

Dear David Morris,

I am pleased to formally request the loan of a stone handaxe dated to the Acheulean period from the Wonderwerk cave (St 9, SPL 97) for the exhibition *Conserving Active Matter* at the Bard Graduate Center scheduled to open at the Bard Graduate Center Gallery on February 25, 2022 and continue through July 10, 2022. I understand that Dean Peter Miller, a member of the curatorial committee for the exhibition, has previously been in contact with you about the selection of this loan, at the recommendation of Michael Chazan, Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Toronto. This letter provides you with information about the exhibition concept and details regarding our institutional loan procedures.

Conserving Active Matter is an exhibition that explores the practice of conservation as seen through the lens of the activity of matter. The exhibition is the culmination of what will have been a ten-year project sponsored by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, "Cultures of Conservation," which has been dedicated to creating new pathways for exchange and intellectual mingling between conservation and the human sciences (history, archaeology, anthropology, as well as art history). The attached proposed loan derives from the many discussions about conservation that have unfolded at the Bard Graduate Center over the years of the project in the form of events, symposia, and fellowships, as well as the development of the exhibition over the past year.

Conserving Active Matter considers the many ways in which objects are active and envisions an expanded role for conservation in their care. First, it takes a step back from the received knowledge of professional conservation to consider the diversity of human responses to pervasive material activity across time and cultures, and the range of strategies of care, repair, and preservation. It then introduces a variety of ways in which matter itself can be active: on the molecular level, as described by conservation and materials science; according to Indigenous ontologies, by which some "objects" are living beings; and accounting for shifting conceptions of the artwork, particularly those that are ephemeral or performative. Turning to more extrinsic factors regarding how different people act on objects over time, the exhibition posits conservation decisions as a form of active mediation in a shifting present between a construed past and an imagined future. Framed by the persistent human entanglement with objects, the exhibition concludes with a consideration of how conservation might play an expanded role in processes of survival for individuals, communities, societies, and cultures—both within and beyond the museum. With new materials that are carefully engineered for their activity, renegotiated heritage management strategies, and accelerating changes in

the climate, new challenges and opportunities arise for conservation, creating opportunities for creative conservation thinking and practice as we prepare for living in a future with unanticipated forms and levels of activity.

We are seeking the loan of the stone handaxe dated to the Acheulean period from the Wonderwerk cave in your collection because of the evidence of re-knapping on the handaxe that speaks evocatively to the presence of conservation that stretches back far in time preceding even the evolutionary development of *homo erectus* to *homo sapiens* - humans in the present day. The handaxe therefore figures centrally in the concept of the exhibition, firmly grounding conservation as a response to the persistent activity of matter, and moreover the scholarly research that re-situates its past in present understanding as yet another. We envision the prominent display of the handaxe at the beginning of the exhibition as a way to illustrate these ideas.

The Bard Graduate Center will publish an open-access digital publication online that will accompany the exhibition. The digital publication will contain contributions from faculty members on the curatorial committee, contributors and collaborators to the exhibition, and graduate students who participate in two associated courses held in the Spring and Fall semesters of 2021. The digital publication will also include an illustrated checklist of the objects featured in the exhibition.

The Bard Graduate Center will cover the costs of packing, shipping, and insurance for all works included in the exhibition. We can provide wall-to-wall insurance coverage through our fine arts broker, Huntington Block, or cover the cost of the premium designated by your insurance company if you prefer. Our exhibition galleries are equipped with state-of-the-art security, humidity, and climate control systems. The gallery installation procedures adhere to the guidelines of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the American Association of Museums (AAM). If you agree to be a lender to the exhibition, we will send you loan agreements or we can sign yours if preferred.

Please send any and all responses to or questions about this request to Bard Graduate Center Gallery's Exhibition Registrar Eric Edler (cc'd here also) at: eric.edler@bgc.bard.edu.

I very much appreciate your consideration of this loan request.

Yours sincerely,

Nina Stritzler-Levine

Nina Stritzler-Levine
Professor of Curatorial Practice, Director of Focus Project Exhibitions

