



Art Conservation *and reference collections*

Young women in the 18th century interested in learning the fine arts of drawing and painting may have received some of their education from *The Florist* (1759), a popular book containing 23 hand-painted engravings of flower specimens. Noting that it was intended “for the useful and ingenious amusement for young ladies,” the book also contains instructions, a list of the materials needed, and directions for mixing colors. Some illustrations are depicted as outlines for step-by-step copying.

The Florist and a similar, earlier work, *The Ladies Drawing Book* (1753), are both by Augustin Heckel (1690-1770), a German-born engraver, draughtsman, and painter who spent most of his adult life in London. The Winterthur Library acquired copies of these books, bound together with two collections of dried flowers and plants, called herbaria, in 1961. Herbaria are essential tools for the study of plant taxonomy and commonly had specimens glued, taped, or sewn to the pages. The collection, which was disbound during a previous conservation campaign, became a treatment project this year for WUDPAC Fellow and Library and Archives major Katarina Stiller.

Initially, Katarina used x-ray fluorescence to test the pages for inorganic pesticides, which historically have sometimes been used on herbaria. Once deemed safe for handling, Katarina’s treatment goal was to stabilize the collection, and she began by using cosmetic sponges and soft brushes to surface clean both the pages and plant material. She then began to mend tears and losses with mulberry paper and wheat starch paste. The herbaria are fragile due to loose, detached, and lost plant material, and Katarina will use methylcellulose to consolidate the more fragile areas of the specimens. After she has completed her repairs, she will rebound three of the four books into individual books. The fourth book, one of the herbaria, will not be rebound due to the fragility of the plant specimens and stiffness of the paper. She will make a custom housing for the disbound pages so that they can be safely handled.

Before returning the collection to the Winterthur Library, Katarina will house the books together in a custom box. This will create a more protective microenvironment for the collection while also avoiding disassociation of the collection materials. This will also enable ease of access of the entire collection as they are used by researchers, scholars, or, perhaps, young ladies interested in learning to draw or paint.



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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 artifact and archive collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top: Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Katarina Stiller examining one of the herbaria bound with floral reference books by engraver Augustin Heckel. Above: Detail of flowers secured in the herbarium. Left: Katarina examining the herbarium alongside Heckel’s *The Florist* (1759) and *The Ladies Drawing Book* (1753). (Images: E. Krape and K. Stiller.)