

Furniture Conservation Training Opportunities at SAAR in Amsterdam, The Netherlands and Training in Furniture Conservation Through Winterthur's Art Conservation Program

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Furniture Conservation Training Opportunities at SAAR in Amsterdam, The Netherlands

In March of 1986, I attended a three-week program at the "Stichting Amsterdamse Academie Voor Restauratie" which is the State Training Program for Restorers operated by the ministry of welfare since its inception in 1977. Four major areas of study were pursued: European furniture styles, tool making for conservators, French polishing and upholstery. The program was designed for developing restorers/conservators. Dr. M. Kirby Talley and Mrs. Villemien 't Hooft promoted and organized the program. Ten students participated from England, the United States and the Netherlands.

The State training facility for restorers, where this intensive course was held, is located on the Museumplein in Amsterdam near the Rijksmuseum. A conference room, bench room and machine room served as the focus of the activity. The instructors included: Dr. J. Pijze-Domisse, furniture style; Mr. Ton Wilmering, tools; Mr. P.J. Halee, French polishing and Mr. H.S. Bloedhower, textiles. The instructors held to an 8:00a.m. - 5:00p.m. time schedule for their teaching and the execution of our projects.

In addition to the time at the SAAR facility, various museums and historic homes were visited including the Royal Palace, Museum Van Loon, Kasteel Nijenhuis, Palace et 100, House Dorn, Stedelijk Museum, and the Historical Museum in Utrecht. Conservators/restorers, curators and other museum professionals helped to interpret their respective collections, tailoring their presentations to the needs of the class.

The cost of the course and accommodations proved to be reasonable. The tuition was set at \$960 including all materials that were used by each student. Adequate rooming was available for \$25-\$30 per night. Public transportation made it unnecessary to rent an automobile. The course was taught in English with an interpreter on hand as was needed. In general, English was spoken throughout much of the Netherlands as a second language.

This furniture conservation program is the first of its type to be offered by SAAR. The primary function of the Academy normally, is to train restorers in furniture, paper and textiles through a four-year curriculum to serve collections in the Netherlands. The concept of short but intensive courses of study in conservation for foreigners is a new one to SAAR. The Academy intends to continue offering training opportunities on specific subjects over the next few years. This experience was invaluable to me on several different levels. I was exposed to new craft techniques from a European perspective. The collections that were visited presented furniture styles and settings different from what I had seen previously in North America and the British Isles. The conservation problems and solutions that were studied served to broaden my experience beyond what I had been exposed to earlier. Conservators interested in pursuing training in Continental Europe will do well to keep abreast of what SAAR will be offering in the future.

Training in Furniture Conservation Through Winterthur's Art Conservation Program

The Winterthur Museum/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation is a three-year graduate course of study leading to a Master of Science degree. Being interdisciplinary in character, it places heavy intellectual and physical demands upon the students. It incorporates a wide variety of class, laboratory, shop and field experiences. The program is designed to produce candidates for assistant conservator positions who have mastered the principals of art historical, scientific and technical aspects of conservation. There are 18 faculty members, half of whom are conservators, the remaining staff includes those in the sciences, art history, or support disciplines. Prerequisites include undergraduate courses in art history, studio art and chemistry. Ten students are admitted into each class receiving a \$14,000 stipend partialed out over 36 months and a wave of tuition.

The first year of the program begins in July, covering the following areas of study: methods of examination, documentation; paper; paintings; wood, wood technology, wood i.d.; ceramics and glass; metals; photography; microscopy; consolidation; surface cleaning; materials and techniques. There is an 8-10 week summer work project that is carried out at an institution, regional lab, or other firm away from Winterthur.

The second year is an advanced apprenticeship in conservation with the choices for ones major including ceramics, glass, metals, photographs, paper, textiles, paintings and furniture. The student works with the conservator in her/his specialty.

A furniture major works during the second year under the teaching and guidance of myself and another furniture conservator that we are presently seeking to hire. The experience is centered on the study of the Winterthur Collection and bench work with projects coming from Winterthur's 4,000 some pieces of furniture and other private concerns as is appropriate. Areas of study in the second year include: woodworking, construction of furniture parts, tool care, tool use; structural conservation; the nature of biological deterioration, preservatives; wood degradation and consolidation techniques; finish analysis, care, and treatment; veneer, inlay, marquetry; decorative surface conservation; gilding; surface coatings; adhesives; technical connoisseurship; art historical background on furniture; survey techniques; science project; and summer work project. A second summer work project is carried out at the end of the second year of study.

In the third year, the student interns at a recognized center of furniture conservation. This lasts a full twelve months with the predominant activity being at the bench caring for and treating joined wooden objects.

The furniture conservation major in the Winterthur Art Conservation Program is very much alive and kicking. It is in a stage of active development seeking to meet the needs of those desirous of advanced training in the conservation of furniture and related wood objects.

The focus of the Art Conservation Program and particularly, for those training in furniture conservation, is teaching the why as well as the how. Education in conservation concerns itself with more than just the passing on of techniques.

Equally stressed in this program is the reasoning behind a given solution, technique or choice of materials. It is hoped that in addition to the ever important bench skills that these principles will also be developed in the students: the ability to apply ethical concerns in practice, analytical and theoretical thinking, problem solving, the logic, the ability to get the work done, and other survival techniques.

What I have briefly presented is one of several training alternatives in the conservation of wooden objects, preparing people for job opportunities in museums, regional labs, private firms or private practice. Developments in training will have a definite and measurable payoff for all of us in the field. Collectively, these educational opportunities are oriented towards continuing the growth of professionalism so that those wooden objects of artistic, cultural, or historical significance will be cared for in as responsible a manner as possible by all of us involved in the conservation of wooden artifacts.