

Art Conservator

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**The
Great
Society**

Art Conservator

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Winter in Stone Hill Center was as beautiful as expected. Tadao Ando's building nestled into the landscape, and its angles were even more intense in the stark whiteness, as you can see from the picture below. During a storm, the view out the windows felt like a snow globe.

As spring returned to the Berkshires, the economic downturn was beginning to be felt directly here at the Center. We have had three member institutions tell us they will not be continuing in the consortium because of budget constraints, and others are being forced to lay off personnel. The work load in all our departments remains even so far, but I am predicting we'll begin to feel the full impact of the recession in fiscal year 2009-10, only a few months away. There could be a silver lining to the dark cloud, though; members of the staff have pointed out that with the economy prohibiting institutions from accessioning new work, the focus could well turn to treatments of existing, perhaps forgotten works in their collections. Here's hoping!

If you have not seen our new website, www.williamstownart.org, please check it out. WACC editor Timothy Cahill, who also brings us *Art Conservator*, and designer Ed Atkeson of Berg Design in Albany, have orchestrated another literary and visually engaging work of art. Meanwhile, our conservators continue their efforts in New Orleans, with all departments taking part in a comprehensive collections survey for the Louisiana State Museum. The work will continue throughout this year, and hopefully set the stage for treatments in the future. I really don't want to have to bake brownies and sell them in the parking lot. —*Tom Branchick*



"Ando's building nestled into the landscape, and its angles were even more intense in the stark whiteness . . ."

The Great Society

An exuberant assemblage from the 1960s leads to an overlooked master

By Timothy Cahill

Art Conservator Editor

Even among the eclectic artworks that regularly find their way to the WACC objects lab—an ancient Palmyrene portrait bust, a satin wedding bodice, Katherine Hepburn’s golf club—this piece stood out. Titled #175 *The Great Society*, it was unmistakably an artifact of the 1960s, expansive and prophetic, “Lucy in the Sky” meets “Blowin’ in the Wind.” Having lived through the era as a young boy, and wishing I’d more fully experienced it, the work was impossible to pass without stopping for long, enthralled looks.

The assemblage—part sculpture, part painting, part artist’s book—is described formally as an “optical box.” Some 25-inches square and nearly eight inches deep, the wooden box feels even larger, as its complex array of visual stimuli careens through your skull. The work has three glass panels suspended in thin channels one above the other. Including the bottom of the white case, the four parallel surfaces are packed with an assortment of orbs,

candy-colored cones and intricately painted rocks; with variously-sized spheres covered in obsessive designs; with calligraphy, cartoonish drawings and political caricature. Interspersed on the stacked layers are a series of small and large optical lenses, magnifying glasses that further fracture and distort the surface. Finally, the sides are covered with whimsical handwriting that itself is punctuated by tiny drawings.

Made in 1969, *The Great Society* is at once an exuberant ode to psychedelic culture and a send-up of the day’s politics. The title refers to the 1965 social reforms of President Lyndon Johnson, progressive initiatives toward poverty, race, health care and the environment that were overshadowed by US involvement in Vietnam. By 1969, undone by domestic violence and anti-war sentiment, Johnson was gone and Richard Nixon had assumed power. While repeated caricatures of LBJ dominate *The Great Society*, Tricky Dick lurks there too, a portent of things to come. The work offers commentary on contemporary American values in a free-association poem that runs along

the inside lip of the box. “[T]he clean society, the smug society, the preserved society,” it sings; “the germ-free, the slim-lined, the pillied, the shot, the drugged, the eye-closed, the sense-blocked . . . the running, the earning, money, material, meat, time, time, what about your time, life, life, fly. . . .”

The work is owned by the Mead Art Center of Amherst College, Massachusetts, and was brought to the Center for cleaning and slight repair. It had been bequeathed to the Mead by investor and Amherst alumnus Richard S. Zeisler, a collector of modern art who gave several pieces to Amherst, as well as significant work to the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim, among other prominent institutions. Zeisler, according to Mead director Elizabeth Barker, “lived informally with his collection. He kept the . . . box on the floor of his bedroom, where he would have seen it every day—and where it must have gathered the dust that the conservators . . . removed.” At WACC, objects conservator Allison McCloskey cleaned a heavy layer of dust, grime and what may have been spilled coffee off the artwork’s myriad surfaces, and reattached assorted loose bits. The Mead museum plans to exhibit the work with the rest of the Zeisler collection sometime in the future.

The appearance of *The Great Society* in the lab made possible the discovery of an artist who has mostly vanished from American awareness, the German multi-mediaist Mary Bauermeister. Now 75 and living “in the woods,” as she puts it, outside Cologne, Germany, Bauermeister’s career began in the 1950s, when she made her first mature paintings in her early 20s. In 1960, she established *Atelier Bauermeister* in Cologne, where German artists associated with the Fluxus art movement gathered with the likes of Americans John Cage and Merce Cunningham, and the young Korean video-art pioneer Nam June Paik.

Bauermeister moved to the United States in 1962, attracted by the work of Jasper Johns and, especially, Robert Rauschenberg. She stayed for a decade, then

returned to her country to raise her children and continue a career that thrives to this day. Though she is recognized as an important figure in post-war German art, a web search revealed very little about her in English. Determined to “meet” the creator of *The Great Society*, even at a distance, I was assisted by the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, which had mounted a Bauermeister retrospective in 2004.

In her self-designed home studio, Bauermeister does not use e-mail. Our interview was conducted via fax in February of this year, when I sent a series of 10 questions about *The Great Society*, her background, philosophy and current activity. She replied by mail with two catalogs and an expansive 15-page handwritten letter, in which she described her life following World War II, her training and early career as an artist, her association with Fluxus and numerous other topics. The full text of the letter can be seen on the WACC website, www.williamstownart.org. Below, an extended excerpt from this singular woman.



to paint figures, landscapes, still lifes, at least to me and my closest artist friends, seemed ridiculous.

Also, as a child I saw around every living being a colorful moving aura (even around so-called dead things like stones), so when I saw Art, paintings of reality, I missed the color field. Later, when my visionary childhood vanished away through schooling and teaching, when I had to learn the reduced interpretation of the world, *I refused*. Before I knew what-for, I resisted the normative dogmas of what one does, thinks, feels, or what one does not. An ambiguity, a multi-dimensional, integral understanding: things are not either/or. They are $1+1=3$. Non-dualistic. That's why, later in my artistic life, I was so happy to have found the optical glasses, which, when put over the written statements in my lens boxes, would distort and change and make relative my statements. They were not meant as absolute truth, they were in-between results of a thinking and feeling process.

As I resisted art teaching more-or-less successfully, . . . I followed an inner drive to express what was not yet *there*, in reality or thought. To make art was more a finding, searching process than a knowing. Then, in 1962, I had my first one-man show in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. . . . At the same time in the museum there was a little show of American art—Johns, Stankiewicz . . . and Rauschenberg's goat. I was so flabbergasted by this piece, and I knew, where this is called Art, I want to be! I went to [the Stedelijk director's] office and asked him to buy one of my pieces, so I could afford a ticket to America. He did, and I ended up in the USA October, 1962. Six months on Long Island, then in 1963, to New York, to which I transported all kinds of natural materials, stones, sand, pebbles, tree trunks and

many "ready-*trouvier*." That's what I called my found objects, which I hung on the wall of my first New York show, Galleria Bonino, 1963-64, as an homage to Marcel Duchamp (who I consider my teacher, and who liked my work very much). I stayed in New York and did many shows, was bought by many museums, and interrelated with the art scene, the artists and the critics.

In the United States I gave up my resistance to figurative elements. You cannot illustrate something absurd or abnormal without reference to something else. So surrealism needs realism to play with and against. . . . So I gave into figurativeness, and I also could not resist becoming politically involved—Bob Dylan's songs, Joan Baez, the political atmosphere—Vietnam War, money, greed, inhuman exploitation, together with a clean, anesthetic morality. The Cold War, the "fellow traveler," the "yellow danger," the Chinese, were the evil ones—an enemy was always needed to distract from one's own shallowness. Pop Art as a warning signal, making banalities the subject of art.

From 1968 to 1971 I did several pieces with figurative elements, drawings with political themes and titles, which show my intentions, [including] *The Great Fallout Society*, 1969, about 10 pieces, lens boxes. *The Great Fallout Society*, "fallout" equaling atomic waste, and another meaning, our whole Western decadence. Are we as humans, the way we behave, not ourselves the "fallout," the poison, the mistake of evolution? Are we on the verge of collective suicide? and if yes, why? Is the human experiment still valid, meaning does it lead to a peaceful, harmonious integration of spirit and matter? . . . Can we tame our reptile brain and stop fighting. Can we bring this experiment to a fruitful end, or do we end ourselves in



Mary Bauermeister in her New York studio, 1964

atomic, ecological, economic disasters?

All these influences were urgent in the late Sixties. The Hippie movement. The student revolt. The anti-dogma . . . anti-establishment protests. And above all, "Mr. Clean, Mr. Proper," keep it antiseptic, as long as it's germ-free: a symbol of moral cleanliness, self-importance, arrogance, hubris. Oswald Spengler, in *The Decline of the West*: "Can we be saved?" Yes we can, but not from outside. The change has to come from deep within us. These were the thoughts I had when creating *The Great Society*.

How did you develop the optical box?

The "optical box": a multi-dimensional circumscribing of my interpretation of life. It can be viewed both ways, [hung] on the wall or as a table, sitting around it. With a glass plate on top, and with our daily "cocktail" glasses on top of that, it could maybe give us a hint—a warning.

I stopped "political art" when I realized that I would not change the world. I could only change worlds. So I withdrew into the German forest, brought up four children, grew vegetables, got involved with ecology . . . mysticism, meditation, silence instead of verbs—my art withdrew from figurativism and became utopian.

I question myself: What did we artists achieve? Whose consciousness did we touch, enlarge? What did our warnings (in prophetic art) effect?

Why did you leave New York in the early 1970s and return to Germany?

Many reasons: a) The early times, 1960s—when the motive was art, exchange among artists, sharing of ideas, searching—had slowly changed into established movements, *results* instead of *research*. Money came into the scene and with it all the vices that accompany money: greed, jealousy, "fences" against the other, protection, security—possession—a "this was my idea" syndrome. The purity and innocence had vanished. b) I realized how important language is in the education of children, and as I spoke four languages, but none of them well enough, I thought it better to bring up my children in my home language. (While I'm writing this letter, I miss so many words and have to use so many superficial expressions from the "bread and butter" language, as I call it when language only circles around our daily life and its needs.) c) The father of my children, and the man I loved,

Karlheinz Stockhausen, lived in Germany and only part of the year shared my life in [America], so it was also a personal reason. d) The mystic experience of my early childhood started to reemerge and I needed a refuge which I found in the German forest. (I built my studio there, and it's from there that I answer your letter.)

Please tell me about the work you're making now. You obviously still have an enormous curiosity and love for life. How do you nourish that?

Until this month, I cultivated a landscape garden, which I created in the city on terraces, roofs, balconies and surroundings of an old Cologne insurance company. This job gave me the income for my life and the education of my four children. (I always fed them myself, so the fathers of my children did not need to support them nor me.) Unfortunately, this insurance company was taken over by [an American firm]. Now the rules of the "new-liberal market" have changed the, until-now, social-market-oriented politics. Quick money, shareholders' interest, capital has to be served. So my job (and the jobs of many others in that company) . . . the involvement [with] others . . . the *caring*, has stopped. The atmosphere is of non-trust and fear. Who will be fired next? People who have worked for 20, 30 years in a faithful relationship with their company are being treated like *Abfall*—garbage—rubbish. Until now this word was only used for things, now it's used to describe people. So your question, what about my work now? I've gotten into politics, not with drawings, but with actions. I encourage people to claim back their dignity, regardless of the currency of money. ■



Tinned Americana

Lenett Fellow discovers the secrets of an early Connecticut tavern sign

By R. Ruthie Dibble

Editor's Note—Each academic year, a second-year student at the Williams College/Clark Art Institute Graduate Program in the History of Art is awarded the Judith M. Lenett Memorial Fellowship in Art Conservation. The fellowship provides the student with the opportunity to pursue an interest in American art through the research and conservation of an American art object. This year's Lenett Fellow, R. Ruthie Dibble, requested an object that would allow her to explore early-American material and visual culture; an early 19th-century painted tavern sign from the collection of the Connecticut Historical Society was chosen as her project. Ms. Dibble worked under the dual guidance of Sandra Webber, Conservator of Paintings, and Adam Nesbitt, Assistant Conservator of Objects. The project culminates in a public lecture Ms. Dibble will present at the Clark on May 6.

Bristol town history records that an Abel Lewis (1749-1820) opened a tavern at the corner of Maple and Stearn Street in Bristol, Connecticut in 1794.¹ The son of an early Bristol settler and one of nine brothers, Abel Lewis was a veteran of the Revolutionary War and an active member in the community, which lies some 15 miles southwest of Hartford. Like many adult males in New England communities, Lewis served as a “tythingman,” or tax collector, in addition to his own work.² With his wife and eight children, Lewis was part of an expanding network of inns that acted as social centers for New England towns and travelers.³ Reflecting the importance of these institutions, each town in Connecticut was required by law to have at least one tavern, and each tavern was required to have a sign advertising the establishment.⁴ Travelers, who typically covered six to eight miles an hour, could expect shelter and sustenance for themselves and their horses within a comfortable distance at all times during their journey. Villagers gathered in taverns for many reasons beyond imbibing, such as evening social events or to have their portraits painted by itinerant artists.

A circa-1800 tinned sign, quite likely from the Abel Lewis tavern, has been my focus as 2008-2009 Lenett Fellow at WACC. The sign was acquired by the Connecticut Historical Society in 2006, as an addition to that institution's definitive collection of early American tavern signs.

Both the painted surfaces and the metal substrate of the Lewis sign needed conservation. The 22-by-16¾-inch sign is made of two sheets of tinned iron, roughly equal

in size, that are soldered together horizontally across the center. Side One features the Connecticut State Seal above a central row with a punchbowl, two full glasses of punch, and a full decanter. Below, the words “A. LEWIS’ / INN,” entwined by a flowering vine, have been inscribed. Side Two features the eagle of the United States Seal, complete with arrows and an olive branch in each talon. The name of the innkeeper is repeated and surrounded by similar foliage.

In keeping with its status as the emblem of a public establishment, the Lewis sign employs imagery that communicates the role taverns played in post-Revolutionary New England. One side speaks to national community through the Great Seal of the United States, which had been established by Congress in 1782. The other side appeals to local community through the trio of grape vines on the Connecticut State Seal, a design in use since the mid-17th century. The punch bowl, glasses and decanter advertise the socially welcoming and physically nourishing nature of the establishment. While the imagery is typical of other signs in the Connecticut Historical Society's collection, certain aspects of the sign raise questions about its production and use.

The sign is smaller than others that were known to have hung outside taverns. Indeed, its imagery could have proved hard to distinguish by passersby on the road. Yet the fact that it is decorated on both sides suggests that it was not originally meant to be hung on a wall or door. The question of how it was presented to the public is difficult to answer, since the sign lacks any traces of how it was originally mounted. In addition to the issue of size and

mount, the use of tinned iron as signboard material is rare; most were made of wood.

Although the use of tin is unusual for a sign, as an object made in Hartford County, it is a fitting material. By the late-18th century, western Connecticut had become the hub for the production and sale of tinned iron products in the United States.⁵ Peddlers working out of Berlin, Bristol and other towns traveled to Boston to receive shipments of tinfoil from Pontypool, Wales, and supervised the transportation of the sheets inland to western

Connecticut.⁶ At the turn of the century, the standard size for sheets of tinfoil was 10 by 14 inches, but tinfoil also came in a variety of sizes, including 12½ by 16¾ inches, which appears to have been used in the production of the Lewis sign.⁷

Once brought to Connecticut, the sheets were often made into lanterns, coffee pots, trays and other household wares peddlers sold throughout New England. Unworked sheets could also be purchased. An 1815 inventory of the Pattison and Peck Store in Berlin reveals a stock of



Lenett Fellow R. Ruthie Dibble examines the Lewis tavern sign in WACC's objects lab.



This page and next, the A. Lewis tavern sign, c. 1800: Side One is at left; Side Two opposite.

lead white and vermilion, and an additional layer, possibly composed of linseed oil and natural gum resin, that was used to bind the painted layers to the tin surface.

Both the painted layers and the metal substrate have sustained damage. At some point after it was painted, the sign's upper edge was bent backwards from Side One toward Side Two into a shallow lip, and 10 nail holes, again driven from Side One to Side Two, were created using square-headed nails. These physical blows damaged the painted surface, causing deterioration of the paint and tinned coating, and allowing the exposed iron to oxidize.


In order to arrest the paint loss and secure the painted layers

before cleaning, I applied a binding consolidant to areas where the paint layers were broken and fragile. With this complete, I was able to begin cleaning the painted surface. Relatively little dirt came up from Side Two, while Side One was extremely dirty. As I cleaned, it became apparent that the blackened background was originally the same dark red as Side Two. A chelating solution was applied to the rusted areas to remove corrosion and stop further oxidation, followed by a protective coating to the exposed metal. Exposed areas were then inpainted, to protect the tin layer and reduce distracting reflective surfaces.

Although the sign fits comfortably into the context of early 19th-century New England, exact dating was still being explored as this paper was prepared. Initial x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy, which identifies the chemical elements in an object, revealed the presence of lead, a material thought not to have been introduced into the tinning process until the third decade of the 19th century.⁹ Further analysis, including use of a scanning electron microscope, will help determine the elemental composition

of the sign and establish more precisely what materials were used and how that may affect the production date.

Damage sustained by the sign suggests it may have lived more than one life. For some period of time, Side One appears to have been exposed to the elements, while Side Two was protected, presumably sealed against a wall. Perhaps the sign was nailed as decoration to a door or left hanging on a beam in an attic or barn as many other signs were. Many of these questions may remain unanswerable, but there is no question that the sign is part of a rich history of Connecticut tinware production and decoration, tavern keeping, and the early system of New England peddlers and merchants.

The Lenett Fellowship has proved to be an invaluable experience, one that has piqued my interest in the technological innovations that go hand in hand with artistic production in the United States. I look forward to conducting further research in Hartford County on local history and the sign's provenance before my talk in May, and hope to find answers to some of the many questions the sign prompts. 



1. Euphrosinus Peck, *A History of Bristol, Connecticut* (Hartford, CT: Lewis Street Bookshop, 1885), 101.

2. At the first town meeting in which Bristol was a separate town than Farmington, it was voted that "Abel Lewis...be Tythingmen for the present year." Dated June 13, 1785. Reproduced in Eddy N. Smith, et al, *Bristol, Connecticut: "In the Olden Time New Cambridge, which Includes Forestville"* (Hartford, CT: City Printing Company, 1907), 39.

3. Margaret C. Vincent writes that "by 1800 there were over sixty hundred fifty licensed Connecticut innkeepers operating simultaneously." See Margaret C. Vincent, "Signboards and the Enterprise of Innkeeping in Connecticut," in *Lions & Eagles & Bulls: Early American Tavern & Inn Signs from the Connecticut Historical Society* (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Society in Association with Princeton University Press, 2000), 41.

4. A law passed in 1644 stated that towns "should prouide amongst theselves in ech Town one sufficient inhabitant to keepe an Ordinary for pruisio and lodging in some comfortable manner." [sic] See J. Hammond Trumbull, *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, Prior to the Union with New Haven Colony*, 15 vols. (Hartford: Brown & Parsons, 1850), vol. 1 pp. 103-4. Another ordinance in 1672 required that "every person licensed for Common Entertainment shall have some suitable Signe set up." See *The Book of the General Laws for the People within the Jurisdiction of Connecticut: Collected out of the Records of General Court, Lately Revised, and with some Emendations and Additions Established and published by the Authority of the General Court of Connecticut holden at Hartford in October, 1672.* (Cambridge, MA: Printed by SamuelGreen, 1673), 34-36. Both quoted in Vincent, 36, 38.

5. In Great Britain, factories had been efficiently and cheaply producing tinplate since 1728, when Thomas Payne developed a technique for creating sheets of iron by rolling rather than the costly and crude method of hammering. Diane S. Waite, *Nineteenth Century Tin Roofing and its Use at Hyde Hall* (Albany, NY: New York State Parks & Recreation, Division for Historic Preservation. State, 1974), 1.

6. Gina Martin and Lois Tucker, *American Painted Tinware: A Guide to its Identification* (New York, NY: Historical Society of Early American Decoration, 1997), vol. 1, xvii.

7. Waite, 3.

8. Martin and Tucker, vol. 1, 146.

9. This cheap, durable substitute for tinplate was used in varying combinations, for instance a patent awarded in England in 1844 says that no more than 15 percent of the alloy should be made of tin. See E. H. Brooke, *Monograph on the Tinplate Works in Great Britain* (Swansea: Welsh Plate & Steel Manufacturers' Association, n.d.), 14. Quoted in Waite, 6.

"common tinplate, thick tin, damaged tin, sodder [sic], and iron wire."⁸

While available resources related to the tin peddling tradition make it clear that tinplate was a central part of western Connecticut's economy and material culture, it provides no explanation for exactly how the Lewis sign came into being. Perhaps a peddler stopping for the night exchanged products from his wagon for rest and victuals, and went so far as to offer his rudimentary painting skills. Perhaps a member of the family picked up a piece of discarded tinplate at one of the numerous tin shops in Bristol and decided to make an advertisement for the inn. "Flowering," the term for painted decoration applied to tinware, was typically done by girls and young women who were trained in local shops. Yet wares produced for commercial profit exhibit a higher level of painting skill than has been used on the sign. Perhaps a member of Lewis's family, even one of his seven daughters, provided the decorations.

Analysis of the paint layer revealed Prussian blue,

Frankenstein Undead

A seminal work by Tim Rollins and K.O.S. is brought back to life

In preparation for the exhibition *Tim Rollins and K.O.S.: A History*, Ian Berry, curator of the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, discovered that the first two paintings made by Rollins and his K.O.S collaborators still existed. Rollins, an artist, activist and educator, had stored them rolled up in those large cardboard tubes used for pouring concrete.

Berry arranged to have the works shipped to his museum on the campus of Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. When the paintings were unfurled, however, his excitement soon turned to something like horror. It wasn't the content of the art that unnerved Berry, though the pieces are based on the literary classics *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. What sent a stone to the pit of the curator's stomach was the condition of the paintings.

"They were literally crumbling in my fingers," he recalled. "This was three weeks before the show."

In 1981, Rollins, a 26-year-old conceptual artist, was hired by Intermediate School 52 in the South Bronx to develop a curriculum that incorporated art-making with reading lessons for students classified as academically or emotionally "at risk." Rollins told his students the first day, "Today we are going to make art, but we are also going to make history," though he admits he had his doubts. That a guy from central Maine, by way of the East Village, wouldn't last among a group of streetwise Hispanic students, seemed imminently likely. Against the odds, Rollins endured. "I got in there and met the kids and said, 'I can't leave. It would be immoral.'"


Rollins's teaching method was to have one student read aloud from a classic book, while the rest of the class drew responses to the story. In 1983, Rollins scrounged together two 9-by-12-foot pieces of canvas, some white glue and acrylic paints. Rollins and the "Kids of Survival," as they named themselves, stuck the pages from paperback copies of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* into neat grids on the canvas, then transferred the class drawings into enormous pastiches, with allusions from comic books and world literature, great art and graffiti. Thanks to standout entries in two Whitney Biennials and a rave review in the *New York Times*, Rollins's promise came true; he and K.O.S did make

history. They continue collaborating to this day.

Those earliest works, while they reflected the economic and street realities of the group at the time, were not made to last. The paper from mass-produced paperbacks turns brown and brittle after a few years, and the glue named for a certain trademark bull is sodden with water and tends to crack and come loose. As a result, *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* looked, says Rollins, "like the Dead Sea Scrolls" when they were unrolled at the Tang.

WACC director Tom Branchick was at the museum the day the paintings were viewed, and advised the Tang they should be transported to the conservation center immediately. The work of restoring the large paintings was done on the floor of a classroom in Stone Hill Center. Supervised by Branchick, paintings conservator Mary Catherine Betz and pre-program intern Sophie Scully spent two weeks kneeling on cardboard, securing the book pages back onto the canvas with PVA-emulsion glue and inpainting areas where paint had come loose. To reverse buckling caused by time and the original water-based adhesive, the back of the canvas was lightly misted and weighted to bring it back to true. Hanging grommets were added to the top edge of the canvas, and inpainted to blend with the picture.

"It was beat the clock," said Branchick, but the two paintings were in place when the exhibit opened on February 28 (the show continues through August 31). "There's nobody else who could have done this besides Tom," said Berry. "When you're actually able to save an artwork—these could have disappeared—as a curator, as a museum, that's one of our most important roles."

"I'd written it off," said Rollins of *Frankenstein*, by far the more damaged of the two paintings. Standing before the seminal work at the Tang, his voice lowered slightly. "I was just moved when I saw it. It looks just like the day we painted it." 



Frankenstein, 1983, by Tim Rollins and K.O.S.; inset, a detail showing the grid of book pages that make up the substrate.



In Pop Style, Grim Frames from Our Past

In the 1950s, when the American art world was immersed in abstract expressionism, Philip Morsberger sailed for England and Oxford University, where he studied drawing according to the rigid precepts of 19th-century critic John Ruskin. Morsberger returned to America in the '60s, amid what he calls the “exuberant meaninglessness” of Pop art, and the more serious

social upheavals of assassination, war and protest. Borrowing, as did other Pop-influenced artists, from mass media and popular culture, he produced a series of stark paintings that captured the tremors of the age.

Newark, 1968, owned by the Memorial Art Gallery at the University of Rochester, New York, is typical of Morsberger's work at the time. The 72-by-42-inch painting, depicting the shooting of an unarmed looter during a civil rights protest, shows a sequence of four frames reminiscent of a film strip. The first and last frames are cut abruptly by the edge of the canvas, giving the sense of frozen moments caught between frames. The artist's selective painting—sharply describing some details, and leaving others merely as penciled lines on white—feels like the distillation of a moment of crisis. Some details are rendered in sharp focus, others in washed-out silence that yields a grim reality.

The work was brought to WACC with only secondary problems. The canvas had been stretched over a fixed-member wood strainer. The gesso was applied very liberally to the canvas, including the edges of the strainer. Gesso seeped through the canvas and pooled on the strainer bars, essentially gluing the canvas to the wood as it dried. The result worked fine originally, leaving the canvas tightly-stretched, well adhered and smooth. More than 30 years later, however, gravity and normal swings in temperature and humidity had caused the canvas to pucker and sag between the gesso-adhered areas. What should have been a smooth surface had odd ripples and draws that interfered with the presentation of the image.

To restore planarity, the canvas had to be freed from the strainer. This was tricky, as the canvas was trapped in the dried gesso and the entire area was difficult to get at. The canvas had to be released from the strainer bars without distorting the canvas or wrinkling the design surface. With my eyes on the

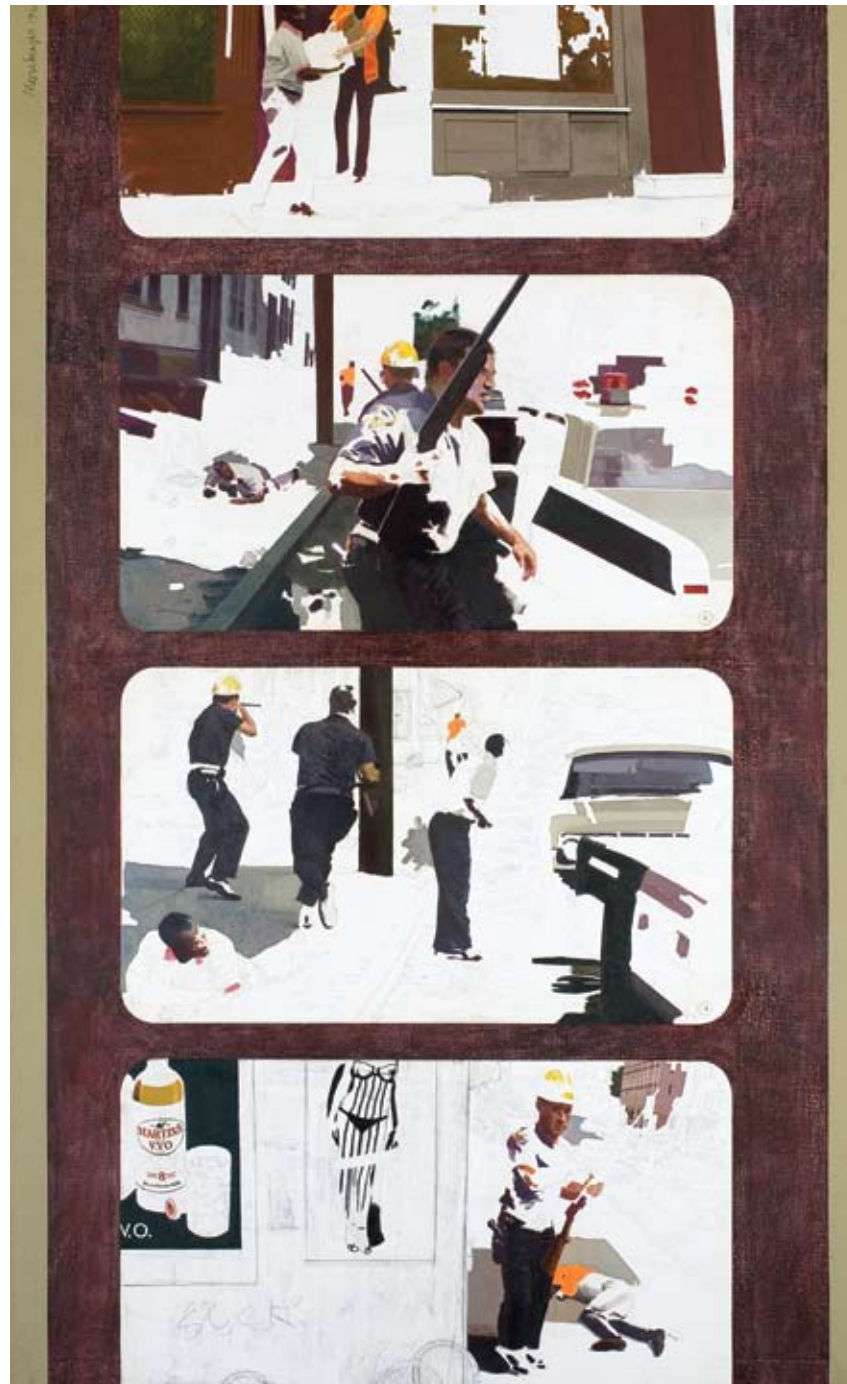
surface of the painting, and hands working primarily by feel behind the canvas and bars, the fabric was slowly pried from the strainer. Once the painting was completely freed, areas of bulges and ripples were humidified and flattened.

A new, keyable custom stretcher was ordered, though every effort was made to disguise that any change was made. The stretcher was shaped where necessary to match the slight curve and slope of the painted image, which followed the curve and slope of the original strainer. Morsberger had only used a few tacks on the margins; instead of adding new and more tacks, the same tacks and holes were re-used, and the extra support needed was added invisibly to the back of the stretcher using the excess fabric. Any future puckers, bulges or sags can be addressed with a gentle tapping on the stretcher keys to take up slack.

Conservators always hesitate to remove or replace original materials, but in this case, substituting the original strainer with the new keyable stretcher helps preserve the impact of this landmark painting. With its signs of age removed, Morsberger's stark vision is fresh for another generation.

—Montserrat Le Mense

Opposite, *Newark, 1968*, by Philip Morsberger, after treatment. Right, Mongolian conservators Nyamdorj Davgadorj (left) and Soyolderene Guugel (right) confer with WACC conservator Cynthia Luk, aided by translator Ariunchimeg Khuyag.



WACC Hosts Mongolian Conservators

A pair of conservators from Mongolia spent the month of March in residence at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center, as the second stage of a professional exchange that is bringing Mongolian specialists to WACC and Williamstown conservators to the Asian country.

Soyolderene Guugel and Nyamdorj Davgadorj, of the Cultural Heritage Center in the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar, specialize in paintings ranging from traditional Buddhist thangkas to 20th-century works. Their residency at WACC, which ran from March 4 through 25, was coordinated by paintings conservator Cynthia Luk, who heads all WACC international efforts. The exchange was made possible by funds from the Trust for Mutual Understanding and the Asian Cultural Council.

Soyolderene, 37, has worked for many years at the Cultural Heritage Center, which serves the conservation needs of museums and heritage sites throughout Mongolia. Nyamdorj, 26, has three years experience at the same institution. The WACC residency offered them exposure to the Center's state-of-the-art facility and provided training in advanced paintings conservation.

Soyolderene, speaking through translator Ariunchimeg Khuyag, said that while many of the conservation procedures were familiar, WACC offered “technologies, working conditions and materials that were totally different and of a higher quality.” He specifically noted the Center's large vacuum hot table as equipment not available to him back home.

There is little formal conservation training in Mongolia, and conservators typically hone their knowledge and skills in residencies. “I am proud to be one of the first conservators from Mongolia to come to Williamstown, and to represent the growing relationship between our two centers,” said Nyamdorj.

“It's been a huge pleasure for me too,” Luk said. “I've been in the conservation labs in Ulaanbaatar, but I didn't understand exactly what the differences in technology were. Their questions made me think of concepts that have become second-nature to me.”

In June, Luk and WACC textile conservator Allison McCloskey will be in Mongolia to conduct a week-long introductory workshop in thangka conservation at the Cultural Heritage Center.



Treatment Report

Title: **Diana of the Tower**

Conservator: **Adam Nesbit**

Description: 1899 bronze sculpture, 40½ -inches high, by Augustus Saint-Gaudens. The work is one of several versions of the original commissioned by architect Stanford White in 1891 for the top of Madison Square Garden. Diana, the only nude that Saint-Gaudens produced during his illustrious career, depicts the Roman goddess of the moon and hunt.



1. The surface was cleaned with a dilute solution of detergent in deionized water. The detergent residue was rinsed with deionized water. Surfaces were degreased with petroleum benzine.

2. The arrow was removed. Excess solder from previous repairs was removed mechanically with a scalpel. The arrow was straightened using a vice and polyethylene shims. The bent tip of the arrow was straightened with pliers. Torch heat was used to anneal the tip prior to reshaping. The arrow was secured to the sculpture with an acrylic resin.

3. The bow arrived broken, bent and distorted, and showed signs of a previous repair. Repair to the bow was disassembled and excess solder from same removed manually with a scalpel and needle files. The bow was realigned by hand using clamps and polyethylene shims. A 1¾-inch long support pin was fabricated from stainless steel. Holes were drilled into the center of the bow on each side of the break to accommodate the pin. The bow was reassembled with the support pin in place. The joint was secured with acrylic resin. The joint was filled and leveled with bleached beeswax tinted with dry pigments.

4. The wire bowstring was removed. An attempt was made to reuse the existing string, but this proved impossible. A replacement bowstring was fabricated from 28-gauge brass wire and tinted with acrylic paints. After examining other versions of the sculpture for appropriate stringing configuration, the string was threaded through the figure's hand and through the hole in the back of the arrow. The wire was tied to the ends of the bow.

5. Patina losses, old solder residue and adhesive joints were inpainted with acrylic colors. The sculpture was waxed overall and lightly buffed. Pumice stone powder was applied to the bow-repair area to decrease gloss.

6. A new marble pedestal was made by an outside stone contractor. To secure the sculpture to the pedestal, a custom mount was designed to fit inside the base of the sculpture. The mount was fabricated from a triangular stainless steel plate and epoxy forms that were press-molded into contours in the base. The plate and epoxy forms were assembled with threaded hardware and securely anchored to undercuts in the bronze. A stainless steel rod attached to the plate was used to secure the sculpture to the pedestal. The mounting system was secure, invisible and reversible.

Note: Clean the sculpture only by dusting with a soft brush. Wiping or buffing the surface with rags may distort the tinted wax fills on the bow and remove inpaint from the surface.



In the census of 1850, George Robert Lawton (1813-1885), aged 36, was listed as a farmer living in Scituate, Rhode Island. More than 150 years later, Lawton is known as a cabinetmaker and folk artist whose works are highly prized. Few of his pieces have more charm than this two-drawer stand signed "George R. Lawton Stand March the 13, AD 1869." The stand is fancifully painted in red, black and yellow on all four sides, with animal motifs including bulls, cows, sheep, birds and, improbably, leopards.

The piece was brought to WACC by a private owner for examination and treatment of its top, which had been overpainted in white and pale blue. The blue paint completely obscured the surface of the top and was visually incongruous with the red tonality of the darkened, oil-resin-coated lower portions of the stand. As such, it was painstakingly removed with solvents and by hand with a scalpel. Overpaint removal revealed that the uppermost surface of the top had no old paint or varnish remaining. Hatched and parallel scoring in the wood suggested the stand had been used as a food-prep surface and cutting board. Luckily, surviving traces of old varnish were found on the edges of the top, and these evidences served as a model for the toning of the scrubbed portions. Using pigmented conservation resins, the top was toned to visually reintegrate it with its base. Treatment was performed by Kate Payne de Chavez, Assistant Conservator of Furniture and Wood Objects.

Mary Catherine Betz
Associate Conservator of
Paintings

Thomas Branchick
Director; Conservator of
Paintings/Dept. Head

John Conzett
Office Manager

Matthew Cushman
Assistant Conservator, Paintings
and Analytical Science

Hugh Glover
Conservator of Furniture and
Wood Objects/Dept. Head

Matthew Hamilton
Photography Technician

Teresa Haskins
Accounts Manager

Rebecca Johnston
Conservator of Paper

Henry Klein
Conservation Technician

Montserrat Le Mense
Conservator of Paintings

Allison McCloskey
Assistant Conservator of
Objects and Textiles

Cynthia Luk
Conservator of Paintings;
International Projects Specialist

Amanda Malkin
Pre-Program Intern/Technician

Adam Nesbit
Assistant Conservator of
Objects

Leslie Paisley
Conservator of Paper/Dept.
Head

Kathleen Payne de Chavez
Assistant Conservator of
Furniture and Wood Objects

Sophie Scully
Pre-Program Intern, Paintings
Department

Katherine Tremblay
Assistant to Director

Amanda Turner
Office Assistant

Sandra Webber
Conservator of Paintings



Tulips Under a Canopy, n.d., by Florine Stettheimer, after treatment.

Still Life for a Free Spirit

Florine Stettheimer (1871-1944) was one of those free-spirit avant-gardists America was once so good at creating. A child of the Gilded Age, the daughter of a wealthy banker, she lived a life of economic ease dedicated to her art. She studied at the Art Student's League, had her first and only solo exhibit during the height of World War I at Manhattan's prestigious Knoedler gallery, and collaborated with Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thompson on his infamous 1934 opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, making headlines for her sets constructed of cellophane. As a painter, Stettheimer had an odd and engaging sensibility, as evidenced by her *Tulips Under a Canopy*, which was

recently brought to the Atlanta Art Conservation Center. The privately-owned oil on canvas, which bears no date, was in need of significant aesthetic and structural treatment. A gift from the artist's family, it had never been cleaned and the paint was actively flaking. AACC conservator James Squires consolidated the fragile paint layer and removed decades of grime, freeing the genie of Stettheimer's brilliant, high-keyed palette. It's questionable whether the artist ever expected her work of last as long as it has, or prepared her canvases for permanence. Her will stipulated that all her paintings be destroyed upon her death, a request her sister was unable to fulfill.

Preservation strategies for East Asian painting

Leslie Paisley and Amanda Malkin

In July 2008, the Williamstown Art Conservation Center hosted a workshop entitled "Care and Handling of East Asian Scrolls and Screens," conducted by Andrew Hare, Supervisory Conservator of East Asian Painting at the Smithsonian Institution's Freer and Sackler Galleries in Washington, D.C. This technical bulletin presents some highlights from the workshop. Andrew's approach to preserving East Asian paintings in Western collections integrates Eastern and Western preservation principles, while remaining aware of the interactive nature of painting formats. Additional and more detailed instructions are found in the references cited at the end of the article.

The basic presentation formats for East Asian painting have the best preservation strategies inherent in their design. The formats of folded album pages, rolled scroll paintings and folded screens make them portable and accessible, are protective of surfaces and colors, and are easy to store safely when not on view. Since East Asian paintings are interactive objects, repetitive use will inevitably cause wear. Thoughtful handling practices will prolong the useful life and integrity of the painting and will limit the types and frequency of conservation treatment and remounting.

Scroll Paintings The earliest scrolls date to the Tang dynasty in China (618-907 A.D.). Chinese mounting techniques evolved into both hand scroll and vertical scroll formats, each with a specific viewing method. During the sixth century, these techniques were introduced in Japan and perfected over the centuries. The scroll mount is designed to present the painting in the most esthetically pleasing manner while protecting it from the environment. The mount is considered part of the finished painting and necessary for its appreciation, even though the color and type of mountings may change several times in the life of the artwork. The most important elements in scroll construction are the proportions above and below the painting. Traditional layouts are based on Chinese mythology and follow specific rules for proportions and colors. The basic ratio for the decorative silk, satin or brocade mountings is two-thirds above (heaven) and one third below (earth) the painting. The mountings of scrolls, as well as screens and albums, also provide a layer of paper or silk at either the beginning and end (or between separate works in the case of albums) to protect the paintings housed in the center of the structure. These mountings become an important element within the object and are necessary when attempting to view the painting in its traditional display. The laminate structure of East Asian paintings on paper or silk, and their mountings, which include glue and



Figure 1



Figure 2

starch adhesives, paper, silk, wood, ivory, jade and bone or metal, make proper care a complex undertaking, especially when they are not additionally protected by a frame and glazing as is typical in the West. [Fig. 1]

General Scroll Care Damage to East Asian paintings consists of three main types: *Physical* deterioration from improper or hasty handling or neglect, and *chemical* or *biological* deterioration due to improper storage and display environments. A clean, pest-free environment, with a stable relative humidity level of 50 to 60 percent and temperature of 65 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit will help retard physical distortion, embrittlement, and mold. Generally, scrolls are some of the most vulnerable art objects in a collection and should be exhibited in the least vulnerable display area. When handling East Asian paintings use a meditative approach: slow down, use clean hands, prepare a viewing space, and think through the procedures before you handle the artwork.

Handling Scrolls Precise handling techniques are developed with experience and are modified for each handler's height and arm length. The act of "reading" a hand scroll resembles that of reading a book. The scroll should be unrolled on a flat, clean surface and opened from right to left. This process for viewing hand scrolls is important to ensure the safety of very long scrolls as well as to create intimacy for the viewer. Only a single narrative section should be opened at any one time. [Fig. 2] To view the next section, the right portion should be rolled to meet the left (keeping the proper tension on the rolled section), cradled in both hands and brought back in front of the viewer to begin again. The same process should be used to roll the scroll back to the beginning, only in reverse. When ready to re-roll the scroll for storage, roller clamps (Futomaki-hinged cylinders of wood) fitted to the bottom roller are traditionally used when necessary to increase the diameter of a tightly rolled scroll and to reduce stress on the painting. A modified form of these rollers can be made from Mylar or Zotefoam® tubing covered in Stockinet®. These modern rollers are made of inert lightweight materials, and are cost effective. [Fig. 3] During re-rolling, a strip of Japanese paper can be rolled within the structure to mark weaknesses or tented areas in the scroll to alert future handlers. Once rolled correctly, a strip of clean, soft paper (3-4 inches wide) can be wrapped onto the outside of the

scroll to protect the silk mountings from abrasion of the wrapping cord. Both hanging and hand scrolls should be wrapped with muslin, Tyvek®, or an acid-free paper and stored in a protective box on a flat surface. The box may be made of traditional Pawlonia wood or archival boxes can be constructed from acid free blue board. The storage materials and box itself become a microclimate for the object, protecting it from fluctuations in the environment and dust, as well as slowing down the handler with the several layers of protection. Alternative systems for outfitting flat files with hammocks of muslin can be effective for scrolls without boxes or when scrolls are over-sized.

Displaying Scrolls For hanging scrolls and hand scrolls, limited display helps to reduce fading and color change of the silks, paper and paint media, as well as preventing damage due to dust and the environment. Additionally, while the object is "resting" off display, its absence builds anticipation for viewing the object with fresh eyes once it is brought out again. A rotation cycle of six months on display at low light levels, followed by four-and-a-half years in storage is maintained at the Freer and Sackler Galleries. While this may be difficult to achieve in a home setting, consider rotating your personal collection seasonally and avoid direct sunlight of any amount. Because continuous display of a hanging scroll will cause progressive, permanent planar distortion, there should be two display periods of three months with a rest period at least three months between them. This policy will cause less distortion than one continual exhibition period of six months. Roll scrolls for storage or pull shades or blinds when the home or room is not occupied for long periods of time.

When preparing to hang scrolls for exhibition, it is important that the object remain safe, especially when lifted. It may be necessary to have a second person available for assistance when hanging it. Thoroughly clean and dry your hands to remove skin oils prior to art handling, and wash periodically through the process as the hands can become soiled or damp. Gloved hands can be dangerous unless the gloves fit tightly. Never touch the paint surface directly. It is important to cradle the scroll in one hand when unwrapping the tie and clasp from around the scroll. Prior to hanging, one or two feet of the scroll should be unrolled on a clean table to assist in safe handling. The eyelets and knots found on the hanging mechanisms should be checked for security and stability. Decorative hooks are used to



Figure 3

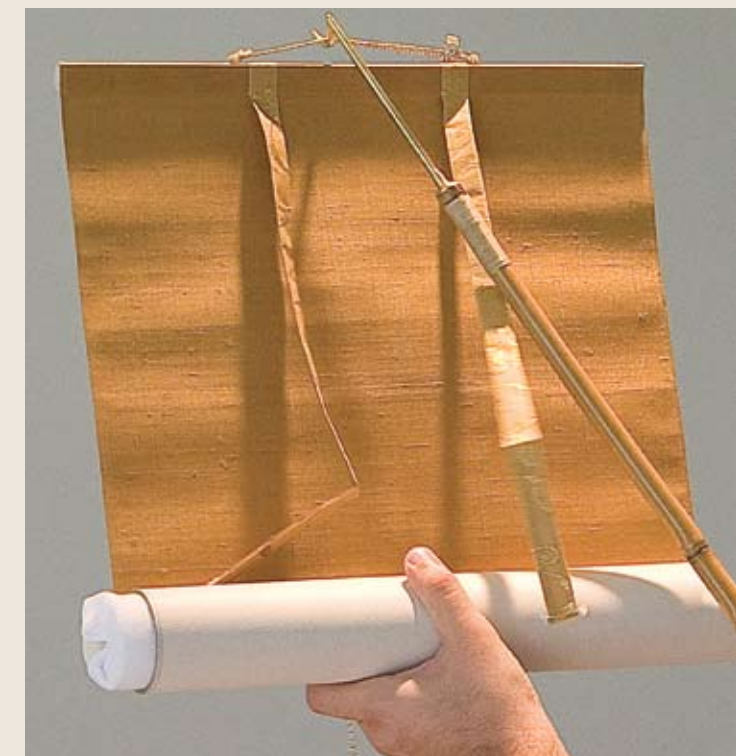



Figure 4

hang the scroll, and the number of hooks depends on the width of the object and the number of hanging mechanisms provided by the artist. J hooks are often used below the bottom roller to secure it safely to the wall. The Yahazu (hanging hook on a bamboo pole) is slipped under the hanging cord to lift it to an adjustable wall hook and then gently removed, while being aware not to touch the Yahazu to the back of the object. [Fig. 4]

Albums Determining the front covers of an album can be tricky unless some time is spent observing the security of the hinges at all four edges of the folded structure before attempting to open it. Albums open from left or from the bottom and should be handled carefully when turning pages at their outer edges, as failures at the page joints are common and may damage further. Albums must be examined and displayed flat, as they do not have a supporting spine like Western books, and cannot be kept upright on a bookshelf. While on display, the album may be kept open, but must be supported by book supports under the front and back covers to relieve stress on the binding. The intended

display of albums involves viewing the painting and the facing decorative page as one object. Books with broken bindings, pages or loose covers should be wrapped and tied or boxed to prevent further damage. Collapsible, multi-flap book boxes made from thick paperboard, laminated with fabric or paper, and secured with clasps are commonly used for this purpose. 

Further information on scroll mounting, conservation of Japanese paintings and vocabulary for East Asian painting terminology can be found on the website of the Freer Gallery of Art. See "The Conservation of a Japanese Painting" in the publication Asian Art Connections [w ww.asia.si/edu/education/Connections Fall 2004.pdf]. Additional guidelines for handling album and screen formats may be found in Andrew Hare's "Guidelines for the Care of East Asian Paintings: Display, Storage and Handling," in The Paper Conservator, vol. 30, 2006, pages 73-92 [For information, see www.icon.org.uk].



Leslie Paisley (right) has been the chief paper conservator at WACC since 1989. She apprentice-trained with Christa Gaehe from 1977-1982 before receiving her Certificate of Advanced Studies at the Center for Conservation and Technical Studies at the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, in 1983. Prior to joining WACC, she was senior paper conservator at the Pacific Regional Art Conservation Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. Amanda Malkin is the pre-program intern in the paper lab at WACC. She earned her BFA in Fine Art Photography from Rochester Institute of Technology in 2007 and intends to complete graduate study in art conservation in the near future.

Williamstown

Art Conservation Center

227 South Street, Williamstown, MA 01267

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy
—Andover, MA

Albany Institute of History and Art
—Albany, NY

Alice T. Miner Colonial Collection
—Chazy, NY

The Arsell Museum
—Canajoharie, NY

Arnot Art Museum
—Elmira, NY

Art Complex Museum
—Duxbury, MA

Atlanta Historical Society, Inc.
—Atlanta, GA

Bennington Museum
—Bennington, VT

Berkshire Museum
—Pittsfield, MA

Bowdoin College Museum of Art
—Brunswick, ME

Charles P. Russell Gallery,
Deerfield Academy
—Deerfield, MA

The Cheney Homestead of the Manchester Historical Society
—Manchester, CT

Colby College Museum of Art
—Waterville, ME

Connecticut Historical Society
—Hartford, CT

The Daura Gallery at Lynchburg College
—Lynchburg, VA

Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art
—Amherst, MA

The Farnsworth Art Museum
—Rockland, ME

Fort Ticonderoga
—Ticonderoga, NY

Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center
Vassar College
—Poughkeepsie, NY

Frederic Remington Art Museum
—Ogdensburg, NY

Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University
—Ithaca, NY

Historic Deerfield, Inc.
—Deerfield, MA

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College
—Hanover, NH

The Hyde Collection
—Glens Falls, NY

The Lawrenceville School
—Lawrenceville, NJ

Mead Art Museum, Amherst College
—Amherst, MA

Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester
—Rochester, NY

Middlebury College Museum of Art
—Middlebury, VT

Mount Holyoke College Art Museum
—South Hadley, MA

Munson Williams Proctor Arts Institute
—Utica, NY

Museum of Connecticut History
—Hartford, CT

Neuberger Museum, Purchase College, State University of New York
—Purchase, NY

New Hampshire Historical Society
—Concord, NH

New York State Office of General Services, Empire State Plaza Art Collection
—Albany, NY

Norman Rockwell Museum at Stockbridge
—Stockbridge, MA

Picker Art Gallery, Colgate University
—Hamilton, NY

Portland Museum of Art
—Portland, ME

Preservation Society of Newport County
—Newport, RI

Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art
—Providence, RI

The Rockwell Museum of Western Art
—Corning, NY

Roland Gibson Gallery, State University of New York
—Potsdam, NY

St. Johnsbury Athenaeum
—St. Johnsbury, VT

Springfield Library and Museums Association
—Springfield, MA

Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute
—Williamstown, MA

Suzy Frelinghuysen and George L.K. Morris Foundation
—Lenox, MA

Tioga Point Museum
—Athens, PA

Union College
—Schenectady, NY

Vermont Historical Society
—Montpelier, VT

Vermont Museum and Gallery Alliance
—Shelburne, VT

Williams College Museum of Art
—Williamstown, MA

Mission Statement
The mission of the Williamstown Art Conservation Center, a non-profit institution, is to protect, conserve and maintain the objects of our cultural heritage; to provide examination, treatment, consultation and related conservation services for member institutions, and for other non-profit organizations, corporations and individuals; to conduct educational programs with respect to the care and conservation of works of art and objects of cultural interest; to participate in the training of conservators; to promote the importance of conservation and increase the awareness of the issues pertinent to collections care; and to conduct research and disseminate knowledge to advance the profession.

Atlanta Art Conservation Center

6000 Peachtree Road
Atlanta, GA 30341

Alabama Historical Commission
—Montgomery, AL

Booth Western Art Museum
—Cartersville, GA

Columbia Museum of Art
—Columbia, SC

The Columbus Museum
—Columbus, GA

High Museum of Art
—Atlanta, GA

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts
—Montgomery, AL

Morris Museum of Art
—Augusta, GA

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