

CONSERVATION PROGRAM TEAMS UP WITH LIBRARY FOR EXHIBITION

By Ellen Pearlstein

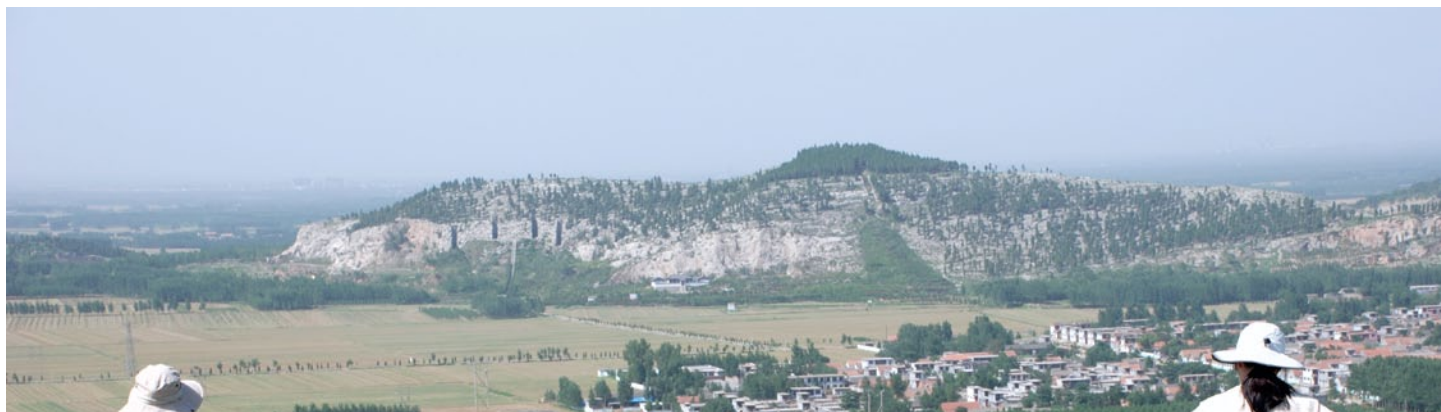
From May 10 to July 8, 2009, indigenous objects along with technical and cultural discoveries made by students in the UCLA/Getty Conservation Program were shared with a wide audience through an exhibition on the first floor of the Young Research Library (YRL). Students researched, treated, and documented cultural objects from the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum (ACCM) in Palm Springs, California, as part of their coursework during winter quarters 2007 and 2009. This course (Conservation of Archaeological and Ethnographic Materials [CAEM] 222) brought in tribal and museum instructors to engage students in consultation about preservation practices.

The exhibition in the library used a built-in display case with sliding glass doors and internal lighting that had never before been used for museum objects. Museum standards for security, temperature, relative humidity, and illumination had to be met. Fortunately, the case has a secure locking system, and the temperature in YRL remains stable and moderate year round. The light and ultraviolet levels were considered acceptable for cultural materials. Our biggest challenge was raising the relative humidity above the ambient levels that reflect moisture conditions outdoors. We accomplished this by sealing perimeter gaps on the sliding glass doors, installing about 90 pounds of silica gel in the case (borrowed from our friends at the UCLA Fowler and the Getty Villa Museums), and running humidifiers



Above: An ornate basket from the ACCM partially reconstructed by Siska Genbrugge.

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An unusual double basket attributed to Mary Kintana of the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians with the help of Jiafang Liang.



Collectable Skookum doll from the 1920s, dated with the help of Suzanne Morris.

inside the case for weeks before the installation. Our stacked trays of silica gel adsorbed moisture, buffered the case to a stable relative humidity, and caused University Librarian Gary Strong to ponder on his blog about when our seedlings were going to sprout!

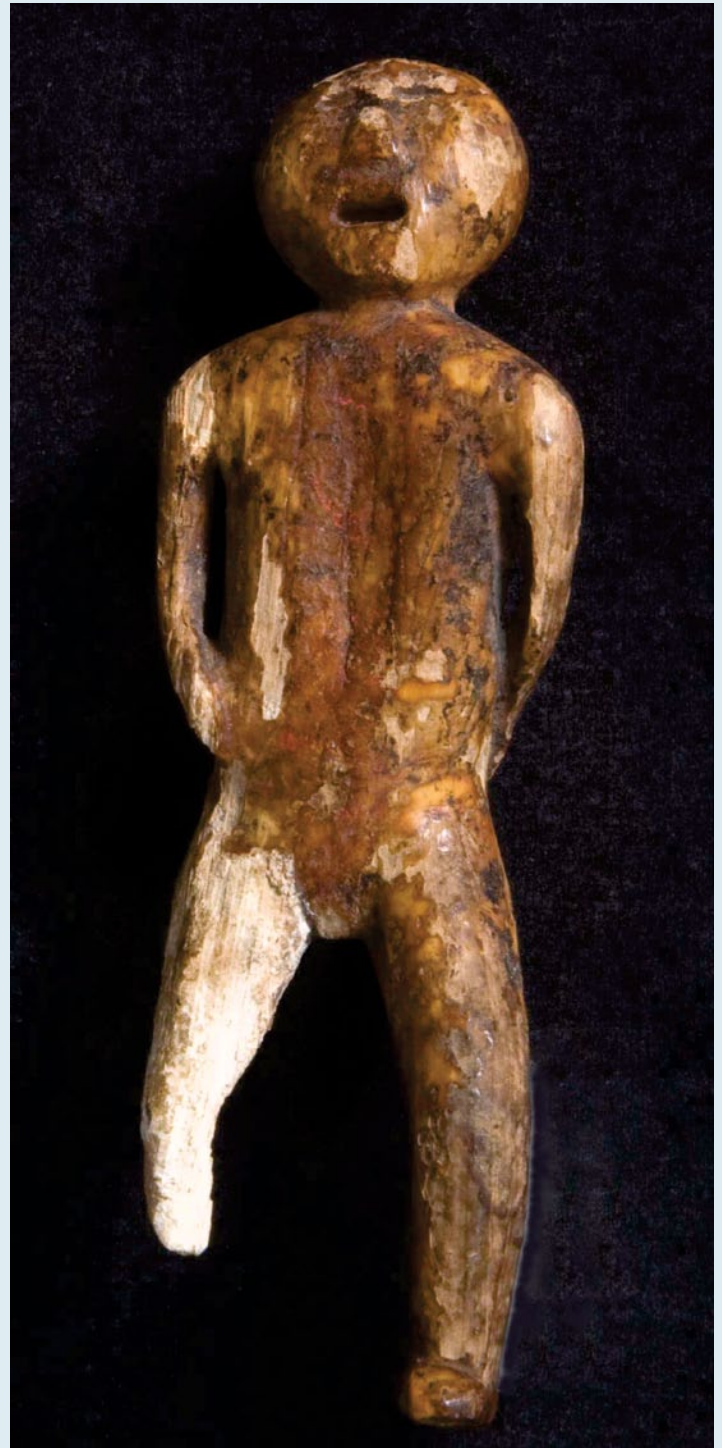
UCLA/Getty students meanwhile characterized plant fibers and animal materials found in the museum objects, explored complex manufacture methods, and used traditional and innovative materials to stabilize deterioration and replicate missing elements, all while the case achieved a stable 45% relative humidity and we refined the appearance of our case seals. Six of the objects displayed were Cahuilla baskets from southern California. Non-Cahuilla objects included baskets from Southwest cultures including Tohono O'odam and Apache, recent donations of Eskimo ivory and wood carvings, and a nonindigenous collectible doll depicting an American Indian.

Students used visual and analytical methods and consulted with native and museum experts and with Professor Ellen Pearlstein in order to characterize materials and help to establish provenience for inadequately documented objects. Lauren Horelick's identification of walrus ivory contributed to the Eskimo attribution for an undocumented figure, and Jiafang Liang's identification of palm leaf as a fiber in an unusual double basket supported an attribution to Mary Kintana of the Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla. The construction of this virtuoso basket, consisting of two coiled bowls progressing from a single base, was explained and diagrammed by Liang in exhibit text, while Linda Lin described the many different approaches to stitching a coiled basket which result in different appearances and preservation. Siska Genbrugge explained the decision-making process for choosing a material for reconstructing large sections of an ornate willow (*Salix* spp.) and devil's claw (*Proboscida* spp.) basket rim; decisions were influenced by na-

tive beliefs, material properties, and object preservation. Suzanne Morris used material characterization to assist museum curators in dating the collectible doll to the 1920s, documented evidence of a previous infestation, and identified the doll's original manufacture as one of a pair of Skookum "twin" dolls.

The ACCM received a digital copy of all the students' labels so they could be used at the museum. The Conservation IDP thanks the Cotsen Institute for the opening reception, ACCM Registrar Christie Burton, Jo Hill at the Fowler, and Jerry Podany at the Getty Villa, and especially UCLA library staff Dawn Setzer, Ellen Watanabe, and Octavio Olvera. ACCM Program Director and Curator Ginger Ridgway declared of the outcome that "the interaction between students and Native artisans produces conservators not only with special skills in treating Native materials, but with the awareness of cultural needs and sensitivity to tribal requests for non-standard methods. The recognition of tribal peoples' expertise is greatly appreciated and promotes continued consultation."

Ellen Pearlstein is Associate Professor of Information Studies and the UCLA/Getty Master's Program in the Conservation of Archaeological and Ethnographic Materials. From May 10 to July 8, 2009, indigenous objects along with technical and cultural discoveries made by students in the UCLA/Getty Conservation Program were shared with a wide audience through an exhibition on the first floor of the Young Research Library (YRL). Students researched, treated, and documented cultural objects from the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum (ACCM) in Palm Springs, California, as part of their coursework during winter quarters 2007 and 2009. This course (Conservation of Archaeological and Ethnographic Materials [CAEM] 222) brought in tribal and museum instructors to engage students in consultation about preservation practices.



Lauren Horelick identified this undocumented figure as being made from walrus ivory.