



Art Conservation *and piecing together history*

Small, old, and beautiful is a quick description of the glazed ceramic bowl of Middle Eastern Islamic origin that became a treatment project this year for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Victoria Schussler. Made of fritware sometime between the 13th and 15th centuries, the bowl is almost four inches high, approximately seven inches in diameter, and decorated with an appealing pattern of green, blue, and black geometric and floral arabesques. Broken in pieces and covered with discolored and failed restoration materials, the bowl was donated to the program's study collection in 2002. When Vicky received it, the bowl's condition was a reflection of its age, burial and subsequent excavation, and a history of restoration.

Vicky's treatment goal was to make the bowl whole so that it could be considered for acquisition by the Winterthur Museum and used as a teaching tool. Her treatment built on work done previously by other Fellows, whose efforts included removing the overpaint applied during earlier restorations.

Vicky began by reversing all the previous repairs made to the bowl by using both a steamer and a commercial solvent gel to completely remove the shellac that held the repairs in place. This turned 11 fragments into 21 fragments and seven small chips. She then focused on the weathering, known as glass corrosion, on the fragments' exterior glazed surfaces. Using a fine brush, she applied a conservation-grade acrylic polymer in ethanol to the weathering in order to consolidate and hold the glaze in place. Finally, she brushed the clean edges of all the fragments with an acrylic adhesive and reassembled the bowl.

Once the bowl was whole, Vicky filled small areas of loss with an acrylic spackle. She covered the bowl's interior repairs with acrylic paints and glaze to match the surrounding colors, but because of the museum's plans to use the bowl as a teaching tool Vicky will paint the exterior repairs with solid colors, making them easier for viewers to see. She will also leave some of the small ragged missing areas on the bowl's rim so someone studying it can better understand its archaeological past. Vicky similarly decided against altering small indentations at the bottom of the bowl. Made when a number of bowls were stacked for firing, they are true to the way the bowl looked when it was first in use.



ARTC Spotlight—April 2013

The University of Delaware's Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifacts and entire collections. Our students are powerful public spokespersons for cultural heritage and its preservation. Visit our web site at <http://www.artcons.udel.edu> for more news about our students and other department activities.

Top: WUDPAC Fellow Victoria Schussler and Assistant Conservator Lauren Fair assemble the fritware bowl with Paraloid® B-72, temporarily held with 3M™ Scotch Tape. Inset: The bowl in pieces prior to treatment. Above: Victoria inpainting a small fill in the bowl's interior. Left: The loss in the bowl's translucent glaze and colored underglazes before treatment, filled with Flugger, and toned with Golden paints and restoration glaze. Photos: Victoria Schussler, Courtney Von Stein, and Becky Kaczkowski.