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# Curators learn about influential North Dakota woman as painting returns from repair

canvas.  
In the 19th century, Slaughter moved

By [Erika Craven](#)

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BISMARCK, N.D. (KFYR) - A work of art, that might just be North Dakota's "Mona Lisa," has been absent from Bismarck since 2018. Now after a lengthy repair process, that was delayed by fundraising needs and the pandemic, the painting of Linda Slaughter is back and better than ever.

The brushstrokes give us a glimpse into Bismarck's history.

"This is the painting of Linda Slaughter," said Jenny Yearous, curator of collections management at the State Historical Society of North Dakota as she pointed to a framed portrait in the basement of the North Dakota Heritage Center.

The state museum has looked after this painting since the 1920's, but couldn't display it.

"Unfortunately, it had a tear right across her neck," said Yearous.

At the state museum, curators carefully care for art with special cleaning procedures, but send significant pieces, like the Linda Slaughter painting, to Minneapolis for more extensive repair.

"The conservator was telling us how they went in with a microscope where the tear was, where the tear across the neck was. They went in with a microscope and literally found the other fragments of the canvas to stitch her back together," said Lori Nohner, assistant curator at the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

While conservators worked, those at the museum learned a little more about the woman depicted on canvas.

In the 19th century, Slaughter moved to Fort Rice with her husband before she helped establish the town of Bismarck. She was a writer, artist, and woman's rights activist. She started Bismarck's first public school and was the first woman to vote for a presidential candidate in a national convention.

"She was definitely a mover and shaker within the Bismarck community," said Yearous.

Curators say the conservation of Slaughter's portrait not only gives viewers a glimpse into her life, but also has uncovered secrets about the artist.

The artist's full name is still a mystery, but they could see his process as parts of the work had been painted over.

"They used an infrared camera to take a picture of her and they found the necklace was differently positioned than it is right now. That's the artist trying to get the composition just right," said Yearous

The professional repair work on the painting can be reversed if needed.

"It's our job to make sure the artifacts in our collection, that people have entrusted us with, are here for hundreds of more years," said Nohner.

It appears Linda Slaughter is ready for her next 100 years.

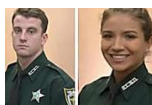
The museum hopes to display the painting in the future.

Curators additionally took three other paintings and a wood carving to the Midwest Art Conservation Center in Minneapolis, MN to be evaluated for conservation.

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