



Art Conservation *and preserving the luster of time*

The porcelain soup tureen, shaped like a terrapin with a small thrush-like bird figure perched on its domed carapace, was an award winner in 1976 when it was submitted to a sculpture competition by potter Lizbeth McNett Stewart (1948-2013). The terrapin has an extended tail and head, rests on four legs with claws, and measures 11 x 20 ½ x 15 ½ inches when the bird is attached. If used as a tureen, the body would hold the soup, the carapace serving as the lid.

The tureen was initially acquired by the Campbell Soup Company. By 1996, when the company's famed collection of more than 500 18th-, 19th- and 20th-century tureens was gifted to Winterthur, the delicate object had been so damaged that it could not be displayed.

This year, however, it came out of storage for treatment by Katie Shulman, a second year WUDPAC Fellow, who sought experience working with porcelain. As she began, Katie found a hand-crafted, soft-paste porcelain object coated with a transparent lead glaze and hand-painted with vivid luster overglaze enamels and distinct areas of gilding, all of which create a unique interplay of light as one moves around the sculpture.

Katie also saw evidence of repeated damage and earlier repairs, especially to the carapace. The fragile luster and gilt patterning on the carapace were severely abraded, while the top-heavy bird was detached and broken into many fragments. Katie focused her treatment on minimizing the appearance of the abraded areas and resurfacing and inpainting old, discolored fills. In one instance, she was able to match a piece of original porcelain found among the many fragments stored with the tureen and use it to replace an old fill that had been applied in its place.

During her treatment, Katie tried a new fill technique taught to objects majors during a seminar led by conservator Jon Kovasckitz. She found that bulking epoxy with fumed silica and pigments resulted in a smooth and glossy surface, a perfect foundation for inpainting and gilding. Katie welcomed the challenge of mimetically inpainting lusterware, pushing her technical abilities and allowing her to experiment with new materials and techniques.

With the treatment of the terrapin complete and the bird figure similarly reassembled and inpainted, Katie discussed display options with curator Leslie Grigsby. They decided to keep the fragile bird separate for safety during storage, handling, and display. Katie created a discrete mount to support the bird, which now proudly stands alongside its shining companion.



ARTC Spotlight—January 2022

The University of Delaware's Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators who are well versed in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifact and archive collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top: Detail image of Winterthur/ University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Katie Shulman using a scalpel to reduce and reshape an old discolored epoxy fill at the rear of the carapace shell. Above: Katie applying isopropanol with a gloved finger to smooth her new epoxy fills. Upper left: Katie readhering the tail feather fragments of the bird finial, held in place while positioning the fragment. Lower left: Image of the terrapin tureen and bird after treatment. (Images: E. Krape and L. Fair.)