

The Conservation Laboratory

Barbara Hall

This year my energies in conservation were directed towards the rearrangement of our basement storage area. Because of a shortage of cabinet and floor space within the locked storage section, we had been unable to provide organized storage for our very fine Nubian collection; and of necessity, some of the objects were housed outside this area on open shelves next to the preparatory shop. There they were subjected to dust and fumes from the shop and a lack of proper security. My goals were to organize storage more efficiently to provide space both for thirty new locked cabinets and for an expanded work area for the registrar, and to bring a general sense of order and cleanliness to this long-neglected area of the basement. The energy needed to do all this was enormous, and I could not have accomplished anything without the strength and patience of our two preparators, Raymond Tindel and Honorio Torres, who—albeit with much grumbling and many complaints—disassembled, moved, and reassembled what must have seemed like every cabinet in the basement.

First of all, our large unused exhibition cases scattered throughout storage were relocated in one section, freeing an area that when freshly painted and illuminated provided an archeological work area for Helene Kantor. Then hundreds of ceramic pots and stone relief fragments were moved from cabinets due to be relocated or from open shelves due for permanent dismantling. Chaos! Two movers who specialize in handling heavy art objects were called in to crate up and to move thousands of pounds of stone Khorsabad relief fragments from the center of the storeroom floor. True to Murphy's Law, after lying undisturbed and unnoticed for scores of years, and within a month of crating, the reliefs were the object of a scholar's request for examination. I had expected that something like this would happen, but not quite so soon.

Once floor space had been cleared of open shelves, work tables, and relief fragments, thirty new metal cabinets were installed. They are tall cabinets specifically designed to take advantage of our high ceilings and thus maximize limited storage space. Being of metal they are insect and fire proof, and their welded construction and the rubber gasket around the doors makes them virtually dust

proof. There is one “granddaddy” cabinet that is over seven feet long for our oversized artifacts: a coffin, a sarcophagus, several reed mats, spears, and a burial, all of which had previously been stored on top of cabinets. We also purchased two safety ladders to help us reach the new heights and a large cart to help us transport objects. To complement the pristine new cabinets (chosen in a light beige color), fluorescent lighting was installed and painting of the walls, last done in the 1930’s, was begun.

All this was accomplished with the financial assistance of a \$5,000 National Endowment for the Arts grant prepared by the Conservation Laboratory and an additional \$15,000 provided by the Institute, including \$5,000 of private contributions specially earmarked for this project. John Carswell generously allocated \$2,000 from our this project. John Carswell generously allocated \$2,000 from our Institute of Museum Services Grant to cover the lighting and painting.

All this work has greatly improved our storage capabilities and our working space. There is still much to finish up—the task of moving the Nubian objects into the new cabinets has just begun—but at least the major reorganization, which was several years in the planning, has been finished.