

# NEW YORK METAMORPHOSIS

Lisa Conte, Head of Conservation at National September 11 Memorial & Museum

## Introduction

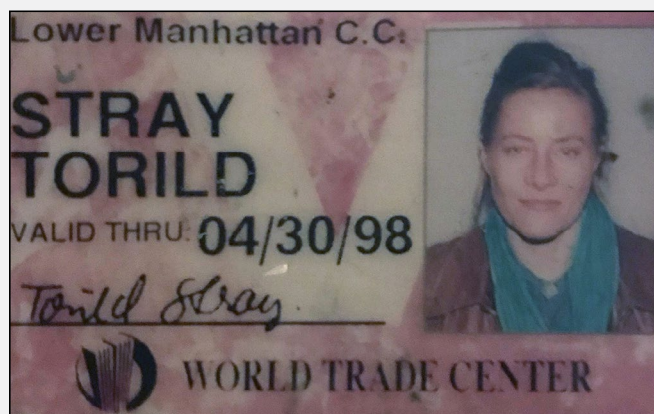
**Fig. 1**



*New York Metamorphosis*, Courtesy of Dwight Primiano

*New York Metamorphosis*, a large-scale charcoal drawing on paper created by Norwegian-born artist Torild Stray, was acquired by the 9/11 Memorial Museum in 2017. Stray created the 60 in x 168 in (152.4 cm x 427 cm) panoramic drawing of New York City while an artist-in-residence at the famed World Trade Center artists' residency program, *World Views*. The program was run by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council in partnership with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The program provided artists with around-the-clock-access to dedicated studio space in the Twin Towers, offering a rare opportunity to create work from high above the city traffic in one of the world's most renowned landmarks. Stray was among a group of 18 artists chosen for the inaugural year-long class of residents in 1997. More than 150 artists served residencies in the Twin Towers before the buildings' destruction on September 11, 2001 (see Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2**



Torild Stray WTC ID, Courtesy of Torild Stray

The residency provided artists free, but vacant and raw spaces, located on various floors in both towers, to create work inspired by the dramatic setting and sites they witnessed and to mingle with the archetypal nine-to-five

occupants. Stray spent her 12-month residency on the 85th and 91st floors of the North Tower admiring, painting, and drawing the grandeur of the city as seen through the floor-to-ceiling windows in her office-turned-studio (see Fig. 3).

**Fig. 3**



Torild Stray in her studio in the North Tower (floor unknown), Courtesy of Geraldine Bien

Stray made numerous preparatory studies for *New York Metamorphosis*, composing smaller vignettes of the larger scene in oil paint, pencil, and ink, to refine her ultimate composition—a semi-abstract portrait of the city looking north, anchored by its classic architectural features, including the Empire State Building and the Brooklyn Bridge. Stray used heavyweight Saunders cold pressed paper, a high-quality rag paper she valued for its unique texture, and worked with charcoal, chamois leather, and various erasers to create her highly expressive composition. Over the course of several months, she worked and reworked the surface—lines, forms, and tones were built-up over time to create extraordinary depth and dimension. Today, the drawing is significant not only for its composition and form, but also because it has become a historical record, offering a rarefied view of New York City that no longer exists.

## Framing and Glazing

The drawing, when previously exhibited, was simply pinned to the gallery wall, as it had been at the time of its creation (see Fig. 4). This method of presentation provided an unmediated experience with the drawing, but did not offer much in the way of protection from physical damage, UV radiation, dust or other environmental hazards. Indeed, the repeated tacking was causing wear to many of the pin holes—some had grown in size and others had torn. The 9/11 Memorial Museum faced a dilemma—how could the drawing be safeguarded while on view and still be presented authentically? The drawing had to be framed.

**Fig. 4**

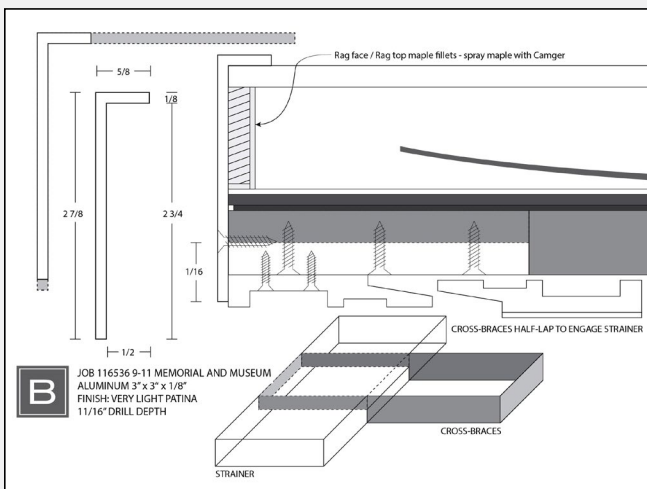


Torild Stray with *New York Metamorphosis* pinned to gallery wall, Courtesy of Torild Stray

First and foremost, the artist was consulted to find a framing solution that would honor the original minimal presentation aesthetic, as well as the period of the drawings creation. **Bark Frameworks (Bark)**—known for their thoughtful collaboration, craftsmanship, and mindfulness about archival materials—was engaged to design and fabricate the frame.

Bark designed a simple, spare frame made of welded aluminum with a patina and wax finish for the drawing to evoke the aluminum cladding of the Towers façade and the framed plate glass windows the artist gazed out of to create the composition. It both celebrated the history of the artwork and provided a relatively unhindered viewing experience (see Fig. 5).

**Fig. 5**



Frame Drawing, Courtesy of Bark Frameworks

The scale and media of the work made the framing project somewhat tricky—the mount for the artwork comprised several layers—Dibond® aluminum panel, 4-ply 100% cotton matboard, and a facing paper to conceal the seam between matboards, which is only available sized up to 48 in x 96 in. Additionally, non-static glazing was needed because of

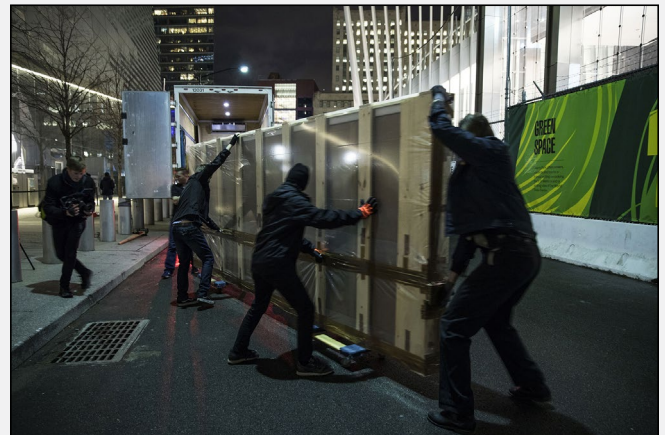
the friable charcoal. Moreover, because of its weight, glass was out of the question. High-quality sheets of polymethyl methacrylate (acrylic) suitable for use in framing have been available since the 1970s, but not all provide the same physical protection for an artwork when it is on display. UV-filtering, abrasion resistant, and with an anti-static coating, Optium Museum Acrylic® was the ideal choice for glazing *New York Metamorphosis*. And with an anti-reflective coating, it provided the optimal viewing of the work.

Like the matboard, the Optium Museum Acrylic® also needed to be seamed because of the large scale of the drawing. **SmallCorp** created the 64 3/4 in x 187 in (164.5 cm x 475 cm) piece of glazing needed for the frame by joining two pieces of 6mm Optium Museum Acrylic. The result is remarkable—it is strong and the seam is nearly imperceptible.

### Installation

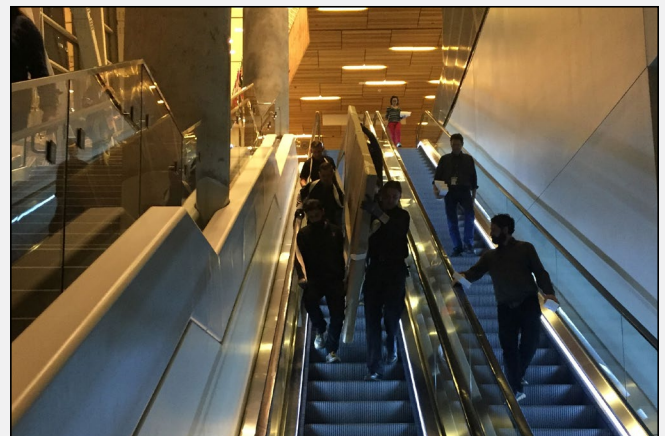
The installation was no less carefully considered—a formidable team was assembled that included staff from the 9/11 Memorial Museum, Bark, and **Crozier Fine Arts (Crozier)** to develop and execute a plan to take the drawing

**Fig. 6**



Crozier team moving the crate from the truck into the Museum, Courtesy of Lisa Conte

**Fig. 7**



Crozier walking down escalator Courtesy of Jin Sup-Lee



**Fig. 8**



*New York Metamorphosis* installed in 9/11 Memorial Museum gallery, Courtesy of Jin Sup-Lee

from Bark's studio to the gallery wall. Crated, the framed drawing was inches bigger than what the freight elevator could accommodate, so it had to arrive through the street entrance of the Museum after closing (see Fig. 6). Crozier's highly-skilled team of art handler's then maneuvered the framed drawing down the escalator (switched-off)—a feat that left many breathless—before it was finally hoisted-up and secured to the gallery wall (see Fig. 7). The work is now displayed not too far from where it was created to tell the story of one view of New York City at the close of the last millennium. (see Fig. 8).



**Lisa Conte**, received her B.A. in English and Studio Art from Hobart & William Smith Colleges and an M.A. in the History of Art and an Advanced Certificate in the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works with a specialization in paper conservation from the Conservation Center, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Lisa is the Head of Conservation at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum and has previously held positions in paper conservation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Scott Gerson Conservation.

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