



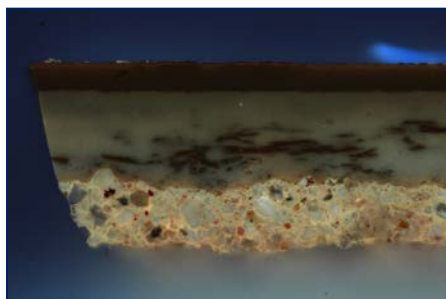
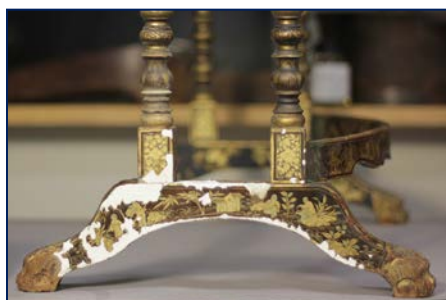
## Art Conservation *and historical trade*

*Four early 19th-century Chinese lacquered nesting tables made in the Neoclassical style and donated in 2019 to the Winterthur collection offer a good example of a design trend that was once all the rage in western Europe. From the time Europeans were first introduced to lacquered furniture by seafaring traders returning from Asia in the 16th century, home-*

*owners coveted items they were able to special order in familiar forms with designs that were seen as “exotic.”*

These export objects were generally not as fine as lacquered items made for the domestic Asian market, and westerners did not clearly understand the nuances of their design, decoration, and care. Even so, Asian lacquered objects and “Japanned” objects, those made by Europeans in imitation of Asian techniques, continued to be highly valued and popular for most of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries.

Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Caroline Shaver, a furniture major and decorated surfaces minor with a particular interest in lacquer and Asian art, treated the largest of the four tables. She also used it as the focus of a technical study and so was able to carry out in-depth analysis of the complex layered coatings. In its position on the outside of a nested group, this table had been more exposed to light and abrasion than the three tables nestled beneath it, and was in poor condition overall. The lacquered surfaces



were delaminating, with large flakes of lacquer lifting from the surface to reveal the wooden form beneath. The intricate gold painted decorations on the table were covered in a brown semi-translucent coating, likely a restoration material, that made it difficult to see the design and motifs clearly.

As she began to test ways to clean the surfaces, Caroline found that dust and dirt had settled into the coating atop the lacquer. After consultation with furniture and paintings conservators, she found a gel specifically formulated to deliver a tailored cleaning solution that removed the grime and coating without damaging the sensitive lacquer decoration beneath it. Other treatment steps included humidification to relax the cupped and brittle lacquer, consolidation and re-adhering of the delaminated lacquered layers, and infilling losses with toned paper and a conservation fill material. Caroline then inpainted select designs of the gold decoration to unify the aesthetics of the intricately decorated surfaces. Caroline anticipates that someday the table she treated will be displayed in the Winterthur house museum. Before then, however, the other three tables will likely be treated by future Fellows in the WUDPAC program.



### ARTC Spotlight—June 2023

*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 artifact and archive 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: Winterthur/University of Delaware Fellow Caroline Shaver cleaning the stretcher with a soft bristle brush. Above: Caroline leveling infill material with a scalpel. Right, top: Detail of fills to the left foot before inpainting. Right, bottom: Cross-microscopy showcasing the layers of the ground and lacquer under ultraviolet illumination. (Images: Evan Krape, Ashley Stanford, and Caroline Shaver.)*