



## Art Conservation *and a mysterious landscape*

*A second-hand store for household goods is an unlikely place to find a 17th-century Italian painting, but that is exactly what College of William and Mary art history professor Miles Chappell thought he'd found when he spotted a framed painting so darkened with grime and old resins that it was difficult to see the unsigned landscape scene painted below.*

Chappell, a specialist in Italian Renaissance and Baroque art, purchased the painting and later sought a full technical examination and conservation treatment from the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) to test his theory. This fall, the painting, which shows a house, people, animals, and a river, became a treatment project for WUDPAC Fellow Jennifer Myers following completion of a condition report and treatment proposal by her classmate, WUDPAC Fellow Yan Ling Choi. Yan believed the frame was not original and found evidence of earlier attempts to restore the painting. Visiting expert Dr. Melanie Gifford found Prussian blue pigment in the sky which could contradict Chappell's hope that the painting was created

by an Italian artist influenced by the Bolognese circle of artists including Annibale Carracci (1560-1609), Gaspard Dughet (1615-1675), and Claude Lorrain (1604-1682). Prussian blue was not available until the 18th century, but the painting does appear to have been carried out in the Classical Italian landscape tradition.

Jennifer is continuing the analysis, but had much work to do before the nearly black painting could be cleaned so that the landscape could be further studied. Her first step was to consolidate large areas of flaking paint so the canvas could be turned over without losing any of the loose flakes on its surface. She then was able to pull out the tacks, lift the stretcher away from the painting, and carefully peel away brittle, glue-soaked old linen that has been used as a lining.

She has now mended a small hole, using a tiny piece of fabric from the painting's tacking edge. To attach the fabric to the hole, as well as to bridge smaller gaps and tears, she used parallel thin linen threads with a sturgeon glue/wheat starch adhesive. She has further consolidated the flaking paint on the vacuum hot table and is now testing cleaning strategies. She will then line the canvas with a stronger, more stable support fabric and restretch it onto a new, tailor-made stretcher. She looks forward to telling Professor Chappell what has been learned during the treatment.



**ARTC Spotlight—January 2019**

*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](http://www.artcons.udel.edu).*

*Top: WUDPAC Fellow Jennifer Myers consolidates loose and lifting paint flakes with an adhesive and sets them down using a heated tacking iron. Above: Mechanically removing the failing glue-paste lining on the reverse of the painting from a prior restoration. Inset: Linen thread bridges applied to the reverse of the painting using a modified Heiber method, to support an area of loss in the fabric support. Left: The painting shown in raking light, before treatment (top) with visible bulges and flaking paint, and during treatment (bottom) after consolidation and bringing into plane on the hot table, with cleaning in progress. (Photos: Julianna Ly and Jennifer Myers.)*

