or sinew attached, you don't want them sitting on that. They have to have a little custom mount sitting up under the wooden shaft to prevent pressure damage. Then, if they need to be cleaned, that's usually just done with a small wooden stick and a fine brush. You are basically trying to remove crusted dirt. Then, the archaeologists are often taking radiocarbon samples and then in some cases, if there is clearly an adhesive or other things like that, I would do that sampling. Over the years we had contractors who work with the collections and they make the final storage, custom boxes and supports for them and they go into the collection.

**Q: Thank you so much for telling me such an interesting project. I remember finding one of your articles from 2005 which had a picture of one of the artifacts that were melted out from the ice. It looked very well preserved. It was really surprising because as you said, these artifacts could be from 9000 years ago. It's hard to believe!**

A: Some of them are so well preserved and it is hard to imagine how old they are. Again, when the residues have been sampled and sent, there are many cases where they are matching the modern reference because there's been so little degradation over time, because while they're

frozen, almost nothing happens. The degradation and deterioration are really only after they melt and before they're collected. In theory, over time they'll continue to age as things do in storage. There are certainly, objects that are in the collection that do not look in any way as if they are the age that we know they are.

**Q: Thank you so much, Valery. Could you briefly explain to me what your lab looks like?**

A: It's pretty simple. It's a room with a fume hood. There is a working sink and a regular sink, and there is a shelving unit for supplies and objects that are in treatment or being stored short term. I have a work colleague who is in the same building and who does reproduction casting and historic carpentry work for historic sites in the Yukon. It's really great to have him in the same workspace. If I need a crate to ship an object or custom mount, if it is larger, then I can give him a form and he will use a saw or other carpentry-related equipment to do precise cuts. Because he does casting for reproduction work, he can also make detailed carving work for storage or mount, he can also do that for us. That's really helpful because I don't have that skillset. So having him literally in the same building, always eager to use his skills to help with collection care is great.

**Q: This will be the last question. What advice would you give to the students or the newly graduated students specifically for those who would like to work in a similar field as you are in?**

A: I think if you want a varied career and are able to move, I think it is worth considering working in a smaller community. There can be great opportunities outside major urban centres and I think part of it is that it's that pull and push that many of the larger museums and galleries are in major urban centres, but there are often significant ones that aren't in major urban centres. I think in terms of job prospects, I think it will be easier if you are willing to move out of some of the few larger cities. I also think that if conservation work isn't available either right away upon graduation or after you graduate. I think it's important not to be afraid to apply for work that is related to, but maybe not specifically in, conservation. I think if people are willing to do collection management type projects like an inventory or spend time learning and doing art packing preparation work or framing, I think a future employer sees these as broader skillsets and advantage. I think if you end up in a smaller institution or in private practice as a conservator, you're going to need to use those skills anyways because you may not have staff or colleagues who do that specifically, because that's really only something that's through a larger institution. If you do end up in a larger institution, maybe there are managers, art handlers, preparers, you actually do a way better job working with them in a team if you already have some idea of what it is they do and what skills they have and how their experience and ability are things that you should be working with. I think regardless of the size of institutions you end up with or if you end up in private practice, you still benefit from having some of that experience even if it isn't conservation-related specifically. I also think that it's worthwhile taking conservation jobs that are away from the type of objects that you specifically thought you would want to work on, because sometimes that's the only thing that's available. You will never not use those skills. All skills are useful. There is never a downside to learning

skills that you didn't expect to need to know, or to have a diverse work experience that you might have not expected. The other thing is that career lasts a very long time. You love what you do, hopefully, but you also have to pay bills, so I think it is important not to worry too much if you are not working in conservation or in exactly the type of conservation that you expect, right away. There is probably going to be a time for you to do that. In the meantime, you may discover something that's different, or even better, or you may find in the end that these kinds of side roads that you take still allow you to walk back to the thing that you were originally interested in, but you may come back with different approaches. I think it's all valuable and I think it's important to take those opportunities. It's not going to be a problem to take different types of work.

**Q: That's a very encouraging message for us. Thank you so much.**

A: Well, it's hard I mean conservation students spend a lot of time and effort learning very specific things, but that doesn't necessarily mean that there is that job ready for you when you come out. I think it's important to be innovative and important to again take those opportunities.