



Art Conservation *and preserving illustrations*

While a dark, “8”-shaped stain on a 300-year-old print might worry some, finding a way to remove it was a very satisfying part of Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Joanna Hurd’s training to become an art conservator. Indeed, as a paper major who describes herself as “passionate about pH and conductivity,” Joanna welcomed the opportunity to find the right method for reducing the stain.

The print is from Book III of what is likely the 6th edition of *Paradise Lost*, John Milton’s (1604-1674) epic poem in blank verse first printed in 1667. It tells the story of the Fall of Man, Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve, and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden; the detailed print shows Satan reaching Earth as God observes from above. Designed by Flemish painter John Baptiste Medina (1659-1710) and engraved by Dutch engraver Michael Burger (1647/48-1727), the print dates from between 1688 and 1695 and belongs to Special Collections and Museums at the University of Delaware.

Joanna noted that the stain and a three-inch long horizontal tear were the print’s primary problems. The print also had several smaller tears, overall stains and tidelines, a missing top left corner, and a large piece of paper applied to the back of the tear at some point in the past to hold it in place and stop it from spreading. Joanna first worked to remove the stain through a gel bath which involved placing the print between pieces of Japanese tissue and laying it on a large slab of gellan gum. This process allows for a slower, more controlled cleaning than full immersion in a water bath and can reduce the stain with minimal effect to the paper fibers. Like many dark stains, however, the figure “8” proved stubborn. Joanna was able to further minimize it through an innovative, reversible technique of using wheat starch paste to adhere small slivers of very thin toned paper onto the stain, sometimes placing them between the engraved lines. She also removed the paper mend, realigned the tears, and re-mended them using Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste applied on the reverse side.

Once she completes her treatment and prepares a window mat for display, Joanna will return the print to the UD Museum, happy to know, she said, that even if she cannot restore the object to its pre-damaged state, she can feel restored by working to preserve something that is 300 years old for future generations to enjoy.



ARTC Spotlight—March 2019

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: WUDPAC Fellow Joanna Hurd removing previous paper tape mend from the verso during a gel bath. Above: Using a dilute reducing bleach solution to further reduce the stain after the gel bath. Far right: Detail of the stain before and after treatment (6.3x magnification); after removing as much of the stain as possible through cleaning, Joanna used individual bundles of fibers applied to the surface to visually reduce the stain in a reversible way. Right: Illustration from *Paradise Lost* after treatment (normal illumination). Images: J. Irving, L. Zachman, J. Hurd.

