



WORLD
MONUMENTS
FUND

The New York Studio School *of* Drawing, Painting and Sculpture

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

PROJECT OVERVIEW





The school's entrance foyer

A BRIEF HISTORY

The New York Studio School occupies a group of four mid-nineteenth-century townhouses at 8, 10, 12, and 14 West 8th Street in New York City's Greenwich Village, each with a carriage house behind it opening onto MacDougal Alley. The properties were acquired and combined from 1907 to 1929 by sculptor and art patron Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, the eldest surviving daughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt II (1872–1942), as her salon and an artist studio space for herself and numerous fellow artists. Whitney's first purchase was the carriage house behind #8 in 1907, a three-story building with a stable below and hayloft above, where she established her personal studio. She bought the townhouse in front of it in 1913, followed by #10 in 1923 and #14 in 1925.

In 1929, in order to consolidate the complex into a whole and create the Whitney Museum of American Art, she purchased #12 from sculptor Daniel Chester French. French had first introduced her to 8th Street and maintained his own studio next to hers from 1913 on. The Whitney Museum opened in 1931 and operated at the site until 1954.

When Whitney bought the townhouse at #8, she retained architect Grosvenor Atterbury to redesign it and connect it to her carriage-house studio. Atterbury built an enclosed stairway from the third floor of the townhouse to the second floor of the studio in the courtyard between the two buildings, added a copper-clad enclosed balcony to the courtyard wall of the studio, and a large north-facing skylight. In 1917 Whitney commissioned her close friend, artist Robert Winthrop Chanler (1872–1930), to decorate the interior. Chanler designed an intricately detailed room, with a fantastic, polychrome ornamental plaster ceiling and 20-foot-tall bronze and plaster chimney. Painted standing screens and stained glass windows (now removed but accessible in private collections) completed the ensemble. It was completed in 1923. Whitney used the studio, along with another studio at her country estate in Old Westbury, Long Island, until her death in 1942. The Greenwich Village studio was her most private space.

When the Whitney Museum of American Art moved to new quarters in 1954, the complex of conjoined townhouses was sold to the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), which occupied it until 1967. At some point during the NRPA's tenure, the original finishes of the studio's ceiling and fireplace were completely obscured by several layers of white paint. During that period, Whitney's studio was rented to Herbert Matter, a photographer. Seeking to establish an art-education alternative to Pratt Institute, Matter's wife Mercedes and a group of artists purchased the complex in 1967 to establish the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture.

Due to its significance as the original home of the Whitney Museum, its association with Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, and the extraordinary work of Robert Chanler, the New York Studio School was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1989. The accompanying report identifies the school's most significant original features as the façade, entry foyer, and the Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Studio. A Historic Structure Report on the studio was completed by preservationist Wesley Haynes for Li/Saltzman Architects in 1993. A master plan for the entire school was undertaken by architects Diane Lewis and James Rossant in 2003.

Located in the heart of the National Register and New York City-designated Greenwich Village Historic District, the New York Studio School is part of the rich bohemian and artistic history that made the neighborhood famous throughout the twentieth century.

WMF AND THE NEW YORK STUDIO SCHOOL

Although the New York Studio School and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's studio specifically were the subjects of much study and attention, the original polychrome appearance of the studio as completed by Robert Chanler remained largely unknown. WMF became involved in 2005, when Morris Hylton III, a WMF staff member—at the time a professor at the School of Visual Arts—became interested in having the interior of the New York Studio School be the focus of student research and interpretation. Hylton and a group of eight third-year students (collectively named 1107 Design) studied the various elements of the school's interiors, including public spaces, administrative areas, studios, lecture spaces, and the Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Studio. The group developed individual plans for each designated area and combined their work into a larger report on potential ways to improve presentation and functionality of the interior spaces. Selected elements of their work were incorporated into the aforementioned Lewis/Rossant Master Plan for the school, which was completed in March 2006.

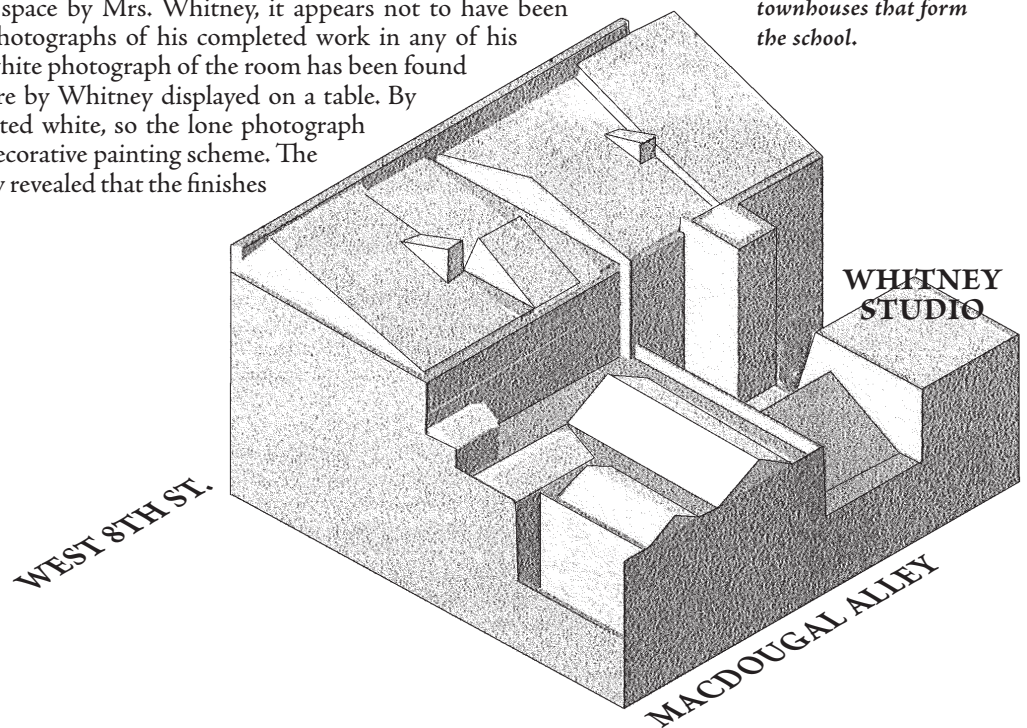
In May, 2008, a small portion of the ornamental ceiling in the Whitney Studio collapsed, creating concerns about public safety and the stability of the ceiling as a whole. In spring 2009, WMF entered into a partnership with the University of Pennsylvania's Architectural Conservation Laboratory and Integrated Conservation Resources, a conservation firm in New York, to conduct a conservation survey, involving documentation, analysis, and testing of the entire decorative ceiling in the studio, as well as a limited number of samples from the fireplace and chimney. WMF coordinated the work with the New York Studio School to minimize disruption to classes, student exhibitions, and critiques. Phase one of the project focused on the stabilization of the area of ceiling that had collapsed. In a subsequent phase of study, Lauren Vollono Drapala, a post-graduate research associate from the University of Pennsylvania supervised by Professor Frank Matero, undertook a conservation study of the decorative finishes of the ceiling. Completed in summer 2010, Ms. Drapala produced technical specifications for the treatment of the ceiling and a conjectural mockup of its original appearance based on paint analysis. The conservation principles used for this project included retention of as much historic fabric in situ as possible in order to retain evidence of the elaborate original finishes.

In October 2011, WMF included the New York Studio School on the 2012 World Monuments Watch to assist the school in creating national and international awareness of its significance and conservation needs.

To complement the ceiling survey and complete the analysis of the studio, WMF partnered with the New York University Institute of Fine Arts in fall 2012 to undertake a thorough study of the fireplace and chimney. Field analysis was executed by a group of four NYU graduate conservation students and one Columbia University graduate student in historic preservation. They conducted work onsite in January and March of 2013, under the direction and supervision of Professor Michele Marincola, Sherman Fairchild Chairman and Professor of Conservation at the Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts, and building conservator Mary Jablonski. Laboratory analysis of the samples taken in the field was performed at the NYU Conservation Laboratory. At the same time, a research paper on Robert Chanler's work in the studio was undertaken by Elizabeth Frasco, an art history graduate student at the Institute of Fine Arts.

The research underscored the lack of documentation about the appearance of the studio. Perhaps due to the extremely personal use of the space by Mrs. Whitney, it appears not to have been photographed. Chanler did not include photographs of his completed work in any of his publications; only one historic black-and-white photograph of the room has been found to date, showing a maquette for a sculpture by Whitney displayed on a table. By that time the room had already been painted white, so the lone photograph provides no information about Chanler's decorative painting scheme. The surface analysis of the fireplace and chimney revealed that the finishes

An isometric projection of the four conjoined townhouses that form the school.





Layers of white paint were removed from a section of the fireplace, revealing Chanler's original finishes

used on both plaster and bronze elements were similar to those of the ceiling. But in a composition as varied and idiosyncratic as Chanler's design, the way these colors and finishes varied and actually came together on the fireplace, chimney, and ceiling—producing the actual appearance and impact of the entirety—can only be conjectured for lack of photographic documentation.

The question therefore remains: what did the room look like when Chanler completed it in 1923? Removing multiple layers of white paint from the entire ceiling and fireplace to reveal the Chanler surfaces is impractical, if not impossible. The completed research informs decisions about appropriate treatment of the surfaces and to what extent assumptions can be made about potential restoration and interpretation of the room. WMF's interest has been to assist the New York Studio School in determining the best ways to represent the legacy of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Robert Chanler, and the role the studio played in motivating Mrs. Whitney to create the Whitney Museum within these Greenwich Village rooms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WMF is grateful for the time spent and discoveries made by many people over the course of the project. Morris Hylton III and his 1107 Design group of students from the School of Visual Arts launched WMF's involvement with their analysis of the entire group of buildings that make up the facility, which put the studio in context. Frank Matero of the University of Pennsylvania and Glenn Boornazian of Integrated Conservation Resources undertook careful analysis of the plaster ceiling, which led to the first in-depth analysis of the painted finishes on the ceiling by Lauren Vollono Drapala. Michele Marincola of the Conservation Center of the NYU Institute of Fine Arts and Mary Jablonski of Jablonski Building Conservation, along with NYU graduate students Megan Randall, Kari Rayner, Jessica Walthew, and Elizabeth Frasco and Columbia University graduate student Alafia Akhtar, completed a similar analysis of the painted finishes on the fireplace and chimney. Jablonski Building Conservation additionally executed a one-foot-square reveal on the fireplace, exposing the original finishes as Chanler left them.

None of this would have been possible without the support and access to the building provided by the New York Studio School's board and management, especially Graham Nickson, Dean; Constance Evans, Director of Resource Development; and Jason Grodsky, Building and Studio Manager. Morris Hylton and Amy Freitag—both former WMF staff—oversaw critical elements of WMF's work at the New York Studio School. Frank Sanchis, currently WMF's Program Director for the United States, has led these recent efforts. Special thanks go to Kristen Ahye and Ken Feisel for contributions in editing and designing the publication.