

The Oaks News, February 2015

The Oaks News

A monthly bulletin from Dumbarton Oaks

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Diana of the Fellowship House

The Restoration and Installation of a Link between Past and Present



The Fellowship House, at 1700 Wisconsin Avenue, opened its doors to the research fellows in December of 2014. Among the many works (photographs, casts, and prints) that grace its new spaces, the bust of Diana in the Garden Room boasts the richest history.

You can read the director's narrative of how Diana was rescued from her formerly undignified plight and transported to the Fellowship House [here](#), and information about the bust's careful restoration [here](#).

Above: Sebastian Martorana installs the restored Diana in the Fellowship House.

Pre-Columbian Studies Workshop

The Art and Archaeology of Central America and Colombia
Panama City, January 26–29, 2015



The Pre-Columbian Studies Program organized a workshop in Panama City on the Art and Archaeology of Central America and Colombia, cohosted by the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI), on January 26-29, 2015. The workshop represents the latest stage in the development of the definitive catalogue of the [Dumbarton Oaks collections from Central America and Colombia](#). An invited group of international scholars presented recent archaeological fieldwork and collections research in Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia. Participants also discussed the history of pre-Hispanic contact and exchange between Central America and Mesoamerica, the Caribbean, and points south.

Read more about the workshop [here](#).

Museum Director Awarded Curatorial Fellowship

Dumbarton Oaks Museum Director and Curator Gudrun Bühl is one of twelve recipients of the Center for Curatorial Leadership's 2015 Fellowship. She joins



the eighth class of the CCL program, which aims to provide accomplished curators professional training that will help them become visionary leaders of art museums.

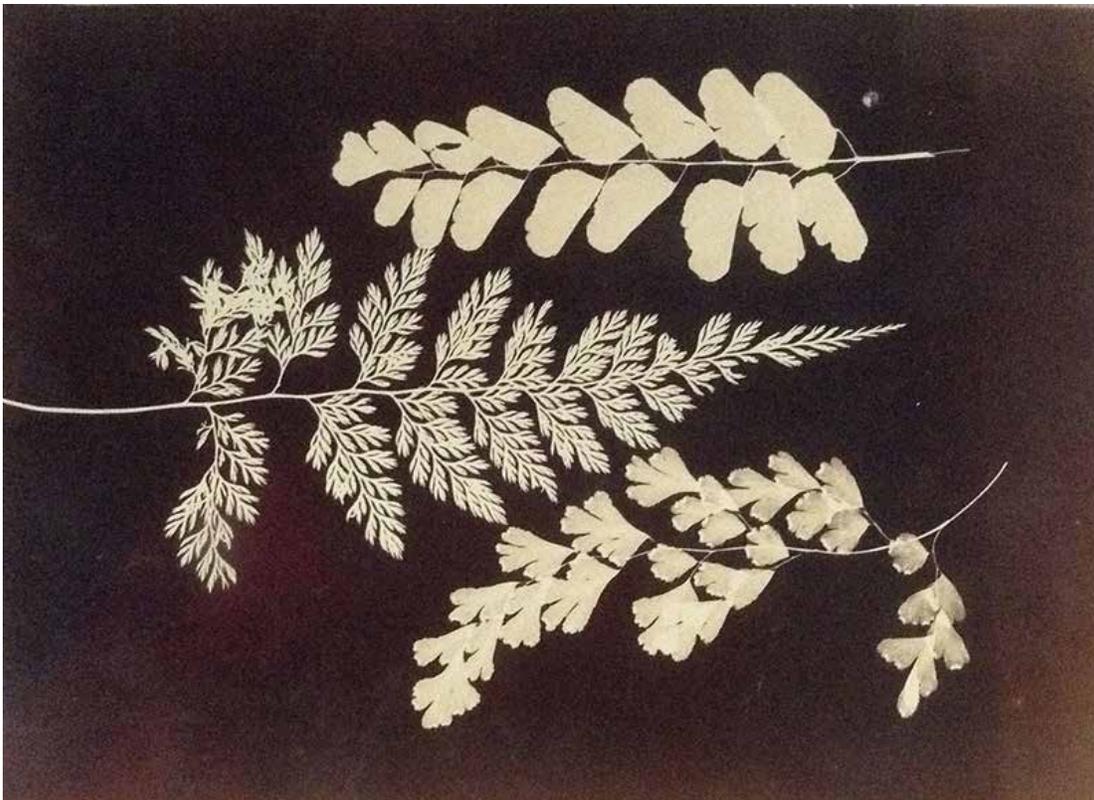
In early January, Gudrun headed to New York, where she spent the first two weeks of the fellowship with her cohort of eleven other curators from museums across the United States and Europe under the guidance of CCL's cofounder and director Elizabeth Easton and Columbia Business School professors.

For Gudrun Bühl, one of the highlights of the training was the opportunity to speak with her colleagues about the similarities that Dumbarton Oaks shares with other museums, as well as the unique features that distinguish it from peer institutions. The operations of Dumbarton Oaks are certainly not as attendance-driven as those of other museums, allowing Bühl and her museum team to focus on its place as a nexus of scholarship. "Here at Dumbarton Oaks, it's so much easier to reach out to the specialists and to keep up-to-date because we are surrounded by scholars almost year-round," she says.

Read more about the fellowship [here](#).

Library Exhibit

A Collection of Ferns from the Dumbarton Oaks Library



The current library exhibit features early printed illustrations of ferns, including hand-colored woodcuts, as well as books and illustrations documenting the Victorian fern craze, or

pteridomania. The exhibit also includes unique material from the Rare Book Collection, such as manuscripts by Hans Jancke and S. Fred Prince, and several images of the so-called fern motif on Inca ceramics.

Read more about the exhibit on our [DO conversations blog](#).

Above: Late nineteenth-century French photogram showing three ferns.

Upgrade of AtoM@DO

One year ago, ICFA launched its online database, [AtoM@DO](#). The database has now been upgraded to a new version (2.1) of the AtoM (Access to Memory) software, which features a redesigned interface and many enhancements for searching and browsing.

Read more about the update to AtoM@DO [here](#).

From the Archives

Hydrology and the Dumbarton Oaks Gardens



Hydrology is a critical component of the Dumbarton Oaks Gardens. Water needs to circulate through thirteen fountains and pools, as well as the swimming pool and changing room showers; water should cover the pebble mosaics in the Pebble Garden but does not because of cracks in the foundation; and water is needed to irrigate the gardens in periods of drought. Over time, the Dumbarton Oaks Gardens' hydrology system, most of which dates to the 1920s, has become compromised and has required numerous repairs. Presently, minimal rainwater is able to be captured and reused, and only a small fraction of the fountains and pools can recirculate their continuous supply of domestic water.

To deal with these issues, Dumbarton Oaks has embarked on a project to document and assess the existing garden hydrology systems in order to design and propose improved systems. Now in the documentation phase, the project draws on the large collection of surveys, plans, and drawings that are found in the Garden Archives of the library's Rare Book Collection and in the Dumbarton Oaks Archives.

The complexity of upgrading and improving the hydrology systems is daunting. The gardens' hardscape elements and the lawns, flower beds, shrubs, and trees are fragile and easily susceptible to damage. Fortunately, the rich archival resources will make the endeavor of documenting the garden hydrology systems both easier and potentially less damaging to the garden infrastructure.

Read more about the restoration project [here](#).

Above: Pebble Garden Fountain.

Behind the Scenes

Dumbarton Oaks Photographer Completes 33,876 Seal Photographs

Over the past four years, Dumbarton Oaks Photographer Joe Mills has taken a staggering 33,876 photographs of lead seals for the [Online Catalogue of Byzantine Seals](#).

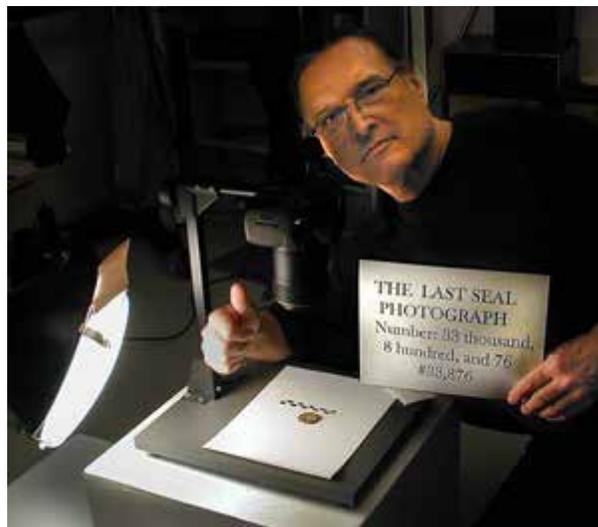
Dumbarton Oaks currently has 16,938 seals in its collection, the majority of which were acquired between the years of 1947 and 1977. For the seals team, the main motivation for the Online Catalogue was twofold: access and preservation.

Seals allow historians to fill gaps in histories of places and people, especially in an empire with constantly advancing and receding borders, in which titles and holdings are ephemeral, enough so to be missed by the era's historians. At the same time, lead seals are especially vulnerable to decay because of the center channels through which strings were run to attach them to documents. Eventually, Mills says, "All these seals are going to deteriorate into nothing." For this reason, recording them is an essential act of preservation as well as a contribution to scholarship.

"I never felt like I was getting anywhere," says Mills, who was surprised when he found that he had only fifty, and then ten, and then no seals left to photograph.

While joking that he is busily searching the floor for the "few marbles" he lost during the photography process, he recognizes that these 33,876 photographs together form a highlight among his achievements at Dumbarton Oaks. "My fortieth year here is coming up, and that makes you wonder about your lasting impact," he says. "This is about real knowledge coming together. I take a lot of pride that these are indelible things."

Read more about Joe's photographs and the catalogue project [here](#).



Good Ink

This month, *The Medieval Review* featured Robert Bjork's translation of *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*, the twenty-third volume in the *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library*. Renée Trilling called the volume "a delight to read," concluding that the DOML version "will ensure that *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf* find an even wider audience among twenty-first-century readers."

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