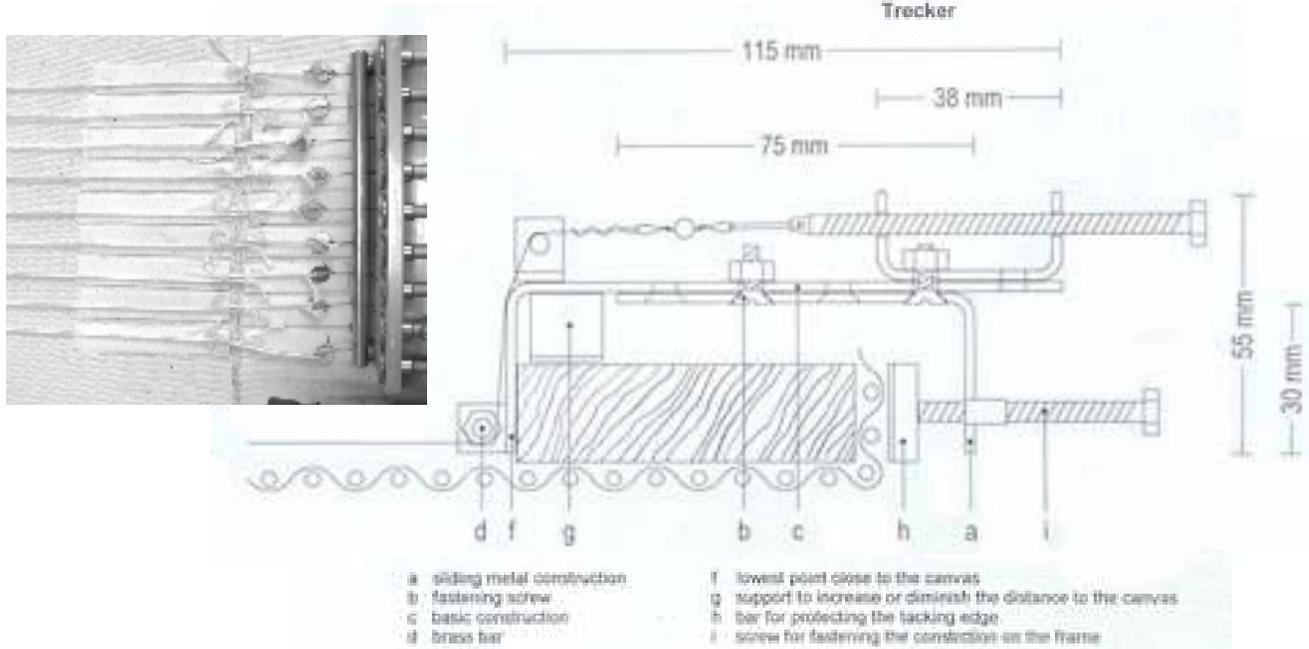


A Useful Tool for the Repair of Gaping Tears: The RH Trecker

(Heiber, Alternatives to Lining)



Der Trecker (The Puller) is a tool that was developed by Professor Winfried Heiber as a tensioning aid capable of pulling the two edges of a gaping tear together and enabling the completion of a thread-by-thread tear mending treatment. This tool allows the torn edges to be brought closer together while the stretched canvas remains on its auxiliary support. With the sad passing of Professor Heiber, his device is no longer available, however Robin Hodgson (RH Conservation) has recently developed a Trecker that is available for purchase.

We were fortunate to have Robin give a workshop demonstration of his products at the Winterthur/UD Program in Art Conservation in May 2011. Along with the demonstration Robin also shared his intention for developing the RH Trecker, expressing that this Trecker was constructed to be a readily accessible tool for the conservator that was durable and efficient. Robin's Trecker was modeled after Professor Heiber's design and works similarly.

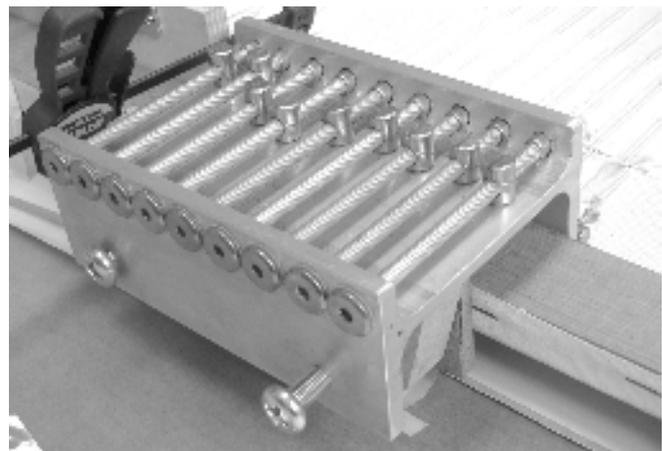
Professor Heiber's model consists of two steel constructions that are pressure fit using screws and wooden blocks and attached across from each other to the wood of the auxiliary support or frame of a painting. Screws are aligned parallel to the surface of the painting, across the metallic construction. Strands of bookbinding thread (or a similar material) are threaded through holes at the ends of the screws and run at a 45° angle beneath a brass rod (ensuring the strands pull the edges of the tear straight back and not upwards) and are attached to the opposite edge of the tear.

The ends of the thread are tied to flat washers that are sandwiched between linen tape, adhered together with BEVA@371 film (or a similar adhesive). These strips are

then attached either perpendicular or parallel to the tear (depending on the type of tear and location), directly to the canvas of the painting. Heiber recommends using Power-Strips™, a commercial product that adheres to a surface and has good shearing strength but low peel strength, for attaching the strips to the painting support

Tension is brought to the edges of the tear by turning the screws, which in turn pull the attached threads and bring the edges of the tear together.

Robin's construction has an aluminum body that is anodized satin black (the version shown here is the prototype,) and all of the screws and the front bar that hold the threads against the verso of the work are stainless steel. The 10 "nuts" that run on the 10 adjusting screws as well as the 20 end fittings are nickel plated steel.



The metallic frame measures 152 mm in length, 112 mm wide, and 50 mm high, similar to Heiber's original framing. The RH Trecker differs in that there are 10 tensioning screws as opposed to 9 on the Heiber Trecker, and the space between the screws is slightly larger in the RH design.

The maximum stretcher bar that can be clamped onto with the RH Trecker is 3 3/8" / 85 mm. It is supplied in pairs and includes a hex wrench to adjust the screws and clamp it onto the stretcher bar.

We received the RH Trecker just as a painting came in with a large and linear gaping tear. The tear measures approxi-

mately 38 centimeters in length and the gap between the two torn edges spanned approximately 1 centimeter at its widest space. The painting dated to the 20th century and consisted of oil paint applied over a medium-weight, fairly coarse, plain-woven canvas. The canvas appeared to be commercially primed and stretched onto a stretcher, possibly one of the "Red Label Stretched Canvases" manufactured by Frederix.

Due to the size of the tear, a makeshift trecker was constructed to provide tensioning of the entire area. The makeshift trecker took about 3 hours to construct, including a trip to the music supply store, and consisted of guitar tuners fixed to a wooden board and a metallic rod. While functional, our trecker provided an interesting contrast to the one built by Robin highlighting the advantages of his design.

Apart from the convenience of having a ready-made trecker, there were several additional benefits evident in Robin's design. The electric guitar pegs used in our construction were chosen (as opposed to violin pegs) with the intent of having more precise control over the amount of tension applied to the loomed threads. The RH Trecker allowed for an even more exact tuning of the tensioning strings with a turning system that was accessible from both sides, allowing one-person control of both frame constructions simultaneously.

The smaller spaces between each tensioning string of the RH Trecker were close enough together to apply an even and consistent tension to the tear while still allowing workability during the tear mending process. With our model, it was difficult to align the metallic bar in such a way that threads would be pulled at an exact right angle, ensuring the tension was being pulled outward. This limitation gave our design less control over the tension.

Robin's trecker also had the advantage of being self-attaching via a screw system, eliminating the use of clamps and clutter, and was very sleek and comfortable to work around.

Overall, the RH Trecker proved to be a very useful tool. The tear was brought together nicely and tear mending is currently underway. Although modifications could be made to the ready-made design, the RH Trecker proved to be an accessible product that provides the conservator with a design both proficient and convenient to everyday use.

The RH Trecker is available from rhconservationeng.com/.

References

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