

# THE CONSERVATOR'S EASEL, LLC

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## Examination and Treatment Report

29 December 2021

**Owner/Agent:** *Omitted*

**Examiner:** Josephine Ren

**Supervisor:** Linnaea Saunders

**Artist:** H. Bahgdasarian

**Title:** Mt Ararat

**Date:** 1921

**Medium and Support:** Oil on canvas, no secondary support

**Dimensions:** 7  $\frac{3}{8}$  in H x 19  $\frac{5}{8}$  in W

**Signature:** "H. Bahgdasarian 1921" in light brown paint in lower left corner

**Frame:**

Narrow wood frame with glass; retained by the owner. The painting will be fitted with a new frame after conservation.

**Legends/Labels/Stamps:** None

**Inscriptions:**

On the reverse of the paperboard backing to the frame the following is inscribed using black ball point pen, incised deep into the paperboard backing:

"Chuck and Layce Hopper / watched the painter paint / this painting of Mount Ararat / in eastern Turkey in 1921".

The text is enclosed in a drawn linear, abstract border. This appears to be a later inscription.

**Conservation History:**

The painting does not appear to have been treated before. The frame is original to the painting, but will be replaced at the owner's discretion.

**Construction:**

The painting was made on a fine weave cotton canvas support with no stretcher or other secondary support.

The cotton was prepared with a very thin white ground, followed by a dark wash of brownish black covering all of the canvas except for the foreground landscape. An overall grey layer was then applied. This preparation creates an underlying dark gray tone for the mountains and receding landscape, which aids in the recession of space in the painting. The dark ground layer is also visible from the reverse of the canvas.

No underdrawing was noted, although a graphite line along the bottom edge was used to indicate the edge of the canvas/composition.

The paint layer is thinly applied, using a fluid moderately-bodied paint. The film quality is a combination of lean and paste vehicular. Observation under normal light and ultraviolet fluorescence indicates that there is no overall varnish. Local peaks of the paint layer appear burnished and flattened, possibly from being pressed against a previous glazing.

**Condition:**

The painting is in good condition overall. The paint and ground remain well-secured to the support and there is no significant surface grime or coating present.

In general, the canvas has an undulating planarity due to the development of mechanical cracks and distortions to the canvas. This occurred because it was unsupported in the frame, compressed between glass and backing board. There are localized mechanical cracks in the paint layer, primarily throughout the upper half and with one notable vertical crack running down to the left of the center of the painting. At the bottom edge of the left corner there is a cropping of the support  $\frac{1}{8}$  in H x  $1\text{-}\frac{5}{8}$  in W that relates directly to the cut edge of the glass that was in contact with the canvas.

The reverse of the canvas has variegated staining, discoloration, and darkening throughout due to the priming application, and possibly due to the paperboard backing.

There are minor losses to the paint and ground at the edges of the paint layer along the right edge, by the upper corner and center, and top edge, left of center. There is slight discoloration or yellowing along the edges, most noticeably along the top edge. There appears to be a small yellowed cellulose-based accretion on the tip of the central mountain.

There is light surface grime overall. The paperboard backing is acidic and friable.

**Recommendations for Treatment:**

It is recommended that the painting be treated to provide an overall support for the painting. This would allow for reducing planar deformations and provide a means for the painting to be securely supported prior to reframing.

**Treatment Proposal:**

1. Photograph before, during, and after treatment.
2. Remove surface grime from the face of the painting using appropriate aqueous system on swabs.
3. Evaluate how sensitive the canvas and paint are to humidification to determine whether the painting is a candidate for overall humidification.
4. Place painting face down on a clean surface and remove surface grime and debris that may interfere with flattening treatments.
5. Humidify painting and place under light pressure during drying to address planar deformations.
6. Evaluate possible edgeline materials including different types of Hollytex, linen, paper, and different types of adhesive such as Beva 371 film, wheat starch paste, and synthetic adhesives including approaches that would involve reactivating adhesives rather than heat setting adhesives.
7. Prepare edge lining.
8. Prepare an acid-free board to act as a secondary support.
9. Secure edge lining to original canvas.
10. Secure lined canvas around the secondary support.
11. Fill and inpaint losses, if needed. These are primarily quite small and confined to the edges of the canvas.
12. Photograph after treatment.
13. Prepare final written report and process photodocumentation.
14. The client will be utilizing a new frame.

**Treatment:**

1. Photographed before treatment.
2. Placed painting face down on a clean surface and removed surface grime and debris that may interfere with flattening treatments. Surface-cleaned reverse of the canvas using a soft goat-haired hake brush and cosmetic sponges.
3. Surface-cleaned face of painting using a soft goat-haired hake brush.
4. Evaluated one possible edgeline method using Hollytex and BEVA 371 film. Created samples of two different weights of Hollytex (#3257 and #3265) lined with BEVA 371 adhesive, which was adhered using a heated spatula. Hollytex #3265 was determined to

be compatible with BEVA 371, whereas #3257 was too thin and allowed the adhesive to penetrate through. Linen was also evaluated, and was determined to be too thick for the canvas.

5. Prepared pH-adjusted water solutions for oil paintings according to recipes formulated by the Modular Cleaning Program. Prepared aqueous solutions adjusted to pH levels of 5.5, 6.5, and 7.5.
6. Tested small areas of the paint layer with all three pH-adjusted water solutions.
7. Cleaned and removed grime from face of painting using cotton swabs and pH-adjusted aqueous solutions at pH levels 5.5 and 6.5.
8. Evaluated how sensitive the canvas and paint are to humidification during grime removal using aqueous cleaning. The painting was deemed fit for overall humidification.
9. Humidified painting by placing it between layers of Evolon CR, dry blotter, and one layer of damp blotter underneath the dry blotter, all of which were loosely encapsulated in mylar. The damp blotter was wetted with distilled water using a dahlia sprayer. Checked painting every 10 minutes and humidified for around 30 minutes.
10. Removed painting from humidification system. Placed painting between layers of Hollytex and blotter, and under weights in order to address planar deformations during drying. Left painting under weights overnight.
11. Checked condition of painting. Planar deformations were significantly reduced, but the painting required a second round of humidification and flattening.\*

*\*These steps were completed in the duration of my internship. Treatment of this painting is incomplete and currently ongoing.*



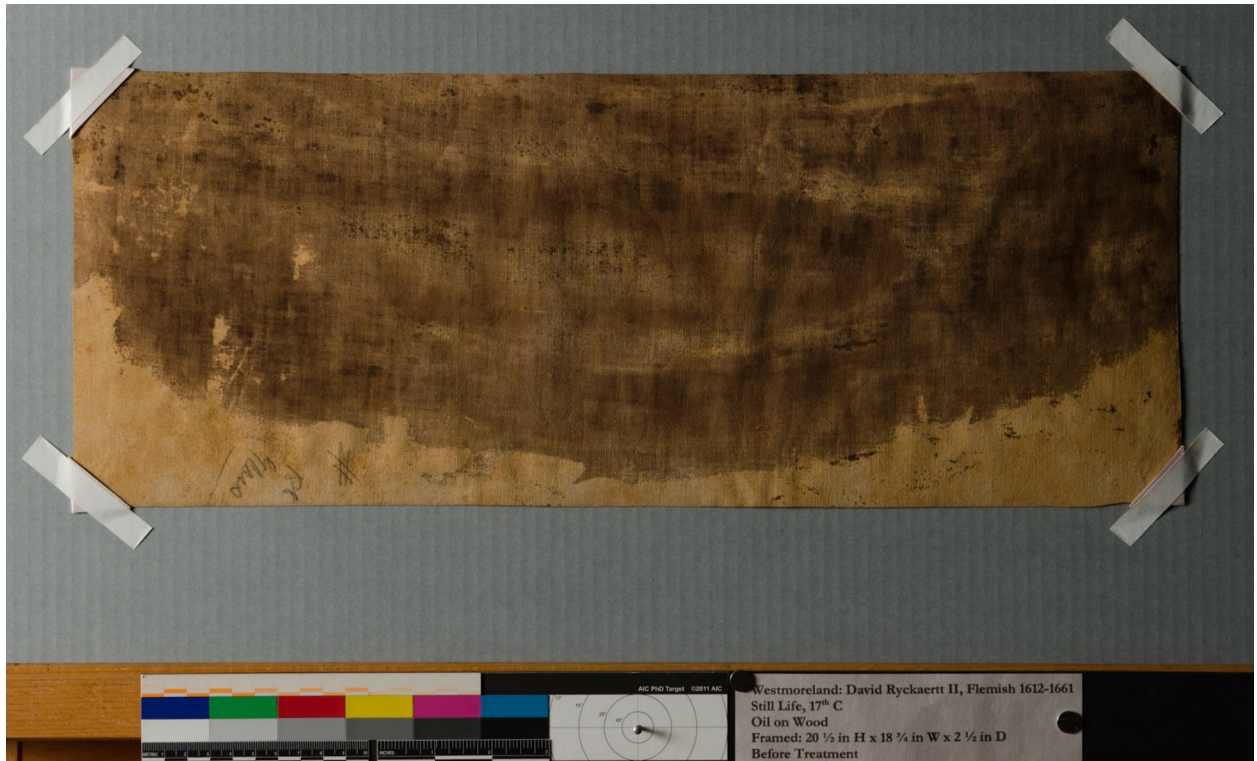
Front, Normal Illumination, Before Treatment.



Front, Raking Illumination, Before Treatment.



Back, Normal Illumination, Before Treatment.



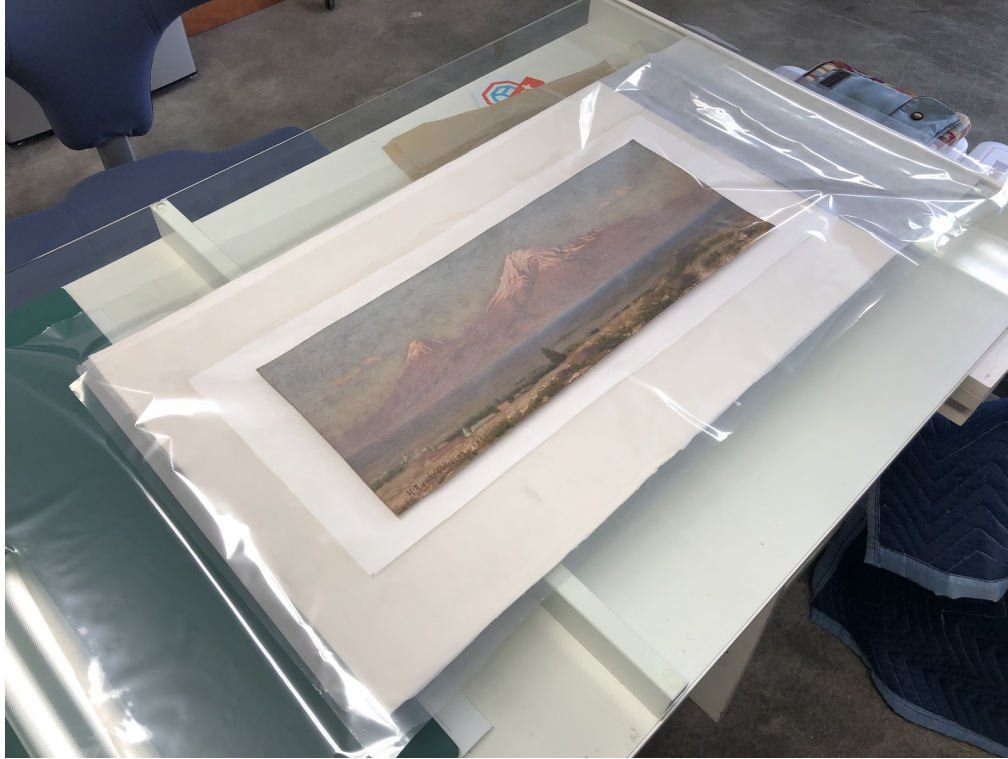
Back, Raking Illumination, Before Treatment.



During Treatment. After grime removal using pH-adjusted aqueous solutions.



Used cotton swabs showing evidence of very subtle grime removal.



During Treatment. Humidification of painting.



During Treatment. Flattening under weights after humidification.