

Saving Pennsylvania's Past

When you care about things, you naturally want to protect them.

For instance, when you visit the National Archives in Washington, D.C. and see the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, you immediately know that these documents are valued. The investment in preservation attests to their importance. You gaze at the nation's founding documents in their encasements of pure titanium, high-strength tempered float glass, and specially treated aluminum, looking across a space filled with argon, an inert gas conducive for long-term preservation. The documents have received full conservation treatment, temperature and humidity are tightly controlled, and security is state-of-the-art. Everything about their presentation proclaims: We care about these documents.

But what about all the other great American treasures, stored at historic sites, museums, archives, and libraries all across the country? These items tell the stories of the settling of states and communities; the rise of great businesses and industries; the compelling lives of scientists, artists, lawmakers, entertainers, and sports figures; and the upheavals of war and violence. How safe are these treasures?

This question was posed by Heritage Preservation, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the cultural heritage of the United States. In partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), Heritage Preservation surveyed the nation's collecting institutions to determine the condition, ongoing care, and security of their collection items. The answers they received raised serious concerns. Heritage Preservation's survey analysis and report, published in 2005 as *A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America's Collections*, concluded that millions of historic objects in collections were in urgent need of conservation treatment; many objects at collecting institutions had experienced damage due to improper storage; many collecting institutions did not have an emergency plan that addressed the safety of collections; and many collecting institutions did not regularly allocate funds in their annual budget for preservation or conservation.

The objects of the past are fragile. Paper is vulnerable to destruction by fire and water. Exposure to light and humidity can alter an object's appearance beyond recognition. Glass shatters and pottery breaks. Mold spores are invisible to us but they are in the air, waiting to settle on an object and grow if the conditions are right. Mice and other vermin will scout out collections with enthusiasm.

While few objects will ever receive the level of preservation employed at the National Archives, much can be done to help ensure long-term preservation simply through thoughtful planning and judicious investments in time and money.

Building upon the findings of *The Heritage Health Index Report*, IMLS launched the *Connecting to Collections* initiative in 2007. During the past four years, CCAHA has

been privileged to lead or participate in complex preservation planning projects in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, West Virginia, and Delaware through this program.

This year, the preservation strategy developed in Pennsylvania has received follow-up funding from IMLS so that a wide range of preservation activities can be implemented. CCAHA is serving as the lead agency, responsible for organizing and delivering a multi-faceted program of education, training, and cultural promotion. To accomplish this work over the next few years, CCAHA will be working with three partners: the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, the Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations, and LYRASIS, as well as a task force comprised of leaders from some of Pennsylvania's most notable collecting institutions.

Save Pennsylvania's Past (the official name of the Pennsylvania program) will focus on basic collections care training needs, environmental management, disaster planning, preservation resource building, and fundraising and marketing support. The marketing firm Leapfrog Advancement Services has been engaged to develop ways to promote awareness of the collection care needs of Pennsylvania's museums, libraries, archives, and historic sites. P'unk Ave, a web design and development team, will assist with the development of a new Pennsylvania Preservation Resource clearinghouse section to be located on the CCAHA website. This website section will include information on: assistance for preservation planning, disaster planning, and fundraising; resources for disaster planning, storage equipment, storage facilities, collections care, and educational programs in preservation; listings of collections care professionals and public and private funding sources; and links to other respected websites and resources.

And then there are the educational programs: From 2011 through 2013, leading preservation professionals from CCAHA, LYRASIS, and other institutions will fan out through the state to bring a total of 56 full-day educational programs to the state's eight distinct regions. Plus, CCAHA will develop two state-wide conferences, with the first addressing disaster planning issues (planned for the Harrisburg area in spring 2012) and the second focused on environmental management.

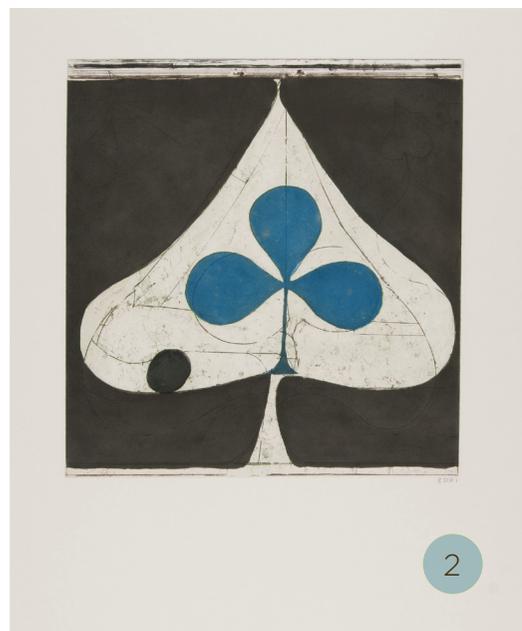
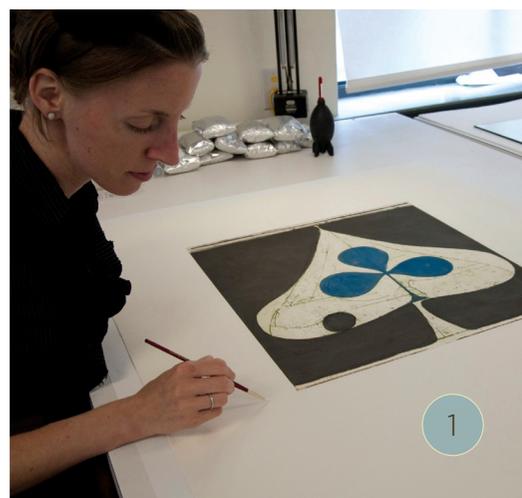
Many important preservation resources have been severely cut back over the past few years. Institutions are struggling, and collections remain at risk. The nationwide *Connecting to Collections* initiative of IMLS represents a needed counterbalancing force, firmly attesting to the importance of preserving our country's past. CCAHA's ambitious *Save Pennsylvania's Past* program is at the forefront of this initiative, driven by a commitment to preserve historic collections that are truly vast in scope, richness, and diversity.

—LEE PRICE

In the Lab

Richard Diebenkorn (1922–1993), one of the most important American painters in the postwar era, surprised critics in 1981 with a group of works on paper called *Clubs and Spades*. Now highly valued, these works were a brief and unexpected change in direction for the artist when first shown.

Two *Clubs and Spades* works—aquatint, spit bite, and soft ground etchings titled *Blue Club* and *Tri-Color II*—recently arrived at CCAHA from a private collection. Conservator Samantha Sheesley removed mold from the prints' surfaces and reduced dirt on the back and non-printed areas of the front of each. She humidified the prints and immersed them in baths to reduce discoloration, then locally reduced stains left by the mold using dilute bleach.



1 / Conservator Samantha Sheesley locally reducing stains on Richard Diebenkorn's *Blue Club* with a dilute chemical bleach solution 2 / *Blue Club*, after treatment