



Art Conservation *and planning for disaster*

Disaster planning is critical for any cultural institution, and art conservators must sometimes prepare for the unthinkable. That was the focus of Winterthur/University of Delaware Art Conservation Program (WUDPAC) Fellow Ronel Namde’s summer internship at the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) in Beirut, Lebanon.

The AIF, a small foundation with a collection of 600,000 photographs taken in the Middle East, North Africa and of the Arab diaspora, is part of the Middle East Photograph Preservation Initiative (MEPPI), along with the University of Delaware, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Getty Conservation Institute. Ronel, a photograph major who lived abroad with her family as a child and speaks English and some French and Arabic, welcomed an internship in the Middle East. She spent most of her nine weeks at AIF drafting a disaster plan for the institution. To do this, she referred to the Australian Heritage Collection Council’s “Be Prepared, A Guideline for Small Museums for Writing A Disaster Preparedness Plan,” as well as existing plans from many other institutions as she determined what pieces would be most relevant for the AIF.

Ronel understood that without a plan, a person’s first instinct when a disaster strikes is to rush to the collection and grab as much as possible. The plan she drafted, working with a part-time art conservator, provides a blueprint for identifying both natural and man-made risks, planning for both immediate and short-term responses, prioritizing different parts of the collection, making decisions about salvage, and training, which is critical. The plan also contains an extensive section on how to prepare for, and react to, armed conflict. The completed draft will be reviewed by a representative from the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), which helps cultural institutions prevent and respond to natural and man-made disasters. Once the plan is finalized it will be offered to local and regional archives as an introduction to disaster planning for print and negative collections through a one-day workshop in Beirut.

Ronel’s internship also included working with a large collection of photographs from the archives of a now-defunct newspaper called Al-Yom, or “The Day.” Ronel dusted, arranged, and sorted the photographs by

size, and then created archival housing for them. She also worked with glass plate negative slides from the Anouchian collection. Many slides were stuck together, and Ronel helped separate, clean, and rehouse them.

Ronel is spending her third-year internship in Massachusetts at the Weissman Preservation Center at the Harvard Library.

ARTC Spotlight—October 2014

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

Top: WUDPAC Fellow Ronel Namde separating two adhered glass plate negatives. Above: Ronel examining a group of separated negatives. Bottom, left to right: Two negatives from the Arab Image Foundation collection, adhered together and after separation. (Images: Ralph Nashawaty and Ronel Namde.)

