

Rachelle Wolfe - Penn Museum

This summer, I had the opportunity to attend a virtual internship with the Conservation Department at the Penn Museum under the supervision of Lynn Grant. The experience was fundamental for me because it gave me hands-on experience in a field that I only understood conceptually.

My internship was split into two parts: a project digitizing film and learning about actual conservation techniques and skills.

The digitization project involved digitizing archival 35mm color film from previous conservation projects that took place anywhere from the early 1970s to about 2001. For this project, I digitized about 900 images and recorded any data that was included on the slide mount. This data is important to the museum because it can be used for research and to learn more about the past treatment of objects. Before the digitization, these images were only available physically but now they will be uploaded into a database and can be readily accessible.

The second part of the internship was learning about conservation and involved weekly lectures which I attended on zoom. These lectures were presented by members of the Conservation Department and discussed various topics in the field of conservation such as monumental stone conservation or techniques for analysis. The opportunity to ask questions directly to conservators and to learn about their experiences in the field was an incredible learning experience. I was able to get to know the members of the department during these meetings and I received valuable career advice.

During my internship I also worked on my own conservation project where I was able to apply the conservation skills that I learned during the lectures. I received from my supervisor a broken ceramic vessel and was tasked with putting it back together, following the steps that would be required in a real conservation lab. This was a long process involving written and photo documentation, figuring out how the pieces fit back together, allowing adhesive to dry, adjusting as necessary, and cleaning away extra adhesive. This was my favorite project because it was so hands-on and allowed me to practice skills that I will use in the future.

I am very grateful for the funding that made this internship possible. This experience has made me confident in my decision to pursue a career in Conservation and I feel prepared to navigate my next steps after graduation!

