

# Careers in the Arts

## Art Conservation

Claire Taggart

*Claire Taggart is Conservator at the Nasher Sculpture Center.*

### What sparked your interest in conservation?

Even though I studied fine art during undergrad, it wasn't until my mid-twenties that I discovered the field of conservation! Once I started looking into it, I realized that this career combines much of what I was already passionate or curious about: art, art history, cultural heritage, and material science.

### What did you study? Where did you go to school?

I received my Bachelor of Fine Arts in drawing and painting from the California College of the Arts, and earned a Master's of Science in Art Conservation from the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation.

### What advice do you have for students?

If you have an interest in working in the arts, ask a lot of questions! Challenge yourself, and be prepared to be a lifelong student (I am always researching and learning new things).

### How did you get started?

The first step I took to get into conservation, was to reach out to the graduate programs that offer degrees in this subject in the United States. Once I knew the prerequisites for admission, I started taking classes in chemistry and art history. The graduate programs in conservation require general and organic chemistry, courses in art history and studio art, and many hours of pre-program internship experience.



TOP: Claire Taggart in the Nasher conservation lab. SECOND: Some of Claire's "tools of the trade," including dental tools, brushes, a porcupine quill, and a bone folder. THIRD: Paints and dyes kept on hand in the conservation lab. BOTTOM: Claire treats an artwork by Magdalena Abakanowicz, preparing it to be hung in the Nasher galleries.

### **How did you choose sculpture as your specialty?**

Initially I was interested in painting conservation, but after an internship at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, I became interested in the bizarre challenges of modern and contemporary sculpture.

### **Weirdest part of the job?**

The best AND weirdest part of the job is experiencing the ways artists create - they are frequently challenging traditional art materials, or using non-traditional materials in innovative ways. This gives me the opportunity to research how to care for these artworks once they get to the Nasher. Whether it's a sculpture made of foam, stainless steel, ceramic, stone, fabric, or bronze (or a combination of many materials!) each piece has its own set of needs.

### **Tools of the trade....**

In addition to using science lab equipment like glassware and pipettes, conservation borrows tools from a variety of fields. These fields include medical and dentistry, cosmetics, and the restaurant industry. Looking around the lab at this moment, I can see a scalpel, tongue depressors, a dental mirror, cosmetic sponges, and a hot plate – to name just a few things! I even use a porcupine quill when I need something sharp, but not *too* sharp.

### **Favorite artwork in the Nasher collection?**

One of my favorites is *Linear Construction in Space No. 1 (Variation)*, 1968, by Naum Gabo. I love how luminous it looks in the gallery light.

*Interview conducted in 2020.*