



## Art Conservation *and recovered histories*

When second-year WUDPAC Fellow Taryn Nurse, a painting major, began work on an 1866 portrait by 19th-century English artist Simeon Solomon, she had no idea it would turn into a detective story. The painting *Atalanta*, depicting the Greek mythological heroine, belongs to a private collector and is being treated at Winterthur as part of a larger collaboration with the Delaware Art Museum, which is organizing an upcoming exhibition on Solomon.

The artist was once closely linked to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood—a group of experimental artists in London who rejected the traditional teachings of the Royal Academy of Art. Solomon was arrested in 1873 for homosexuality—a scandal that led to his erasure from much of the art historical record.

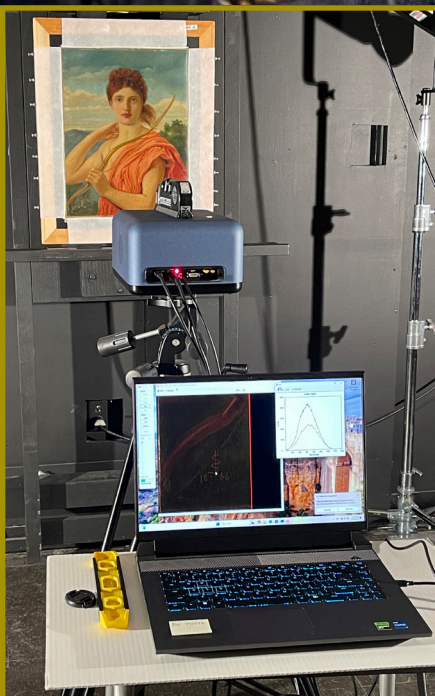
Taryn's project aims to shed new light on Solomon's materials and methods, but early imaging on *Atalanta* revealed something entirely unexpected: a second, hidden composition. Beneath the portrait, a ghostly cityscape emerged through x-ray radiography and infrared reflectography. "We knew we were dealing with at least two paintings on the same stretcher," she said. After additional examination under magnification, Taryn discovered not only a second image, but also two additional canvases: the portrait and cityscape were lined on a secondary support and mounted atop a third, primed but blank canvas.



The origin of the architectural painting remains a mystery. Taryn now plans to "perform additional analysis to study the paint color and layers of both paintings," she said. She will also perform hyperspectral imaging and elemental analysis to identify pigments and better understand Solomon's techniques—work that can better clarify the influence the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had on Solomon's working practices: "We want to know if he was painting in a similar way and if he was an experimenter as well."

Taryn's journey to conservation has been as layered as the painting itself. Born in Guyana and raised in the Bahamas, she first encountered the field of art conservation as a double major in pre-med and studio art at Fisk University. A visiting conservator's suggestion led to an internship and then a year-long museum leadership program that took her across the U.S.

"I always loved the analysis side of science," said Taryn, who earned a master's in education and taught chemistry during the pandemic. "I also had a love for painting and making art and I wanted to figure out how I could combine scientific instrumentation and art." Conservation offered the perfect blend. "This is so much fun," she said, laughing. "I wouldn't be doing this in medicine."



### ARTC Spotlight—April 2025

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](http://www.artcons.udel.edu).

Top: Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Taryn Nurse dismounting the painting from the stretcher to reveal the lower, third canvas. Above: The painting set up for hyperspectral imaging. Right: Sketch of the underlying composition found using IRR overlaid on top of the visible composition. (Images: Zoë Avery and Taryn Nurse)