

## A PERUVIAN-AMERICAN CONSERVATION COLLABORATION

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**ABSTRACT**—Since 2003, Museum Textile Services and the Municipal Museum of Huaca Malena have collaborated to offer an annual Ancient Peruvian Textiles Workshop in and around Lima, Peru. This unique independent program brings Peruvians and non-Peruvians together with the goal of conserving archaeological textiles and mummy bundles while learning firsthand about Peru's long and multifaceted history. During the ten-day course, students visit museums and historical sites, and work together to conserve artifacts salvaged from the pre-Inca archaeological complex of Huaca Malena. The non-Peruvian students provide the funding for the course, and the Peruvian students attend for free. Students are drawn from many related fields like archaeology, conservation, and art history. They receive instruction on textile structures, Peruvian history, documentation, preventative conservation, and reversible mounting. Of equal importance, students visit the heavily looted archaeological site at Huaca Malena, and gain perspective on difficult issues like grave robbing, cultural repatriation, and the treatment of human remains. This presentation outlines the steps to take in assessing the potential for such collaboration. Guidelines for safely and efficiently working with a group of disparately-trained students will also be given, along with illustrations of objects conserved by students of the Ancient Peruvian Textiles Workshop.

**UNA COLABORACIÓN EN LA CONSERVACIÓN AMERICANA- PERUANA POR CAMILLE MYERS BREEZE, RESUMEN**—Desde 2003, Museum Textile Services y el Museo Municipal de Huaca Malena han colaborado para ofrecer un Taller de Textiles Precolombinos anual dentro y en los alrededores de Lima, Perú. Este programa independiente y único une a estudiantes internacionales y Peruanos con el objetivo de la conservación de textiles arqueológicos y textiles para embalaje de momias, y aprendiendo de primera mano sobre la larga y multifacética historia de Perú. Durante los diez días del curso, los estudiantes visitan los museos y sitios históricos, y trabajan en conjunto para preservar artefactos rescatados del complejo pre-Inca de Huaca Malena. Los visitantes proveen los fondos para el curso, y los estudiantes Peruanos asisten de forma gratuita. Los estudiantes proceden de muchos campos relacionados como la arqueología, la conservación, y la historia del arte. Ellos reciben instrucción sobre la estructura de textiles, la historia Peruana, documentación, conservación preventiva, y montaje reversible. De igual importancia, los estudiantes visitan el sitio arqueológico muy saqueado en Huaca Malena, y ganan perspectiva sobre cuestiones difíciles como saqueo de tumbas, repatriación cultural, y el tratamiento de restos humanos. Esta presentación describe los pasos a seguir en la evaluación del potencial de esa colaboración. Directrices para el seguro y eficiente trabajo con un grupo de estudiantes con tan diversa formación también será provisto, así como ilustraciones de nuestros objetos conservados por estudiantes del Taller de Textiles Precolombinos.

## A PERUVIAN-AMERICAN CONSERVATION COLLABORATION

### 1. INTRODUCTION

To the ancient Peruvians, textiles played a fundamental role in the dispersion of political and religious ideology. Both in life and death textiles were used to clothe the body as well as fulfilling social functions such as paying taxes. Every hand-weaving technique invented anywhere in the world was also known to the ancient Peruvians, which illustrates their ingenuity and resourcefulness. It is this unique legacy that attracts textile scholars and students to Peru.

The idea for the Ancient Peruvian Textiles Workshop came after the author and Rommel Angeles Falcon met at the 2002 conference of the Comité Nacional de Conservación Textil in Lima. Angeles Falcon is on the staff of Peru's Instituto Nacional de Cultura and the Director of the Municipal Museum of Huaca Malena. He spoke with passion about his Adopt-a-Textile program that



Figure 1. The 2005 class of Ancient Peruvian Textiles Workshop in front of the Huaca Malena Museum.

## CAMILLE MYERS BREEZE

was uniting local residents, institutions, scholars, and the public at large behind the urgent need to rescue and preserve textiles from Huaca Malena. With the assistance of ICOM-Peru, the adoption project has provided funding for the conservation of dozens of textiles. Compared to its neighboring countries, Peru has a robust national museum system employing thousands of archaeologists, conservators, curators, and related professionals. However the need for project support and affordable professional development opportunities is also great.

Together Rommel and the author envisioned a collaborative program that would bring Peruvian and foreign students and professionals together to adopt Huaca Malena textiles by documenting, surface cleaning, stabilizing and mounting them when appropriate (fig. 1). During the ten-day course, students would visit museums and historical sites to gain perspective on difficult issues like grave robbing, cultural repatriation, and the treatment of human remains. They would socialize together in the evenings and work in the daytime at a space provided by one of the Lima museums. The non-Peruvian students would provide the funding for the course, and the Peruvian students would attend at no cost. There is a precedent for this type of program. In June of 2002 the author taught was hired by Nanette Skov to teach a similar workshop in Arequipa, Peru. Many of the basics for the collaboration with Huaca Malena came out of this teaching experience including the concept of training Peruvians for free using course fees provided by the non-Peruvian students.

### 1.2 HISTORY OF HUACA MALENA

Huaca Malena is a pre-Inca ceremonial complex that functioned as an administrative and religious center from 400 to 500 C.E. Between 700 and 1100 C.E. the upper platform was used by the provincial Wari culture as a cemetery. The site was excavated in 1925 by Julio C. Tello. 309 mummy bundles were retrieved and moved to the National Museum of Archaeology, where they remain. When Rommel Angeles Falcon was an archaeology student in the early 1980s, the site was relatively undisturbed. By 1997 when he was appointed the Director of the Huaca Malena Archaeological Project, the site was sixty-five percent sacked, and the top platform completely destroyed. He undertook a campaign of surface salvage, and now more than three thousand recovered artifacts and mummy bundles are housed in the nearby museum, which opened in 2001 (figs. 2, 3).

### 2. FINDING STUDENTS

The timing of any workshop is a key to finding a renewable pool of qualified students. Rather than hold the workshop in North America's summer months, when the archaeological digs are taking place in Peru, the Ancient Peruvian Textiles Workshop takes place in January. It falls

A PERUVIAN-AMERICAN CONSERVATION COLLABORATION



Figure 2. Upper platform of the Huaca Malena Archaeological Site.



Figure 3. Rommel Angeles Falcon speaking to members of the 2008 class at Huaca Malena.

## CAMILLE MYERS BREEZE

between the usual academic semesters in the northern hemisphere and during summer break in the southern hemisphere. It is cold and grey in the north and hot and sunny in the south.

Almost all of the advertising for the program is done through email and internet postings. In addition to sending announcements to friends and colleagues, several familiar list serves are used: ConsDistList, TextCons DistList, the Andean DistList, the New England Conservation Association list, Textile Society of America list, and the Costume Society of America. In recent years a flyer was also emailed to colleagues for them to post at their institutions. As the word of mouth spread through friends and students of the programs, more and more applications were forthcoming. Rather than change the criteria for accepting students, the increase in interest was accommodated by expanding the program. There is a limit to how many students should be accepted, however, before resources and energy are strained.

Students for a conservation-based program can be drawn from many related fields such as archaeology, anthropology, history, art history, and weaving, in addition to conservation. The most essential qualifications they must have are excellent hand skills, museum sensibilities, and the ability to work well in a group. Working with archaeological objects is dirty and occasionally uncomfortable, and requires a strong work ethic. Therefore a successful group must have a balance of advanced and beginner students, know-it-alls and wall flowers. The right group will be supportive, social, and work as a team, whereas another group might be cliquey and, at worst, rebellious (fig. 4).



Fig. 4. 2007 students Nadia Tsatsouli and Lisa Ellis examining a mummified head. Both are trained object conservators.

## A PERUVIAN-AMERICAN CONSERVATION COLLABORATION

### 2.2 VETTING OVERSEES APPLICANTS

The Peruvian students are sometimes harder to vet. English is a requirement for all Peruvian students of the Ancient Peruvian Textiles Workshop. This not only saves the instructor from saying everything twice, in English and Spanish, but allows all students to speak with each other (Spanish is not required for the non-Peruvians.) It is not uncommon for students to have better written than spoken English, however, so the instructor should either be proficient in the local language or work with a translator.

A further tool for choosing from among the applicants in a foreign country is to invite all those interested to a special event held prior to the workshop. In 2008 there was one-day class on conservation stitching and mount making held in Lima prior to the Ancient Peruvian Textiles Workshop. This class was an opportunity not only for prospective and accepted Peruvian students to meet the instructor, but it was also a way for the instructor to judge their hand skills and personalities. In the process, the accepted students who attended got their conservation stitching lesson out of the way, allowing them to move ahead the next week when class began. Fifteen mount boards were also covered with fabric and fitted with Velcro for the modular mount system that was developed for Huaca Malena—a win-win situation (fig. 5)



Figure 5. Peruvian students learning conservation stitching at Casa Serena prior to the formal workshop.

## CAMILLE MYERS BREEZE

### 3. THE ESSENTIAL TEAM MEMBERS

Assisting Rommel Angeles Falcon and Camille Myers Breeze in the running of the Ancient Peruvian Textiles Workshop are the driver, Clever Justo Gomez, and Cerena Consillia of Casa Serena Bed & Breakfast. Together they represent the four cardinal points for the successful running of the conservation program.

#### 3.1 TRANSPORTATION

Since 2004 Clever Justo Gomez has been the driver, unofficial bodyguard, and personal shopper for the Ancient Peruvian Textiles Workshop (fig. 6). Clever owns a van in good condition that seats fourteen in a pinch. He is a life-long resident of Lima and knows how to get anywhere and where to buy anything. He is punctual, cheerful, and always accommodates the sometimes unpredictable schedule. Clever is paid a daily rate for each student, plus a fee for airport runs. In



Figure 6. Driver Clever Justo Gomez and 2005 student Omar Zamaoilla in front of the Municipal Museum of Huaca Malena.

## A PERUVIAN-AMERICAN CONSERVATION COLLABORATION

return he provides the instructor with transportation free of cost before, during, and after the course. The students immediately trust Clever and, even though he does not speak English, they will travel alone with him after class for shopping excursions and the like.



Figure 7. Members of the class of 2006 eating breakfast at Casa Serena.

### 3.2 HOUSING

While in Lima, the group stays at Casa Serena, a beautiful three-story hostel in the Lima neighborhood of Miraflores. It is home to Cerena, her husband Victor, their three children, and other visiting members of Cerena's large family. Casa Serena meets all the important criteria for a



## CAMILLE MYERS BREEZE

home-away-from-home: amazingly generous and friendly people; comfortable lodging with private bathrooms and lots of public space; high security including gated entry and 24-hour attention; and reasonable pricing including group discount and free stay for the instructor (fig. 7). By building a relationship with Casa Serena the group is excited to return year after year, and the family takes a genuine interest in the goals of the course.

### 3.3 LOCAL COORDINATOR

Rommel Angeles Falcon is the third piece of this puzzle. He is a trained archaeologist with a passion for his country and its patrimony. He is an excellent administrator, project manager, and advocate for conservation. It is Rommel's challenge to identify appropriate textiles in his collection that are small and stable enough to be documented, surface cleaned, humidified, and mounted in five days. He takes care of permission to work with the textiles and, together with Clever, moves them from Huaca Malena to Lima for the workshop. Rommel also has helped secure the work spaces in Lima at other museums. Since January 2008, the course has been held at Huaca Huallamarca, a restored adobe structure with a small museum and ample work room. In return for providing the facility, some of Huallamarca's textiles are also conserved.



Figure 8. Instructor Camille Myers Breeze with Melina La Torre, who is now a practicing textile conservator and who returned in 2008 as the teaching assistant.

## A PERUVIAN-AMERICAN CONSERVATION COLLABORATION

### 3.4 INSTRUCTOR

The instructor is the fourth member of the administrative team (fig. 8). As the project director, Camille Myers Breeze is responsible for recruiting students, deciding on class content, coordinating activities, instruction, getting the students safely from and to the airport, and providing the information they need to arrive prepared. It is a four-month, part-time job with a paid working vacation each year. The course earnings are split more or less in thirds: 1/3 for housing, 1/3 for transportation, and 1/3 for the instructor. Rommel is not paid but his collection gets conserved at no cost.

### 4. GUIDELINES

If you are considering putting together a project of this type, here are some skills you should have:

- ❖ Be fluent in the native language or have a translator.
- ❖ Become as familiar as possible with the area and its attractions.
- ❖ Know your subject well and know your limitations.
- ❖ Be resilient when weather, traffic, and other unforeseen obstacles cause problems.
- ❖ Be able to function with less sleep.

In every successful collaboration there are unexpected surprises and magical moments of grace that can't be planned for but make all the difference. For Ancient Peruvian Textiles Workshop these include:

- ❖ The fact that Clever and Cerena are also artisans and are excited to sell us their crafts.
- ❖ How some students have gone on to become conservators or more informed archaeologists.
- ❖ That each year one Peruvian student has stood out, and has returned later as an assistant.
- ❖ How teaching and learning often switch places, leading to rewarding experiences.

With any large project there are also things that could be done better. To avoid some of the more common pitfalls, consider the following:

- ❖ Some students just don't do well—always have a set of tasks, such as photography or making boxes, for those who don't take to conservation.
- ❖ Ideally all team members should speak the same language, in this case English.
- ❖ The visiting students may take for granted certain things that are luxuries elsewhere in the world like hot showers and air conditioning.

## CAMILLE MYERS BREEZE



Figure 9. Rommel Angeles Falcon and Camille Myers Breeze in 2008 at the inauguration of a new exhibit at the Municipal Museum of Huaca Malena celebrating five years of conservation collaboration.

- ❖ Scheduling becomes more complicated with different definitions of “on time.”
- ❖ Resist the temptation to make more money by accepting more and more students. Too many students will stretch assets and patience too thin.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The ongoing success of the Ancient Peruvian Textiles Workshop is due to the contributions of every member of this team, as well as to the amazing students. As of January 2009, sixty-two students have participated, with eleven of those returning for more than one year. Together they have conserved sixty textiles, mummy bundles, and mummified heads for the Huaca Malena Museum. The amount of work that goes into preparing for, executing, and recovering from this ten-day collaboration is formidable. In order to do it well, there must be enthusiasm, energy, and creative problem solving in equal measure. It is our hope that this program can serve as a model for self-funding programs in other parts of the world where cultural patrimony is being protected with very limited resources.

## A PERUVIAN-AMERICAN CONSERVATION COLLABORATION

CAMILLE MYERS BREEZE is a nationally-known textile conservator and educator, and Director of Museum Textile Services in Andover, Massachusetts. Museum Textile Services provides textile conservation for collectors and collecting institutions throughout the US and abroad. Before starting Museum Textile Services in 1999, Camille worked for the Textile Conservation Center in Lowell, Massachusetts. Prior to moving to New England, Camille worked at the Textile Conservation Laboratory of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and the Textile Conservation Workshop. Camille has a BA in Art History from Oberlin College and a MA in Museum Studies: Costume and Textiles Conservation from the Fashion Institute of Technology. She can be contacted at PO Box 5004, Andover, MA 01810 or [museumtextiles@gmail.com](mailto:museumtextiles@gmail.com). [www.museumtextiles.com](http://www.museumtextiles.com).