



Art Conservation *and a sense of obligation*

Growing up with grandparents who were Holocaust survivors and in an engaged and practicing Jewish family, Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Margalit Schindler has developed a passion for Judaica and considers its preservation a sacred obligation. They have used that passion to guide their graduate education in art conservation.

Margalit took an important step at the end of their first year in deciding to specialize in preventive conservation, which focuses on the many complex issues, including the environment, pest management and emergency preparedness, involved in the protection and preservation of art and cultural heritage. To understand more fully what that might mean in relation to Judaica, this year Margalit prepared and distributed a survey to members of the Council of American Jewish Museums. The survey included questions on staffing, the types of items in the collection, materials, how the pieces in the collection were acquired and used, and the holiness status of those pieces.

From the organizations that responded to their survey, Margalit found that many Judaica collections are relatively small and lean heavily towards paper, photographs, and books, though they include all types of material. Judaica can be found not only in museums of all sizes but also in synagogues, Jewish Day Schools and with families not associated with any institution at all. Most respondents possessed one or more holy objects, which may have special handling considerations. Margalit was surprised to find that no respondents had a formal conservator on staff or anyone with traditional conservation training caring for these items, and almost half of the respondents had no preservation policies in place to guide them. Margalit also found that the highest priority for respondents was digitizing their collections, and that the most frequent concerns were how to find space to house them.

In response to these findings, Margalit has proposed several next steps. High on the list is involving rabbinical insight to focus on ethical issues, while other initiatives include supporting respondents while writing preservation policies, seeking resources to help with digital preservation and researching space-saving storage. Margalit has been buoyed by the survey results, which have given them much to consider as they look ahead to a third-year internship and completion of the program. Meanwhile, their passion for Judaica and commitment to its preservation promise to play an important role in their career as an art conservator.



ARTC Spotlight—May 2021

The University of Delaware's Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators who are well versed in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifact and archive collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top: A shelf in WUDPAC Fellow Margalit Schindler's childhood home, displaying heirloom prayer books and personal effects. Above: David Levine's (Margalit's Grandfather) Dachau prison uniform. Right: Most survey respondents confirm that their collections have at least one object with elevated holy status, and their collections are diverse in terms of material. Photos: M. Schindler, A. Rezny.

