Examination Report and Treatment Proposal

21 June 2019

Cindy Cleary
Interim District Director
Altadena Library District
600 East Mariposa Street
Altadena CA 91001

(626) 798-0833 x103
ccleary@altadenalibrary.org

Artist: George Gardner Symons, American 1865-1930
Title: Millard Canyon at Granite Gate
Date: 1896
Media/Support: Oil on canvas
Dimensions: 70 ¼ in H x 50 ¼ in W

Frame: 72 ½ in H x 52 1/ 8 in W x 1 ½ in D; 1 ¼ in profile; projects 5/8 in front face of canvas
Narrow profile wood frame with metal leaf, most likely brass. Toning layer, some abrasion and loss. The frame does not appear to be original to the painting. The frame has open miters and has been carved out in the rebate to accommodate the current painting. The painting is secured in the frame using nails driven through the stretcher and offset clips. There is no backing board.

Labels/Inscriptions:
JW James Pasadena, in large script in ink on crossbar, upside down

University of Southern California/ University Galleries/ University Park Los Angeles California 90007/ Pack-in Painters of the American West/ November 22- December 23. 1976; red and white label on reverse of stretcher and frame.

Laguna Art Museum 307 Cliff Drive Laguna Beach CA 92651-9990/ exhibition: Loners, mavericks, and Dreamers: Art in Los Angeles Prior to 1900/ George Gardner Symons (1861?-1930)/ Millard Canyon at Granite Gate, 1896/ Oil on Canvas/ 71 x 51 in./ Altadena Public Library, Altadena, California; Gray and white label on stretcher
Conservation History:
The painting appears to have been treated at least once, at which time it was re-stretched, cleaned, and small tears were repaired and inpainted.

The painting was examined in the current frame that is quite tight and restricts tensioning of the canvas. Therefore, the edges of the stretcher and canvas were not examined.

Construction and Condition:
The painting is made in oil on a commercially prepared canvas.

Secondary Support:
The commercial canvas is comprised of a wooden stretcher with metal Shattuck keys at each of four corners. A crossbar has been added that is made from an outer stretcher bar member and has an inscription in ink. This is upside down relative to the painting. Each stretcher bar member and the “crossbar” is 2 7/8 in W. It is likely that the stretcher is not original, given the presence of stretcher bar cracks in the paint layer that reflect a narrower profile stretcher (1-1/2 to 2 in W) at all four edges. The elements of the stretcher are fully extended with a slight gap at all miters. The stretcher members are also twisted so that the inner edges project backwards. The stretcher is therefore not stable.

Canvas:
The moderately fine weave linen was prepared with a white ground layer prior to being secured to the original stretcher. The edges of the canvas still retain the tacking margins that are prepared with a white ground.

It appears that the foldover edges may not be well secured to the current stretcher. This is most notable at the top and right sides, where the foldover is visible at the face of the painting. It is not clear whether the tacking holes are failing or if the canvas was never well secured to the current stretcher. Regardless, the canvas is currently poorly tensioned and sags with undulating horizontal rolls in the bottom half of the canvas.

Three small tears or punctures near the top of the canvas are repaired using a white canvas or canvas paper patch and wax or BEVA 371 adhesive. An additional puncture near the bottom center was prepared with wax on the reverse only. There may also be tears at the corners and at the foldover edges that are not visible given the current frame.

Ground and Paint Layer:
In general, the ground and paint layer appears well adhered to the canvas support. The composition is rendered using a fluid paint, and is relatively thinly applied. Slight rounded impasto is present that mimics the structure of the rocks and trees.
Mechanical cracks are present throughout the painting in an even distribution. There are mechanical cracks associate with the inner edge of the original stretcher and with the current crossbar that are more pronounced. In general, the mechanical cracks appear stable and do not need to be consolidated at this time.

Along the bottom edge there are active areas of lifting paint as well as old retouching using artist’s paint that appears to address past losses. The reworking of the painting is visible on close inspection. In the upper right corner in the sky along the right edge and top edge, there are passages of the sky that appear to have been repainted, again, possibly addressing prior areas of active flaking.

There are areas of past losses to the paint and ground that are associated with small tears. Small losses also occur at the intersection of mechanical cracks.

There is a scratch in the center of the sky through the clouds that appears only to involve the varnish layer.

**Surface Coatings:**
Examination under ultraviolet light indicates that there are residues of an earlier natural resin varnish that fluoresces yellow green. The current upper most varnish is relatively thick, moderately discolored and glossy. It does not fluoresce under ultraviolet illumination, and solvent testing was not done. It may be a synthetic varnish such as Paraloid B-72 or B-67, but given the discoloration, thickness and surface, it is more likely a polyurethane.

Retouchings are present that appear dark in ultraviolet light. These are primarily located where tears were repaired and are discrete. Additional retouching may also be present along the bottom edge and in the blue of the sky in the upper right corner at both the top and left edges. These are not visible under ultraviolet examination but have a slightly different quality that the clear original painting and should be examined further. (See discussion of active flaking above)

There is an overall surface coating of grime, including thicker layers of grime that are present on the top surfaces of the horizontal draws in the canvas. The reverse of the canvas, stretcher, and frame are also quite dusty.

**Recommendations for Treatment:**
It is recommended that the painting be treated to address structural and aesthetic concerns.

The areas of active flaking should be consolidated and the painting should be properly tensioned. Replacement of the existing stretcher may be recommended depending on further evaluation. The areas of past tear repairs should be reverse and done in a more sympathetic manner. Newer tears should also be repaired and reinforced. The painting most likely will not need lining, but it will need striplining to reinforce the tacking margins and allow for securing to the current or possibly a new stretcher.
The painting should be cleaned of surface grime. Removal of the overall varnish is an option that should be considered, given the overall appearance of the painting will be greatly improved. Losses would be filled and inpainted.

Given the current frame is not original and is quite tight, it may be that when the paintings is properly tensioned, it will be too big for the frame and require a new one.

**Treatment Proposal:**

1. Photograph before, during and after treatment.
2. Remove surface grime from the reverse of the canvas, stretcher and frame using vacuum and dry methods.
3. Remove labels from reverse of stretcher and frame. One label is glued to both stretcher and frame and would be damaged on unframing if not removed. Encapsulate labels to be secured to reverse of backing board.
4. Remove nails and offset clips from frame to allow painting to be unframed.
5. Evaluate condition of tacking edges and ability of stretcher to maintain planarity. Make recommendations for whether new stretcher should be made. *Revise estimate if needed.*
6. Consolidate areas of lifting paint using appropriate material.
7. Remove surface grime overall using aqueous solutions.
9. Evaluate possible presence of broad retouching underneath the current varnish layer along the bottom edge and in the sky along the top edge and right side. *Revise estimate if needed.*
10. Remove three old patches and areas of wax previously used to repair tears.
11. Realign tears and repair using refined tear mending techniques, combined with discrete local reinforcement.
12. Remove stretcher from painting in preparation for strip lining.
13. Reduce overall deformations of the canvas using light moisture, heat and pressure, as needed.
15. Secure strip lining to tacking edges.
16. Restretch canvas to existing or new stretcher.
17. Fill and texture areas of loss.
18. Varnish areas of fills locally. If painting has been cleaned of varnish, a new saturating varnish will be applied.
19. Inpaint losses and abrasions to reintegrate composition.

**Frame:**

20. Remove surface grime using dry methods.
22. Reframe painting using appropriate hardware, D-rings, and backing board.
23. Secure labels to reverse of new backing board.
24. Prepare final treatment report and process photography.

**Please note:** Proposal does not include varnish removal at this time. This will be reevaluated once the painting has been cleaned of grime.

Proposal does include replacing stretcher but does not include replacing frame.

It is possible that the current stretcher is too small for the frame, and thus the painting cannot retain its tension if returned to the current frame. If a new stretcher is made, it too will likely be too small for the frame.

Linnaea E. Saunders
Conservator of Painting

Please see accompanying Appendix of Conservation Diagrams and photos.