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Welcome to the first issue of *Art Conservator*, the new bulletin of the Williamstown Art Conservation Center. With the advent of a new location on the horizon, we have redesigned our newsletter, formerly called FYI, with more pages, expanded content and the addition of full color. *Art Conservator* is written and edited by Timothy Cahill, an award-winning arts journalist, and its visually sophisticated look is by Kosak Design. Our intent is a publication that will be a “keeper,” offering great stories, images that speak of the conservation process, updates from WACC and AACC, the Atlanta Art Conservation Center, and more. As in the past, we also include a technical pull-out for filing and reference.

I hope many of you had the opportunity to view Jackson Pollock at the Williams College Museum of Art earlier this year. It would be hard to top the humbling experience of working on that project, which is described in our cover story. Also larger than life was the Frans Hals painting worked on here from the Ryksmuseum in Amsterdam, and a seminal work by Edward Hopper. Both are featured in this issue.

Construction commenced on our new facility this past April. We’re staying on the campus of the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, but this time we’re sited halfway up Stone Hill with gorgeous views of the surrounding hills. I pinch myself when I go to the construction site to insure that this is really happening. As you can see below, the project is moving along beautifully. Target completion is the fourth quarter of 2007, with WACC move-in scheduled for the end of next year or the beginning of ’08. Our existing square footage of 9,157 will jump to 11,747 in a handsome building designed by Japanese architect Tadao Ando. I can’t wait. —Thomas J. Branchick

**Building the Future**  Construction of WACC’s new facility has moved along rapidly. The building, designed by Tadao Ando, is scheduled for occupancy by early 2008.
Bringing A Pollock to Life

With a PVA topcoat removed, Jackson Pollock’s *Number 2, 1949* reveals a painter way beyond “Jack the Dripper”

Jackson Pollock reinvented modern art in a matter of just four years. In 1947, he spread a length of canvas on the floor of his Long Island studio barn and made his first painting entirely by dripping and pouring colors directly onto the supine surface. What followed was an intensely creative 48-month period during which the seminal abstractions Pollock is remembered for appeared in Promethean succession. He worked vigorously and spontaneously, approaching the canvas from all sides, circling his paintings sometimes with a boxer’s ferocity, other times like a shaman before a fire. In the early 1950s, after having exploded every convention of Western painting, Pollock suspended his signature technique and never returned to it.

The artist the press dubbed “Jack the Dripper” once famously declared, “I don’t paint nature. I am nature,” and the experience of standing before his best works induces the same awe as a restless sea. In 1986, however, when WACC director and chief painting...
conservator Tom Branchick first treated *Number 2, 1949* at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute Museum of Art in Utica, New York, he found this dramatic effect considerably muted. Branchick had been asked to stabilize imperfections on the painting caused by routine handling and underbound (overly-thinned) paint. Inspecting the canvas under a microscope, he observed the extent that the surface had been compromised by earlier conservation.

At issue was a coat of polyvinyl acetate, or PVA, applied in 1959, three years after the artist’s death. The plastic sealer had been sprayed over the entire painting, front and back, to prevent the paint from flaking. The treatment gave the work a glossy surface Pollock never intended, and starkly diminished the visual impact of his colors. The PVA, though applied with the best intentions, “effected the way the painting looked both in saturation and reflectance,” says Branchick. “Colors that were mat became glossy. Colors that were glossy became dead.”

Branchick had to wait 20 years for the opportunity to restore *Number 2* closer to its original state. The occasion finally arrived earlier this year, when the conservator teamed with Williams College Museum of Art to mount the exhibition “Jackson Pollock at Williams College.” The show, which contained three paintings from the height of Pollock’s career, marked the return of the painter to the college after more than 50 years.

Williams had been one of just two venues for Pollock’s first-ever retrospective, organized by famed critic Clement Greenberg in 1952, when the painter was largely unknown. (At the time, Williams was offered *Number 2, 1949* but declined the opportunity to purchase it.) The 2006 exhibit also celebrated the life of the late Kirk Varnedoe, a 1967 Williams graduate and the revered Chief Curator of Paintings and Sculpture for the Museum of Modern Art. Varnedoe mounted the definitive survey of Pollock at MoMA in 1998.

“Jackson Pollock at Williams College” centered around the dramatic unveiling of the restored—some might say reborn—Munson-Williams-Proctor painting.

The restoration began in early April. The 16-foot painting was brushed with ethanol to dissolve the PVA, which was wicked off the back of the canvas into cellulose blotters. In less than half a day, the sealant was eliminated and the original Pollock emerged from its plastic cocoon after nearly a half century.

It was then possible to fully appreciate what the artist had made. *Number 2, 1949* is quintessential of
Number 2, 1949 is quintessential of Pollock’s drip-and-pour ethos. His earlier paintings had been shown with evocative titles such as *Alchemy* and *Cathedral*, suggesting a mystical/spiritual source of Pollock’s inspiration. By 1949, he had begun designating the works by number alone, avoiding lyrical interpretation altogether. In a statement at the time, Pollock declared that, “the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through.” (Eventually, Pollock allowed a return to poetic titling, producing the masterpieces we know as *Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950* and *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950.*

*Number 2, 1949* was painted on loosely-woven commercial hemp sail cloth, tan-bark dyed to give it an earthy red color. Pollock worked on the canvas raw, using the reddish tint as his ground. The colors were poured from cans, flung from brushes, dripped from sticks, possibly even dribbled from a turkey-baster, settling in skeins and splatters, pools and filaments. The picture’s underlying movement comes from waves of white paint that crest and fall over the canvas; these are balanced by heavy sickle-moon passages of black moving from left to right. Slashes of rain-slicker yellow break the surface, as
do scribbles of bright red and industrial aluminum. The surface is punctuated by marks of a darker red, nearly the color of the ground, that stud the painting like jewels. In some areas, thinned paint bled into the canvas, creating a halo effect of oil around a dark center of color.

Working with Jason Vrooman, Judith M. Lennet Fellow in art conservation at WACC and the Williams College Graduate Program in the History of Art, Branchick restored cratered and pitted areas of pigment with acrylic paint. The losses ranged from the size of a dime to about the size of a quarter, and were up to three millimeters deep. Smaller cracks were left as is. Frequently, the in-painting process required Branchick and Vrooman to connect the dots inside the artist’s head. This was especially true when pigments overlapped, requiring the men to extrapolate the order in which the colors were originally applied.

At Williams College, Number 2 was shown with two other Pollock masterpieces, the whimsical Number 7, 1950 from the Museum of Modern Art, and the moody Number 13a: Arabesque, from Yale University. Number 2 was dramatically displayed on an altar-like plinth that allowed both the front and back of the canvas to be viewed. Arabesque was of particular interest to Branchick, who co-curated the exhibit with Williams College director Lisa Corrin, because it was painted on the same red sail cloth. “I hoped Arabesque would be a ‘control surface’ for me as I prepared Number 2,” he explains. “But Pollock made completely different choices in how he handled the ground in both paintings. He sized the cloth of the Yale painting with Rivit glue, a refined polyvinyl emulsion similar to Elmer’s. As a result, the colors in Arabesque sit up on the surface and are very crisp. In our painting there was a lot of bleed of the paint. It was thinner, and the canvas was unsized.”

“I walked away with a completely different understanding of Pollock,” Branchick says. “I was in the ‘Jack the Dripper’ mindset, him doing his dance around the canvas. But the more and more you look at his work, you understand he was in total control of what he was doing. Pollock had a perception of how the paint would dry, whether the colors would be shiny or mat, how they would intersect and bleed into each other. He was calculating about all that stuff. I walked away with a whole new respect of how controlling he was.”
Hopper’s Colors of Morning

“...My aim in painting,” Edward Hopper wrote, “has always been the most exact transcription of my most intimate expressions of nature.” That nature, very often, was human nature, and the psychological complexities of the modern world. Hopper’s Morning in a City captures a moment of psychic suspense and erotic ambiguity, set inside a small bedroom at sunrise. The painting is regarded as a masterpiece of Hopper’s mature work.

Morning in a City was painted in 1944, after Hopper (1882-1967) and his wife Josephine had returned to New York from a sojourn in Mexico. Though their marriage was often stormy, Jo was a willing model for her husband. In her 1995 Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography, Hopper expert Gail Levin, discussing the picture, wrote that Jo “responded with her usual readiness when Edward was taken by the idea of yet another erotically charged canvas featuring her in the leading role.”

In preparation for lending the painting this past spring, the Williams College Museum of Art contacted Tom Branchick, director and head of the paintings department at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center, to inspect Morning. Branchick first viewed the painting at the museum and was disturbed by discoloration on areas of the surface. He surmised that in-painting done by an earlier conservator had changed with age.

Analysis in the lab revealed that the discoloring was the result of four synthetic varnish films applied during conservation treatment in 1962 and 1979. Additionally, the painting had been wax-resin lined to a secondary support fabric (a once-common practice). Oxidized residue of wax resin on the surface of the picture had contributed to the shift in color, as had delaminations in the varnish films. The color, in Branchick’s words, “was similar to a tobacco brown.”

“Both of those earlier treatments contributed to the painting’s physical appearance,” Branchick explains. “After opening a cleaning window, we could see the extent to which it was masking the painting. It wasn’t Hopper anymore.” Removing the old varnish and wax rejuvenated the paint surface. Subtle colors reappeared on the woman’s skin. The exterior window frame glowed with notes of coral and tangerine. Shadows inside the apartment yielded rich, unexpected tones.

While Hopper apparently did not object to varnish being added to his work by restorers, research indicates the artist himself did not coat his paintings. The restored Morning was left unvarnished and spent the summer on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art. It is now back at WCMA in an exhibition pairing Hopper with tableaux photographer Gregory Crewdson. Preparatory drawings for Morning in a City are also on display.
A Frans Hals Reunion

Analysis of the Dutch master’s Portrait of Maritge Voogt reunites a pendant pair

When Gwen Tauber set out to conserve a Frans Hals portrait this past summer, she was not just restoring a painting. She was verifying an identity.

The 1639 Portrait of Maritge Voogt is owned by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, where Tauber has been Senior Paintings Conservator for 16 years. Tauber, who was raised in Williamstown, worked on the Hals while on sabbatical at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center from February until August. In addition to permitting an extended stay with her father, Tauber’s residency allowed her to share her European conservation background with WACC colleagues.

The work Tauber brought from the Netherlands is typical of commissions produced by Hals at the peak of his career. In an era when society portraiture was highly formal, Hals (1580/82-1666) perfected a spontaneous, intimate style that attracted Holland’s wealthiest and most powerful patrons. His portraits impart a feeling of casual intimacy that is generous and frank.

The matriarch of Tauber’s picture had long been identified as Maritge Claesdr. Voogt, wife of Pieter Jacobsz. Olycan, a prominent grain wholesaler and burgomaster (council leader) in Haarlem, where Hals lived and worked. It was this marital identity that Tauber sought to verify while in America, along with a complete restoration of the picture. A varnish layer had yellowed and contracted, leaving the spidery network of small cracks known as craquelure. Discolored retouchings from an earlier restoration further detracted from the painting’s original beauty. Tauber’s cleaning revealed Hals’ original palette, and offered new revelations about the artist’s ability and intent.

“There are highlights on the chair which were painted in vermilion, a very bright, permanent red,” Tauber explains. “But examination under ultraviolet light indicated the presence of an additional glaze, a translucent darker red paint used to tone the bright color back.” Tauber retouched around the remnants of this glaze, muting the vermilion and partially restoring the area’s original color balance.

Scientific observation revealed other secrets as well. An analysis of the coat of arms in the background showed the presence of Prussian blue paint, a pigment that was not manufactured until 1710, more than 40 years after the artist’s death. Obviously, the heraldic arms had been added by another hand, a change that inspired scholarly uncertainty. While Hals’ authorship of the portrait was never in doubt, such an undocumented alteration meant the painting’s history could no longer be taken for granted.

Tauber, with colleague Nadia Baadj, an art history graduate student at Williams College, travelled to the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Fla., to study that museum’s Hals portrait of Pieter Olycan, Maritge’s husband. The generally accepted hypothesis is that the Rijksmuseum portrait and the Ringling’s had been produced at the same time as pendants, paired portraits intended to be shown together.
With a magnifying glass and thread-counter applied to an X ray of the painting, Tauber found that the Rijksmuseum’s Maritge was painted on a coarse linen canvas. While such coarsely-woven cloth was uncharacteristic for Hals, an estimated thread count taken from the face of the painting in Sarasota indicated an identical weave of that canvas support—powerful evidence that the two pictures were created as a set. An X ray is currently being made at the Ringling to confirm that likelihood. Minute cross-sections of paint taken from both paintings are also being analyzed to compare the preparatory layers. Visually, the paintings differ considerably. The Ringling portrait shows a commanding, even fierce man, painted with the “loose brushwork and bravura” which Tauber notes are Hals trademarks. In contrast, Maritge Voogt’s likeness is more restrained and polished (though painterly passages do show up in her cap and skirt). Ironically, the differences in style support the theory that the paintings were created to hang together. “It’s typical of Hals,” says Tauber, “to paint the man as more dynamic and the woman as more staid in perfect completion. This is an extreme example of that approach.”

The scholarship of Tauber, Baadj and their colleagues at the Ringling Museum adds additional understanding to these two pendant paintings and to Hals’ working methods. The findings will be highlighted in a 2007 travelling exhibit curated by Baadj. The centerpiece of the exhibition will be the reunion of husband and wife, as the Rijksmuseum and Ringling portraits will be shown together after more than 172 years apart. That show opens at the Ringling Museum in January and arrives at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in June. It will travel to Amsterdam in the fall of 2007.
Connecticut Silhouette Masterpiece Renewed

The WACC Department of Paper Conservation has begun a two-year project to conserve and archivally re-house a significant portion of the paper silhouette collection owned by the Connecticut Historical Society Museum in Hartford. The project involves some 90 paper cutouts, most dating from the early- to mid-19th century.

The silhouette was a popular form of portraiture between 1800 and 1850, before it was replaced by photography. WACC paper conservator Rebecca Johnston is head of the Connecticut project. Treatment procedures will include stain reduction, mending tears and losses, and archival reframing to improve the chemical, physical and visual condition of each work.

The CHS collection contains the work of indigenous and itinerant silhouette artists living and working in Connecticut, including several likenesses by William H. Brown (1808-1883), among the best known of the traveling silhouettists. While most silhouettes would fit easily into the palm of the hand, Brown’s *magnum opus* is the 19- by 81-inch *DeWitt Clinton Locomotive*, a depiction of America’s first steam railroad excursion, from Albany to Schenectady, N.Y. in 1831.

Brown’s image is exceptional in size and detail among early American silhouettes, says CHS graphics curator Nancy Finlay. Brown is said to have been a passenger on that first railroad ride, says Finlay, and probably executed the silhouette years later. The artist once boasted he had been “gifted with a rare and peculiar talent . . . of executing with wonderful facility and accuracy outlines or form of any person or object from a single glance of the eye, and without machinery whatever, but a pair of common scissors and a piece of black paper.” His silhouette drawing of the event is mounted on canvas and embellished with yellow detailing on both riders and train. The fabric mount showed overall discoloration with areas of severe staining from water damage and adhesives used in past restorations. The black paper figures had come loose from the fabric in several places, and small pieces of the work had been lost, leaving gaps in the drawing.

Johnston re-adhered the paper to the canvas, then methodically in-filled missing pieces of the outline with conservation-quality black paper. In the process, she corrected earlier mends to the drawing that had been inaccurately rendered. She was able to reduce much of the fabric staining with deionized water, applied with a small brush and hand-held suction device. Stains in a border of blue and gray pastel were masked with pastel pencil. Johnston completed the treatment by supporting the canvas with a cushioned backing for the fabric to rest on in the frame, and adding archival spacers to keep the glazing from touching the surface of the artwork.

The silhouette project is funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.
A moving experience at Bowdoin

When six massive Assyrian relief carvings were installed in the rotunda of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art in 1930, the story goes that the museum director recruited the college football team to do the heavy lifting. This past summer, the 2,500-year-old sculptures were moved from the rotunda to a new wing of the Brunswick, Maine museum, this time by preservation masons and master riggers — and guided at every stage by WACC objects conservators Katherine Holbrow and Gerri Ann Strickler.

Although Holbrow and Strickler are often called upon to work with large sculpture, the job presented unique challenges to the conservation team. “Lifting and moving something that heavy, that fragile and that valuable—that was new,” says Holbrow, WACC’s head of objects conservation and coordinator for the Bowdoin project. Strickler managed the removal process.

The reliefs’ heavy, puzzle-piece fragments (none of the six sculptures is intact) had to be chipped away from brick and concrete which held them to the museum wall. Along the way, the job yielded surprises. In one instance, the crew found a cold chisel bent like a nail holding one of the sculptures to the wall. Two of the largest fragments even contained travel instructions. One clearly read “AMERICA”; the other, much fainter, “Prof. Cleaveland, Brunswick, Maine.” Parker Cleaveland was a professor of natural philosophy at Bowdoin in 1860, when the reliefs arrived on campus.

Moving and reinstallation proved no simpler. Under Holbrow’s supervision, lifting bolts were threaded into the slabs to hoist and transport the sculpture. A system of metal mounts was attached to steel beams built into the walls displaying the stones. “The mounts are designed to be easily accessible and entirely reversible,” Holbrow says. “At the beginning of the project I was told not to worry, that once the reliefs were in the new gallery, they’d never be moved again. I said, ‘No—they’ll move again! They will move again!’”

Maybe in another 75 years.

—Thanks to Bowdoin Museum director Katherine Kline and Associate Director Suzanne K. Bergeron for help on this report.

The Pabst Cabinet

A Gothic-revival cabinet by Daniel Pabst of Philadelphia, circa 1875. The cabinet, which was recently acquired by the Munson-Williams-Proctor Art Institute, has similarities to an 1867 design by Bruce Talbot and is illustrated in his Gothic Forms. The Pabst cabinet features the distinctive cameo veneer decoration and English ceramic tiles. The cabinet’s rear corner finials are missing; inset shows clay and wood mock-up designs created by WACC furniture restorer Hugh Glover which are under consideration as replacements.
WACC News & Notes

WACC team assesses collections in Katrina’s wake

Four conservators from WACC were in Louisiana in August to assess the destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina to that state’s artistic and cultural heritage. The four conservators—Katie Holbrow (objects), Leslie Paisley (paper and books), Sandra Webber (paintings) and Hugh Glover (furniture)—traveled to New Orleans and Baton Rouge for the Louisiana State Museum, to evaluate the museum’s collections and to make recommendations for a storage strategy in the wake of the catastrophe.

The WACC team assembled first in Baton Rouge, where in the weeks following Katrina the collections had been hastily evacuated to a rented warehouse. The Louisiana State Museum is made up of a complex of buildings in New Orleans’ French Quarter, which did not sustain the devastating flooding of other parts of the city. Nevertheless, climate conditions, power outages and other threats necessitated the move, leaving much of the collection housed some 80 miles north, just outside Baton Rouge.

The team inspected a cross-section of holdings, from dolls to guns to domestic furniture, paintings to maps to vintage records, much of it stacked in boxes on warehouse shelving. The museum is home to elaborate Mardi Gras costumes and a world-class collection of early jazz artifacts, including Louis Armstrong’s first cornet. Mold, mildew and insect damage were determined to be the collections’ major threats.

“In the end, we were not so much looking at the collections as at the facilities,” says Holbrow, who headed the WACC effort. Katrina has refocused attention and resources to upgrading the State Museum’s storage. After a tour of the institution’s numerous buildings in New Orleans, the team recommended an 1835 former U.S. Mint repository be converted into a primary storage facility. Holbrow notes that the old Mint’s thick walls, behind which gold bullion was

WACC-Bulgarian partnership continues

Work continues on behalf of the archeological treasures of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. For several years, WACC has been part of an international team of conservation experts working on the ruins of the ancient Roman town of Philippopolis, present day Plovdiv, in southern Bulgaria. In 2004, the Center aided in the conservation of the Roman floor mosaics at the Eirene Residential Palace there, and in 2005 WACC hosted a site management planning project for the long-term preservation of the ruins.

The Philippopolis site dates from between the 1st to 5th century AD and contains significant archeological monuments, including an ancient Roman theater, stadium and forum. These sites have been preserved in situ, with some sections even adapted for modern life. An ancient theater is now used for performing arts productions, and portions of the stadium have been incorporated into the interiors of new buildings. The forum includes a repository, a library and an odeum, which has been restored to its original purpose as a performing venue and now hosts small musical productions. Similarly, after extensive preservation and conservation, the Eirene mosaic floors, with are dated from the 4th to 6th century AD, are part of the interior of an art gallery open to the public.

Paintings conservator Cynthia Luk has spearheaded the Plovdiv project for WACC. Through funding from the New York-based Trust for Mutual Understanding, Luk traveled to Plovdiv in December, 2005 to meet with educators, tourism experts, conservators and archeologists. These specialists are now advocating the installation of a heritage trail there similar to Boston’s Freedom Trail. “If we gain public interest, respect and pride for the archeological history, it will be easier to gain public support for our efforts,” says Luk. “The citizens need to be made aware. That will lead to appreciation, and that will lead to funding.”

Luk returned to Bulgaria in October for further discussions on the heritage trail with the mayor of Plovdiv. She then traveled to Serbia to present a paper on the Philippopolis work she co-authored with Bulgarian team members, at a conference on the “Condition of Cultural and Natural Heritage in the Balkans,” held Oct. 23-27.
We all recognize

Norman Rockwell’s magazine covers, but a lesser known aspect of the master illustrator’s career was his work for Hollywood. This painting was created for the 1943 “The Song of Bernadette,” in which Rockwell depicted Jennifer Jones in the title role as the peasant girl who has a vision of the “beautiful lady.” The painting arrived at the Center with a series of horizontal cracks caused by a loss of canvas tension. “Norman sometimes forgot to put the keys (tightening wedges) in the corners of his stretchers,” says paintings conservator Sandra Webber, who has worked on numerous Rockwells. “This causes the canvas to go slack.” After keying the stretcher, the painting was cleaned of surface grime and the cracks inpainted. Cleaning was restricted, because Rockwell achieved a sense of depth in the picture by glazing with toned layers of varnish, which are integrated into the picture surface. Working on Rockwell’s pictures has given the conservator respect for the artist. “Technically he’s quite proficient,” she notes. “He emulated the Old Masters.” In the course of restoration, Webber discovered that Rockwell had included the name “Bernadette” at the bottom of the painting. The studio over-painted the name before using the picture as the film’s main poster image, including a 150-foot version that hung from a Broadway theater.

once stored, are its greatest asset. “Next time they have a month-long power failure,” she observes, “that building will stay the coolest.”

Beyond storage issues, Holbrow noted the dedication of the museum staff. “They are totally devoted. They worked 12-hour days.” But the stress was also evident. “You can’t maintain that kind of intensity for so long,” says Holbrow. “They all looked on the edge of burn-out.”

The four-day trip resulted in a 34-page assessment report for the state museum. In early 2007, WACC conservators will return to the museum and make recommendations for a long-range preservation plan there.

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Conservator of Furniture and Wood Objects, Department Head

Matthew Hamilton
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Conservator of Paintings

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Conservator of Paper

Henry Klein
Conservation Technician

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Associate Conservator of Paintings

Cynthia Luk
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Sandra L. Webber
Conservator of Paintings
Hale Woodruff (1900–1980) was a painter, muralist and printmaker known for his works that captured the African-American experience. He is also recognized as a leading art educator who, among other achievements, established Atlanta as the Southeast’s premier site for art instruction for blacks during the era of segregation.

The Spelman College Museum of Fine Art worked with the Atlanta Art Conservation Center earlier this year to conserve several Woodruff paintings. The project, funded largely by a Getty Trust Conservation Treatment Grant, restored the work of an artist whose importance is only now being reassessed, and added greater understanding to Woodruff’s techniques and creative process. Spelman College is part of the Atlanta University Center consortium of African-American colleges and universities.

Woodruff showed an early interest in art, and in 1928 won a Harmon Foundation award, which enabled him to travel to Paris and study painting at the Académie Moderne and the Académie Scandinave. While in Paris, Woodruff noted that many of the French modernists had incorporated African and other indigenous forms and images into their work. African art would influence Woodruff’s own creative work, and throughout his career he continued to explore its effect on modern art.

In 1931, Woodruff was invited by Atlanta University president Dr. John Hope to create an art department that would serve the five historically-black colleges and universities of the Atlanta University Center (AUC). Woodruff was reluctant to return to the US from Europe, but financial hardship compelled him to accept the position. Woodruff was a visionary art educator who engaged his students in social issues and the surrounding community. By the mid-1930s, the AUC had become the premiere site in the Southeast for art instruction for African-Americans. Students came to study under Woodruff, even though no school in the AUC had yet established a graduate program.

While in Atlanta, Woodruff emphasized his role as a teacher. He declined opportunities to exhibit his work and did not pursue his career as an artist to the fullest degree. Nevertheless, in 1934 a grant enabled him to study mural painting in Mexico with Diego Rivera. The experience deeply influenced Woodruff. His experience in Mexico led to a 1939 commission by Talladega College to create a suite of murals commemorating the 100th-year anniversary of the mutiny on the slave ship Amistad. The Amistad murals show the impact of Rivera on Woodruff’s style, techniques, and the way he conceptualized space.

A fellowship allowed Woodruff to spend much of 1943 living and working in New York. He left Atlanta in 1946 to teach at New York University, a position he held till his retirement in 1968. While in New York, he associated with luminaries of the New York School of abstract expressionists, including Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and Mark Rothko. Woodruff was radically altered by...
these associations. His work transformed from populist social realism to pure abstraction. Whatever the style, he remained devoted to bold, expressive color throughout his career.

Though Woodruff’s legacy as an artist has been not been fully examined, interest in his work has been consistent. A retrospective, “Hale Woodruff: 50 Years of His Art,” was mounted at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1979. A smaller exhibition, “Hale Woodruff in Atlanta,” was presented by the High Museum of Art in 2004. Spelman College’s “Hale Woodruff Conservation Treatment and Research Project” builds upon these earlier efforts. The findings of conservators at AACC introduced new aspects of Woodruff’s under-examined life and work, and the restored paintings unveiled work that has never been available for public viewing.

“Through treatment and technical analysis, the project allowed us to get a better understanding of Woodruff’s materials and methodologies,” explains James Squires, Associate Conservator of paintings at AACC.

Squires subjected seven of the artist’s canvases to close examination, including ultraviolet and microscopic analysis. Cross-section analysis of the pigment revealed a shift in Woodruff’s technique from the 1930s to the 1940s. His earlier work, Squires found, used “more traditional glazing techniques,” of applying paint in thin layers of pigment and oil medium. His use of paint in the abstractions was considerably less fastidious. Although the paint application was deliberate, it was done much more loosely and quickly, caring less for traditional technique.

The early work presented challenges to the conservator, particularly issues of solubility.

Particularly difficult was an image of a bullfighter in dramatic reds and golds. Portrait of a Matador appears to be a surviving fragment of a mural by Woodruff that is currently lost or destroyed (while Woodruff’s other murals are well documented, this unidentified mural has never been discussed or reproduced in the literature).

Three tears were present in the canvas and planar distortions existed throughout. Traction cracks, a result of the artist’s technique, were visible in many of the darker paint passages, and age and mechanical cracks in paint existed throughout the picture. A discolored varnish and thick grime layer significantly darkened and dulled the painting.

As the grime was cleaned, the top layer of varnish proved extremely porous to cleaning agents, which threatened the pigment below it. After the grime layers were removed, spot tests indicated that the solubility of the upper varnish was very close to that of the pigmented glazes and pigments underneath. Squires developed gel-based cleaning systems customized to the solubility of the upper layer. Conservators gain extra control by suspending solvents and other cleaning agents in gels.

Woodruff’s abstract canvases presented different needs. One of his most revered paintings from this period is the 1953 Celestial Gate, 1953, from a series of the same title. The painting depicts a stylized gate, with geometric motifs painted on its surface, set against a background of light blue and bright yellow. Before treatment, slack tension had promoted minor planar distortions in the canvas. Cracks throughout the picture had begun to cup and delaminate from the surface, causing localized paint loss. Squires consolidated all loose and flaking paint and lined the painting with an auxiliary canvas before restretching and reframing.

Work on the paintings was done between January and May, 2006. Squires worked around the shooting schedule of a documentary crew that has produced a film of the Woodruff project for Atlanta PBS affiliate Georgia Public Broadcasting. The restored Woodruff paintings, and more than a dozen Woodruff linocuts restored at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center, will be the centerpieces of the exhibit Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and the Academy, opening January 2007 at the Spelman College Museum of Art. The exhibition, organized in conjunction with the 75th anniversary of Woodruff’s establishment of Spelman’s art department, will also highlight sculptor Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, the first woman on Spelman’s art faculty.

Educational programs organized around the Woodruff project and exhibit will include student tours of the AACC lab, to introduce issues of conservation to the current generation of art students and allow them to see restoration and conservation projects in process.

—Thanks to Andrea D. Barnwell, Ph.D., Director of the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, whose biographical sketch of Hale Woodruff is excerpted in this article.
The high museum of art in Atlanta acquired Anselm Kiefer’s 2001 Drache (Dragon) for its new contemporary wing in conjunction with the opening of the museum’s Renzo Piano expansion last year. The massive work depicts the diagram of the astronomical constellation of the same name seen over sky and sea. The painting arrived from Europe already in need of conservation, showing areas of paint flaking and cracking as well as tears and sags in the canvas. The upper two-thirds (sky) of the painting is composed of lead sheets adhered to heavy cotton canvas over a strainer. The lower third (sea) is a very thick oil paint applied directly onto a heavy cotton canvas, also stretched over a strainer. As with many of Kiefer’s works, the artist’s materials and methods rendered the artwork very fragile. Kiefer, a student of Joseph Beuys, has said he does not mind when paint “sluffs off” his artwork. The artist expressly forbids readhering lost paint, but allows loose paint still attached to the surface to be reconsolidated. The treatment of Dragon involved consolidating all loose and flaking paint and photographically documenting the existing topography and condition of the work. AACC associate paintings conservator James Squires had the 18-by-15-foot artwork suspended from a wooden frame and, working from a scissor-lift, used string to construct an overlay grid of 110 numbered sections. After treatment, each section was photographed for reference by museum staff and conservators. As areas of instability are observed in the future, documentation will aid in repairing the paint surface before permanent loss occurs.
Care and use of 19th-century American gilded picture frames

Hugh Glover

Picture frames are a component of most art collections and are subject to wear and tear in their functional role surrounding paintings. Damage to frames occurs during exhibition, storage, and travel, and is caused by handling, hanging processes, adverse environments, neglect, and irreversible restorations. Picture frames are maintained by a variety of preservation specialist and their preservation interests have only rarely been addressed.

The following is Section 4 of a larger paper, “A Description of 19th-Century American Gilded Picture Frames and an Outline of their Modern Use and Conservation,” presented in June to the Wooden Artifact Group at the 2006 annual meeting of AIC in Providence, Rhode Island. This section addresses general preservation, handling and preparation of frames for exhibition.

Environment  Gilded wood objects are ultra sensitive to environmental conditions and are probably more sensitive than most paintings. Gilded wood in adverse climates experiences detachment and loss of gilding/ornament, while the accumulation of grime leads to surface darkening and cleaning campaigns that may well cause damage.

The protected bright gilding that survives on shadow boxed frames of the second half-century illustrates how more exposed gilding has now been altered by grime, abrasion, and staining from moisture and grease during handling.

Handling  All gilded objects should be handled with non-marring gloves to avoid abrasions and staining, and even paper towels or cotton cloth will suffice. In practice, however, gilded frames are still handled with bare hands as the frame is considered a safe means of handling the artwork. Other handling precautions include using soft support pads, not lifting empty frames by the thin sight edge, and avoiding contact with loose parts. Ziploc-type bags labeled with marker pens are useful for saving detached parts.

Dusting  Occasional dusting of frames with a clean soft brush and vacuum is recommended to remove the dust that eventually becomes grime that attracts moisture. [See Fig. 1 on the following page] Light-weight dust covers can help in dustier storage areas, e.g. clear 0.35 mil (9 mm) polyethylene. Over-zealous dusting results in progressive abrasion that removes the gold and reveals the bole and gesso preparation layers, and varying degrees of this condition are very common. Aqueous cleaning results in the removal of water gilding and toned coatings and this is also a common condition.

Complete descriptions of conservation services and rates are available on the WACC Web site. For information, visit: www.williamstownart.org
Hanging hardware  The early 19th-century hanging device was a ring and screw combination located singly or as a pair in the top rail. Simpler early devices included wire, leather, and sheet metal loops, located in the top rail, while some rural portraits were not framed and the loop device is found on the stretcher. Paired screw eyelets located in the side rails were popular after about 1825, and heavier frames could have custom hardware. [Fig. 2]

Modern practice is to fit steel D-rings for hanging, Oz-clips for some crating, and mending plates for securing the artwork, mostly with pan-head sheet-metal screws. Secure fittings reduce the incidence of repeated screw holes, but events can lead to new holes in the frame and stretcher backs, and care is necessary to avoid excessive holes or obscuring historic evidence. A direct-reading caliper is useful for optimizing the length of screws added to a frame. Redundant early hardware can be preserved on the frame, or separately if necessary.

A heavy-duty hanging scale was used to crudely measure the failure point of a common D-ring with a stand-up wire loop (item U711, United Manufacturers Supplies Inc.) [Fig. 3]. The wire loop failed by unwinding from its strap at around 520 lbs., despite the strap being fixed with only small screws in softwood (No. 8 x 1 in. screws in sugar pine). With safety margins that include an allowance for one hanger to temporarily hold the whole weight, perhaps 150 lbs. is a reasonable maximum loading for a pair of these D-rings. Most framed paintings weigh less than 150 lbs., even when they are fitted with laminated safety glass. A record of the weight of heavier objects can be useful, as would further load tests of hanging devices. Old braided steel wire corrodes and becomes brittle and should be replaced with a stainless type. A single wall fixing combined with a connecting wire on the back of the frame is less secure than two wall fixings, with one for each D-ring. Failures within the hanging arrangement can be disastrous.

Labels  Frame makers can be identified from the occasional inscriptions found on the frame back. These can be printed paper glued on the wood, pencil inscriptions, and late-century marks applied by carving, ink stamp, and engraved metal coupons. [Fig. 4] A selection of late century marks are illustrated by Smeaton (1988), and many New York and Boston makers have been recorded by Katlan (1987). Other frame back inscriptions record dimensions, style, owner, and hanging location, etc.

Ideally, owner records should include copies of maker’s labels/marks since they are fragile and subject to loss. Surviving labels can be protected in place with an overlay of 5 mil (0.127 mm) Mylar attached with double coated tape (3M 415) on an isolation layer (B72), and detached labels can be encapsulated in Mylar.

Exhibition labels have traditionally been placed on frame and stretcher backs. A less intrusive and longer lasting location is on the painting’s backboard encapsulated in Mylar, and/or placed in the owner’s records. Modern inventory marks are applied between soluble varnish coatings to
a discreet part of the frame, usually an outside corner and/or the back. Troublesome old inventory labels include gummed paper on water gilding, and pressure adhesive labels or masking tape on oil gilding.

Gilding that has been covered with a title plate is usually better preserved than adjacent surfaces and indicates an earlier condition. The silhouette revealed when plates are removed may need to be masked with pigments. The introduction of new title plates will eventually result in the same irregular coloring to the gilding.

**Rebate modifications** Frame rebates are sometimes modified to improve the fit of a painting. When an aperture is too large to neatly and safely house a painting the sight size can be reduced by fitting flat or L-section wood slips (or a liner) within the rebate. Mitering the ends of the slips is often sufficient to hold them in place, rather than adding fasteners or adhesive. L-section slips can double-serve by also centering the painting. Whether to only paint the reveal of the new slip, include a cavetto profile, or gesso and gild the reveal with oil or water gilding, depends on the frame’s existing gilding quality and the extent of the reveal. Linen covered liners were popular in the second half of the 20th-century and they can be original to a 20th-century frame, but they are a later addition to a 19th-century frame and were added to modify the sight size.

A keyed-out stretcher or a larger painting can require the widening of the rebate. Wood may need to be removed with a sharp chisel or router, although this obviously involves the loss of original material and detail.

Strips of polyester felt tape with an adhesive backing (e.g. Decco tape) are now generally fitted to rebates to cushion the edges of the painting. Attachment of the felt is improved by first dusting the rebate with a brush, and/or coating it with thin varnish (e.g., B72, shellac).

**Glazing** Glazing is added to frames for the protection of artwork, generally for specific exhibitions and travel. Modern glazing materials are light-weight thermoplastics (acrylic or polycarbonate) or heavier-weight laminated glass, and most have proprietary coatings to reduce UV light and reflection. A glossary of glazing terms and a comparison of glazing materials are available as technical leaflets on WACC’s website. Glazing is fitted in the rebate (or in front of a liner) and is backed with dark colored and felted wood or acrylic spacers. The increased protrusion of the painting in the back can be enclosed within an added build-up (see below).

**Microclimates** Sealed microclimate enclosures are used to stabilize environmental influences during exhibition and travel. The history, development, and design of various enclosures have been described in recent literature: e.g., Kamba (1993); Richard (1995); Wadum (1995); Sozzani (1997); Phibbs (2002). The painting is enclosed behind glazing within the frame (or travel frame), or larger enclosures such as vitrines can also include the frame.
Sozzani demonstrates that the moisture content of wood within the enclosure (i.e. stretcher, panel, cradling, interior frame and build-up, etc.) helps control RH during temperature variations, and a silica gel component can be a hindrance. The method described uses gaskets fitted between the glazing and rebate, and between the back of frame or build-up and an aluminum sheet backing, plus additional seals as needed.

Phibbs describes a simple method that uses a single piece of Marvelseal covering the object’s back and sealed to the front edges of the glazing with double coated adhesive tape. Phibbs also describes a more labor intensive method that involves two pieces of Marvelseal per edge, bonded to the front and back edge of the glazing with hot melt adhesive, and folded and heat sealed over the painting’s backboard.

Factors influencing the choice of microclimate method include size, weight, shape of the packaged artwork, rebate size of the frame, the exhibition environment and duration, and individual preferences. A small data logger enclosed within the envelope can give an after-event assessment of temperature and RH.

**Build-up** A build-up is an addition on the frame back that extends the rebate’s depth to improve the housing of protruding artwork. A build-up is usually made from four pieces of straight grained and light-weight wood (e.g. sugar pine, tulip poplar), 0.5-1.5 in. deep, and attached to the frame back with a minimum number of woodscrews. Joining the corners of the build-up with splines or lap joints adds useful support to the frame’s own corner joinery, and beveling and painting the outside perimeter reduces visibility. A build-up for an oval or round frame can be prepared from birch plywood cut to a circle with bandsaw and jig saw. Reasons for adding a build-up include protecting the back of protruding artwork, as a component of glazing and microclimate set-ups, and as a support for failing frame joinery. Build-ups do push the hanging object away from the wall, but they also hold hardware and can provide an insulating air space behind.

The complete paper, with notes, references and supplier’s list, is available at www.williamstownart.org/publications.htm

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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.