

Paper and Politics: Working with South African Paper Conservators

ABSTRACT

In 1995 I was invited by the South African Paper Conservation Group (SAPCON) to come to Capetown and teach a three-day course on pressure-sensitive tapes and their removal from paper. SAPCON president Hohan Maree organized the trip and obtained funding from the United States Information Agency. The class was hosted by the Library of Parliament and was attended by paper conservators from several South African states as well as Zimbabwe. Also attending were collections care professionals, librarians, and curators. Following the class I assisted SAPCON members in a two-day holdings maintenance project on the oldest lending library for black South Africans. I then made site visits to the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal in Durban, to the National Archives Depot in Petermaritzburg, and the National Gallery of Art in Capetown. The timing of the trip was providential as President Nelson Mandela had been elected earlier in the year. The change in government had begun to place a different and challenging pressure on cultural institutions to exhibit art works by native South Africans (and to put into storage enormous quantities of Western art and artifacts). Also, the previous restrictions to materials in the National Archives had been lifted, and the institution for the first time in its history was mandated to open to all of the country's citizens. This talk presents the experiences I had in the three-week trip with an emphasis on the "politics of paper" in the South Africa of today.

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