



Art Conservation *and delicate decoration*

For many years the decoratively-veneered demilune pier table, made in Baltimore about 1790, was displayed in the Billiard Room at the Winterthur Museum. At some point, however, while not on display, exposure to moisture caused its veneers to lift as much as one-half inch. This year the damaged table became a treatment project for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Leila Sabouni, an objects major with a minor in wooden artifacts and three years' experience in furniture conservation.

The veneer-patterned top on the Winterthur table is arrayed like a fan, with blades made of red-colored mahogany, lunettes made of black walnut, and crossbanding along the edge made of once-bright yellow satinwood. Over the years the varnish has darkened and the veneers have dulled, but when new, the colorful table top would undoubtedly have caught the eye of passersby.

To re-adhere the veneer back into place, Leila injected hide glue between the veneer and mahogany substrate or, when possible, reactivated the original hide glue by injecting small amounts of water and warming the area. She then clamped the veneer pieces to the substrate after inserting a flat piece of warmed pink rubber over silicone release Mylar between the clamp and veneer. This protected the veneer and also helped to warm the glue. The curved crossbanding along the table's edge was missing in many locations. Leila was able to cut new veneers from a satinwood board with a grain pattern similar to the original crossbanding.

Leila's treatment also included re-saturating the old varnish, locally applying a reversible conservation-grade varnish, and addressing areas of loss and discoloration with tinted wax. During the documentation process, Leila discovered both a straight skirt back made of a single board and a curved, brickwork skirt back running along the table's back. Since the straight board alone would have stabilized the table, and the curved brickwork piece would have been time-intensive to make and since it wasn't intended to be seen, it was unclear why the 18th-century craftsman who made the table felt it needed an additional brace. The mystery remains unsolved, as there are few examples of similar curved-back demilune pier tables available for comparison.

Once her work is complete, Leila hopes an appropriate display space for the table can be found in the museum so that visitors will once again be able to admire its beauty and craftsmanship.



ARTC Spotlight—February 2018

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 artifacts and entire collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top: The veneer is clamped in place to allow the warmed glue to set. Above: WUDPAC Fellow Leila Sabouni injects hide glue between the veneer and mahogany substrate. Above left: This original lunette had become detached; the loose veneer was placed into position and re-adhered with new and reactivated glue. (Photos: Leila Sabouni and Caitlin Richeson.)



Above: Before treatment, images of the veneer table top and of the curved back edge of the table. (Photos: Jim Schneck.)