

Up-and-Comers: News for Student and New Archivists

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Meet Ellen Faletti, University of Wisconsin–Madison iSchool



Ellen Faletti

As a part of the MuSe internship, I was required to lead at least three public tours over the summer. We spent the first two weeks at the museum developing our tours. Professionals from the Education Department who worked in programming for families, teens, students, and visitors with disabilities came in to talk and demonstrate how they incorporate different visual learning strategies into tours. The first two weeks we shadowed many to see how these strategies play out in tours. It was great to get hands-on, immersive training from professionals. Also, these tours were a great way to explore the museum's large collection and experience different ways to look at art through various themes.

Wanting to connect my tour with my archival experience, I developed a tour focusing on the theme of memory. I led visitors through the modern and contemporary art; art of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas; Islamic art; and European paintings. We looked at four specific pieces that memorialized somebody, evoked memory, and served as mnemonic devices. Admittedly, leading a tour was intimidating, but I made it through, and it was great experience to learn different ways to involve visitors. I also loved going on different interns' tours, seeing works of art through their different themes and perspectives.

In the archives, I spent my time working on two different projects. The first was assisting a curator in the American Wing with research for the museum's 150th anniversary exhibit in 2020. The curator was interested in learning

more about certain donors and how they got involved with the museum, or how certain pieces got to the museum. This aligned with my own interest in the history of collecting. I looked at correspondences between the museum and early donors to the textile collection to determine if there was enough information for the curator to pursue further research. In certain instances, I looked at women collectors who had donated to the museum, making an effort to identify these women by first names, rather than by their husbands' names. I found this work refreshing, understanding the different needs of researchers and the role an archivist can play in finding different approaches to address those needs.

The other project I worked on was digitizing special exhibition press kits. The Watson Library intern and I spearheaded this project. Before we could start digitizing anything, we needed to update the archives' exhibition database. This meant entering information gathered from annual reports and the museum's website. We utilized the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine when we came across

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Meredith Lowe, Assistant Editor

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dead web pages. After updating the exhibition database, we created a copy that could be updated as the digitization project moved forward. We located press kits that were already cataloged and scanned.

Once we identified all digital copies of press kits, we were able to begin the digitization portion of the project. We crafted catalog entries for Watsonline, the library's online catalog system, and created both archival and web scans of the press kits. We focused on special exhibitions from 1995 to 2013, so a majority of the press kits were hard copies. Creating the scans took the longest amount of time, and we were able to create a workflow and time estimate projections for future interns who would continue working on this project. The press kits are available in the library's digital collections (<http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16028coll12>) for research.

One unique aspect of the MuSe internship program is its Friday programming. Every Friday, we came together as a cohort and met with different people who worked at the Met to gain a broader understanding of the museum field. We met with the president and people from development, exhibition planning, different curatorial and conservation departments, the general counsel's office, and education. They talked to us about the ins and outs of their jobs, how they got to the Met, and where they see the future of the Met and museums going. We also toured different conservation labs, the Department of Drawings and Prints, the Costume Institute, and different departmental libraries. We had the opportunity to visit the Morgan Library and Museum, the Studio Museum of Harlem, the Met Breuer, and the Met Cloisters. Curators met with us and toured us through different special exhibits. I also took advantage of being in such a large institution—and city—to meet with different archivists, digital asset managers, and digital conservators to learn more about what they do.

Overall, this was an amazing opportunity. It combined my technical skills with my interest in art museums and the history of collecting. The experience solidified my desire to work in libraries and archives in art museums and validated my hard work in grad school to gain similar experiences. It was also great to work with professionals and see how the skills I honed in graduate school are applied in a professional setting. Returning to Madison, I hope to continue to cultivate these skills and acquire more experience that can lead me back to an art museum!

