



# QUESTIONS

for Jessica Silverman

**Education:** Education: M.S., Winterthur / University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation, Winterthur, DE; B.A., Art History and Chemistry Minor with a certificate in Museum Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL / **Years at CCAHA:** 8

## How did you get into conservation?

I was taking a course in Art History for my Associate's degree in Fine Art, and a professor spoke about the conservation of the Sistine Chapel ceiling. I was mesmerized by the combination of fine art, history, science, and ethics.

## How did you start at CCAHA? What were some of your first projects?

I started as a post-graduate fellow in 2008. One of my first treatment projects was a William Penn indenture on parchment—an entirely different beast than paper, pun intended! I also worked on a series of Louis Kahn architectural drawings from the University of Pennsylvania, French Nouveau posters belonging to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and fine art from private collections—an Audubon print, a Renoir print, and a 19th-century Micah Williams pastel. Those are just some of the treatments from my first year. I also helped with a condition survey of manuscripts from the Sol Feinstone Collection of the David Library of the American Revolution. My boxes for the survey contained the correspondence of John Adams, including letters to his wife, Abigail. I love how he signed letters to her, "I am with all tenderness yours," ...sigh.

## You also serve as a Preservation Consultant. Can you speak a little about that work?

Sure. Partway through my first fellowship year, I did a survey with CCAHA's Preservation Services Office (PSO). We learned about preventive conservation during graduate school but seeing the impact that could be made by consulting with institutions and finding out that I still had much to learn about preservation was eye-opening. When I was hired as a permanent staff member, I was hired with the idea that I'd split my time between PSO and the lab. For many years I was doing both—I wrote some emergency preparedness plans, co-taught workshops, did surveys and consultation as well as paper conservation work.

## What are some of your favorite projects from your time at CCAHA?

A 16th-century Persian miniature that I worked on always stands out—the detail on them is amazing. We are working on a large collection of stunning 19th-century watercolors right now for a museum. Through our observations, we're identifying some of the artist's techniques and gathering information about the papers he used through noting watermarks in the papers. We've been sharing what we're finding with the curator and adding to the institution's knowledge of their collection. I've also had the opportunity to work on some beautiful Pennsylvania-German frakturs, works by Andrew Wyeth, a lottery ticket that was signed by George Washington,

even a letter from a young attorney named Thomas Jefferson to a College of William & Mary classmate, talking about girls that he fancied! I have to say some of the consulting work I've done has been the most exciting though. It's hard to beat actually touching Francis Scott Key's "Star-Spangled Banner" manuscript.

## What is the most challenging project you've done at CCAHA?

I once did a lead white conversion on a privately-owned gouache painting. This particular pigment, lead carbonate, can turn black when exposed to pollutants in the environment. We can't actually revert the compound back to lead carbonate but we can convert it to another compound, lead sulfate, which also appears white. Finding a method that would deliver the chemical I was using without dissolving the paint was particularly complicated for this piece.

## How have your responsibilities changed since becoming the lab's Senior Paper Conservator?

Now that I'm Senior Paper Conservator, I supervise the postgraduate Fellows and help the Director of Conservation keep everything moving in the paper section of the lab. Working with the Fellows is rewarding. They ask such insightful questions and keep us on our toes by bringing new developments in the field into our lab.

—AMY HEUER