

Conservators Prepare for Moving (but not Shaking)



Curator for Conservation Suzanne Davis applies cyclododecane bandages to a cracked ceramic vessel currently housed in the Kelsey basement.

Preparations for the move of the Kelsey collections to the Upjohn Exhibit Wing have been a true team effort. The Museum's curators worked hard early on to choose objects for their new exhibits so that we would have time to pack the collection, and the registrars conducted a collection-wide inventory and developed a moving plan. Claudia Chemello and I, the Museum's conservators, were charged with packing the collection and ensuring all objects were stable enough to be lifted and handled during the move.

When we began our work two years ago, we weren't sure who might be transferring objects to the new storage area in the Upjohn Wing. At any given time, we might have volunteers, students, or fine-art movers handling the Kelsey's artifacts. We had to make sure that even our most fragile items could survive the trip, and we knew that some portions of our collection would need significant help.

We started by identifying the objects that would need treatment in order to move. This was a daunting task because the Museum contains about 100,000 accessioned artifacts. To record the condition of each object quickly and easily, we created a criterion-anchored rating scale (CARS) condition survey. On our 1–5 scale, a ranking of 1 meant "Please help me now, or I will never make it!"; a 4 was, "I'm fine, I don't need any work"; a 5, "It's too late for me, so just move on."

The first artifacts to be surveyed were

those housed in the Kelsey's basement. Many of the ceramic vessels stored there contain water-soluble salts, and as a result they've suffered damage from the fluctuating environment. (The salts in the ceramic crystallize and solubilize as the ambient humidity changes, breaking the pot apart.) As we suspected, we found that many of these vessels would require treatment prior to the move.

The next items we looked at were the Museum's large and impressive collection of limestone funerary stelae. Although these objects have been housed in the Sensitive Artifact Facility and Environment (SAFE), many still have extensive condition problems.

When we had identified the objects most in need of treatment, we began to stabilize them. Although all of these objects would benefit from individual conservation, preparing them to move safely was our primary concern. For this reason, we chose to use a quick, if temporary, stabilization treatment.

The treatment we chose involves cyclododecane, a hydrocarbon wax that is used extensively in archaeological field conservation to lift fragile artifacts during excavation. The melted wax is applied by brush and allowed to cool and harden, rendering the previously fragile surface strong and robust. The most impressive characteristic of this wax is its ability to sublime, or evaporate, at room temperature. Following treatment, each object is carefully wrapped in plastic to prevent sublimation of the wax. Once the wax is no longer needed, following our move, for example, or when we are ready to perform a thorough conservation treatment, the object is simply unwrapped, and the wax is allowed to sublime.

In addition to the temporary conservation we performed, we also developed custom packing for different types of artifacts within our collection. Two particularly challenging materials to pack were glass and cartonnage. Broken and cracked glass objects were carefully wrapped and supported to prevent structural collapse. For the cartonnage mummy masks, we built protective, padded enclosures to keep the delicate, gilded masks from being crushed during transport.

Conservation's preparation of the collection for moving was ably assisted by Lorene Sterner. After two years of planning, preparation, and teamwork, we look forward to a safe, successful move.

Suzanne Davis

In Memoriam

It is with great sadness that I report the passing of Dr. James A. McLean, a long-time Associate of the Kelsey, a valued member of the Kelsey Associates Board (1987–1993), and part of the first Kelsey Museum docent class. Jim was not only an exceptional contributor to the Kelsey but an extraordinary individual. As a captain in the U.S. Army, he was stationed in Augsburg, Germany, during the Korean War, serving as chief of medical services for the 11th Field Hospital. After the war, he returned to Ann Arbor (where he had received his medical degree) and joined the faculty at the University of Michigan. Retiring in 1986 after thirty years of service, Jim turned to his long-time passion for archaeology. His timing was perfect since we were starting our first docent class in 1987. He was the only man in the group but seemed to enjoy that role. Indeed, we often kidded him about his "harem" at the Museum! He was, in addition, a great ambassador for the Museum and a tireless fundraiser.

Full of humor and an incredibly hard worker, Jim became a great docent and continued to give tours to school groups until he no longer could. Even after a stroke, he managed to come to events at the Museum and always stayed connected with us by phone, calling to talk about archaeology, interesting archaeological news in the papers, or his progress on various Kelsey projects. Jim was particularly interested in the ancient Near East and was one of the main creators of the Kelsey's Near Eastern Civilizations-in-a-Crate kit that travels to schools and other venues. We are now in the process of transferring his wonderful slide shows on the Near East into PowerPoint presentations, giving his work a new life for the digital age.

At one point Jim decided to clear out his many books on archaeology and very generously donated his collection to us. They are now part of the Kelsey's library.

I was touched to read in his obituary that he asked for donations to be sent to the Kelsey in his name. I know the Kelsey meant a lot to him, but he meant even more to us.

All of us on the staff who knew Jim miss his presence, but he left a part of himself here not only in the form of his books and the Near Eastern crate but in the wonderful memories we have of him. He will be fondly remembered.

Lauren Talalay