MUSEUM

SUSAN ALLISON, KATE AYRES, ROBERT BAIN, DENISE BROWNING, LAURA D'ALESSANDRO, ANNE FLANNERY, KEA JOHNSTON, MARC MAILLOT, HELEN McDONALD, KIERSTEN NEUMANN, MADELEINE ROBERTS-GANIM, JOSH TULISIAK, TASHA VORDERSTRASSE, ALISON WHYTE, AND ELISHEVA YARDENI

The main challenge of the ISAC Museum is to keep bringing the audience back in person to the galleries and for special exhibitions. To that end, the Museum continued its strategy of the past couple of years in pursuing the expansion of its activities throughout this report year.

GENERAL ATTENDANCE AND MUSEUM SHOP

Thanks to the Museum's dedicated staff, guards, and volunteers, we were able not only to maintain our current opening hours but also to continue offering extended Friday evening hours until 8:00 p.m. The idea behind these expanded hours is to allow after-work visits concurrent with consistent programming.

Between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025, 41,028 visitors viewed the Museum's galleries—an increase of 18.71 percent over last year. Combined with the 6.37 percent increase in 2022–23 and the 30.28 percent increase in 2023–24, audience rates grew by 65.17 percent in three years' time. During the same twelve-month period, 1,483 visitors enjoyed the Friday evening hours in a calm and welcoming environment.

Attendance peaks on weekends exceeded 200 visitors (some 50 more than last year), confirming that our policies and engagement were fruitful. This valuable data was gathered thanks to Madeleine Roberts-Ganim, our Youth and Family Program coordinator; Dan Bloom, former Visitor Services desk manager; and Issac Muhammad, current Visitor Services desk manager. Strengthened by the numbers and new staff members—including Kate Ayres, assistant director of Programs and Education, and Elisheva Yardeni, conservator—we continued striving toward the main goal of the Museum team: to reach and surpass pre-COVID-19 Museum attendance numbers, which during the best years averaged 58,000 visitors annually. As stated in the 2023–24 annual report, a 20 percent increase in attendance per year is entirely reachable, which means that we could surpass the pre-COVID-19 number within two and a half years.

It is pertinent to connect these numbers with ISAC Museum Shop sales. The pandemic disrupted Shop sales dramatically, especially in 2020–21. Those sales have been slowly but surely returning to pre-COVID-19 levels, consistent with the 65.17 percent increase in Museum visitors between 2022 and 2025. The Museum Shop generated $130,000 this year, a 3.7 percent decrease compared with last year's $135,000. We are thus almost on par with last year's sales despite a noticeable decrease in touristic activities during 2024–25. Prior to the pandemic, average annual sales amounted to $200,000, and new merchandising and product development make a return to this level quite attainable going forward.

The Museum Shop's strategy has been to leverage special exhibitions as opportunities to develop new merchandise for long-term sales. The Shop has offered juvenile-oriented products (such as children's activity books) to draw attention to books and other items targeted at adults, items made all the more appealing by the high production standards we set two years ago for Museum catalogs and monographs. Since the

COVID-19 years, the Shop has been open only half the time it used to be—an important point, since sales nevertheless reached 65 percent of the total sum the Shop generated in 2018 and 71 percent of the amount it generated in 2019. The fact that volunteers continued their support of the Shop in 2025, together with the addition of extra opening days on the Juneteenth and Fourth of July public holidays, helped reinforce our customer service.

To accompany this growth, we continued working with ISAC's information technology staff and the Administration and Finance department to create an updated online Museum Shop on Shopify, as half our customer base is international. We have no doubt that we will rapidly surpass pre-COVID-19 sales once an effective online shop is implemented on our website. Now is the right time to launch it, as the on-site sales rate this year showed a stable revenue comparable to last year's 30 percent increase, which means that we hit the maximum growth capacity that on-site sales can allow without international outreach online and/or infrastructure updates of the Shop's footprint.

Subsequent to the integration of the Programs and Education department with the ISAC Museum (see the Programs and Education section below), docent-led tours of the Museum galleries were restructured to streamline our training and certification protocols. As a result, and thanks to our dedicated Programs and Education team and docent liaison Marilyn Murray, the number of docents in effect doubled (to more than thirty) in less than six months' time. We were particularly pleased to offer the docents refresher tours of the main galleries, led by ISAC staff. In March and April 2025, Marc Maillot, Kiersten Neumann, and Foy Scalf offered in-person tours alongside our virtual options. Regarding the latter, special recognition should be given to Tasha Vorderstrasse for the high quality and consistency of the adult education courses based on our collection.

INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

ISAC is a world-renowned institution, so international outreach is one of our priorities. This year we maintained our already-strong relationship with the French Consulate in Chicago and the Chicago chapter of the French-American Chamber of Commerce, most recently on June 6, 2025, with a group of entrepreneurs and businesses for gallery tours. The Museum partnered with ISAC's Chicago Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation, under the directorship of Gil Stein, to organize a two-day conference at the University of Chicago's International Institute of Research in Paris (IIRP). On May 19–20, 2025, we focused on at-risk cultural heritage with contributions from the Smithsonian Institution, American Society of Overseas Research, DePaul University, Sorbonne University, University of Pennsylvania, and British Museum. The Louvre Museum, University of Bologna, Hemo Laboratory in Ukraine, and major nongovernmental organizations such as Turquoise Mountain were also among the presenters showcasing international initiatives in Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Sudan, Syria, Mali, Israel/Palestine, France, England, and Italy. During a keynote address, the executive director of the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage Foundation, Valery Freland, presented a panorama of the foundation's seven years of action in cultural heritage initiatives. Jyoti Hosagrahar, deputy director of the UNESCO World Heritage Center, concluded the first day of the conference at the IIRP with a review of the most-endangered areas monitored by UNESCO. Last but not least, Stéphane Verger and Claude Rilly—of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, which cosponsored the event—gave presentations.

Rilly accepted our invitation to present his work on the decipherment of the Meroitic language in the frame of our monthly lecture series in Breasted Hall last year. His participation at the IIRP conference demonstrated that institutional bonds tied early on are fruitful in the long term in a vast array of fundamental research orientations. As explained in last year's report, the ISAC Museum plays a pivotal role in the field of cultural heritage preservation, and this conference confirmed ISAC's identity as a reference

institution in the fields of art history, archaeology, and cultural heritage management. As further evidence, the ISAC Museum was invited by Morag Kersel and Patty Gerstenblith, both of DePaul University, to participate in the US Committee of the Blue Shield conference at DePaul on March 14, 2025, specifically on the "Cultural Heritage at Risk around the World" panel.

The stated intention of connecting our members and audience to the latest state of the art in fundamental research was illustrated by the panel discussion related to ISAC's special exhibition *Staging the East: Orientalist Photography in Chicago Collections* (see Special Exhibitions section below). Titled "An Exploration of Orientalist Photography," the panel comprised Liz Siegel, chief curator of the Milwaukee Art Museum; Laetitia Zecchini, director of research at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) and director of the CNRS–UChicago HumanitiesPlus Laboratory; and Nicolas Revire, the Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Research Fellow in the Arts of Asia at the Art Institute of Chicago. Looking ahead to the bicentennial celebration of the invention of photography programmed for late 2026 in the European Union, the ISAC Museum is planning a timely series of events on campus and at the IIRP showcasing the depth of the ISAC Museum Archives collection.

The increases in inquiries about loans and requests for research materials from the Museum are further evidence of the excellence of our reputation both domestically and abroad. The total number of research requests and visits in 2024–25—more than 130—represents an 11 percent increase over last year (see Registration section below); combined with the 20 percent increase during the previous year, our requests have thus increased 35 percent over the past two years. The same applies to loans: the Museum loaned objects to and borrowed others from several institutions for special exhibitions—including the Regenstein Library, the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago—and we have executed collaborations with Chicago's Field Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection in Berlin.

The 2024 delegation from Greece mentioned in last year's report expressed interest in establishing more concrete cooperation with the ISAC Museum in 2025. This visit led to the Museum's loan of twelve Mesopotamian objects and a full set of the multivolume *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* for the special exhibition *Allspice: Michael Rakowitz & Ancient Cultures*—a collaboration between Athens's Acropolis Museum and the NEON Organization for Culture and Development—curated by Prof. Nikolaos Chr. Stampolidis, director general of the Acropolis Museum, and Elina Kountouri, director of NEON, from May 13 through October 31, 2025. Drawing on her longstanding relationship with Rakowitz, ongoing collaborations on his projects, and expertise in Mesopotamian cultural heritage, Kiersten Neumann was invited to deliver a lecture, titled "Of Gods and Kings: The Material Legacy of Mesopotamia, Eternal yet Fragile," on May 15 at the Acropolis Museum as part of the exhibition programming. She also contributed object entries for the loaned pieces used in the exhibition labels and catalog. In June 2025, Neumann presented her research on another object from the ISAC Museum's collection—the inscribed bronze roundel with inlays from Tell Tayinat—in a workshop on new research on old collections at the fourteenth International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, organized by the Université Lumière Lyon and the Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée in Lyon.

ISAC's international engagement was also visible thanks to conservation training and on-site conservation treatment overseas. Alison Whyte went to Uzbekistan in October 2024 to participate in the fifth workshop of the Cultural Training Partnership for Artifact Conservation organized by Gil Stein. In June 2025, Whyte provided support to David Schloen's excavation of the Phoenician site of Cerro del Villar in Málaga, Spain, where she worked extensively on pottery. Her work there confirms our reputation of excellence in museum studies at the international level (see Conservation section below).

This reputation applies also to the ISAC Museum Archives (see Archives section below), which, in addition to working with fourteen institutions from across the nation and overseas, continued its commitment to our campus community and to scholars beyond Chicago through outreach that included student

engagement and exhibition curation. Indeed, the Museum's special exhibition *ISAC's "Fifty-Cent Men": How the Gold Reserve Act Altered the Business of Archaeology* at the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business exemplifies our goal of expanding our footprint on campus to reinforce interdisciplinary projects. In that spirit, we started discussions with the University of Chicago's Divinity School for an ambitious partnership of a similar kind in 2027.

Toward the end of the report year, Anne Flannery notified us of her planned departure on July 28, 2025. She had led the Museum Archives for a decade and transformed it into a dynamic and reactive repository. Her generosity and commitment were instrumental in integrating the Museum Archives and Center for Ancient Middle Eastern Landscapes datasets into ISAC's Integrated Database. Apart from the *"Fifty-Cent Men"* exhibition, and further demonstrating her commitment to public outreach, she curated the 2019 *Discovery, Collection, Memory: The Oriental Institute at 100* centennial exhibition at the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library. Beginning in 2018, she led the Cultural Heritage Experiment Initiative, which now engages more than forty undergraduates annually. She has been a dedicated and visionary colleague, and the ISAC Museum team will miss her deeply. We wish her the best in her future endeavors. (For her personal reflections on her time at ISAC, see the Museum Archives section below.)

On the long-term side, we continued to pursue the very demanding update of the entire collection database and nomenclature regarding our name change to ISAC. Indeed, of the more than 350,000 artifacts in ISAC's inventory, fewer than 2 percent are on display, and each item requires an updated entry in our database to maintain public access to it by researchers and a general audience. To help us with that task, we partnered with the University of Chicago's Early Career Advancement Program to hire two summer interns, Cora Miller in Museum Archives and Libby Konjoyan in the Museum's curatorial department. Thanks to complementary partnerships with the University of Chicago Divinity School and DePaul University, we were also able to onboard two supplementary summer interns, Emma Yeager and Dayna Pinsky, in our Programs and Education department. They helped us build new tours dedicated to conservation and museography, as well as religion-focused tours based on artifacts with theological significance.

The ISAC Museum was featured in several news media this year, including the University of Chicago News website on July 19 and November 7, 2024. The Museum was also highlighted in *Liberal Education* magazine thanks to article author Mike de Socio (https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/articles/treasure-troves). The *Chicago Tribune*'s annual top-ten list of must-see museums ranked the ISAC Museum among the best collections to be seen in the city (https://www.chicagotribune.com/2025/01/14/museums-for-winter-2025-our-top-picks-around-chicago-for-the-chilly-months/), and the *Hyde Park Herald* featured an article by Michael Liptrot about the *Chicago on the Nile* exhibition (https://www.hpherald.com/arts_and_entertainment/chicago-on-the-nile-brings-a-century-of-hieroglyph-studies-to-isac/article_d1e99f4c-6ed5-11ef-a8c1-e383b01c148f.html). The *Chicago Asian Network* covered the exhibition *Staging the East* and the associated panel discussion (https://www.chicagoasiannetwork.com/event/an-exploration-of-orientalist-photography).

SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS

During this report year, the ISAC Museum's special-exhibitions program presented two shows that highlighted ISAC's longstanding commitment to visual recordkeeping, thereby engaging visitors with the legacy and future of field-based visual documentation of art, inscriptions, monuments, and landscapes from West Asia and North Africa. After the August 18, 2024, close of *Pioneers of the Sky: Aerial Archaeology and the Black Desert*, an exhibition that explored the trajectory of aerial photography with a focus on Jordan's Black Desert, the *Chicago on the Nile: 100 Years of the Epigraphic Survey in Egypt* exhibition (https://isac

Figure 1. *Chicago on the Nile* special exhibition, which ran from September 17, 2024, through March 23, 2025.

.uchicago.edu/chicagonile) ran from September 17, 2024, through March 23, 2025, to mark the centennial of the Epigraphic Survey (fig. 1).

Curated by Emily Teeter, J. Brett McClain, and Catherine Witt, *Chicago on the Nile* invited visitors to engage with the Survey's century-long efforts to record and preserve the carved scenes and inscriptions of Egypt's most important monuments—many of which are endangered today. Founded in 1924 by ISAC's visionary director James Henry Breasted (whose goal was to both copy and publish all the historical texts in the Nile Valley), the Survey began its monumental work at the 3,000-year-old temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. The exhibition illuminated this legacy through photographs, drawings, field notes, and publications from the Survey's archives, as well as key artifacts from ISAC's collections (fig. 2).

On display were rarely seen items, such as an original 1924 architectural plan and elevation of Chicago House by British engineer and archaeologist Arthur Callender, loaned by Dr. Anthony Marks, and a nineteenth-century, salted-paper print of Medinet Habu by French writer and photographer Maxime Du Camp, loaned by the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art. A series of photographs, drawings, and blueprints allowed visitors to trace each step of the meticulous "Chicago House Method" for creating facsimiles (highly accurate records of the original carving), while a custom-designed digital app let them try their hand at reassembling decorated block fragments from the Luxor Temple blockyard.

A series of programs enriched the exhibition. An exclusive preview was held on September 16, 2024, followed by a centennial gala on September 21 on the University of Chicago campus, where the exhibition was a focal point. Public lectures included Emily Teeter's "Chicago on the Nile: 100 Years of the Epigraphic

Figure 2. Archival documents and artifacts on display in the *Chicago on the Nile* special exhibition.

Survey" (October 20, 2024) and Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek's "Epigraphy and Exploration at Beni Hassan, Egypt" (March 12, 2025). The exhibition also produced a pair of publications: *Chicago on the Nile: A Century of Work by the Epigraphic Survey of the University of Chicago* by Emily Teeter (ISAC Museum Publications 2) (fig. 3), and the children's activity book *So You Want to Be an Epigrapher?* by Catherine Witt and Joshua Tulisiak with J. Brett McClain. Public outreach extended beyond the gallery with the release of the scarab plushie Khepri (whose name means "My Scarab") and a 1,000-piece puzzle featuring the sacred boat of the god Khonsu. The show garnered media attention, including a feature in the *Hyde Park Herald* ("Chicago on the Nile Brings a Century of Hieroglyphic Studies to ISAC," September 9, 2024).

The exhibition was generously supported by the University of Chicago Women's Board, ISAC Museum visitors, and ISAC members. Photographs were provided by Keli Alberts, Ahmed Bozghol, Frank Helmholz, W. Raymond Johnson, Yarko Kobylecky, Owen Murray, Dominique Navarro, and Amanda Tetreault, as well as Epigraphic Survey photographer/photo archivist Susan Lezon. Additional thanks go to Dr. Anthony Marks and the Smart Museum of Art for the loan of archival images.

Concurrent with the *Chicago on the Nile* exhibition was the installation of two paintings by German-American artist and stonecutter Johannes Weninger near the Museum's Robert and Deborah Aliber Persian Gallery (fig. 4). Curated by Kiersten Neumann, the works—*In Harmony with the Landscape* and *Guardian of the Temple*—evoke the Survey's enduring presence in Luxor. The former

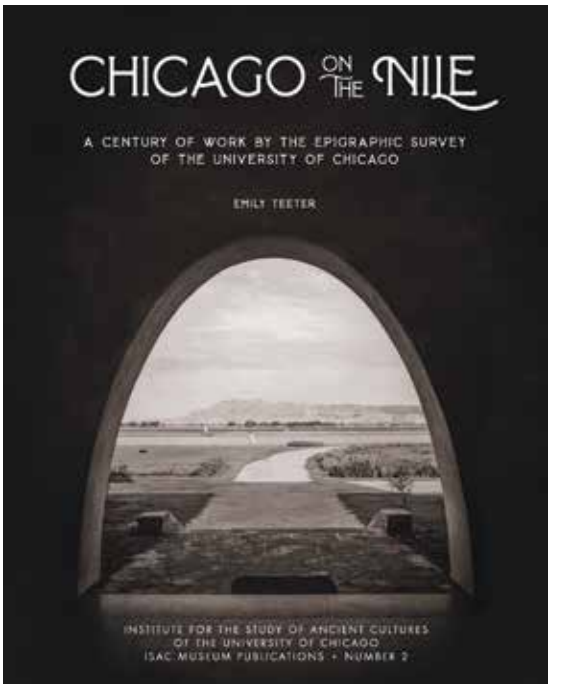

Figure 3. The monograph *Chicago on the Nile: A Century of Work by the Epigraphic Survey of the University of Chicago*, by Emily Teeter.

presents a landscape view of the old Chicago House on the west bank of the Nile, and the latter is a portrait of the Survey's current *rais* (foreman), Badawy Abdullah Muhammad Abdul Rahman, who is also a descendant of the well-known Abdul Rasoul family that is intertwined with the history of archaeology in Egypt. Weninger's work is a tribute not only to an individual with whom Weninger has worked for a decade, and who is a pillar of the Survey's fieldwork, but also acknowledges the generations of skilled and often unrecognized local laborers who have long underpinned the work of archaeological excavation and documentation.

Figure 4. Paintings by Johannes Weninger on display in the ISAC Museum.

Following *Chicago on the Nile*, the ISAC Museum shifted focus to another facet of visual recording with the opening of *Staging the East: Orientalist Photography in Chicago Collections* on April 17, 2025 (https://isac.uchicago.edu/stagingtheeast) (fig. 5). Curated by Marc Maillot and on view through August 17, 2025, the exhibition explored the formative years of archaeological photography and the commercial market that emerged around it—when studios and travelers alike began to commodify images of the "Orient" for Western audiences.

Figure 5. The special exhibition *Staging the East: Orientalist Photography in Chicago Collections*, which opened on April 17, 2025.

The term "Orientalism" refers to the Western tradition of representing West Asia and North Africa through a colonial lens, often romanticizing or stereotyping its peoples and landscapes. Within this framework, Orientalist photography—produced largely by Western travelers, artists, and studios from the mid-nineteenth century onward—played a central role in shaping how these regions and cultures were perceived. Through works by prominent photographers and drawn from multiple Chicago institutions—including albumen prints, salted-paper prints, photographic albums, and modern reproductions—as well as examples of early photographic equipment, visitors were introduced to the scope and influence of this visual tradition.

Organized thematically, the exhibition documented the precursors of Orientalist photography, the rise of commercial studios, representations of West Asia and North Africa in Chicago-based collections, the visual legacy of the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition (also known as the Chicago World's Fair), and the evolution of academic photography at ISAC. Highlights included a copy of Napoleon's *Description of Egypt* (1822); albumen prints from Studio Sébah and Joaillier (1890), Studio Zangaki (1880), and Studio Bonfils (1870) (fig. 6); a copy of a salted-paper print of Baalbek, Lebanon, by Maxime Du Camp (1850); a salted-paper print from a calotype negative of Middle Egypt by Félix Teynard (1854); Francis Frith's *Egypt and Palestine: Photographed and Described* (1858); and John Beasley Greene's *Fouilles exécutées a Thèbes dans l'année 1855* (1855).

Figure 6. Albumen print of the Hathor temple at Dendera, Studio Bonfils, 1870. ISACM P410.

Exhibition programming opened with an exclusive preview on April 16, 2025, followed by a June 13 panel discussion, "An Exploration of Orientalist Photography," with Maillot, Liz Siegel (Milwaukee Art Museum), Nicolas Revire (Art Institute of Chicago), and Laetitia Zecchini (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris). A children's activity book—*A Day in the Life of a 19th Century Photographer*, by Maillot and Tulisiak—was released alongside the exhibition (fig. 7), with additional photography-themed materials available through the ISAC Museum Shop.

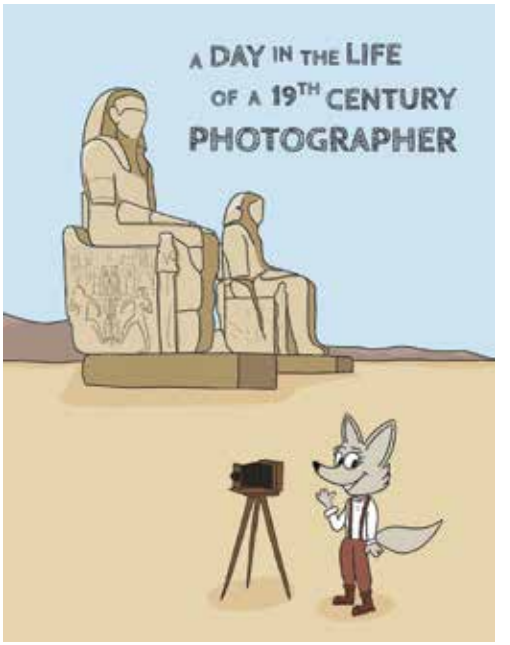

Figure 7. The children's activity book *A Day in the Life of a 19th Century Photographer*.

The exhibition brought together works from the ISAC Museum Archives, University of Chicago Library Special Collections, Smart Museum of Art, and Art Institute of Chicago. Additional media and support were provided by Northern Illinois University Libraries, Paul

V. Galvin Library, Chicago History Museum, Princeton University Library, Library of Congress, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Victoria and Albert Museum, Getty Museum Collection, and Newberry Library. Special thanks go to ISAC Epigraphic Survey director J. Brett McClain for facilitating access to Epigraphic Survey negatives and to the Frith and Greene albums.

Also as part of this year's exhibition cycle, and curated by Neumann, in February 2025 we installed three of Joseph Lindon Smith's Persepolis paintings for long-term display in the Robert and Deborah Aliber Persian Gallery (https://isac.uchicago.edu/contemporary-art-installations) (fig. 8). This installation brought Smith's vivid works into dialogue with monumental sculpture and portable finds excavated at Persepolis by ISAC in the 1930s.

Smith (1863–1950), known for his accurate renderings of archaeological subjects, painted six monumental canvases at Persepolis in 1935 at the invitation of ISAC founder James Henry Breasted. Over six weeks and accompanied by his wife, Corinna, Smith used 11.5 m of rolled canvas and a dry-brush oil technique to paint freehand on-site, capturing both landscape scenes and detailed sections of the Apadana staircase reliefs. This approach allowed for striking realism, especially in rendering textured stone, though it limited post-application revisions.

After completing the series, Smith traveled to Giza in Egypt (he was also a member of the joint Harvard University–Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition there) and then to Chicago to deliver the paintings—three landscape scenes and three lifesize details of the Apadana staircase reliefs. All six were reunited publicly for the first time since the mid-twentieth century in the 2022 ISAC Museum special exhibition *Joseph Lindon Smith: The Persepolis Paintings*, also curated by Neumann. After that show, we launched a fundraising initiative to prepare the paintings for long-term display, with plans to rotate two sets of three paintings every couple of years. Conservation work, carried out by Third Coast Conservation, included surface cleaning and stabilization of both the painted surfaces and the canvases.

This first rotation comprised two renderings of the Apadana's eastern staircase reliefs—including a 3.5 m wide detail of the lion and bull in combat—and one landscape featuring Apadana columns and Central Building sculptures. The paintings' installation was celebrated on March 7, 2025, with the event "Joseph Lindon Smith's Persepolis Paintings: Their Conservation and Exhibition." The evening featured a presentation by Neumann, a conversation discussion with ISAC conservator Laura D'Alessandro and Third Coast Conservation conservators Dorota Bobek and Elena King, remarks by ISAC director Timothy Harrison in the Robert and Deborah Aliber Persian Gallery, and a reception.

The conservation and exhibition of the Persepolis paintings was made possible by a principal gift from the Ashtiani-Bonebrake family, with additional encouragement and support from Smith's granddaughter, Linden Gaspar, and her husband, Charles J. Gaspar. As Linden remarked, "The preservation of this group of paintings from Persepolis serves to enhance the study of ancient cultures and to encourage students, both young and old, to delve further into my grandfather's paintings of other parts of the ancient world."

EXHIBITION DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

For 2024–25, the Exhibition Design and Production department's primary projects were the design and production of the Museum's special exhibitions, *Chicago on the Nile: 100 Years of the Epigraphic Survey in Egypt* and *Staging the East: Orientalist Photography in Chicago Collections*.

In fall 2024, we opened the *Chicago on the Nile* exhibition, curated by Emily Teeter, J. Brett McClain, and Catherine Witt. Featuring artifacts, artwork, photographs, and publications, this exhibition involved the in-house design and fabrication of display cases, custom object mounts, and several smaller wall vitrines, pedestals, and other furniture and picture frames. Almost all digital and print materials were also internally produced. The main palette of the exhibition was maroon and beige to distinguish different sections

Figure 8. Joseph Lindon Smith's Persepolis paintings in the Robert and Deborah Aliber Persian Gallery.

and complement the archival and modern photographs being displayed. *Chicago on the Nile* also included the exhibition of two contemporary paintings by German-American artist Johannes Weninger: a landscape view of old Chicago House, the Epigraphic Survey's first headquarters in Egypt, and a portrait of Badawy Abdullah Muhammad Abdul Rahman, current foreman of the Epigraphic Survey.

Staging the East, which opened in spring 2025, presented some of the earliest examples of photographic documentation of archeological sites and demanded some less common exhibition practices to afford the public the opportunity to view these extremely fragile and light-sensitive early photographic prints. They included an album of salted-paper prints on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago, a massive illustrated volume from 1822 on loan from the University of Chicago Library's Special Collections (*La Description de l'Égypte*, second edition), and salted-paper prints from the Smart Museum of Art, exhibited along with a selection of albumen prints and artifacts from the ISAC Museum Archives.

Design-wise, the exhibition followed the chronology of the original photographs on display, which were supported by modern prints for a cohesive narrative. For the exhibit's main color, we chose a modern off-white to evoke the feeling of a contemporary space—a color that would complement the prints while also taking a minimalist approach. The text and other didactic materials were also designed in a minimalist fashion to keep the focus on the prints. For consistency with the originals, the modern prints were produced on media that closely resembled the salted-paper prints. Lighting was tailored to highlight the prints and compensate for the reflective cases in which the prints were housed.

While designing and building these special exhibitions, the Exhibition Design and Production team continued several other projects in the permanent galleries, including the ongoing update of museum graphics and didactics and the installation of redesigned exhibition cases. A main focus this year was improving the orientation area of the permanent galleries with an updated general map and comparative chronology, a brand-new highlight display case (fig. 9), and new informational wall graphics (titled "From Ground to Gallery") presenting the history of the ISAC building, ISAC's excavations overseas, and the ISAC Museum and Museum Archives collections. Also marking this report year was the installation of three large, recently conserved paintings in the Robert and Deborah Aliber Persian Gallery that had previously appeared in our 2022 special exhibition *Joseph Linden Smith: The Persepolis Paintings*.

Figure 9. The highlight display case in the orientation area of the museum galleries.

PROGRAMS AND EDUCATION

Public Programming

The report year 2024–25 was an intense one for the Programs and Education department. The year began with a search to replace Youth and Family Program manager Kate Hodge, who had departed in June 2024. Madeleine Roberts-Ganim, who served as a Museum educator at ISAC in 2022–23 during her final year in the College of the University of Chicago and as a Metcalf Program education intern with ISAC in summer 2023, was appointed Youth and Family Program coordinator in October 2024. Roberts-Ganim earned a bachelor of arts with honors in history and French and spent the 2023–24 academic year teaching English to middle and high schoolers in France.

At the end of October, the small team lost ISAC's associate director of member programming, marketing, and communications Matthew Welton, who left after seven years at ISAC. His departure led to the separation of his area of responsibility into two: (1) Communications and (2) Programs and Education. Kate Ayres was appointed assistant director of Programs and Education in January 2025, bringing with her a doctorate in cultural heritage as well as a wealth of museum experience as a former director of museums in both the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates (director of museums for the Government of Ras Al Khaimah) and as a lecturer in museum and heritage studies at Durham University in the United Kingdom.

In addition to our annual and new family events (described below), we hosted the following guests for ISAC's free monthly lectures:

- October 2024: Eric H. Cline (George Washington University), in conjunction with the Archaeological Institute of America's National Lecture Program, "After 1177 BCE: The Survival of Civilizations"
- November 2024: Rune Nyord (Emory University), "The Modern Making of the Ancient Egyptian 'Book of the Dead'"
- December 2024: Jaqueline Williamson (George Mason University), "The Sun Temple of Queen Nefertiti"
- February 2025: Cheryl Makarewicz (Christian Albrechts University), Braidwood Visiting Scholar Lecture, "The Emergence of Pastoralism East of the Jordan Valley"
- March 2025: Catherine Kearns (University of Chicago, Department of Classics), "Cyprus, an Archaeological Crossroads"
- April 2025: Derek Kennet (ISAC), "Samarra: The Abbasid Capital of Iraq in the 9th Century"
- May 2025: Selena Wisnom (University of Leicester), "The Library of Ancient Wisdom: Mesopotamia and the Making of History," including the launch of her book of the same name

We also offered a visiting lecture series in March 2025:

- Rory Cox (University of St Andrews), "The Same Old Problems? Ancient Military Ethics and Modern Conflicts"
- Katharina Schmidt (University of Münster), "The Amman Citadel in Light of Recent Archaeological Work"
- Walther Sallaberger (Ludwig Maximilian University), "Anointing Oil: From Basic Need to Sensory Experience in Early Mesopotamia"

Adult Education

Tasha Vorderstrasse's job expanded this year, from running (and teaching in) the Adult Education program and managing ISAC's social media (a role she has performed since 2021) to also cover ISAC's audiovisual

needs while IT user support specialist Logan MacGregor was on parental leave in January–March 2025, as well as part of the job previously done by Matthew Welton, who left ISAC at the end of October 2024.

Vorderstrasse organized the following classes for Adult Education:

- "Continuing Demotic" (Foy Scalf, four weeks), an extension of "Introduction to Demotic"
- "Introduction to Hieroglyphs" (two parts; Scalf, sixteen weeks)
- "Introduction to Coptic" (two parts; Scalf, sixteen weeks)
- "Hittite Literature" (Theo van den Hout, six weeks), the first hybrid class since the COVID-19 pandemic
- "Introduction to Hieroglyphic Luwian" (Emily Smith, planned for eight weeks but ended after six weeks)
- "Handy Hieroglyphs: A Beginner's Guide to Impressing Friends and Colleagues in Museums" (Kea Johnston, six weeks)

In addition, Vorderstrasse organized and taught the following herself:

- "Ancient Coins: An Introduction" (with Tine Rasalle, eight weeks)
- "Exhibiting the East: Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and 1933 Century of Progress" (four weeks)
- "Medieval Christian Art: Coptic Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia/Eritrea" (five weeks)
- "Envisioning Ancient Landscapes: Robert Duncanson's Paintings of Antiquity and Ruins" (Juneteenth free class)

The hieroglyphs and Coptic classes taught by Scalf were bundled, following the success of bundling last year. A total of 371 students took adult education classes, accounting for a gross profit of $53,232.29.

This year, as part of the University Tour Program, Vorderstrasse guided forty-one University of Chicago tours with 772 students and instructors, in addition to staff tours. In total, she led tours for 1,362 people. The specialist tours focused on the following areas:

- Postcolonial (fifteen tours)
- Writing (five tours)
- Islamic exhibit cases (three tours)
- *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *1001 Nights*, *The Iliad*, and other epics (four tours)
- *Chicago on the Nile* special exhibition (one tour)
- Figurines (including figurines in the ISAC Registration area)

The other tours for staff and prospective students were conducted by both Vorderstrasse and Museum educators and docents, and for University of Chicago staff mostly by Museum educators. Together with Valerie Levan of the "Reading Cultures" humanities core course, Vorderstrasse developed a new activity for University of Chicago students, one that focused on the travel of objects by looking at where objects in the ISAC Museum came from. Several self-guided activities and tours were also developed—on inscriptions (300 students), postcolonial (56 students), and the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools (200 students), including two classes examining cuneiform tablets with PhD student Marta Díaz Herrera. This year also saw an expansion in the number of tours available to patrons by offering the Lab School self-guided activity tours to other schools, reviving the Tour and Film option, and developing a special Assyrian-focused tour for members of the Assyrian community.

Social media continued with daily posts on Facebook, X, and Instagram. Engagement continued to be high, with followers on Instagram steadily growing. While MacGregor was on parental leave in February and March 2025, Vorderstrasse ran technology for ISAC's lectures and the Egyptology and Hittitology professorial searches. This work involved creating various Zoom links and explaining the

technology to the guest lecturers, recording the lectures, trimming them, and uploading them to the relevant platforms.

When Welton left ISAC in October 2024, Vorderstrasse became temporarily responsible for the adult guided-tour bookings and later for the self-guided tours when Dan Bloom left the Visitor Services desk in April 2025 (in total, thirty-eight adult and self-guided tours with 620 individuals). She also assumed responsibility for sending the monthly (sometimes bimonthly) ISAC eTablet newsletter to ISAC faculty, staff, and public stakeholders, as well as for answering and forwarding email inquiries from the ISAC-Communications and ISAC-Volunteers shared mailboxes.

Artifact Replicas and ISAC Education Artifact Investigations

The ISAC education office possesses several object replicas, as well as actual archaeological materials and models. While many of these objects are replicas of items in our collection, a few of the originals are not held at ISAC.

Qasr Ibrim Bronze Lamp Replica

As part of the Artifact Analysis teaching program, the ISAC education office has two replica horse-head lamps from Nubia about which nothing further was known (fig. 10, left). While preparing a talk on the Meroitic ruling queen Amanikhatashan for the American Research Center in Egypt in April 2025 (see her individual research report), Vorderstrasse was able to identify this replica. It is a bronze lamp found in a grave at Qasr Ibrim in Nubia (located in modern Egypt) dating to the first or second century CE (fig. 10, right).

En-Nasbeh Teaching Material

Doctoral student and Museum education specialist Samantha Suppes researched a collection of teaching material, part of the simulated tell formerly in ISAC's LaSalle Bank Room that came from Chicago's Spertus Institute. Originally believed to be from an excavation at Tel En-Nasbeh during the late 1990s of which there is no record, the collection of material is now understood to have been compiled to teach archaeological investigative measures to a public audience. Through her investigation, Suppes discovered that this collection may have been inspired by someone's trip to Israel and their visits to various archaeological sites. The collection seems to reflect a basic knowledge of archaeological methods, such as understanding sites through stratigraphy and the importance of databases, maps, and ceramics. It also reflects a basic understanding of the ancient history of the region. The collection outlines what is involved in an excavation

Figure 10. Left: ISAC's replica. Right: British Museum EA66576, Qasr Ibrim, 50–150 CE. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

by focusing on Tel En-Nasbeh (mentioned on the object labels and maps), which was not being excavated in the 1990s (as the labels imply), and has drawings of some site plans. Although this collection did not come with a written or verbal statement of purpose, Suppes worked out its role as a teaching program by considering the hand-drawn copies of plans from published excavation reports, laminated images of the site of Beer Sheva, an intentionally empty floppy disk (likely to show the importance of databases), a collection of colorful maps, and a series of inconsistent notes referring to "the excavation." Information about Tel En-Nasbeh can be found at https://jrzorn.arts.cornell.edu/pdfs-of-collected-works-of-j-r-zorn/ and https://jrzorn.arts.cornell.edu/tell-en-nasbeh-biblical-mizpah-of-benjamin/.

Youth and Family Program

The Youth and Family Program offerings were considerable in 2024–25 despite our losing two months at the start of the year as a result of the staffing transition. We were fortunate to have Maria Moreno, a master's student and former dual-language schoolteacher, work with us as a Museum education translator. Moreno translated all field-trip lesson plans, materials, and presentations, as well as family event activities, into Spanish and assisted at the family programs by offering translations for Spanish speakers.

During sixty field trips, twenty-nine guided tours, and thirty-three self-guided tours, a total of 3,478 students from ninety-two schools, including homeschoolers, visited the Museum over the course of the year. In addition to facilitating the self-guided visits made by Lab School students, Vorderstrasse led ten of the sixty field trips (see Adult Education above).

Field trips were offered on eight themes—an increase from the six offered in 2023–24—with the lesson component led and taught by Roberts-Ganim, along with a team of seven others: lead Museum educator Elena Tiedens, Museum education specialist Samantha Suppes, and Museum educators Anika Miro-Quesada, Josh Nkhata, Thomas Pflanz, Natalia Potente, and Yunyi Xing. These options included Time Travelers (grades K–4) with nine bookings, the popular Artifact Analysis (grades 5–8) with twenty-six bookings, Mummification (grades 7–12) with ten bookings, and Ancient Innovators (grades 9–12) with seven bookings. Two new field trips were created—Myths and Ancient Storytelling (grades K–2) and Introduction to Hieroglyphs (grades 3–5)—both of which were modified from previous programs by Suppes and Pflanz, respectively, to create lessons appropriate for younger students. These field trips were piloted with one school each and will be offered to all schools in 2025–26. In addition, a self-guided activity run by Vorderstrasse specifically for the Lab School was offered this year to all schools, led by the Museum educators (three bookings). Finally, the Tour and Film field trip was reintroduced (two bookings). For the third year, the Youth and Family Program was able to offer fifteen pro bono or discounted K–12 field trips, which benefited 595 students.

The Youth and Family Program welcomed 1,458 people over eight weekend events across seven months in 2024–25. The events included our annual Haunted Halloween in October, in which we partnered for the first time with the Regenstein Library to offer story time, face painting, and button making and which culminated with the Hyde Park Community Players performing their "Evening of Horror and Suspense in the Old-Time Radio Tradition" in Breasted Hall; Nowruz in March, in which we partnered with the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago and which featured a performance by the Middle East Music Ensemble; Ancient Earth Day in April, during which, for the second year, lead Museum educator Tiedens gave special, child-friendly talks; and Ancient Games Day in May, which coincided with Alumni Weekend and during which we again gave "history of dice" gallery talks written by Suppes. The new calendar year saw the introduction of a $5 member/$10 nonmember event fee, and the format of events changed so that they ran for up to four hours with a drop-in structure allowing for maximum attendance.

Four new family events were introduced: children's book author Arsia Rozegar read from his *Shahnameh for Kids* series, hosted in partnership with the Lab School's Iranian Families and Friends affinity group; Myths & Magic (modified from a virtual field trip offered during the COVID-19 pandemic) and

Figure 11. Family events led by Museum educators.

Fabulous Pharaohs used the gallery discovery carts as teaching aids along with storytelling and crafts; and finally, Fun with Photography was tied to the special exhibition *Staging the East*: *Orientalist Photography in Chicago Collections*. Each of these events offered drop-in sessions, and new gallery and craft activities were developed for the last three, including clay-amulet making (fig. 11), solving a gallery crossword puzzle, and creating a stereoscope based on Breasted's example on display in the special exhibition. Particularly popular with children of all ages was borrowing Polaroid-style cameras for the Fun with Photography event, an activity that will be introduced at all future family programs.

Finally, we welcomed thirty-seven children at two birthday parties (one for five-year-olds and one for ten-year-olds) facilitated by Miro-Quesada and Nkhata, who led modified versions of the Time Travelers and Artifact Analysis field trips. We also held our first birthday party for adults; led by Pflanz, the birthday guests took a tour of the galleries, completed a scavenger hunt, and participated in a lesson on hieroglyphs.

Volunteer and Docent Program

The free Discovery Tours launched in 2023–24 proved a tremendous success and continued to welcome groups averaging between eighteen and twenty-five people. In September 2024, Marilyn Murray and Margaret Schmid, the driving forces behind the tours, assumed the inaugural position of "docent liaison." This shared, voluntary post was created to work closely with Matthew Welton to act as lead contacts for the docents both to communicate general information and to bring any docent concerns to the attention of ISAC leadership.

With the advent of the new school year, the decision was made to return to a field-trip structure in which docents were responsible for leading the tour component. To that end, the need for an increased number of docents was recognized, and Murray and Schmid began to plan for new docent training (fig. 12). Kate Ayres's first role was to oversee this effort; fifteen trainee docents were recruited and took part in intensive training across two consecutive Monday and Tuesday sessions at the end of March and beginning of April 2025. The aim was to have this new cohort certified by the 2025–26 academic year, and, by the end

Figure 12. The new cohort of trainee docents learning alongside current docents during training in the Museum.

of the report year, six of the fifteen had become full docents: Eva Clark, Rosina Negisnsky, Brian Penoyer, Kay Poyner Brown, Jeannette Scalise, and Ellen Sluss. A huge thank-you must go to everyone who helped deliver the training and the exceptional work of the coaches: Joe Barabe, Roberta Buchannan, Debby and Philip Halpern, Kay Holz, Jim Houston, Larry Lissak, Sara Lindholm, Marilyn Murray, Hilda Schlatter, and Steve Wolfgang. We are so privileged to have such fantastic and enthusiastic volunteers and are excited for the future of the Volunteer Program as it enters its sixtieth year.

Several Volunteer Days this year offered the opportunity for volunteers to get together over coffee and pastries and meet with faculty and staff in the LaSalle Bank Room and the Museum galleries. Emily Teeter and Marc Maillot offered tours of their respective special exhibitions; Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek gave an engaging talk about her work at Beni Hassan; and Kate Ayres spoke about exhibition planning and conservation in preparation for the new museography and conservation tours being planned for fall 2025.

CONSERVATION

New Conservation Staff

We were excited to welcome a new colleague to the Conservation laboratory this past year: Elisheva Yardeni. She comes to us from the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where she served as head of the inorganic objects conservation lab. We are so pleased that she has joined our team.

Sin Temple Facade Project

With a new sense of urgency guiding the project, the glazed bricks forming the decorated facade of the eighth-century BCE Sin Temple at Sargon II's palace complex in Khorsabad, Iraq, remained the primary focus of Conservation's efforts in 2024–25. The wooden crates used to ship the tableau to Chicago at the conclusion of ISAC's 1932–33 field season were deteriorating at an alarming rate. The tightly packed crates hold thousands of loose fragments that make up the bricks in their original configuration. Although the bricks are damaged, the excavators in 1933 were able to pack each one with its attendant fragments in a defined space within each crate. If the integrity of the crates fails, it will become almost impossible to return

those thousands of fragments to their original, correct positions.

Over the course of the year, Alison Whyte and Yardeni finished preparing the crates of bricks for the photogrammetry documentation performed by Kea Johnston, an ISAC postdoctoral scholar focusing on digital management of museum collections. As part of this process, the lids were temporarily removed from all the crates. This step had the benefit of clearing up a long-standing question: five of the original forty crates shipped to Chicago from Khorsabad in 1933 and believed to contain Sin Temple facade bricks were seen to contain finds from other areas of the excavation. In fact, the original accession record listing thirty-five crates with Sin Temple facade bricks was correct. Using field photographs and notations on the crates, Whyte and Yardeni identified each brick and then realigned dislodged fragments and removed loose dust and debris, thus revealing the glazed surface in preparation for Johnston's preliminary photo documentation of the untreated bricks. The conservators have since turned their attention to stabilizing and reconstructing the remaining uncrated bricks that were removed from six of the crates in the early 2000s but were not yet treated. At the time this report was written, this task was nearing completion (fig. 13). But the bulk of the work will begin in 2025–26, when the Conservation team commences the labor-intensive task of unpacking the remaining twenty-nine crates of bricks and stabilizing the 232 bricks that remain in their crates. The first crate to be unpacked in this next phase is TSB 5856 (fig. 14).

Figure 13. Elisheva Yardeni treating a glazed brick from the Sin Temple facade.

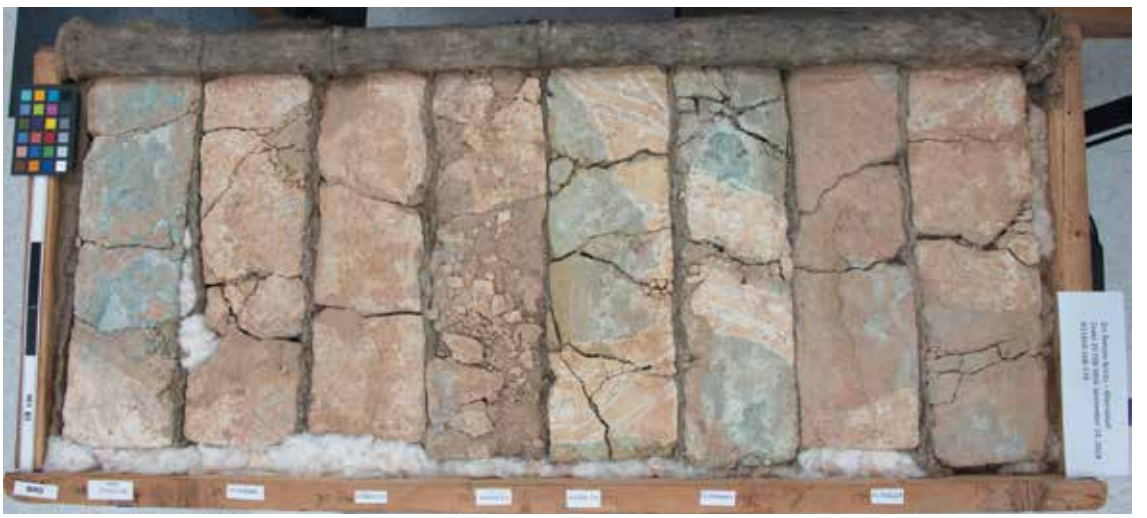

Figure 14. TSB 5856, the next crate of glazed bricks from the Sin Temple facade that will be unpacked and stabilized. The third and fourth bricks from the right are decorated with portions of a bull's tail and back legs.

In an effort to obtain external funding for this critical project, as well as for much-needed temporary conservation assistance, a proposal was submitted to the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services granting agency under its program Museums for America. This proposal would support an additional conservation position for two years. With the federal budget cuts that have occurred in 2025, the fate of the proposal is still uncertain.

Researcher Visits, Loans, Exhibitions, and Teaching

In tandem with the Sin Temple glazed-bricks project, the regular activities of the Conservation lab continued. This year saw another substantial increase in the number of research requests—an increase that affected many Museum departments, including Conservation. The numbers of loan requests and object requests also increased. In January 2025, Whyte and Yardeni completed the documentation for thirteen objects loaned to the Acropolis Museum in Athens, Greece. In the spring, Laura D'Alessandro traveled to Athens as courier for the objects on loan to the exhibition *Allspice: Michael Rakowitz & Ancient Cultures*, and Yardeni acted as courier for the return of loaned materials from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Also in the spring, Whyte and Yardeni created condition reports for another thirteen objects that were to be loaned to the Fralin Museum in Virginia later in 2025. At the end of the report year, they were working on documenting the condition of four objects that were to travel to New York City for an exhibition opening in October 2025 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Public Outreach and Education

On several occasions throughout the year, Yardeni gave talks to University of Chicago classes and groups. The talks provided a brief overview of the conservation profession and the importance of conservation for the safekeeping of cultural heritage. Students were also instructed on best practices for handling objects and approaching collections. Among the classes visited were Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek's class on Egyptian archaeology and Kathryn Bandy's class titled "Art and Archaeology of Egyptian Funerary Traditions." D'Alessandro presented a short segment in Mehrnoush Soroush's class on ancient empires that discussed the conservation history of the Persepolis Fortification tablets. In January 2025, Whyte led a gallery tour for students in Kiersten Neumann's class "Collecting the Ancient World: Museum Practice and Politics," where, using examples from the ISAC Museum's permanent displays, she gave an overview of the history of conservation at ISAC and how attitudes toward restoration have evolved over time.

Whyte continued to participate in the C5 Cultural Training Partnership for Artifact Conservation (CTPAC), an advanced training program organized by Gil Stein for artifact conservators at the national museums of the five republics of Central Asia. She spent two weeks in early October 2024 at the State Museum of History in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where she presented lectures, organized practical exercises centered on the conservation of wooden artifacts, and assisted fellow instructors Susanne Gänsicke (senior conservator and head of antiquities conservation at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles) and Fabio Colombo (an independent conservator), who taught modules on the conservation of stone, bone, and ivory artifacts (fig. 15).

Whyte also traveled to Málaga, Spain, where for two weeks in June 2025 she continued the conservation treatment of artifacts recovered from the Phoenician site of Cerro del Villar, a joint excavation of the University of Chicago and the University of Málaga (see Cerro del Villar report). This year, she and fellow conservator Evren Kivançer worked on cleaning and reconstructing ceramic artifacts.

Whyte coauthored "Polychromy as Provenance Research: A Statuette of Venus and Cupid from Roman Syria(?)" with Toledo Museum of Art curator Roko Rumora, a study that integrated an art historical analysis with the scientific examination of ISACM A30908. Rumora presented the paper at the 12th International Round Table on Polychromy in Ancient Sculpture and Architecture at the J. Paul Getty Museum and Getty Center in November 2024, and it will be published in the forthcoming conference proceedings.

Figure 15. Alison Whyte (at left) presents a lab exercise to participants in the 2024 CTPAC workshop in Tashkent.

Over the course of the year, Whyte attended a series of Crystal Report training sessions together with Foy Scalf, Anne Flannery, and Susan Allison. Crystal Reports are an important component of ISAC's EMu database (EMu, or "Electronic Museum," being the software used by ISAC's Integrated Database).

The Conservation lab hosted a variety of visitors over the course of the year, ranging from colleagues from the North Carolina Museum of Art and an Uzbek delegation to preservation specialists from the Museu do Ipiranga of the University of São Paulo, Brazil. We also hosted two behind-the-scenes tours for ISAC members showcasing the current work on the Sin Temple tableau.

Analytical Equipment and Professional Development

D'Alessandro, Whyte, and Yardeni attended a variety of workshops and equipment demonstrations this year. The Field Museum hosted a conference on the twentieth anniversary of its Elemental Analysis Facility laboratory under the direction of Laure Dussubieux, which showcased projects conducted at the facility since its establishment. We also attended a workshop on microfading conducted by conservation scientist Giovanni Verri and colleagues at the Art Institute of Chicago's conservation department, who demonstrated principles of microfading and equipment used to measure color fastness and fading on artwork. Our University of Chicago Materials Research Science and Engineering Center (MRSEC) colleagues Justin Jureller and Sarah Brown invited us to a demonstration of a JEOL JCM-7000 tabletop scanning electronic microscope (SEM) that they subsequently purchased. We will be working with them in 2025–26 to test some of the ISAC Museum's objects on the portable SEM. Just a few weeks later, we attended a symposium conducted by Oxford Instruments titled "All the Small Things," which highlighted work on campus and new state-of-the-art equipment and software. We were able to bring a few of our objects to several of the

demonstrations to test the ability of the equipment to identify ancient materials accurately.

We ended the year with exciting news: in May 2025, we were able to purchase needed analytical equipment for the Conservation lab. An intense, three-week search commenced with a series of in-house demonstrations of equipment able to identify inorganic and organic compounds. We looked at a range of Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) and Raman spectroscopy equipment from a variety of manufacturers. FTIR uses transmitted or reflected infrared light from a sample to identify molecules, and Raman (named after physicist C. V. Raman) uses the interaction of light in the form of lasers to identify the chemical bonds within a sample. Both techniques are typically used in the analysis of cultural heritage artifacts and tend to complement each other. After consultation with our colleagues at MRSEC, we determined that Horiba's MacroRAM, a portable Raman spectrometer, would best serve our purposes at this time (fig. 16).

Figure 16. Horiba Scientific engineers analyze ISACM A30908, a Venus with Cupid statue, during the equipment demonstration in the Conservation lab using a MacroRAM Raman spectrometer.

Persepolis Fortification Archive Project: Packing Continues

The multiyear project of returning the Persepolis Fortification Archive tablets research collection to the National Museum of Iran in Tehran continued throughout this report year as another batch of studied tablets was prepared for shipment. Aiyana Leigh, a rising senior in the College of the University of Chicago with a joint major in geophysics and Latin American studies, returned to work on the project. Her attention to detail and meticulous work on a project consisting of carefully handling thousands of unbaked clay tablets was greatly appreciated.

REGISTRATION

The Museum's Registration staff responded to more than 100 requests in 2024–25. Museum staff, student helpers, and volunteers carried out more than 14,500 object movements, and more than 300 objects were registered, including pottery from Chogha Mish (Iran) and Iron Age sherds from Alishar Höyük (Türkiye).

Researchers

Joseph Harris (PhD student, University of Chicago) studied the Tepe Asiab (Iran) flint collection in summer 2024. Matei Tichindelean (PhD student, University of California, Los Angeles) came to study and conduct portable X-ray fluorescence (p-XRF) analysis on a variety of Egyptian and Nubian metal objects. Maryan Ragheb (PhD student, University of California, Los Angeles) studied and conducted p-XRF analysis on a variety of objects from Nubia related to personal adornment, including beads, shells, and pins.

Matthieu Husson (researcher at the SYRTE Observatoire de Paris / Centre national de la recherche scientifique) made two visits to examine a selection of Mesopotamian and Egyptian objects for a future ISAC Museum special exhibition on astronomy. Clay animal figurines from Megiddo were studied by Nadia Knudsen (PhD student, Tel Aviv University), and Iron Age chalices from Megiddo by Prudence Sheaves (PhD student, University of Sydney). Ludivine Audebert (PhD student, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne) visited for nearly three months to study fourth-millennium BCE pottery from Chogha Mish; she studied more than 1,000 sherds and vessels. Libby Bush (master's student, Southern Methodist University) studied statue fragments from Tell Asmar (Iraq). Philip Senter (professor, Fayetteville State University) came to photograph a selection of objects, mostly from Megiddo, related to a variety of articles. Anna Everett Beek (visiting researcher, Case Western Reserve University) photographed a variety of bronze mirrors for a forthcoming book. Gabriele Biancalani (PhD student, University of Venice) studied some of the Iron Age sherds from Alishar Hüyük. Natasha Ayers (postdoctoral researcher, University of Vienna) visited to measure more than 100 pots from Assasif (Luxor, Egypt) for an article she is working on with Christine Lilyquist. Gabrielle Brugnacchi (PhD student, Sorbonne University) came for a month to study Middle Kingdom pottery from Serra East (Nubia). Sibylle Emerit (research fellow, Centre national de la recherche scientifique) came to study two wooden Egyptian harps. Benedetta Bellucci (postdoctoral researcher, University of Würzburg) visited to study music-related objects for the Musical Instruments of Ancient Mesopotamia project, including bells, rattles, and representations of musicians and instruments. ISAC's Tasha Vorderstrasse continued to work on the coins from the Mannheimer collection.

Loans

The 2024–25 year was a busy one for both incoming and outgoing loans, with six times as many incoming loans and three times as many outgoing loans as last year. The *Chicago on the Nile* special exhibition (September 2024–March 2025) included three incoming loans: the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art loaned a salted-paper print of Medinet Habu (2014.286) by nineteenth-century French photographer Maxime Du Camp, an architectural plan and elevation of the original Chicago House building by British engineer and archaeologist Arthur Callender was borrowed from Dr. Anthony Marks, and Chicago House stonecutter Johannes Weninger loaned two of his paintings of the original Chicago House and local staff at Luxor.

In March 2025, three loans came in for the ISAC special exhibition *Staging the East: Orientalist Photography in Chicago Collections*. They included an album of salted-paper prints by Maxime Du Camp and fellow nineteenth-century French photographer Aimé Rochas, loaned by the Art Institute of Chicago (*Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, 1959.608.1-25); a plate volume of photographs loaned by the University of Chicago Regenstein Library's Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center (*Description de l'Égypte,* DT46.D442); and three salted-paper prints loaned by the university's Smart Museum of Art. The latter group consisted of *The Rameseum of El-Kurneh Thebes* by English photographer Francis Frith (2014.336); *Jerusalem, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, West Side* by French archaeologist, painter, and pioneer archaeological photographer Auguste Salzmann (2014.693); and *Middle Egypt, Sphinx and Pyramid of Chephren* by French photographer Félix Teynard (2014.802).

In November 2024, a loan to the Staatliche Museen, Berlin, returned to us—a leather manuscript (ISACM E10552) loaned for the *Elephantine: Island of the Millennia* exhibition. A loan to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art went out in October 2024 and returned in March 2025—a cylinder seal (ISACM A27901) and its rolling (ISACM C4108) included in the exhibition *Mapping the Infinite: Cosmologies across Cultures*. This seal was relevant to the exhibition because of its representation of the goddess Ishtar, associated with the planet Venus. A predynastic pot (ISACM E1983) and two pieces of ancient bread (ISACM E130) out on long-term loan were returned by the Field Museum in December 2024.

In May 2025, twelve Mesopotamian objects and the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* series went out to the Acropolis Museum in Athens to be included in an exhibition of contemporary works by Michael Rakowitz, an artist who takes inspiration from the ancient world; the exhibition was titled *Allspice: Michael Rakowitz & Ancient Cultures*. One of his works is on display in the ISAC Museum's Dr. Norman Solhkhah Family Assyrian Empire Gallery (*Reappearance of Panel G-13*). This sizable loan included several statues from the Diyala (Iraq) (ISACM A12340, A12412A–B, A12431, A12434, A12435, and A18108); some clay figurines, molds, and plaques (ISACM A16994, A17672, A21203, and A21723); a stone bowl fragment (ISACM A18144); and part of a gameboard (ISACM A381). Most of these objects are usually on display in the Museum's Edgar and Deborah Jannotta Mesopotamian Gallery.

A loan of obsidian tools from various Braidwood excavations (Tell Asiab, Banahilk, El-Khan, Gird Chai, Gird Ali Agha, Karim Shahir, Matarrah, M'lefaat, and Palegawra) went out to the XRF laboratory at Canada's McMaster University, under the auspices of anthropology professor Tristan Carter, for X-ray fluorescence carried out by Joseph Harris (PhD student, University of Chicago). Harris also took three loans to McMaster's anthropology department to examine flint tools under a microscope housed there.

Class Use and Related Events

In summer 2024, Foy Scalf used a selection of manuscripts and ostraca for a class for the Rare Book Society, Tasha Vorderstrasse spoke to a class from the University of Chicago's Graham School about the Museum's fragment of Homer's *The Iliad* (ISACM E2058), and Ahmed el-Shamsy used some manuscripts for a class on the Arabic manuscript tradition. In the fall 2024 quarter, Kathryn Bandy used a few objects from the site of Deshasha (Egypt) for the "Art and Archaeology of Egyptian Funerary Traditions" class; Margaret Geoga used some scarabs for the "Introduction to Middle Egyptian Hieroglyphs I" class; Cecilia Palombo used a selection of Arabic papyri and ostraca for the "Documentary Cultures in Islamicate Societies" class; Egyptian flints and Middle Kingdom pots were used by Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek for a class on Egyptian archaeology; and in October 2024, a selection of sherds and pots was made available for James Osborne's Humanities Day lecture "Why Do Archaeologists Love Pottery So Much?"

In the winter 2025 quarter, Scalf used a variety of manuscripts, including sections of the Book of the Dead, for a Dominican University class titled "History of the Text," and Brian Muhs used several ostraca for a class on hieratic Egyptian. In the spring 2025 quarter, Mourad-Cizek used a selection of ushebtis and a selection of objects of different materials for an Egyptian archaeology class, and in May, Margaret Graves (professor, Brown University) visited to give a workshop on the Islamic site of Rayy (Iran) under the auspices of the University of Chicago Department of Art History. A variety of Islamic Rayy sherds, mostly glazed, were made available for this workshop.

In cooperation with Vorderstrasse, objects were provided for the following classes: Mehrnoush Soroush's class on the Achaemenid Empire (fall 2024 quarter), Catherine Kearns's class on gender (human clay figurines; winter 2025 quarter), and Valerie Levan's "Reading Cultures" class (a selection of scans of accession records relating to objects on display; winter 2025 quarter).

Acquisitions

Seth Cooper kindly gifted some Egyptian *Triticum dicoccum* seeds originally given to one of his ancestors by James Henry Breasted (accession group no. 3861).

Photo Permissions and Photography

More than 200 photo permission requests were processed during this report year, including new external and internal photography requests; more than 400 images, new and existing, were added to the database; and more than 250 objects were photographed for both publication and research purposes. In addition to

these totals, another 5,100 digital record shots were added to ISAC's Integrated Database by our student helpers. Just under 650 objects, mostly of Nubian pottery, were moved for photogrammetry that was carried out by ISAC postdoctoral scholar Kea Johnston.

Integrated Database

In August 2024, Susan Allison attended a two-day EMu advanced user training and meetup workshop at the Field Museum. She also participated in several training sessions in the Crystal Reports software program used by EMu to generate reports.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our University of Chicago student helpers and volunteers. Brittney Coelho and Libby Konjoyan joined us for summer 2024. They registered fourth-millennium BCE pots and sherds from Chogha Mish and Iron Age sherds from Alishar Höyük, and they took record shots of gold and silver objects for the Integrated Database. Coelho continued as a helper for the 2024–25 academic year, and Anthony Ray again joined us for the fall 2024 quarter. Joseph Harris registered some sixty obsidian tools from Gird Ali Agha (Iraq), and our volunteer helpers Terry Friedman and Toni Smith continued to make a valuable contribution with inventory and labeling, with more than 2,000 objects inventoried.

ARCHIVES

In addition to fulfilling its ongoing responsibilities—acquiring new collections and assisting researchers—the Museum Archives in 2024–25 expanded its public engagement efforts both online and in person through curated exhibitions, outreach programming, class sessions, and tours. Work continued on the ISAC Digital Archives, with curated and cataloged content taking shape. The Cultural Heritage Experiment completed another successful lending period in the spring quarter, and significant progress was made on updating documentation and advancing the reorganization of information and data sciences at ISAC, culminating in the establishment of the Data Research Center (DRC).

With this institutional shift, 2024–25 also marked a bittersweet transition: it was not only my (Anne Flannery's) final year as ISAC's archivist but also the final year the Archives will be housed under the Museum. The Archives will move to the DRC along with the Research Archives and Data Services—a change that promises stronger integration of information sciences and institutional research.

New Acquisitions and Collection Processing

This year saw an expansion of holdings thanks to generous contributions from both ISAC faculty and external donors. Notable acquisitions include the papers of Janet Johnson and Donald Whitcomb, previously inaccessible Diyala records, and long-missing Nippur records that had somehow ended up at the University of California, Berkeley, before making their way home to ISAC. These collections will prove invaluable to future researchers, though the Johnson and Whitcomb materials will require ongoing processing because of their size and complexity.

Efforts to make photographic materials more accessible also continued. In 2024–25, Museum Archives assistant Xilin Liu, a recent graduate of the University of Chicago's Master of Arts Program in the Humanities, continued cataloging the ISAC Lantern Slide Collection and entering Epigraphic Survey negatives into the database. Anthropology master's student Megan Sands spent the academic year cataloging the remaining ISAC Directors Correspondence and conducting preliminary assessments of a variety of collections, including McGuire Gibson's. She also cataloged the Anna Rosich Collection and rehoused the Donald Whitcomb Slide Collection.

The Zeutschel scanner, acquired only last year, has already earned its keep. With Liu's help, more than fifteen boxes of Directors Correspondence were scanned folder by folder and stored in the Integrated Database, thereby making them digitally accessible while sparing the fragile originals from further wear.

Research Requests and User Support

The Museum Archives responded to more than 200 research and information requests this year—both in person and digitally—from users across the globe. In addition to researchers from the University of Chicago and the greater Chicago area, inquiries came from institutions such as Boston University, Copenhagen Business School, Indiana University, Freie Universität Berlin, Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, New York University, University of Pennsylvania, Shahid Beheshti University, The Smithsonian, Sorbonne University, Stanford University, University College London Institute of Archaeology, Washington University in Saint Louis, and Yale University.

Curatorial Work and Outreach

Spring 2024 saw the installation of *ISAC's "Fifty-Cent Men": How the Gold Reserve Act Altered the Business of Archaeology*, a mini special exhibition that the Museum Archives curated for the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business atrium. This publicly accessible display explores the economics of ISAC's foreign excavations during the Great Depression and exemplifies the Museum Archives' ongoing commitment to public engagement and education. This year, the exhibition was renewed through May 2026.

The Museum Archives also provided curatorial support to the ISAC Museum by contributing documents and materials to both the fall 2024 special exhibition, *Chicago on the Nile: 100 Years of the Epigraphic Survey*, and the spring 2025 special exhibition, *Staging the East: Orientalist Photography in Chicago Collections*; the latter prominently featured nineteenth-century photographs, some of which were preserved this year with expert help from Chicago conservator Carol Turchan. The Museum Archives also supported the upcoming fall 2025 exhibition on the centennial of ISAC's Megiddo Expedition by providing more than twenty archival documents for display.

Undergraduate engagement remained a strong focus of the Museum Archives. The Cultural Heritage Experiment once again saw enthusiastic participation, with archival objects loaned to approximately forty students in the fall 2024 quarter. Students contributed in situ photographs and took part in archival tours and a weekly, ISAC-themed trivia contest during the month of February 2025.

Data Research Center

For me as the ISAC archivist, this year was very much defined by the creation of the DRC. The Integrated Database committee worked alongside ISAC director Timothy Harrison and interim DRC director Foy Scalf to shape the mission of a new center that would build on ISAC's data legacy and bring it into an innovative and sustainable future. The launch of the DRC marks a major advancement in ISAC's support for collaborative, interdisciplinary research in information science, data management, and digital scholarship. Serving as interim assistant director of the DRC from April through July 2025, I had the privilege of contributing to the foundation of a centralized hub designed to support and expand ISAC's digital infrastructure. The DRC is already spearheading key initiatives, including the digitization of the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* corpus, modernization of the Diyala database, and engagement with the University of Chicago president's AI Pillar initiative. The DRC's emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration is evident in its growing partnerships across campus and with industry leaders. A notable example is the pilot project with Amazon Web Services that explores the use of artificial intelligence to generate descriptive metadata for digitized images by integrating photographic and archival documentation. The momentum behind these efforts signals an exciting future for ISAC's role in digital research and cultural heritage.

The End

On July 28, 2025, my almost-nine-year tenure as ISAC archivist came to an end. I began here in 2014 as project manager for the Integrated Database, working with John Larson and Foy Scalf to bring the Museum Archives online, and was hired as the archivist two years later, after Larson's retirement.

Annual reports are meant to highlight achievements, but archival work often consists of unglamorous, persistent tasks: locating misplaced collections, clearing out faculty offices and random storerooms, managing deteriorating paper and photographic records, and making room in overcrowded storage spaces. This year I recovered boxes previously thought lost, brought back ISAC materials from other institutions, and continued to make sense of a century's worth of complex and often inconsistent documentation.

For most of the past decade, I ran the Museum Archives alone with a surprisingly small budget—until 2023, when things began improving financially for the Archives. Although I often use "we" when describing this work, the Museum Archives has always functioned as a one-person department. That said, I was fortunate to work with excellent student assistants and receive support from generous and brilliant colleagues. I leave behind a significant amount of unprocessed material—as is often the case in archives—but I also improved documentation, fueled a growing digital infrastructure, and developed much stronger public access to the collections.

Though I was not formally trained as an archivist, I have worked in this field for twenty years. My education began as an undergraduate at the University of Chicago and culminated in a doctorate in literature, and that training offered some perspective on how institutional narratives form and how they are preserved. Archives like those at ISAC can seem like magical spaces that materials go into and emerge from exactly when needed. Occasionally, that is true. But more often this work is steady, meticulous, arduous, overwhelming, and invisible.

A new archivist will soon be hired. That individual will do more than I could, just as I built on the work of John Larson and that of Ronnie Burbank before him. And together, however imperfectly, we will have helped make this institution's record more legible for all of you.

ISAC MUSEUM / FIELD MUSEUM POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLARSHIP

Kea Johnston is the first joint postdoctoral scholar of the Field Museum and ISAC Museum. For the Field Museum, Johnston is writing software to orchestrate the various programs used to generate models with photogrammetry. The Anthropology Collections department at the Field Museum wishes to digitize large numbers of objects in its archaeological collections. Thus, the overarching goal for the software is to automate the model-building process such that the user can build models in ten minutes or less per object by placing the object on a turntable and pressing a button (fig. 17). Currently, the software, named APHOMA (for "automated photogrammetry assets"), can build a model with no user interaction in about ten minutes and thirty seconds. To test the software, Johnston built models of more than 200 artifacts, most of which come from the ISAC Museum's collection and were excavated at the Meroitic cemeteries of Ballana and Qustul in the 1960s. These models are available for viewing on ISAC's Sketchfab page and also under the entry for each object in ISAC's collections search. For each piece of Meroitic pottery, an image of the unrolled surface has also been produced. Some of them will be featured in the ISAC Museum's spring 2026 special exhibition, *A Bestiary of Ancient Nubia*.

Johnston organized a conference titled "Technology as a Bridge to the Museum," which took place at ISAC on May 23–24, 2025. Sponsored by ISAC and the University of Chicago's Franke Institute for the Humanities, the conference featured nineteen speakers, ranging geographically from Sweden to the

Figure 17. Kea Johnston using a computer to operate an automatic turntable with a five-camera arm hovering over it. This device is called an Ortery and automates the photography of objects for photogrammetry at the Field Museum.

university's Center for East Asian Studies, as well as academics and professionals working in many types of museums. The lectures, however, were united by the theme of how technology can help museums form meaningful connections and collaborations among the communities on which they depend: students, communities of origin, scholars, and the public. Two keynote addresses were given. On the first day, Medeia Csoba DeHass, a professor at the University of Missouri, and Alex Taitt, from the University of Alaska, Anchorage, spoke about working with Native groups from the Bering Straits to digitize cultural objects and working to support indigenous digital sovereignty over the objects. On the second day of the conference, video-game designer Isaac Epp—whose work has appeared in many games, including *The Sims 4*, *Dauntless*, and *Fae Farm*—spoke about how basic principles of game design might be used to build engaging and memorable exhibits. Speakers addressed a range of topics, from artificial intelligence to scientific testing of materials to using virtual reality in the classroom, and the conference provided a valuable opportunity for those interested in both science and the humanities to learn about innovative approaches to technology outside their immediate fields. Johnston has been editing the proceedings of this conference, which will be published in the ISAC Museum Publications series. As with all monographs in this series, this one will be available as both an open-source PDF downloadable from ISAC's website and an 8 × 10 inch printed hardcover book for purchase.