

ABSTRACT

Herculaneum Tripod and Ivory Fragments: A Visible Mount and Reversible Conservation Support

Presenters:

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Typically, one of the main objectives in Mountmaking is to design a mount that both provides protection to the object from potential damage and displays it in a way that aligns with a curator's vision, doing so in a way that goes unnoticed...as close to being invisible as possible. On rare occasions, however, Mountmakers are asked to fabricate a mount that is as equally on display as the object it supports. This was the case with the Herculaneum Tripod and Ivory Fragments, an artifact discovered in the ruins of the Villa dei Papiri in 2007 at Ercolano, Italy. This tripod was on display for the first time at the Getty Villa in the exhibit, *Buried by Vesuvius: Treasures from the Villa dei Papiri*, in 2019.

The Tripod was pieced together from fragments found, buried in a heap, beneath pyroclastic flow from the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. The numerous fragments of carved ivory veneer that originally covered the wooden table legs have, for the most part, been painstakingly reattached by conservators at the Parco Archeologico di Ercolano. However, there are still many fragments that remain in pieces due to the uncertainty of their placement. Working with curators and conservators from both Ercolano and the Getty, Richard Hards, Senior Mountmaker and Jessie Arista, Associate Conservator in the department of Antiquities Conservation, were able to gain a consensus on which parts to include in the final display and how they were to be oriented.

The Conservator's role involved developing a safe way to support and temporarily reattach a separate, important piece of carved ivory depicting a figure of Dionysos to one of the table legs, a focal point in the display, while the Mountmaker worked on designing and creating the mount.

For the Mountmaker, the primary goal was to design a mount that would provide a realistic framework for which to understand the object given its fragmentary nature, but not replicate the original Tripod. Simultaneously, all involved parties agreed it was important to make clear the separation between mount and original object. With the aid of a digital rendering, 3D replicas of the table legs and estimated dimensions of the diameter and height of the Tripod, Richard was able to form the foundation of the mount.

The Dionysus figure presented an additional challenge for display, as it arrived at the Villa reassembled from multiple fragments and adhered to a backing board of fabric, thin sheet cork, and Plexiglas. Given the object's fragile condition and inherent weakness, it was determined that a new backing system was required for safe display. This backing system provided safe support of the object and allowed it to be integrated into the larger overall mounting system.

This Poster will examine in detail the solutions discovered during the process of articulating the fragments of this unique, fragile ancient Tripod.

BIO



Richard Hards is a Senior Mountmaker in the Antiquities Conservation Department at the J Paul Getty Museum specializing in the design and fabrication of seismic mounts. He earned his MFA in Painting and Printmaking from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and his BFA from Utah State University. Richard joined the Antiquities Conservation Department in 2015, bringing with him over 30 years of experience in Mountmaking and Art Handling. He has been instrumental in the Department's use of 3D scanning technology for developing new approaches to Mountmaking.



Jessie Arista (she/her) is an objects conservator specializing in the conservation and technical study of ancient art. She joined the J. Paul Getty Museum Antiquities Conservation department in 2019. She earned her B.A from Smith College and her M.S. from the Winterthur/University of Delaware program in art conservation and has held internships and worked previously at the National Gallery of Art, the Walters Art Museum, the Harvard Art Museums and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. She is dedicated to public outreach and is currently a member of the Getty Museum's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force.