



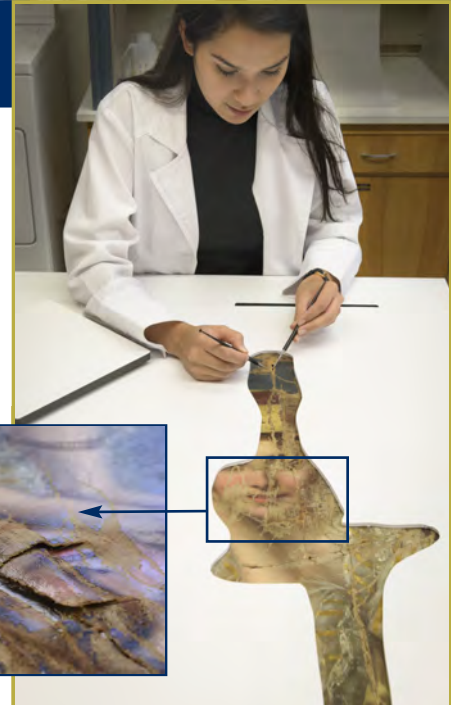
Art Conservation *and harrowing journeys*

The pretty young woman in the straw bonnet and ruffled gown leans on a porch rail and gazes serenely from her late-19th-century portrait, unaware of the harrowing future that awaits her image. Over the next century, the painting would be heavily overpainted during the course of at least three restoration attempts, possibly spirited out of Poland to escape Nazi vandalism during World War II, and most damaging of all, intentionally sliced and torn with a sharp object in the late 20th or early 21st century, leaving it with long tears, a gaping hole at its center and a broken stretcher.

Last year its owner, who described the painting as a family treasure, asked the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) for assistance. The portrait became a treatment project for WUDPAC Fellow Julianna Ly, who found that the heavily damaged painting had been wax lined and, through cross-sectional analysis, that some areas had as many as 14 layers, including a layer containing a bitumen material that had caused extreme craquelure. She also discovered a signature, “T. Maleszewski,” that had been obscured by uneven areas of saturation. Tytus Maleszewski (1827-1898), was a Polish painter and pastel artist who often painted women in regional folk costumes.

Julianna first removed the broken stretcher and cleaned away debris. She then temporarily mended the tears on the front of the painting so she could reverse the wax lining with heat. She removed excess wax from the verso using Evolon®CR and petroleum benzene and removed as much of the discolored varnish as possible. Because the extensive tears could not be mended using water-soluble adhesives due to impregnation by some of the wax, she collaborated with Winterthur textile conservators Laura Mina and Kate Sahlmeier to create custom mends by adapting an “eye-lash” textile mending technique on the textile mending table, which allowed her to access both sides of the canvas simultaneously. Then she humidified the painting, lined it onto a new, stable secondary fabric support, and filled the losses.

She is now working on completing her treatment by inpainting areas of loss, using pre-vandalism photographs provided by the owner to reconstruct portions of the sitter’s face. Although the young woman’s image will never again be quite as lovely as it was when her portrait was new, Julianna’s treatment has assured that the painting is much stronger and more stable than it has been in many years.



ARTC Spotlight—May 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.

Top: WUDPAC Fellow Julianna Ly inpainting losses with reversible conservation paints. Above: Mending the tears using “eyelash” mends, a technique adapted from textile conservation, the painting supported between boards with cut outs allowing access to the tears. Inset: Detail of tears extending through secondary support, before treatment. Left: Before and during treatment, in raking light. Images: J. Myers, J. Schneck, J. Ly.