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## Internship Stories from the Heritage Interiors Conservation Division

By Tyler C. Cantwell and Alice Wang



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Figure 1. Tania Mottus using a bench top humidity generator to calibrate data-loggers when she was an intern at the Canadian Conservation Institute in 2012.



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Figure 2. Melanie Bell photographing artworks in storage as part of a rehabilitation project.

Since the first internship program at the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) in 1980, CCI has welcomed over 250 budding conservators and conservation scientists. In this interview, we catch up with former intern Tania Mottus (January 2012 to April 2013) and current intern Melanie Bell (June 2022 to June 2023) to learn about their experiences at CCI.

[Tania](#) now serves as a senior collections preservation advisor in the Heritage Interiors Conservation Division and is the team lead for the work CCI is completing on the rehabilitation of the Supreme Court of Canada building and the Judicial Precinct. Melanie is currently working with Tania as part of her internship.

*The interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

**Tyler C. Cantwell (TCC):** Let's begin with some background. Tania, how did you become an intern at CCI?

**Tania Mottus (TM):** Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be an artist. So I went to art school for my Bachelor of Fine Arts, majoring in studio art with a focus on sculpture, and after five years, I saw that art conservation was a field that resonated with my skill set and my attention to detail. Knowing that the program requirements included chemistry, I revisited high school math, chemistry, physics and biology and realized how much I actually enjoyed studying the sciences. I just kept taking courses until I found myself with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry.

From there, I applied and was accepted into the Master of Art Conservation program at Queen's University, in the object conservation stream. For my curriculum internships, my first placement was at the Canadian Museum of Nature and my second was at the National Gallery of Canada. After I graduated, I applied for the internship with the Preventive Conservation Division at CCI (or Preservation Services, as it was called back then). It was a relatively new division. When I was accepted, I was their second intern.

**TCC:** Melanie, how did you become an intern at CCI?

**Melanie Bell (MB):** I did my undergraduate degree in Humanities at Carleton University. While I was there, I got to do a little bit of travelling (to England in my second year and to Greece and Turkey in my fourth year). I also had a professor in my third year who took his class on a bunch of tours, especially to the National Gallery of Canada since one of his friends was the paintings conservator there. During these experiences, I kept thinking that something with art, history and conservation would be such a great career. It was too bad that I didn't have the sciences background.

After I graduated, I started doing my Grade 12 chemistry while taking stained glass classes so I could apply to the Cultural Heritage Conservation and Management program at Fleming College. It was great! I loved it.

While I was in school, I interned at Eve Guinan Design (or EGD Glass Studio) in Toronto, where we worked on the windows from two local churches and the Massey Hall rehabilitation project. Then a job came up at Legris Conservation Inc. in Ottawa to work on the paintings at Parliament Hill. Because I had site experience from working with stained glass and had completed my “Working at Heights” training, I got that job. I worked with Legris for two and a half years. We were involved in a number of projects for the Parliament Hill rehabilitation.

From there, I returned to Parliament Hill to work as a junior masonry conservator with Capital Conservation Services. I was on the north wall exterior team, so I helped with tracking progress along the wall and assessing the long-term storage of the stones that had been removed from the building. When the posting came up for this internship, it encompassed all the skills and material knowledge that I’d slowly been building up.

Our division is called Heritage Interiors Conservation, but it’s a bit of a misnomer. It really includes a focus on the entire building: finishes, envelope, fixtures, architectural paint. There is so much to learn about. I know CCI is one of the top places in Canada to work, so I’m really excited to be here. I’m loving it so far.

**TCC:** What has your internship at CCI been like to date, Melanie?

**MB:** Well, it has been a little bit different because we are still mostly working remotely. But we stay in touch through regular meetings so that helps to keep everything moving. Right now, I am researching a collection of nine artworks at the Lester B. Pearson Building. I’m researching the artists and helping to create interpretation panels for these artworks. That has been really enjoyable. We also have a few site visits planned.

**TCC:** Do you go into the labs?

**MB:** I’ve been there a couple of times, but I haven’t done any lab work myself yet.

**TM:** For the work Melanie and I do, you could consider our visits to client sites as “lab work.” Sometimes this is to review project-related mock-ups or to assess storage facilities; sometimes it’s to facilitate the work of our CCI colleagues for specific aspects of these projects, like fine arts or textiles, for example. Most recently, we have been on-site to perform heritage inventories of the federal heritage buildings in Block 3 (the city block that is bounded by the Wellington Building and the Sir John A. Macdonald Building in downtown Ottawa). From these heritage inventories, we can develop heritage value assessments that will help define the scope of work for the future rehabilitation of these buildings.

**TCC:** Tania, what was your internship experience like at CCI?

**TM:** Well, on the first day of my internship, I disclosed to my supervisor that I was newly pregnant. The timing wasn’t great, but I knew this internship was such an incredible opportunity that I couldn’t

turn it down. Everyone was really supportive and accommodating. My manager ensured that I had a varied experience, including travel to Montréal and Edmonton to deliver emergency preparedness workshops and local travel to provide facility assessments. Also, the work was innocuous: I wasn't handling solvents and things like that, so it really lent itself well to my personal situation.

After the birth of our daughter, I took three months off and then split the parental leave with my partner so that I could return to CCI to finish up the remainder of my one-year term. When I look at my daughter now, she's the physical embodiment of my career at CCI. She was there with me from the beginning, and she just turned ten so it's pretty neat that we have that comparable growth: her growth as a kid and mine as a conservator. Except now I'm worried that I'm just going to be remembered as the "pregnant intern."

**MB:** No, Tania. Honestly, it's comforting to include this. That way people know if they have a situation that has to be worked around, they'll be supported.



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Figure 3. Tania Mottus receiving the CCI Director General Excellence Award from then-Director General, Patricia Kell, in 2016.

**TCC:** Melanie, what do you plan to do after your internship?

**MB:** I hope to stay in this field. I enjoy working on-site; I think it's really fun. I'm comfortable in my steel toes and working at heights. The more I learn, the more things I like. For example, I didn't realize how interesting stone was. The engineering of a building can change entirely, depending on the materials it's made out of. It is way more fascinating than I ever gave it credit for.

**TCC:** Tania, being where you are now and having gone through the internship program, what advice do you have for current and future interns at CCI as they navigate their career ahead?

**TM:** Engage in all the opportunities afforded to you. The diversity in skills and knowledge at CCI is how we've been able to negotiate many of our service agreements with our clients. We're not just a team of five in our division, rather we are supported by a strong collection of staff members with a variety of specializations. Everyone is always very open to sharing their expertise, from our CCI Library staff to any of the conservators and conservation scientists to our colleagues at the Canadian Heritage Information Network. My advice is to take advantage of all the available resources during your internship!

Interested in learning more about the internship programs at CCI? Visit [Canadian Conservation Institute internship programs](#).