Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation

Conservation Examination Report and Treatment Proposal

Owner: United States Senate/Commission on Art
Accession #: 65.00106.000
Object: 1819 Senate Chamber Chair

Artist/Maker: Thomas Constantine
Object Date: 1819
Materials: Mahogany, Leather, Horsehair
Dimensions:
Distinguishing Marks:

Reason for Treatment or Examination: Presentation at the October 2020 Furniture Forum
Examined by: Kathy Z. Gillis
Consulted: Mark J. Anderson

Description

Side chair with evidence of previous presence of arms; therefore the chair has been modified. Curved back with stuffed black leather inset; removable slip seat stuffed with horsehair covered with black leather. The front legs are reeded and tapered; the rear legs are flared. Previously fitted with casters, now has round metal glides on each foot.

Historical Context

The chair was constructed for the Senate Chamber in 1819 as part of the refurbishment of the Congressional Houses following the fire that destroyed the building in the War of 1812. This chair has been modified from its original appearance, most notably in the removal of the arms, reupholstery of the seat (current show cover is leather), and removal of the feet casters. These alterations presumably occurred during the time the chair was not in the possession of the collection of the U.S. Senate

Condition

The surfaces of the chair are dusty with at least one layer of dirt and grime throughout. This has created a cloudy, disfiguring appearance to the visual qualities of the mahogany.

The leather of the seat cushion is brittle and split, revealing the interior horsehair stuffing. Edges of the split appear to have sustained some losses.

Purpose of Treatment

- The chair will be presented in the Furniture Up Close presentation in October, 2020 along with another chair by Thomas Constantine in the Winterthur Collection that has a cleaner surface. The goal is to have the Senate Chamber Chair not appear dirty and grimy next to the Winterthur chair.
- Clean the wooden surfaces to remove dirt and grime to reveal finish and wood for better reading of the figure.
- Stabilize the seat to prevent any further loss of leather or horsehair.

Treatment Proposal

1. Digitally photograph Before and After condition of the chair surfaces to document change in appearance.
2. Remove loose dirt by brushing with a soft brush.
3. Test an inconspicuous area of the finish (rear leg) for any sensitivities to mineral spirits and water.
4. Clean all mahogany surfaces by wiping with soft cloths impregnated with mineral spirits to remove any wax build-up on the surface.
5. Clean all mahogany surfaces by wiping with soft cloths impregnated with a 1-2% solution of a non-ionic detergent in deionized water to remove dirt and grime.
6. Clear the surfaces by wiping with soft cloths impregnated with clear water at least two times to remove any detergent residue and additional water-soluble grime.
7. Dry surfaces thoroughly by wiping with a clean, dry cloth and allow to air dry overnight.
8. Wipe surfaces with a final pass of mineral spirits on a clean cloth to remove any wax that may remain under the dirt and grime removed by the detergent cleaning. Allow to dry thoroughly.
9. Apply two coats of paste wax rubbed into the surface using a soft cloth to provide saturation of the wood figure as well as a protective coating to the surface.
10. Attach period-appropriate brass casters to the existing holes from the now lost casters on each foot.
11. Wrap the leather slip seat in a thin gauze material, such as Stabiltex or Crepeline as a temporary stabilization step until further conservation treatment can be undertaken in the future.
12. Prepare a written Final Treatment Report describing all methods and materials used in treatment.

Kathy Z. Gillis, Senior Furniture Conservator	**Date**
Melinda K. Smith	09/02/2020
Melinda Smith, Owner's Agent	**Date**

Credit: Courtesy, Winterthur Museum

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