

SERCA

Southeastern Regional Conservation Association

NEWSLETTER

Fall 2020 Volume 3, Number 2

Dear SERCA Members,

With the current cultural climate and resulting dissemination of the [statement made by black art conservators](#) in July, the SERCA leadership wants to echo the call for diversity, equity, and inclusion of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in conservation. This is not an attempt to jump on a bandwagon but an opportunity to look inward and allow SERCA to grow in our membership, visibility, outreach efforts, and overall way of thinking. Some of the ways we as an organization will begin to do this over the next year and beyond are to:

- Be in contact/collaboration with [The Art History & Curatorial Studies Collective](#) through the Atlanta University Center.
- Be in contact/collaboration with the [HBCU Library Alliance](#).
- Offer our website and Paypal infrastructure to smaller and diverse groups who want to host and organize workshops and/or programming.
- Financially support, through sponsorship, programming that is diverse in participation, scope, and leadership.

We charge our members to bring forth other ideas of how SERCA can be more active in ensuring BIPOC voices are heard and encouraged.

Thank you,
The SERCA Board

Transforming the world of art, one student at a time | Meet the Atlanta University Center Art History + Curatorial Studies Collective (Atlanta, GA, USA)

The [Atlanta University Center Art History + Curatorial Studies Collective](#) is the first and only undergraduate program in the United States designed with the specific purpose of educating the next generation of African American museum professionals. Made possible by the generous support of a multi-year grant awarded by the Alice L. Walton Foundation in 2018, the AUC Art Collective serves students of the largest Historically Black College and University network in the country, numbering 8,000 students, at Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College.

The AUC Art Collective offers a major and minor in Art History and a minor in Curatorial Studies, with all courses taught by faculty experts in the Department of Art and Visual Culture at Spelman College. Designed to be a pipeline for African American students to revolutionize the art industry, including the conservation and preservation professions, the AUC Art Collective also offers an Early College Program for high school students in partnership with the High Museum of Art, paid summer internships, and scholarship support.



March 2020, undergraduate students visited the Spelman College Archives with Archivist, Holly Smith and Archives Assistant, Kassandra Ware (pictured).

The AUC Art Collective marks its founding as a bold response to the humbling results of [The 2015 Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey](#), published by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The report confirmed that although 28 percent of museum staffs are from minority backgrounds, the great majority of these workers are concentrated in security, facilities, finance, and human resources jobs. Among museum curators, conservators, educators, and other leadership positions, only four percent were African American and three percent were Hispanic.

In 2018, [a second demographic survey report](#) identified some meaningful progress based on a variety of initiatives undertaken to support greater diversity among art museum staffs. The updated results

reported new hires since 2014 in curatorial and education departments (now 11% Black), but conservation, collections management and museum leadership roles (now 4% Black) have not seen similar increases. While the data serves as an accountability benchmark, it also confirms that through intentional planning and dedicated resources, museums are and can move towards greater and sustainable diversity and equity. Much of this progressive work is continuously supported through the activities of the AUC Art Collective.



July 2019, Early College students toured the High Museum of Art's off-site conservation lab with Snow Fain, Associate Paper Conservator.

Careers in art conservation and cultural heritage preservation remain an area of growing interest for our students, faculty, and staff. While no academic program currently exists at the AUC for students who are interested in entering these specific fields, strategic partnerships and targeted programs make exposure to this work possible. On January 24th, 2020, in collaboration with the Emerging Conservation Professionals Network, the AUC Art Collective brought to life an original symposium entitled *To Preserve A Legacy: Art Conservation at the Atlanta University Center*. By looking inward and making the intentional decision to focus the day's programming on the local collections at the Clark Atlanta University Art Museum, the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, and the Robert W. Woodruff Archives Research Center, the symposium illuminated the fields of art conservation and cultural heritage preservation in a fresh and relevant way, while underscoring the urgent need for stewardship of African American works of art and artifacts. The three invited African American conservators, Shannon A. Brogdon-Grantham (Spelman College C' 2009), Photographs and Paper Conservator, Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute; LaStarsha McGarity, Andrew W. Mellon Fellow, Objects Conservation, The National Gallery of Art; and Ephranette Brown (Spelman College C'

2009), Conservation Technician, Emory University Libraries, enabled participants to envision their futures in these fields.



January 2020, participants attend the *To Preserve A Legacy: Art Conservation at the Atlanta University Center* symposium workshop studying quilts from the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art with LaStarsha McGarity, invited symposium presenter and Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Objects Conservation, National Gallery of Art and Anne Collins-Smith, Curator of Collections, The Spelman College Museum of Fine Art.



January 2020, participants attending the *To Preserve A Legacy: Art Conservation at the Atlanta University Center* symposium workshop viewed Hale Woodruff's the *Art of the Negro* mural series in the atrium of the Clark Atlanta University Art Museum.

More recently, on July 29th, 2020, Rachel Rivenc, PhD, Head of Conservation and Preservation at the Getty Research Institute, presented to our Inaugural Summer 2020 Virtual Internship program. Dr. Rivenc shared her professional journey and introduced art conservation studies. Students participated in an interactive workshop that invited them to problem solve like conservators, using three contemporary case studies, including the recent global “toppling of the monuments” and various implications for the field; conserving the work of LA-based artist Betye Saar, whose archive was acquired by the African American Art History Initiative at the GRI; and finally, the conservation-related considerations of the historic purchase of the Johnson Publishing Company archives, containing more than four million images and 10,000 hours of video and audio recordings of 20th-century African American life and culture.

The AUC Art Collective actively seeks new partners to continue this transformational work. Organizations wishing to partner are welcome to contact :

- Cheryl Finley, Ph.D., Distinguished Visiting Director, at cfinley5@spelman.edu
- Rachel Brown, Program Manager, at rachel.brown@spelman.edu.

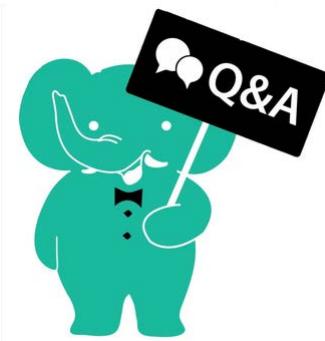
Please visit our website www.aucartcollective.org and follow us on Instagram [auc_artcollective.](https://www.instagram.com/auc_artcollective/)

Membership Experiences & Opportunities

5 Questions for Ginny Newell

How did I choose conservation as a career?

I started college on the science track but then, in a humanities course my sophomore year, I had my first art history lecture and my world completely changed. I ended up taking lots of art studio courses and then studying 19th century art and Medieval architecture in France my junior year. After graduating from Davidson College with a BA in Art History and no real desire to press on to grad school at that moment, I ended up taking a framing position in an art gallery in Columbia, SC. It was there that I was exposed to conservation. Art was coming in that needed conservation and the owner was sending them to a conservator in private practice. I became completely obsessed with the subject and so I tried to apprentice with said conservator to no avail. By that point I absolutely HAD to learn how to do conservation. I KNEW it was what I was meant to be and do and so I found a Master Conservator in California who would apprentice me. I then went to Holland for more training. That was back in 1983 and I have never once looked back.



How did I learn of SERCA?

Well, let's see...I was a Founding Mother in 1997.

What has been my most memorable treatment?

In 2017, with an insane museum deadline, I was charged with treating *Portrait of a Young Girl* ca. 1710 by Henrietta Dering Johnston (Irish-American, 1674-1729; first recognized professional artist in America). It was an 11" x 9" pastel with a severe stain of unknown origin down the entire right side of her face, shoulder, and bodice. I was able to successfully reduce the stain and line the fragile support with no change to the pastel. It was probably the most scared I have been treating a piece and also the most pleased with the results. It is now proudly displayed in the museum where it was once considered a lost cause.

What has been my biggest regret professionally?

Like so many I know in private practice, I regret not making the time to publish. I have done many treatments through the years that colleagues have said were worthy of publication but I just never got around to it. I also regret that I have always felt "less than" because I was American and European-bench-trained instead of attending a graduate program, but back in the day it was an acceptable educational entrance into the field.

What tool or supply do I still guard with my life?

I want to be buried with my scalpel, Teflon knife, and a jar of methyl cellulose.

Operating a Private Practice in the Time of COVID-19

2020 began like any other year. The steady stream of art and artifacts for treatment flowed in as usual from all the usual locations. We began the year with a typical 3-4 month backlog of work to be completed.

Things were as normal, routine, and typical as they could be. Then we started hearing about a virus going around. Our daughter was selling Girl Scout cookies at a booth and soon after got sick. It was not a normal cold; 5 weeks she was down and out. In early March we had our first cancellation. A long standing client that was just not comfortable with the idea of a home visit to pick up the next in a series of paintings we had been working on for her for the past year. This was the beginning of the slowdown. E-mail enquiries from the website dried up and the studio phone fell silent. I do not think it rang for over a month. I began to wonder, would the phone ever ring again. Conservation is not what I would call an "essential service" but rather a luxury service.



Looking back on it now, in some ways, this break in incoming work was a blessing and we have to count ourselves extremely lucky. When many of our neighbors were being laid off we were busy catching up on a backlog of work. I spent March through May doing treatments at my usual pace without any new incoming work. This grouping included many works from my strong client base in Alabama. Typically I schedule trips there every 4 months. For efficiency I always schedule new pick-ups to coincide with delivery of completed projects. My dozen items to deliver were finished but I had only 3 pick-ups scheduled. Deliveries were gloved, masked and did not include the usual handshakes or hugs I often get from appreciative owners. Each client had a different set of requirements from "stay over there and wear a mask" to "want a glass of wine?" People still did not know what was going on and the pile of work left to do was dwindling.

As the parents of two middle school age children who were not at school or summer camps we struggled with finding the time to do the work we had. With less to do, and less income to match, we made lemonade out of lemons and spent much time at the lake swimming and doing zero cost "social distancing". On the bright side, we got to spend lots of time with the kids and exploring our local natural resource.

Nobody has to have their painting cleaned; it's discretionary spending and people were not out and about to spend. But they were sitting at home for months, looking at their dirty paintings and wanting something to do. So beginning in June the phone began to ring again. Slowly the work has returned. Museums are planning exhibitions, collectors are buying, and accidents that need repairs happen. The backlog is again climbing and the e-mail enquiries have returned. The client that cancelled in March called back in August to schedule getting her painting cleaned. Is it over? No, probably not. Will we be OK? I hope so.

Early Pre-Program Reflections: Change, Transformation

By Sara Lanham

I'm a paper conservation intern this summer at the Georgia Archives. Landing my first pre-program internship was a huge lucky break, and a dissonant pairing with 2020's dark mood. It's been a difficult year. Older millennials like me have seen pervasive disillusionment, worry, and unrest before. But this time, alongside those recognizable feelings is a distinctive air of catalysis. It applies as much to our little world of conservation as to the world at large. To me, the potential for change feels greater today than it did twenty years ago when I was a student first researching conservation.

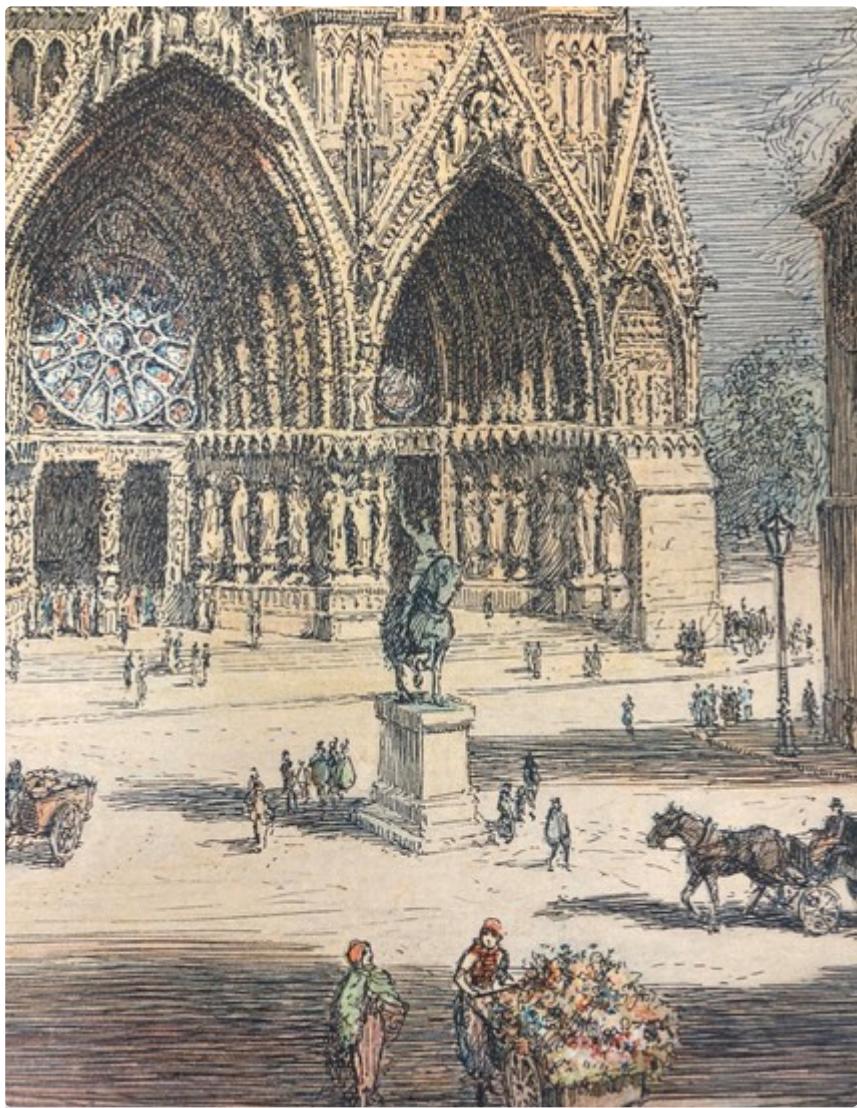
Change is a certitude, vividly manifest in dealings with object condition over time. Conservators can slow change down, but we know it will eventually do its thing. Paradoxically, it's this work of nibbling

with senescence that gives us understanding and acceptance that change is inevitable. That's why I'm puzzled that our profession has delayed in acknowledging and enacting some imperative course corrections. Why, in 2020, is this still a métier of white women? [i] Why are conservators' qualified perspectives undervalued and sidelined in institutions? [ii] (Many of which are in dire need of such insights in order to surmount their flawed role as "trophy cases for imperialism.") [iii] Who can access conservation careers, how their expertise is utilized, and the organizations they support—these parameters shape what emerges synergistically from conservators' efforts. That product is the historical narrative, and it remains shockingly constrained.

Conservation's influence on the historical narrative is under magnification thanks to current arguments about American monuments to subjugation. AIC members have posted online about this, many opining that damages to offensive public monuments during recent protests need not be repaired. Plenty of conservators advocate removing the monuments from public spaces, with the damage preserved as a historical record of people engaged in struggle against oppression. [iv] So I'm hopeful that just like those monuments, inequitable customs in conservation can finally be pulled from the pedestal, too. To wit: The idea that surreal pre-program standards serve to weed out unmotivated candidates, when of course they leave out unmoneied candidates. [v] Also: Conservators' habitual acquiescence to unfair pay and sway on the org chart. [vi] And: Collections and interpretations that are coy about the ugly sides of the truth, speaking to select groups while alienating others. [vii]

We can't task merely a few individuals with such problems. Unjustly, minorities in conservation have had no choice but to grapple with these issues, [viii] when it needs to be all of us grappling. Hannah Clare generalizes that conservators are often introverted souls, disinclined to lead a charge. [ix] She's painting with a broad brush, but she has a point. Sanchita Balachandran writes more toughly, "Our crisis is one of desperate urgency, but it has gone unchallenged from the safety of our benches." [x] Even if being bold doesn't come easily, we can't afford to do otherwise. Fortunately conservators are professional problem-solvers. We examine situations closely and respond with flexible plans of action. We're creative troubleshooters who are constantly taking inspiration from unusual places. Just look at our tools, adapted from every scenario *except* conservation! As a cohort we are undeniably equipped to seek solutions.

But everyone must search, because we're facing a test of the collective character of our profession. Having owned up to such glaring inadequacies in our systems, we cannot conscientiously fail to fix them. On the path to becoming a conservator, I take it as a responsibility to pinpoint the ways in which I will create change. No one enters this field dispassionately; we know the worth of the work. By the transitive property we know, too, what we are worth. Let's ensure that our labor is in service to an accountable, inclusive, and honest legacy. We can make changes that add up to transformation.



Detail, *Rheims Cathedral*, BT. William Mark Young, published by G.L.Co., c. 1900-1946.

Chromolithograph from the thrift store, used to practice paper conservation treatments during my internship. The statue in front of the cathedral depicts an undisputed French patriot and heroine, Jeanne d'Arc.

[1] UCLA/Getty Conservation Program. "[The Current State of Diversity in the Cultural Heritage Field](#)," June 10, 2020. Accessed August 14, 2020.

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[1] Ashley-Smith, Jonathan. "[Losing the Edge: the Risk of a Decline in Practical Conservation](#)." *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 2016, 39:2, 119-132.

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Halperin, Julia. "[Here's How Much Money Museum Employees Really Make](#)." news.artnet.com, June 29, 2017. Accessed August 15, 2020.

[1] Saffore, Marz as quoted in Boucher, Brian. "[People Are Calling for Museums to Be Abolished. Can Whitewashed American History Be Rewritten?](#)" cnn.com, July 12, 2020. Accessed August 13, 2020.

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[1] Search term: "[monuments](#)," community.culturalheritage.org. Accessed August 13, 2020.

[1] UCLA/Getty Conservation Program. "[Paying to Learn: How Unpaid Internships Perpetuate Inequity in the Cultural Heritage Field](#)." June 11, 2020. Accessed August 16, 2020.

[1] Ashley-Smith 2017. Clare 2018. Halperin 2017.

[1] Bishara, Hakim. "[Artists in 18 Major US Museums Are 85% White and 87% Male, Study Says](#)." hyperallergic.com, June 3, 2019. Accessed August 15, 2020.

[1] Panel discussion: Brogdon-Grantham, Shannon; Brown, Ephranette; and McGarity, LaStarsha. "To Preserve a Legacy: Art Conservation at the AUC." Atlanta University Center's Art History + Curatorial Studies Collective with Emerging Conservation Professionals Network. Atlanta, GA. January 24, 2020.

[1] Clare 2018.

[1] AIC Conservators Converse. Full text of talk: Balachandran, Sanchita. "[Race, Diversity and Politics in Conservation: Our 21st Century Crisis](#)." 44th AIC Annual Meeting, May 26, 2016. resources.culturalheritage.org, May 25, 2016. Accessed August 14, 2020.

Health and Safety

A Refresher on Respirators

By *Laura Garner Hine*

It is important to be proactive in our own health and safety. The proper care, monitoring, and routine maintenance of our Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is of paramount importance. One of the most frequently employed and versatile types of personal protective equipment is the highly adaptable, versatile, and ever handy respirator. In a time where the world has donned face masks and protective breathing equipment, a brief overview of respirator selection, use, and maintenance might prove handy to conservators and non-conservators alike. The following are some general guidelines and rules of thumb when it comes to employing this particular piece of protective personal equipment.

Selecting the Proper Respirator

As with most things, there are advantages and disadvantages associated with each type of respirator. When selecting the right respirator to provide the right protection from your specific hazard, some things to consider are whether a half face mask versus a full face mask is appropriate, air purifying versus atmosphere supplying respirators, should it be tight fitting or loose fitting and which cartridges are best to use for which job.

1. Half Mask or Full Mask

Most respirators are engineered with a snap fit design, making the cartridges and filter cottons easy to install, replace, and disassemble. The cartridges or filter boxes snap into the mask, which can either be a half facepiece, covering the nose and mouth, or a full facepiece which covers the nose, mouth, and eyes. Again, depending on the job and the work environment, complete protection of the face may be pertinent, whereas other circumstances may deem a half mask more appropriate.

2. Air purifying or Atmosphere Supplying

The difference between these two options is that air purifying respirators provide you with clean air through the use of filters and cartridges which remove any hazardous contaminants from the air you breathe, while atmosphere supplying respirators deliver clean air from an outside and uncontaminated source, such as an air tank or compressor. The latter of these two types of respirators provide the highest level of respiratory protection and are most often employed in circumstances where oxygen levels dip below 20% or when certain gas and vapor levels are at high levels of concentration.

Selecting the Right Respirator Cartridge

With all of the options of models and colors of cartridges and filters available, choosing the correct cartridge for the job can be a bit tricky. Happily however, most filter boxes and filter cottons protect against chemicals commonly involved in chemical plant, medical treatment, and mechanical processing, home decoration, mold making, light industrial production, automobile exhaust, mine work, pesticide spraying, filtering gasoline, benzene and its homologs, organic steam, carbon dioxide, dust, mold, acetone, soot, and aerosols. Most cartridges contain an activated carbon filter that has the capacity to filter against resin smoke, however there are specific cartridges that can be selected which offer a higher ability to protect against smoke. It is recommended that once the specific types of hazards have been identified from which protection is sought, respirator cartridges should be chosen based on their expected hazard exposure. Proper respirator cartridges are labelled with a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) approval label, manufacturer's name and number, filter type, lot number, European Standard for filtration class, and a color that corresponds to a manufacturer's color code that denotes its filter type and capacity. It is always advised to use the manufacturer's cartridge guide that is specific to your respirator brand to determine the correct cartridge and protection for the job.

Respirator Fit

1. Tight Fitting

This type of respirator requires a tight seal between the respirator mask and the face; otherwise, contaminated air can seep in through any cracks or breaks in the seal and can be pulled into the face mask and inhaled. To this end, facial hair, jewelry, or head pieces that could interfere with respirator seal are against recommendation when utilizing this type of respirator.

2. Loose Fitting

This type of respirator does not require a tight seal between the mask and the face to provide protection. Usually, this type of respirator mask is a hood draped over the face and shoulders typically used in a PAPR or supplied air configuration system. And don't forget that a proper fit is key! Seal checks should be conducted by the wearer upon every use, and OSHA requires a Fit Testing once a year for jobs that require individuals to wear a respirator. Even disposable dust masks are considered respirators by OSHA and should fit properly to be effective. According to OSHA, "A "fit test" tests the seal between the respirator's facepiece and your face. It takes about fifteen to twenty minutes to complete and is performed at least annually. After passing a fit test with a respirator, you must use the exact same make, model, style, and size respirator on the job ." For further information on seal checks and fit tests, please refer to OSHA's website for further details.

Shelf and Service Life

1. Under normal use, the main body of the mask can be used for about 2 years. In circumstances where a respirator is used daily or regularly, it is recommended to replace the main body of the mask after one year.

2. The service life of the cartridges and filter cotton are determined by the environmental conditions, breathing rate, cartridge filtering capacity, and the amount of contaminants in the air that the respirator is used in. However as a standard rule of thumb, cartridges and cotton filters that have been opened should be replaced every six months, even when unused. If left in their original packages unopened, they are safe to use for up to five years.

3. It is recommended that when replacing a cartridge, make a note or write the date on

each cartridge when using a new package.

4. It is recommended to replace the cartridges and filters in the event that even with a proper seal, odors and smells can be detected or if there is difficulty in breathing or a resistance in breathing through the mask.

Maintenance, Cleaning and Storage

Proper, regular cleaning and maintenance of your respirator mask will greatly prolong its longevity. If possible, before each use but definitely after each use, make sure to clean your mask. This not only serves as a sanitary measure but will also prolong the service life of your respirator.

1. Remove the filter materials such as the filter boxes and the filter cotton. If necessary, such as working in an environment where mold, soot, or dirt were heavily present, the suction valve, head wear, and other accessories can be removed as well to ensure a thorough cleaning. It is also advised that "When working with particulates such as mold or asbestos, it is good practice to apply a strip of adhesive tape to the outside opening of each cartridge with a plastic canister (to prevent contaminants from the outside of the cartridge getting lodged on the part of the filter that attaches to the interior of the mask).

2. Soak the respirator in a bath of warm water that does not exceed a temperature of 120 degrees fahrenheit or 49 degrees celsius. Using a soft brush or sponge, wash the mask until it is free and clean of dirt and grime. Do not soak or immerse the cartridges, a careful wiping down of the outsides will suffice. If the use of a soap is required, be sure to use a neutral detergent and steer clear of moisturizing soaps, alkaline soap, washing or laundry soda, or baking soda as these can cause the materials of your masks to degrade at an accelerated rate.

3. After a thorough cleaning, it is prudent to sterilize the mask and cartridges. Alcohol- free disinfecting wipes or disinfectants designed for safety and personal protective equipment will do the job, but avoid using alcohol or other harsh chemicals as these can cause degradation to the materials found in the mask and cartridges.

4. After thoroughly cleaning and sanitizing, rinse all elements with clean warm water and allow them to air dry in a clean environment.

5. Be sure to store the mask body and cartridges separately, each in their own individual storage bag, such as one made of polyethylene. Store in a clean, dry place that is safe from direct sunlight and extreme fluctuations in temperature and humidity. Multiple masks and cartridges should be stored separately to avoid cross-contamination.

Membership

Now Accepting Payments ONLINE via PayPal!

Renewing your membership is even easier without having to worry about mailing in those pesky checks!! You will also be able to register and pay for workshops online. Please be sure to submit **BOTH** the registration form *and* the payment. If you haven't already renewed, please do so today. Please spread the word to your colleagues!

Find a Conservator

If you would like to be included on the [*Find a Conservator*](#) page of the SERCA website, please contact: Rachel Penniman, Member-at-large/Website Guru rachel.penniman@duke.edu

Newsletter Submissions

Working on an interesting project? Have an internship or job opening to share? Let us know what's going on in your studio! Items for inclusion in the newsletter should be directed to both Newsletter Editors:

Ephranette Brown
ephranette.brown@emory.edu

Tracey Johnson
tracey.johnson@usg.edu

SERCA's Newsletter is published three times a year in April, August, and December. Please note that articles should be sent at least two weeks prior to publication and should not exceed 750 words. Also, there should be no more than 4 accompanying images in jpeg format. The editors reserve the right to copy-edit in order to fit available space.

Next issue: December 2020

Deadline for submissions: November 15, 2020



SERCA - Southeast Regional Conservation Association

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