

# YOST

CONSERVATION, LLC

January 29, 2013

## Condition Report

Gilbert Stuart – George Washington  
Oil on canvas, 28 ½ x 24 ½ inches

This painting was examined for condition and age on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The painting was found to be in very good overall condition. The surface of the painting has a recent surface coating of synthetic resin varnish overlying a thin layer of slightly yellowed natural resin varnish. Minor surface remnants of older resin varnish and dirt are also present. The paint layer is in a wonderful state of preservation with almost no abrasion and very minor restored damages. The paint has maintained good opacity and richness of color with minimal oil and weave staining in the more thinly applied background. The painting is glue lined and stretched onto an oval replaced stretcher. The current size and oval shape of the canvas are likely due to size reduction that occurred in a previous restoration of the painting. There is a very fine network of aging cracks within the paint layer that are stable and supported by the lining. The lined canvas has a few broad buckles present that can easily be eliminated by tightening the canvas on the existing stretcher.

It is our opinion that this painting is unquestionably an original work dating from around 1800. The painting was executed on a gessoed fine weave linen toned to a cream colored ground. The background and suit coat were applied in one sitting, all painted in thin washy paint strokes with the ground showing through along overlapping strokes. The ruffled shirt, collar, head, and hair were also painted “wet and wet” with more buildup of color and carefully placed impasto strokes applied to the shirt, hair, facial features, and highlights in the eyes. All of the paint application has an immediate gestural and spontaneous quality. The wet application is visible under microscopic examination of the paint layer. The aging cracks in the paint layer predate the age of the current lining (circa 1945) and a likely late 19<sup>th</sup> Century restoration as well.

The painting was recently varnished with a thin coating of synthetic resin varnish applied within the last year. The previous restoration most likely dates from circa 1945 which would correspond to the Nicklin estate sale of 1945. The current frame, oval stretcher, glue lining, and minor scattered retouches all fit a date of 1945. In addition to being glue lined at this time, the painting was most likely cleaned and re-varnished. Evidence of this natural resin varnish layer can be seen as a pale green fluorescence in ultraviolet light. Some distinct spots of inpaint having a dark purple fluorescence also dating from this restoration and include a ¾ x 1 inch spot of inpaint at the upper left edge, a ½ x ¾ inch spot of inpaint at the lower center edge, and a few minor smaller spots in the background, coat, and one small spot below the lower lip. The glue

lining caused some minor cratering of the paint surface adjacent to the small impasto strokes as well as some minor weave interference.

There is clear evidence of an older 19<sup>th</sup> Century restoration. There are two exposed small filled losses with some remaining old overpaint on the fillings that were likely exposed when the painting was cleaned in 1945. These fillings with some retouch color on the fillings include a 3/16 x 3/4 inch vertical filling on the right side of the face near the hairline and two 1/8 inch diameter fills on the upper shirt collar adjacent to the coat. In the 1945 restoration, these fills which are hard to see visually, were missed by the inpainter. The overpaint on these fills has a distinctly different fluorescence than the other retouches applied in the 1945 restoration. Also these older late 19<sup>th</sup> Century fillings interrupt aging cracks which would have formed at least 60 years after the painting was executed. Microscopic examination also reveals the presence of an older yellowed resin trapped in surface textural cavities in the face and shirt that must have not been cleaned away in 1945.

The edges of the painting which have been cut down, possibly from an original 30 x 25 inch canvas size, may have been cut to a slightly smaller oval to fit a new frame. There are no remnants of the original tacking edges present.

In terms of future conservation, the painting should be at the very least tightened on the existing stretcher. This would require enlarging the frame rabbet to accommodate the expansion of the current stretcher bars. Additionally, it is recommended that the painting be properly cleaned and the painting Beva re-lined. The reversal of the glue lining would allow examination and photography of the back of the original canvas and a vapor treatment on a conservation vacuum-hot table would help to reverse the impressed impasto and reduce the weave interference. Also, the current minor inpaint (currently a fraction of one percent) could be further reduced as well.

We would be happy to answer any questions regarding these conclusions.



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