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Spotlight on newly identified drawings in albums: Piranesi and his studio at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe

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Lucile Dessennes, Nadège Duqueyroix and Manon Tertrain-Bloch

Conservation treatments of sketches, preparatory drawings and set models at the Bibliothèque nationale de France

Abstract
The Atelier de restauration des documents graphiques et maquettes (Graphic documents and models conservation laboratory) at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) is in charge of the conservation of preparatory drawings and 3D models for theatre sets and costumes held at the Bibliothèque nationale. These documents are fragile. They are often painted with gouache on poor quality paper and can include additional materials such as pinned fabric samples. Their nature is complex and particularly difficult to grasp. They are simultaneously technical documents that helped with the preparation of the costumes and theatre sets, archives of past theatrical performances, documents of historical value, and, in most cases, true works of art. Each of these aspects demands a specific conservation approach. In this paper, through concrete examples of our practice, we illustrate the challenge of striking a balance between the needs of long-term conservation and the preservation of the complex nature of the document.

Keywords
Theatre set; 3D models; gouache; mounting; comic strip; lead white

Introduction

The Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF, France's national library) holds over 30,000 theatre set sketches and 3D models.[1] Despite their remarkable aesthetic qualities, most of these documents were primarily preparatory drawings and models and considered as such by the set designers. They were coloured for technical purposes only, using fragile graphic media such as watercolours, gouache or coloured pencils. They have clearly been handled a lot (more or less carefully), bonded with adhesive tape, and punctured with pins. Many bear written annotations; some have pieces of fabric fastened to them by paper clips or pins. All were originally stored in poor conditions, despite their fragile media. Other departments of the BnF, such as the Réserve des livres rares (rare book department) hold different types of preparatory objects which present similarities with these performing art objects; we will discuss several of these related case studies here.

Over the last ten years a large conservation effort has been undertaken to preserve these collections, which are going on exhibition on a more and more frequent basis. Most of this preservation work is carried out within the Graphic Document and Model Laboratory of the BnF, which conserves documents from the Département des arts du spectacle (Department of Performing Arts), the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra National de Paris and the Réserve des livres rares.

This preservation work has brought many technical[2] and ethical[3] concerns because of the mixed status of these objects: they are definitely more than just archives, but not really works of art, and often not considered as such by their creators. Most documents are in an unstable condition and our treatments have to be curative. In addition, our institution being a library and not a museum, necessitates that these drawings could not only be exhibited but also accessed by readers as easily as precious books. On the other hand, this unstable condition is part of their original creation process and has to be preserved. It is sometimes difficult to strike a balance between the need to preserve the documents and the need to keep track of the damage that is part of their nature. This results in specific choices in all aspects of the conservation and curative treatment. Even though we were aware of these problems, many of our choices have induced transformations of the original document. We have often observed that after conservation it has lost a little of its original status of archive. Now that it has gone from the shadow to the light, is it still the same? How can we preserve its original meaning as far as possible?

Because of the diversity of the problems we have encountered while working on these collections, we have not been able to establish a general conservation doctrine. However, we have been able to outline the specific principles that we are discussing in this paper, based on case studies.

We will first present some classical treatments and mounts that do not deeply affect the documents but may change their meaning. Then we discuss how structural treatments undertaken to protect the documents during an exhibition could change the documents or the

1 Nicole Wild, *Décors et costumes du XIXème siècle*. Tome I et II (Paris: BnF, 1967).

2 Marianne Bovis, *La restauration et conservation des maquettes en papier et carton en architecture et scénographie* (Chavin, 1997).

3 Lucile Dessennes, *From deontology to practice: considerations on the restoration of documents (sketches, masks and models) from the Department for Performing Arts (National Library of France)*, (Paris, BnF, 2018).

objects physically. Finally, we will describe aesthetic treatments made for exhibition or digitization that influence the perception of the documents.

Mounting of the documents

1. François Schuiten's strip sketches: a custom-made mount

The Réserve des livres rares hosts the original sketches of François Schuiten's most famous comic book series, created with the scenarist Benoît Peeters (*Les murailles de Samaris, La Tour, Mary la penchée, L'Enfant penchée, L'Ombre d'un homme*[4]...). The strip sketches were drawn with a graphite pencil, inked, and painted with acrylics over which were superimposed many layers of colored pencil. The illustrator clearly loves the graphic technique, and these sketches are much larger than the printed final document. Some consist of just one large drawing on a large format sheet, while others, like *L'Enfant penchée*, mix photographs and drawings. The documents have no peculiar annotations but all the media are fragile and can easily transfer if any material is placed in contact with them.

These documents are exhibited on a regular basis and a lot of effort was put into optimizing their protection and mounting. Our general rule is to use the same mount for storage and exhibition, in order to avoid handling and to optimize costs and manpower. Another general rule is to use a false margin (or inlay) and a thick mount to protect the media.

However, the curator was very mindful not to transform the comic strip panels into classical drawings. In this case, choosing the right mount style and material was essential. The mount protects a document but also needs to match with the document's status. A thick mount is good protection but it gives the document a frame. With a frame, the document is no longer perceived as a sketch comic strip but as a classical drawing. Consequently, the curator asked us not to mount them with a permanent, thick mount. This solution attempts to preserve both the materiality and the specificity of the drawings.

We therefore decided to hinge each drawing on a mount board with a flap folder. This solution allows for minimal storage space. The document is ready to be exhibited without a frame (as required by the curator) by simply folding the cover over to the verso. The paper cover protects the surface from abrasion and rubbing. The drawback of this approach is that the documents require regular inspection to monitor possible deposits of the fragile media. This approach gave good results for about 85% of the collection (360 documents). In some cases, however, we had to devise a specific mount resulting in a potential mismatch between the intrinsic nature of the document and how it may be perceived at an exhibition.

The photographs had to be protected without any material in contact with the surface because of a sticky varnish put on them by the author. For these, we decided to add a thick mount inside the folder, in order to avoid contact between the strip sketches. The thick mount is left loose and can easily be removed before an exhibition.

Another series of sketches were drawings on small papers mounted to a full large-format sheet. The risk of media offset from contact is greater because of the raised surface of the drawings. Due to the fragility of the mixed media, we decided to apply a permanent, thick mount to the sheets for protection. Given the ambivalent nature of these full sheet drawings (illustrations or classical drawings?), we consider in this specific case that our approach was not a betrayal.

The conservation of François Schuiten's series is a good illustration of some of the problems we have been confronted with when dealing with theatre sketches. It is nevertheless a relatively simple problem, because these documents are still 2D pieces of art, relatively close to classical drawings. These are also a relatively small series of a few hundred documents, which allowed us to take decisions on a case-by-case basis. Nonetheless, we were lucky to have only a few dozen documents requiring a thick mount. Had all documents required this solution, the storage costs would have been prohibitive. In addition, the solution of having a removable thick mount for all documents would have complicated the handling and increased the risk of abrasion.

2. The choice of a mount for a whole collection

François Schuiten's illustrations represent a very small part of the collection of the Reserve des livres rares. In this specific situation, it was possible to undertake a case-by-case treatment. The collection of theatre set and costume sketches of the Département des Arts du spectacle comprises of around 30,000 models and 3D sketches, and the approach described above is not practical. Most often drawings are made of gouache on a relatively thick but low

4 http://www.bnf.fr/fr/evenements_et_culture/expositions/f.schuiten_peeters.html

quality paper. They may have pieces of fabric glued to them, and are often punctured by pinholes and marked by glue spots or annotations.

Given the fragility of the collections, we chose with the curators to protect each drawing with a permanent thick mount. This choice dates from only five years ago. Before this date, the sketches were put in a false margin and then in a folder. The false margin allowed the documents to be manipulated without any risk to the paper and drawing. As with Schuiten's strip sketches, the folders protect from slight abrasion and rubbing. However, over the years we have noted that in many cases the coloured graphic media has offset on the paper cover, hence our decision to use thick mounts in a systematic way.

This has been a difficult decision for the curators and conservators, with many consequences: a large increase in storage space requirements, and profound modification of the status of these drawings from simple archives to pieces of art. Our choice was dictated by conservation requirements.

This choice was not made universally; for example, we chose to mount a series of eighteenth-century drawings from the Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra National de Paris (BMO) with a simple folder. The BMO in the Palais Garnier has little storage place, so we had to save storage space where we could. Furthermore, this series of drawings was composed of graphite pencil and iron gall ink drawn on laid paper. The graphite pencil was sensitive to smearing but does not offset. Mounting with a thick mount would not have given meaningfully more protection.

3. A more extreme case: a Georges Lepape series of costume models

Sometimes we had to change the structure of the document to preserve it. We encountered this situation with sketches by Georges Lepape (Fig. 1). Georges Lepape made costume sketches with watercolour and gouache on tracing paper. To facilitate their handling by seamstresses and technicians, the drawings were mounted firmly on cardboard (Fig. 2). Interestingly, those

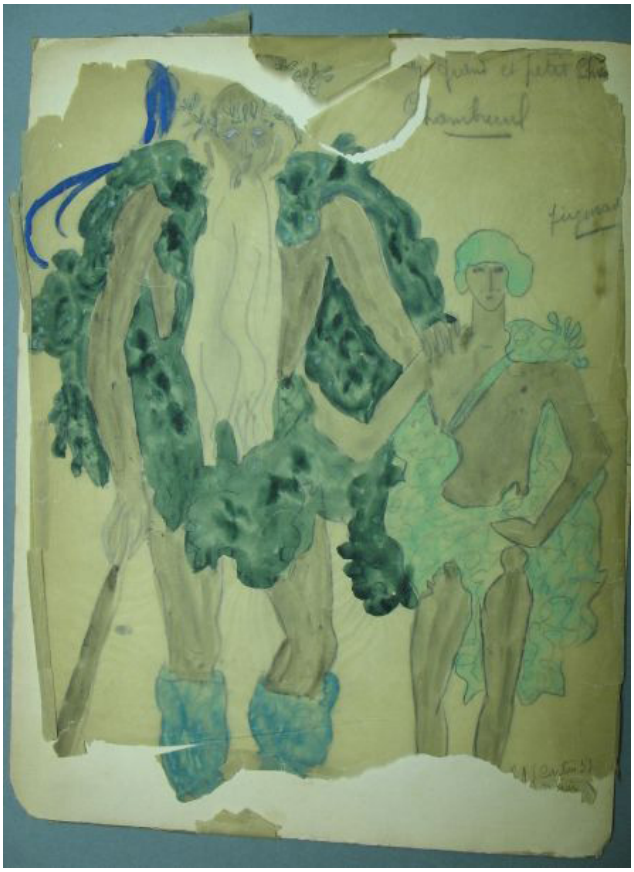

Fig. 1 Georges Lepape, *L'Oiseau bleu, le grand et petit Chêne*, recto, 1923, Bibliothèque national de France, Arts du spectacle department, before treatment.

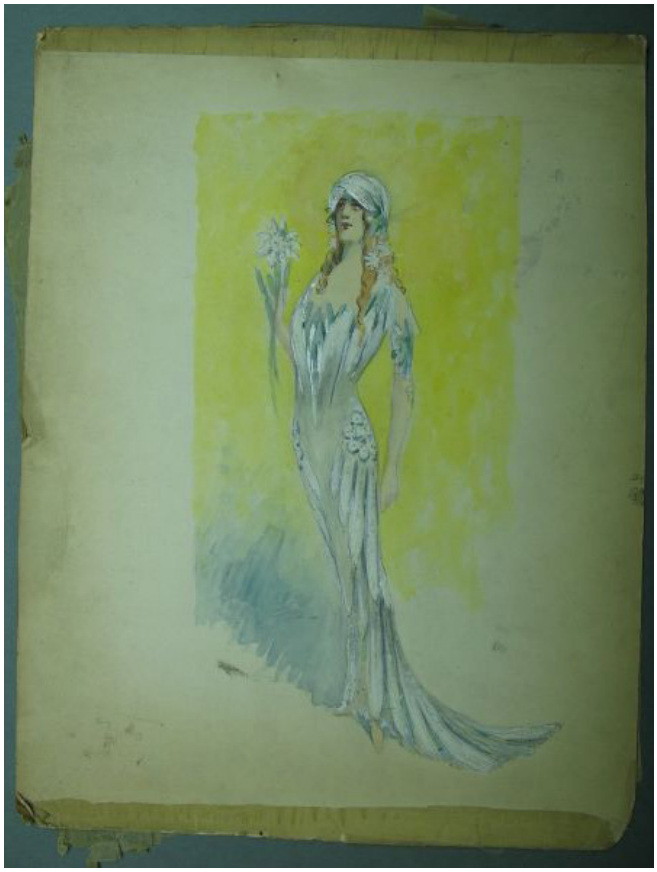

Fig. 2 Unknown artist, *Woman costume*, verso of Georges Lepape, *L'Oiseau bleu, le grand et petit Chêne*, Bibliothèque national de France, Arts du spectacle department, before treatment.

boards were themselves parts of music hall costume sketches drawn by various costume designers, so the objects had drawings on both sides. Over time, the tracing paper has become yellow, brittle, fragile and sometimes torn alongside the folds (Fig. 1). It was impossible to flatten the papers as they were adhered to the cardboard with creases and false folds. The deformations of the tracing paper caused added stress in its brittle state and we risked creating more tears or aggravating the existing ones.

We therefore chose to dismantle the documents in order to flatten them and consolidate the folds and tears. We knew this choice was irreversible. Indeed, the technical challenge which consisted of pressing fragile folds without weakening them was not the only difficulty. The paper and cardboard support were both discoloured where they had made contact, and not where air bubbles, curls, false folds and tears had prevented direct contact. Once the tracing paper was flattened, it was not possible to line up the discolouration on the paper and support. Gluing the conserved drawing on the same cardboard was therefore not meaningful. We therefore decided to mount both objects (Georges Lepape's tracing paper drawings and the cardboard drawings) separately in a false margin to ease handling.

Georges Lepape's drawings were also put in a thick mount to protect the coloured surface. Usually at the BnF, these types of anonymous series of costume drawings are gathered in albums belonging to a designer's workshop or a theatre. We decided with the curator to bind them in two scrapbooks to keep them together.

By doing this, George Lepape's sketches were transformed from archives into works of art. The original drawings on the cardboard used as support have been transformed into archives. This is an example of an extreme situation, where we need to transform the original presentation of the document. These were generally dictated by conservation considerations. To conserve these documents, we have removed from them a part of their authenticity.

Mounting and preservation of 3D models

1. Preservation and models set mounting

The BMO and the Département des arts du spectacle are in charge of several collections of 3D theatre set models, built about 100 years ago, most of them for the Opéra Garnier. These are 3D paper objects composed of several drawings, cut and folded to represent the true spatial organisation of the theatre set. Most of them are gouache painted on thin card, which has become brittle with time (Fig. 5). Since the creation of the Opéra Garnier, these objects

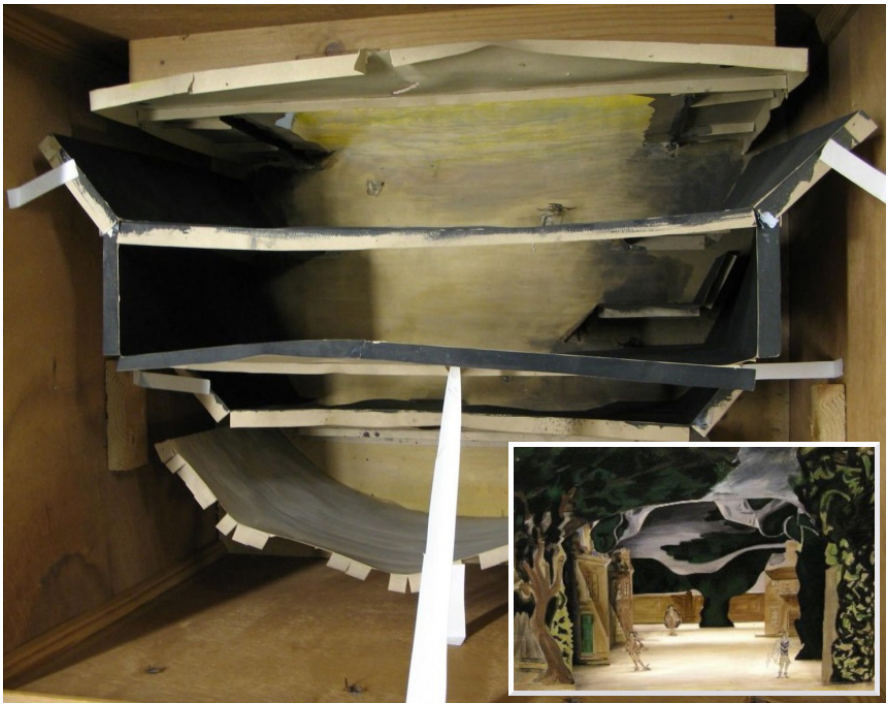

Fig. 3 Georges Braque, *Les Fâcheux*, 1924, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, top view before treatment and set remounting.

have gone on exhibition very regularly in a dedicated gallery called La Galerie des Guignols. Depending on their popularity, they have differentially suffered from these repeated exhibitions (Fig. 3). A program has been started, first to conserve these objects, but also to develop specific techniques to reinforce them in a non-invasive and reversible way, and protect them better during storage and exhibition.

To prevent distortion to the models during the several months of a typical exhibition, we mount each drawn panel with a stiff card. The card stiffens the panel and helps it to support its own weight. This new card is attached with Japanese paper hinges. Removable folded squares are sometimes slid between the cardboard and the verso of the panel to further increase rigidity.

These structural modifications are essential to prevent warps and weakening of the original card. They are reversible and not visible at first sight. Nevertheless, they modify deeply the structure of the object (Fig. 4). The set model becomes heavier and more structurally sound, which contradicts its original nature as a light and mobile object that could be transported and handed over between decorators and technicians. The original purpose of these objects is also changed: originally technical documents, they are now miniature theatre sets, conserved with the goal of presenting them to the public. However, this shift happened a long time ago, with the inception of the Galerie des Guignols. Hence, we consider that we are just following an established tradition.

All the treatments discussed so far were motivated by considerations related to their long-term conservation. In the specific case of 3D set models, there are also motivations to carry out an irreversible chemical treatment to preserve the original status of these items as technical objects: the reversion of lead white degradation.

A lot of 3D theatre set models are not fully colored but painted in shades of grey, black and white (Fig. 5). The use of light in theatre sets increased from the nineteenth century until the present,[5] following technical innovations in lighting: first gas at the end of the nineteenth century, and later electricity. However, there was no directional light, which is why the light was painted directly on the set using white paint. These white paint highlights not only showed the direction of the light, but also helped to structure the space, showing the moment of the day, the season, or even the country through their subtle variations. They gave atmosphere and consistency to the set. Lead white was the only available opaque white colour until the beginning of the twentieth century. With time and pollution many of these lead white highlights have oxidized and become dark grey or variations of pink and orange (Fig. 5), considerably changing the interpretation of the set. For example, full daylight may be seen today as a sunset.

5 Christine Richier, *Le Temps des flammes, Une histoire de l'éclairage scénique avant la lampe à incandescence* (Paris: Editions AS, 2011).

Fig. 4 Georges Braque, *Les Fâcheux*, 1924, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, top view after treatment and set remounting.

Fig. 5 Jean-Louis Chéret, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 1873, BnF/Bibliothèque Musée de l'Opéra, before treatment of lead white.

Fig. 6 Jean-Louis Chéret, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 1873, BnF/Bibliothèque Musée de l'Opéra, after reversion of lead white.

Because the raison-d'etre of a technical model is to bring accurate information about lighting, we decided to reverse the oxidised white colour. The whitening of discoloured lead white is a key requirement for the understanding of the theatre set and we consider that exhibiting a technical model with oxidised lead white is a betrayal. By the reversion treatment we try to preserve the technical meaning of the set model, at the cost of the irreversibility of the treatment. In this case we prioritize the purpose of the technical document at the expense of the authenticity of the drawing. This treatment is not carried out on all collections systematically but a priori for all blackened lead white on 3D models. This decision was taken in coordination with the curators in charge of the collection.

The difficulty is then to treat not only small white highlights but also wide washes without altering the paint layer. The classical methods of applying hydrogen peroxide solution directly with brushes or gel coats on the lead white is not appropriate on washes, so we tried to diffuse hydrogen peroxide by nebulisation and the results were most satisfactory (Fig. 5, Fig. 6).

2. Living artist and living document?

We try to keep the technical meaning of the 3D theatre set models, but very often in an exhibition the visitor only sees a very small part of the model. A frame hides the chassis and the 3D model becomes a miniature theatre set. To enhance viewing and to allow good digitization, we have to remove the curling of the paper ground or to hide unexpected gaps between panels. However, such small defects are part of the model. Hiding them is a demand from curators and photographers, and sometimes from ourselves to answer to the exhibition pressure.

Sometimes the theatre set is symbolically retaken by the artist, when he or she is still alive. We encountered this situation with a set designer who supervised an exhibition devoted to the role of scenography. One of his own models was exhibited, and was the subject of several discussions between his assistant, the lighting designers and our laboratory. We had many exchanges, principally about the lighting (how to improve the lighting without opening the protective box), and about the goals of the treatment (how to consolidate the structure). We agreed on a conservation protocol: the conserved model was displayed in a box, with the original structure of the model preserved. In the end, the artist's assistants took the model from the box and closed some gaps with adhesive tape, in order to improve the visual aspect of the model, whose original panels were not perfectly square. These small defects, which we tried to preserve, were not accepted by the artist once the model stopped being a technical document to become a miniature set in an exhibition.

3. 3D model mounting and extrapolation

Finally, we would like to discuss a tricky situation we faced some time ago. We were working on the 3D model created by André Derain for the ballet *Jack in the box* (1927).[6] The set arrived at our lab fully mounted (Fig. 7). Nobody knew who had mounted it, but clearly rules had been broken: some elements were torn and put in upside down. Fortunately, we found an illustration of the sketch which allowed us to see that some elements were not in their original places. So, with the agreement of the curator, we dismounted the previous set mounting, and

6 John E. Bowlt, Zelfira Tregulova, and Nathalie Rosticher-Giordano, *Etonne-moi! Serge Diaghilev et les ballets russes* (Paris: Skira, 2009).

remounted it, following the drawing we had found. It was thus possible to get a better idea of the original format of the set.

Our mounting left some space for interpretation, as we did not have any ground plan for the set model (Fig. 8). All we had was a 2D drawing, which gave only an idea of how things should look.

Sometimes it is not easy to know the boundary between a preservation treatment and an aesthetic treatment. Very often, both are intricate. It is all the more complicated when working with performing art documents. The whole works of art to which they once belonged no longer exist. The sketches and models are the survivors. They are perceived less as sketches but as the memory of past performances. Along with other performing art documents or objects such as masks or marionnettes, they give an indication of the whole atmosphere of a show. So, while we may transform their meaning by preserving them, their meaning has already been transformed by time. So, every time with each document we must raise questions to be aware of the consequences of our actions.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to illustrate, with concrete examples, the specific difficulties of preserving and displaying performing art documents: the size of the collection requires that we define very general conservation protocols that can be applied to large numbers of documents at once. The state of the documents (brittle acidic paper and powdery gouache layers) demands that the documents be well protected and that we minimize their manipulation after conservation. We found experimentally that these constraints have an impact on how we perceive these documents after treatment: from being archival documents, they have become pieces of art.

We tried to preserve their original status, or at least to document as much of it as possible. However, we found that it was rather difficult, in particular under the pressure of an exhibition. There are many technical reasons for this, but we think that an interesting explanation is related to the complex nature of these objects: more than archival documents, more than pieces of art, they are echoes of past theatrical performances that still live on through them. When getting ready for an exhibition, these humble technical documents that were not meant to survive a theatrical performance can help bring that performance back to life. The treatment of the 3D models bring the lights of the scenery back to life. In this situation, the conservator struggles to maintain a balance between the urge to preserve the original nature of the documents, and the necessity to keep them alive and preserve the link with distant performances that are now long gone.

Fig. 7 André Derain, *Jack in the Box*, 1927, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, before treatment and set remounting. In the upper right corner: the drawn model used as a basis for the remounting.

Fig. 8 André Derain, *Jack in the Box*, 1927, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, after treatment and set remounting.

Biographies

Lucile Dessennes graduated from École du Louvre (Paris) in 1996, with a Master's degree in Art History. She then studied paper conservation at the Institut national du patrimoine (Inp, Paris), from which she graduated in 2000, with a research on gouache consolidation, and the conservation of 3D paper objects. In 2001, she joined the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris). She has specialized in the conservation of 2D and 3D theatre design sets. Since 2004, she leads the Drawing and 3D-Model Conservation Laboratory at the Bibliothèque nationale.

Nadège Duqueyroix completed a master's degree in paper conservation at the Institut national du Patrimoine (Paris, France) in 2012 with a research on flexible mounting techniques for illuminated parchment documents. She then worked as a freelance conservator for Coralie Barbe's conservation studio (Paris, France) and then moved to Canada where she held conservator positions at the Archives of Ontario and at the Toronto Public Library (Toronto, ON). In 2014 she joined the Graphic Documents and Models conservation lab (Atelier de restauration des documents graphiques et des maquettes) at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris).

Manon Tertrain-Bloch graduated in 2016 with a master's degree in Conservation of cultural heritage from Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (Paris, France). Her research for the master's program dealt with the mounting of large contemporary works of art on paper, especially through a study of Christian Bonnefoi's work. Thereafter she worked part-time as a freelancer for public institutions such as the Louvre Museum but also for private owners in the field of original comic book drawings. The same year she worked part-time as a curator of the collections of the Musée de l'image (Épinal, France). In January 2018 she joined the Graphic Documents and Models conservation lab (Atelier de restauration des documents graphiques et des maquettes) at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris).

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