



Art Conservation *and love notes from the past*

When a colorful fraktur valentine became a treatment project this year for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Jacinta Johnson, little was known about the cutwork except that it was created around the year 1800 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and is an example of a well-known style of Pennsylvania German Folk Art.

Like other fraktur, the valentine was executed in watercolor and ink. Most fraktur are documents or certificates that commemorate occasions like births, marriages, or house blessings, but valentines were also made, sometimes commissioned or copied. Jacinta's valentine was covered by a love poem written in old German text; creases, fingerprints, and stains indicated that it was much handled. It may have been kept folded and tucked into a Bible or perhaps slipped into a pocket close to the heart.

Jacinta, a paper major, puzzled over the valentine's unusual shape and wondered about its construction. The opened heart is circular, with a central hexagon surrounded by, and attached to, six hearts. Though most of the valentine was cut with scissors, the hearts had been carefully torn apart from one another. To better understand whether

mending them was an appropriate conservation technique, she experimented with a paper circle the same size as the unfolded valentine. She realized that after folding the circle in half, three more folds created a pie-shaped wedge she could cut as a child would to create a paper snowflake, and she was able to recreate the valentine. From this, she determined that the hearts were connected to each other when the designs were hand-painted and could be mended.

Jacinta's treatment goal was to stabilize the valentine without removing the smudges and fingerprints, which are part of its history. She first consolidated flaking paint using a gelatin adhesive and a small brush, and then cleaned it by gently brushing away loose dirt and grime. To mend the tears that had severed the hearts from one another, she began by relaxing the paper, which she believes is made of flax, by applying a solution of ethanol and deionized water and then reshaping it before placing it under a weight to dry. She then carefully realigned the paper fibers one by one before applying a very dilute solution of wheat starch paste to hold them in place. Jacinta is continuing to study the green, red, yellow, and blue watercolors in order to identify and determine how best to stabilize them. She will create new housing for the fraktur before it is sent back into the Winterthur collection.



ARTC Spotlight—June 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 and above: Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Jacinta Johnson consolidates flaking colorants on the fraktur using gelatin adhesive; Right: A tear in the fraktur before treatment, and following realignment of fibers and adhering with dilute wheat starch paste. (Images: Anisha Gupta and Jacinta Johnson.)