for display. During its lengthy storage, perhaps fostered by the moist Georgia environment, protein-eating insects found the coat an ideal food source. They ate their fill, roughly ingesting a quarter of the wool fabric, leaving behind a lacy network of losses. What remained of the fabric was vulnerable to tearing and loss. Most of the buttons were cut from the coat to serve as family mementos including the eighteen buttons that once held the bib to the coat front. Four detached buttons were delivered with the coat and another two were reattached to the base of each coattail. Charged with stabilizing the coat so it could be exhibited and to insure its long-term preservation, the treatment drew on a wide range of techniques from the conservator’s tool kit. Much of the stabilization and integration of the coat was performed with standard techniques common in textile conservation. The split seams and insect holes allowed access to the interior layers of the coat, which permitted a red cotton interlayer to be inserted and serve as a stitch support for a fine bobbinet overlay, a near-invisible nylon mesh that covers and reintegrates the fragile original fabric. The two new layers disguise many of the losses in the red fabric. To treat the armpits of the lining, stitching was combined with modern adhesive techniques. The fabric at each armpit was humidified, repositioned and reinforced with a light adhesive-coated sheer fabric. The light touch of the conservation-grade adhesive, combined with sparse stitching, allowed the underarm lining to be reintegrated. Soft arm supports may now be inserted into each sleeve and integrated to a mannequin torso to support the arm of the coat while on display. Replacement buttons were cast in epoxy with stainless steel shanks and painted to look like the brass originals. For a brief time, WACC was the center of brass button manufacture for the Columbus Guard.

This unique piece of history is now on display at the Columbus Museum. The staff at the Museum hopes additional Columbus Guard artifacts, from its earliest years through its disbandment after the First World War, will emerge from other families.

—Gretchen Guidess
Assistant Conservator, Objects and Textiles

Opposite, the restored 1861 Columbus Guard dress-uniform coat, and detail showing replacement buttons and fabric repairs. This page, Monument to Comrade Picasso, after treatment.

*Monument to Comrade Picasso* was among the last works by the Ukrainian avant-garde artist and designer Yasyi Yermolov. Active from 1911 to 1968, Yermolov studied under Ilya Mashkov, Pyotr Konchalovsky, and other artists associated with the cubist “Jack of Diamonds” group at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. His own art was a synthesis of several artistic streams, taking cues from expressionism, cubism, futurism, and neo-primitivism. In addition to paintings, assemblages, and sculpture in a variety of materials, Yermolov was a prolific designer, creating textiles and interiors for the Kharkov Pioneer Palace, as well as book illustrations, advertisements, and propaganda posters.

The painted wood sculpture, one of two such “monuments” by the Soviet-era artist, arrived at the Center exhibiting numerous minor structural insecurities, cracking and lost paint, and a surface discolored overall by a coating of ingrained dirt and flyspecks. The most striking feature of its pretreatment condition, however, was the advanced degradation of the polymer film that enclosed the tower. The film was nearly opaque, with a dull yellow color that completely obscured the colors and details within the tower. It was highly embrittled and split easily when handled. From the characteristic vinegar odor that came from the piece and the results of testing, the polymer was identified as a cellulose acetate.

Treatment included cleaning, repairing splits and cracks in the internal plywood structure, consolidation of cracking paint, fills, and inpainting. The degraded polymer on the tower was removed and saved for curatorial purposes. It was then replaced with Mylar of an approximate thickness to the original, wrapped around the sculpture the same number of passes and secured to the outside of the tower using the original nails as possible.

Besides leaving the object structurally and chemically stable, this treatment revealed the lively Easter egg colors and architectural details within the tower that were impossible to appreciate before, and restored the original visual contrast of the glossy and colorful tower against the textured matte planes of the surrounding structure.

—Christine Puza
Assistant Conservator of Furniture and Wood Objects