



## Art Conservation *and American portraiture*

*In the early days of the Republic the most admired Founding Father may have been George Washington, whose image was frequently copied and shared. Many of those images still survive, including a portrait that this year became a treatment project for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Keara Teeter.*

Keara soon learned that the painting came to her with both a need for treatment and a mystery about the identity of its artist. This portrait is a copy of the *Athenaeum Portrait* painted by Gilbert Stuart. It is one of three portraits of Washington that Stuart painted from life (the other two are the *Vaughan Portrait* and the *Lansdowne Portrait*). The copy is attributed by the family that owns it to Emanuel Leutze (1816-1868), a 19th-century German-born artist known for his paintings of narrative events in American history and best remembered for the iconic *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Some circumstantial evidence indicates that Leutze may have painted this copy.

A telling clue is the monogram and date “EL 1835” that Keara uncovered when she removed a thick layer of dirt and grime from the lower left corner of the painting. While this does not prove that Leutze painted the portrait, he grew up in this country and is known to have studied art in Philadelphia in the mid-1830s before returning to Germany in 1840. The mark is also referenced in a typed label on the back of the painting and in documentation provided by the owner. This traces the painting’s provenance back through Philadelphia lawyer, philanthropist and art collector John Frederick Lewis (1860-1932), a discovery in the attic of “an old house at Second and Queen Streets” in Philadelphia. It also mentions conservation work done in the 1920s, something Keara was able to identify as she continued her own treatment.

Keara will complete her treatment by removing the old varnish from the painting’s surface, revarnishing with a reversible and saturating coat of low-molecular weight varnish and then inpainting areas of loss. She also plans to do pigment analysis to help determine if the materials and style of the painting correlate to the time period and work of Leutze. While Keara may not be able to determine if Leutze did, indeed, paint the portrait, her treatment will enhance its appearance and ensure that the painting, along with the mystery that surrounds it, can continue to be enjoyed by its owners.



### ARTC Spotlight—November 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](http://www.artcons.udel.edu).*

*Top: Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Keara Teeter reducing the layer of degraded natural resin varnish on top of the oil painting. Above: Detail of the monogram and date (“EL / 1835”) inscribed in the lower left corner; the monogram and date appear to have been written using the same type of paint but the scripts were done in two different hands. Right: Details of Washington’s face during the varnish reduction part of this conservation treatment; the first image was taken in under normal illumination (visible light) and the second under long-wave ultraviolet (UVA: 320-400nm) to induce visible fluorescence of the natural resin varnish. (Photos: Paula Pérez and Jim Schneck.)*