

Harvard / News Release Art Museum

Patricia Cornwell Conservation Scientist is established at the Harvard Art Museum's Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies

Endowed position will help to advance the Straus Center as a leader in conservation science

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The Harvard Art Museum today announced the establishment of the Patricia Cornwell Conservation Scientist at the museum's Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies. This new position is established through a generous \$1 million commitment from bestselling author Patricia Cornwell, matching additional support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Ms. Cornwell is the author of 16 Kay Scarpetta thrillers, including the forthcoming 2008 release Scarpetta, as well as several other works of fiction and non-fiction.

The Cornwell Conservation Scientist will be a key position within the analytical laboratory of the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies. The Center for Conservation and Technical Studies was established at Harvard in 1928, and in 1994, it was renamed the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies. Specializing in the conservation and study of works on paper, paintings, sculpture, decorative objects, and historic and archaeological artifacts, it is the oldest fine arts conservation treatment, research, and training facility in the United States.

The Straus Center is a pioneer in innovative practices of conservation and conservation science. Conservation science uses contemporary scientific techniques from other disciplines and applies them to art conservation to systemize art materials analysis and develop conservation methods. With the addition of the Cornwell Conservation Scientist, the Straus Center will have an enhanced capability to analyze works of art, employ sophisticated forensic applications to studying works of art, and advance its contribution to the field.

Ms. Cornwell's interest in conservation science stems, in part, from her interests in combining forensic science, the subject of many of her novels, with the arts. A great deal of her own research and scientific investigations have focused on the infamous serial killer known as Jack the Ripper in England in the 1880s. Using forensic techniques, Cornwell discovered compelling evidence to implicate the well-known British artist Walter Sickert as the Ripper murderer, as published in her book Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper – Case Closed (2002).

Cornwell has been a longtime and generous supporter of the Harvard Art Museum and recently donated a major collection of 24 paintings, 22 drawings, and 36 prints by Sickert, as well as 25 prints and drawings by American artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler and 6 works by British artist Augustus Edwin John. In addition, Ms. Cornwell previously donated technological equipment to the Straus Center that allows for innovative applications in conservation normally used in forensic science. Her gift to the Art Museum in 2005 of a Foster and Freeman VSC 5000 video spectral

comparator—a forensic tool widely used to detect forged passports and counterfeit currency—provides sophisticated technology for the technical examination of works of art through the use of visible, near-infrared, and ultraviolet regions of the electromagnetic spectrum. These applications allow for the detection of forgeries, finding changes or damage to a work of art, examining under-drawings not normally visible, and even uncovering an artist’s original intentions.

“I am delighted to thank Patricia for this generous commitment and the important work it will advance at the Harvard Art Museum,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard Art Museum. “Patricia’s support brings together two disciplines—science and art conservation—and will promote our teaching and research initiatives in conservation science. Thanks to her support, our scientists will continue to develop new techniques that can advance conservation applications at museums all over the world.”

Patricia Cornwell commented, “I am pleased to be able to support the work of the Harvard Art Museum and the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies. The museum brings together a unique combination of curators, conservators, scientists, and researchers across a wide range of disciplines and continues to be a leader in scholarship in the arts. Harvard is the center of ground-breaking research in many areas of study, and I am confident that the Cornwell Conservation Scientist will make strong contributions to advancing the field of conservation science.”

About the Harvard Art Museum

The Harvard Art Museum is one of the world's leading arts institutions, comprised of three museums (Fogg Museum, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Arthur M. Sackler Museum) and four research centers (Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museum Archives, Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, Turkey). The Harvard Art Museum is distinguished by the range and depth of its collections, its groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of its staff. As an integral part of Harvard and the community, the three art museums and four research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and visitors. For more than a century, the Harvard Art Museum has been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and is renowned for its seminal role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

General Information

In June 2008, the Harvard Art Museum's building at 32 Quincy Street, formerly the home of the Fogg and Busch-Reisinger Museums, closed for a major renovation. During this renovation, the Sackler Museum at 485 Broadway remains open and has been reinstalled with some of the finest works representing the collections of all three museums. When complete, the renovated historic building at 32 Quincy Street will house the three museums in a single state-of-the-art facility.

Hours

Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; Sunday 1:00–5:00 p.m.
The Harvard Art Museum is closed on all national holidays.

Admission

Paid admission includes entrance to the museum, public tours, and gallery talks. General admission is \$9; \$7 for senior citizens; and \$6 for students. Admission is free for Harvard University ID holders, Members of the Art Museum, Cambridge Public Library cardholders, visitors under 18 years of age, and is free to all on Saturdays before noon. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or www.harvardartmuseum.org.

The Harvard Art Museum receives support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

For more information about the Harvard Art Museum, please contact:

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