

Treatment and Housing for a Large-Scale Architectural Drawing of the Face of the Clocktower at the University of Texas at Austin

Introduction

The Campus Conservation Initiative (CCI), spearheaded by the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin and funded by the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost, aims to serve the conservation needs of several collections across campus, including those at the Briscoe Center for American History, the UT Libraries' Alexander Architectural Archives, and the Benson Latin American Collection.

One such collection item, a 1935 drawing (Figure 1) from the architectural firm of Paul Philippe Cret and Robert Leon White, depicting the face of the UT clock tower at half-scale, serves as an iconic image for the university and is frequently presented to tour groups and classes. As such, the Alexander Architectural Archives (AAA) identified its conservation treatment and construction of new a housing as high priorities.

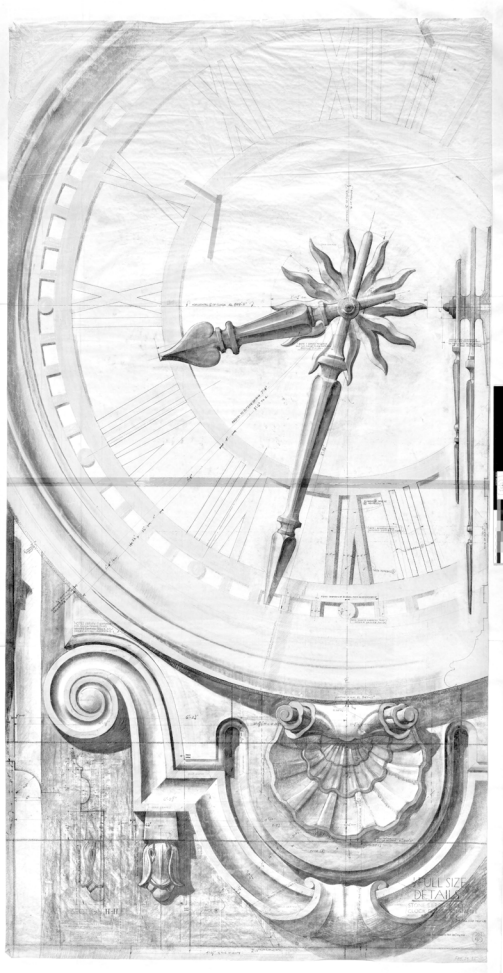


Figure 1: University of Texas. Comm. 282 sheet #99. Main building and library extension. Clock face – 1/2 full size details stone & bronze detail clock dial & ornament below clock (before treatment), Feb. 23, 1935. Charcoal, pastel, colored pencil, and graphite pencil on transparent paper, 105 1/2 x 54 1/4 in. University of Texas Buildings Collection, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin. Image Credit: Pete Smith.

The thinness, fragility, and reactivity of the tracing paper were just a few of the concerns when planning for treatment, but the large scale of the drawing, 105 1/2 x 54 1/4 in., was the biggest challenge in the design and construction of a custom housing. It became clear that this project would be highly collaborative and call upon the expertise of multiple colleagues across the campus.

Treatment

The predominant concern necessitating treatment was the numerous campaigns of tape applied to the recto and verso of the drawing.

Rubber-based adhesives from tapes, applied to the central join of the two sheets (Figure 2) and upper right corner, had caused dark yellow staining, and more modern pressure-sensitive tapes had been applied where the rubber-based ones had failed.

Additionally, disfiguring glassine tapes had been applied to the upper left of the clock's dial.

Treatment included the removal of all tapes and adhesives, stain reduction, minor retouching, tear mending, and local humidification and flattening of select creases.

After 152 hours of treatment, the physical and chemical stability, as well as the aesthetics of the drawing, were much improved.

Housing

Consultations and conversations with the Ransom Center's chief preparator of exhibitions services, the assistant director of stewardship for UT libraries, and several colleagues at the AAA informed the decision to construct a housing at the Ransom Center, as opposed to outsourcing the construction of a custom frame package and glazing, which would have been prohibitively expensive (>\$10,000).

The goal was to create a clean, presentable package that could be supported by two people, moved flat or on its side into and out of various buildings on campus, and be easily inserted into a frame in the future, if desired. With the construction of several small-scale mock-ups, the design went through several iterations of revision. The final housing includes a rigid backing board, a deep window mat, and cover panels secured with magnets and fabric straps (Figures 3 and 4).

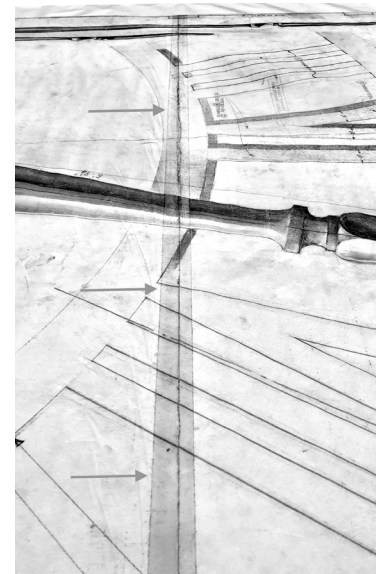


Figure 2: The before treatment image shows the dark yellow staining associated with the pressure-sensitive tape that was applied across the center to join the two sheets.

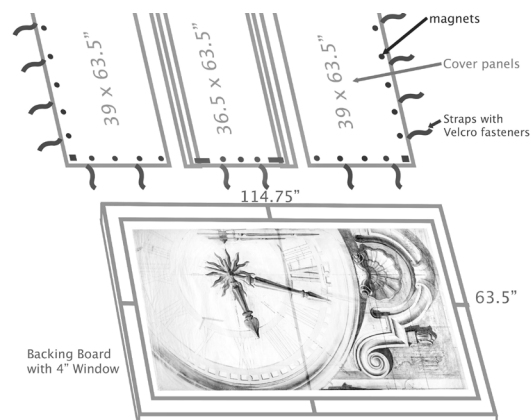


Figure 3: The overall design of the housing includes a rigid backing board, a window mat, and three cover panels, secured to the backing board with magnets and straps with Velcro fasteners.

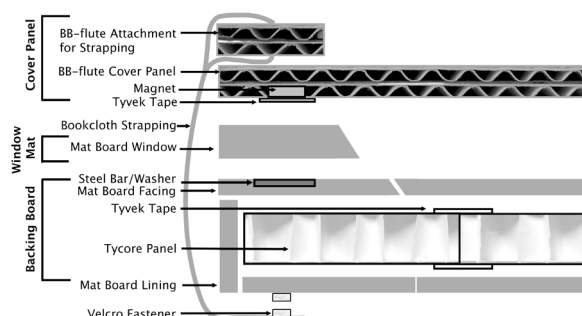


Figure 4: The diagram of the components of the backing board, the window mat, and the cover panels in cross section.

Rachel Mochon, CCI paper conservator, worked with the technicians in the Preservation & Conservation Division to cut materials for the housing on the GUNNAR AiOX mat-cutting machine.

The precision of the AiOX was essential. Due to the large dimensions of the drawing, every layer of the housing construction was composed of smaller pieces of material that had to be cut and seamed. Slots were cut in the mat board facing to embed steel bars that served as anchors for the magnets in the cover panels (see Figure 4).

Kaeley Ferguson, graduate intern in book conservation, assisted Rachel with the physical construction of the housing, which involved the meticulous placement of large sheets of glue-covered mat board (Figure 5). Once complete, a handling guide was written to demonstrate appropriate opening and closure of the housing (Figure 6). Overall consultation, design, and construction totaled 139 hours. The total cost of materials (including shipping and extra) was approximately \$2,500.



Figure 5: Kaeley Ferguson (left), graduate intern in book conservation, and Rachel Mochon (right), CCI paper conservator, line the backing board with pieces of mat board cut with beveled edges and slots to embed hardware. Image Credit: Ellen Cunningham-Kruppa.



Figure 6: Brianna Warren (left), Preservation Technician, and Rachel Mochon (right), CCI Paper Conservator, demonstrate appropriate handling of the housing. Image Credit: Chloe Gise.

Digitization, Transportation, and Collaboration

The drawing and its housing will be transported back to the Collections Deposit Library (CDL), where the AAA is temporarily storing their collections, while Battle Hall, their primary repository, undergoes renovations. The drawing will not be transported to CDL in its new housing because of the risks of maneuvering the board into the freight elevator at the Ransom Center. The drawing, currently in two separate sheets, will be transported in a rigid portfolio half the size of the overall housing. Upon arrival, the drawing will be hinged to the backing board on site.

Lastly, the work was digitized at the Ransom Center by photographer Pete Smith, in the hopes of producing an exhibition facsimile and reproductions (posters) in an effort to disseminate this image as a collaborative achievement for the Campus Conservation Initiative and the university as a whole.

Acknowledgements

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