



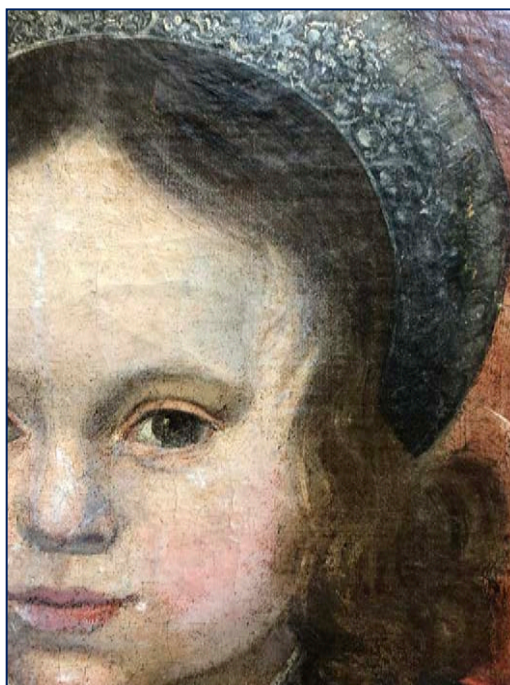
Art Conservation *and historical treatments*

A lot can happen to a girl in almost 400 years, and much of what has happened to the small lass in a 17th-century oil painting known as *Portrait of a Dutch Girl with a Parrot and a Basket of Fruit* has been challenging for her long-term health. That’s the assessment of WUDPAC Fellow and paintings major Brianna Weakley, who this year is treating the privately owned painting.

Numerous well intentioned treatment campaigns over the centuries have left the painting with an abraded surface, visibly distracting coats of overpaint, and unevenly applied layers of varnish that are now yellow and degraded. The painting is also no longer firmly attached to the stretcher, and the lining has been compromised by insect and water damage. When it first arrived for treatment, the girl’s face had been covered with a white wash of overpaint, possibly applied to brighten it. Only the child’s eyes were left untouched, and they appeared to look out from a ghostly apparition, haunted either by grief or illness.

The painting’s subject is a small girl, about three years old, standing on a balcony and wearing an elaborate dress with a white apron, cap, and cuffs. A parrot perches on the girl’s right hand while she holds a basket filled with fruit and tulips with her left. The sky behind her appears grey (which might indicate a formerly blue sky created using smalt, an unstable pigment), and the date 1646 is inscribed below tied-back red drapes on the right. Inscriptions on the back of the painting include the date 7/9/02, which Brianna postulates may document a restoration carried out in 1902, and a framer’s sticker.

Brianna began by removing dust and grime along with the uppermost overpaint and the top layers of varnish. As the paint layers appeared brighter and colors emerged, the young girl’s face became less ghostly, and her dress started to change from black to green. Brianna plans to remove and replace the stretcher and lining, which was so riddled with holes from insect damage that the back of the painting was visible. She will complete her treatment by filling and inpainting losses, and then coating with a synthetic varnish that is less likely to yellow over time. When Brianna’s treatment is complete, she will return the painting to its owners with the hope that the next 400 years will be a kinder time for the little Dutch girl.



ARTC Spotlight—May 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.

Top: Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Brianna Weakley stabilizing flaking paint under magnification, using a small brush loaded with conservation grade adhesive. Above: Brianna examining the painting before treatment. Right: Detail of the face of the Dutch girl before treatment showing extensive opaque white overpaint. (Images: Evan Krape and Brianna Weakley.)