

# SERCA

Southeast Regional conservation association

## Newsletter

Spring 2022 Volume 5, Number 1

### Eliza Gilligan - Vice President

Eliza Gilligan Lenz has been a book conservator for 20 years, mostly working in academic and museum libraries. She has served on the board of the Washington Conservation Guild, in various volunteer roles with the Book and Paper Group of the American Institute for Conservation, and now serves on the board of the Southeast Conservation Association. Eliza moved to Macon, GA in 2018. She has small conservation and consulting practice that she runs out of her home. Moving to Macon has allowed Eliza to realize her dream of having a board shear of her very own. When she's not working on organizing her studio, Eliza enjoys gardening, beekeeping, and volunteering at a local dog rescue.



### Katie Etre - Health and Safety Liaison

Kathryn Etre is currently the Director of Conservation for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, since 2016. She previously held positions at the Michael C Carlos Museum of Emory University and the Detroit Institute of Arts. She is a graduate of the University College London's MSc in Conservation for Archaeology and Museums program

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## 2022 Annual Meeting Survey

Hello All-

Due to a misunderstanding on my part, here is 2022's Annual Meeting survey along with questions for 2023's annual meeting. We would like EVERYONE to please fill out this survey - if you did not attend

2022's meeting just leave those questions blank.

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfFxoJ-HR2pcWfYQEF6w\\_OFy-ZzB00Q9Fc7pZQEiKJzKwASqA/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfFxoJ-HR2pcWfYQEF6w_OFy-ZzB00Q9Fc7pZQEiKJzKwASqA/viewform)

Sincerely yours,  
Michelle  
SERCA President

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## From the Bench of the President

By Michelle Savant

Hello All-

I'd like to start by thanking all my board members for a job well done on the 2022 Annual Meeting. I will miss Shannon and Laura but look forward to working with our new board members Eliza and Katie. Oh, and I thank everyone that was present that reelected me for a second term. Thank you for your confidence in me, and that I'll be able to finish up that unfinished business from last year. If you weren't at the meeting - the unfinished business was the logo design, the website redesign, and working toward getting our 501(c)3 status back. Yep, we lost that at some point in time.

This past weekend, Larry and I had the pleasure of having lunch with a young lady who is interested in art conservation. She is a junior at Paideia High School and found out about conservation through her father who is a repeat client of ours. So they asked us to lunch to pick our brains about how to get into the field. It was nice seeing someone who is young and driven, and it was nice to share our love and passion for the field. This leads me to next year when SERCA board positions open up; I hope that a few of the younger members will step up. Not only do we need a mix of age groups on the board, but it's nice to be able to pass down the history, and the passion that we older folks have for SERCA. It's also a great resume item, something that I no longer need as retirement is, hopefully, sooner rather than later.

Speaking of retirement, I'll end on congratulating Kate Singley! She has won the AIC **Honorary Membership Award** (given out for exceptional contributions to the conservation profession over the course of one's career). Just remember Kate - we all knew you before you were this cool!

Very sincerely yours,  
Michelle Savant

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## Five Questions with Matt Johnson

*Matt Johnson (AIC-PA) is a Senior Book Conservator and Director of Client Development at ECS Conservation/HF Group in Greensboro, NC. He joined ECS in 1993 and trained under Don Etherington. He has been a SERCA member since 1999, and has served as a board member, vice president, and president. When not conserving, he enjoys gardening, cooking, and dabbling in some letterpress projects.*



### ***How did you choose conservation as a career?***

It wasn't so much a choice as it was a career that began through a series of fortunate encounters. When I was an undergrad at UNC Greensboro, I became friends with the special collections librarian who a) taught me how to set type and do letterpress printing, and b) introduced me to Don Etherington and wife Monique Lallier. It was then that I realized that bookbinding/book conservation was a possible career path; however, it was sometime later that another chance meeting set everything in motion. At the time, I worked as a fine dining waiter and one of my regulars asked me what I was interested in career-wise. I answered, "I've been thinking about bookbinding." He said, "one of my friends [Information Conservation Inc. CEO Jack Fairfield] owns a bindery. Give me your number and I'll pass it along to him." A week later I did indeed get a call and went to visit the facility. There were no openings at the time in the conservation division, but a few months later, Don Etherington called and said a position was available. He asked if I was still interested, and would I like to come in for a formal interview? So I did, got the job, trained under Don and now am in my 30th year as a conservation professional. Conservation careers don't really happen that way anymore, and I consider myself very fortunate to have been able to join the field as I did.

### ***How did you learn of SERCA?***

Etherington Conservation Services (ECS) was contacted as part of the original outreach for members back in 1998-99. Several of us from the lab drove down to Atlanta for the 1999 meeting, and I have been a member ever since. In 2004, I was "convinced" to join the board as a member at large by certain parties who shall remain nameless (okay, I was strong-armed by Alex Klingelhofer and Kate Singley, with help from David Goist). After a couple of years, I moved to Vice President, then served two terms as President. It's been a great experience.

### ***What has been your most memorable treatment?***

Well after nearly 30 years, there are several that stand out, either because of the treatment or the nature of the item itself. If I had to pick one, I'd say treating and rehousing Mark Twain's original manuscript for *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*...the treatment itself was fairly straightforward, but how cool is it to have the initial handwritten version of a bedrock of literature in your hands and in your care?

### ***What has been your biggest regret professionally?***

I wish I'd had more opportunities to directly collaborate with more of my longtime SERCA colleagues. I've been able to do so a few times over the years, and it was always an enjoyable experience. I still have a few more years to go in the field, but a lot of the OG SERCA folks are now in the retirement phase. But then again, we all know conservators never REALLY retire, right?

***What tool or supply do you still guard your life?***

Am I limited to just one? Hope not, because I have at least four. My English paring knife...a small inpainting brush (yes, book conservators can inpaint, too)...my medium-sized Teflon tapered-end folder...and Mr. Lifty, my offset handle lifting blade.

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## **Ask a Conservator: Tips, Tricks, and Hacks from Three SERCA Members**

reported by Clara Gonzalez

*The Tips and Tricks portion of the SERCA annual meeting is a regular favorite amongst attendees. In this popular segment, professional conservators share personal recommendations and advice, as well as ingenious ways of using or making tools, finding products or applying methodologies. This year was no different thanks to thoughtful and creative insights into the field from David Goist, Larry Shutts, and Sigourney Smuts. Here are some highlights from what they shared:*

### **David Goist Gets Creative in a Pinch**

While in NYC following superstorm Sandy in 2012-2013, David Goist undertook an emergency response and remediation project to help local artist, Ronny Landsfield, store several large canvas paintings from his studio. Unable to source or afford the required number of acid-free tubes, he and the artist obtained oversized cardboard rolls from a local carpet store. Each tube was wrapped with protective polyethylene sheeting to form an acid-free barrier before rolling multiple paintings onto the tubes in layers.

As David explained, "Ronny was able to put four paintings on each tube, interweaving with polyethylene as he rolled. He then wrote inventory numbers at the end of each tube." His paintings were later taken to the Recovery Center established in Brooklyn by FAIC for vacuuming and rolling onto acid-free tubes.





*Carpet tubes with canvases ready for transportation. Image courtesy of David Goist.*

In 2016 David performed a major treatment on a painted theatrical curtain from 1855 that hung at the opening of Thalian Hall in Wilmington, NC. Treatment took place at the Cameron Art Museum where it was placed on exhibition before returning to Thalian Hall. David used a large 12-inch diameter by 20-foot long Sonotube to roll and transport the large theatrical backdrop. Sonotubes are typically used for casting concrete footings in building construction making them a strong and clever product for moving heavy textiles.

These creative methods of storing, moving, and tracking canvas paintings and textiles required quick thinking and ultimately provided a highly effective, and highly affordable, solution with minimal delay.

### **Larry Shutts Shows Us How to Save With DIY & Dupes**

Larry Shutts from Savant and Shutts Art Conservation put on an impressive "gun show" this year, which concluded with a tour of his lab. During his demonstration, the decades-long professional shared airbrush product recommendations, discussed how to best achieve a matte finish with a spray gun, and shared his custom-built easels and DIY hot table.

Larry is a conservator in private practice working in a small, shared room with wife and Objects Conservator Michelle Savant. He is conscientious of how he uses the limited space in his home, taking on tools and equipment with purpose, and only as needed. He's also a big proponent of working smart with your conservation budget.

During the tour of his lab, he explained this as the reason why he went with a custom-built easel and vacuum hot table for his work with paintings.

The blueprints Larry purchased for the Cadmium Easel from ArtistEaselPlans.com provided step-by-step assembly instructions with pictures, making it easy to follow along. He built the fully customizable and adjustable easel exactly to his specifications, and at a fraction of retail cost. This



allows the husband-and-wife pair to work on small-to-larger size canvases as needed, without requiring a large workspace.

Larry's vacuum hot table is another custom build frequently used in his practice. The large table measures 48" x 84" and has a 1/8" thick aluminum plate. Larry was able to save money by sourcing the metal locally, and he uses a custom-sized, digitally controlled, 240V silicone heat mat he found on eBay. Exploring DIY options and affordable solutions helped Shutts and Savant find the equipment they needed to do the best job within the space they have.



*Larry's hot table with his spray-gun collection.*

While touring the lab, Larry highlighted the impressive array of airbrush guns he uses in his practice and outlined his preferred application techniques. His number one tip? Don't overspend on equipment when you don't have to.

Shutts recommends the Harbor Freight Tools Deluxe Airbrush as an inexpensive, small tool that performs similarly to the Paasche VL. Perfect for fine details, this cost-effective dupe provides dual-action adjustment like the Paasche VL for just half the price.

Larry went on to demonstrate an arsenal of conservation tools, including the Jam Gun, a narrow-gauge spray gun used for small to medium size work about 4 inches in diameter. Happy to demonstrate his most reliable tool, his old-fashioned spray gun is able to cover an area of 12 inches in diameter and is used for applying varnishes to large areas. He highlighted other specialized airbrush guns, including a purple spray gun similar to the old-fashioned sprayer, used daily for varnish application.



*Image of Harbor Freight Tools Deluxe Airbrush.*

He explained that in paintings conservation, it is important to apply varnishes in even, thin layers. Achieving a matte finish can be challenging with a spray gun because it often produces a shine or creates a powdery surface.

In order to achieve the perfect matte finish, Larry recommends first applying an even layer of varnish and allowing it to dry. Drying time will vary based on the size of canvas, as well as the distance, pressure, and volume of the varnish application. All of these will ultimately contribute to the final finish.

Note: The second coat should be applied a few feet back from the canvas, allowing the particles to travel through the air for a greater distance and enabling the varnish to dry in the air just a moment before it hits the canvas surface. Larry explained that the more pressure and greater distance, the less liquid volume of varnish will hit the canvas surface, further contributing to the final matte finish.

### **Sigourney Smuts Shows Off Smart Use for a Simple Toy**

Today, Sigourney Smuts is an experienced conservator working with the Georgia Archives with a host of professional tools and resources at her disposal. But it wasn't always that way. As a young conservator often working under very tight time and budget constraints, Sigourney relied on ingenious thinking to solve problems quickly, efficiently, and cheaply.



When faced with long panoramas, unusually shaped canvases, or odd-sized artworks, Sigourney learned to use modeling plasticine, an oil-based clay, to build up a dam or walled enclosure on a waterproof, non-porous table. In the absence of an appropriately sized traditional water tray, this technique makes it easy to create any size or shape “tray” needed.

With full control over the wall height, shape, and size, this system is particularly useful if you are trying to control the size and amount of fluid used during the washing process. Fast, easy, and cheap to assemble, Sigourney added that a spout can be created by hand or attached to help the dam drain when the project is complete.

Thank you to all who shared during this year’s Tips and Tricks portion. Your creative ideas, DIYs, dupes, and advice are always a great resource to our growing conservation community.

Take care and until next time!

You can order Sonotubes here

<https://www.sonotube.com/sonotubeconcreteforms/builderstube/howtousebuilderstube.aspx>

You can find the Harbor Freight Tools here for \$22 <https://www.harborfreight.com/deluxe-airbrush-kit-95810.html>

The Paasche is available through Amazon here for \$92 <https://www.amazon.com/Paasche-VL-SET-Double-Action-Airbrush/dp/B00397TTTT?th=1>

You can find the Cadmium plans here for \$40

<https://www.artisteaselplans.com/collections/87821>

You can purchase 2lb of plasticine here for \$24

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0027ACJDW?ref\\_=cm\\_sw\\_r\\_cp\\_ud\\_dp\\_ZZTMAGA1KHE3C7ZCD5Y5](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0027ACJDW?ref_=cm_sw_r_cp_ud_dp_ZZTMAGA1KHE3C7ZCD5Y5)

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## SERCA 2021 Opportunity Grant Recap

By Sara Lanham

Hello, SERCA colleagues. I’m here to share the outcomes from my 2021 Professional Opportunity Grant, which I used to register for five online workshops during AIC’s 49th Annual Meeting. I hoped to glean some information to share with a small organization I’d worked for in my hometown—the Houston Museum of Decorative Arts in Chattanooga, TN. I also knew that the variety of topics would benefit me as a pre-programmer, and indeed it felt a little like going to a restaurant and ordering an extravagant appetizer sampler as an entrée. With a list of questions in hand from the museum, I attended “Building Imaging Workflows” instructed by Jennifer McGlinchey Sexton, “ID and Preservation of Archival Materials” with Tatiana Cole and Allison Holcomb, “Stressed About Pests” with Rachael Arenstein and Pat Kelley, “How to Label and Mark Your Collections,” taught by Eugenie Milroy and Fran Ritchie, and “Silver Image Chemistry & Deterioration” with Scott Williams and Doug Nishimura. I bounced from tasty digital image capture to crunchy (and confusing) entomology,



through toothsome realms of lignin-free paper and B-72. In each, I got a few bites, providing food for thought and a lot of leads to follow.

A year out, I can attest that the material from the workshops has informed my pre-program work. I've referenced ideas from those sessions while prepping images for the Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) at the Smithsonian; during run-ins with lively library insects in Charleston, SC; and at HF Group, my current workplace, where on any given day I might observe silver mirroring in photographs, or iron gall ink corrosion in manuscripts. Additionally, the questions and scenarios described by other workshop participants sparked discussions illustrating how we use broad conservation concepts to brainstorm highly specific solutions for unique situations. And that constraints and limitations are omnipresent. So, for instance, while I came to "Imaging Workflows" seeking the names of fancy cameras the Houston Museum ought to have for collections photography, I left knowing that the scrappily serviceable digital ELPH setup I made is...just fine. That it's appropriate for the context in which it functions. I felt good relaying that back to the museum, and happy with my improvisation.

Perhaps the biggest boost I got from these sessions was in my capacity to represent our field to others and to connect people with my connections. Nowadays, I occasionally receive conservation queries from friends in the Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums (GLAM) world; and often the best advice I can give is to point people in the direction of those-more-knowledgeable-than-I. In that spirit, I left these sessions well equipped. Not with any new authority to deliver conservation edicts, but rather with new acquaintances in my network, lots of references and links, and an increased ability to assist in thinking through problems. These are the types of tidbits that I was able to take back to the Houston Museum. While I wish I could do much more, sharing a bit of what's been shared with me is a start.

I think the workshops were a fitting use for this grant money, in keeping with the continued remote nature of so much of life during our second pandemic year. It was an unglamorous reality, but with a major silver lining for me. If not for the mass migration to online spaces during Covid-19, I'd likely have had a fraction of the access to the field of conservation that I ultimately enjoyed. Pre-pandemic, we had many online conservation resources. Yet to take a tour, see an in-person talk, or meet a real live conservator in situ, I needed to schedule unpaid days off from work and travel to other parts of the Southeast or beyond. Suddenly it became possible to virtually access this kind of learning almost daily. Which, I did! This was an unexpected, *major* assist in the very early days of my career change. It demonstrated to me firsthand the gains in accessibility that can be achieved through online event components, gains I hope we can keep facilitating even as we enjoy the restored option to see one another face to face.

The one remaining outcome left to share here is my gratitude to SERCA: I credit this community as an instrumental force in helping me find my point of entry as a pre-programmer. I'm so thankful to the scholarship committee for showing confidence in me; to all the members who made SERCA's online meetings happen these past two years; and to everyone in SERCA who has spoken with me about their experiences in conservation and given me a chance to try out this work. It will be up to me to contribute in kind to our organization and to assist other emerging conservators in our region. Thank you.

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- Buffalo State graduate student Jenni Krchak has been accepted into an internship at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Kayla Moorhead has been accepted into a summer internship at the Georgia Archives in Morrow, Georgia.
- Kate Singley, conservator in private practice, will receive an AIC Honorary Membership for outstanding contributions to the conservation profession over the course of her career.
- Charlotte Starnes has been admitted to the Buffalo State conservation program for Fall 2022.



If you'd like to acknowledge the accomplishments of any other SERCA members, please let us know. We would love to celebrate their hard work too!!

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## Health and Safety


### Health and Safety and Integrated Pest Management (IPM): How to Protect Yourself While Protecting the Collection

By Kathryn Etre

Conservators are constantly aware of the vast damage insects can cause within their collections. Due to this damage, the creation and implementation of a strong Integrated Pest Management (IPM) system is one of their major duties. However, the damage such pests can do to the conservator themselves is not always evident. Below is a description of two IPM cases from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) which posed potential health and safety risks.







The sitting room and attached bathroom of the Eudora Welty House – home of Pulitzer Prize author Eudora Welty – has been continually infested with fleas. These fleas appear to be coming around the bathtub, likely from either a rodent or an opossum nesting under the bathtub. Fleas can cause a range of health risks such as skin irritation, cat-scratch fever, typhus, and plague.

The first step is to get rid of the source of the fleas. This step was accomplished by placing bait stations around the property to kill rats, live-trapping opossums, and eliminating access points for said animals. Eliminating access points, however, may be difficult in older properties, especially one which is a National Historic Landmark, such as the Eudora Welty House.

The next step is to eliminate the fleas. Exterior and basement spraying with WSG Alpine (a waterborne powder) and spraying the runners, which are over the historic carpets, with Precor 200 seemed to be the most effective solution. Both chemicals are growth inhibitors, preventing the fleas from reproducing. Neither of these chemicals pose danger to humans. Both of these chemicals also seemed to pose the least danger to collections compared to other chemical options.

These steps above, however, tend to be slow and thus museum staff will need to protect themselves. Fleas jump and climb. Due to this behavior, foot protection is necessary. Tall disposable boot covers can be purchased. Or staff members can tuck pant legs into white socks. The fleas will be more visible on a white surface and fleas are attracted to the change in light intensity. This foot protection will both protect the members of staff from the health risks listed above and will also aid in monitoring the number of fleas. If the flea-infested surfaces are being handled, Tyvek suits with the arms tucked into nitrile gloves and the legs tucked into one of the foot protection methods listed previously is recommended.

## Rodents

MDAH recently acquired a study collection of pottery sherds and stones from a local archaeological site. However, the collection's previous storage location had been infested with mice and the collection was covered in urine and feces. MDAH Administration were concerned about students handling the collection in that state and wanted the collection to be disinfected if possible.

Contact with rodent urine can spread salmonellosis and listeria, causing symptoms of food poisoning, and Hantavirus. Hantavirus is a severe, sometimes fatal, respiratory disease. Hantavirus tends to be contracted upon the inhalation of the dust of dried urine and feces.

When such a collection is handled, dust masks and nitrile gloves should be worn. The collection was then disinfected with thymol. Thymol, the essential oil in thyme, is a potent antimicrobial and antiviral. In fact, the reader rails and touch panels with the galleries at MDAH were regularly disinfected with thymol during COVID. Thymol was chosen in both cases as it has no adverse effects to humans or the environment, does not off-gas, can be dispersed in water, and – the case of the collection above – does not cause staining to pigments or semi-porous stone (Casadio 2000 and Sakr et.al. 2018).

These two cases are, of course, not the only insects that may pose a health concern. Cockroaches, flies, and mosquitoes, to name a few, can also carry diseases. Although contraction of these diseases tends to be rare, as the adage goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." The addition of PPE supplies to a conservator's IPM regimen – especially in the case of large and/or unusual infestations – will help a conservator to continue protecting the collection while protecting themselves.

## Resources



[www.cdc.gov/rodents/diseases](http://www.cdc.gov/rodents/diseases)

Casadio, F 2020. Will Coronavirus Forever Change the Chemical Composition of Artworks. ArtNews. May 8, 2020

Sakr A, Ghaly M, Helal G, and Haliem M, 2018. Effect of Thymol Against Fungi Deteriorating Mural Paintings at Tell Basta Tombs, Lower Egypt. International Journal of Research Studies in Biosciences. V6.6. 8-23.

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## Membership

### Membership 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. And spread the word to your colleagues!

Visit our website for more details: <https://sercaconservation.org/membership/>

### Find a Conservator

If you would like to be included on the [Find a Conservator](#) page of the SERCA website, please contact: Katie Boodle, Communications Coordinator at [kboodle@nedcc.org](mailto:kboodle@nedcc.org).

### Newsletter Submissions

Working on an interesting project? Have an internship, job opening, or workshop opportunity 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](mailto:ephranette.brown@emory.edu)

Tracey Johnson

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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: August 2022


Deadline for submissions: July 15, 2022




## Southeast Regional Conservation Association - SERCA

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