



Art Conservation *and encouraging diversity*

A diorama created by African American artists in 1940 and stored for more than 70 years in the basement of Tuskegee University's Legacy Museum has been at the Winterthur Museum this summer, helping art conservators address a very modern concern: how can their profession become more diverse?

The five-foot diorama depicts the 1619 arrival of the first slaves in Virginia and was one of 33 created for the "American Negro Exposition in Chicago." The intent, noted one contemporary newspaper account, was "to show the history of the Negro race." At Winterthur, the diorama served as a teaching tool for four competitively selected African American students from historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) as they received a two-week introduction to the practical aspects of art conservation. Their removal of decades of grime and dirt from the diorama's surface, for instance, revealed a theme of red and blue, colors that may have had special symbolism for the slaves; they found as well that the reverse, unseen sides of the 12 plaster figures, which included chained male and female slaves and three white slave traders, were hollow and in some cases flat. Their June workshop was the result of a joint effort by the University of Delaware, the Alliance of HBCU Museums and Galleries, and Yale University, where the students spent a week being introduced to the profession.

At Winterthur, the students worked in the paintings studio with paintings conservator and University of Delaware faculty member Joyce Hill Stoner and 2015 UD graduate Julianna Ly, who this fall joins the Class of 2020 in the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation. When the HBCU students returned home, they carried with them the hope that their experiences may have kindled an interest in pursuing graduate studies in art conservation. The work they helped start is being continued by UD honors undergraduate Amanda Kasman as part of her senior thesis on the dioramas and their creation. Her goal is to clean, consolidate and stabilize the diorama so that it can be returned to Tuskegee for exhibition. As she works, she is continuing to uncover aspects of the diorama that have made it an absorbing project. She is painstakingly mending the ship's deteriorated riggings which were made of three different types of thread, and she is continuing the rejoining of a large split in the curved Masonite board that serves as the background for the scene. Although the diorama's treatment will be completed in 2018, it is hoped that funding can be found to continue the initiative so that other dioramas can be treated in public view, especially in African American Museums.

ARTC Spotlight—August 2017

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 Julianna Ly holds a hand mirror to examine the back of the figures in the diorama. Above: UD honors undergraduate student Amanda Kasman stabilizes rigging from the diorama ship. Right: Taryn Nurse (Fisk University) reviews documentation on the diorama. Far right: Julianna Ly examines a section of the diorama's lower frame with Matthew Fields (left, University of Arkansas) and Devin Davis (right, North Carolina Central University). (Photos: Evan Krape for UDaily)

