

An Informal REVIEW
of the
THIRD INTERNATIONAL MOUNTMAKING FORUM
at the
Field Museum, Chicago, IL
April 26-27, 2012

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The Third International Mountmaking Forum was generously hosted by the staff at the Field Museum in Chicago. Sincere thanks go to Pam Gaible and all the staff and volunteers there for being willing to take this on and to host so graciously. I know how much effort goes into pulling off an event like this and they did a superb job. The scale and elegance of the James Simpson Theater was perfect for the first day presentations, and the interesting posters and workshop tours offered on the second day were informative and thought provoking. The area around the Field offered a great range of restaurants and beautiful exhibits to visit in our off hours. Chicago was also a great central location for the Forum, rounding out our previous West and East Coast representations.

It had been my intention to write this review immediately upon my return from Chicago at the end of April. The experience, as with the previous two Forums, had been exhilarating and informative, so I was excited to share everything right away. However, a challenging work deadline delayed that intention. Instead of finding time to write about the Forum, I found myself “reviewing in practice” some of the new materials and techniques that had been picked up at this and previous Forums. The project offered opportunities to experiment with the adjustable joints introduced by Jim William’s poster session and the Fosshape introduced by Marla Miles and Cynthia Amneus in 2010. This brought the real value of these Forums home. My opinion is that a conference is only as useful as the practical information one can incorporate once back at work. If we use that criterion to judge the Chicago Forum, in my experience, it was worth its weight in gold (or should I say, brass?).

Here is the list of the presenters and tours that were offered:

PRESENTERS

Welcome Remarks

John McCarter, President, Field Museum, Chicago, IL

Mountmaking at the Field Museum

Pam Gaible, Mountmaker & Shop Supervisor, Field Museum, Chicago

Display and Storage Material Testing at the Field Museum

Ruth Norton, Chief Conservator, Field Museum, Chicago, IL

Solutions and Challenges in Complex Design & Fabrication for Two Large Sculptures

Keith Conway, Exhibit Specialist - Mountmaker, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian, Washington, DC

Mountmaking for the Fossil Called "SUE"

Phil Fraley, Mountmaker and Owner, Phil Fraley Productions, NJ

Exploring Computer Modeling Analysis for Seismic Mount Designs

BJ Farrar, Mountmaker, Getty Villa, Los Angeles, CA

A Mount for Lyuba (40,000 yr. old baby mammoth) for the Mammoth and Mastodon Exhibit at the Field Museum

Earl Lock, Mountmaker, Earl Lock Inc., Chicago, IL

Using Vivak for Garment Mounts

Paul Singdahlsen, Museum Exhibit Specialist, & private freelance Mountmaker, Dept. of Cultural Affairs, State of New Mexico, Santa Fe, NM

Safeguarding Art Work: Mount Solutions for Unusual Objects Made from Experimental Materials

Mark Mitton, Mountmaker, J. Paul Getty Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA

Canyon Wall Case at the Natural History Museum of Utah

Bill Thomas, Exhibit Preparator, Natural History Museum of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT

POSTER PRESENTERS

Instrumentation Applications for Seismic Mountmaking

McKenzie Lowry, Mountmaker, J. Paul Getty Villa, Los Angeles, CA

Rib Form for Maori Cloaks

Penny Angrick, Mountmaker, Tepapa Museum, Wellington, NZ

Building Conservation Grade Support Systems for Long-Term Fossil Vertebrate Storage

Arianna Bernucci, Conservator, Paleontology Dept., Natural History Museum, London, UK, in collaboration with Team Allington (Jones, McKibbin, Graham, & Collins)

Vanishing Act: Mount Solutions for Jewelry and Fashion Accessories at the Cincinnati Art Museum

Kim Flora, Preparator, Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, OH

Developing a Strategy for Mounting a Large Quantity of Unframed 2-D Artwork

Denise Fordham, Chief Mountmaker, Fordham & Associates, San Francisco, CA;

Ben Peters, Chief Preparator, The Walt Disney Family Museum, San Francisco, CA

Cutting Character: Research into Innovative Mannequin Costume Supports in Collaboration with the Royal College of Art Rapid Form Department

Sam Gatley, Textile Display Specialist, Victory & Albert Museum, London, UK

Pitching a 19th Century Persian Pleasure Tent for Photographic Purposes

Deanna Hovey, Mountmaker, St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO, in collaboration with Zoe Perkins, Conservator, St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO

Creating a Dissection Mount and Bone Jig

Tyler Keilor, Fossil Preparator & Paleo Artist, University of Chicago, Fossil Laboratory, Chicago, IL

Using Argentium Silver to Fabricate Small Mounts

Ann Prazer, Mountmaker, Field Museum, Chicago, IL

The Process of Changing a Mount on a 2,000lb Marble Statue

Bill Skodji, Exhibit Designer/Senior Preparator, & **Brian Stieler**, Senior Preparator, Minneapolis Institute for the Arts, Minneapolis, MN

Dancing Pants! Articulated Mannequins (Legs only) for Katharine Hepburn Costumes

Jim Williams, Exhibit Designer/Preparator, Kent State University Museum, Kent, OH

Display of Chavin Culture Painted Textile with Pictorial Infill of Deterioration

Joyce Hulbert, Conservator, Berkeley, CA, in collaboration with the Collections and Conservation staff at San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles, San Jose, CA

TOURS

The Field Museum – behind the scenes in the Exhibit Department

The Adler's Webster Institute for the History of Astronomy

The abstracts for these presentations are attached to this site if you would like more detail. I haven't met a mountmaker yet who wasn't interested in helping solve a problem or share a solution, so I assume you may contact any of the presenters with specific questions about their topic.

The natural history bent that was totally appropriate to this venue was really informative and useful across mountmaking disciplines. While I may or may not ever need to actually mount a 40,000 year old baby mammoth, I very likely may need to incorporate the cool strapping process that Earl Lock explained in his talk about how Lyuba was mounted. While I am not making mounts for many gems these days, the use of Argentium Silver discussed in Ann Prazer's poster session was intriguing and I am glad to add it to my bag of tricks for mounting smaller objects. While I hope (please!) that I am never faced with

the challenge of mounting 600 objects to a 3-story high glass case, the systems and solutions shared by Bill Thomas from the team at the Utah Natural History Museum were inspiring. Though I likely never will get my hands on the largest T. rex fossil ever discovered, Phil Fraley's description of the process of mounting "Sue" at the Field Museum was full of ingenious solutions. And although Pam Gaible's talk about the mountmaking process at the Field was inspiring in itself, I will definitely be stealing the idea for the ingenious Q-tip contour gage that someone on her team crafted.

It is impossible for me to resist comparing the three Forums to date – the 2008 inaugural Forum hosted by the Getty Villa and the Getty Center; the 2010 Forum hosted by the Smithsonian Institution and this one at the Field Museum. Although there were differences to each Forum, guided by the hosting institution's collection, recent projects or staff interests, there were also some interesting similarities in general topics. Cross-Forum similarities included talks pertaining to seismic mounts, mannequin-making, and large object challenges.

The fact that general families of interest repeat does not mean the presentations this year felt repetitive or stale. On the contrary, I feel that this repetition indicates a continuing need in our profession to approach these problems and to look deeper for solutions. Indeed, new and interesting ideas in all three of these subjects were presented at this conference. The latest trends on seismic mount design, computer modeling and instrumentation were approachably conveyed in both presentations by BJ Farrar and McKenzie Lowry from the Getty Villa. Thought provoking mannequin-making solutions and materials were shared in Paul Singdahlsen's presentation on the use of Vivak, as well as in the Sam Gatley's description of the collaboration between the V&A and the Royal College of Art to create experimental laser cut corrugated costume supports. The posters from Penny Angrick on an adaptable system of mounting for the Maori cloaks at the Te Papa Museum and from Jim Williams on his discovery of and experimentation with the adjustable joints that were used in Katharine Hepburn mannequins at the Kent State University Museum both showed interesting and very different methods of adjustability within a mannequin form. In addition to the previously mentioned large object mount solutions discussed by Phil Fraley and Earl Lock, some thoughtful and practical ideas were brought to us in Keith Conway's presentation on the evolution of the mounts for two concrete sculptures at the National Museum of African Art, Bill Skodji and Brian Stieler's poster about their plans to change a mount to a new orientation for a 2000 lb sculpture and Mark Mitton's description of several brilliant solutions for tricky contemporary art sculptures at the Getty Center.

There were several posters that introduced unique topics as well: Arianna Bernucci, from the Natural History Museum, London shared tips on storage mounting techniques. Berkeley conservator Joyce Hulbert shared her techniques for preparing a completely reversible display mount for an extremely fragile painted textile. Kim Flora's poster shared interesting and subtle jewelry mount solutions from the Cincinnati Art Museum and an efficient and cost-effective mounting strategy for two-dimensional artifacts was introduced in Denise Fordham and Ben Peters' poster. Deanna Hovey brought the subject of mountmaking for photography into the conversation with her presentation on pitching

several Persian Pleasure Tents. Tyler Keilor, from the University of Chicago, created an ingenious mounting technique for the purposes of dissection using the epoxy and wire materials common to most mountmakers.

While it's obvious that I feel that this was an enormously successful event, there is always room for improvement. It was clear at this Forum, as at earlier ones, that there are specific families of mountmaking interest that could benefit from smaller breakout groups to allow conversations to continue in depth. Panel or round table discussions would be a welcome addition in future Forums. For example, during the question period that followed Ruth Norton's talk about materials testing at the Field, it was clear that many in this field were hungry for information on testing and safe materials and would have benefitted from some time just discussing that topic. Of course, the challenge of adding this separate component is to schedule in such a way that those interested in more than one topic can participate in as many discussions as possible. Personally, since I often found inspiration where I least expected it, I wouldn't have wanted to miss anything that I heard at this event!

Another huge value of the Mountmaking Forum remains the social aspect – the face to face interaction with colleagues who speak the same “language” and are facing similar work challenges. Just getting out of the shop and meeting people who have approached similar work in different ways and have experimented with different tools and materials is invaluable. The number of now “old” friends that I have met and look forward to seeing at these Forums is as valuable to my work as to my sanity. As Jamie Hascall said at the first Forum, “It is nice to be in a place where everyone knows what a 4-40 screw is.”

Finally, I think it bears saying that this is just one mountmaker's humble view of the event. To the other several hundred of you out there who attended, please add your comments, impressions, criticisms, and favorites too! Are there experiences you had in Chicago (or any of the Forums) that have benefitted you or could benefit others now? Are there things you would like to see done differently next time? Do you have ideas for round table discussion topics or workshops? (A few that have come up already are: solutions for large scale objects, mountmaking for decorative arts or historic houses, mannequin making, seismic mitigation solutions, natural history collections, material choices/testing, book mounting, etc.) Let this be a living document – come out of the basement and let your voice be heard! I am sure that the hearty souls who decide to host the 2014 Forum will appreciate your input!

Shelly