Have you ever wondered what an art conservator does, or how to assess the condition of a work of art? The Tufts University Art Gallery shines a spotlight on these questions this summer in "Open Conservation Studio," an exhibition on view that lays bare the conservation assessment process and offers a rare opportunity to see an art conservator at work. Selected paintings from the Tufts permanent art collection by Elaine DeKooning, Maude Morgan, Georgy Kepes, and Grace Hartigan, among others, are on display, with conservation assessment reports by their side, so that the public can inspect the works first-hand to see evidence of deterioration and damage that calls for treatment.

The Tisch Family Gallery is also being used as an active workshop where paintings are de-fit from their frames and examined by Cambridge, MA conservator Elizabeth Leto Fulton. Fulton has over 20 years of experience as a paintings conservator and has performed work on paintings in the collections of Harvard University, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

About the Collection:
Tufts University’s permanent art collection is to enhance and enliven the quality of Tufts’ visual environment and support the educational mission of the University by encouraging direct and daily contact with original works of art through the publicly sited outdoor Permanent Art Collection and the intra-university Circulating Art Program.

Due in large part to the interests and donations of the Tufts community, the Permanent Collection is broad and diverse and has grown to nearly 2,000 objects since the College was founded in 1854. The Collection is comprised of works spanning a 3,000-year period with artifacts from ancient civilizations to contemporary western art.

A large portion of the Collection is comprised of works that date from the mid-19th century and include landscapes by New York Luminists John Kensett and Christopher Pearse Cranch. The early decades of the twentieth century are represented by paintings such as Grant Wood’s Ph.D. and Alice Neel’s Spanish Harlem as well as several works by Gifford Beal and Russell Cheney. The continued support of many recent graduates and
donors has made mid-century Abstract Expressionism one of the highlights of the collection including paintings by John Singer Sargent and Helen Frankenthaler. Tufts’ holdings also include European paintings by renowned artists such as Emile Bernard, Henry Moore and David Park.

Thanks to its close proximity to the city of Boston, the permanent collection reflects the rich artistic heritage of the city. Many of the paintings in the collection were created by artists with ties to Massachusetts including Jane Stuart, Willard Metcalf, John Frederick Mulhaupt and George Albert Frost. Tufts has received many of these works from descendants of the artists, sitters, or original owners.

**Conservation Assessment Grant:**

Although the Tufts University Art Gallery strongly supports having works from the Collection exhibited in buildings across the Medford and Boston campuses, the consequences are such that many works have been exposed to a multitude of detrimental factors. Temperature and humidity extremes, excessive light, accidental damage and vandalism have all contributed to the degradation of many of these fragile works of art. In the course of conducting a recent physical inventory of the collection it became evident that many of the paintings, specifically the works on canvas, have a significant need for conservation treatment.

Earlier this year the Tufts Art Gallery was awarded a NEH Preservation Assistance Grant to support a conservation condition assessment of paintings in the University Permanent Art Collection. In addition to examining the paintings, Fulton will collaborate with Gallery staff to create a long-term plan for the preservation of these objects through recommendations for improvements to storage facilities and the environmental conditions under which these works are stored and displayed. In order to raise awareness of basic art handling techniques among the University community the grant will also support a Collections Care workshop hosted by Fulton at the Medford campus for all interested students, faculty and staff. Once the condition assessments have been carried out the Gallery will have a written report on the condition of the paintings collection as a whole, as well as a list of conservation priorities that will serve as a basis for further grant requests.

—Laura McCarty,
Tufts University Collection Registrar