

Conservation to prevent restoration

Pictures and their frames will deteriorate if not looked after properly; they dislike extremes of temperature, humidity and strong sunlight. Modern oils painted on a well primed, fairly thick composite board and modern watercolour frames using ultra-violet absorbent glass are much more resilient than older pictures but still need to be monitored on a regular basis.

Common signs of deterioration include: cracked or flaky paint, the outline of the stretchers showing through from the back, dull patches on the painting, the slackening and wrinkling of the canvas; bulges at the bottom of the painting (where a stretcher wedge has fallen down between stretcher and canvas); warped stretchers; yellowed or darkened varnish.

Frames can also suffer from deterioration; they can be affected by dust, smoke and water which will stain and dull the gilding; frames and their inner slips can move with time and spoil or warp so that the mitred corners open up and plaster drops off; and frames can suffer from woodworm.

Works on paper should be sealed in between the glass in the front and the taped in back-board behind – if the sealing degrades and the paper is open to the atmosphere it can easily deteriorate. Foxing spots and iron rust fungus staining, wrinkling of the paper due to increases in humidity and marks left by the invasion of thunder flies under the glass are common problems. Works can also be damaged by a cleaner spraying polish on the glass which runs down between rebate and glass and then spreads up and damages the work itself. In short, the only method that should be used by owners to clean oils is simply by using a duster on the frame and gently wiping the painting with a soft cloth slightly moistened with white spirit or turpentine (ethyl alcohol) - other methods of cleaning may damage the painting.

The cord or wire from which the picture is

hung, the hanging fittings on the picture itself and the fittings inserted in the wall can all become weaker over time, which can cause a valuable picture to fall off the wall, damaging the objects it falls on in the process.

Regular inspections

It is crucial that all pictures are regularly – say annually – taken down from the wall and inspected by the owner or preferably by an expert. We can undertake these inspections - called Condition and Valuation Reports - which are based on a rate of £100 per hour. The valuations supplied in the Condition Reports are

“An inspection will identify problems at an early stage and if a picture has started to deteriorate, conservation measures can be undertaken immediately”.

informal; full insurance valuations are quoted for separately as often more research work is required to undertake these valuations. You should note that some insurance companies will request a condition report before providing cover.

Informal valuations will indicate whether you require a formal insurance valuation. If your picture collection includes some valuable works we strongly advise that you have them inspected to protect your investment. The majority of pictures appreciate in value over the years so make

sure that yours aren't under-insured.

An inspection will identify problems at an early stage and if a picture has started to deteriorate, conservation measures can be undertaken immediately. At the same time values can be updated. Pictures that have deteriorated are much more vulnerable to damage through flood, fire, impact, or vandalism than pictures in good condition.

Quotations

When we quote for restoring and conserving a picture we explain in detail the different stages of work that will be necessary and the likely length of time it will take along with a cost estimate. If the time estimate is likely to be exceeded, the customer will be warned in advance. All work is insured for an agreed amount whilst with us and we are very happy to lend pictures temporarily to replace ones that are being restored.

Relatively straightforward restoration of a small or medium sized picture could be in the region of £75-200. For larger and more valuable works that are badly damaged and need many hours of restoration, the cost can increase.

Although we tend to measure conservation and restoration costs against the monetary value of the works, pictures frequently have significant sentimental value, which cannot be measured, although it is certainly to be taken into account.

Framing costs start from around £30 for a mount frame and glass for a small print. Framing for an average oil or work on paper is in the £50-100 range whilst expensive hand made hand gilded frames with “welded” (no sign of the join) corners are more expensive, but are well worth the cost if you have a very valuable painting.

We look forward to discussing your requirements with you in detail at our gallery or call us on 01491 575 499.

PICTURE FRAMING, FINE ART CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION

Art and Science Combined

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CENTURY GALLERIES

A wide range of services

We restore oils, works on paper and old frames. We also make new frames.

At Century Galleries we have been providing the highest quality framing, picture conservation and restoration work for over 40 years. In the late 1990's we formed a close association with **Tadley Services Group**, which specialises in insurance and non-insurance restoration of fabrics, furniture, ceramics, glass and other items of high net value. Century Galleries undertakes the fine art and frame restoration for TSG and because of this relationship we can also offer our customers the full range of restoration services.



Oil Paintings

a) Oil Paintings on Canvas

Oil paintings on canvas started appearing in number around the early part of the 18th century - before that oils were mostly painted on wooden or copper panels. A rectangle of canvas is stretched over a framework of four - often mahogany - stretchers with two small wooden wedges at each corner which move the stretchers apart to stretch the canvas tight. Larger canvases will have a framework of cross-struts similarly arranged to prevent warping.

Paintings deteriorate slowly over time but this tends to pass unnoticed. The telltale signs of deterioration are the gradual stiffening and rotting of the canvas causing wrinkles, cracking and paint loss. The painting itself can deteriorate with yellowing and darkening varnish, and changes in the colour of pigments. The painting can even move on the canvas over time. The stretchers can warp or rot and are vulnerable to woodworm attack. Deteriorating paintings are more than usually vulnerable to impact, and flood damage in particular. All these problems can be rectified. Every painting is unique and the procedures involved from a re-line to a light clean are fully discussed with customers.

For acrylic paint which has been introduced in recent years, we use broadly similar conservation and restoration procedures.

b) Oil Paintings on Panel

Nowadays artists often paint on primed composite or hardboard panels. The

conservation procedures for paintings on panel are different from those on canvas because the wooden panels can move and the restorer needs to correct and stabilise the panels (bracing) before commencing work on the painting.

Works on paper

These consist of watercolours, drawings (pencil, pastel or ink) and prints. All works on paper particularly watercolours and prints are very susceptible to ultra-violet light and will fade over a period of prolonged exposure, therefore they are best kept on view out of sunlight if possible. It may not be possible to fully restore images of this sort once they have been very badly affected by U.V. light.

Paper is subject to damage from moisture and temperature changes as well as insect, bacterial and fungicidal attack. A really good frame will protect the work on paper but if the frame and its backing deteriorates over a period, apart from wrinkling (or tearing) the work will start to show the well known brown "foxing" spots caused by bacteria, the brown stains left by iron rust fungus or from insect damage. Old mounts and card backings cause acid stains.

PLEASE ASK US FOR A VIDEO

illustrating the range of restoration work offered by TSG



TADLEY SERVICES GROUP



"Planning and discussing the work required on two valuable early Victorian oil paintings."



Framing

The objective of framing is both to protect and enhance the artwork. Frames can deteriorate over time because of damp which can warp or rot them. The surface finish can be damaged by woodworm or other insects. The card mounts surrounding works on paper, and the backings, were until relatively recently, chemically very impure. They often contained acid which can cause staining and discolouring to the paper on which the image is made. The backing on older pictures often consisted of very thin pine panels. Combined with strong light these pine backings can cause a lot of damage to watercolours. However they are part of the overall provenance of a picture and we frequently re-install them over the top of modern impervious chemically neutral backing.

Old frames tend to be rather elaborate by modern tastes and sometimes it is felt they look better round a mirror than a picture. However they can be valuable, particularly gilded carved wood frames and even if they are made of plaster on wood it is important to restore and retain them if they are the original frame on that particular picture.

In the early years of the 20th century frames became plainer although matching gold mounts became popular, as opposed to the traditional "wash-line" mount. A gold frame and a gold mount on a watercolour looks rather too much for current tastes, so even if both are original we may recommend changing to an off

"Framing and fine art restoration are both an art and a science. All of our restorers and framers are highly trained and skilled using museum quality materials and procedures and working to strict tolerances. Our restorers are also artists themselves, so as well as having an extensive knowledge of the technicalities of fine art restoration, they are highly creative, a quality essential for a good picture restorer."

white mount with appropriate watercolour wash lines. The important point is that one should retain as much as possible of the original framing of a picture within your own tastes and the introduction of modern conservation techniques.

A good picture framer needs both the knowledge and the skills to competently use old framing techniques and materials and to conserve and restore old frames. To ensure the best results, our framers work closely with our picture restorers and use acid free materials which will not damage the work. We also recommend ultra-violet light absorbent glass for use in frames for all works of value. Our framers are experts in the use of gold leaf, watercolour washes and lines and are experienced with all the complex machinery and tools associated with their job.

We can advise customers on how best to present their pictures and would suggest framing alternatives if the customer required some guidance. We can recommend the most suitable weight and style of frame for a particular painting.

We offer a very wide range of mouldings, mounts and framing materials to choose from and can offer bespoke frames, frames with welded corners and hand applied gold leaf finishes.



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VI

IV The restoration of an old gilt frame.

V Burnishing a gilt frame.

VI Making the "wash-lines" on the mount.

I The removal of yellowed varnish from an old Seascape oil.

II Varnishing an oil.

III The project may involve several different specialists.



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