

HARN PARTNER

Q&A
with...



ART CARE CONSERVATION

CONSERVATOR **KELLY O'NEILL**

How long have you been collaborating with the Harn?

Our conservation studio, specifically our director, Rustin Levenson, has been working with the Harn for many years. I had a fellowship at the Harn years ago in the Education Department while I was completing my masters at UF in Museum Studies but I believe the first time I worked with the Harn as a conservator was about 5 years ago, we were preparing the Kehinde Wiley *Dogon Couple* for travel.

How do your services contribute to the Harn achieving its mission and goals?

As the Harn's mission aims to inspire, educate and enrich people's lives through art with the engagement of the community, I feel we are helping take care of an integral part in this equation - the artwork itself. Without conservators to oversee and carry out the care of works of art, they would degrade and fall into disrepair. This includes assessment, stabilization, and full treatment. We are also available for advice on environmental conditions, loan/travel recommendations, and artist's materials.

Over the years, you have worked with the Harn on many projects – tell us about one that was unique, challenging or memorable for a particular reason.

An ongoing project with Harn these last few years, which I have been a part of, is the treatment of their Jamini Roy paintings. Roy is a celebrated Indian artist and the Harn has one of the largest (or the largest) collections outside of India. We have been fortunate to help clean, stabilize and repair several in the Harn's collection. The artist's materials are especially problematic as the paint layers are usually friable, flaking and sensitive to water. We've been able to safely conserve several in the Harn's collection over the years.

What does supporting the Harn mean to you/your business?

We take great pride in working with the Harn, a revered art museum, and it is a privilege to work on their painting collection. As a business, it is great to have the work, but even better is the opportunity to work with an institution that places the utmost importance on preserving art for future generations.

Art conservation is necessary because...

Without this field, our cultural heritage would deteriorate and potentially disappear altogether.

Is it advisable to consult with a conservator before acquiring new artwork?

It is very advisable! In fact, we wish more people would take us up on our pre-purchase consultation. While we cannot assess monetary value or authenticity of an artwork, we can offer important information to help guide your purchase. Conservators can assess invaluable information on the condition of an artwork, including the stability of work, any previous conservation/restoration and future conservation concerns.

What is something about the profession/process that art enthusiasts may not realize/know?

I think the number one misconception about art conservation is that many people think we paint over an artist's original work. As a trained conservator, we do not paint over the artist's original paint. Conservation professionals study chemistry and materials analysis to prevent an incident like this from occurring. In addition, the artist's intent is something we hold with utmost regard and strive to preserve in each treatment.

What do you hope for the Harn's future?

I hope the Harn continues to flourish with their collection and continues to educate the community and student body on the importance of art in our own lives and in the world.



#HARNPARTNER

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