

**The Arts Society Sussex
2018 Summer Term Report for Rosie Blay
West Dean College Graduate Diploma in Conservation of Ceramics**

Tutor Report

Rosie has made the most of the learning opportunities offered by West Dean. Rosie has demonstrated an enquiring mind, dedication to her studies and is supportive of her peers. Natural talent for colour and form is shown through practical work and information is assimilated quickly and effectively. All academic written tasks are completed to deadline and two voluntary experiences off-site demonstrated Rosie's capacity to be flexible and an excellent team member.

Rosie has shown a growing awareness of the subtleties of conservation in theory and practice and is a highly valued member of the department. Rosie plans to return to West Dean this autumn to commence Level 7 studies, having shown personal initiative in organising a work placement during the summer at the National Museum Scotland.

Lorna Calcutt, Ceramics Programme Leader

Student Report

I have thoroughly enjoyed studying at West Dean and looking back over my first year I can appreciate the extent of my progression. Throughout the year my skills have developed both academically and on a practical basis. Although I have previously achieved an undergraduate degree, and have experience of academic writing, I have needed to learn how to write analytical reports and essays at post graduate level. Whilst this was daunting at first, throughout the year my skills have improved and this has been reflected in my grades. I enjoy professional and contextual studies, which I find interesting, and this has also enabled me to achieve good grades. I have given several presentations to my peer group, which has helped me improve my skills in this area and also my professional practice.

The nature of the practical work involves testing out techniques, noticing and reflecting on what could be improved and then taking action implementing what I have learnt. This has meant that I have had to redo several stages in the treatment of objects. However, each time I have learned from what did not go so well the first time and have a better understanding of what works for the future reference. For example, one plate I have worked on had a tricky glaze layer to recreate and I attempted colour filling several times. Each time I have learnt more and more about colour matching, reaching the desired translucency and working with epoxy resin to create a smooth finish. By reflecting and assessing my work I am gaining a better understanding of treatment methods that can then be applied to current and future objects.

Examples of my work

I have continued to work on a range of ceramics, each requiring specific conservation needs. This has enabled me to reflect on my work, and learn new skills as I performed various treatments whilst working with different materials.



One object I have been working on is a medieval full-bodied squat jug with anthropomorphic decoration, also known as a face jug C. 1350 – 1375. The body is earthenware with lead glaze applied to its exterior. Owned by Crawley Museum, it was excavated in 2002. The jug had evidence of previous conservation treatment, with a relatively clear adhesive situated along the break edges. Some of the sherds previously bonded were still intact, whilst others had become separated through the failed adhesive.



Figure 1. (Left) Squat jug before treatment.

Two large areas of loss were present around the centre of the jug. Strips of masking tape were located to the inner side of the sherds. It was noticed, through handling and observation, that the two areas of loss initially documented in the archaeological report seemed larger. This indicated that since its excavation there might have been further loss of sherds. The museum was contacted but unfortunately no other sherds could be found. The possibility of further sherds being found needed to be considered when deciding on the treatment: I hope to make removable fills in case further original sherds are found and the fill can be amended.



Figure 2. (Right) Removing tapes from sherds.

I began treatment by carrying out preliminary solvent tests on samples of old adhesive, followed by scientific analysis using FTIR (Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy), which matched to UHU All Purpose. I then used Ethyl acetate on cotton wool swabs which was brushed over the tapes to aid their removal and limit adhesive residue left on the ceramic body. The sherds that were still intact by the previous adhesive were dismantled by placing them in a desiccator filled with acetone. I am currently working through each individual sherd, removing the remaining adhesive from the break edges. Acetone

has been applied to paper towel and placed along the break edges to soften the adhesive, which is then mechanically removed using a scalpel under the microscope. Once this process is complete the sherds will be bonded. Areas of loss will be filled with an appropriate material such as plaster of Paris or bulking agents mixed with Paraloid B72. The museum will be contacted closer to the time regarding the level of retouching.



Figure 3. Footbath before treatment.



Figure 4. After filling areas of loss.



I have also been working on a group project: A Chinese blue and white hard paste porcelain footbath with cobalt blue underglaze decorations. It was purchased in China by the client and was damaged during shipment. Located on the exterior of the rim is a rectangular area with six Chinese characters, which translates to, “Made in the year of Emperor Jiajing of the Great Ming Dynasty.” This emperor ruled from 1521 - 1567, but this is not necessarily the date that the object was created, it is probably a later reproduction. Further research and analysis is needed to determine a more accurate date so that we can ensure the conservation documentation is accurate.

Treatment has involved cleaning, bonding, filling, and now we are at the stage of polishing the epoxy resin fills. The object was displayed in the recent open house exhibition day where we were able to talk to the public about techniques and materials used as an example of the types of objects we have worked on.



Figure 5. Colour filling using epoxy resin.

Visits and volunteering

Recently I attended ICON's workshop: gilding and metallic surfaces on ceramics, with Judy Wetherall and Pete David, which was a wonderful glimpse into the history and conservation of two beautiful materials. I learnt about history, science and restoration when using both gilding and lustre. Demonstrations were given and I learnt the importance of customizing the techniques and materials used to suit the needs of each object. I also learnt about managing the clients' expectations and planning for the environment the object will be displayed in; these are just as important as the restoration itself, and this was very helpful in improving my understanding for practice. By seeing

many examples and possible applications, I was able to see how methods could be adapted to a variety of objects and situations. A highlight was being able to practice oil/mordant gilding and verre églomisé, or reverse glass gilding. Working with gold leaf is an art that requires much practice therefore having expert guidance was brilliant and enabled me to practice my technique. Overall the workshop inspired me to test and play with materials when carrying out my own practice.

In March, I had the pleasure of contributing to the fascinating National Museum Scotland glass conservation project. I was tasked with cleaning the collection of deteriorating glass, also known as sick glass. Sick glass occurs due to its type of manufacture and can be identified by signs of crizzling, flaking and weeping, which eventually leads to the breakage of the object. Cleaning the glass reduces the rate of deterioration and extends the object's lifespan. It was a great opportunity to work on such a diverse range of objects - glass that reflected aspects of social history, material, culture, and decorative styles over a broad date range. The experience enabled me to learn how to identify signs of deteriorating glass and clean it in a safe manner. My highlight of the trip was being able to view the collections and visit the museum. I really enjoyed working as part of a team to conserve objects at National Museum Scotland; it was a unique opportunity to learn about my future career.

I am pleased to say that following my visit, I have managed to secure a four-week work placement at the National Museum Scotland over the summer. This means that I will be able to work on a variety of ceramic objects, contemporary and historic glass, ethnographic figures (mixed media), and some archaeological metals. I am thoroughly looking forward to the experience, as I believe it will allow me to practice the skills I have already learnt at West Dean College, whilst learning new ones and preparing me for my second year of studies.

In September, I plan to start the Postgraduate Diploma with the aim of achieving an MA. I am particularly looking forward to the work placement in January, as I would like to gain experience at The British Museum. It would be a great opportunity to work on further archaeological objects, as this is something that I find very exciting. I hope to secure an internship on completing my education, and I would love to work in either a museum, or in the private sector, because this will enable me to achieve my aim, which is to work in conservation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank The Arts Society Sussex for providing me with the funding that has enabled me to study conservation of ceramics. The course at West Dean is widening my horizons and opening up new opportunities. I would not be able to have such prospects without your help so I am extremely grateful. Thank you.