

NEWSGRAM

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INSTITUTE of FINE ARTS
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Preserving Newport's Gilded Age

Linsly Boyer '12 Creates An Outdoor Sculpture Maintenance Program in RI

The preservation of outdoor sculpture is a difficult challenge at the best of times. Artworks exposed to the elements year-round will inevitably deteriorate more rapidly than those sheltered within a museum environment. In order to prolong the lives of outdoor sculptures it may often seem that the wisest choice is to move them indoors where their condition and environment can be more carefully controlled. However, the importance of retaining the object's historical context in the outdoor environment makes this a less-than-ideal solution. A sculpture's presence in a specific location, such as a cemetery or on the grounds of historic houses, may contribute significantly to the work's historical value. The preservation of these objects therefore relies upon maintenance, and creating protocols that will provide regular mitigation of the environment's effects.

As a third-year graduate student at the Conservation Center, I developed an interest in outdoor sculpture preservation through my participation in the [Central Park Conservancy's](#) summer monument maintenance program and through an Individualized Instruction course on historic graveyard preservation. My fourth-year Internship was spent at [The Preservation Society of Newport County](#) (PSNC), a non-profit foundation established in 1945. The PSNC maintains ten historic houses, which exhibit some of America's finest architectural traditions, spanning the 18th to early 20th centuries. It also owns the Arnold Burial ground, a small colonial cemetery that contains the burial plot of the first governor of Rhode Island, Benedict Arnold. Building on my third-year studies and interest in outdoor sculpture preservation, I chose to perform an in-depth condition survey and proposal for the maintenance of the Arnold Burial Ground as part of my Internship. After exploring the issues associated with the preservation of outdoor objects in a historic house setting, I decided to expand my survey to include all of the outdoor sculptures on the PSNC's properties.

Over several weeks, I worked with my Internship supervisor, Chief Conservator Jeff Moore, and a consultant from the Williamstown Art Conservation Center, Helene Gillette-Woodard, to examine and document the condition of 150 objects, ranging from mythological figures carved in white marble to cast-iron light fixtures. It quickly became apparent that the outdoor sculptures, many of which were significant elements in the original designs of the properties, had suffered considerable deterioration, neglect, and vandalism before their acquisition by the PSNC. Although the PSNC had made commendable efforts over the years to repair and preserve the works, in many cases it was simply beyond their resources to give the objects the attention they required. When works were deemed too degraded to remain outside, they were often displayed indoors or moved into storage, with rep-



Aurora, Jules Allard after Jean-Joseph Vinache, 1900 after 1750 original, white marble; from top: historical autochrome image (ca. 1930s), Before Treatment 2012, After Treatment by Linsly Boyer 2012

licas taking their place outdoors. It was then I began to consider the creation of a yearly maintenance program based on my experiences at Central Park Conservancy, but the rest of my Internship was already devoted to other ongoing projects.

With Jeff's approval, I proposed a summer fellowship to follow the completion of my Internship, allowing me to complete a pilot outdoor-sculpture maintenance program on selected pieces from the collection. I began with several works on the upper terrace at The Elms, 1901 (as seen in the header above), which included examples of marble and bronze with characteristic deterioration issues. The outdoor sculpture at The Elms plays a significant role in the French Neoclassical style of the property, designed by Allard et Fils of Paris. Together with an exceptional pre-program intern, Caitlin Sofield, I spent ten weeks performing maintenance treatments on twelve sculptures, which greatly enhanced the character of the grounds. Near the end of the summer, I was asked to give a presentation to the public regarding the transformation of the upper terrace, and although a few visitors preferred the aesthetic of moss-covered sculptures, the majority were pleased with the results of our work.

Given the success of the pilot program, I submitted a proposal to the PSNC to continue the outdoor-sculpture maintenance program (OSMP) on a yearly basis. I recommended that the PSNC hire conservation technicians for six-week periods each summer. Under the supervision of a professional conservator, the technicians would be responsible for treating several high-priority sculptures, as well as maintaining those previously treated. I suggested that in order to promote the visual cohesion of the grounds the program should focus on treating all of the outdoor sculptures at one property before continuing to the next property. After the completion of initial treatments, regular maintenance would require less time, and eventually the entire collection could undergo maintenance on a biennial cycle. This approach would preserve the original objects in their historical context and improve the visitor experience of the properties. It would also provide an opportunity for educational outreach, as the ideal candidates for the technician positions would be individuals in graduate-level fine art conservation or historic preservation programs.

Jeff Moore succeeded in acquiring the funding for OSMP 2013, which included wages for two conservation technicians and funds for me to visit and supervise the project. We received dozens of applications for the positions, most of which were from fully-qualified and impressive candidates. Finally, we offered the technician positions to Caitlin Sofield, who had worked with us the previous summer, and Corey Pacheco. Caitlin will be applying to conservation graduate programs this year and plans to specialize in furniture conservation. Corey completed the North Bennet Street School program in preservation carpentry and he is currently completing an MA in historic preservation at Roger Williams University.

The OSMP 2013 season began on July 8th with a condition survey of the ten sculptures at The Elms slated for treatment this summer. A brief survey of the objects treated last year indicated that although there was some returning biological growth the sculptures remain in good condition. This year, the program will focus on sculptures in the Sunken Garden at the west end of The Elms property, including a white marble nymph figure, a Roman-style wellhead, four marble busts representing the four seasons, and two marble sculptures near the carriage house. These sculptures had been heavily damaged by vandalism before being acquired by the PSNC and have issues relating to previous restoration campaigns.



Left: Faun, Mathurin Moreau, 1879, white marble, During Treatment 2013; Right: Winter, Allard after Pierre Legros, 19th century, white marble, Before Treatment 2013

The treatments will consist primarily of washing and steam-cleaning to reduce soiling and biological growth, the removal of failing restoration materials, and testing replacement fill materials for durability in the outdoor environment. We will also treat two sculptures at the front entrance to The Elms, bronze cupids riding white marble sphinxes. We hope to improve the appearance of the bronze cupids with cleaning and a protective wax coating, while poultice materials will be tested on the considerable staining found on the marble sphinxes.

At the start of program, I spent three days training the conservation technicians in the techniques that had been effective the previous summer. My employer, [Art Conservation Group](#) (a private conservation studio located in Brooklyn and owned by Leslie Ransick Gat '88) has supported my work as a consultant for the project and allowed me to make regular trips to Newport throughout the program to supervise the progress. It is my hope that the experiences gained during this summer's program can be used to improve next year's proposal and that they will ultimately allow for the program's successful continuation. •

—Linsly Boyer

Linsly is an objects conservator at Art Conservation Group

Special thanks to Jeff Moore, Caitlin Sofield, Corey Pacheco, Leslie Ransick Gat, Rebecca Gridley '17, Helene Gillette-Woodard and the Preservation Society of Newport County for making this project a reality.



Cupid Astride a Sphinx, Allard after Sarrazin, Lerambert et Duv, 19th century, bronze and white marble; Before Treatment 2013

Photo credit: courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County