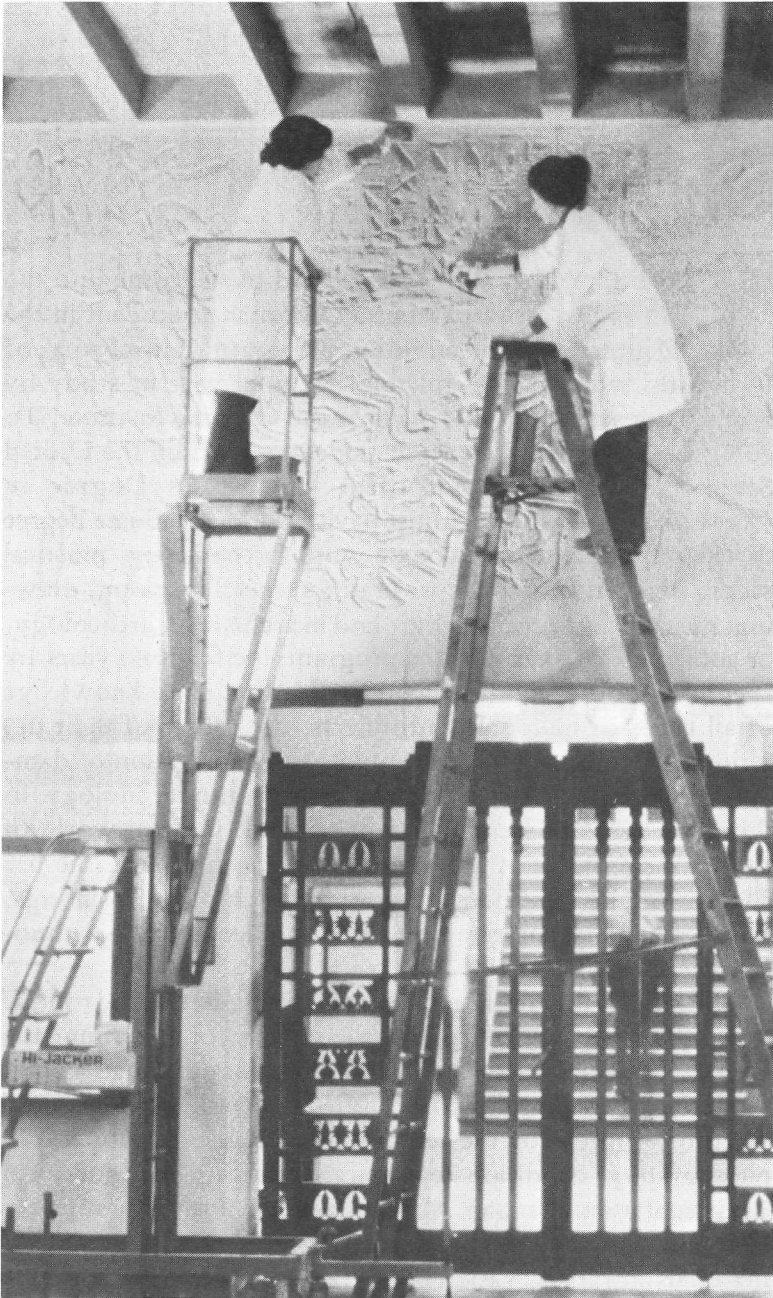


THE CONSERVATION LABORATORY

Barbara J. Hall

THIS YEAR I was pleased to welcome into the lab as my assistant Maura Comman, a student in the Winterthur Conservation Program, University of Delaware, who was completing her final year of study by doing a conservation internship at the Oriental Institute. To enter the Winterthur Program—one of several in the United States and Canada that offer a Master's Degree in Conservation—a student must have an undergraduate degree that combines extensive course work in chemistry, practical studio work in such areas as ceramics, metal working, drawing, or sculpting, and a background in art history, archeology, or anthropology. Once in the program, the first two years are spent in acquiring both a theoretical and practical knowledge of all types of materials and objects, the causes of their deterioration, methods of prevention and stabilization of damage, techniques of restoration, and studies into technology. In the third year the student is sent out into the real world of museum problems as an intern, working in the area he has chosen for specialization. This might be in paper, paintings, photography, decorative objects, or archeological or ethnographic material.

Working in the laboratory exposes the student to the routine responsibilities which run the gamut from the mundane chores of washing glassware and the floor or ordering supplies to dealing with complex environmental problems in museum and storage areas or the tedious procedure of examination, photography, condition reports, and packing that goes into the preparation of a loan. More important, I provide supervision and guidance in the treatment of as wide a variety of materials and conservation problems as possible. But since the majority of interns have had some conservation experience



Maura Comman (left) and Barbara Hall repainting the Egyptian relief cast

before they enter their program, have spent not only school time conserving objects but also “vacation” time working in museums or on excavations, and are well versed in theory and latest treatments, the internship is in reality a mutual learning experience for both supervisor and intern. As well as giving much needed practical training to the student, the internship is a valuable source of assistance to the institution involved, providing an extra pair of enthusiastic, capable hands to deal with the large backlog of objects in need of treatment.

Maura, in addition to working on objects of ivory, bone, silver, bronze, papyrus, wax, and stone, reached the height of her profession atop a swaying twelve-foot ladder in the Egyptian Hall doing a bit of routine museum maintenance—repainting the large plaster cast over the door. Another intern, Laura Gorman from Queens University in Canada, was lured into the dark recesses of the storage area to help clean out the mummy cabinet, enshrouded in curses and therefore untouched since time immemorial. Among the grim remains cleaned and reboxed were several dozen diminutive crocodiles, a monkey’s paw, two human heads, and three human left feet sawed off above the ankle.

Over the past year, I have continued my participation in the “Treasures of Tutankhamun” Exhibit, traveling with the show to New Orleans, Los Angeles, and Seattle to help a conservator from the Metropolitan Museum pack, unpack, and conserve the objects. The hospitality, enthusiasm, and cooperation of museum staffs from directors to preparators have been most welcome and appreciated. Seattle in particular was like old home week with Emily Teeter and Gene Cruz-Uribe from the Oriental Institute serving as Egyptologists for the duration of the exhibition.

The objects are traveling well. Because we were able to improve the packing in Chicago, we no longer have to make minor repairs to the pieces after they are unpacked and are now able to devote some time to lightly cleaning those objects in need of attention. It has been interesting to compare the different exhibition designs in each city; but more important the whole experience of working with the show has enabled me to gain a great deal of practical knowledge on packing, climate control, lighting, and exhibit design.