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# SERCA

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

paper | books | paintings | objects | textiles

WINTER
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## From the Desk of the President

Dear SERCA members,

As many of you know, federal funding impacts have had rippling effects. Institutions are navigating difficult decisions, and like for many of you, these shifts have been felt on a deeply personal level. Without financial assurances, my previous position was dissolved, leading to an unexpected life change and a relocation to Savannah.

While change is never simple, it has reminded me how essential it is for us—as conservators and as people—to remain vigilant, adaptable, and open to new paths. Our industry continues to face challenges: tightening budgets, shifting priorities, and the growing need to advocate for the visibility and value of conservation work. Yet these obstacles also reinforce the strength of our community, our collective creativity, and our capacity to pivot with purpose. Even in moments of uncertainty, our dear field continues to evolve – and so do we.

(*continued on page 4)*

## Board Members

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## Leadership Opportunities

Dear SERCA Members,
Big changes are coming to the SERCA Board of Directors! As we approach February, several key roles will be opening as current members complete their terms. According to our bylaws, board members may serve up to two consecutive two-year terms — and this year brings fresh opportunities for new leadership to step forward.
The following positions will be available: President, Health & Safety Coordinator, Member-at-Large, Newsletter Editor, and Treasurer.
While our immediate priorities are filling the Presidency and the Health & Safety Coordinator roles, all of the positions listed above are open. If you've ever considered taking on a leadership role — or would simply like to be kept in mind for future opportunities — we'd love to hear from you. Submitting a letter of interest now, helps us build a strong bench of engaged members ready to lead, collaborate, and help shape SERCA's future.
To express your interest or learn more about ways to get involved, please contact: president@sercaconservation.org
Thank you for being an essential part of the SERCA community. Together, we're building something extraordinary — and we can't wait to see what comes next.

With appreciation,

***The SERCA Board***

# HAPPY WINTER!

**Wishing all SERCA members joyful holidays and a bright New Year!**

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# JOIN US!

# SERCA ANNUAL MEETING 2026

# OUT-OF-THE-BOX!

## The Use of Non-Traditional Methods, Materials, and Practices in the Care and Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Join us from February 27th to March 1st, 2026 - Cherokee, North Carolina

The Southeastern Regional Conservation Association (SERCA) is thrilled to host our annual conference, taking place this year in the stunning Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina!

Attend presentations that explore a variety of innovative and thought-provoking approaches to conservation. This year's theme, Out-of-the-Box!, celebrates the bold, the experimental, and the unconventional—methods, materials, and practices that push beyond traditional models of care and preservation.

**Keynote Speaker: Laura Elliff Cruz, Head of Collections at the School for Advanced Research (SAR) Indian Arts Research Center (IARC). She will provide a virtual presentation on the Indigenous Collections Care (ICC) Guide. This framework honors Indigenous belief systems and practices, centering Tribal sovereignty and intellectual authority over cultural heritage.**

Presentations will also include the ones listed below to name a few. But stay tuned: more great talks are on the way!

**- Clays and Plant Leaves for Cleaning Paintings: Evaluating and Developing Bio-Based, Historically Inspired Methods for Oil Paintings at the Rijksmuseum – Presenter: Victoria Ward**

**- Live conservation, a non-traditional practice: Notes on art conservation under the public eye – Presenter: Luis Sexas, Objects Conservator**

**- Spin Doctor: A Case Study of the Conservation Treatment of a Damaged Globe – Presenter: Geneva Ikle, Paper Conservator**

Visit the SERCA Website for an updated schedule in the coming weeks!
Join us as we gather in the heart of the Appalachians to share knowledge, spark conversation, and reimagine the future of cultural heritage preservation.

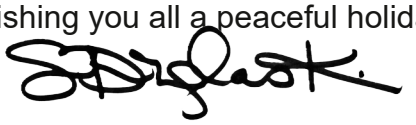
REGISTER HERE: https://sercaconservation.org/annual-meeting/
Email any questions at communications@sercaconservation.org

## From the Desk of the President *(continued from page 1)*

Support, collaboration, and connection within SERCA feel more vital than ever, and I'm excited by the potential to expand our network and strengthening ties across the region. In fact, I look forward to hosting a SERCA Happy Hour in Savannah soon. Can't wait to connect with the conservators of the Low Country!

As we wrap up this year—one filled with challenges, growth, and surprising turns—I hope you each find moments of rest, joy, and connection. May the holidays bring warmth to your home and calm to your days, and may the new year greet you with renewed energy, clarity, and opportunities that light your path. Wishing you all a peaceful holiday season and a bright, hopeful start to the year ahead.

Yours,



## SERCA Community Connections

**Bookbindery/Conservation Studio for Sale in Beaufort, South Carolina**

Price: $8.400 (entire bindery as one lot), Well-cared-for and in great shape.

For details contact Teri Lynn, herbertL@musc.edu

Ingento floor paper cutter, Canterbury Cathedral Harris & Sons board chopper, Lying press/tub with ebony track, Standing press, 2 nipping presses, Bench press, Finishing press, Sewing presses, Type cabinet, Finishing stove, Sealector Teflon tacking iron, Lighting, Hand Tools, supplies, and much more.

Remember that our new section, SERCA Community Connections, is up and running. It is here to help us share opportunities, advice, and resources within our community. While we've launched the space, we haven't received too many contributions from members, and we'd love to hear from you! Do you have: A job or internship opening? A piece of equipment looking for a new home? Advice for early-career conservators? An upcoming workshop or funding tip? This is your space to connect Send your submissions or questions to newsletter@sercaconservation.org

## Membership

Membership Payments now available online via PayPal

Renewing your membership is now easier than ever—no more mailing checks! You can also register and pay for workshops online. Please remember to submit both the registration form and payment to complete your renewal. If you haven't renewed yet, take a moment to do so today—and feel free to share this with your colleagues!

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

## Serca Newsletter Archive

Explore our archive of past SERCA newsletters for valuable insights, case studies, and member contributions. Catch up on issues you may have missed!

https://sercaconservation.org/serca-newsletters/

Next issue: April 2026 Deadline for submissions: March 15, 2026

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# Polyester Folders, Protected Papers: A Studio Hack

Marianne Kelsey
*Paper Conservator at Kelsey Conservation*
kelseyconservation.com

Do you have a stockpile of Japanese tissue, sheets of Hollytex, Reemay, Evolon, or other two-dimensional materials that you struggle to keep organized and clean in your studio space? I would like to share an organizational trick that has made a huge difference for me in my studio.

I place my Japanese tissue in large Mylar folders, and label them accordingly. I have found than when I am searching through my flat files looking for a specific tissue, it is much easier to locate because of the transparencyof the polyester film and labelling. I also have a clear idea if I am running low on a particular material. In addition, it helps protect papers and tissues from getting folded or damaged as well! I prefer to use a 4 mil or heavier polyester film, and for my own purposes I have simply cut down oversize polyester film sleeves that are already welded together, so that there is only one weld along the back side of the sleeve (the side that will be located at the back of the flat file drawer). You could also tape two sheets of polyester film together with Tyvek tape or something similar to create a similar result, or potentially fold the polyester film in half. To label the folders, I use a black sharpie pen for simplicity, but you could also use a label printer to create adhesive labels.


I hope you enjoyed this tip! May it serve you well in your studio organization efforts!

# Repairing a Puncture: Oil on Primed Paper Laid on Canvas

Amparo Escolano Mena
*Senior Conservator at South Florida Art Conservation*
*sflac.net*

This case study, an artwork by Marino Marini presented a deceptively complex conservation challenge: a puncture roughly the size of a quarter. The artwork was mixed media—oil and ink on a paper support laid over canvas. To complicate matters further, the paper had a water-based ground layer. This multiple-layer construction—paint, ground, paper, fabric—complicates both structural and aesthetic treatment. Our goal was to restore the integrity of the surface while preserving the artist's original texture, sheen, and unvarnished finish.

The first hurdle was replicating the surface texture. We opted to use a silicone putty to create a mold of the surface. Traditional silicone

1. Silicone mold and acrilic putty

putties used for mold-making are often greasy and can leave residues that stain or alter the artwork. To avoid direct contact with the painted surface, we considered taking a texture impression from the reverse side of the canvas. While not identical to the painted paper surface, the fabric's weave offered a compatible base.

2. Un-molding

However, because the fabric had a very open weave, the obtained texture would have been too rough. To simulate the presence, density, and smoothness of the paper layer, we placed a sheet of glassine plastic over the canvas before applying the silicone. We allowed the mold to cure under weight, yielding a clean and reasonably accurate texture reference without compromising the artwork.

3. Texture obtained

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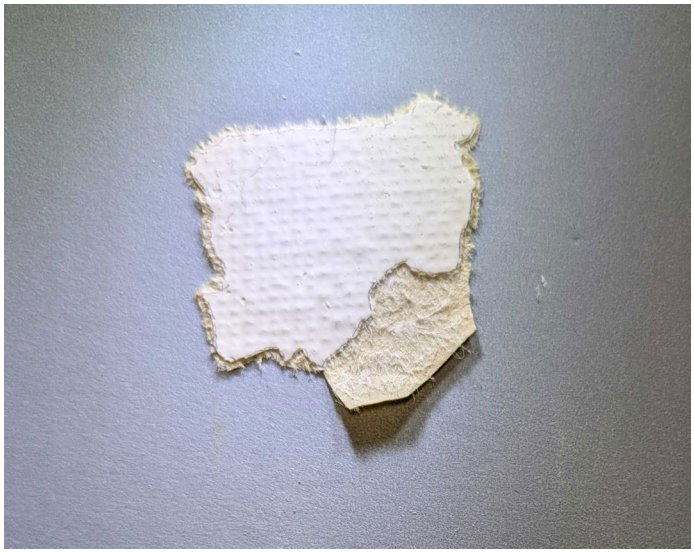


4. Insert trimming

Once the mold was ready, we used Flügger® acrylic putty to create the fill. This material was selected for its workability, adhesion, and compatibility with both paper and canvas substrates. Immediately after applying the putty into the silicone mold, we pressed a piece of thick Japanese paper over it. This step was critical: the Japanese paper acted as a stabilizing support, preventing the putty from

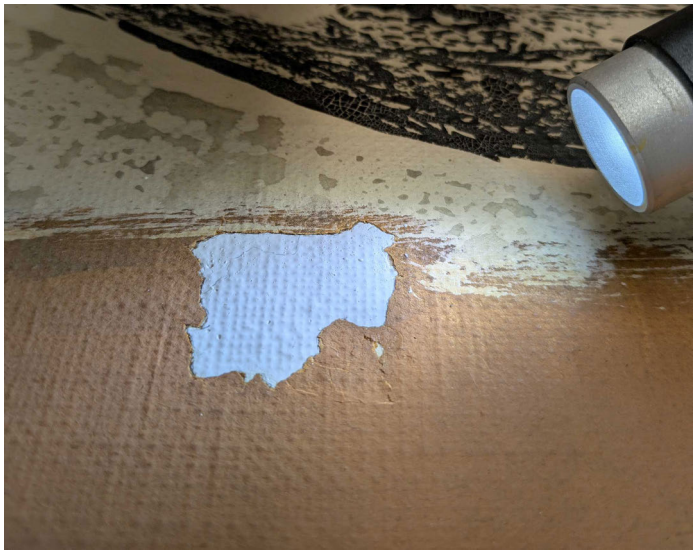
5. Insert and hole

crumbling during trimming and shaping. It also provided a subtle fibrous texture that helped bridge the visual gap between the fill and the surrounding original surface.

A one-millimeter margin of Japanese paper was left around the perimeter of the insert. This allowed for temporary attachment to the original canvas, facilitating precise alignment and

6. Insert placement

integration. Once the insert was shaped, positioned, and held on place with minute japanese paper strips and Methyl Cellulose, we reinforced it using PECAP® and BEVA®—archival materials known for their strength, flexibility, and reversibility. PECAP provided structural support, while BEVA served as the adhesive layer, ensuring long-term stability



7. Insert with raking ligth to show texture

without compromising future treatment options.
With the structural repair complete, and after filling the small gaps around the insert with the same acrylic putty, attention turned to the paint layer. The artwork was unvarnished, which meant any inpainting had to match not only the color and tone but also the surface reflectivity and texture. Achieving the soft matte finish of the original paint was particularly challenging. Traditional inpainting mediums tend to dry with a slight gloss or uneven sheen, which would stand out against the surrounding surface.
To address this, we incorporated glass spheres as a matting agent into the inpainting medium. These microspheres scatter light in a way that mimics the diffuse reflectivity of unvarnished paint, allowing us to fine-tune the surface finish. The result was a seamless integration of the repaired area—visually coherent, structurally sound, and respectful of the artist's original intent.
The entire process was guided by the ethical principles of minimal intervention, reversibility, and material compatibility.
This case exemplifies the kind of adaptive problem-solving that conservation demands. The layered nature of the artwork and the need for precise texture replication required a blend

8. Gap filling

of technical ingenuity and aesthetic judgment. By working from the reverse side, introducing intermediary materials, and customizing the fill and finish, we were able to restore the painting without compromising its integrity.
The final result is a repair where the puncture is no longer visible, the surface texture is consistent, and the paint layer retains its soft, unvarnished character. It's a reflection of the power of thoughtful conservation—where science, dexterity, and respect for the artist converge.

9. Treatment finished, raking light

10. Area damaged before treatment

8. Area damaged after treatment

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# Only You Can Prevent.....Workplace Burns

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*Mississippi Department of Archives and History*

Burns are extremely common - both in the home as well as in many work environments. Worldwide, about 10 million people experience burns, and about 180,000 die from them each year. Burns require special care, different from the basic first aid discussed in the last article. As many conservators, from all specialty groups, use hot tools and potentially volatile chemicals, it is important that a conservator is aware of methods to prevent burns and of the care of said burns.

There are five different categories of burns: thermal, electrical, chemical, friction, and sun. Thermal burns can be caused by touching any surface above 111°F. Thermal burns are the most common. Electrical burns are typically caused by loose and frayed cords. Chemical burns are caused by caustic chemicals. Friction burns are caused when skin rubs against a rough surface, generating heat and damaging skin. Friction burns are most common in road rashes and will not be discussed in this article. Sun burns are caused by prolonged exposure to sunlight.

The first health and safety step is always prevention. To prevent burns, it is advised that a conservator not wear loose clothing while working with hot tools and caustic chemicals. While working with hot tools, a conservator should ideally wear insulated gloves, and most importantly not touch said tool to test if that tool


is operational. All electrical cords should be examined periodically to ensure that the cords are functioning properly. All tools should be unplugged when not in use, as well. In the prevention of chemical burns, all chemicals should be properly labeled to avoid accidental chemical reactions. While working with caustic chemicals, conservators should wear the appropriate PPE, such as googles, gloves, and a lab coat. Finally, if a conservator is working outdoors, sunscreen and protective clothing should be worn.

However, accidents can always happen and burns may occur. Health professionals no longer use the terms first-, second-, or third-degree burns. Health professionals instead determine the severity of the burn and the depth

and size of the area burned. See the box for more information. Any type of burn, no matter the depth, can be an immediate health concern. Immediate attention should be sought if:

- The skin appears dry and leathery.
- The skin appears charred or has patches of white, brown or black.
- There is severe pain.
- The area is numb.
- The area is larger than 3 inches in diameter.
- The burns cover the hands, feet, face, genitals, any major joint or encircles an arm or leg.
- The burn begins to swell immediately.

**TYPES OF BURNS BY SEVERITY**

**Superficial** (similar to first-degree). These only damage the epidermis, the top layer of skin. These are minor and always self-treatable.

**Partial-thickness** (similar to second-degree). These go deeper, damaging the outer two layers of your skin. They can blister, cause color or texture changes more than just simple redness and be painful.

**Full-thickness** (similar to third-degree). These burns go through all skin layers and can reach all the way to the fatty tissue underneath the dermis. Full-thickness burns

As you are waiting for emergency services, you can do the following:

1.Remove jewelry, belts and other tight items. Burned areas swell quickly.

2.Cover the burn loosely with gauze or a clean cloth.

3.Raise the burned area above heart level if possible.

4.Watch for symptoms of shock, such as cool, clammy skin, weak pulse and shallow breathing.

**DO NOT**

- Don't use cold water to cool the burn.
- Don't try to remove clothing stuck in the burn.

**For minor burns, follow these first-aid guidelines:**

- If the burn is only superficial, cool the burn. Hold the area under cool — not cold — running water for about 10 minutes, or apply a cool, wet cloth until the pain eases.
- Remove rings or other tight items - quickly and gently, before the burned area swells.
- Apply lotion, such as aloe vera or cocoa butter. This helps prevent drying.
- Cover the burn with a clean, loose bandage.

**DO NOT**

- Break blisters. Blisters help protect against infection.
- Use butter to soothe the burn. Butter will cause infections.

Burns happen frequently within the workplace. Knowing how to prevent, or at least how to reduce the frequency of burns, will help keep the conservator pain and scar free, and not cut the length of a conservator's career. Knowing how to react in an emergency, knowing how to provide first aid to burns, will contribute to the above goal as well.

**For more information:**

American Red Cross, Burns: How To Help. https://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/resources/learn-first-aid/burns

Cleveland Clinic, Burns. https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/12063

Mayo Clinic, Burns: First aid. https://www.mayoclinic.org/first-aid/first-aid-burns/basics/art-20056649

University of South Florida OSHA Training, Preventing Workplace Burns. https://www.usfosha.com/osha-articles/workplace-burn-prevention/

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# Infrared Photography: An Essential Tool for Art Conservation

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*sflac.net*

Every digital camera sensor possesses an inherent ability that art conservators have learned to exploit: the capacity to detect infrared light. This capability, deliberately suppressed by manufacturers for consumer photography, becomes invaluable when examining paintings, manuscripts, and historical artifacts.

At their core, digital camera sensors—whether CCD or CMOS—are naturally sensitive to a broader spectrum of light than human eyes can perceive. This includes infrared wavelengths extending well beyond the visible spectrum of approximately 400-700 nanometers. The silicon-based photosites that comprise these sensors readily respond to infrared radiation, making them ideal for non-invasive conservation documentation.

However, camera manufacturers intentionally suppress this capability by installing an infrared blocking filter directly in front of the sensor. This hot mirror ensures color accuracy for conventional photography but eliminates a crucial diagnostic tool for art historians and conservators.

When professionally modified to remove this IR blocking filter, digital cameras reveal hidden layers of artistic history. Infrared imaging penetrates surface varnish and upper paint layers, exposing underdrawings, pentimenti—artist's changes of mind—and previous restorations invisible to the naked eye. Different pigments reflect infrared light distinctly, allowing conservators to identify materials, detect forgeries, and assess deterioration without touching the artwork.

Museums and conservation laboratories routinely convert dedicated cameras for this purpose. A modified digital camera can reveal whether a Renaissance master changed a figure's position mid-composition, showing the underlaying drawing. This transformation unlocks the sensor's true potential, turning consumer technology into a window through time, revealing the artist creative process.

# A Friendly Reminder!

A quick and friendly reminder that the SERCA Newsletter thrives on the voices and experiences of our members! Just like our website's blog, this space is meant to highlight your stories, insights, projects, questions, and discoveries. We'd love to feature more of your work in upcoming issues—whether it's a short piece, a photo, a tip, or a reflection. Every contribution helps strengthen our community. For those in private practice, don't forget to sign up for the Find a Conservator tool on the SERCA website. It really works—just last week, a client said they found us through the SERCA directory before even visiting our website. Moments like this show how valuable our collective presence can be.

We want SERCA to continue growing as a supportive, visible, and connected community. Your participation—sharing your expertise, submitting content, or keeping your directory listing updated—helps make that happen.If you've been on the fence about contributing, consider this your invitation. Your voice matters, and we'd be delighted to feature it!