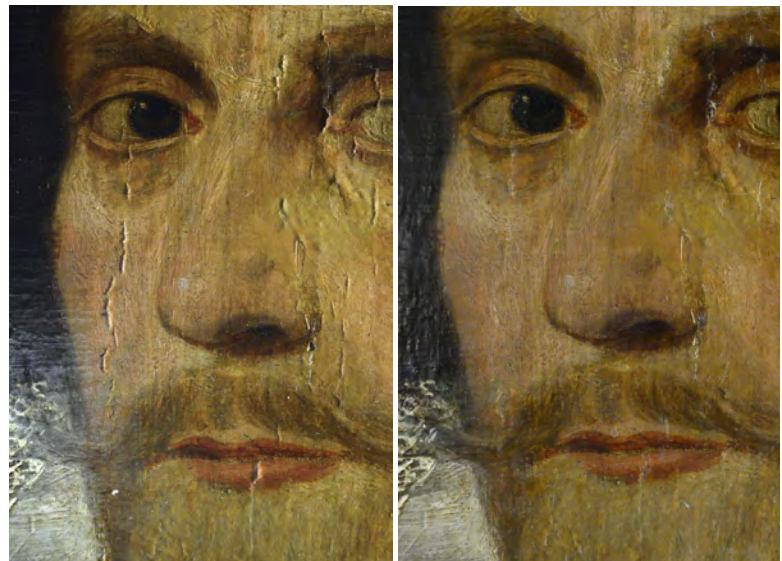




Art Conservation *and historical mystery*

*Gazing out from the oil portrait on panel, the pensive looking gentlemen in the brown doublet and ruff did not seem to be very enthused about life in the 17th century. The only clues to his identity were the date “1621” in the upper left hand corner, and “Æ t.” (age) 52” in the upper right hand corner. The family that owned the portrait had nicknamed it *Shakespeare*.*

After some dedicated research and conservation treatment, however, Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation second-year fellow José Luis Lazarte has developed some theories about the portrait. These include José’s belief that the gentleman cannot be William Shakespeare, who died in 1616. José also doubts that the sitter is English, although portraits on oak panels were common throughout northern Europe in the 17th century. Instead, José believes the gentleman was Dutch; ruff collars as worn in this portrait remained fashionable in the Netherlands long after they had gone out of favor elsewhere in Europe at the end of the 16th century.



José notes that a cradle was adhered to the back of the panel to address a problem common in panel paintings. The wood panel has expanded and contracted, while the paint on top stretched and collapsed to form small tents in a ridged vertical lines along the wood grain of the painting’s surface. José first consolidated tented paint by applying heated sturgeon glue and a single layer of Russian cigarette paper. He then was able to carefully bring the lifting paint back into plane.

Prior to structural work on the cradle, José secured the fragile paint and a large vertical crack with cyclododecane using a *kistka* decorator, a tool more commonly used to paint Russian eggs. José then adjusted the tension of the battens that run both vertically and horizontally on the back so that they can move as the painting expands and contracts. As José began to remove a thick layer of varnish, a less pensive and more confident and lively-looking figure emerged. This work also led to the discovery that the gentleman’s doublet was not brown, but was made of a silvery grey fabric laced with bronze or gold-colored threads. Once José completes his work, the portrait will be returned to its owners for reframing, along with the suggestion that they might consider renaming it *Portrait of a Man Wearing a Ruff*.

ARTC Spotlight—February 2015

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 José Luis Lazarte applying cyclododecane using a kistka tool to temporarily secure the crack on the panel; Above: Thinning of the runners with a card scraper; Right: Before and after consolidation and setting down of tented paint, raking light. (Images taken by Pamela Johnson, Bianca García, and José Luis Lazarte.)