



Art Conservation *and seeking hidden treasure*

A 16th-century panel painting of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child by a highly regarded artist who trained in Raphael's workshop would be a rare find and difficult to authenticate. Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) second-year Fellow Mina Porell hopes her research will help establish whether a warped and weathered oil-on-wood painting of the Madonna and Child is such an artistic gem.



The painting is one of more than 100 known copies of a work by Raphael (1483-1520) called *Holy Family* that is dated to 1509. It was purchased recently in Europe by an American collector who has done extensive research and believes it was painted by Perino del Vaga (1501-1547), an admired artist of the Late Renaissance. Perino entered Raphael's Roman workshop in 1517 and is thought to have painted a copy of *Holy Family*.

The painting, structurally unstable and covered in thick varnish and overpaint when purchased, underwent an initial analysis and cleaning at the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts. The owner then requested assistance from WUDPAC, where this year it became Mina's technical assistance and a treatment project. Through scientific analysis and historical research, Mina has sought to better understand the painting's origins and its relationship to Raphael's *Holy Family* and Perino's work. Mina was intrigued by one indication that a young Perino could have painted the copy, which is one of only three that does not include Joseph. X-ray analysis of the painting accepted as Raphael's, which hangs in the Musée Condé in Chantilly, France, showed that it did not originally include Joseph. If Perino encountered the painting before Joseph was added, it is possible he then based his copy on that version.

Through her analysis, Mina determined that the pigments in the original paint could date from the 16th century. Mina's research also led her to believe that the painting is consistent with Perino's early classicizing style. She hoped additional analysis would help identify all the materials used in the painting, in order to contextualize it within the vocabulary of 16th-century Italian painting and particularly that of Raphael's workshop. In early October, the painting was taken to an experienced panel painting conservator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where a complicated break in the wooden support will be mended. In preparation, Mina cleaned the panel's reverse and consolidated areas of unstable paint. Mina said she was excited to be part of efforts to solve the mystery of the painting's origin and looks forward to its return to Winterthur, where she will continue her investigation and treatment.



ARTC Spotlight—October 2016

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: Detail showing damage from past restorations, as well as paint film tenting/flaking and splitting/warping of the wooden support due to fluctuating climate. Above: WUDPAC Fellow Mina Porell applies sturgeon glue to consolidate unstable paint, then lays down tenting and flaking paint with gentle pressure and heat. Left: Infrared reflectogram shows carbon-based underdrawing, some similar to Raphael; X-radiography reveals fibrous strips used to reinforce panel joins and confirms a split along the proper right join. (Photos: James Schneck, Matthew Cushman.)