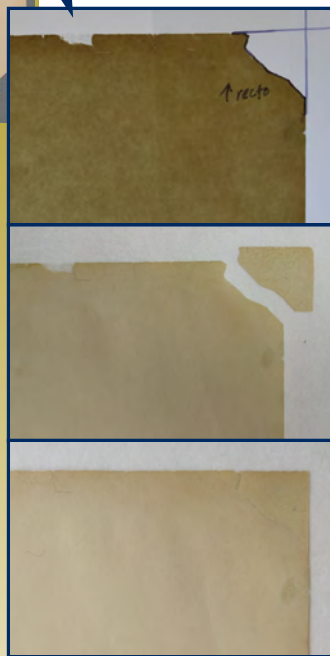




Art Conservation *and works on paper*

The small dog, sketched in graphite pencil on a plain piece of wove paper, busily sniffs something interesting at his feet. He seems oblivious to the artist who took a few moments on March 17th, 1896, to capture the moment in what was probably a sketch-book before signing it “C. Wood,” making the note “Art Club,” and jotting down the date.

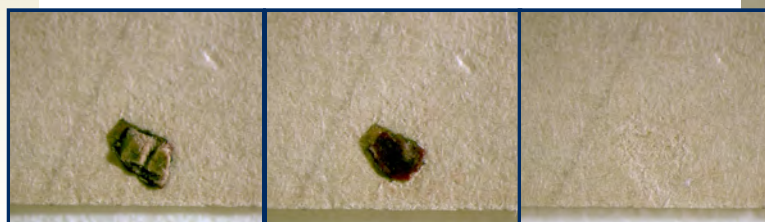


The sketch's history is hazy. There are only theories about who C. Wood may have been, including a possible connection to “American Gothic” (1930) artist Grant Wood (1891-1942). C. Wood must have belonged to one of the many popular art clubs that blossomed in the late 19th century, but which one? And was C. Wood male or female? In 2004, however, the sketch was donated, along with other papers, to the University Museums at the University of Delaware, and this year it was selected as a treatment project for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) second-year Fellow Michelle Sullivan.

Michelle, a paper major who has been drawn to paper and printmaking since high school, liked the project because it offered experience with many of the treatment techniques she will use in her career as a paper conservator. The sketch, a type of object not usually handled with great care, was in fair condition overall, and Michelle's goals were to stabilize it so that it would be easier to handle, store, and display, and to improve its somewhat worn appearance. Rather than return it to a pristine state, Michelle wanted to retain visual clues to its history of use and the qualities that distinguished it as a sketch rather than a finished work.

Michelle carefully cleaned the entire surface of both sides of the sketch with soft brushes, eraser crumbs, and cosmetic sponges. She then used methylcellulose to soften and remove adhesive holding paper hinges to the back of the sketch and worked with a scalpel under magnification to remove specks of foreign material from the front. She also mended small tears along the sketch's edges with Japanese

paper and wheat starch paste, and then created inserts from pieces of comparable, machine-made antique paper to fill areas of loss. Her final step will be to construct housing for the sketch. She will then return it to the University Museums with recommendations for preservation, including the most appropriate temperature, relative humidity, visible light and ultraviolet radiation, so that the small graphite dog will be able sniff without concern for many years to come.



ARTC Spotlight—February 2014

The University of Delaware's Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifacts and entire collections. Our students are powerful public spokespersons for cultural heritage and its preservation. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top: WUDPAC Fellow Michelle Sullivan preparing an insert to fill a corner loss in the sketch (photo: Kimi Taira). Above: The graphite sketch before treatment with corner losses, detached fragments, and surface soiling. Insets: To create precisely shaped inserts, the contours of each loss were first traced onto Mylar to prepare a template. Inserts were carefully shaped using a scalpel and adhered to the drawing with a mixture of wheat starch paste and methylcellulose. Right: Working under a microscope, Michelle mechanically reduced accretions from the surface of the sketch with a scalpel (photo: Ronel Namde).