

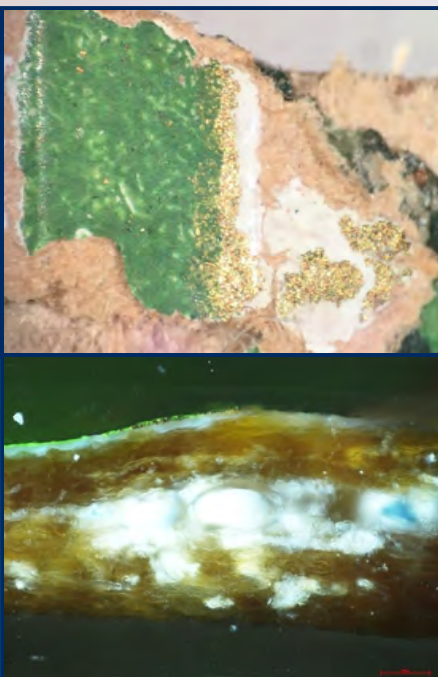
## Art Conservation *and piecing together the past*

*Imagine a rainy afternoon almost 150 years ago and a mother and daughter sitting by a window, engrossed in filling a scrapbook with pretty pieces of this and that. As they create little rooms on each page by combining pictures cut from magazines with bits of ribbon or wallpaper and scraps of foil and fabric,*

*the album comes to represent an idealized household. Vignettes like this were on the mind of Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Program (WUDPAC) Fellow Yan Ling Choi this year as she analyzed, studied, and did historical research on one such album from the Winterthur Library's John and Carolyn Grossman collection.*

Known as the "Helen Collage Album" because "H," "E," "L," "E," and "N" are collaged on the cover, it resembles similar albums, sometimes called "Paper Doll Houses," created in idle hours by preteen middle-class American girls between about 1875 and 1920. The project proved both stimulating and fun for Yan, a library and archives major who was born and raised in Hong Kong.

Yan focused on the album cover and two album pages, with the goal of dating and learning more about its historical origins. Through scientific analysis she also wanted to identify the inorganic colorants and coatings used on the album pages. The album has lost its spine, is not inscribed, and carries no provenance. Yan determined, however, that it likely dates from the late 19th century, based on a comparison of the binding remnants with other scrapbook bindings in the Winterthur Library and research into "PAT. MARCH 1886" embossed on its back cover. The two pages contained 57 different items, including decorative borders made from Dresden trim and printed images of hanging pictures, a desk, flowers in a vase, a lamp, cup and towel, a woman wearing a dress from the Bustle period (1870-1890), a handbag, dogs, and paper fans. Working with other conservators and scientists at Winterthur, Yan gained experience with analytical techniques including ultraviolet light examination, X-ray fluorescence (XRF), Raman spectroscopy and cross-sectional analysis, and was able to identify most items as chromolithographs on pigment-coated or uncoated papers. She also found a few photographs, intaglio prints, and other specialty papers.



### ARTC Spotlight—October 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](http://www.artcons.udel.edu).*

*Top: WUDPAC Fellow Yan Ling Choi conducting X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis with Associate Scientist and Affiliated Associate Professor Dr. Rosie Grayburn. Above: Photomicrograph and cross-sectional image of a detached scrap showing paper support and white, green, and "gold" decoration. Right: Overall image of a selected page from the album, photographed in normal illumination and with ultraviolet-induced visible fluorescence. Images: Evan Krape, Yan Ling Choi, and Jim Schneck.*

When Yan finished the study, she returned the album to the Winterthur Library collection. She hopes to someday return to Hong Kong to work as a library and archives conservator. When she does, she'll take with her some insights into a 19th-century middle class American pastime.