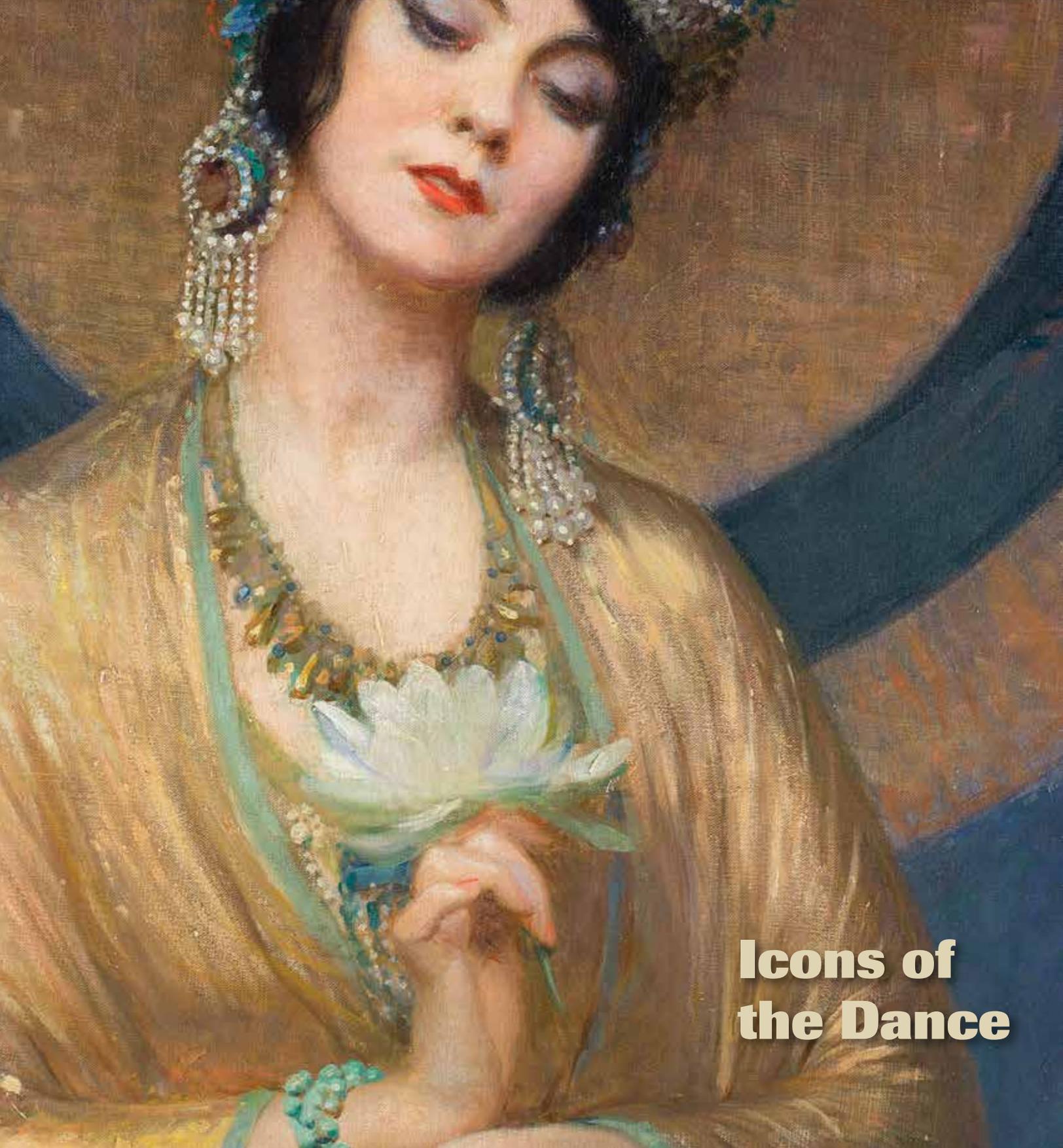


Art Conservator

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**Icons of
the Dance**

Art Conservator
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Hard to believe it's been ten years since we moved to our gorgeous Tadao Ando-designed home here in the Lunder Center at Stone Hill, on the campus of the Clark Art Institute. Visitors continue to marvel at WACC's spacious and well-lighted work spaces and breathtaking vistas of the Berkshire hills—and so do I. I never tire of the view outside the large windows of the paintings lab, which look north on Vermont and the drama of changing scenery and sky.

Relocating to the Lunder Center has allowed us to work on an incredible array of artworks that would have strained our former space. Large, high-ceiling labs; long, wide hallways; and, during the off-season, the Lunder exhibition galleries all accommodate monumental artworks that require massive areas for inspection, treatment, and storage. Among the works the space has permitted over the ten years are a rare theater drop by Willem de Kooning and an early drapery sculpture by El Anatsui.

One of the joys of being on Stone Hill is its proximity to the Clark, with its fine staff, exceptional library, and, of course, excellent exhibitions. As I write this, two must-see summer shows have opened, including *Women Artists in Paris, 1850–1900*, a blockbuster exhibition that celebrates female painters who made history in the art world and society at large. Along with such luminaries as Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, and Rosa Bonheur, the show includes a number of lesser-known painters whose work is equally as warm and insightful.

The Clark's Michael Conforti Pavilion, meanwhile, features *The Art of Iron: Objects from the Musée Le Secq des Tournelles, Rouen, Normandy*. This specialty museum owns more than 16,000 works of historic ironwork collected in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The thirty-six objects in the show are beautiful, ornate, and whimsical, including the suspended carp treated at WACC prior to exhibition. The installation of dark iron against gleaming white walls, with the Clark's reflecting pool and green hills visible through the gallery's glass wall, is a work of art itself.

—Tom Branchick



A pair of eighteenth-century wrought-iron carp hang at the entrance to the Clark Art Institute's show *The Age of Iron*. WACC objects conservator Hélène Gillette-Woodard treated the upper fish in preparation for exhibition.



Dance They Must

New life for two icons of modern dance

By Timothy Cahill

Once you've seen it, you never forget it. As the lights go down on the audience in the Ted Shawn Theatre, the last sight in the darkening house is of two full-length portraits illuminated on the side walls near the stage. On the left hangs a dashing male figure, nearly naked but for a red loincloth and eagle-feather cape; while on the right, a willow woman in Chinese robes and jeweled turban contemplates a lotus. They are Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis, pioneers of American dance and progenitors of Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, home of the theater that bears Shawn's name.

Jacob's Pillow is a summer dance festival and school located on a 220-acre former farmstead in Becket, Mass., in the heart of the Berkshires. The farm was bought by Shawn in 1931, following two decades when he and St. Denis developed the adventurous dance ethos that animates the Pillow to this day. The eight-foot portraits flank the main stage like spiritual icons, a constant presence through nearly all of the building's seventy-six-year-history. The Ted Shawn Theatre is a rustic, barn-like structure with brown weathered boards and exposed beams, and two outsized sliding doors at the back of the stage that part to let in a vista of lush Berkshire hills.

Built in 1942 as the main stage of the summer festival, the theater contains none of the climate controls of a modern performance space—or a gallery, for that matter. The portraits of Shawn and St. Denis have hung in their exalted perches through all seasons, gracing the theater during the humidity and thunderstorms of summer and guarding its frigid interior each winter. Earlier this year, however, for just the fourth time in nearly eight decades, the paintings were taken down. They were part of a group of artworks brought to the Williamstown Art Conservation Center for examination and treatment in advance of a groundbreaking summer exhibition at the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA).

The show, *Dance We Must: Treasures from Jacob's Pillow*,

Albert Herter, *Ted Shawn in 'Feather of the Dawn'* and *Ruth St. Denis as Kuan Yin*, both 1925, after treatment.

1906-1940, is the first comprehensive museum exhibition to examine the world of Jacob's Pillow founder Ted Shawn and his wife, visionary modern dancer Ruth St. Denis. The show covers the first three decades of the twentieth century, charting the movements of St. Denis and Shawn from Los Angeles to New York to Becket and placing them squarely in the context of the modernist movements that defined the day. On display are 350 objects from the Pillow archives, including costumes hidden for decades in antique touring trunks, archival photographs, props, backdrops, and original artworks.

This is the first time in half a century or more that many of the show's contents have been seen. The exhibition is a debut of sorts for the portraits of Shawn and St. Denis as well. Despite the paintings' ubiquitous presence in the theater, it's been nearly a century since they've been as vivid as they are now after treatment.

"This is close to the way they would have looked when they left [the artist's] studio" in 1925, said Kevin Murphy, Senior Curator of American Art at WCMA.

Murphy co-curated *Dance We Must* with British costume and dance historian Caroline Hamilton. The show highlights original costumes from the 1910s and '20s, when Shawn and St. Denis toured the country as the Denishawn Dance Company. The costumes are displayed beside documentary photographs and artworks of Shawn and St. Denis in performance. WACC treated four paintings that help form this visual record, including the large portraits of Shawn and St. Denis in roles they developed during the Denishawn years. Shawn stands on tiptoes in white moccasins in his 1923 Hopi-inspired dance *Feather of the Dawn*, while "Miss Ruth," as St. Denis was affectionately called, is seen as *Kuan Yin*, the Buddhist goddess of mercy she embodied in a 1919 work.

The oil-on-canvas paintings were created as a pendant



pair by Albert Herter (1871-1950), a society artist, muralist, and illustrator active in New York and Los Angeles from the 1890s through the 1940s. The product of an artistic family—his father and uncle founded Herter Brothers, maker of Gilded Age aesthetic-movement furniture—Herter eschewed an Ivy League education and sailed for Paris to study painting. “Instead of the campus of Columbia, Yale, or Harvard,” reported the journal *Art and Progress* in 1914, “his college was the Quartier Latin on its art side.” Herter’s style ranged from Symbolist-derived portraiture to realist history painting to Byzantine-inspired abstract design.

In her 1939 autobiography, *An Unfinished Life*, St. Denis wrote glowingly of Herter. “Albert is one of my choicest and most delightful friends,” she beamed, “an artistic guardian angel.... It would for me be hard to imagine my art life without Albert Herter somewhere in the offing.”

What set Herter apart as an artist, *Art and Progress* observed, was “a particular sense of color ... which gives, to use a musical term, the timbre to his work.... It is a comparatively high note of color, not so much rich as strong. It seems to express the optimism of modern Americans....”

When the paintings arrived at the lab, however, Herter’s optimistic palette had become shrouded by decades of grime and old varnish. “There was no light penetrating the varnish of the St. Denis portrait to the background,” observed Murphy, Assistant Conservator of Paintings Maggie Barkovic, who treated the portraits, said that the paintings “were extensively

dirty ... on the face and reverse.”

Both artworks showed areas of discolored varnish, water damage, and flaking and raised paint. Shawn’s portrait presented areas of “bloom,” an organic breakdown of the film layer resulting in surface whitening. The surface of the St. Denis work, meanwhile, had a scaly appearance caused by delaminating layers of varnish and paint. The reverse of the paintings also showed signs of long exposure, displaying what Barkovic described as a “very thick dirt” layer of accumulated dust, organic residue, and environmental grime. The St. Denis canvas in particular “took quite a while to get the reverse clean,” Barkovic said.

Exacerbating matters, the canvas of Miss Ruth’s portrait was almost completely detached from its stretcher. A half century earlier, a conservator had relined the St. Denis work using a thick wax lining, and rather than tacking the painting to the stretcher, had simply bonded the two elements together with a thick layer of paraffin. This bond had failed, and for some unknown number of years the painting was more clinging to its stretcher than attached to it, held in place by the frame.

For each painting, Barkovic first consolidated areas of flaking and raised paint. In Shawn’s case, this distressed paint layer followed a craquelure network in the background around the body, the feathered part of the costume, the top of the head, and under Shawn’s left arm. On the St. Denis portrait, damaged paint was prevalent along the lower edge of the canvas, possibly the result of water damage. After consolidation, both surfaces were washed with deionized water, and the reverse of each cleaned with the aid of a soft brush and vacuum and, as necessary, a smoke sponge.

Barkovic next tensioned both paintings so they could be worked on at the easel. In the case of the St. Denis portrait, this required reattaching the canvas to the stretcher with staples. Both stretchers were re-keyed to the proper tension and the edges wrapped in twill tape to prevent fraying.

A top layer of discolored varnish, applied when the painting was lined, was carefully removed from the St. Denis painting. The second layer of original, artist-applied varnish was retained where it was still intact. Herter used his varnish layers purposefully to add more gloss and saturation to specific parts of his composition. The lower half of the St. Denis painting had been overpainted

Saving the portraits for Pillow and public

The 1925 portraits of Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis are as much a fixture at Jacob’s Pillow as the Ted Shawn Theatre that is their permanent home. But they might have been lost from public view forever if not for a stroke of good luck that arrived over the telephone in 1982.

Shawn is said to have driven the nails to hang the paintings inside the theater sometime in the 1940s. There they hung for three decades, with two exceptions. In 1960, the portrait of St. Denis was loaned to the Museum of the City of New York for a retrospective exhibition. It is speculated that this exhibit was the occasion for the painting’s only known conservation intervention prior to this year’s treatment at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center. Back at the Pillow, the paintings were witness to Shawn and St. Denis’s final performance together, in a special appearance at the Pillow in 1964 on the occasion of their fiftieth wedding anniversary. St. Denis died in 1968.

In 1971, the portraits were loaned to an exhibition at the

National Portrait Gallery. Following Shawn’s death in 1972, they reverted to his estate and were removed from the grounds of the Becket, Mass. dance festival.

They may have been lost permanently, said Norton Owen, Jacob’s Pillow Director of Preservation, but for a 1982 phone call to Liz Thompson, then-director of the Pillow. A friend of the festival called to inform Thompson that the paintings were being auctioned off in forty-eight hours. She rushed to New York immediately to see the artworks and garner the funds to purchase them. The day of the auction, she bought both paintings for \$6,000—“which was a lot of money for us then,” Owen recalled.

The paintings were returned to the Berkshires, where “the nails they had hung on before were still there,” Owen said. “So we put them right back where they were.”

Newly conserved, they are sure to grace Jacob’s Pillow for decades to come.



Ruth St. Denis photographed by Marcus Blechman in front of the *Kuan Yin* portrait at the Museum of the City of New York, 1960.

to hide previous abrasion and paint loss; this overpaint was retained. The Shawn painting was resaturated using synthetic resin, which concealed areas of bloom.

Barkovic completed the treatment by retouching areas of lost paint and application of a final, protective layer of varnish. A corrugated plastic backing board was secured to the back of each painting to protect it from temperature fluctuations, vibrations, and dirt.

With the surface no longer obscured by grime and varnish, the conservator was able to admire Herter’s artistry. “Both paintings are really beautiful,” Barkovic said. “There’s a diaphanous quality to Ruth that is softer, more painterly.” The paint was applied wet-on-wet, she observed, which achieved a

“lovely soft glow in her face,” the result of innumerable small strokes of lavender, teal, pink, and blue. Shawn, in contrast, was “more uniform, with flatter brush strokes” in lieu of Ruth’s “delicate daubs.” This firmer hand, Barkovic observed, matched the subject’s extroverted bearing.

Herter “adapted his technique to evoke the sitter’s personality,” Barkovic said, a quality he extended in the composition of each painting. Compared to the outward-facing physicality of Shawn, St. Denis’s pose is more inward, contemplative, spiritual.

The treatment revealed riches and subtleties of the paintings that no one knew were there. Norton Owen, Jacob’s Pillow Director of Preservation, described the

Jacob’s Pillow *continued on page 14*



Installation view of *Dance We Must: Treasures from Jacob’s Pillow, 1906-1940*, at the Williams College Museum of Art. The Shawn and St. Denis portraits hang opposite “Miss Ruth’s” original *Kuan Yin* costume, at left.

The Art of (Conservation) Compromise

By Annika Cilke

In 1840, William Henry Harrison ran one of the first modern campaigns for President of the United States, inventing many of the activities common to campaigns today. He created the first campaign slogan, released a policy paper, and spun his opponents' criticisms into strengths.

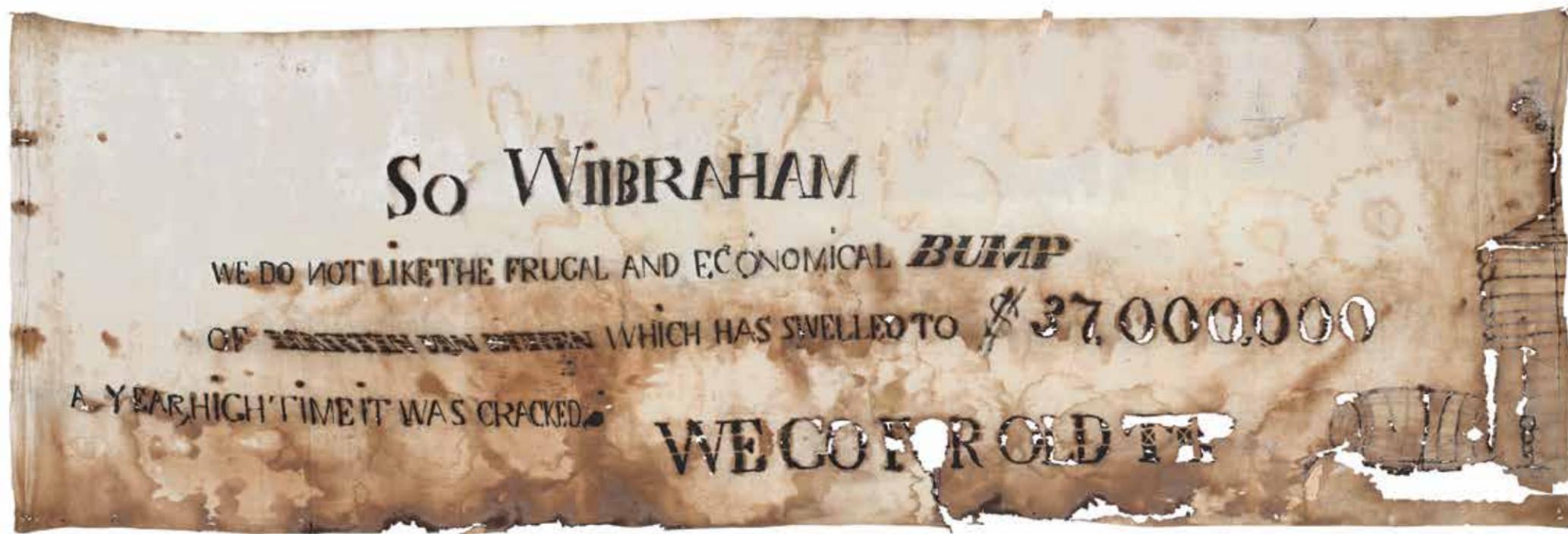
The election of 1840 was a time of deep economic uncertainty. The nation was in the throes of a recession that began with the Panic of 1837 and lasted for seven years. Though the incumbent, Martin Van Buren, had easily won the Democratic nomination, his party faced a difficult re-election. The public was angry with Van Buren for refusing to use federal resources to ease the hardships of recession, instead cutting federal spending to maintain a balanced budget.

To oppose Van Buren, the Whig party chose a pair of military heroes from the War of 1812, Harrison and John Tyler. In 1811, Harrison had been hailed for leading an army of more than a thousand troops against a Shawnee encampment on the banks of the Tippecanoe River in Indiana. During his Presidential run, this fame resulted in Harrison supporters proclaiming, "Tippecanoe and Tyler too!" — arguably the most famous slogan in American politics.

When the Democratic newspaper *Baltimore Republican* painted Harrison as old and out-of-touch—"Give him a barrel of hard cider, and settle a pension of \$2,000 a year on him," the paper snarked, "and my word for it, he will sit the

remainder of his days in his log cabin, by the side of a 'sea-coal' fire and study moral philosophy"—the Whigs rose to the challenge. They declared Harrison the "Log Cabin and Hard Cider" candidate, depicting him as a humble, hard-working, whiskey-abstaining common man, an obvious slap at the lavish (and lubricated) lifestyle Van Buren led in the White House.

The Hampden Historical Society (HHS) in Hampden, Maine, brought a large political banner from 1840 to the Williamstown Art Conservation Center for conservation and



advice on future display. Measuring seven-and-a-half feet long by two-and-a-half feet deep, the plain-weave cotton standard captures the essence of Harrison's campaign. The hand-stenciled text reads, "So[UTH] WILBRAHAM, WE DO NOT LIKE THE FRUGAL AND ECONOMICAL BUMP OF MARTIN VAN BUREN WHICH HAS SWELLED TO \$37,000,000 A YEAR, HIGH TIME IT WAS CRACKED. WE GO FOR OLD TIP." The banner attacks Van Buren's fiscal austerity while declaring support for Harrison, complete with log cabin and cider barrel.

The Historical Society wanted to preserve the banner and find a way to exhibit it in the society's 1797 historic house,

which has neither temperature nor humidity controls. A discussion followed between conservator and curator about the role of the object and the best conservation plan to enable the object to fulfill that role. The survival of a rare and special object inspires sometimes-conflicting desires to both protect and display the treasure. Not unlike politicians, conservators sometimes seek to balance opposing claims, compromising in one direction or the other depending on the condition and desired function of the object under treatment.

have enabled display of the object, the lack of a suitable exhibition environment argued against pursuing what, on such a fragile object, would be an irreversible treatment. If the piece cannot be displayed, why subject it an intervention that might be classed as re-treatable, but not truly reversible? The decision to resist the lining option also required suppression of the conservator's ego, which delights in dramatic aesthetic improvement between before- and after-treatment photographs.

The decision was made to pursue minimal treatment on the banner and focus maximum resources to its preservation, with the best practical solution being to optimize storage conditions for the object. The fabric was humidified to restore pliability to the fibers, reduce creasing, and reorient distorted areas. Thus rendered as smooth and flat as possible, the banner was interleaved with archival tissue and rolled on a solid core, then suspended inside a custom-designed box for safe storage.

Before being rolled, the banner was digitally photographed at high resolution. The photo files were used to print a full-sized surrogate of the

banner on fabric, allowing the rare artifact to be enjoyed by the public at the historical society.

The solution extended the banner's already long life, which stands in stark contrast to Harrison's Presidency, the shortest in American history. Old Tippecanoe died just thirty-one days into his term, the victim of pneumonia contracted after delivering a two-hour inaugural address in a cold rain, suggesting that in politics, *vita brevis, ars longa*. 

Annika Cilke, former Assistant Conservator of Objects and Textiles at WACC, lives in Oslo, Norway.

In this instance, the Hampden Historical Society's banner is in extremely fragile condition. A substantial portion of the bottom edge is charred, probably from having been carried in a torchlight rally, and areas of lettering are additionally brittle due to degradation of the cotton fabric in contact with iron gall ink. Given the banner's condition, maintaining a stable environment is critical to the object's long-term preservation. In HHS's historic building, achieving adequate environmental controls to permit the banner's safe exhibition would be prohibitively expensive.

Although installing a conservation adhesive lining would

Conservators meet “Rough” conditions at Newport mansion



Photo by Leslie Paisley

Montserrat Le Mense (right) at “Rough Point” with the mansion museum’s former Deputy Director, Margot McIlwain Nishimura.

Crashing ocean waves, rocky coastline cliffs, lush green grounds, stone-mullioned windows and vibrant art masterpieces—all in a day’s work! Some workdays are better than others, and surveying the painting collection at Rough Point, Doris Duke’s Newport mansion, is as good as it gets.

The Gilded Age manor was built by Frederick William Vanderbilt in the 1890s, and purchased in the 1920s by industrialist, tobacco titan, and Duke University benefactor James Buchanan Duke. Doris (1912-1993) was her father’s only child and heir of his fortune; from 1958 until her death at age 90, Rough Point was her principle residence. The 105-room home is now a house museum occupying a wild, rocky point at the southern end of Newport’s “Mansion Row.” If there were no house and no magnificent collection of art and antiques, it would still be a place of awesome beauty.

In the spring of 2017, WACC conservators were at Rough Point for several days to survey the museum’s holdings and aid the staff in prioritizing treatment needs and preventive measures for the collection. For one lucky paintings conservator, that meant two days of up-close visual communication with Gainsborough, Reynolds, Raeburn, van Dyck, and the other masters whose work normally hangs high above visitor’s heads.

In addition to paintings, WACC conservators surveyed decorative arts and furniture collections as well as extensive works on paper. In exchange for the most personalized and intimate opportunity to view these masterpieces, conservators Hugh Glover (furniture and wood objects), Leslie Paisley (paper), and myself identified objects in need of conservation

assistance and advised on condition, environment, and maintenance.

During the survey of Rough Point’s paintings, two works were marked for immediate treatment at the center in Williamstown. The late eighteenth-century *Portrait of Thomas Freeman* had minor



Prince Hoare of Bath, *Portrait of Thomas Freeman*, after treatment.

incidental damage and required cleaning to remove years of grime. A haphazard past treatment that had left scattered islands of yellow varnish also needed to be remedied. The artist, Prince Hoare of Bath (1755-1834), was a well-connected English painter and playwright, and Freeman, his prominent sitter, a handsome man of fashion. The freshly cleaned and repaired portrait was returned to Newport in time for the season opening, and the dashing Thomas can once again be found smiling at summer visitors.

A Sir Thomas Lawrence portrait of a young boy, *Portrait of Master Thomas Barber*, remains at the lab in mid-treatment for a failed lining. The portrait of young Master Barber—possibly Lawrence’s apprentice at the time—reclining nonchalantly on a forest bank, should return to the walls at Rough Point soon.

—Montserrat Le Mense
Conservator of Paintings



Photo by Brook Prestowitz

WACC conserves original Declaration of Independence

Paper conservators Rebecca Johnston and Brook Prestowitz, with technician Henry Klein, made the trip across Williamstown to the Special Collections department of Williams College’s Chapin Library to reframe and reglaze an original printing of the Declaration of Independence owned by the college. Lexan used to protect the rare founding document in 1983 had degraded and become cloudy. There was concern that the cloudy appearance was the result of mold growth, but no mold was found and the Declaration remains in excellent condition. The Lexan was replaced with reflection-free Tru Vue Museum Optium Acrylic glazing in the unique double-sided frame, which gives the appearance that the document is floating. Here, surrounded by storage boxes at the library, Johnston cuts a Japanese paper hinge to remove the Declaration from the old glazing.

Preserving a unique New Hampshire chair

In the late 1830s, Lewis Downing embarked from his home in Concord, New Hampshire, for a lengthy, arduous, and potentially risky sales trip to California. Downing was co-founder of the Abbott-Downing Company, originators of the Concord Coach, a carriage with a robust suspension designed to smooth out the rough roads of nineteenth-century America. Some months later, upon his safe return, Downing’s employees presented him with an elaborately carved Elizabethan-revival chair to celebrate the successful trip.

The stately chair, now owned by the New Hampshire Historical Society, was distinctive even for its day. It is made of hand-worked walnut, with premium leather upholstery featuring a hard sheen and diamond pattern to the grain. The upholstery is characteristic of a material known as Russia Leather, a vegetable-tanned cowhide finished with birch oil to impart durability, flexibility, and water resistance. The upholstery on the chair back is oval and tightly button-tufted, like that used on the best coach seating. The seat itself is especially notable for containing a very early example of coiled springs. The coiled upholstery spring was patented in 1828 by Samuel Pratt, a London mattress maker, and did not become generally widespread in American furniture until the 1840s. How the innovation made it to New Hampshire so early is not known, but Downing must have been one of the first Granite Staters to sit in such deluxe comfort.

The chair arrived at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center with its leather surfaces badly in need of rescue. The wooden structure was in overall good condition, with signs of only slight wear from age and use and a layer of grime and dust. The leather, in contrast, arrived in extremely poor and unstable condition, particularly on the seat, with several branching tears that had separated and large areas of loss. The discolored and brittle leather was curled upward in numerous areas, revealing the woven underpinning. The bright red color of the leather’s core and its brittleness suggested red rot, a chemical process that degrades leather. Red rot results from high intrinsic acidity produced during tanning and is common in nineteenth-century vegetable-tanned leathers.

Red rot damage is not reversible, but it can be contained.

The leather was cleaned, then stabilized overall with red-rot consolidant. Besides strengthening the surface of the leather, the consolidant had the effect of darkening and saturating the colors slightly, as well as imparting a subtle shine.

A piece of scoured heavyweight polyester fabric was placed underneath the broken leather of the seat to provide support for the fills and the leather upholstery. The shattered pieces of the leather were adhered to this with a 1:1 mixture of Lascaux 498 HV and 360 HV. Leather fills, colored to match using acrylics, were shaped and inset into the losses, and adhered with the same 1:1 Lascaux mixture. The edges where the fills met the original leather were blended with pigmented wax. The gloss was adjusted



Top, the Downing chair, after treatment. Above, detail of ravaged leather on the seat.

WACC News & Notes *continued on page 14*

Surveying the many views of *The Farm at Laeken*

The seventeenth-century pastoral scene arrived at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center bearing only a title, *The Farm at Laeken*, and an “anonymous-artist” attribution. Labels on the oak panel’s verso tantalizingly named the artist as Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), but research suggested the work was only a



Above, the Arnot Museum’s anonymous *The Farm at Laeken*, after treatment. Right, detail of Peter Paul Rubens, *Milkmaids with Cattle in a Landscape*, “*The Farm at Laeken*,” c. 1617-18, in the Royal Collection.

copy of an early landscape by the Flemish master held in the Royal Collection at Buckingham Palace. This authenticated Rubens, *Milkmaids with Cattle in a Landscape*, “*The Farm at Laeken*,” also an oil on panel, measures approximately thirty-four by fifty inches, nearly twice the size of the apparent facsimile.

The anonymous panel was part of a 2014 survey by WACC conservators of the collections of the Arnot Art Museum in Elmira, New York. In 2017, the painting was sent to Williamstown for paint consolidation, cleaning, minor inpainting, and application of a new varnish coat. In addition to the treatment, supplementary research into the provenance of the panel was undertaken in an effort to solidify an artist attribution and better understand the painting’s context in relation to the work in the Royal Collection.

The Arnot panel had been part of an aristocratic collection housed at Hamilton Palace, Scotland. This grand mansion in the Lowlands was built in 1695 for James, 1st Duke of Hamilton. Through successive generations, the house amassed fine artworks

rivaling those at Buckingham Palace. In 1882, lavish spending and mounting debts compelled the 12th Duke to authorize a sale of the house’s art holdings. The Hamilton Palace sale garnered widespread attention and attendance, beginning in mid-June of 1882 and continuing over the course of a month.

A catalog published after the sale, *The Hamilton Palace Collection: Illustrated Priced Catalogue*, created an important provenance record of the dispersed artworks. A paper label on the verso of the Arnot panel, “Hamilton Palace No. 1013,” correlates with the “Tenth Day’s Sale” of “Pictures by Old Dutch and Flemish Masters” on July 8, 1882. The catalog entry for lot number 1013 on this day describes the painting as, “Milking-Time, a landscape, with peasants and animals. / 21 in. by 31 in.” and lists the artists as “Rubens and Wildens.” The entry also lists the painting purchased by “M. H. Arnot”—Matthias H. Arnot, banker, philanthropist, and founder of the Arnot Museum.

Rubens and Jan Wildens (1586-1653) were known to be close friends and collaborators. Between 1616 and 1620, Wildens worked for the workshop of Rubens, creating the background landscapes for many of the older master’s paintings. Wildens tended to paint with a much softer and muted hand, while Rubens is famed for his abilities in expressing energy through a bold and highly detailed style. The partners achieved an artistic balance through their collaboration.

Wildens was known to create versions of Rubens’ paintings, in addition to rendering multiple copies of his own works. Rubens too produced duplicates of his imagined landscapes, which were widely sought after.

The Royal Collection’s *Farm at Laeken*—the town’s name having been Anglicized—is understood to have been held privately since 1639, and therefore would not have been easily accessible for copying

by other artists. Nevertheless, at some point in the seventeenth century, an etching of the motif was produced by Lucas van Uden (1595-1672). Van Uden’s *Farm* bears a striking resemblance to the



Royal Collection Trust / © HM Queen Elizabeth II



Lucas van Uden’s etching of *The Farm at Laeken*.

from Europe a misidentified “Old Master.” Hence the Arnot’s prudent attribution as “Unknown.” WACC’s treatment of *The Farm at Laeken* successfully stabilized the paint layer and brought back full saturation and clarity to the surface, allowing viewers an unblemished opportunity to contemplate the Rubens/Wildens/van Uden riddle—or simply to enjoy the bucolic landscape with its elegantly twisted trees and contented cows.

—Mary Holland
Paintings Apprentice

Arnot painting, even more than the Royal Collection’s Rubens. Could the Arnot work have been the inspiration for the engraving? Or was the painting informed by van Uden’s print?

The 1882 catalog attribution does not certify that the Arnot panel was painted by Rubens and/or Wildens. And many a Gilded-Age American collector brought

Frankel to join WACC staff

The Williamstown Art Conservation Center has announced that Nora Frankel has been hired as Assistant Conservator of Objects and Textiles, effective September 2018.

Frankel holds an MPhil in Textile Conservation from the Centre for Textile Conservation, University of Glasgow, in Scotland, and an MA in Principles of Conservation at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London (UCL). She has completed internships at the Burrell Collection, Museums of Glasgow; the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh; the UCL Ethnography Collection; and the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, London; along with work at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and ethnographic museums in the American West. She is currently completing a two-year fellowship in textile conservation at the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

Frankel found her calling in art conservation in 2007 as a junior at Smith College, when she joined the Frame Conservation Program at the Smith College Art Museum. An artist and embroiderer since childhood, Frankel found conservation the perfect marriage of her interests in art making, art scholarship, and science.

Since 2014, she has chronicled her conservation explorations on her blog “Textile Investigations: Conserving and Making, Modern and Historic.” “It’s a blog about cultural heritage, textiles, and how we can think of the world around us,” the young conservator explained. “It’s a way to share the things I’ve learned.”

Frankel is looking forward to the eclectic variety of objects and clients treated at WACC, with a special emphasis on textile conservation. “There’s an intimacy to textiles,” she observed. “You really get a glimpse into someone’s life, even if it’s just an embroidery on a kitchen towel of a girl milking a cow.”



Nora Frankel

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- Lindsey Tucker
Office Assistant/Atlanta

Jacob's Pillow *continued from page 7*

transformation as “overwhelming—I think I had tears in my eyes.” Kevin Murphy recalled, “I went to WACC [to see the finished paintings] with Norton and Caroline and we were just, like—the Ruth St. Denis, the background is electric! We had no idea that the colors would be that rich.”

The paintings' original brass-gilt frames were also conserved by WACC's Hugh Glover, and the works delivered to the WCMA galleries for installation in *Dance We Must*. As they do at Jacob's Pillow, the portraits serve as both touchstone and homage in the exhibition. They are hung prominently at the show's entrance, near the original costume St. Denis wore in *Kuan Yin*. Two other artworks in the show were treated at the Center as well, a painting of Shawn in the “Fire” section of his *Dance of the Ages*, by illustrator Major Felton, and a watercolor by Edward Buk Ulrich of St. Denis in *The Peacock Dance*.

Owen said the exhibition has allowed the Jacob's Pillow community to appreciate its own past in a new light. “These are things that have been here at the Pillow, some of them since the

beginning. To put them in the context of a museum allows us to appreciate them in a different way.” The treatment has also made him more keenly aware of how to care for the iconic paintings.

“It is our intention to take them down each year during the off-season,” he said.



Edward Buk Ulrich, *Ruth St. Denis in The Peacock Dance*, 1920.

For his part, WCMA's Murphy insists that, “for the Berkshires, preserving [the Shawn and St. Denis portraits] was a big deal. Everyone who's gone to Jacob's Pillow has seen these painting.... They're icons of art in the Berkshires. And now we've ensured that they will be secure and stable.... These are Berkshire treasures that are really going to be able to be seen up close, and in great condition. I think that's really exciting.”

The portraits will be on view at Williams College through the summer and

fall. What, then, of the tradition of the house lights in the Ted Shawn Theatre? For this season only, before the lights go up on the stage, full-size, high-resolution photographic surrogates will be the last things audiences see in the house. 

WACC News & Notes *continued from page 11*
where necessary.

The condition of the leather dictated certain compromises in the treatment. The rotted seat was embrittled and fragile overall, and showed additional hardened regions caused by water damage. Some areas were highly distorted, buckled, and cockled and could not be flattened completely; these were supported from the back with pigmented wax and allowed to remain in their curled conformation. Due to this, and to the ragged thin edges of these regions, the fills could not be in plane in all areas. The surface of the seat was saturated slightly with the red-rot consolidant, but remained somewhat matte. An application of waxes or other products to this area might have resulted in temporary minor improvement of the gloss and saturation, but would ultimately have built up on the damaged surface and worsened its appearance. The cleaned and consolidated surface

was allowed to remain in its present state, and the fills colored and textured to match.

The wooden surfaces of the chair were cleaned with an aqueous solution of two percent triammonium citrate with benzyl alcohol, pH 8.3. This was applied to the surfaces with a cotton pad or swab, and was very successful at removing entrenched grime and dirt. The cleaning step was repeated several times, until no more dirt and grime was released from the surface. Wood surfaces were then given a coat of brown paste wax and buffed to a high shine.

The result of treatment was the support and preservation of the chair's original materials, allowing viewers to appreciate the fine craftsmanship of Lewis Downing's gift.

—Christine Puza

Associate Conservator of Furniture and Wood Objects

Benjamin Champney's Drawings of the White Mountains

By Brook Prestowitz
Assistant Conservator of Paper

“Many, many days and hours have I passed, painting and singing an accompaniment to its silvery music, and I know almost every nook and transparent pool in its three-mile course from its birth in the depths at Black Mountain to where it loses itself in the Saco. Many a day I have shouldered my trap, with a lunch in my pocket, and followed its course for a couple of miles, and settled down to work in some secluded, solitary point, with no voice but the brook to cheer me or urge me on to the struggle of solving Nature's mysteries of light and shade and color.”

—Benjamin Champney¹

A collection of 105 drawings and sketches by Benjamin Champney (1817-1907) brought to the Williamstown Art Conservation Center paper department for treatment in 2017 presented an exciting opportunity to study a nineteenth-century master admired for his depictions of the White Mountains in his native New Hampshire.

The portfolio was acquired by the New Hampshire Historical Society (NHHS) in 2014. The drawings, made on a variety of papers in various media, depict the landscape of the Conway, New Hampshire, region from 1850 to 1863; scenes from Champney's 1853 trip to Vermont and New York; and scenery of Europe from his travels in 1865.² The collection arrived in poor condition caused by rough use, exposure to poor storage conditions, and contact with acidic boards and other secondary materials. The goal of the conservation treatment was to stabilize the drawings to make them accessible for scholarly study and exhibition.

Champney was born in New Ipswich, New Hampshire, near the Massachusetts border, and began his career apprenticing for William S. Pendleton's lithography business in Boston. In 1838, while still an apprentice, he would make his first documented visit to the White Mountains of New Hampshire to practice sketching *en plein-air*.³ In 1841, Champney moved to Paris to train as an artist and did not return to New Hampshire until 1853, after marrying Mary Caroline Brooks. The couple settled in North Conway, in the heart of the White Mountains.⁴

Champney was an active member in the artist communities of North Conway and Boston. He regularly exhibited his works in Boston and became a founder of the Boston Art Club, which sought to promote the fine arts and provide a platform for artists to sell their work.⁵ He later worked with Boston-based Louis Prang & Co. to make chromolithograph prints of his paintings as affordable options for tourists.⁶ Champney worked until he died in 1907, at age 90. The beauty of



Figure 1. Benjamin Champney, *Ripley Falls*, September 21, 1858.

his works helped to popularize the White Mountains region, while his charisma drew tourists and artists to his North Conway studio.

The large cache of Champney's sketches provides a valuable record of the landscape art of nineteenth-century New Hampshire. The large number and chronology of the NHHS collection also provides a useful view of the artist community active in the White Mountains during a dynamic era of American landscape painting.

Technique and Media

The treatment allowed for a thorough examination of Champney's materials and working methods. The majority of Champney's drawings in the NHHS collection were executed with linear drawing techniques using graphite pencils of various "hardness," building shape and volume with hatching and crosshatching. Other works are made with different types of soft drawing media, including charcoal, conté crayon, and chalks. In these drawings, Champney used a combination of linear draftsmanship, broad application of soft media, and shading with a paper stump (an artist's implement made from tightly rolled paper that tapers to a point at one end) and/or his fingers. Champney made notations about color and other visual details on the field drawings as references for his studio paintings. [Fig. 1]

Opaque white watercolor and white chalk were used in many of the NHHS drawings to enhance the tonal range. Identification of the white media in ten representative drawings was conducted using ultraviolet radiation and x-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometry by WACC's Christine Puza.⁷ Analysis was necessary to ensure that drawings with white media could be treated safely with aqueous methods. Some white media, especially calcium-based whites, are sensitive to aqueous treatment and may dissolve, become transparent, or yellow as the paper releases acidity and discoloration during aqueous treatments. The white chalk was identified as a calcium-based pigment. The opaque whites were identified as lead white and zinc oxide. Lead white was foreseen, as some of the whites had darkened to a brownish pink or gray color, a form of deterioration characteristic when this pigment is exposed to pollutants.

Zinc oxide was also considered likely because it was a popular watercolor pigment in the nineteenth century. Analysis revealed that Champney used more lead white than was originally suspected. In several drawings, he combined the zinc oxide and lead white in larger, more thickly applied areas using zinc white as a base and lead white for additional heightening of the white area. (See Fig. 1, above.)

Champney's choice of media and technique reflect the practices of his time. Even though charcoal has been used as a drawing material since antiquity and the pencil was invented in 1795 by Nicolas-Jacques Conté, they were not extensively used by artists until the 1800s. Nineteenth-century artists chose charcoal and pencils because their availability and ease of portability facilitated working in the field. Drawing as a finished art form had also become more elevated, encouraging use of such media.^{8,9} Zinc oxide was first introduced as a watercolor pigment called "Chinese White" in 1835 by Winsor & Newton.¹⁰ This white was widely used by artists in the nineteenth century as a replacement for lead white, which was known to darken over time.¹¹



Figure 2. Top: *Unidentified meadow scene with trees* (1860–1870) by Benjamin Champney, before treatment. White chalk and black friable media on light weight, blue-laid paper with Lalanne watermark. Bottom: *Unidentified meadow scene with trees*, after treatment.

Even so, Champney and other artists continued to use lead white, most likely because of its visual characteristics, working properties, and affordability.

Papers

Champney used a large variety of blue and off-white laid papers and white, off-white, cream, tan, brown, blue, and light blue-green wove papers.^{12,13} Several smaller sheets would be made from a single large sheet. Some of the tan, blue, and blue-green papers have the same surface texture and weight and may have come from a large sketchbook with different colored papers bound into a single volume by a stationer or art supplier. Several identifying marks in the papers were discovered, including Whatman, Lalanne, and Frères watermarks and two distinct blind stamps.

Whatman paper was a high-quality artist watercolor paper often used in the nineteenth century. It would have been a likely choice for Champney. He also specifically chose to use laid, off-white or blue Lalanne papers and blue papers with dyed-wool fiber inclusions for work with black conté crayon, charcoal, or chalks. These papers have more surface texture to hold the soft, friable media. Lalanne papers were designed for Maxime Lalanne (French, 1827–1886), who worked extensively in charcoal. Lalanne used laid papers for the interruptions the paper surface texture would make in a charcoal line, creating a sense of fleeting, dappled light in a landscape.¹⁴ The Frenchman also wrote the first artist's manual on charcoal drawing. Given Champney's training in Paris and his specific use of papers with this watermark for soft, friable media, it is likely that he knew of Lalanne's techniques and applied them to his own drawings. [Fig. 2]

The other types of colored papers were used for drawings made in pencil and often had opaque white watercolor applied to capture the effects of light and increase the depth of tone. There were also several examples of thick paper cards with a printed, solid rectangle of a tan color. [Fig. 3] This may indicate that Champney was thinking of compositions to be made into prints that he planned to sell to tourists.

Treatment

Written and photographic documentation of the drawings were made before and after treatment as a record, following conservation ethics. All drawings were dry surface cleaned. Tears in the papers were mended and creases reinforced with Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste. Papers with losses had shaped fills made from papers of similar weights and surface textures and toned with watercolors to match the original paper. The more severely discolored and embrittled drawings that did not have friable media or susceptible white media were washed in appropriate bath solutions. Prior to washing, preliminary spot testing of all media was carefully executed to ensure the media could withstand aqueous treatment. Judicious cosmetic treatment was also applied, including reduction of disfiguring stains and inpainting of small, distracting



Figure 3. Benjamin Champney, *Lake or river scene (ice skating?)*, 1850–60. Graphite on heavyweight, white wove paper with tan printed rectangle. Champney's choice of paper may suggest that he was thinking about compositions for prints.

media losses. Darkened lead white was brightened by conversion to lead sulfate using a methylcellulose poultice of a pH-adjusted oxidizing agent. All the drawings were mounted into window mats made from cotton-rag mat board with activated carbon traps, and secured with Japanese tissue hinges and wheat starch paste. The matted drawings were stored in conservation-grade boxes. The conservation matting and housing will preserve the drawings, facilitate handling and accessibility, and protect NHHS's investment in conservation.

The careful examination of the collection revealed Champney's mastery of drawing technique and choice of materials, and offered insight into artistic works and practices of his era. It was a privilege to preserve the Champney drawings so that they may be appreciated by interested visitors. WACC and NHHS extend their gratitude to the Stockman Family Foundation for making possible the examination, treatment, and preservation of these drawings.

1. Charles O. Vogel, "Wanderings after the Wild and Beautiful: The Life and Career of Benjamin Champney," in *Beauty Caught and Kept: Benjamin Champney in the White Mountains*, Historical New Hampshire, Vol. 51, Nos. 3 & 4, Fall/Winter, 1996, 80.
2. Wesley Balla, e-mail sent to author, January 3, 2018.
3. Ibid.
4. Vogel, 71.
5. Ibid, 72.
6. Ibid, 82-84.
7. A Niton XL3t XRF Analyzer was used in soil mode for approximately 120 seconds using the main, high, and low shutter combinations each at twenty-second intervals to identify inorganic compounds used in the watercolor pigments.
8. Thea Burns, "Nineteenth-Century Charcoal Drawing: The Evidence of the Technical Literature and the Works of Art," in the *Proceedings of Conference Symposium 88—Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works on Paper*, Ottawa, 3-7, October 1988, 121.
9. James Watrous, *The Craft of Old-Master Drawings*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 142.
10. Robert L. Feller ed. *Artists' Pigments: A Handbook of their History and Characteristics*. Readings in vol. 6. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 170-172.
11. Zinc oxide was first recommended as a white pigment for paint in the 1780s as a response to the issue of lead white manufacturers eventually suffering from lead poisoning, however, efforts failed because zinc oxide was more expensive to manufacture. Rutherford J. Gettens and George L. Stout, *Painting Materials: A Short Encyclopedia*. (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1966), 176-177.
12. Laid paper has a ribbed appearance imprinted by the type of paper mold it was made with. The ribs are made by the horizontal, closely spaced laid lines and by vertical chain lines that are spaced further apart. John Krill, *English Artists' Paper: Renaissance to Regency*. (Newcastle: Oak Knoll Press & Winterthur Museum, 2002), 14.
13. Wove paper has a smooth surface because it is made on a mold with a wire, woven cloth. Krill, 14.
14. Burns, 121-123.



Brook Prestowitz is Assistant Conservator of Paper at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center. She received her Masters Degree in the Conservation of Works of Art on Paper from Northumbria University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK, in 2015. Prior to joining WACC in 2017, she held a two-year fellowship at the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) from 2015 to 2017 and a graduate placement at the British Museum in the Hiramama Studio in 2014.

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