

# Smithsonian Voices: A Photo Essay

Betty J. Belanus, Marjorie Hunt & Emily Botein

**W**here can you find people who know how to care for an elephant (stuffed or alive), measure the winds of Mars, move a locomotive, protect a stamp worth a million dollars, hang an airplane from the ceiling, collect thousands of species of bugs from a rain forest canopy, authenticate an ancient Chinese bronze, and plan a research expedition to the Arctic? At the Smithsonian Institution, of course.

In preparation for the *Working at the Smithsonian* program, a corps of fieldworkers combed the Institution, interviewing a wide variety of workers. This photo essay introduces you to just a few of the over 6,000 people who make the Smithsonian what it is: a museum complex, research facility, and public program venue unlike any other in the world.



**Wade Stuart**  
**Bus Driver**  
**Anacostia Museum**

*"I like working with the kids here in the neighborhood. When I go to the neighborhood schools over here, east of the Anacostia River, you see a lot of appreciation from it."*

*In May 1992, the Anacostia Museum got both a new bus and a new bus driver, Wade Stuart. Stuart's job includes not just shuttling visitors from the Mall across the river to Anacostia, but orienting them to the neighborhood and what they will see at the museum.*

*Photo by Sharon Perry, courtesy Smithsonian Institution*





**Polly Willman**  
**Costume Conservator**  
**National Museum of American History**

*“There has been so much learning on the job. It’s an ongoing process — building on past experience and innovating new ideas. That’s what I like best.”*

*With an undergraduate degree in textile sciences and a graduate degree in costume history and preservation, Polly Willman combines her academic background with her personal interest in sewing and design. As the Smithsonian’s senior conservator of costumes, her job involves caring not only for the First Ladies’ gowns, but for costumes throughout the Institution.*

Photo by Doc Dougherty, courtesy Smithsonian Institution



**Billy Turner**  
**Welder Foreman**  
**National Zoological Park**

*“Once I find out what the keepers’ or the curators’ goals are, I actually attempt to mentally place myself in their role, so I can better help them achieve their needs. At times we have to work in the cage ourselves, and you want to secure it so you can do your work, too.”*

*Billy Turner began working as a welder at the Zoo in 1968. As Turner explains, at the Zoo, safety is central: “The way you weld something, and the way you install something, it could be a life.” He not only repairs cages, locks, and other metalwork, but has even fit an elephant with a metal band to secure its tusk.*

Photo by Jessie Cohen, courtesy National Zoological Park





**Cornell Evans**  
Cabinetmaker  
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Freer Gallery of Art

*"I like doing shows that give you an indication of the ritual or the richness of the country which we are exhibiting. That's what we're hoping we've achieved."*

*Cornell Evans, a Washington native, began training in woodworking at Bell Vocational School, followed by four years of trade school, with a focus on cabinet and mill work. Since 1975, he has upheld the exacting standards of the cabinet shop, building everything from replicas of traditional Asian furniture to an Indonesian pendopo (court pavilion).*

Photo by Robb Harrell, courtesy Freer and Sackler Galleries

**Jim Bruns**  
Director  
National Postal Museum

*"I love to go out and visit with the public. I like to talk to the public, and I like to sense what they like and don't like, who they are and where they are from. I do that every day. They're very honest. When they don't like what they see, they don't hold back, because they figure they're paying for it."*



*Jim Bruns remembers coming to the Smithsonian to play on weekends when his father, the late Frank Bruns, worked as curator of the philatelic collection. In 1984, after establishing a teaching and writing career, Bruns became the first second-generation curator at the Smithsonian and later director of the Postal Museum.*

Photo by Rick Vargas, courtesy Smithsonian Institution





**Marty de Montaña**

**Director, Resource Center**

**National Museum of the American Indian, New York City**

*“Things have changed dramatically. In the beginning, I was a one-person ‘Indian Information Center.’ During that time, I would see about 300 people in the Center. During the last year, over 8,000 people have visited the Heye’s Resource Center.”*



*Marty Kreipe de Montaña, a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Indian tribe, had been at the Heye Foundation since 1983; it became part of the National Museum of the American Indian in 1990. She has developed the Resource Center into a model of interactive education and a training ground for young American Indians interested in museum interpretation.*

*Photo by Janine Jones, courtesy National Museum of the American Indian*



**Jimmy Carr & Harry Adams**

**Packing and Crating Specialists**

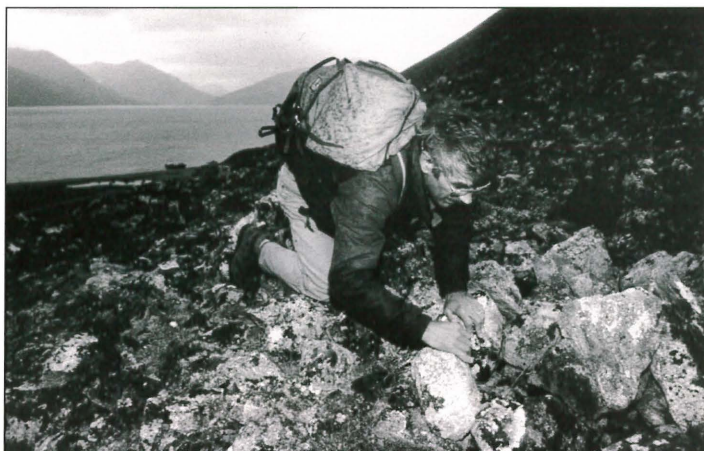
**Office of Exhibits Central**

*“We pack all sorts of things — paintings, spiders, even a model of the Brooklyn Bridge! It’s always something different. They give us the object, and no matter what it is, we scratch our heads and come up with a safe way to do it!”*

*Jimmy Carr started out as a laborer at the Smithsonian in 1974 and learned his crate-building skills on the job. He and his co-worker Harry Adams take great pride in their finely made crates, which must be designed and constructed to the highest standards in order to protect artifacts over many years of travel.*

*Photo by Rick Vargas, courtesy Smithsonian Institution*





**Bill Fitzhugh**  
**Director, Arctic Studies Center**  
**National Museum of Natural History**

"I see the Arctic Center as one of the leaders of a new kind of museum anthropology. We work directly with Native peoples who come to use our collections. The ownership of these collections is not just one of legal status. Its moral and ethical status is much more complex."

*Bill Fitzhugh began his own Arctic research in Labrador, as an archeologist, and later turned his attention to the interpretation of the vast collections of Alaskan material culture at the Museum of Natural History. His work has led him to value his collaborations with Native researchers. He has been instrumental in establishing the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center in Alaska.*

Photo by Marc Bryan-Brown, ©1995

**Cordelia Rose**  
**Registrar**  
**Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum**

"Being a registrar satisfies the mothering instinct in me. I have to make sure the right object gets to the right place in the right condition at the right time. It also means that I can never go to an exhibition without wondering how on earth they packed that flimsy architectural model and got it here in one piece."

*Cordelia Rose has held a variety of museum jobs in places as far-flung as London and Kenya. She became a registrar at the Cooper-Hewitt in 1982 and has written a phrase book for international couriers of museum objects, drawing from her own experiences.*

Photo by Sheila Botein



Festival of American Folklife 1996



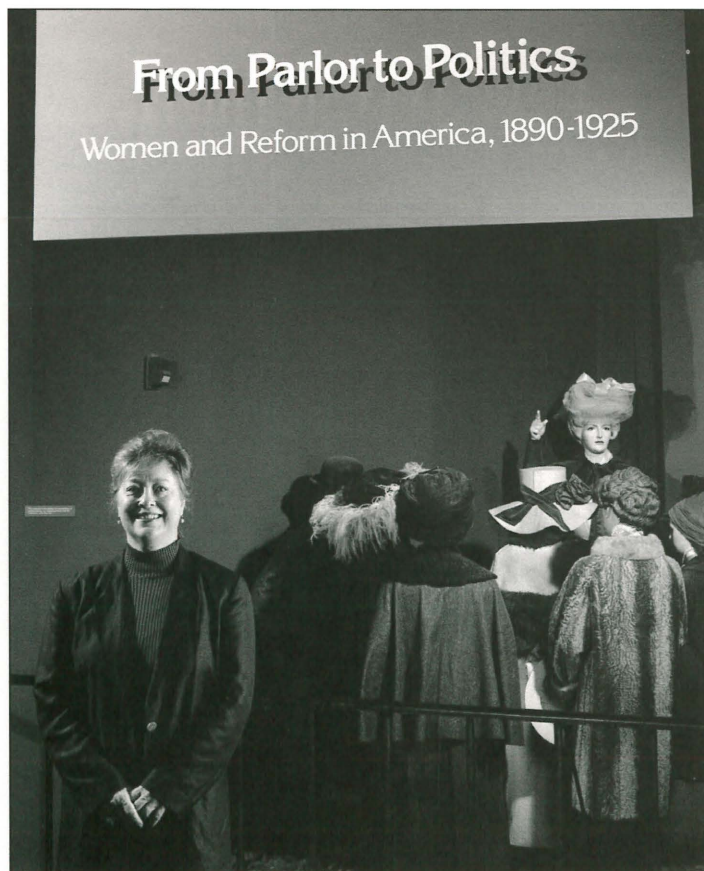
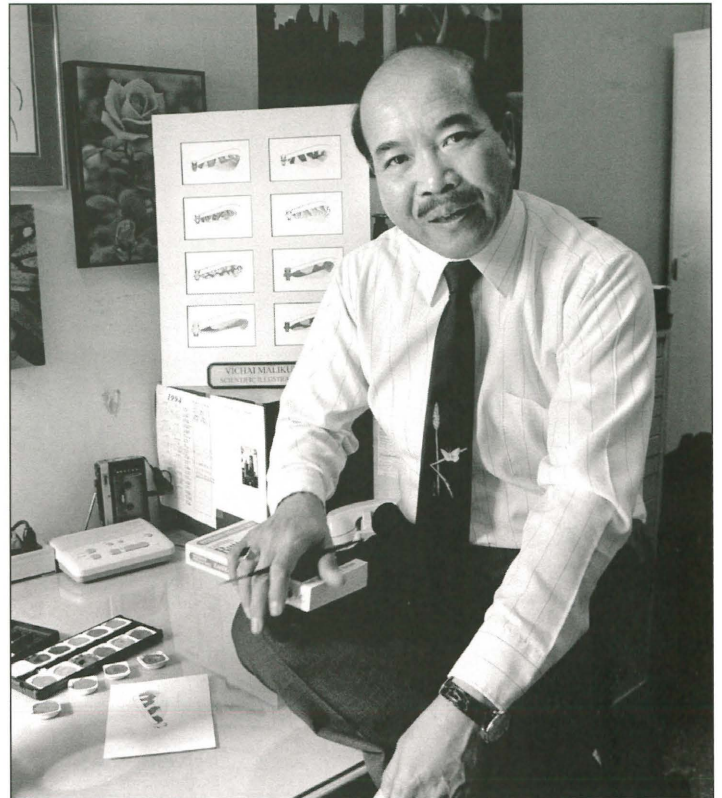


**Vichai Malikul**  
**Scientific Illustrator**  
**National Museum of Natural History**

*"My goal is to be as detailed and precise as possible. You need a dedicated hand to make it complete. We don't exaggerate what nature created. Our work is only a human attempt to catch the beauty of nature."*

*A renowned scientific illustrator of butterflies and moths, Vichai Malikul has worked for the Smithsonian for nearly thirty years. His masterful drawings, noted for their painstaking accuracy, rich detail, and subtle colors, are invaluable research tools for the scientists who study these insects.*

Photo by Rick Vargas, courtesy Smithsonian Institution



**Edie Mayo**  
**Curator of Political History**  
**National Museum of American History**

*"I love collecting. I love it. It combines the excitement of history with a kind of interaction with people that I find exhilarating."*

*Edie Mayo started working at the Smithsonian in 1962. A curator who specializes in women's history and the study of civil rights movements, she combines a love of collecting with a desire to convey important historical concepts through exhibitions.*

Photo by Hugh Talman, courtesy Smithsonian Institution





**Spencer Crew**  
**Director**  
**National Museum of American History**

*“What I like best about my job is the people — their passion for their work, their excitement, their commitment to sharing information with a larger world.”*

*Spencer Crew came to the National Museum of American History in 1981, and worked as a historian, curator, and deputy director, before becoming the director in 1994. His greatest challenges are creating an atmosphere where quality work flourishes and fostering an open dialogue with the public about the American experience.*

*Photo by Hugh Talman, courtesy Smithsonian Institution*

**Melanie Bond**  
**Biologist**  
**National Zoological Park**

*“I will have my twenty-third anniversary in July. One of the things that I have started thinking about is what am I going to do when I can’t work here any more? When it is time to retire, I’ll be sitting out in the public area all day, watching whoever is back here taking care of the orangutans, making sure they are doing it right.”*



*Melanie Bond, a native Washingtonian, was the third woman hired as a keeper at the National Zoological Park. Melanie, who describes herself as a spokesperson for all orangutans, has worked with three generations of orangutans at the Zoo.*

*Photo by Jessie Cohen, courtesy National Zoological Park*





**Jon Coddington**

**Biologist**

**National Museum of Natural History**

*"There are more species per cubic meter in the Museum of Natural History than anywhere else on earth. That's why we're a magnet for scientists all over the world. You can come here and see life on earth. That's our dream, that's our job."*

*Jon Coddington is a biologist who specializes in spiders and their behavior. He conducts field research in many different parts of the world and is an impassioned spokesperson for species diversity.*

*Photo by Chip Clark, courtesy National Museum of Natural History*



*Elsie Hall was one of the first women at the Smithsonian to become a security officer. Before retiring in 1994, she spent twenty years stationed at the North Door of the National Museum of American Art, greeting such visitors as Washington, D.C., artist Jacob Kainen.*

*Photo by Gene Young, courtesy National Museum of American Art*

**Elsie Hall**

**Security Officer**

**National Museum of American Art**

*"When visitors come in, you make them feel at home and tell them what's in the museum, and they like that. You're nice, but you're still firm. You learn how to deal with people. People come in and you treat them with respect, and they'll always respect you."*





## Volunteers

### National Museum of Natural History

"I cannot imagine not being able to work here. My bad dream is that Gus comes in and says, 'Ladies, I'm retiring.' It's become such a part of our lives."

— Priscilla Williams

A dedicated group of volunteers is at the heart of archeologist Gus Van Beek's laboratory, helping to reconstruct the mass of pot sherds from the excavation of Tell Jemmeh in southwestern Israel. Pictured here, from left to right, are: Elisabeth Craft, Rosemary Monagan, Betty Hayes, Marjorie Akins, Lee Hitchcock, and Bebe Katims. Priscilla Williams, the "senior member" of the group, has worked with Van Beek since 1972.

Photo by Chip Clark, courtesy National Museum of Natural History

## Peter Pipim

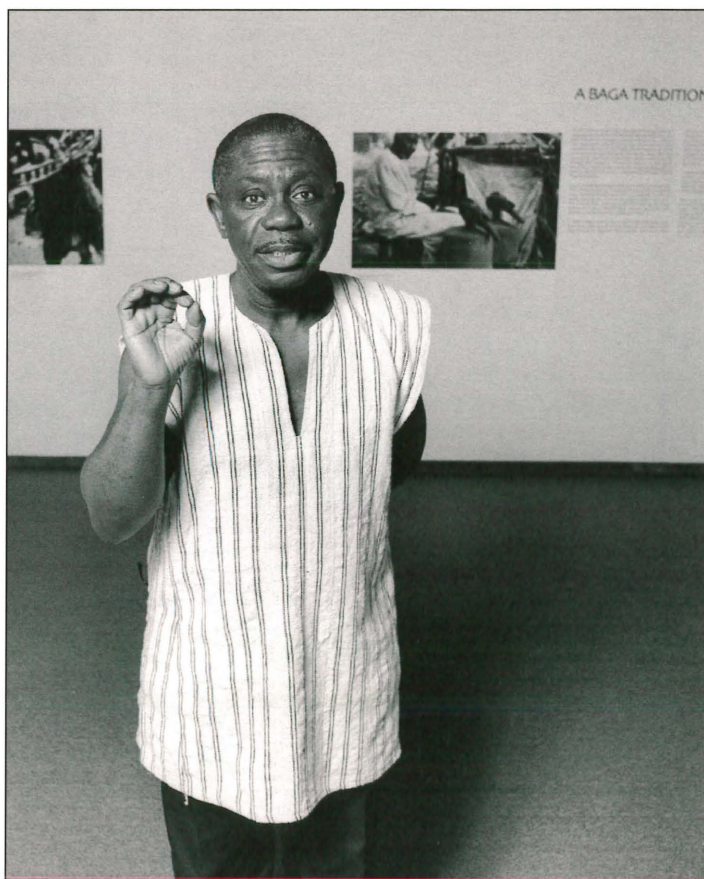
### Education Specialist

### National Museum of African Art

"Verbal communication, to Africans, is very important. If the cultural message is said properly, then it will stick in your head. The audience will have learned, and will be able to teach others what they've learned."

Originally from Ghana, Peter Pipim came to the United States in 1969 to pursue a museum career. In 1976, he began working at the African Art Museum, then located on Capitol Hill. He often uses his skill as a storyteller to give visitors a better understanding of African culture.

Photo by Rick Vargas, courtesy Smithsonian Institution







**Jackie Dulaney**  
**Administrative Officer**

"[I]n the early days] it was just like a big family. Everybody knew everybody, everybody was friendly. Curators, if they got a new specimen, would just stop by. Those kinds of things really made it fun."



*Jackie Dulaney came to Washington, D.C., from Indiana in 1943 to find a secretarial job. In 1948, she was hired as an assistant at the National Collection of Fine Arts, then housed in the Natural History Building. Thus began a long and distinguished career in administration, including a stint at Folklife in the 1980s, that ended in retirement in 1993.*

*Photo by Jeff Tinsley, courtesy Smithsonian Institution*



**Jeff Goldstein**  
**Astrophysicist**  
**National Air and Space Museum**

"What's remarkable about the Smithsonian is the idea of a public institution dedicated to the increase and diffusion of knowledge. We have the ability to bring to bear the mind-set of the scientist, the historian, the curator, and the educator on everything from research to exhibitions to public programs."

*An astrophysicist who studies planetary atmospheres, Jeff Goldstein's passion for his research is exceeded only by his desire to share his knowledge with others, especially young people.*

*Photo by Edward Keating*





**Sung Do "Cheyenne" Kim**  
Orchid Specialist  
Horticulture Services Division

"I realized that my mission was clear — I had to save the species here, because in this day and age we have to have a species bank, an organization to save all species — for the next generation, not just keeping it for ourselves."

*Cheyenne Kim, who was born in Japan, has been growing plants since he was a child. After running his own greenhouse in Washington, D.C., he came to work at the Smithsonian as an orchid specialist. His research has taken him to Brazil several times to consult with other specialists and to collect specimens.*

*Photo by Laurie Minor-Penland. From: The Smithsonian: 150 Years of Adventure, Discovery, and Wonder by James Conaway, Smithsonian Books, ©1995.*

**Rick Vargas**  
Photographer  
Office of Printing and Photographic Services

"You can be shooting diamonds in the morning, roller skaters in the afternoon, and a presidential reception in the evening, all in the same day. You don't get that kind of variety anywhere else."



*Rick Vargas came to the Smithsonian in 1980, after studying photography and art in his native New York City. He began as a library technician at the Hirshhorn, but switched to a photography job as soon as he could. He enjoys the variety of people he encounters in his job.*

*Photo by Sharon Perry, courtesy Smithsonian Institution*





**Louis Purnell**

**Curator of Astronautics  
National Air and Space Museum**

*"I* carried on my work, bucking head winds all the time. But the work was so interesting that I didn't look at the negative side of it. There were times in the routine of my work that I felt kind of guilty since I was having such a good time and getting paid for it, too."



*Louis Purnell took a job as a museum guard in the late 1940s after returning from World War II duty as an Air Force fighter pilot. He was interested in and qualified for a position as a museum specialist at Natural History. Later, he became the first full-time Black curator at the newly formed Air and Space Museum in 1967, retiring from his position in Astronautics in 1985.*

*Photo by Rick Vargas, courtesy Smithsonian Institution*



**Hugh Bennett**

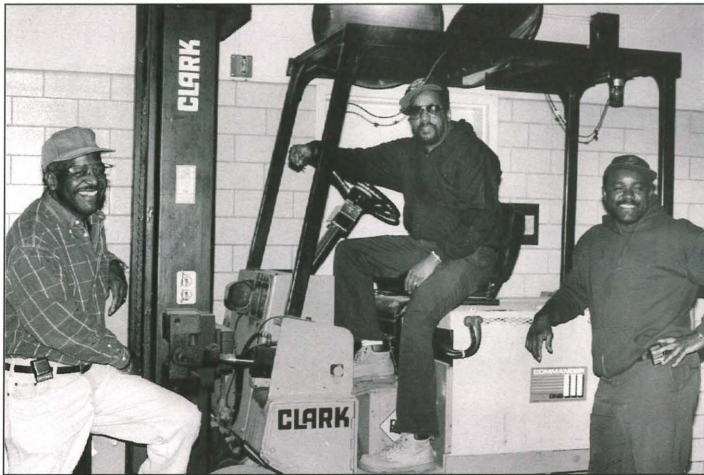
**Painter  
Office of Exhibits Central**

*"T*he Smithsonian is a sanctuary for craftsmen — for people who sincerely care. It's a place where high standards are expected, where quality workmanship counts."

*Hugh Bennett attributes his ability to work with his hands to his early years growing up on his family's farm in New Jersey. A master painter, he is admired for his skill as a faux finisher and his willingness to take on new challenges.*

*Photo by Carolyn Thome, courtesy Office of Exhibits Central*





The American History Museum's team of rigger workers, affectionately known as the "Skull Crew," is responsible for moving large objects into, out of, and within the museum. The core group began as laborers twenty years ago. In 1981, they were sent as a group to rigging training in Florida. This photo shows Steve Jones, Donald Phillips, and Andrew Goffney.

Photo by Erin Roth, courtesy Smithsonian Institution

## Riggers

Facilities, Planning and Management  
National Museum of American History

"We've been together for a long time. We came up together as a team. We grew as a group. Some of the stuff we do could be dangerous, and you could easily get hurt. So, you really need to know the person, know his every move, know him as a worker. You can almost feel his next move."

— Steve Jones

## Ellen Miles

Curator of Painting and Sculpture  
National Portrait Gallery

"I think portraits take a special kind of looking. You have to realize, first, that a portrait depicts an individual. Viewers often react to the person before they take in the aesthetic aspects. I watch people in the gallery look at the portraits, and I'm fascinated by the ones they choose."

Ellen Miles began her job at the National Portrait Gallery twenty-five years ago as special assistant to the director, researching the availability of portraits for the new gallery. She has witnessed a great change in the collection of portraits for the gallery, such as the inclusion of more women and minorities, which reflects changes in the interpretation of history.

Photo by Rick Vargas, courtesy Smithsonian Institution

