

BIO



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Melissa Huddleston is an Assistant Conservator at Getty Research Institute Conservation and Preservation Department in Los Angeles, CA where she has been employed since 2014. She has worked in collection care for museums and private collections throughout Los Angeles since 2007 and specializes in treatment, housing, and installation solutions for Modern and Contemporary archive materials. Recent projects include the recreation of Harald Szeemann's 1974 exhibition, *Grandfather: A Pioneer Like Us*, on tour from January 2018 – September 2019, *Tango With Cows: The storied history of a Russian Futurist Artist Book* presented at the AIC conference in 2020, and *Fluxus Means Change: Jean Brown's Avant-Garde Archive*, September 14, 2021 – January 2, 2022. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in studio art with a focus in painting from Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, 2005.

ABSTRACT

Fosshé: An Innovative Method for Building Flexible, Rigid, Interior Supports

Recently acquired by the Getty Research Institute as part of the Women's Building Archive, *The Breast Dress* (1978) is a costume that was worn during performances by the all-woman artist collective *The Waitresses*, notorious for guerilla style performances held in diners and cafes throughout Los Angeles. Created by artist Anne Gauldin, the costume consists of fourteen cast latex rubber breasts from members of the group, which were sewn to the front of the dress to impersonate the character of the Great Goddess Diana.

After almost fifty years, each of the breasts exhibited different stages of degradation due to the unstable nature of the rubber. Some retained their plasticity with minimal signs of decay, while others were severely discolored with hardened deformations and areas completely shattered.

A treatment plan was formed to clean, consolidate, and repair the fragmented breasts and apply a supporting interior lining to each. Because of the tendency to slump and harden during final stages of degradation, an integral part of conserving latex materials in constructing custom supports to hold the appropriate shape. Mountmaking is an integral part of the treatment process, making this a natural opportunity for conservators and mountmakers to collaborate. Prior to the treatment, vintage latex samples with a similar material makeup were acquired to test various treatment and mountmaking approaches.

The interior supports needed to be rigid, flexible, light-weight, and archival for long term contact with the latex. Fosshape, commonly used in costume mounting, seemed to be the natural choice, but shaping it into a precise fit proved challenging. Experimentation with manipulating Fosshape combined with 3D scanning and printing techniques lead to an innovative solution. Extremely precise conformal internal supports were achieved with essentially zero contact with the object during the process. The success of this method allowed the dress to be displayed upright on a mannequin, as a dynamic way to accompany the videos of the performance.