

**“LIKE LOOKING FOR GOLD”:  
THE WORKSHOP OF ERNEST LONANO AND THE CREATION OF THE  
RE-ENVISIONED DRESS**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in American Material Culture

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the design and labor of the Winterthur Museum through re-envisioned dresses crafted by the workshop of Ernest LoNano. Re-envisioned dresses are objects that began as eighteenth-century gowns, were purchased in the twentieth century, and were then disassembled, reassembled as useable lengths, and used to upholster antique furniture. Examples of these objects can be found at the Winterthur Museum, commissioned by Henry Francis du Pont and brought to life by the workshop of Ernest LoNano. They are composite objects, a proving ground for the long life of textiles and the far-reaching narratives they contain. This thesis applies Henry Glassie's framework of creation, communication, and consumption to the histories of re-envisioned dresses at Winterthur, inverting the typical discussion of material culture by beginning with the objects themselves, moving to a discussion of the craftspeople, then a consideration of the patron, and finally how these systems work together in the creation of the Colonial Revival. Previous examinations of du Pont's aesthetic place him firmly in control of Winterthur's décor; the objects, records, and correspondences, however, indicate LoNano and his workshop played an active role in design. This research utilizes re-envisioned dresses as an avenue to understand this collaborative practice.

*Consider the wonder of a re-envisioned dress. It is a thing of sumptuous textiles, spun from the cocoon of a moth. The echo of the force of the maker's hand pulling at the fibers through a rusted nail. Its moment of transformation from dress to furniture, where it stood in transitioning identity, lingers in the forgotten engagante. Blue wax lines remember its time in the workshop when it was pieced back together. The fronting seems under investigation still, half-unpleated and waiting. The perfectly matched seams, balanced pattern, and taut form speak of the scheme in the craftsman's mind. The split silk, meticulously repaired with needle-woven precision, hints of subsequent travail and care. The final sofa, placed in a public room and perceived by guests and staff alike, joins all in du Pont's taste and lifestyle. The re-envisioned dress embodies the long life of textiles. It plucks an instant out of a winding history of reuse. It materializes its purchaser's desire for tangible wealth, and it awaits use as a tool to demonstrate the resulting taste to others.*

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“The figure of the silent Craftsman who is struck down when asked to tell what he does or how he does it is largely a fiction sustained by those who have a vested interest in securing an academic monopoly over the spoken and written word.”<sup>1</sup>*

Salvatore, Joe, and the rest of the team approached the mansion, the rumble of the Rolls Royce disappearing behind them. The building loomed above, the smell of fresh paint and the presence of antique finishes hinting at a long-accepted contradiction. Entering through the glittering glass of the conservatory, they were greeted by Elijah, who walked them through the bustling home. They passed carpenters loudly affixing eighteenth-century mantles to freshly paneled walls, painters splashing the rooms with hues of blue and yellow, and staff ensuring the smooth co-existence of the creators. Elijah abruptly stopped in their studio of the day, the workshop of Ernest LoNano, where they were to create re-envisioned dresses.

Re-envisioned dresses are objects that began as eighteenth-century gowns, were purchased in the twentieth century, and were then disassembled, reassembled as useable lengths, and used to upholster antique furniture. Examples of these objects can be found at the Winterthur Museum, commissioned by Henry Francis du Pont and brought to life by the workshop of Ernest LoNano. They are composite objects, a

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 109.

proving ground for the long life of textiles and the far-reaching narratives they contain. Markers of their existence are often subtle, from short daybook entries reading “Feb. 14, 1946 - Louis XV Broche Dress - E. LoNano - 850” to the persistent crease of a hemline found in the arm of an easy chair.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1 Bodice, engagantes, and settee upholstery derived from a single dress. Echoes of the dress can be found in the wings of the settee, where a crease of the center front remains in the textile. Winterthur, 1958.1877. Settee; Boston; 1760-1775; Mahogany; Maple, soft; Pine, white; Silk; OW at arms; OD at feet. H (seat) 16.25 in. (41.3 cm); W (wings) 56.5 in. (143.5 cm); W (seat front) 54.25 in. (137.8 cm); W (seat back) 50 in. (127 cm); W (feet) 56.375 in. (143.2 cm); D (seat) 22.625 in. (57.5 cm).

In his 1999 work *Material Culture*, Henry Glassie introduced the framework of creation, communication, and consumption as three classes “that cumulatively

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<sup>2</sup> This is the first recorded dress Henry Francis purchased for the house. It has a green check mark next to it and is not crossed out in pencil which likely indicates that it was used. Winterthur Textile Archive, Fabrics 1952, 69WC1, WC3.

recapitulate the life history of [an] artifact.”<sup>3</sup> This thesis applies Glassie’s framework to the histories of re-envisioned dresses at Winterthur, inverting the typical discussion of material culture by beginning with the objects themselves, moving to a discussion of the craftspeople, then a consideration of the patron, and finally how these systems work together in the creation of the Colonial Revival. Within Glassie’s framework, the idea of creation overlaps with the specific narratives of the re-envisioned dresses as well as the structure of the LoNano workshop. Creation is woven through Chapters Two and Three, which explore the process of crafting a re-envisioned dress and the people involved in the physical labor. Chapter Two focuses on the objects’ materiality, why they came into being, how they were made, and how to identify them. Chapter Three provides insight into the workshop of Ernest LoNano, delving into the three generations that helmed the operation, other workers employed by the LoNanos, and the networks to which the workshop was connected.

The workshop of Ernest LoNano was deeply entangled in the Colonial Revival, a design aesthetic that draws on early American design motifs, which forged LoNano’s connection with Henry Francis du Pont. Chapter Four discusses du Pont’s Delaware residence, Winterthur, and how LoNano helped shape its iconic design. This section discusses Glassie’s concept of communication, where the intention of the creator is mixed with the motivation of the patron, creating an object that evidences inter-personal exchange.<sup>4</sup> Chapter Five addresses the relationship between the workshop of Ernest LoNano, re-envisioned dresses, and du Pont’s Winterthur in the

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 48.

<sup>4</sup> Glassie, *Material Culture*, 55.

face of the larger Colonial Revival movement through Glassie’s final framing concept of consumption.<sup>5</sup> Like creation, consumption “collects contexts in which the means of the artifact consolidate and expand,” allowing one to move beyond LoNano and du Pont and think critically about the larger social systems through which these objects circulate.

This thesis is a discussion of the creation of Winterthur through the objects that decorate its halls and the craftspeople who brought them into existence. Because this research foregrounds the narrative of workers, it begins with the objects they made and their stories before discussing the patron and the role these objects play in his home. This is an intentional inversion of the typical Winterthur narrative; this structure strives to combat the trope of the silent craftsman.<sup>6</sup> Like excavating a site, undressing, or removing upholstery, this framework moves from the outside in, peeling back the layers of the object to reveal the origin of its creation and function.

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<sup>5</sup> Glassie, *Material Culture*, 57.

<sup>6</sup> Glenn Adamson, *Craft: An American History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

## Chapter 2

### CREATION: A DRESS BY ANY OTHER NAME

*“All objects are simultaneously sets of parts and parts of sets.”<sup>7</sup>*

Re-envisioned dresses contain multitudes. They encompass the stories of the designers and weavers of the fabric, the merchants and laborers who made their global circulation possible, the mantua makers who transformed them into dresses, the clients who purchased and wore the dresses, the descendants and collectors who preserved them, the dealers who obtained them hundreds of years later, the upholsterers and designers who bought them with the intent of reinvention, the craftspeople who turned the dresses into flat textiles, the upholsterers who then used the textiles as upholstery, the patron who lived with the furniture, the museum guests and professionals who interact with them today; the network is endless. This thesis focuses on these objects and a subset of their winding narrative: the craftspeople who made these objects and the man who commissioned them. This chapter will define re-envisioned dresses, discuss their role in the study of textiles, and examine a specific dress for telltale markers.

Formerly referred to as ex-dresses, dead dresses, and murdered dresses, these objects have garnered a reputation for object-destructive violence. Scholars and enthusiasts of dress history often have a negative, knee-jerk reaction towards this specific process of reuse. When reading lines such as “out of the pink skirt, which I have sent out under separate cover, we can make the valance and curtains,”<sup>8</sup> there is a

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<sup>7</sup> Glassie, *Material Culture*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest LoNano, letter to John M. Graham, August 21, 1951.

belief that these objects were created with malicious intent, destruction of the sacred remnants of dress history.<sup>9</sup> However, they are in fact still valuable as dress objects, legacies of the long lives of textiles and the expansive definition of dress. A dress doesn't lose its classification as clothing when it changes forms. Rather, these repurposed garments showcase a continuation of textile artistry created by immigrant labor. Though the textile is now draped over a chair frame rather than panniers, its place in dress history is not lost.

These objects exist in this space of change and ingenuity, annotating the stories of their makers. Because they were designed for display and not historical accuracy and because many of them are now removed from the furniture they upholstered, it is possible to examine the techniques of the people who made them, from fiber to dress to upholstered sofa.<sup>10</sup> Their material markers can help interpret the skill of the laborers who created them, revealing histories that shape how scholars think about “an

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<sup>9</sup> The assumption that these dresses were thoughtlessly destroyed assumes that LoNano was not aware of the historical importance of the textiles. This was not the case. LoNano was aware of dwindling fabric availability and the importance of the preservation of antiques. When considering textiles at Colonial Williamsburg, LoNano stated that they were “documents of which to date I have not found any duplicate of, therefore the importance of conserving them is very very important.” Ernest LoNano, letter to Mrs. D. Geiger, May 17, 1945.

<sup>10</sup> Re-envisioned dresses act as a bridge between the materiality of furniture and dress textiles. In the eighteenth century, much like today, textiles used for upholstery differed from those used for garments. Upholstery fabric tended to be heavier and more generic in design (often with larger scale motifs), allowing the textile to withstand the damage of both use and changing fashions. In contrast, dress fabric for the elite was often more delicate and featured more specific, smaller scale patterns, resulting in many brocaded silks used for garments. By placing eighteenth century dress fabric on furniture frames, the creators craft an object with materials that are temporally correct, but “wrong” in their usage.

American aesthetic” in the Colonial Revival. This aesthetic is the product of “an attitude or mental process of remembering and maintaining the past” that decades of Americans have both consciously and latently crafted.<sup>11</sup> The workshop of Ernest LoNano fostered this aesthetic through the production of re-envisioned dresses.

In the 1940s Ernest LoNano lamented that “fabrics are like looking for gold at present, there is so little to see.”<sup>12</sup> During this period, the supply of uncut antique lengths dwindled thanks to increased demand, leaving those that were participating in the Colonial Revival in search of supply. Re-envisioned dresses proved to be an effective answer, as sacque back gowns, a version of popular mid-eighteenth century dress construction that pleated yards of fabric together at the center back, giving the distinctive style its name, could yield up to thirty yards of fabric once disassembled. The textiles used in sacque backs were valuable not just in quantity, but also in quality. Along with robe a la anglaise and polonaise, sacques were worn by the upper class, with the wealthy consuming dresses in exquisite silk damasks and brocades. In the eighteenth century, plain silks “cost between 2 shillings and 8 shillings per yard,” a draw loom woven pattern “almost doubled the price” and the addition of precious metal threads only drove the price up further.<sup>13</sup> Extant gowns and diaries reveal that

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Guy Wilson, Eyring, Shaun, Marotta, Kenny, *Re-Creating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006). 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ernest LoNano, letter to Henry Francis du Pont, February 14, 1946. This comment was made shortly after LoNano offered the first dress to be used as upholstery to du Pont.

<sup>13</sup> Natalie Rothstein, *Silk Designs of the Eighteen Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990). 22. For context, a washwoman would make about thirty shillings annually. Edward Young, *Labor in Europe and America a Special Report on the Rates*

dresses were often treated with reverence from the eighteenth century to today – through material markers such as careful needle-woven repairs that employ threads matching both the warp and the weft colors. LoNano sought out these dresses not only for their yardage but also because the material was desirable for fashionable Colonial Revival interiors, creating as little waste as possible.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Golden Sofa: An Object Study**

Though there are dozens of re-envisioned dresses in the collection, this section will examine the Port Royal Hall re-envisioned dress to illustrate the workshop's process of creation. This object originally began as a twenty-two inch wide length of silk damask; twenty fragments remain, ranging from a seventy-five-inch panel used to upholster the back of the sofa to a hazardous strip of piping studded with rusted nails.

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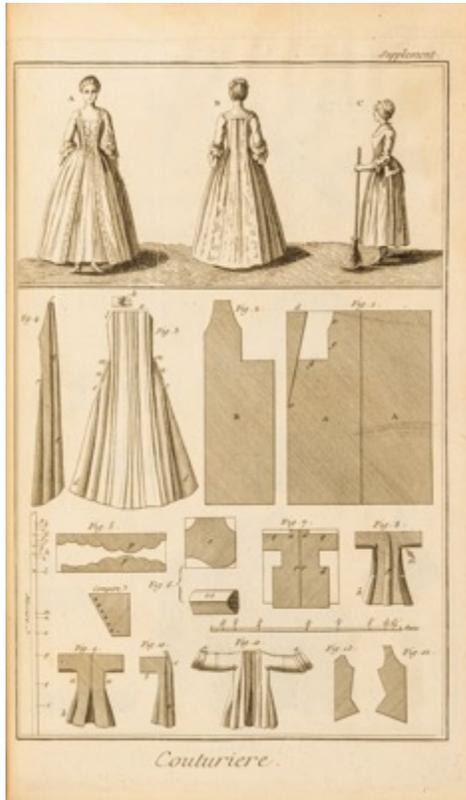
*of Wages, the Cost of Subsistence, and the Condition of the Working Classes in Great Britain, Germany, France, Belgium ... Also in the United States and British America* (Philadelphia: George, 1875).

<sup>14</sup> Henry Francis du Pont, letter to Ernest LoNano, September 30, 1933.



Figure 2 A fragmented re-envisioned dress from the Winterthur collection. Some remnants, like the sleeves, were not incorporated in the furniture, while others, like the skirt, were used to upholster the sofa. All were removed from the sofa frame in 1987. Winterthur, 1960.1072. Sofa; Philadelphia; 1765-1780; Mahogany; Pine, yellow; Wood; Silk; Cotton; 39.5 (H), 93 (W), 35.5 (D). Image courtesy of author.

When combined, the textiles account for approximately thirteen yards of fabric with a width of twenty-two inches. LoNano’s workshop used sacque back gowns for their upholstery and when considering the patterning of these dresses there was undoubtedly more fabric, though it was likely concentrated in the bodice and rendered unusable. For example, Barbara Johnson’s 1746 dress diary illustrates that a long sacque required between fifteen and eighteen yards and Diderot’s “Couturiere” illustration shows that much of this fabric was concentrated in the center back (Figure



3).<sup>15</sup> Sacque backs were typically made of eight to nine panels of facing fabric, five or six in the gown, and three or four used in the petticoat. These panels were approximately sixty inches in length, and their width varied based on location of production, but was typically around twenty to twenty-five inches. In addition, the robings or ruffles on the front of this gown also contained salvageable yardage, up to three yards depending on the techniques employed.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 3 A pattern demonstrating the construction of a mid-eighteenth-century sacque back gown. Figure 3 within the figure illustrates the abundant pleating found in the center back. *Recueil de Planches sur les Sciences, les Arts Liberaux, et les Arts Mechaniques: Avec leur Explication*. Paris, 1762-1772 “Couturiere”. Image courtesy of Winterthur Library.

When deciphering re-envisioned dresses, it is important to understand the trajectory of the object in order to understand the labor that went into its creation. The

<sup>15</sup> Serena Dyer, “Barbara Johnson’s Album: Material Literacy and Consumer Practice, 1746-1823,” *J ECS Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42, no. 3 (2019): 263–82.

<sup>16</sup> Ernest LoNano, letter to Henry Francis du Pont, February 7, 1946. “In the Loius XV broche dress there are 17 yards of the broche in large pieces and 3 yards of it in the ruffle.”

dress in question was a five-panel sacque, which would have been created by a mantua maker, likely in England or France.<sup>17</sup> After this dress was made in the early to mid-eighteenth century, it was edited several times. Evidence of alterations of the sleeves in the eighteenth century, as well as the hem in the nineteenth or twentieth century is present in the scraps (Figures 4, 6, and 7). Additionally, evidence remains of use as fancy dress in the nineteenth or twentieth century with the dropped hemline and the presence of sweat stains in the armpits of the sleeves.



Figure 4 Sleeves from the re-envisioned dress that became the Port Royal Hall sofa. Alterations can be seen in stitch campaigns that re-set the sleeves as well as adapted ornaments. Winterthur, 1969.7854.017. Textile; 1725-1750; silk, linen; 20.75 inches. Image courtesy of author.

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<sup>17</sup> The Golden Sofa dress was made with five panels in the dress, and three in the petticoat. The Watteau pleat remnant is clearly center back, and it is a single width which would have been flanked on either side with adjoining pleats. If it were a six-panel dress, there would be a double-wide width with a seam in the middle making the center back. Both versions of this patterning contain immense amounts of expensive textiles, there is just about a yard and a half less in the five-panel dress.

After its use as a fancy dress, the garment was then purchased either by du Pont or LoNano as upholstery fabric. There is not a daybook entry that is an obvious match for the dress, but there is a record of many dresses entering the collection.<sup>18</sup> Choosing a dress or other upholstery fabric was a collaborative process between du Pont and LoNano. The pair would often exchange ideas about color, light, and material, with du Pont valuing LoNano's opinion. This specific dress was especially important as it was to upholster a sofa to be used either in Port Royal Hall or the Chinese Parlor, one space greeting visitors as they entered the house and the other a frequently used entertainment space. Through its introduction to the institution, the object was symbolically transformed from dress to available yardage.

After the dress was purchased and its purpose was determined, it was sent to LoNano's workshop in New York or to the informal workshop in Delaware where it was transformed.<sup>19</sup> The Golden Dress entered the collection pre-1942, meaning it was likely stripped and recovered in the Chinese Parlor, the room it was designed to reside in.<sup>20</sup> Very broadly, the tasks of cutting were relegated to men and the jobs of piecing

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<sup>18</sup> Du Pont kept meticulous daybooks of his purchases for Winterthur. They reflect his generous spending on antiques, as well as what objects he valued. Some objects garnered long descriptions, while others were curt, like "blue silk." These shorter entries make it difficult to triangulate some objects with their original purchase.

<sup>19</sup> This will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter, but the "informal workshop" in Delaware refers to the actual Winterthur house. Before the house became a museum open to the public, LoNano and his employees worked in the rooms the furniture was destined for.

<sup>20</sup> Winterthur registration files, 1960.1072. This sofa was later re-worked several times, including a 1987 re-re-upholstery by J. H. Thorp & Co.

and sewing were sent to the women.<sup>21</sup> This process was unique for each garment, as the dresses were bespoke and required specialized disassembly. Additionally, they were reconstructing the textiles into lengths for different dimensions of furniture each time. The workshop paid close attention to the quality of the textile, and where it had endured the most visible wear. Relatively unscathed fabric from the Watteau pleats (wide, loose pleats in the back of the gown) were used in the seat back while more damaged portions, like the mended spot mentioned earlier, appear in less conspicuous places like the underside of the sofa's wings. Additionally, they employed careful construction techniques, with beautifully pattern-matched seams and bias piping. Re-envisioned dresses such as this example demonstrate the carefully executed twentieth-century craftsmanship that made the aesthetics of the Colonial Revival possible.

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<sup>21</sup> Du Pont paid the market cost of the materials, the wages of the laborers, and between a 15% and 25% commission, depending on the year. The salaries of the workshop's employees were also dependent on du Pont and his feelings about his overall finances. In 1931 men were paid \$13.00 per day and women \$7.26; in 1935 those rates dropped to \$9.00 and \$4.50 respectively. There were also negotiations of laborers' wages at Colonial Williamsburg. "I wish to advise you that since the last charge of October 1948 there has been quite an increase in labor costs. These increases have amounted to between 13% and 16% for each year since then, which is practically a 50% increase since 1948." Ernest LoNano, letter to Elanor L. Duncan, December 27, 1951. In 1939, du Pont negotiated lower wages because the depression was affecting his finances.



Figure 5 The completed upholstery of the Port Royal Hall sofa, pre-1987. Winterthur, 1960.1072. Sofa; Philadelphia; 1765-1780; Mahogany; Pine, yellow; Wood; Silk; Cotton; 39.5 (H), 93 (W), 35.5 (D).

These thoughtfully constructed pieces are evidence of the haptic knowledge possessed by the workshop. Few written records remain of these individuals, but their careful work is a testament to their participation in and contribution to the Colonial Revival. Additionally, it illustrates their participation in the movement for financial benefit. In some instances, such as the Colonial Williamsburg workshop, they would use eighteenth-century techniques in their reupholstery, whereas in other contexts, such as Winterthur, they would use twentieth-century techniques. This diversity in craft technique demonstrates an ability to code-switch between consumers who value it as a demonstration of historic craft and others who value the aesthetic and the environment it brings. Both styles of craft are valid and important for study as they kept the workshop fiscally solvent, and thus participating in tastemaking.

## Identifying a Re-Envisioned Dress

Re-envisioned dresses contain unique markers that indicate to museum professionals their long history and are identifiable, even if not labeled, within a collection. Much of the groundwork to identify re-envisioned dresses at Winterthur was done by Linda Eaton and others; a storage box labeled “Upholstery Scraps” in Costume Storage contains many of the previously identified dresses.<sup>22</sup> These examples are fairly self-explanatory as their remnants contain obvious markers like sleeves or engantes. However, it is possible to identify re-envisioned dresses without such obvious remnants. Hemlines are often easy to spot – they are evidenced by an unrelenting crease that tends to show wear and soiling concentrated toward the crease, heavier on one side, and gradually dissipating. There is also often evidence of water damage as the hem is the part of the dress most likely to encounter heavy moisture as it drags along the ground. In addition, it is often easy to identify where the center-front of the garment once was, as it bears sharp remnants of creases and cuts that extend across the bias of the fabric. Center front is often accompanied by other thread campaigns, frequently the attaching of the robings down the center of the garment. Center back is also possible to identify, as it typically bears remnants of a Watteau back, characterized by a series of loose box pleats. Sometimes it is possible to find remnants of pocket slits, simply an opening in the fabric at the hip to provide access to tie-on pockets worn beneath the dress. Frequent access required

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<sup>22</sup> Prior to this thesis, these objects were labeled ex-dresses in the Winterthur collection. Search terms to find re-envisioned dresses in the database include “ex-dress” and “ex dress.”

reinforcement at the corner. (See Appendix D for an info-graphic to aid in the identification of re-envisioned dresses).



Figure 6 An example of a Watteau pleat. This would have been in the center back of the garment, resting around the wearer's shoulder blades. Winterthur, 1969.7854. Textile; 1725-1750; silk, linen. Image courtesy of author.



Figure 7 Examples of remnants with evidence of an adjusted hemline. This adjustment is particularly evident in the fragments on the far left and right; the left is folded to the later hem, and right to the original. 1969.7854, textile fragments, 1725-1750. Winterthur, 1969.7854. Textile; 1725-1750; silk, linen. Image courtesy of author.

These objects remember the hand of their makers, the careful dexterity of a needle-woven repair, the confident cut of a discarded sleeve, the precision of a perfectly matched pattern. They hold “in form and ornament the plans that preceded them and the decisions committed in their making.”<sup>23</sup> They are complex material markers of the long lives of textiles and those who shape them.

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<sup>23</sup> Glassie, *Material Culture*, 42.

### Chapter 3

#### CREATION: THE WORKSHOP OF ERNEST LONANO

*“The history of most people, preserved in unwritten artifacts, escapes into oblivion.”<sup>24</sup>*



These complex materials were created by the workshop of Ernest LoNano, which was active from 1912 through the 1980s, and stewarded by three generations of family patriarchs - Ernest LoNano Senior, Ernest LoNano II, and Ernest “Steve” Steven LoNano. The workshop was advertised as a “Decorators Counsel,” focusing mainly on the reupholstery of antiques while also providing restoration and decoration services for broader objects.<sup>25</sup> Their advertisements assured that “collectors and other individuals who are desirous of expressing personal taste, or an idea, [would] benefit by a

Figure 8 Image of Ernest S. LoNano II from his obituary in the New York Times, 1958.

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<sup>24</sup> Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). 44.

<sup>25</sup> There are references to non-dress items at Colonial Williamsburg as well as Winterthur. Winterthur items range from a bird cage to a needlepoint pocketbook. Ernest LoNano, letter to Henry Francis du Pont, February 14, 1948. Secretary (of Henry Francis du Pont), letter to Ernest LoNano, February 19, 1948.

consultation.”<sup>26</sup> The workshop created upholstery for museums and private homes alike, including Monticello, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Colonial Williamsburg, the Smithsonian’s First Ladies Hall, and Historic Deerfield (see Appendix E for a list of known LoNano commissions). These cultural institutions, though different in scale, mission, and interpretation, all shaped how Americans think about and project their national identity. The workshop of Ernest LoNano was a key player in this identity formation, supplying the textiles of the Colonial Revival.

Within Winterthur, there was a concerted effort to gather information about the workshop of Ernest LoNano in the 1990s and early 2000s, spearheaded by Deborah E. Kraak, Jeni Sandberg, Jeff Groff, Maggie Lidz, and Linda Eaton.<sup>27</sup> Their unpublished work provides an overview of LoNano’s time at Winterthur interspersed with information about his work at other institutions.<sup>28</sup> Winterthur fellows have completed some work on LoNano, though not focused on re-envisioned dresses. Jessica June

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<sup>26</sup> Ernest LoNano, “Advertisement,” *Antiques* 55, June 1949, 404.

<sup>27</sup> Deborah E. Kraak was the curator with the driving interest behind LoNano and Jeni Sandberg was the Cooper Hewitt intern who facilitated the correspondence between Winterthur and the other institutions.

<sup>28</sup> I am not the first to believe in the importance of Ernest LoNano to the creation and development of Winterthur. Deborah E. Kraak, former Winterthur associate curator, wrote: “The volume of work that Mr. LoNano did at Winterthur, plus his close working relationship and friendship with Mr. du Pont, makes him an important figure in the history of the museum. As one of the most respected ‘decorator’s counsels’ in America, he played a leading role in creating the look of period interiors in museums and historic houses. I am interested in learning more about his commissions and their influence on creating the style of the mid-20th century Colonial Revival.” She pursued this interest primarily through a survey of institutions with LoNano holdings. Contact the Winterthur Museum curator of textiles for access to these files. Deborah E. Kraak, letter to Stephen E. Patrick, July 12, 1995.

Eldrege’s thesis *“In Themselves a Textile Museum”*: *The Formation of the Textile Collection at the H. F. du Pont Winterthur Museum* focuses on Alice Baldwin Beer’s formative work in the creation of du Pont’s textile collection and in passing touches upon LoNano’s contributions to the house.<sup>29</sup> This chapter includes and expands upon the dedicated research of these individuals.<sup>30</sup>

The LoNano family genealogy has not previously been formally compiled. Ernest LoNano Senior (1879-1934) emigrated from Italy to the United States in 1899 and was listed as an upholsterer in the 1920 census.<sup>31</sup> He was married to Serina LoNano (b. 1875), also native Italian, who gave birth to Isabell LoNano (b. 1904) and Ernest LoNano II (1902-1958).<sup>32</sup> LoNano II followed in his father’s professional footsteps and began his training in 1920—this is the LoNano who is the focus of this

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<sup>29</sup> Jessica June Eldredge et al., *“In Themselves a Textile Museum”: The Formation of the Textile Collection at the H.F. Du Pont Winterthur Museum* (1999).

<sup>30</sup> Though there has not been comprehensive scholarship on LoNano, he appears occasionally in popular publications, in varying degrees of accuracy. The March 2006 edition of *Old-House Interiors* refers to him as a “mid-century anti-modernist fabric designer who did textiles for Colonial Williamsburg.” Biann Greenfield refers to him as “Henry Francis duPont’s favorite upholsterer.” Briann G. Greenfield. *Out of the Attic: Inventing Antiques in Twentieth-century New England*. United States: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> 1920; Census Place: *Bronx Assembly District 7, Bronx, New York*; Roll: *T625\_1140*; Page: *10B*; Enumeration District: *388*

<sup>32</sup> Isabell had a son named Vince DeVita, whose life is discussed in the chapter cited below. Vince went to the college of William and Mary, and his uncle, Ernest LoNano, told him “don’t embarrass me” in Williamsburg. Charlotte Jacobs, “21 The Single-Minded Focus of Vince DeVita” In *Henry Kaplan and the Story of Hodgkin’s Disease, 179-190*. (Redwood City: Stanford University Press), 2010.

thesis.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the third generation, Ernest Steven LoNano (1931-2013) (colloquially known as Steve), began working in the family business in the 1950s and took over as head of operations following the death of his father in 1958. The family resided in the Bronx and operated their primary workshop out of Manhattan, first at 127 East 59<sup>th</sup> Street and later at 235 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street.<sup>34</sup> The family spans these three generations of Italian New-Yorkers, running a dynastic business across the United States.

The workshop created interiors for some of the country's most illustrious Americana collections. Some of the workshop's earliest projects in the 1920s and 30s include the installation of the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the restoration of Monticello, and the creation of the period rooms at the Brooklyn Museum.<sup>35</sup> Through these jobs, LoNano Senior garnered a strong reputation in the

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<sup>33</sup> This is corroborated by a letter from Ernest LoNano to Mr. James L. Cogar, Colonial Williamsburg curator. In this letter he says: "In my twenty years experience in the use of downs this is my first experience and I do not recall my father ever making mention to me of moths in connection with downs, as to feathers I have used them several times and to date this is my first mishap." Ernest LoNano, letter to Mr. James L. Cogar, April 2, 1941.

<sup>34</sup> Du Pont relied on LoNano's location in the city for research. "Will you be good enough to go to my apartment, 280 Park Avenue, New York City, and get a piece of yellow Lampas there, then proceed to the Metropolitan Museum and see how many yards of this material it will take to cover my McIntyre mahogany sofa and four mahogany side chairs that are in one of the tiny rooms up one step off one of the main halls?" Henry Francis du Pont, letter to Ernest LoNano, November 6, 1929.

<sup>35</sup> Linda Eaton, "Ernest LoNano: Decorator's Counsel," *Journal of Advanced Appraisal Studies* 4 (2011): 309.

I compiled this telling of the workshop's history through careful archival reconstruction, relying predominantly on correspondence files. Based on a personal

field of antiques—Fiske Kimball, the director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art,



proclaimed LoNano as “the best in this field,” and boasted his “full confidence” in him.<sup>36</sup>

After establishing the family name, the business boomed in the 1940s and 50s, becoming integral in the web of the

Colonial Revival in the United States.

Figure 9 Image of Ernest LoNano (far left) and others at a reception for the Hammond-Harwood house in Annapolis, Maryland. LoNano collaborated with curators and textile designer Franco Sacalamandre on the reupholstering of the house museum’s furniture. Image courtesy of Gardens, Houses, and People magazine, December 1948, p. 22. Image courtesy of author.

The workshop served as a waypoint for those who didn’t have a gallery or storage space in Manhattan. Dealers were known to invite clients to LoNano’s

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conversation with a Winterthur staff member who knew the LoNano family and hints in later LoNano correspondence, there was once an unofficial archive of the workshop’s papers, but it was lost after the discontinuation of the workshop’s services.

<sup>36</sup> Fiske Kimball, letter to Stuart G. Gibboney, January 15, 1937. Courtesy of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation. Cited in Eaton, “Ernest LoNano,” 317.

workshop to show their wares and hopefully make a sale.<sup>37</sup> For example, the Museum of the City of New York sent loans to LoNano to then be delivered to Colonial Williamsburg.<sup>38</sup> Du Pont would send non-furniture items to him to be sent down with normal deliveries.<sup>39</sup> LoNano did not exist in isolation – others were dealing in antique

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<sup>37</sup> Jennifer Carlquist, “The Antiquarian Career of J.A. Lloyd Hyde: Americana as Business and Pleasure,” 47.

<sup>38</sup> Alfred A. Restar, letter to Mrs. Eleanor Duncan, January 12, 1954. The items for transport included a c. 1780 fashion doll, a c. 1770 men’s yellow velvet suit, and a c. 1770 men’s silk embroidered waistcoat.

When examining the evidence from Colonial Williamsburg, it is imperative to consider how the archive reflects the institution from which it is derived. The fundamental difference between Colonial Williamsburg and Winterthur was that the former was run by business executives (Rockefellers) while Winterthur was run by a wealthy man who inherited his money. Historians talk about a deeply corporate structure that pervades Colonial Williamsburg with executives distanced from the mundane, while at Winterthur, du Pont was involved down to the last detail. These institutions had a heavy overlap in mission – they were both interested in the education of the public. Howard Schuleff, the original head of research and development at Colonial Williamsburg said that the institution was “a golden opportunity to teach the sort of history - and real ‘fool proof’ history, not fake history! - that will make Americans of to-day more aware of the value of the country they live in and more aware of their own obligations.” (Cary Carson, “Colonial Williamsburg and the Practice of Interpretive Planning in American History Museums,” *The Public Historian* 20, no. 3 (1998): 14). While the educational/storytelling element was important, it was also a trojan horse for a cunning business strategy. By essentially making guests participatory members of the Williamsburg community, they were more likely to return multiple times, especially during the off season. One of the most important elements their strategic plan was the visual impact of the physical place, which was also greatly important to du Pont, with LoNano having great say in both visual agendas.

<sup>39</sup> “When you motor down next week, will you be good enough to bring me a box from my apartment, 280 Park Avenue, which has a china bowl in it? I am writing Edward to tie it up securely.” Henry Francis du Pont, letter to Ernest LoNano via secretary, June 26, 1942.

textiles, such as Elinor Merrell, Alice Baldwin Beer, and Cora Ginsburg.<sup>40</sup> Museums would purchase materials through dealers such as Merrell who would then deliver the textiles directly to LoNano for alterations, disassembly, and/or conservation.<sup>41</sup> In addition to housing an internal workshop in Manhattan that executed reupholstery and restoration services, the company had a showroom in Colonial Williamsburg which opened in 1950.<sup>42</sup> They boasted that “in our workroom, you will have an opportunity to see upholstering and the making of draperies in the traditional methods by master craftsmen.”<sup>43</sup> The workshop saw a transition from obscured labor for the original Metropolitan and Brooklyn Museum period rooms to recognition of their expert skill and display of their prowess in the Colonial Williamsburg workshop as well as praise in publications such as *Town and Country*.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to expertly reconstructing textiles, upholstering furniture, and building collections, the workshop also served as an early conservation lab with Ernest

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<sup>40</sup> Linda Eaton, *Quilts in a Material World: Selections from the Winterthur Collection* (New York: Abrams : Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 2007). Eldredge, “In Themselves a Textile Museum.”

<sup>41</sup> Elinor Merrell, handwritten delivery invoice to Ernest LoNano, 127 E 59, January 20, 1940.

<sup>42</sup> Ernest LoNano, “Advertisement,” *Antiques* 56, December 1949, 407.

<sup>43</sup> Ernest LoNano, “Advertisement,” *Antiques* 57, January 1950.

<sup>44</sup> “Monticello: Town and Country Celebrates in Eight Pages the Redecoration of Monticello According to Jefferson’s Original Notes and Sketches,” *Town and Country*, December 1947. 98.

LoNano as the head.<sup>45</sup> He provided recommendations to clients on how to best preserve their textiles, repaired items on site, and provided fuller restoration services in the workshop.<sup>46</sup> He created conservation schedules and trained his staff in basic textile cleaning and repair.<sup>47</sup> He also considered the breadth of ages amongst the upholstery textiles, providing solutions that preserved the eldest textiles while updating the appearance of the furniture. Over his years in the antique business he was able to marry his knowledge of material and design with preservation techniques.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> “So far as the walnut wing chair with original needlework is concerned, I want this needlework very carefully taken off as it will later go back; and I want the chair very carefully treated for moths, as it is full of them, and probably the needlework as well.” Henry Francis du Pont, letter to Ernest LoNano, October 29, 1930.

<sup>46</sup> Ernest LoNano, letter to Mrs. Eleanor L. Duncan, June 3, 1949.

<sup>47</sup> “Due to the difference between the old and new fabrics in the dining room, there is a suggestion which I would like to make. That is, to make slip covers for the chairs out of the new material when the new draperies are hung. This would lend to the attractiveness of the room and make a more uniform color combination. At the same time it would preserve the old covering on the chairs. I feel the same should hold true for the northwest bedroom and the second floor hall. These slip covers could be made, tied under, which would almost give them the appearance of being upholstered. For the chairs in the dining room we would need 5 yards of the 50" material, which is \$19.50 a yard. For the chairs in the northwest bedroom they would require 8 yards of material, and the second floor hall chairs 9 yards of material.” Ernest LoNano, letter to Mrs. Eleanor L. Duncan, June 3, 1949.

<sup>48</sup> LoNano’s workshop was considered an expert not only in materials, but apparently also in non-English languages. When restoring a pair of garters for Colonial Williamsburg, he was asked to provide a translation of the Spanish text on them - “El que estas ligas te da (The one who gives you these garters) ; Tu amante siempre sera (Will always be your lover).” Joseph J. Hennessey (signed under Ernest LoNano), letter to Mrs. A Willard Duncan, June 26, 1958.

## The People of the Workshop

LoNano often publicly took sweeping credit for the work that involved the labor of dozens, not unlike du Pont. His filling material tags read “Made by Ernest LoNano,” giving him as an individual the credit for the work performed by the larger workshop.<sup>49</sup> Like du Pont, he wanted “to keep constant control over everything, in order to keep things in excellent condition at all times.”<sup>50</sup> Other LoNano family members were also active in the business. Colonial Williamsburg employed Vivian LoNano, the daughter of Ernest LoNano, to install and deinstall curtains in the Palace Ballroom in preparation for public concerts.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, she ran the workshop’s “interior design shop” in Williamsburg.<sup>52</sup> She, too, was proficient in the language of textiles.

At any given time, LoNano employed approximately twenty craftspeople in his workshop, with labor divided by gender. Typically fifteen women worked as “seamstresses,” and five men as “upholsterers.”<sup>53</sup> When working with dress fabrics,

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<sup>49</sup> Ernest LoNano, letter to Charles F. Montgomery, August 17, 1951.

<sup>50</sup> Ernest LoNano, letter to Henry Francis du Pont, July 29, 1931.

<sup>51</sup> Eleanor L. Duncan, letter to Miss Vivian LoNano, January 12, 1951.

<sup>52</sup> Williamsburg was important in Vivian’s life – she met her husband, Dudley Jensen, there, and later opened a knitting store, the Knitting Nook. “Vivian S. Jensen Obituary,” *The Enterprise*, June 23, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> Jeni Sandberg, “Re-Covering the Past: Ernest LoNano and Upholstery for Historic Interiors,” Paper Delivered at Bard Graduate Center Symposium Uncovering the Past: New Research on Historic Upholstery, 1600-1850” (Paper Talk, Bard Graduate Center, October 16, 1998). Ernest LoNano, letter to Henry Francis du Pont, September 5, 1929.

men worked at cutting while women pieced and stitched. One possible reconstruction of this process, in the absence of any descriptions of it in the few documents available, is that men would receive the dress and cut the seams, then women would piece the salvageable lengths into straight yardage. Men would then pattern the furniture and cut the re-assembled yardage into its new configuration for upholstery, the women would then sew these pattern pieces together, and then a man would apply this upholstery to the furniture.<sup>54</sup> As indicated by the work receipts, this typically involved between fifty and seventy-five hours of labor from start to finish, with the men being paid \$13.00 per day, the foremen \$15.00 per day, women \$7.26 per day, and the forewomen \$9.00 per day. These wages fluctuated slightly over the years, but the gender disparity remained consistent.<sup>55</sup>

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“Will furnish any quantity of men and women necessary of first class reputation. As for the wages they will be based on the prevailing rates at the time. Everything will be under my constant supervision. The ‘cost plus’ basis to be the arrangement at 25%, with bills rendered each month. I will supply all materials needed... springs, webbing, hair, downs, nails, muslin, etc., at wholesale cost plus 25%. As for the board for the workers you will furnish same as agreed upon. I am to do all the cutting and other most important things for which I am to receive a salary, which otherwise would have to be paid to a cutter.” This is an excerpt from the original agreement – the isolated role of cutter was expanded over the years.

<sup>54</sup> Ernest LoNano, letter to Charles F. Montgomery, August 17, 1951. This invoice indicates that the women piece the fabric.

<sup>55</sup> Winterthur Correspondence Files, Box AD1, Folder: Bills – LoNano, Ernest 1931-1940, Salaries for workers August 10, 1931.

A list of the known LoNano employees: Colonial Williamsburg: Edward C Chorley (Ed/Eddy), Louis De Gasperis (1967), Catherine, Ronnie (he/him), Vivian LoNano, Mr. Frank Biffar (1950) (1949) (also working at Winterthur, Nils (1963), Mr. Gerlot Schmidt (1949), Miss Katherine Mair (1949), Miss Ellen Kilkenny (1949). Winterthur: Winsor, Frank Biffar, Joseph LiVolsi. In addition to upholsterers, LoNano

LoNano's legacy would not be possible without the work of others. One of the most prominent workers in LoNano's employ was Joseph LiVolsi. Joseph, or Joe, worked as LoNano's foreman at Winterthur and Colonial Williamsburg, and likely at the other institutions with which LoNano held contracts. Joe began as a general upholster, and worked his way through the ranks, eventually managing much of the Winterthur project. LiVolsi was also an upholsterer by family trade – he was the third generation in the family to carry on the craft.

Ernest LoNano II and those in his employ worked at Winterthur from 1929 through 1958. Despite attempts to obtain the archive, Winterthur was unable to procure LoNano's paperwork pertaining to his Winterthur commissions, leaving gaps in the written narrative.<sup>56</sup> Joseph Downs, then assistant curator of the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, made the initial connection between du Pont and LoNano.<sup>57</sup> The LoNano archive is even more sparse at the Met, but as the assistant

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also employed Miss Julia Finn as his secretary. She had contact with both Winterthur and Colonial Williamsburg and likely the other institutions that employed the workshop.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Hummel, personal conversation with author, January 12, 2022.

<sup>57</sup> Maggie Lidz, Interview of Salvatore Mendolina, with Maggie Lidz, By telephone, text transcribed, November 13, 2000, Winterthur Library. Linda Eaton also suspected this connection. Eaton, "Ernest LoNano," 310. It seems like Downs is the connection between these museums and LoNano, which was already hypothesized by Linda. In the installation of the Ford House by the National Parks Service, Joseph Downs was brought on to consult and there was debate as to whether to go with a local upholsterer or LoNano. LoNano ended up with the contract. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, "Historic Furnishings Assessment: Morristown National Historic Park, Morristown, New Jersey," December 2003. The interview corroborates that Joseph Downs was the connection between LoNano and du Pont. "Well, at the time that Ernest LoNano got this job of taking care of this at the Metropolitan Museum

curator Downs would have worked with LoNano during the American wing's creation between 1909 and 1924.<sup>58</sup> LoNano and those in his employ began working with du Pont in 1929 and established a cordial professional relationship. According to an oral history with Salvatore Mendolina, an employee of LoNano's, du Pont interviewed LoNano by showing him a collection of fabrics and asking him how he would handle them. According to Mendolina, "by sheer luck he had the right answers" and was hired.<sup>59</sup> Though the employees may have viewed it as luck, LoNano demonstrated great skill through his identification interview.

During the early days of their collaboration, LoNano was learning the ways of antiques alongside du Pont – correspondence documents ideas circulating about color, material, and accuracy, both men developing a proclivity towards aesthetic over period accuracy or comfort which would soon become the hallmark of the Colonial Revival.<sup>60</sup> Though du Pont would later publicly reject this notion, he and LoNano exchanged ideas as partners. Backed by impressive credentials and abundant experience, in 1953 LoNano asked du Pont to be called the "Consultant and Decorator of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum," which du Pont promptly rejected,

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where he was friendly with, what's his name, the curator there." later in the interview he confirms that he was referring to Downs.

<sup>58</sup> R. T. H. Halsey and C. O. Cornelius, *A Handbook of the American Wing* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1938), x.

<sup>59</sup> Lidz, Interview of Salvatore Mendolina.

<sup>60</sup> "I don't want to spend too much money on repairing the embroidered material for the Wentworth Room, but of course some repairs will have to be made on it. This furniture is never to be sat on, so there will be no wear and tear on it." Henry Francis du Pont, letter to Ernest LoNano, January 19, 1939.

allowing him to publicly call himself the “Curtain Maker and Upholsterer.”<sup>61</sup> Despite the outward negation of LoNano’s expertise, du Pont heavily relied on him for his knowledge, even asking for his “expert appraisal” in 1954.<sup>62</sup> As a preamble to this appraisal, LoNano wrote a lengthy description of his work at Winterthur (a full copy of this text can be found in Appendix A). It is evident that these men relied on each other for expertise, ingenuity, and an eye for aesthetics.

To some, working with LoNano was the opportunity of a lifetime. In 1930, Salvatore Mendolina was working at French and Company, a decorative arts and antiques firm based in New York, along with his father Vincent when they were approached by Ernest LoNano Senior at their home in the Bronx. He told them about a magnificent new client he had in Delaware, giving the father and son the impression that he and his firm were handed a blank check and told to upholster. When LoNano Senior asked them to quit their jobs to join him, the Mendolinas did so without hesitation.

When Vincent and Salvatore joined the workshop, the project was in early stages. In an oral history recorded fifty years after his employ, Salvatore describes

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<sup>61</sup> LoNano held expertise in his own right, participating in the first Attingham Program in 1952 alongside John Graham of Colonial Williamsburg, Lydia Bond Powell of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Charles and Florence Montgomery of Winterthur. Ernest LoNano, letter to du Pont at Boca Grande, February 27, 1953. Winterthur was not the only house at which LoNano was not properly credited. When sending out press releases about new house openings at Colonial Williamsburg, curators would receive full credit. “For more than a year, Mr. Graham has been at work on the decorations and furnishings” at the Brush-Everard House.

<sup>62</sup> Du Pont sought out an appraisal of the textiles in the house so that their transfer to the museum would “be absolutely tax-proof.” (presumably) Henry Francis du Pont, letter to Ernest LoNano, July 21, 1952.

arriving in Wilmington, where they “were just about getting ready to start furnishing the place, (...) mov[ing] in the whole group of upholsterers and women sewing. They put us up at the Biltmore Plaza at Winterthur and we had a complete floor.” On his first visit to Winterthur, he met with Henry Francis du Pont and Joseph LiVolsi. In his reminiscing, he explains: “we were picked up by a du Pont chauffeur and that was the first time I ever rode in a Rolls Royce. (Laughter) He used to pick us up in the morning and then drive us back to the house and it was a big thrill to ride ninety miles an hour.”<sup>63</sup> Along with the skilled work, Mendolina remembered early stages of the project as adventurous and enjoyable. This became a routine, the workers picked up at their lodging and arriving at Winterthur to begin the day’s work.

Already at the site were the full-time staff of Winterthur, which Mendolina remembered as over two hundred people. Each morning they were met by Elijah, nicknamed “Lige,” a Black man employed by the du Ponts, who would help prepare their workspace. Elijah laid out a drop cloth on the floor of the room in the house in which they were to work, and they would begin their task, crafting the furniture in the room in which it was to inhabit. Some pieces were completed in the New York workshop, but the majority were in situ at Winterthur.

*We laid down a canvas on the floor and we had the furniture that was brought in from the museum or wherever. We had to strip strips of furniture and we had to save the tacks, the old tacks that were in the upholstery. Du Pont wanted those tacks and this man Lige used*

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<sup>63</sup> Maggie Lidz, Interview of Salvatore Mendolina, with Maggie Lidz, By telephone, text transcribed, November 13, 2000, Winterthur Library.

*to pick them up and at the end of the day he saved all this stuff to keep the room clean.*<sup>64</sup>

The canvas was key to the operation as at the end of the day it was picked up, collecting all of the upholstery scraps to be saved.<sup>65</sup> Mendolina remarked that “everything was saved, the tacks, everything that wasn't dust was thrown out evidently later on.”<sup>66</sup> In fact, it was not thrown out – tacks and all still live on in the Winterthur collection today. This crucial evidence would not be preserved without the labor of Elijah.

Though hands-on with his work with LoNano, du Pont did not have frequent contact with the workshop, even when it was operating out of his own home.<sup>67</sup> Mendolina said that the only time he saw du Pont after the first day was in the workshop on 59th street in New York, which he noted specifically that it was across the street from Bloomingdale's. He says that seeing him occasionally in New York was the only contact he ever had with du Pont.

Most of the time spent on the Winterthur project was in Wilmington. The workers interacted with the community, taking a du Pont chartered bus into town for lunch, either eating at the YMCA or a local restaurant. On special days, they stayed

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<sup>64</sup> Lidz, Interview of Salvatore Mendolina.

<sup>65</sup> Reupholstery was not only for aesthetic purposes – it was mandated by the law. After the 1918 pandemic there was great worry about public health and new mandates were put into place regarding new materials for the sake of the health of the American public. All furniture had to be stripped and reupholstered before it could be sold/resold.

<sup>66</sup> Lidz, Interview of Salvatore Mendolina.

<sup>67</sup> Granted, this was one of several homes du Pont owned, and he mainly spent the spring season in Delaware.

behind at the farm for lunch. Mendolina fondly remembers that Elijah's wife would bake "delicious little pies for \$1.00 a piece." "Home-baked!" he exclaimed. Though away from their homes most of the time, the workshop was able to see their families from time to time. Du Pont would pay for them to go home every other weekend. When asked if du Pont was a good employer, Mendolina replied "oh yeah, it was a good time. It was a good time in those days."<sup>68</sup> Though the most complete narrative of early work for LoNano's team comes from Mendolina's oral history, he was not the only person in the employ of the workshop. Additional names have been recovered from the archives, including Winsor, Frank Biffar, and Joseph LiVolsi. Some of the workers traveled between sites, including New York, Winterthur, Colonial Williamsburg, and possibly others.

With LoNano II's passing in 1958, the workshop saw its last piece from Winterthur. Winterthur became an official museum in 1957 and had curatorial opinions as well as du Pont's to consider in interpretation. Parallels existed between du Pont and LoNano; they were both interested in their definitions of authenticity, which prioritized design and aesthetic over strict historic accuracy. With du Pont solely in charge, it was acceptable for a dress to be used as upholstery. As curator emeritus Charles Hummel said, "if there was enough yardage it went on [the furniture]."<sup>69</sup> This attitude towards textiles was not acceptable in the eyes of curators Charles Hummel and Johnathan Fairbanks; they were concerned with consummate

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<sup>68</sup> Lidz, Interview of Salvatore Mendolina.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Hummel, personal conversation with author, January 12, 2022.

accuracy, documentation, and preservation.<sup>70</sup> For that reason, following the death of LoNano II, Winterthur no longer sent objects to the workshop for reupholstery, beginning to focus on in-house textile conservation, removing all textiles on site with thorough documentation before re-covering a piece of furniture.

This, however, was not the end of the LoNano workshop. Steve LoNano continued working for clients such as Colonial Williamsburg, attempting to maintain the work of his father and grandfather before him.<sup>71</sup> His deliverables were less timely and the craft technique different from his father's, leading curators to be more involved in his creation process. He had to ask for approval on fabric choices, send more detailed work orders than his father, and more frequently consult with curators.<sup>72</sup> In the mid 1960s, the business began to decline financially. Steve requested advances as he was unable to cover the cost of materials and labor.<sup>73</sup> Despite difficulties with some clients, Steve LoNano continued to receive commissions—as late as 1968 the

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<sup>70</sup> John A. H. Sweeney. "The Evolution of Winterthur Rooms." *Winterthur Portfolio* 1 (1964): 106–20.

<sup>71</sup> Ernest was sending Steve down to Washington D. C. to work on the installation of the First Ladies rooms at the National Museum of American History - they were working together as early as 1955 though it was almost certainly earlier. Ernest LoNano, letter to Miss Margaret W. Brown, March 28, 1955.

<sup>72</sup> Mrs. Willard A. Duncan, letter to Mr. Stephen LoNano, September 4, 1969.

<sup>73</sup> "For all the work now in process for Bracken Kitchen, Masonic Kitchen and the various rooms at the Wythe House, you can readily realize the large labor cost involved. With this amount it has squeezed me to a very narrow point financially, making it impossible to secure the trimmings necessary to complete the curtains and bed hangings for the Wythe House." He then asks for an advance – something his father never did – this seems to indicate a turning point in the business towards financial instability. Steve LoNano, letter to Mr. John M. Graham II, May 1, 1963.

Met was sending out materials for cleaning.<sup>74</sup> The 1980s sees the last record of the workshop of Ernest LoNano working in reupholstery.

Throughout his time at Winterthur, Joseph LiVolsi became close with du Pont, receiving correspondence directly addressed to him and even exchanging Christmas cards.<sup>75</sup> After LoNano passed, LiVolsi continued as an independent upholstery contractor, earning commissions at Winterthur and the White House Historical Association. The craft tradition extended beyond the singular form of Ernest LoNano—the skill resided in the group as a composite.

Du Pont was not solely responsible for the aesthetics of Winterthur. Scholar Glenn Adamson describes craftspeople as the “quiet heroes of our national story.”<sup>76</sup> Craftspeople such as Joseph LiVolsi, Salvatore Mendolina, and Ernest LoNano shaped the Colonial Revival as much as those more often credited with its aesthetic development. Though not surprising, the codification of this statement is imperative if we are to move forward in shaping a more inclusive museum environment. Latent understanding and acceptance of the skills and importance of others is not enough; it must be recognized.

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<sup>74</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Outgoing Loan Form, March 4, 1968.

<sup>75</sup> March 24, 1943; addressed to LoNano and Joe, presumably from Henry Francis

<sup>76</sup> Adamson, *Craft*, 1.

## Chapter 4

### COMMUNICATION: RE-ENVISIONED DRESSES IN CONVERSATION WITH WINTERTHUR

*“Things and words are empty in isolation, arbitrary. Arbitrariness leaves them, as they gain places in systems of interrelation.”<sup>77</sup>*

The people who comprised the workshop of Ernest LoNano were significant as individual craftspeople, but their effect on the decorative arts amplified in the context of the Winterthur Museum. Winterthur is a hallmark of Americana; its collection and display connect to and inform the culture of dominant American aesthetics. It serves as a demonstration of the importance of American art and history. Traditionally, Americana reflects the experiences of the wealthy and has often been collected by those who share those experiences or hope to emulate them. Collectors are not monoliths; there are layers to taste making and the strata serve as a form of gatekeeping. Though “high” decorative arts can be cost prohibitive, there is not a cost barrier to collecting as a practice. Homes like Winterthur contribute to a prevailing misconception that collecting is only for the wealthy. The objects created by LoNano and his employees as well as his curatorial eye contributed to this gatekeeping and taste making of Americana. This chapter will explore the role of the workshop’s products within the scope of the Winterthur home.

Since its inception in the early twentieth century, Winterthur has garnered a reputation as a leader in the American decorative arts. With over ninety-thousand objects, one thousand acres of protected land, and two graduate programs to carry on the legacy, Winterthur was designed to preserve and further the ideals of its founder.

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<sup>77</sup> Glassie, *Material Culture*, 47.

Henry Francis du Pont perpetuated the image of his family's prestige by using his inherited fortune to furnish his Delaware home with early American antiques. Through this collection, he simultaneously constructed an American narrative for his family while conveying his taste for antiques, and thus, by implication, his wealth. His commissioning of objects like re-envisioned dresses resulted in a uniquely twentieth century reimagining of colonial American aesthetics.

The museum's collection focuses on Americana from between 1640 and 1860, most of it acquired during du Pont's life. He began collecting Americana in the 1920s, spurred by his circle of friends, including Henry Davis Sleeper and Electra Havemeyer Webb.<sup>78</sup> Like his peers, he was interested in the longevity of American history, but he also placed great importance on aesthetics. Even when materials were temporally correct, he placed color above all else; he would return objects to dealers for a color being "too deep a green and has too much of a blue tinge to it."<sup>79</sup> Though he employed original elements like staircases, building facades, and furniture, they were manipulated to fit his home and collecting goals. Re-envisioned dresses, upholstering furniture on view in carefully curated spaces, helped perpetuate du Pont's vision of American history.

The narrative of the Winterthur collection has long been crafted internally, making the history reflective of those who are privileged enough to work or study at the institution. The story typically begins in 1818 when the Bidermann family made

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<sup>78</sup> Joseph Downs, Winchester, Alice., *A Selection of American Interiors 1640-1840 in the Henry Francis Du Pont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware* (New York: [s.n.], 1951), 4. Jay E. Cantor, *Winterthur* (New York: Abrams, 1985).

<sup>79</sup> Henry Francis du Pont, letter to Ernest LoNano, February 4, 1946.

their first home in the Delaware Valley, occupying the land after the Lenape people were forcibly removed in 1758.<sup>80</sup> Antoine Bidermann, the head of house, was born in Paris, the son of a Swiss millionaire and married Evelina Gabrielle du Pont, who shared his elite French background. Both the Bidermann and du Pont families were involved with French and American political affairs, the latter primarily through gunpowder production at the family mill on the Brandywine River. After residing at the Hagley House for some years, the family then bought the land for Winterthur in 1837 and moved into the new home in 1839. Bidermann built a working farm upon the land. Designed in the Greek Revival style, the house was created by Vergnaud, a French architect working out of Paris.<sup>81</sup> From the beginning, the house was built not only for the family but also for visitors. A newspaper description from 1858 describes: “the visitor on approaching it from the southern entrance, is astonished and delighted at the romantic appearance,” created through “beautiful fields,” “serpentine roads,” and the “splendid mansion.”<sup>82</sup> Those who came to the house came away with memories of a “charming and lovely spot,” curated through the built environment of European aristocracy in the colonies.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See McConnell’s chapter titled Easton and the Kuskuskies, October-November 1758 for a discussion of the treaty of Easton. Michael N McConnell, *To Risk It All: General Forbes, the Capture of Fort Duquesne, and the Course of Empire in the Ohio Country*. Book Collections on Project Muse. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020.

<sup>81</sup> E. McClung Fleming, *The History of the Winterthur Estate*. (Winterthur, Delaware, 1964). 19.

<sup>82</sup> “Winterthur,” *The Delaware Republican*, January 7, 1858.

<sup>83</sup> “Winterthur,” *The Delaware Republican*, January 7, 1858.

Following the death of Antoine Bidermann, the house was unoccupied for several years. It passed down through the family until Henry A. du Pont, who, along with his wife Mary Pauline Foster, moved into the home in 1875 following his military service. He implemented significant changes at the house through three renovations, both expanding the footprint of the building and updating its aesthetic.

In 1926, H. A. du Pont died of sudden heart failure, and his son, Henry Francis du Pont, inherited Winterthur. By this time, Henry Francis already had distinct interests in horticulture, livestock, and American antiques, cultivated by his upbringing and social circles. He began his collecting with a strong focus on European decorative arts, but acquaintances such as Electra Havemeyer Webb and Henry Sleeper influenced his taste away from European materials in favor of Americana. He came to believe that “early American arts and crafts had not been given the recognition they deserved. Serious collectors had for too long focused their attention on Europe and the East, to the exclusion of this country.” He “hoped, therefore, by preserving under one roof examples of architecture, furniture, and widely divergent early American materials of all kinds, interest in this field would be stimulated and that the magnificent contribution of our past would be helped to come into its own.”<sup>84</sup> His vision was to preserve and share American history in the hopes to bolster interest through its material legacy. To accomplish this ambitious plan, Henry Francis had to significantly remodel his ancestral home. Over five hundred employees contributed to this transformation, expanding the interior of the home by two hundred percent. The exterior was stripped of its European Renaissance styling and turned towards

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<sup>84</sup> Henry Francis du Pont, Forward, *American Furniture, Queen Anne and Chippendale* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), v.

eighteenth-century American architecture, specifically through the architectural detailing of the Port Royal and Woodlands estates.<sup>85</sup> Though Winterthur had expanded past the point of a family home, du Pont was interested in presenting a uniform exterior.

Du Pont hired American architects to create the plan for his home, erasing the remnants of European design.<sup>86</sup> From the inception, he set up a tax-free charitable and educational foundation, the Winterthur Corporation, to transform the house into a museum, originally planned to open after his death.<sup>87</sup> In early 1931, the du Pont family moved back into their transformed home, though new room installations and building additions continued through 1951. Around 1947, he made the decision to open the home as a public museum, well before his death.<sup>88</sup> With this decision, he hired Joseph Downs and Charles Montgomery as the museum's first curators and professional staff. In 1951, they opened the museum to the public. When the museum first opened, it specifically catered to an elite group of devoted connoisseurs. The guides were close social friends of the du Ponts, and tours spanned an entire day. Despite the vast expanse of rooms, the museum was described as "intimate" and only

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<sup>85</sup> Both Port Royal (1762) and Woodlands (1788) (county homes in South Carolina and Pennsylvania) were stripped of architectural elements to be used on the house. From Port Royal, du Pont took cornices, coins, windowsills, windows, doorways, facades, and dormers. From Woodlands he took models for elements featured in the dining room porch and the Conservatory.

<sup>86</sup> Albert Ely Ives, based in Wilmington, and Thomas Waterman, based in Boston, were his chosen architects.

<sup>87</sup> Fleming, "History of the Winterthur Estate," 49.

<sup>88</sup> Henry Francis du Pont, "The Building of the Winterthur Museum," *loc. Cit.*, 11.

allowed in twenty guest per day, who secured their tour spots through written applications.<sup>89</sup> Thanks to growing publicity and the lifestyle made possible by generational wealth, the greater public quickly became interested in this sprawling estate and the decorative arts it held. By not having interpretive text in the house du Pont effectively obscured the labor, and his legacy continues to do so, by not naming the craftspeople behind the objects.<sup>90</sup> By placing the furniture in his home, and later the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, he placed what contemporary scholars would call a stamp of makership on the objects. Unless one looks under the sofas for tags, du Pont is able to claim full credit for the artistry.

Though it may appear that re-envisioned dresses were under the purview of du Pont, these complex forms were the product of a vast network of makers. Re-envisioned dresses were distributed throughout the house, both in rigidly formal, public rooms such as the Chinese Parlor and more private spaces such as du Pont's bedroom.<sup>91</sup> The house and the re-envisioned dresses cannot be divorced. They were

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<sup>89</sup> Joseph Downs, Winchester, Alice., *A Selection of American Interiors 1640-1840 in the Henry Francis Du Pont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware* (New York: 1951). 3.

<sup>90</sup> "By diffusing and mystifying the labor expended in its creation, the valentine became an object with no authorship until the giver personalized it by simply signing the card." Christina Michelon, "Touching Sentiment: The Tactility of Nineteenth-Century Valentines," *Common Place: The Journal of Early American Life* 16, no. 2 (Winter 2016): 12.

<sup>91</sup> The re-envisioned dress in the Cecil bedroom was created by Joseph LiVolsi while he was still working for LoNano. Henry Francis du Pont, letter to Ernest LoNano via secretary, October 26th, 1942. "Joe is to cut for slip covers when he comes to cut slip covers for Mrs. du Pont's bedroom."

purpose-built for the space, in direct conversation with the collection that surrounds them.<sup>92</sup>

At Winterthur, re-envisioned dresses were intended not as functional furniture, but as a form of communication; a way for du Pont to demonstrate the lifestyle his wealth supported to his visitors.<sup>93</sup> Winterthur's contents broadcast this immense du Pont wealth and their exclusive lifestyle as taste. The home is, and was, advertised as a museum, a place of art and taste making, not merely a home filled with expensive furnishings. Winterthur is specifically a house museum, not a gallery of antiques.<sup>94</sup> By inviting guests to his home, du Pont was not only able to demonstrate his incredible collection but show visitors what it was like to live with these objects. Even today, the

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<sup>92</sup> Joseph Heathcott, "Reading the Accidental Archive: Architecture, Ephemera, and Landscape as Evidence of an Urban Public Culture," *Winterthur Portfolio Winterthur Portfolio* 41, no. 4 (2007): 240.

<sup>93</sup> The house existed in an interesting duality between comfort and display. Between the years of 1929 and 1939, there is a shift in how du Pont thinks about his upholstery, demonstrating a trend towards aesthetic over comfort. "I shall naturally want the original lines carried out. I shall also want the chair very comfortable, but do not want spring in the seat. I suppose you will make a loose cushion for the seat." Henry Francis du Pont, letter to Ernest LoNano, August 15, 1929. And, "I don't want to spend too much money on repairing the embroidered material for the Wentworth Room, but of course some repairs will have to be made on it. This furniture is never to be sat on, so there will be no wear and tear on it." Henry Francis du Pont, letter to Ernest LoNano, January 19, 1939.

<sup>94</sup> Edgar Preston Richardson, *The Winterthur Story* (Winterthur, Delaware: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1965). Jay E. Cantor, *Winterthur* (New York: Abrams, 1985). An interesting aside – not only was Port Royal Hall an important space to welcome visitors into the physical house, but it also welcomes readers to Cantor's writings on the estate as the cover of his book. The importance of this space lives on outside of du Pont and early tours/entertaining. John A. H. Sweeney et al., *Winterthur Illustrated, A Winterthur Book* (New Castle, Delaware, 1963).

curation gives a direct view into what it would be like to live with these objects and the sumptuous lifestyle they imply. This is a direct contradiction to how the collection was historically framed – du Pont never wanted the family to be a part of the spoken narrative, and asked to be called “the collector,” if reference were absolutely necessary. The narrative was meant to be about the incredible collection that reflected early American life, not him as the collector. His original design for the collection focused on the objects and interior, the manifestation of wealth, and not him, the mitigator of wealth. The early 2000s brought an interpretational shift, with a rebranding of the property as a Country Estate, focusing on du Pont as a gentleman farmer, horticulturist, and collector.<sup>95</sup> The Port Royal Bedroom still today alludes to what it would be like to stay at the home as a guest of du Pont, staged with a breakfast cart, proudly displaying the order card. After visiting for their annual meeting in 1932, the Walpole Society remarked that when compared to Winterthur, “no collection has ever been made comparable with the variety and beauty.”<sup>96</sup> Touring the house gave, and still gives, visitors the imagery to build the fantasy of life at Winterthur but brought them just short of accessing the luxury.

American antiques displayed in historic settings function as didactic devices of history, with the persistent undertones of wealth and opulence. Scholars have noted

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<sup>95</sup> This changed was marked by the opening of the exhibition “Life at Winterthur: Henry Francis du Pont’s Country Estate” in September of 2001. This exhibition included recorded sound stations throughout with former staff people sharing “warm memories of growing up at Winterthur, as well as their affection for “H.F.” This oral history campaign produced the interview with Salvatore Mendolina.

<sup>96</sup> Pauline K. Eversmann, “Henry Francis Du Pont’s American Country Estate,” *Antiques and the Arts Weekly* (blog), November 6, 2001.

that “when investigated closely the activities of house museum founders revealed them to be unclassifiable as either politically detached antiquarians or blue blooded proponents of social control.”<sup>97</sup> This latent social control is coded as American antiques, though these objects are interchangeable with other signifiers of wealth.<sup>98</sup> A distinction should be made that du Pont was not interested in broadcasting his wealth in a form that he viewed as crass nor direct. His home was built with thought, design, and education at its core. It is not excess in the name of excess. His focused collecting was a way to illustrate to visitors how he spent his money, not necessarily that he had it.

What happened within this collection, and what continues through the museum, is tastemaking. This is a familiar concept to those like du Pont who are interested in eighteenth-century history, as his collection, and the museum founded upon it, function as what Bernard Herman calls “a system of social and cultural values.” These values, or taste, echoed those of the periods collectors studied. For Herman, eighteenth-century values included “regularity, hierarchy, order, and standardization.” Taste, performed by careful arrangement of architectural elements and furnishings, functioned as “coded material and performative language strategically employed” by collectors as a form of self-identification. Winterthur's rooms and furnishings were du Pont’s personal wealth, taste, and interests manifested. His

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<sup>97</sup> Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America’s House Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Inst. Press, 1999). xxii.

<sup>98</sup> Patricia West, *Domesticating History*, 157. Dianne H. Pilgrim, “Inherited from the Past: The American Period Room,” *American Art Journal / Publ. by Kennedy Galleries.*, 1978, 5–23.

interests and values were codified in every brass marker on the floor, numbered to help staff arrange the furnishings correctly, according to Mr. du Pont's precise notations.<sup>99</sup>

Du Pont's taste formed identity and community, both of which were exclusive in nature and predicated on immense wealth. Collecting is part of self-identity that can "justify a feeling of pride, even superiority," which accompanies academic understanding.<sup>100</sup> In addition to containing interesting evidence of reuse and textile craft techniques, these objects also contain compelling narratives of the body. Glassie explains that collectors search for objects that marry the human and the material, using collections to "set the mind in the body, the body in the world."<sup>101</sup> It is impossible to ignore the fact that these objects began as dresses worn by women and became furniture to be sat upon. The body changes its position, from inside to outside the dress. The role of supporting the textile transfers from the body dressed in undergarments to the sofa frame. The viewer's gaze shifts from the woman wearing the dress to the dress wearing the sitter. Re-envisioned dresses do this work of setting the body in the world.<sup>102</sup> Despite the body being so integral to both dresses and

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<sup>99</sup> Bernard L. Herman, "Tabletop Conversations: Material Culture and Everyday Life in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World.," *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America*, Ed. John Styles and Amanda Vickery (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 2007), 37–59.

<sup>100</sup> Werner Muensterberger, "Passion, or the Wellsprings of Collecting" and "First Possessions," in *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). 4.

<sup>101</sup> Glassie, *Material Culture*, 42.

<sup>102</sup> Glassie, *Material Culture*, 42.

furniture, its presence is lost through the negation of the dress form and the barring of sitting on the furniture. Visitors felt trepidation about the physicality of their bodies in the house. In a now-famous poem titled “Good Girl’s Soliloquy,” a visitor explained that good guest of the house did not let their bodily presence be known in the objects. She said that “when I visit Winterthur / Most strange discomfort I endure / For ne’er I lie upon the bed / Or put my shoes on the Franklin spread” as one might do at home.<sup>103</sup> These objects were created for bodies, and by disallowing their use as such, du Pont further exercises his control over his collection and those that visit it.

The experience du Pont was able to craft for visitors was not codified in a day. It took years of building his collection to crystalize. It is important to remember that this was a learning process for him as well as the people he employed. Winterthur is a teaching collection in the purest sense. Its physical assemblage was a pedagogical exercise in American materiality. The arc of both du Pont and LoNano’s knowledge is profound – they begin by referring to materials only by their tag numbers, and by the 1950s are corresponding using general date frames to reference textiles.<sup>104</sup> The following chapter will delve into this slow learning and assemblage, understanding the role of the working craftsman in the creation of spaces of Colonial Revival luxury.

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<sup>103</sup> Box H496, Winterthur Archives. Reproduced in Linda Eaton, Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, *Quilts in a Material World: Selections from the Winterthur Collection* (New York: Abrams & Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 2007). 176.

<sup>104</sup> “Mr. du Pont would like to know the price of the blue and yellow material as he thinks it might go in the Morning Room. He says you will know the material he means as it is thirty years later than the yardage of Philip de la Sale material.” Henry Francis du Pont, letter to Ernest LoNano via secretary, March 31, 1947.

## Chapter 5

### CONSUMPTION: INTERRUPTING TRUTH-MAKING IN THE COLONIAL REVIVAL

*“In the end, the art of the past is being mystified because the privileged minority is striving to invent a history which can retrospectively justify the role of the ruling classes, and such a justification can no longer be made in modern terms. And so, inevitably, it mystifies.”<sup>105</sup>*



#### The Colonial

Revival reflects the present through a lens of the past. As a modality “made rather than found, [it] generates passionate struggles over its meaning.” Control over history is “an important

Figure 10 Ernest LoNano (front row, third from left) with his colleagues in the inaugural class of the Attingham School in 1952. The Attingham School is a summer program that trains participants in British Decorative Arts through immersive tours of historic sites. Geoffrey Beard in *Attingham, The First Forty Years*. Image courtesy of author.

power relation,” one that allows “particular social groups to establish those versions of historical truth that serve their own interests.”<sup>106</sup> Henry Francis du Pont engaged in his

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<sup>105</sup> Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC and Penguin, 1972. 11.

<sup>106</sup> Yiorgos Anagnostou, *Contours of White Ethnicity: Popular Ethnography and the Making of Usable Pasts in Greek America* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 3.

version of truth-making through Winterthur, employing the skilled workshop of Ernest LoNano to execute his vision. Despite supposedly operating exclusively under the wishes of his patron, LoNano's practices interrupted this narrative, placing his own claim to ownership of American history through design and monetary control in the present.

### **Colonial Revival Historiography**

The Colonial Revival was a curation of motifs that reflected America's colonial past in nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty first century design. This design trope encompasses different forms of colonialism, appearing in objects ranging from bow-front chests to Spanish baroque leather chairs to Emanuel Louetta's painting of Washington crossing the Delaware.<sup>107</sup> Richard Guy Wilson describes the Colonial Revival as "an attitude or a mental process of remembering and maintaining the past that generations of Americans have quite consciously created."<sup>108</sup> However, before maintaining the past, "Americans first had to become convinced that they had a culture before that culture could be promoted."<sup>109</sup> As this chapter explores, the

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<sup>107</sup> Aware of others, this thesis specifically addresses the revival of English colonialism, concentrated mainly on the east coast of the United States. One should also note the critical lens that this section introduces against the colonial revival is specifically against its manifestation at Winterthur. The movement is multifaceted and not monolithic, with many people engaging with its concepts with different approaches from du Pont.

<sup>108</sup> Richard Guy Wilson, Eyring, Shaun., Marotta, Kenny., *Re-Creating the American Past : Essays on the Colonial Revival* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006). 3.

<sup>109</sup> Dianne H. Pilgrim, "Inherited from the Past : The American Period Room," *American Art Journal / Publ. by Kennedy Galleries*, 1978, 6.

aesthetic of Americanness took root in the early twentieth century though an increased interest in the decorative arts.

The 1876 Centennial Celebration of the foundation of the United States, hosted in Philadelphia, sparked an interest in early America. It was the first World's Fair held in the United States and commemorated the hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Prior to this exhibition, many felt that they could not consider colonial buildings as "a model of architecture ... in any aesthetic sense."<sup>110</sup> Despite this belief, many who felt that because colonial architecture had "looked upon great men and great events," it had the power to lift their "minds to a higher level of feeling."<sup>111</sup> The exposition fed upon the idea of important architectural forms connecting to great histories and many of the auxiliary buildings highlighted colonial forms. This celebration sparked an interest in early America and created a strong market for American antiques, inspiring those with disposable income and patriotic hearts to decorate their homes using the decorative arts of the nation's founders.<sup>112</sup>

The interest in Americana was sustained past the centennial celebration. The 1920s once again saw increased public interest and investment, with the creation of the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum in 1924, the Philadelphia

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<sup>110</sup> Cambridge Citizens, "Old South Meeting-House. Report of a Meeting of the Inhabitants of Cambridge, in Memorial Hall, Harvard College." (Boston: Press of G.H. Ellis, 1877), 7.

<sup>111</sup> Cambridge Citizens, "Old South Meeting-House," 8.

<sup>112</sup> This period also saw the publication of Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste* which advised readers to "furnish their houses in accordance with a sense of the picturesque" while maintaining "modern notions of comfort and convenience." Early American seventeenth-century design fit this mold.

Sesquicentennial International Exposition in 1926, and the period rooms at the Brooklyn Museum in 1929. This interest continued through the twentieth century, and arguably still continues through American heritage brands like Bode or more traditional reproduction stores like The Seraph. There is a stereotype that those who participated in this artistic practice were doing so only as a way of communicating wealth. Some were genuinely interested in United States history, others because it was easily producible, and some because it had commercial value.<sup>113</sup> The people who engaged with the Colonial Revival were diverse, from the average shopper at Ethan Allen to Henry Ford and his creation of Greenfield Village.

Not only did the Colonial Revival inspire collectors, but it also encouraged a field of academic thought. In the early twentieth century, the overlap between collector and scholar was strong, with publications such as Wallace Nutting's *Windsor Chairs* drawing from his love of the object as a collector.<sup>114</sup> In the middle of the twentieth century, scholars primarily drew from experience as academics, not personal collectors, though they were still closely tied to collectors, and their works reflected that connection. Publications like Charles Hummel's *A Winterthur Guide to American Chippendale Furniture* provided a scholarly overview of a Colonial Revival collection.<sup>115</sup> Hummel was among several Winterthur-based scholars who used the collection to investigate early American aesthetics under the supervision of du Pont.

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<sup>113</sup> Wilson, *Recreating the American Past*, 5.

<sup>114</sup> Wallace Nutting, "Windsor Chairs." (Newburyport: Dover Publications, 2012).

<sup>115</sup> Charles F. Hummel, "A Winterthur Guide to American Chippendale Furniture: Middle Atlantic and Southern Colonies" (New York: Crown, 1976).

These scholars argued for the importance of material culture and craft as historical evidence, laying strong foundations for the field.

Following the 1960s, scholarship adopted a more critical lens, considering consumption and consumers as the antiques market skyrocketed around the bicentennial. About ten years after this celebration, historian T. H. Breen enlightened audiences of the connection between consumer goods and colonial identity and how the two entities fed and shaped one another through his essay, titled “‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century.”<sup>116</sup> He argued that colonists demonstrated not only personal taste through material culture, but also status and political affiliation. This latent system of communication “provided them with a common framework of experience, a shared language of consumption.”<sup>117</sup> The Colonial Revival capitalized on the romantic notions ascribed to a colonial past understood primarily in terms of patriotism and craftsmanship in the name of aesthetics. Today, scholars look at the movement through a critical lens, understanding the temporal layers of taste and framing the Colonial Revival as a reflection of its present. The academic arc has slowly bent from tight control exerted by collectors to a distanced, historical stance.

### **Narrative Control Through Object Creation**

The scholarship and collecting of the Colonial Revival are profoundly object-centric. Materiality is used as a proving ground for American histories and legacies.

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<sup>116</sup> T. H. Breen, “‘Baubles Of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present* 119, no. 1 (May 1, 1988): 73–104.

<sup>117</sup> Breen, *Baubles of Britain*, 448.

Re-envisioned dresses, one form of this material evidence, are a form of what Richard Guy Wilson refers to as a “caricature of what the past might have been,” they are no longer the dresses they were and have been repurposed in a form for which they were never intended. They recall an ideal past while remaining firmly rooted in their American present.<sup>118</sup> They are symbols of the past shaped by their present. Re-envisioned dresses were seen not only by LoNano and du Pont, but also by the visitors to Winterthur, subscribers to the magazine *Antiques*, those who passed through the LoNano New York showroom, and many others in their elite circles. These objects are part of a vast network, individuals, and experiences that, when consumed, create what scholars consider the Colonial Revival. This aesthetic would not be nearly as powerful without a receptive audience – the consumers of du Pont’s commodification of wealth.

Publications speaking to a range of audiences such as *The Magazine Antiques* and *House Beautiful* featured homes of the exceptionally wealthy, and advertisements like LoNano’s to encourage readers to aspirationally participate in the antiques market (see Appendix 3 for a sampling of LoNano advertisements).<sup>119</sup> LoNano used his advertisements to communicate his relationship to du Pont’s taste, thus establishing him as a tastemaker in his own right. He ran advertisements with images of his designed interiors in *The Magazine Antiques*, though he also paid for text-only promotion in publications such as *Town and Country*, often when his work was cited

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<sup>118</sup> Wilson, *Recreating the American Past*, 9.

<sup>119</sup> Peter Bleed, “Purveying the Past: Structure and Strategy in the American Antiques Trade,” *Plains Anthropologist* 45, no. 172 (2000): 179–88. Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, “Metropolitan Americana,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin / Metropolitan Museum of Art* ., 1957, 1–12. John Loughery, “Americana,” *Hudsonreview The Hudson Review* 55, no. 1 (2002): 114–22.

in an article. His advertisements of Winterthur interiors were carefully crafted with the approval of du Pont, as discussed in Chapter Three. The copy accompanying the images reads: “A complete decorating service to suit your budget – Traditional or Contemporary – including decorative accessories, painting, remodeling and restoration. // Curtain maker and upholsterer for the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum // Ernest LoNano,” followed by his address, the name of the room at Winterthur, and the photography credit. By name alone, these advertisements placed him in the sphere of du Pont’s taste.



Figure 11 Ernest LoNano advertisement in *The Magazine Antiques*, 1958, featuring Winterthur’s Readbourne Room. *The Magazine Antiques*, Volume 71, June 1958. Image courtesy of author.

Figure 11 is an example of a typical LoNano advertisement, with the LoNano name large on the left, the standard copy text, and an image of an interior he crafted (often with input from a patron), in this case the Readbourne Room (or Readbourne Parlor) at Winterthur. Readbourne Parlor is on the fourth floor of the house, and in the image readers can just see out the central window onto the back terrace. The room derives its name from installed architectural details removed from the 1733 home by the same name in Centerville, Maryland. The space is dominated by a portrait of Experience Johnson Gouverneur which hangs above a fireplace lined in delft tiles and is filled with sumptuous textiles from the silk velvet slip seats in the foreground to the nineteenth-century Persian medallion rug they rest upon. The photograph of this interior feels dominated by the spirit of du Pont, despite being an advertisement for LoNano. By focusing on the room as a whole, attention is drawn to the larger curatorial eye and aesthetic rather than a craft work in individual objects. On first glance it is not obvious what LoNano is providing. Only after one reads the small text to the side of the image do they discover that he does custom upholstery for home interiors. The image of the museum space with the advertisement of home serves creates a disconnect between the function of furniture as display and furniture as practical comfort as well as the line between public and private space. Through his advertisements, he is demonstrating that he is able to bring the museum to the customer's private living room. By hiring him and his deep knowledge base, he provides the aesthetic of the elite to clients. In these advertisements du Pont did not allow LoNano to call himself the decorator of Winterthur. Du Pont laid claim over the space as a whole while LoNano is associated with isolated objects; these advertisements present LoNano's work through the lens of du Pont. Though this thesis

is focused on LoNano, his advertisements function exactly as du Pont and LoNano intended: as an image that privilege du Pont's vision. LoNano capitalizes on his deep involvement with the crafting of this vision by associating his name and practice with it.

In addition to consecrating his relationship to du Pont's taste in text, these advertisements placed LoNano in the sphere of tastemakers. Textiles play key roles in the rooms chosen for the images, from the Blackwell Parlor filled with English-made Chinoiserie-patterned drapes and chairs to the PELLE et Cie reproduction lampas in the Phyfe Room. John Berger remarks that "publicity is always about the future buyer." It offers the buyer a fantasy of themselves "made glamorous by the product or opportunity it is trying to sell" which in turn makes themselves envious of the fiction. He asks "yet what makes this self which he might be envious?" And answers, "the envy of others. Publicity is about social relations, not objects."<sup>120</sup> Through these images LoNano was able to build a fantasy of the buyer in a home like du Pont's, offer the consumer proximity to du Pont taste and status through his paid services.

Both LoNano and du Pont benefited from these advertisements. LoNano was able to show his wares in a beautifully curated setting, illustrating their place in a collector's home. While the objects are the physical product of his labor, he is ostensibly selling the image that accompanies them. He is selling his clients the ability to live with the same taste and luxury that du Pont's interiors demonstrate, which simultaneously brings credit to his work while consecrating the public's image of the lifestyle du Pont's wealth can purchase. Du Pont's home is named alongside those of

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<sup>120</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 132.

George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. He is placed in a lineage of great American wealth and power through the advertisement and labor of LoNano's immigrant workshop.<sup>121</sup>

### **The Golden Sofa: Redux**

One can once again turn to the example of the Golden Sofa as a modality for understanding the tensions present in the creation and consumption of the house. It is an incarnation of what Berger calls a “bogus religiosity;” it holds the cultural sense of grandeur and monetary value. Berger theorizes that when an image becomes saturated in the media, it loses its exclusivity, which makes the physical object unique and covetable, imbuing the object with a “bogus religiosity.” In this moment, the meaning of the object no longer “lies in what it uniquely says,” but rather in what it “uniquely is.”<sup>122</sup> Because of this association, the Golden Sofa is assigned what one might call false authenticity today (false in the sense that this is an eighteenth-century sofa frame upholstered in the early twentieth century with a textile never meant for upholstery fabric. The sofa as an entire object as presented at Winterthur is still authentic as a signifier of applied wealth). To du Pont and LoNano, authenticity was “seen as an objective and measurable attribute” present in the materials (frame and textile independently) of the sofa, meaning their provenance in the eighteenth century.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> LoNano frequently listed Mount Vernon, Monticello, the Met, and Winterthur as his clients in advertisements and his letterhead. See Appendix B for a sampling of his advertisements, and Appendix C for a chronology of his letterhead.

<sup>122</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 21.

<sup>123</sup> Siân Jones, “Negotiating Authentic Objects and Authentic Selves: Beyond the Deconstruction of Authenticity,” *Journal of Material Culture* 15, no. 2 (2010): 182.

What was important was the perception of the authenticity, both to du Pont and to his visitors, and that the burgeoning museum collection was viewed as “good.” Like the house as a whole, the sofa is not authentic to the eighteenth century, but rather to the unique moment of collaboration that created this re-envisioning of the period. Du Pont and LoNano worked together to create their definition of authenticity, one that was specifically crafted, and thus can only be evaluated, “within the cultural contexts to which it belongs.”<sup>124</sup>

Not only does the absurdity of authenticity interface with materials, but also in artistic creation. If one were to look at this object in context, like the photographs discussed above, it would register as an object curated by du Pont. It fits seamlessly into the lexicon of the house, almost acting as something to placate the eye while skimming the room, providing a sort of latent reassurance of taste. The authenticity that they have built is based on their defined sincerity of materials, a way to maintain an air of honesty in the house.<sup>125</sup> For LoNano, authenticity as proved through his relationship with du Pont, was a way to confirm the integrity of his business and the materials they produced.<sup>126</sup>

For du Pont, authenticity became important in the eyes of his visitors. This sofa was intended to reside either in Port Royal Hall or the Chinese Parlor, two spaces

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<sup>124</sup> International Council on Monuments and Sites, “The Nara Document on Authenticity,” (ICOMOS, 1994). Article 11.

<sup>125</sup> Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Charles Eliot Norton Lectures; 1969-1970 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), 1-200.

<sup>126</sup> Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Malden, MA ; Blackwell Pub., 2008), 1-176.

with divergent functions.<sup>127</sup> Port Royal Hall was intended as the grand entrance for visitors, where du Pont would welcome guests but quickly move through the hall. Port Royall Hall is an important, albeit transitional, space. In this hallway, the sofa is performative. Guests would not have been able to or encouraged to sit upon it. The sofa would function as a visual rather than a tactile experience, much like the LoNano advertisements. There could not be an inversion of the body and in the dress, as one's physical body was not integral to the interaction. In contrast, the Chinese Parlor was a main entertainment space for du Pont and his family. Today it is a key point of interpretation, where guests then and now could linger and enjoy their surroundings. Then guests could interact with the sofa personally, inserting themselves into the physical history of the object, interrupting the narrative between the body and original dress. The importance of this sofa was not purely in its aesthetic harmony with both rooms given its transferable quality, and thus perfectly designed for neither. Its demonstration of high design and materials is what made it applicable to both spaces, functioning as a signifier of taste and authenticity in both the Parlor and the Hall. The workshop of Ernest LoNano was not just creating upholstered furniture, they were crafting enviable images that visitors sought to replicate in their own homes, further disseminating Colonial Revival design.

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<sup>127</sup> Winterthur Museum registration files; Winterthur, 1960.1072

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

*“We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.”<sup>128</sup>*

LoNano and his workshop were active in the creation of Winterthur’s hierarchy-enforcing Colonial Revival design, as illustrated through re-envisioned dresses. This system is but one small facet of the Colonial Revival, but it is mirrored in the structures of other institutions LoNano contracted with and in the relationships du Pont shared with other designers.

The network of creation that brought Winterthur’s re-envisioned dresses into existence was vast, complex, and is still not deciphered in its entirety. Throughout this research additional questions continued to surface, leaving a myriad of paths through which this project can continue. Questions include, but are not limited to: what is the network of artisans in New York City that make the Colonial Revival possible? Where are they located? What does their place-based history tell us about their status and function in New York?<sup>129</sup> Was LoNano advertising outside of *The Magazine Antiques*? If so, what audiences do these advertisements reflect, and how do the ads differ from those in *Antiques*? How did LoNano influence people and institutions outside of Winterthur? What did it mean to be an immigrant craftsman in the Colonial Revival?

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<sup>128</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 9.

<sup>129</sup> This thought came about while reading correspondence between LoNano and Charles H. Beckley Inc., a NYC based company that specialized in innerspring mattresses, hair mattresses, box springs, and pillows. They were located at 305 East 47<sup>th</sup> Street, New York. (Harvard Warren, letter to Ernest LoNano, March 31, 1941).

Communing with objects is a wholly personal endeavor. This thesis is a reflection of my unique background and how I relate to these objects—a reflection of the relationship between myself as researcher and re-envisioned dresses. LoNano's relationship was primarily monetary in the sense that this was his income, while du Pont's was monetary in the sense that this was an implicit form of wealth demonstration. Today, these objects have the power to continue this narrative of wealth, acting as aspirational markers for unattainable wealth of the past. Rather, they can be carefully inverted as a tool to carefully examine du Pont's demonstration of taste, a way to illustrate to museum visitors the many skilled craftspeople that contributed to building the complex and layered site that is Winterthur. Winterthur can be reframed not solely as the home of the du Ponts, but also as the workshop of LoNano. One would not be possible without the other, and continued study of the makers of the house will only continue to unravel the complex, interdependent narrative of the Winterthur Museum.



Figure 12 The façade of the Winterthur East Terrace under construction. Black and white print, Sanborn Studio, March 20, 1930. Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Winterthur Archives.

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## Appendix A

### JULY 22, 1954; A LETTER FROM ERNEST LONANO TO HENRY FRANCIS DU PONT ENCLOSED IN A MESSAGE FROM CHARLES MONTGOMERY TO ALEXANDER L. NICHOLS

Dear Mr. du Pont:

Herewith I am pleased to submit the figures in my appraisal of the curtains at the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, for the rooms as enumerated.

In arriving at the final figure for the appraisal of the curtains and draperies as listed, several factors had to be taken into consideration.

Throughout the Museum, the materials used in the making of curtains and draperies are antique fabrics of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early-nineteenth centuries. In most cases, sufficient yardage has been obtained through the use of old bedspreads and wall coverings. In preparing these for curtains and draperies they had to be taken completely apart and assembled into yardage form prior to the layout for the necessary steps in their making. This entails quite a substantial amount of labor. Also, all of these had to be hand-cleaned as any dry-cleaning process could not be used with the materials involved because of their age and tenderness. In most cases the materials had to be completely restored, matched, and backed. All of this work--seaming, matching, etc.--had to be done by hand. The use of a machine with these materials would have been dangerous, at the risk of cutting into the material.

The fine stitching necessary for the repairs is very time consuming, and today there are few people available who do this kind of fine sewing. As a matter of fact, needlework of this caliber is rapidly becoming a lost art and the few who still practice it receive high wages.

Today it is virtually impossible to gather the yardages of old fabrics necessary for completing curtains and upholstery of identical or similar materials, as you have done for each room and as was done in early times. The upholstery materials and curtains should match. This is the proper method to follow in recreating period rooms, otherwise they are historically incorrect.

Prior to the last World War, occasional lots of old fabrics came on the market in Europe. Since that time, almost no antique fabrics seem to reach the American market. This is due to two reasons: many were worn and destroyed in the war; and, since that time, European museums buy them up to replace their own collections. Consequently, it would be impossible to duplicate this collection of fabrics today.

## Appendix B

### LONANO ADVERTISEMENTS IN ANTIQUES MAGAZINE

Phyfe Room, The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum; Photo by Gilbert Ash  
Antiques 70, November 1956, p. 418. Image courtesy of author.

A complete decorating service to suit your budget — Traditional or Contemporary — including decorative accessories, painting, remodeling and restoration.

CURTAIN MAKER AND UPHOLSTERER FOR THE HENRY FRANCIS DUPONT WINTERTHUR MUSEUM

**Ernest LoNano**

235 E. 42nd Street  
New York  
MUrray Hill 9-1815  
462 Francis Street  
Williamsburg, Virginia  
Williamsburg 857



*Phyfe Room, The Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum.*

*Photo by Gilbert Ash.*

The Chestertown Room, The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum; Photo by Gilbert Ash  
Antiques 71, January 1957, p. 35. Image courtesy of author.

A complete decorating service to suit your budget — Traditional or Contemporary — including decorative accessories, painting, remodeling and restoration.

CURTAIN MAKER AND UPHOLSTERER FOR THE HENRY FRANCIS DUPONT WINTERTHUR MUSEUM

**Ernest LoNano**

235 East 42nd Street  
New York 17  
MUrray Hill 9-1815  
•  
462 Francis Street  
Williamsburg, Va.  
Williamsburg 857



*The Chestertown Room, The Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum.*

*Photo by Gilbert Ash.*

Readbourne Room, The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum; Photo by Gilbert

Ash

Antiques 71, February 1957, p. 130. Image courtesy of author.



A complete decorating service to suit your budget — Traditional or Contemporary — including decorative accessories, painting, remodeling and restoration.

CURTAIN MAKER AND UPHOLSTERER FOR THE HENRY FRANCIS DUPONT WINTERTHUR MUSEUM

**Ernest Lo Nano**

235 East 42nd Street  
New York 17  
MUso 9-1813

462 Francis Street  
Williamsburg, Va.  
Williamsburg 837

*Readbourne Room, The Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum*

*Photo by Gilbert Ash*

The Tappanhook Room, The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum; Photo by Gilbert Ash

Antiques 73, January 1958, p. 16. Image courtesy of author.



A complete decorating service to suit your budget — Traditional or Contemporary — including decorative accessories, painting, remodeling and restoration.

CURTAIN MAKER AND UPHOLSTERER FOR THE HENRY FRANCIS DUPONT WINTERTHUR MUSEUM

**Ernest Lo Nano**

OUR NEW ADDRESS  
201 East 67th Street  
New York 21  
LEhigh 5-1026

*The Tappanhook Room, The Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum*

*Photo by Gilbert Ash*

The Stamper-Blackwell Parlor, The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum; Photo by Gilbert Ash

Antiques 73, June 1958, p. 531. Image courtesy of author.



A complete decorating service to suit your budget — Traditional or Contemporary — including decorative accessories, painting, remodeling and restoration.

CURTAIN MAKER AND UPHOLSTERER FOR THE HENRY FRANCIS DUPONT WINTERTHUR MUSEUM

**Ernest Lo Nano**

201 East 67th Street  
New York 21  
LEhigh 5-1026

*The Stamper-Blackwell Parlor, The Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum*

*Photo by Gilbert Ash*

The Cecil Bedroom, The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum; Photo by Gilbert Ash

Antiques 70, December 1956, p. 530. Image courtesy of author.



A complete decorating service to suit your budget — Traditional or Contemporary — including decorative accessories, painting, remodeling and restoration.

CURTAIN MAKER AND UPHOLSTERER FOR THE HENRY FRANCIS DUPONT WINTERTHUR MUSEUM

**Ernest Lo Nano**

253 East 42nd Street  
New York 17  
MUney HIR 9 1813

462 Francis Street  
Williamsburg, Va.  
WILLIAMSBURG 537

*Cecil Room, The Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum*

*Photo by Gilbert Ash*

A setting of fine Americana in our Showroom in New York  
Antiques 57, June 1950, p. 404. Image courtesy of author.



A view of the showroom of our new shop in Williamsburg, Virginia  
Antiques 57, March 1950, p. 166. Image courtesy of author.



Announcement

Antiques 56, December 1949, p. 407. Image courtesy of author.

*Announcement*

We take pleasure in announcing the opening of our new showroom and workroom in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, about January 1, 1950.

When in Williamsburg we extend a cordial invitation to visit our shop. Here in our showroom, we will be glad to have you consult with us on any of your decorating problems.

In our workroom, you will have an opportunity to see upholstering and the making of draperies in the traditional methods by master craftsmen.

*Ernest LoNaro*

DECORATOR'S COUNSEL

462 Francis Street  
Williamsburg, Virginia

235 EAST 42nd STREET  
NEW YORK 17, N. Y.  
MUrray Hill 9-1815

Williamsburg, Ernest LoNano

Antiques 60, September 1951, p. 164. Image courtesy of author.

*WILLIAMSBURG*

ERNEST LONANO

The SAME that did certain of the Furnishings and Hangings in the *Palace of the Governors*, and in other private and public Buildings in *Williamsburg*, both great and small — and who has done as much for Persons of Quality and Distinction in other Sections of this extensive Country,

**B**EGETS LEAVE to inform the Publick generally, and the Inhabitants of this Section in Particular, that he now maintains Offices and a SHOP in *Francis Street*, not far from the Capitol.

HERE he offers Householders, Housewives, and Others the most thoughtful and expert *COUNSEL ON DECORATION* in Matters pertaining to the interior Planning, Fitting, Furnishing, and Adornment of Dwellings, and Buildings, whether modest or elegant, simple or ornate — to the End that complete Harmony may prevail.

LIKEWISE he is well-informed and experienced in Matters having to do with the interior Painting, Papering, Remodelling, Renovation, and Restoration of Homes and other Structures.

HIS SHOP is prepared, equipped, and stocked to make and install all Manner of

*HANGINGS & DRAPES*

to Order — and for this Purpose, or for Sale by the Yard, he offers the widest and most unusual Selection of *FABRICKS, MATERIALS, and TRIMMINGS*, both imported and domestick — many in special and exclusive Designs and Patterns, which are not to be had elsewhere at any Cost.

SIMILIARLY, he carries a full Assortment of *FABRICKS and MATERIALS* especially for

*UPHOLSTERING*

which Art he also undertakes in all its Branches, producing the most harmonious Effects, with the skilled and lasting Workmanship essential to such Undertakings.

ALSO TO BE HAD in the greatest Abundance and Variety are

*WALL PAPERS,*

these being of the finest and most likely Sorts, whether of Home or Foreign Manufacture and Design, and adapted to very nearly any Problem, Situation, or Scheme of Decoration.

MOREOVER, he has on hand for Sale a wide Variety of

*ANTIQUES & ACCESSORIES,*

including Furniture and Objects of Art, Rugs, Lamps, Mirrors, Table-Wares, *Dresden* Figures, Glais, Pictures and other Wall-Ornaments, and Quaint Curiosities — many of small Size, and well-suited to Gift Purposes at all Seasons.

THE SUBSCRIBER would make it known that, while his Charges and Prices for these and other Services and Wares are of the most reasonable in the Trade, they are not so established at the Sacrifice of Quality and Durability.

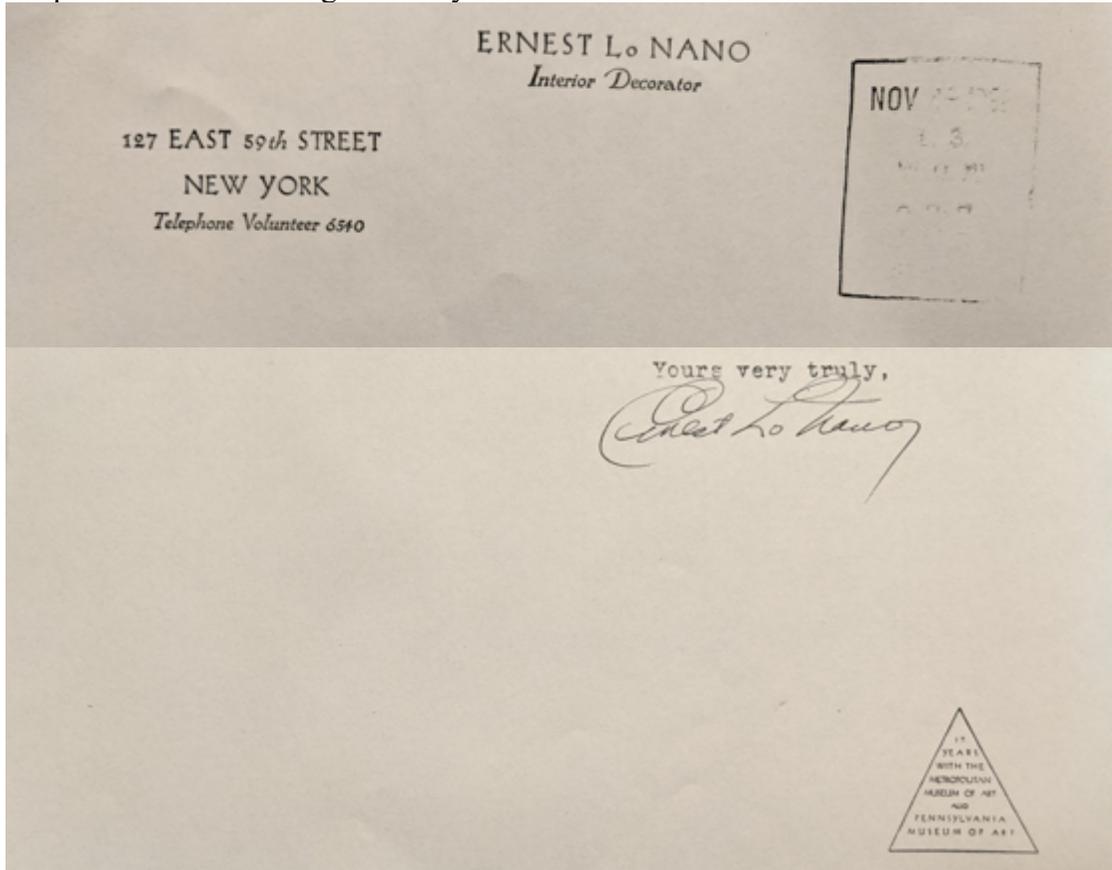
NEW YORK STUDIO • 255 EAST 42nd. STREET

Appendix C

LONANO STATIONARY

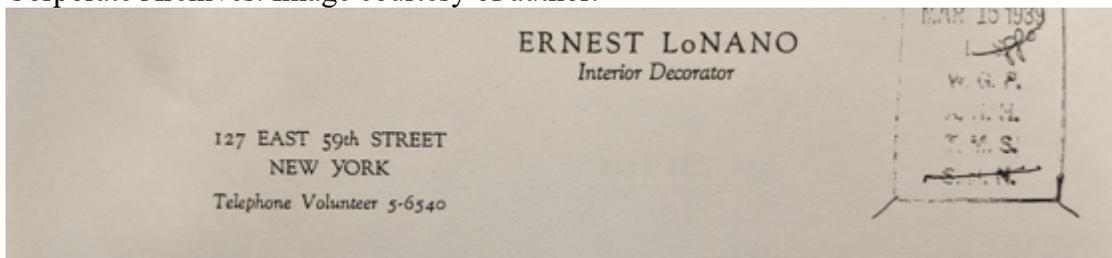
November 3, 1938

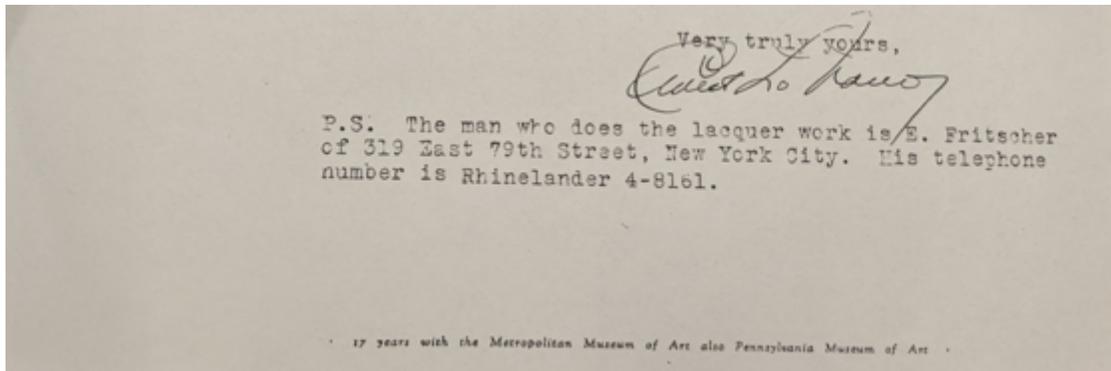
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library – Corporate Archives. Image courtesy of author.



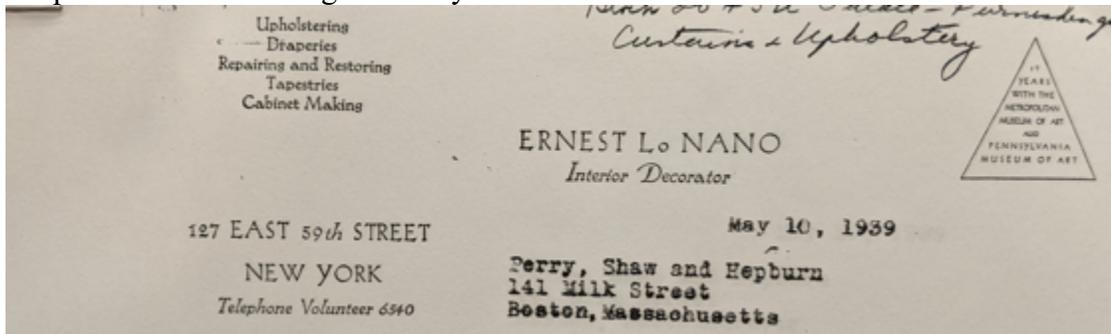
March 13, 1939

Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library – Corporate Archives. Image courtesy of author.

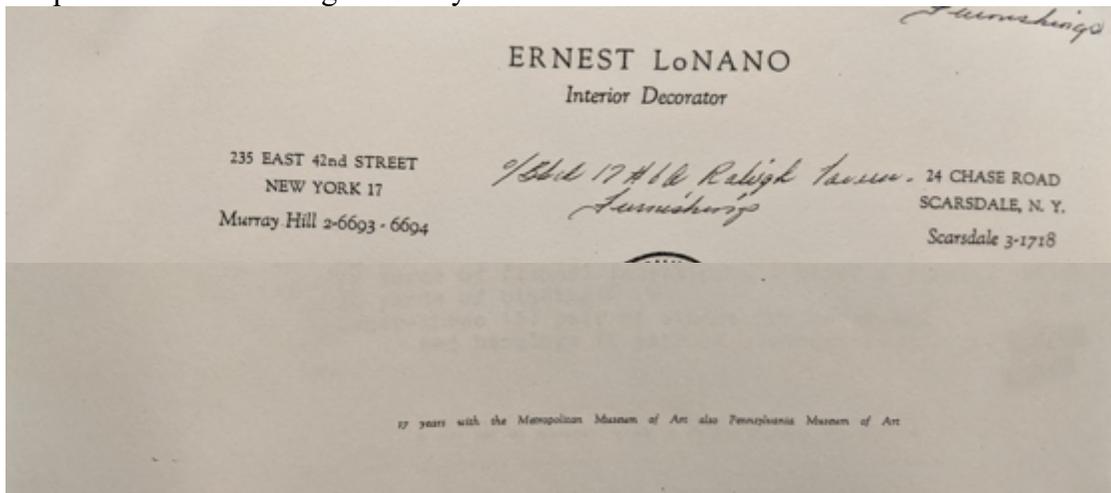




May 10, 1939 (Invoice)  
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library –  
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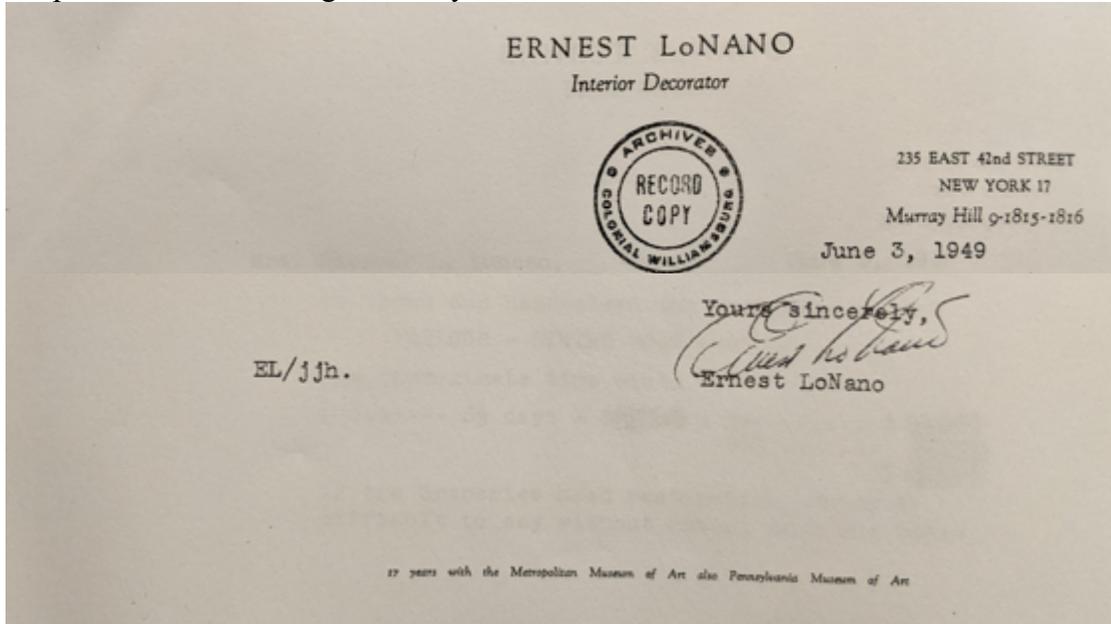


October 8, 1948  
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library –  
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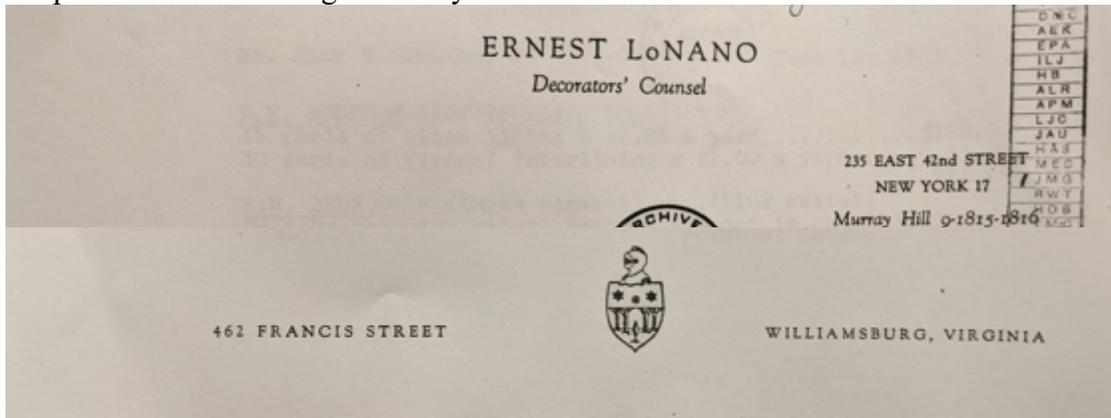
June 3, 1949

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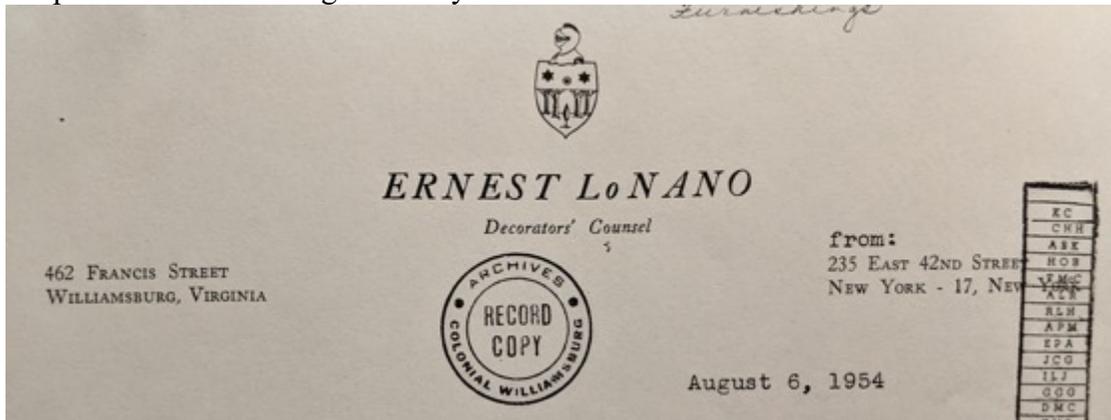
June 13, 1951

Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library – Corporate Archives. Image courtesy of author.



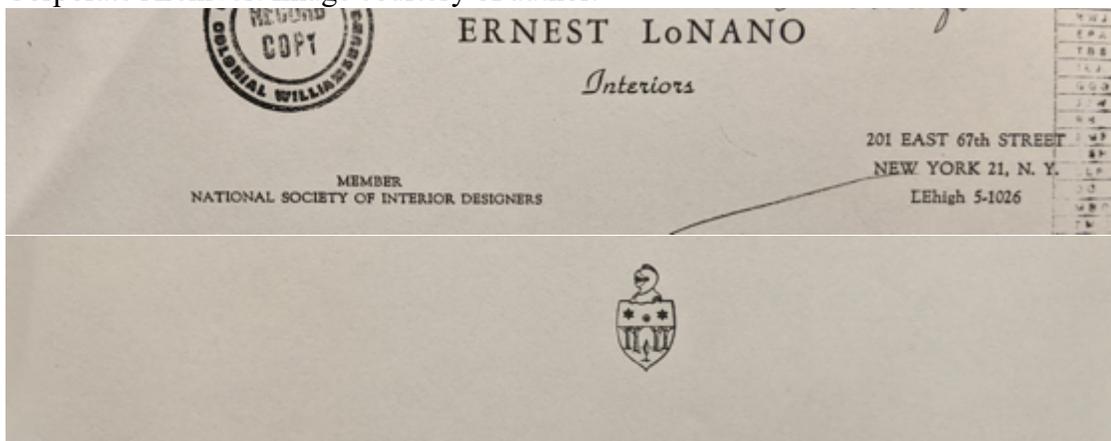
August 6, 1954

Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library – Corporate Archives. Image courtesy of author.



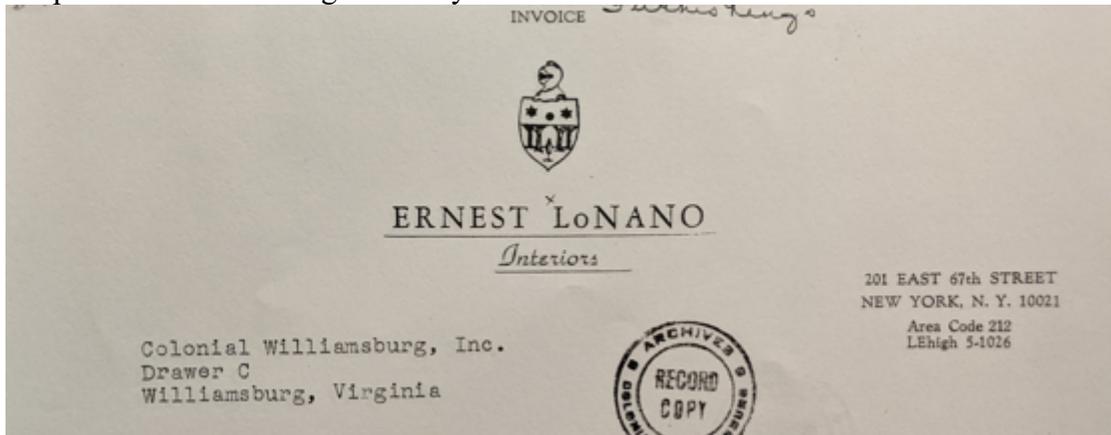
February 25, 1963

Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library – Corporate Archives. Image courtesy of author.



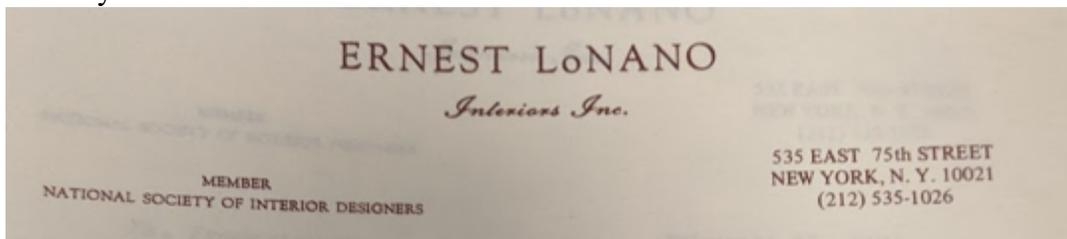
March 25, 1964 (Invoice)

Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library –  
Corporate Archives. Image courtesy of author.



May 6, 1974

Courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library Correspondence Files. Image  
courtesy of author.



## Appendix D

### HOW TO IDENTIFY A RE-ENVISIONED DRESS

#### How to Identify a Re-Envisioned Dress

In searching for a re-envisioned dress, you want to look for the markers of garment construction that remain within the upholstery fabric.

**Sleeves/Bodices** – sometimes, complete portions of garments remain because they yield so little fabric once disassembled. A remaining sleeve or bodice is a clear indicator that upholstery was formerly a dress



**Hemline** – the lower edge of a dress, which is often raised, lowered, and/or cut throughout the lifecycle of a garment. Hemlines leave stark crease lines in textiles, often accentuated by water and debris stains. Pieces affected by hemlines are often discarded because of their general dirtiness.



**Robing remnants** – robings were the wide ruffles that often adorned the front of sacque back gowns. Sometimes, they yielded enough fabric they were useable for upholstery. When incorporated in couches, one most often sees them in piping or otherwise narrow areas of cover. Robings are generally characterized by a narrow width and residual creasing from pleating.



**Center front** – the center front of a sacque back gown was left open to allow one to see the petticoat below. Center front seams are characterized by a sharp crease, but one that is less marred by dirt and water than a hem. It additionally goes along with warp grain rather than the weft.



**Stitch campaigns** – once pierced by a needle, silk damask usually bears the evidence in perpetuity. These textiles contain evidence of stitch campaigns, such as where robings were affixed to the center front, where two lengths were adjoined, or where a sleeve was inset. These campaigns are visible both on the furniture and in scraps.



**Watteau Pleat** – a series of box pleats, typically four, in the center back of a garment. This is where the hallmark fullness of sacque back gowns is found. These are typically identifiable by a series of creases, typically within a few inches apart, that when refilled make box pleats. There is not evidence of LoNano using the tops of Watteau pleats in upholstery, but they remain in the Winterthur collection as scrap.



**Furniture evidence** – sometimes the furniture no longer remains, and one has to prove that the dress underwent the transformation into upholstery. Helpful indicators include outlines of upholstery shapes (this example shows a slip seat) and the presence of upholstery tacks and/or splinters.



## Appendix E

### LIST OF KNOWN LONANO COMMISSIONS

LoNano Commissions Illustrated in Antiques Advertisements, 1949-1960

- John Marshall House, Richmond, VA (June 1949)
- Hammond-Harwood House, Annapolis, MD (July 1949)
- Monticello, Charlottesville, VA (November 1949)
- Brooklyn Museum Period Rooms (July 1950)
- Pingree House, Salem, MA (June 1951)
- Schuyler Mansion, Albany, NY (October 1951)
- William Trent House, Trenton, NJ (February 1951)
- George Wythe House, Williamsburg, VA (January 1953)
- Brush-Everard House, Williamsburg, VA (March 1953)
- Wilton, Richmond, VA (September 1953)
- Adena, Chillicothe, OH (October 1953)
- Governor's Palace, Williamsburg, VA (January 1954)
- Wheatland, Lancaster, PA (February 1954)
- Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, MI (March 1954)
- Mowbra Hall, Scarsdale, NY (February 1955)
- Gunston Hall, Lorton, VA (October 1955)
- Kenmore, Fredericksburg, VA (November, 1955)
- First Ladies Hall, Smithsonian, Washington, D.C. (December 1955)
- Craft House, Williamsburg, VA (February 1956)
- Winterthur, Winterthur, DE (November 1956)
- Manse, Deerfield, MA (March 1957)

- Tryon Palace, New Bern, NC (April 1959)
- Van Cortlandt Manor House, Croton-on-Hudson, NY (September 1959)

Commissions located in additional resources

- Wayside Inn (LoNano 1958 obituary, New York Times)
- Metropolitan Museum of Art ( LoNano 1958 obituary, New York Times)
- Bayou Bend (Linda Eaton LoNano Files, Office of the Curator of Textiles, Winterthur Museum)
- Stratford Hall (Linda Eaton LoNano Files, Office of the Curator of Textiles, Winterthur Museum)

## Appendix F

### IMAGE PERMISSIONS

WINTERTHUR



March 22, 2022

Alexandra Izzard  
1305 N Broom St  
Wilmington, DE 19806

Permission is granted to include the image listed below in *"Like Looking for Gold": Ernest LoNano and the Creation of the Re-Envisioned Dress*, by Alexandra Izzard, to be published as a master's thesis at the University of Delaware in Spring 2022.

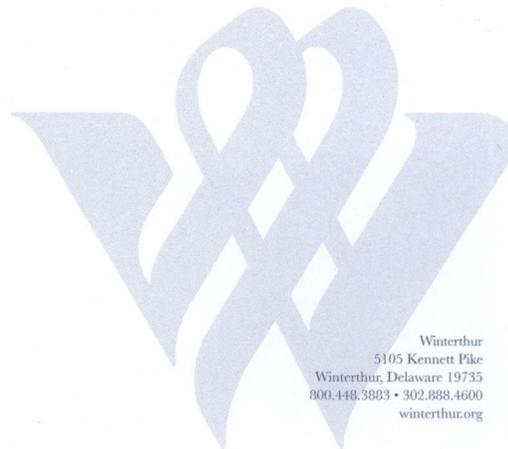
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# WINTERTHUR



April 20, 2022

Alexandra Izzard  
Winterthur  
WPAMC '22

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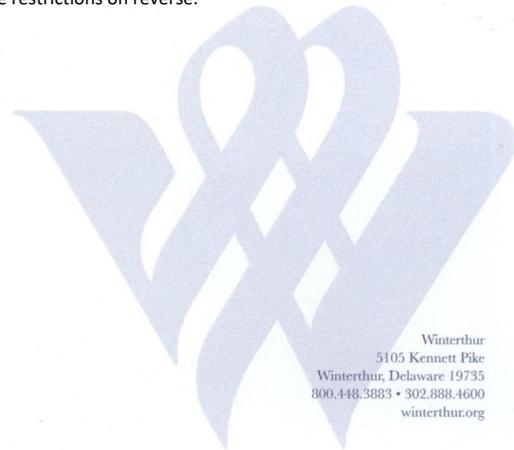
Accession or Call Number	Book or Object	Reproduction to be made from
P120-116	Sanborn Studio. Construction of the addition to Winterthur. Winterthur, DE 1930.	Digital Scan
P127-021	Sanborn Studio. Excavation at rear of present house. Winterthur, DE 1929.	Digital Scan

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