



Fragments Reassembled: Conservation of the Maya Murals of San Bartolo, Guatemala

Angelyn Bass

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In 2001, extraordinarily well preserved Maya murals were discovered at Las Pinturas, San Bartolo, Guatemala. Subsequent archaeological investigation revealed elaborate murals devoted to Maya mythology, complete with hieroglyphic texts--the first artworks combining figure and text--buried in successive architectural phases dating from ca. 400-100 B.C. In addition to the 15 meter-long Late Preclassic-period wall paintings still standing in Sub-1A, there were over 7,000 mural fragments from four separate painted chambers within the pyramid that were intentionally broken into fragments and cached by the Maya as they dismantled older architecture to make room for new construction. Conservation of the wall paintings has been a 20-year collaboration between an international team of conservators, archaeologists, engineers, materials scientists, excavators, epigraphers, and iconographers. In this presentation I will discuss the materials and methods used to conserve the in situ wall paintings, as well as the mural fragments now in the collection of the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, Guatemala City. Our ultimate conservation goal was to maintain the artwork's physical condition in ways that make space for new values and narratives to emerge.

Angelyn Bass is an architectural conservator specializing in the conservation of archaeological sites, with a focus on architectural features, finishes, and wall paintings. She is a Research Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico, and has been a conservator with PARASBX Proyecto Regional Arqueológico San Bartolo-Xultun since 2002.

Photo credit to include: North wall painting, Las Pinturas, San Bartolo, Sub1A. Copyright: Heather Hurst, 2019



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