



Emerging
Conservation
Professionals
Network

Get to know the ECPN Graduate Liaisons

Spotlight on FIT

This latest ECPN Outreach series highlights the Graduate Liaisons in the [ECPN Liaison Program](#), who facilitate the flow of information about their particular graduate programs from their perspectives to you, their fellow emerging conservators. Whether you're pre-program or a graduate of a different program or specialty, they are here to help!

This interview highlight is with **Diane Walker**, ECPN FIT Liaison and current second-year student focusing on textile conservation. Continue reading for Diane's personal insight into FIT, graduate school, application tips, and valuable resources from this impressive emerging conservator!



Diane Walker positioning a textile with a tatting border on a suction table for cleaning in the FIT wet lab.

The Fashion Institute of Technology (State University of New York) offers a two-year Master of Arts degree program in Fashion and Textile Studies: History, Theory, Museum Practice. During the second year of study, students have the option to concentrate in conservation studies. Graduate students prepare and execute an exhibition that is put on view at the Museum of FIT and must complete an approved internship and write a qualifying paper (which can be a conservation treatment report) in order to graduate. You can read more detailed information about the FIT program, entry requirements, and current students on their website [here](#). If you cannot find the answers to your questions and don't want to cold email a program administrator, please reach out to Diane at fit.ecpn.liaison@gmail.com.

Scroll through below for valuable information about Diane and the art conservation program at FIT!

Outreach Officers' Burning Questions:

1. What resources (articles, websites, data, books, etc) were most helpful to you while preparing for graduate school?

While preparing for graduate school, the resources provided by AIC and ECPN were most helpful. I joined the local ECPN group in New York City where I lived and was able to participate in tours and more informal meetups. I also found that following conservation accounts on social media was a great way to learn about the field and different specialties, tools, and treatments.

2. What is a tool or material that you use every day/most often?

I frequently use a micro spatula for precision work. I have also learned that a curved needle can be incredibly helpful at working around barriers and when only one side of a textile is accessible.

3. What has been your favorite treatment/project you have completed at FIT (or pre-program)? Why?

My favorite treatment that I have worked on at FIT is a pieced paisley shawl that has parts that are jacquard woven, embroidered and appliqué. The shawl was my favorite because its varied construction and previous conservation work made it interesting to document and treat.

4. What has been the biggest challenge for you at FIT?

I think it goes without saying that the pandemic and transition to online coursework in the Spring of 2020 was the biggest challenge for me at FIT. Conservators have to take each object individually and problem solve as issues arise, so I think that the pandemic was an example of having to shift the planned course and figure out how to make coursework and projects work under the limitations presented.

5. What has been the biggest highlight for you at FIT?

The biggest highlight for me at FIT has been my classmates. Their camaraderie, generosity, and teamwork have helped immensely in the shift to remote work. It was especially vital in the pandemic to share resources, suppliers, tips, and encouragement as we worked on conservation projects from our homes.

6. How do you feel your experience at FIT differs from other conservation programs/What does FIT do differently from other programs in art conservation?

FIT is different from other conservation programs, because it also has a curatorial track and includes coursework on fashion and textile history. Site visits in the New York City area provide opportunities to look at objects in collections, visit labs and storage spaces. The non-conservation coursework provides a context for research on objects and for the broader museum field. An additional unique aspect of FIT is that during the second year, all students work together to plan and execute an exhibition in conjunction with the Museum at FIT.

7. Has FIT arranged networking for future job/internship opportunities? Are alumni involved with hiring/networking?

FIT alumni have been involved in the program through site visits, internships and guest lectures in class, which provide opportunities to meet and connect with them.

8. What would you most like ECPs to know about your school/chosen track/specialty?

Textiles have so many intricacies and variations, and their history ties into so many aspects of culture, technology and the lived human experience. I realized that I was fascinated with woven structures through two pre-program internships and some local weaving classes.

9. Do you have any advice for applicants/pre-programmers?

My advice for applicants/pre-programmers is to try a variety of studio classes and to work with different materials to understand the tools and material characteristics of the act of making in a particular medium. Pursuing internships is also so important for gaining hands-on experience and an understanding for the differences between different labs and museum structures. Podcasts and social media are also a great and growing resource for conservation applicants/pre-programmers. Don't forget to document both your conservation and your studio work, as well as documentation of you doing the work!

Thank you so much, Diane, for your time and generous answers that share with all of us your experiences in getting to and studying at FIT!

Readers, stay tuned for our FINAL interview in the Graduate Highlight series coming out in May and please continue to let us know your thoughts and send any questions you have to us or our Graduate Liaisons. Reach us at ecpn.aic.outreach@gmail.com

Bio

Diane Walker is a second-year graduate student focusing on textile conservation in FIT's MA program in Fashion and Textile Studies: Theory, History, Museum Practice and holds an M.A. in the History of Art and Archeology from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Her background is in art history research, databases, and digital asset management. Previously she worked on archaeological digs in Egypt and Peru and has interned at the Textile Lab at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.