

# Discover More

Welcome to our Summer term 2017 newsletter. As the final term of the academic year draws to a close, we are celebrating the achievements of this year's graduating students and we wish them well as they embark on careers as artists, makers and conservators. We hope the skills they have honed during their time here will have a great impact on the cultural world.

We also say a fond farewell to two conservation tutors. Matthew Read moves from the Clocks conservation programme to lead a new initiative at the Bowes Museum in County Durham and Jon Privett is moving on from the Metal workshop to run his own bronze foundry in Somerset. We thank both of them for their long support of conservation students and look forward to introducing their successors in the new academic year.

Have a wonderful summer,  
**Alex Barron**



## Conservation in action

At the end of each academic year, Conservation students at West Dean College have the opportunity to spend two weeks working on live 'Preventative Conservation' projects. Facing similar challenges to other Historic Houses, West Dean College is uniquely positioned to offer students a rare opportunity to develop their professional portfolios and work with the Collections team to prevent the deterioration of our own collection. Projects include environmental monitoring, pest control, implementing appropriate storage, conducting inventories, and preparing items for display. This opportunity to implement direct changes that safeguard our cultural heritage is invaluable both to the student and the College.

One of this year's projects saw two students, James Davis and Natalia Maliga, working alongside Collections staff to assess and improve storage of a selection of items from the College collection dating from the 18th-21st century. Highlights of the selected works include a set of theatre designs by Eugène Berman, photographs by Cecil Beaton, portfolios of work by Bernard Sanders and John Floyd Morris and a telegram from King Edward VII congratulating Evelyn and William James on the birth of their son, Edward, and agreeing to be his Godfather.

James and Natalia checked the works against the College inventory and made some exciting new discoveries. The works were cleaned and any out-dated storage folders were replaced with



conservation-grade boxes. The students made recommendations for conservation work - much of which will be carried out by next year's cohort.

## We caught up with the students to find out more about the project

Sitting at the benches we focus on one object. This project let us be part of the entire spectrum of conservation; looking at the environment the objects were kept in, cleaning, cataloguing and rehousing. This is what it feels like to work in a live house and is more dynamic.

We learned that you need to be flexible when you begin working on a project. Every object requires an open mind and conscious thought as things change all the time. We were given free rein to make recommendations but had the support of the Collections Team.

# Spotlight on...

## Daniela Corda (MA Conservation of Clocks and Related Objects)

In my final year show at the Glasgow School of Art, I made a collection of jewellery inspired and influenced by time and time-telling objects. I was interested in the philosophy of time, early instruments, symbols and the movement of time pieces. I think I was looking for something more technically challenging than jewellery alone was giving me.

I heard about West Dean College from another student on my jewellery course so in 2014 I came and did a short clock making course with Matthew Read. I was really inspired by everything we did that week, and wanted to continue to learn not only about how to make clocks but also how to conserve them, particularly the ethical decisions a conservator needs to make.

The first object I worked on here was a trial by fire. I was learning the language and specific techniques of clock conservation as I went. I look back now and the mistakes I made and the lessons I learned on that one object have influenced me hugely with each further object that has come across my work bench.

I'm always drawn to the underdog so when we went to survey the Finter's Carousel on display at the Guildford Museum. I wasn't sure I would do an MA until the carousel inspired me. I was drawn to its complex make-up of material and conceptual challenges. It is a handmade carousel created by a hobbyist using whatever materials he had to hand. While it's not a precision object it is still a record of the past and highlights the ingenuity of the maker. It deserves to be conserved as much as a high end antiquarian clock would. However, because it falls outside of any one



Daniela Corda. Photograph by Christopher Ison ©

specialism there are no pre-determined professional conservation guidelines to advise on its treatment; so I have been exploring a new approach to drive the superstructure/carousel remotely and safely. It's a multimedia mishmash!

The carousel doesn't have the springs, hands or weights that you would find in a clock, but as with a clock the dynamic, mechanical nature of it means there are similarities in the way its function and materials degrade over time. There is a duality to these dynamic objects - between working as they are designed to and the wear that happens while they are being used - the way the object sacrifices itself to work.

I have been very lucky to be encouraged to follow the project through to completion and base my MA dissertation on my research. I've used the carousel as a launch pad to look at wider approaches to conserving dynamic objects and exploring non-traditional, innovative conservation methods, which in this case means programmable microcontrollers.

Without the generosity of the funders who supported me with scholarships and bursaries over the last two years, I would not have been able to embark on this course, or devote myself fully to my studies. Funding motivates you because people have chosen to support you, giving you a chance to succeed. That they believe in you is a really encouraging thought.



Image courtesy of Guildford Heritage Services.

## Celebrating the Class of 2017

112 students have graduated from the class of 2017 with qualifications in historic object conservation, historic craft practices and visual arts. The culmination of their hard work was celebrated through our formal graduation and prize-giving ceremonies.

Industry experts, funders, friends and family were able to visit the student end of year exhibitions which included items worked on and curated by Conservation students, hand-crafted items from furniture, clocks, metalwork and musical instrument makers, and the visual arts students end of year show, *Critical Paths*. This show was also exhibited at London's Espacio Gallery in July.



Critical Paths exhibition 2017.  
Photograph by Christopher Ison ©

18 prizes were awarded this year. Sarah Cliff was awarded the University of Sussex Vice Chancellors Prize for her "consistent and challenging work" demonstrated during her Master of Fine Arts.

The Trustees' Prize for Creative Arts awarded to Laura Luna Castillo for her "witty and original work". Laura's art work explores dimensions of time and memory through the transformation of everyday objects.

The Trustees awarded their Prize for Craft Practice to Dale Sardeson, studying historic craft practices, clocks, for his "coherence in integrating professional practice, historic research and bench craft practice."

Michelle Kirk was the recipient of the Trustees' Prize for Conservation for her "complex restoration of a set of 19th century torchers". Michelle begins work as a furniture conservator at Windsor Castle later this summer.

We thank all our supporters who awarded student prizes, and wish graduating students every success in their future careers as artists, conservators and makers.



## My life in conservation

Since secondary school Edward Cheese has been repairing objects. At the age of 14 he was restoring a player-piano - it's a keen interest he continues to this day. He was studying for a PhD in English and American poetry at Durham University when he realised he didn't want a career in academia.

“

Although my postgraduate study suggested an academic career I realised I had a deep need to incorporate my long-standing interest in hands-on craft and repair work into my working life. I'm really interested in how you can combine academic knowledge with the practice of doing the work. It was this that drove me to come and study at West Dean College.”

Having completed the Post Graduate Diploma in Conservation-Restoration of Books and Library Materials in 2006, he went to work at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Edward is now Conservator of Manuscripts and Printed Books (Assistant Keeper), at The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. It houses one of the finest museum collections of illuminated manuscripts in the world, second only to the Vatican Museum. The Fitzwilliam Museum also contains significant collections of fine and early printed books alongside important collections of music manuscripts and literary archives. Edward's role combines work for the Museum and for Trinity College where he spends half his time working for the Wren Library on their collection of rare books and medieval manuscripts.



Resewing Fitzwilliam MS 251, which Edward conserved and rebound for the Museum's bicentenary exhibition, COLOUR, in 2016.

“

The greatest thing is having the opportunity to really get to know some extraordinary manuscripts through conservation work, such as the 8th century Pauline Epistles. It's a privilege to work on such extraordinary items. I also do outreach and teach students in the University and members of the public. I really enjoy being able to share my knowledge.”

Today, Edward continues to be involved with West Dean College in many ways; he is an external examiner for the Books Conservation programme, a long-term supporter of the student bursary fund and he has pledged a gift in his Will to support the education of a future conservator.

“

It's really important to me that I give something back. I was helped so much through the generous support of funders and private individuals that it's important I can do the same for others. Even a small contribution makes a big difference. And if we all did that the result would be phenomenal!”

## Inspiration and installations

As part of the West Dean Arts & Craft Festival in June, five works by Visual Arts students were installed in rooms around West Dean House. Guests were drawn into one room by a kinetic sound installation created by Laura Luna Castillo in collaboration with Clocks conservation student, Jonathan Turner Bishop. Using a combination of motion sensors, programmable electronics, brass mechanisms and wooden cuckoo bellows the pair created an enchanting experience using the guest's movement through the room to trigger the bellows.

Alison Baxter, who heads our short course programme, used the Edward James Archive to delve into the life of Evelyn James, Edward's mother, as part of her own MA studies. Using letters and newspaper cuttings Alison discovered hidden depths to a woman most famed for asking nanny to send "the child that goes best with my blue dress" when preparing to go to church. Alison created an ephemeral installation using thread and lace in The White Room, Evelyn's bedroom, to express the fragments of memories left to us about a woman who was an actress, hostess and socialite as well as wife and mother.



Asylum installation by Laura Luna Castillo and Jonathan Turner-Bishop. Photograph by Christopher Ison ©



Noah Smutz. Photograph by Christopher Ison ©

## Alumni – where are they now

**Alessandro Sidoti** – Conservation of Books and Library Materials 1996-98. Alessandro is a book conservator for the National Library of Florence. It is the largest library in Italy and houses approximately 6,000,000 printed volumes, not to mention pamphlets, manuscripts and other texts – keeping Alessandro very busy!

**Emma Norris** – Conservation of Ceramics and Related Materials 1998-2000. Emma is an object conservator for Canterbury Cathedral working across their collection, in particular preparing items for exhibition or loan to other organisations.

**Noah Smutz** - Conservation of Books and Library Materials, 2013-15. Noah is a conservator for the Smithsonian Libraries; His recent projects include illustrated books on anthropology, natural sciences, history of science and technology. He is the designated conservator for their adopt-a-book programme, allowing members of the public to help preserve - risk books in their collection.

**Janet Wilson** – Conservation of Ceramics and Related Materials 2007-08. Janet is Head of Ceramic Conservation at National Museums Liverpool. Their collection includes a large number of Wedgwood jasperware pieces which belonged to Charles Darwin.

## Supporting skills development in the arts

Newly published Government data reports that half of graduates from creative arts and design courses make an average of just £20,000 five years after graduation. This makes it difficult for students to invest in developing their skills if it means accruing debt that they will struggle to repay on graduation. As a result, it is increasingly important for education providers to offer alternative solutions for students.

Scholarships and bursaries can be a lifeline for students which bridge a sometimes insurmountable gap. So too, are more flexible approaches to study. At West Dean College, courses including the Foundation Degree in Art and Design, the new Diploma in Art and Contemporary Craft and MAs in Collections Care and Management, and Creative Writing offer part-time study options which enable students to combine work and study commitments.

For Joanna, 24, who is due to complete the West Dean College Foundation Degree in Art and Design (FDAD) this Summer, this combination was vital.

“Thanks to the bursary I received for the FDAD programme my whole outlook and direction as an artist has changed and now anything is possible.

I studied Art History with the Open University but realised I wanted a more hands-on career as a working artist. But



Joanna Biggs working on Swept Away

my lack of knowledge was restrictive and I needed something to breathe new life into my work.

I got a place on the FDAD programme at West Dean College. It's just fantastic and there isn't a course like it at any other institution. The short course format means I can focus on different skills, techniques and areas of interest that I want to incorporate into my art.

Last year I took a course with Caroline Wendling. We walked and sketched the West Dean landscape, later drawing from memory how it made us feel. Caroline encouraged me to create bigger pictures than I was used to. The size was daunting

but I realised the space gave me much more freedom. I believe the final picture I drew on her course is one of the best I've done. Without her support and encouragement I would never have tried it.

I'll complete the FDAD in July. I have a room at home in Cornwall where I can work but I'd really like to find a studio and somewhere to exhibit my work. My aim is to be a working artist and the FDAD has given me choice in what I do next.”

If you would like to make a donation to the Edward James Foundation scholarship and bursary fund, please talk to any member of the team (details below) or visit [westdean.org/donate](http://westdean.org/donate)

## Restoring our Victorian Glasshouses



We are delighted that renovation has started on the Nectarine and Late Vinery glasshouses in the fruit garden and we expect the work to be completed by the end of summer. If you're visiting, come and

admire the difference that has been made possible thanks to the wonderful support of our donors. We hope there will also be time to renovate the Fern glasshouse next to the potting shed and the Gardens Office before the weather turns.

You'll also notice ongoing maintenance and painting of some of the other glasshouses in our extensive collection during the summer months. These repairs are vital for their preservation but we couldn't do it without your support - so thank you very much. We hope to secure enough funding to renovate the Peach and Tomato glasshouses in 2018.



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