



Art Conservation *and artifacts of leisure*

Good cheer, friendly bets, and lively evenings spent playing cards by candlelight are all suggested by the dark wood paneling and 18th-century furnishings in the Gidley Room at Winterthur. Among those furnishings are five small enamel counter dishes, used by players of a (once popular, but now largely forgotten) card game called Quadrille to hold tokens and coins as they gambled on the outcome.

When small detached fragments were recently found in one of those dishes, concern about its condition prompted closer examination by a student in the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC). The dish is currently both a treatment project and technical study for second-year Fellow Maggie Bearden.

The white enameled dish, which measures 5"x4.5"x1.5" in size, has a copper core, is shaped like a rectangular quatrefoil, and is rimmed by a half-inch wide band of diamond-shaped piercing. Analysis of the top edge of the rim indicates that it was once gilded in gold, while the inner surface and bottom of the dish bear colorful images of hand-painted floral motifs, playing cards and coins carrying the likeness of King George III, who reigned from 1760 to 1820. The dish is similar to other 18th-century enameled utilitarian items made to resemble more expensive porcelain objects popular at the time. Maggie found that the dish was in fair to poor condition

overall and that the loose fragments

were discolored pieces of unstable Plaster of Paris fills previously used to repair losses in the enamel layer, which typically has poor adhesion to the copper. She gently removed the remaining fill material using a scalpel and solvent gels. This exposed areas of the copper core, some of it darkened by corrosion, and highlighted weakness in the adjoining enamel. She will complete her treatment by consolidating the fragile enamel overall and filling and toning the areas of loss with stable conservation materials.

As she began her technical study, Maggie learned from Winterthur curator Ann Wagner that enameled items made in Canton, China, were commonly exported to England in the 18th century. She hopes her historical research and scientific analysis of the enamel and colorants used in the Winterthur dish, and a comparison of those results to known examples of English and Chinese export enamels, will help reveal where her dish was created.

When the work is complete, the dish will return to display in Winterthur's Gidley Room, where it will once again offer curious visitors a chance to reflect on life and leisure in the 18th century.



ARTC Spotlight—December 2015

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: Detail of discolored fill material on the exterior of the Quadrille dish from the Winterthur Museum collection.

The fill material was loose and unstable, and determined by Maggie to be Plaster of Paris. Inset: The discolored fill material fluoresces when viewed under ultraviolet illumination and is therefore easily distinguished from the original materials used to create the dish. Above: An image of the enamel dish before treatment; the interior design depicts cards, tokens, and coins used in playing Quadrille. Right: Winterthur/University of Delaware Fellow Maggie Bearden removing fills using a scalpel (and flexible light source) under the microscope. (Images: Maggie Bearden and Madeline Corona.)