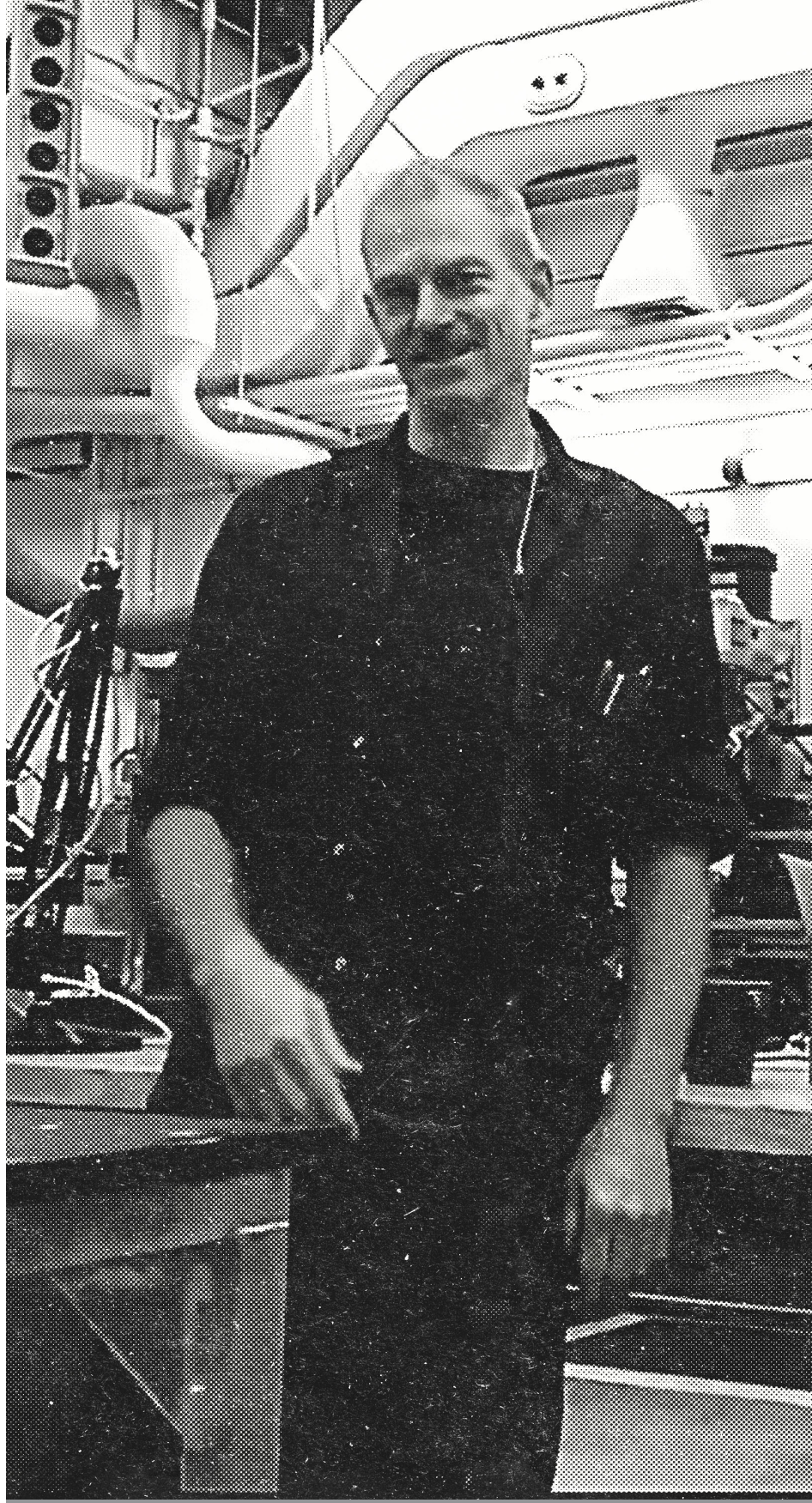


HUMANS OF MOUNTMAKING

# MCKENZIE LOWRY

FORMER SR. MOUNTMAKER  
DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES,  
GETTY MUSEUM  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, USA



INTERNATIONAL  
MOUNTMAKERS  
FORUM





# MCKENZIE LOWRY

**As one of the co-founders of the International Mountmakers Forum, Mac is a perfect candidate to kick off our IMF Steering Committee “HUMANS OF MOUNTMAKING” Interview Series along with BJ Farrar. Currently working as a freelance mountmaker in the Bay area, he had contributed to the design and production of seismic mounts for the Getty Villa galleries since the late 1990s and has traveled widely to present on seismic issues relating to art collections.**

## **What has your role been in the IMF?**

**Mac:** In 2006, the Getty Villa hosted an international conference on seismic mitigation methods for collections. BJ and I were invited to present a paper on the Getty Museum’s history of mountmaking, which gave us a chance to define the nature of our work to an audience of professionals in the field. We were inspired by that opportunity to try and imagine a conference that was targeted more towards our peers in mountmaking at large.

After receiving an encouraging response to the idea from our department head, Jerry Podany, we were left with the task of trying to reach out to a mountmaking community that had no means of affiliation.

Over the course of the next six months or so we cold-called every museum that we could think of in the US, asking whoever picked up the phone if they had mountmakers on staff. Slowly, we began to compile a list of names and institutions, and those that we were able to reach helped spread the word.

When the first Mountmakers Forum conference came together in 2008 at the Getty Villa, we had

just over a hundred attendees from across the nation. We were thrilled with the success of it all and the feeling that this community was starting to recognize itself.

The glow of our accomplishment didn’t last long, as Jerry mentioned that our success should probably be measured by our ability to keep it going. Recognizing the enormity of that task, we aimed for a biennial schedule, giving us a year between events to find another willing host.

Towards that end we decided to double down on the introductory speaker at the first Forum, Shelly Uhlir of the Smithsonian’s NMAI. She graciously took on the challenge, and at the second forum in 2010 grew the attendance substantially in Washington DC.

After all these years we’ve continued to be impressed and amazed at the skills, talents and tenacity of so many wonderful hosts. Each of them has brought a unique perspective and experience to a group that continues to grow and diversify.



# MCKENZIE LOWRY

**How did you find your way to the mountmaking profession? What sort of education or professional experience did you have that led you to your mountmaking career?**

**Mac:** After getting an M.F.A. in painting and drawing in 1987, I supported myself by teaching drawing and working in museums. I've always been a tinkerer and picked up mountmaking while helping install exhibits in L.A. during the early 1990's. I enjoyed the focus that it required, as well as the opportunity to try and visualize discrete methods to help protect art and artifacts.

**What are some of your favorite and least favorite things about this work?**

**Mac:** I enjoy the close proximity to some of the world's finest treasures. I loathe the thought of failing them.

**Do you have a favorite object or exhibition that you've worked on? What made it stand out to you?**

**Mac:** I've helped install the Getty Villa twice, and although each time was different, the tremendous team effort required was a remarkable thing to behold.



## 2015: UK KICK-START

In 2015, The Natural History Museum in London hosted an informal IMF meeting to inform museum professionals in the UK (and Europe) about the IMF and support for the future 2018 Forum.

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## 2010: 2ND INTERNATIONAL MOUNTMAKERS FORUM

Mac speaking at the Smithsonian's  
National Museum of the American  
Indian for the 2nd IMF

**You have worked as both a freelance and a staff mountmaker. From your experience, what are the pros and cons of each approach?**

**Mac:** Freelance work provides the chance to chart your own course, but you have to be reasonably good with navigation or you'll end up on the rocks. Working as a staff member puts you in touch with professionals in your field on a daily basis. That provides for quite a stimulating environment, which can be a blessing, a curse or both at the same time.

**Have you worked at different institutions or companies as a mountmaker (or in different capacities at the same place)? If so, have the job responsibilities varied greatly between workplaces?**

**Mac:** I've made mounts for a number of different institutions. The methods, practices and priorities of each differed greatly, as did the degree of responsibility. One of the ongoing conversations in the IMF is how we might establish basic standards in the field.

**What does your day-to-day work look like? What type of objects have you been working with lately?**

**Mac:** Since retiring from the Getty, I've mostly been involved with marble sculpture. I'm presently working on mount designs for a Roman statue and a number of Greek vases.

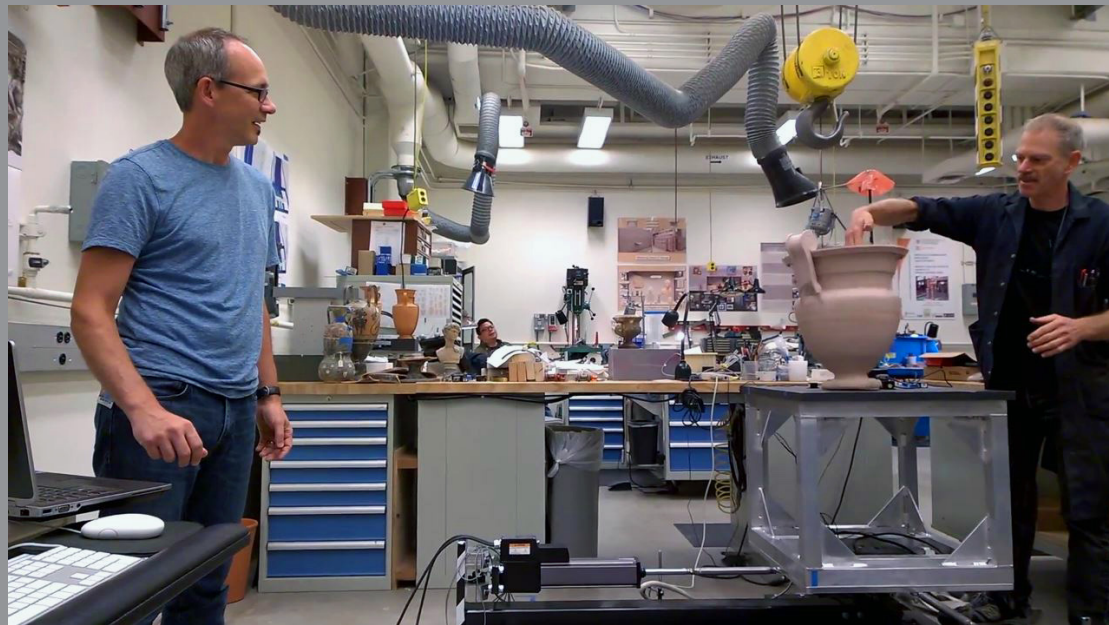


## 2008 : GETTY VILLA

Mac explains contour mounts in the  
[New York Times article "Protecting  
Treasures on a Shaky Planet"](#)



# MCKENZIE LOWRY



## 2015 : GOOD VIBRATIONS

Mac, BJ, and David Armendariz with a replica Greek Krater on a small shake table at the Getty Villa mount shop.

### Do you have any advice for people just starting out in mountmaking?

**Mac:** Never stop looking for ways to make your work more elegant and efficient.

### Where do you see the future of mountmaking heading?

**Mac:** 3D scanning and printing is certainly opening new doors in the field. Melding that with the craftsmanship and imagination of mountmaking creates a very dynamic potential.

### Would you like to share anything else about the IMF, the mountmaking field in general or anything else I might have missed?

**Mac:** What a wonderful group of folks we have at the IMF! If our success is to be measured by our ability to keep it going, I'd say we're in the running. The challenge as always is to keep a good thing going.



## 2015 : LONDON

BJ Farrar and Mac, on the loose in London.

This series was inspired by the AIC-ECPN's @humans\_of\_conservation Instagram series. We are grateful to them and expand on their idea with their permission.