

# THE FRICK COLLECTION

## PREPARING FOR IMPLEMENTING CONSERVATION SOFTWARE



The Frick Collection, located in New York City's Upper East Side neighborhood, is one of the most well-known museums in the world, with a collection specializing in Old Master paintings and European sculpture and decorative arts predominantly dating from the 14th to 18th century. Henry Clay Frick, who built the Frick mansion as his home, assembled the main part of his art collection from the late 1890s till his death in 1919.

With such a unique and historic collection and building, the conservators at The Frick Collection wanted a better way to manage conservation documentation, to make it easily accessible to members of the Curatorial Department and visiting scholars, and to improve their workflows and collection care.

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- JULIA DAY, CONSERVATOR, THE FRICK COLLECTION



### OVERVIEW

- Gilded Age Mansion
- Permanent collection of over 1500 paintings, objects, and furniture
- 6 to 7 special exhibitions annually



### PRODUCTS

- The Museum System (TMS)
- TMS Conservation Studio
- eMuseum



## THE CHALLENGE

The Frick's Conservation department was created in 2000 to provide full-time onsite care for the objects in the collection, as well as the Frick Mansion itself. Currently the Chief Conservator, Joseph Godla and Julia Day, Conservator, treat the furniture and objects in the collection. Day explains, "We're a small department that works closely with Operations regarding the historic preservation needs of the building." The Conservation department also includes the museum's administrator, preparator and gallery technician, and collaborates with the Curatorial and Registrar departments to coordinate exhibitions on site and loans for travel.

The information found in the conservation records needs to be easily accessible by many members of the museum's staff. Gianna Puzzo, Administrative Assistant for Conservation, tells us, "If a member of our staff is working on an object, they often reference treatment history or condition history." Colleagues need access to details of the object's history in order to do a thorough review of objects before exhibition, movement, or when updating an object's condition status.

In addition to making information more accessible, the department also wanted to ensure they had one centralized system of record. Julia explains their previous process, "We were using the Conservation features in TMS but found the fields were too limited and it was not set up for how we would typically enter data, so we were still using FileMaker to do some of the larger surveys that we needed, and sometimes we used Word as well." It was frustrating to go to several different places to look for information, and the department wanted to ensure that data about the collection was not getting lost or misplaced. "The goal is to have all the information in one database where everyone can find it and we can easily report on any aspect of the collection," says Julia. "We feel strongly that this is very important for the care of the collection."



## THE SOLUTION

The Frick was already using TMS for collections management, so when they decided they wanted to expand their conservation documentation capabilities, they chose to implement TMS Conservation Studio as early adopters. "We were dedicated to using TMS, so it made sense," says Julia. "Gallery Systems showed us Conservation Studio, and it seemed like it would build on the workflows we already used in TMS, and give us many improvements too. The link between TMS and Conservation Studio was important because we didn't want to have to go into a separate system to access object data."



## THE PROCESS

After deciding to use Conservation Studio, the Conservation and Digital departments were excited to get into their new system. Being one of the first museums to use Conservation Studio, they also knew they had some heavy work ahead of them. "You have the entire world open to you, you're building on a lot of the work you did in TMS, but with more options and possibilities," Julia says, "We had a lot of discussions about the types of reports we wanted to create, how complex they should be. All of those details depend on your collection and what you're trying to achieve. You can create as many reports as you want. We had to think about what our department needed, and we realized that just because we could do so much more, that didn't always mean we should."

Chrisy Tselentakis, Collections Database Specialist at the Frick, remembers what it was like to get started with Conservation Studio, "We had some questions, but we were able to get into the work pretty quickly. Julia was involved with the whole process, so I think it was easy for her. But even new users have been able to pick up things quickly without having that background."

Their suggestions? Start with a map. “Before we even started testing a migration for our data, we started a migration map,” recalls Chrisy. Julia adds, “You need to know what your conservation process for reporting is going to look like before you start making big decisions about how your new report system will work.”

Chrisy gives some examples, “We had many different kinds of reports that we wanted to put into Conservation Studio. There was a long list of fields and drop down menus, and the conservators had to decide if they wanted check boxes or text fields or something else. Sometimes we would test a field type, and then end up changing it to better fit our needs.” Gallery Systems and The Frick’s Digital department did multiple rounds of test migrations before finally migrating their data to their new system. Chrisy thinks this played a role in their ability to get started quickly. “The test migrations helped,” says Chrisy. “Even when we had made a decision about what we wanted a field to look like, once we tested it we would sometimes think, ‘Maybe it would be better if this was a different type of field.’ Starting with a map and doing several test migrations is really helpful.”

The Frick also realized that some of the heavy lifting done in the beginning of the process would help their workflows in the future. “We had to make a lot of decisions, more decisions than we expected,” says Julia. Conservation Studio helps conservators and collection care staff to track many more details than they had previously been tracking, but it came with a learning curve. “For example, Conservation Studio has things like Departments and Unique Numbers for reports. That’s not something that we had in TMS, so

The screenshot shows the TMS CONSERVATION STUDIO web application. The top navigation bar includes the application name, user profile (GIANNA PUZZO, CONSER), and language settings (ENGLISH (US)). The main header displays 'Conservation Reports' and a page indicator '10 / 38'. The left sidebar contains a 'Record Hierarchy' section with a dropdown menu showing '2019-04-17 201908002\_CR20190502 Jul'. Below this is a list of 'Available Data Entry Views' including 'Condition Report', 'Required Information', 'Condition Checklist', 'Loan, Storage, and Display Checklist', 'Media', 'Projects', and 'Report Number'. The main content area is titled '201908002\_CR20190502' with a 'START DATE: 17-APR-2019' and 'Condition Report' label. It features four large text input areas for 'Technical Exam Notes', 'Handling & Storage Recommendations', 'Travel/Display Recommendations', and 'Mount/Install', each with a rich text editor toolbar. At the bottom, there are five expandable sections: 'Condition Checklist', 'Loan, Storage, and Display Checklist', 'Media', 'Projects', and 'Report Number'.

Condition Report

we had to make decisions about that.” The numbering system they settled on is composed of a report type, accession number and date. For example, Condition Report for object number 1916.4.03, Report Date: 4/25/2002 Report Number = 191604003\_CR20020425

Although you can have an unlimited number of report types or views in Conservation Studio, The Frick staff recommend setting a goal to keep the number to a minimum due to the time it takes your TMS administrator or Digital staff to design the reports. For example, the conservators at The Frick chose to have one condition report that would cover each conservation specialty’s needs. “If you have a very large conservation department, it may be worthwhile to have a report for each specialty,” suggests Julia.

TMS CONSERVATION STUDIO






GIANNA PUZZO, CONSER

ENGLISH (US)

### Conservation Reports

Conservation Reports (Frick)

+ - Navigate

Media	Report Number	Department	Report Date	Date Completed	Project	Examiner	Classification
	193603055_CR20180104	Condition Report	2018-02-21		OGL Museo de Arte de Ponce	Julia Day, Conservator	Works on Paper-Drawing
	194003061_CR20180105	Condition Report	2018-02-21		OGL Museo de Arte de Ponce	Julia Day, Conservator	Works on Paper-Print
	198203124_CR20180105	Condition Report	2018-02-21		OGL Museo de Arte de Ponce	Julia Day, Conservator	Works on Paper-Drawing
	201003002_CR20180105	Condition Report	2018-02-21		OGL Museo de Arte de Ponce	Julia Day, Conservator	Works on Paper-Watercolor
	201003007_CR20180105	Condition Report	2018-02-21		OGL Museo de Arte de Ponce	Julia Day, Conservator	

Report Numbering System

Another feature that the Conservation department uses effectively is the checkbox capabilities. Julia recalls, "We made use of that immediately once we got Conservation Studio. For example, we've organized the checkboxes into groups by object type; we have a list for general structural and surface issues, and additional lists specific for works on paper or painting and objects. So for things like objects, there are checkboxes for corrosion, oxidation and coatings, to name a few."

But no matter what, the Conservation department's priorities remain the same. "Mainly, we're entering reports for either condition, damage, or treatment," states Julia. "That's the main function and will always be the main function. From there, we're using Conservation Studio to print reports, keep records on file, or submit records to someone."

**Condition Checklist**

**Structural**

Name	Value
Broken/Missing Part	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unstable/loose part	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crack	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Deformation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Repair/Restoration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**Surface**

Name	Value
Loss	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scratch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Abrasion/Worn	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pinhole/Hole	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friable/Flaking	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spot	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stains/discoloration	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accretion/Residue	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

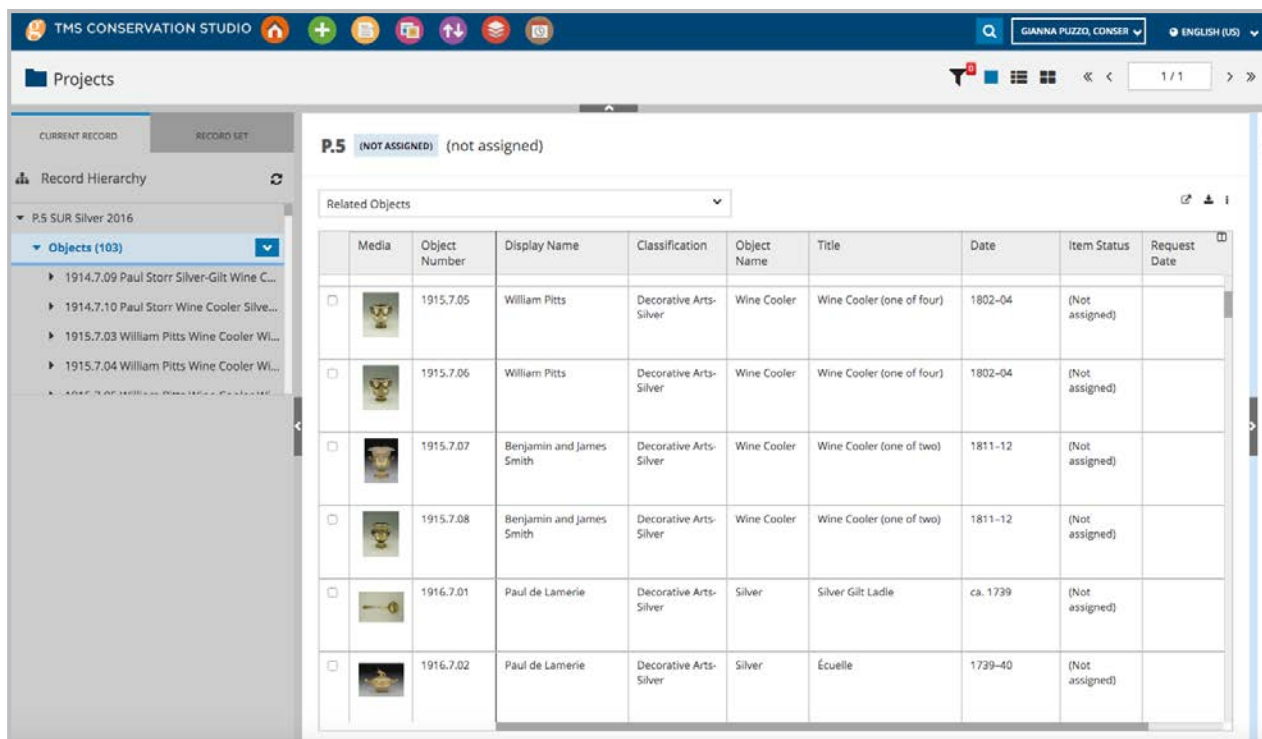
Conservation Checkboxes

The Conservation department is also making use of the Conservation Studio Projects module, along with the templates feature. When a large group of objects requires treatment, a Project is created and a template report is used to generate batches of reports for several objects in advance, with pre-populated fields to reduce repetitive data entry. The templates ensure that data is entered with consistency and the process is efficient.







Object condition reports aren't the only thing that Conservation Studio can help with. "There are other functions too," says Julia. "We've done surveys of the collection, which is somewhat similar to an informal report. We use that to track general information about the entire collection, rather than specific details about objects. Recently, for example, we did a survey of all of our silver objects." This survey helped Conservation address issues that the entire silver collection had in common. From small details to the big picture, the Frick is using Conservation Studio to build on the work they were doing in TMS.

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The Frick Collection has made significant progress in their implementation of conservation software, though they encountered challenges related to being early users of a new software system. Going forward, the Frick is gearing up for some renovations to the building, and thus is planning for a major move of collection objects. They hope that Conservation Studio will help with the planning and execution of these moves. Julia adds, "The collection care members and contract staff who are involved in the move



The screenshot shows the TMS Conservation Studio interface. On the left, a sidebar displays a 'Record Hierarchy' with 'P.5 SUR Silver 2016' expanded to show 'Objects (103)'. The main area shows a project titled 'P.5 (NOT ASSIGNED)' with a 'Related Objects' table. The table has columns for Media, Object Number, Display Name, Classification, Object Name, Title, Date, Item Status, and Request Date. It lists six objects, all with a status of '(Not assigned)'.

Media	Object Number	Display Name	Classification	Object Name	Title	Date	Item Status	Request Date
	1915.7.05	William Pitts	Decorative Arts-Silver	Wine Cooler	Wine Cooler (one of four)	1802-04	(Not assigned)	
	1915.7.06	William Pitts	Decorative Arts-Silver	Wine Cooler	Wine Cooler (one of four)	1802-04	(Not assigned)	
	1915.7.07	Benjamin and James Smith	Decorative Arts-Silver	Wine Cooler	Wine Cooler (one of two)	1811-12	(Not assigned)	
	1915.7.08	Benjamin and James Smith	Decorative Arts-Silver	Wine Cooler	Wine Cooler (one of two)	1811-12	(Not assigned)	
	1916.7.01	Paul de Lamerie	Decorative Arts-Silver	Silver	Silver Gilt Ladle	ca. 1739	(Not assigned)	
	1916.7.02	Paul de Lamerie	Decorative Arts-Silver	Silver	Écuelle	1739-40	(Not assigned)	

Silver Survey Project

will need specific conservation information, details that will help ensure the safety of the artwork and interiors of the building." The conservation department wants to provide necessary staff with reports of the exact information they'll need for the work they're conducting as they move the collection. Gianna adds, "Right now this information is in different Excel sheets, it will be good to have everything in one database so it's accessible to whoever needs that information at the proper time."

Stay tuned for more details on the movement of the Frick's collection, updates to their conservation processes, and their suggestions for future users of Conservation Studio. For more information on The Frick Collection and their renovation and expansion project, visit [www.frickfuture.org](http://www.frickfuture.org).