



~~19 September 2014~~  
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## Heritage Industry Abuses

We should be clear: the preservation of historical heritage has long since ceased to be considered a desirable end in itself. Today it constitutes a means for growing audiences and maximising revenues – as most notoriously is the case with the National Trust. Worse, as Florence Hallett reports below, it now also provides cover for concocting phoney histories to generate (chump) tourism.

### “Exceptionally high levels of satisfaction”

The National Trust’s own heritage portfolio is proving a nice little earner. The trust employs over 7,000 permanent staff and a further 4,000 seasonal staff (in addition to more than 60,000 voluntary staff) at a total cost this year of £194 million. Its Director-General, Dame Helen Ghosh, would seem to earn between £220,000 and £229,000, with a further 97 staff members earning between £199,000 and £60,000. In surveys, the staff members express exceptionally high levels of satisfaction (97%). Growing visitor numbers and income is clearly a high priority for these administrators.



Above, Dame Helen Ghosh, who worked as a civil servant for 33 years – as photographed by Jeremy Young for the 24 February 2013 [Sunday Times](#) article “A wind turbine is a thing of beauty”.

Although National Trust visitor numbers are presently at a record high (21.3 million last year over 19.2 millions in 2013) the trust has expressed alarm because in surveys “visitor enjoyment scores” dropped by 2% last year to 60% – which figure is below the Trust’s own target of 68%. On 12 September the *Daily Telegraph* reported that the trust’s 4.2 million members – another record high – are said to be “getting tired of the most popular attractions and it [the trust] has to do more to make them interesting” (“The National Trust’s treasures are losing their lustre”). However, it may be the case that the members are aghast and dismayed by the National Trust’s self-declared “Disneyfication” policies under which properties can be held to contain “too much historic stuff” and to provide too few opportunities for “interactive” participation by all age groups.

(See: [Sir’s not always right; Applying recreated authenticity to historic buildings in the name of their conservation](#); and, [Bags and Abuses of National Trust](#).)

### A Cultural Fraud at Chester – Florence Hallett, ArtWatch UK’s architecture and monuments editor, reports:

Plans to attach bogus gates to one of Chester’s most well-known historic monuments were realised temporarily last week, during an extraordinary spectacle commemorating the Queen’s 62-year reign. In an event that saw giant effigies of Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II paraded through the historic Eastgate last Wednesday, commentary, and an especially composed poem were provided by husband-and-wife town criers, David and Julie Mitchell. A spokesperson from Cheshire West & Chester Council had said that the ceremony would involve recreating “gates at Eastgate with interlocking shields. As part of the pageantry, they will knock on the shields and be let in.” In the event, *The Chester Standard* reported that local businessman Gordon Vickers, the brains behind the campaign to attach gates to the historic structure permanently, arranged for Roman soldiers to hold up wooden gates, which the queens passed through.



Above and below, three photographs of the so-called Chester Parade from a group shown on [photosnack](#).

So far, planning permission has not been sought for the controversial plan to attach iron gates permanently to the Eastgate, which Vickers claims could attract millions of visitors to the city. In January he told *The Chester Standard*, “This could rival the changing of the guards at Buckingham Palace in London if it’s done in the right manner.” The Chester Archaeological Society has described the plans as “anachronistic” and a “historical pastiche”. Nevertheless, Historic England has expressed support for the plan, and this latest revival of the scheme suggests that planning permission may be sought some time soon.





### STOP PRESS – 18 September 2015

On ArtWatch UK's objections to the increasing trafficking of works of art, see "Works of art — handle with care", the *Financial Times* and "Whatever happened to 'Do Not Touch'?"

## Fake or Fortune II

Here's a curious thing: this evening BBC Television re-showed an episode of Fake or Fortune in which a fake Chagall was exposed. During the course of the programme and afterwards a post we had published on the programme the first time round ("Good Science, Over-reaching science, Over-promoted Science", 24 February 2014) received an unexpected spike of visits.

Our post had begun:

"On February 10th the *Daily Telegraph* published a letter from a professor of chemistry at University College London (Robin J. H. Clark) questioning the relationship between art and science in general terms and with regard to a supposed Chagall painting featured on a recent BBC Fake or Fortune television programme. Prof. Clark expressed particular concern over art world failures to heed the testimony of available scientific techniques.

"In the late 1980s the UCL chemistry department had developed a non-invasive technique – "Raman microscopy" – for identifying both natural and synthetic pigments within paintings. Because the latter have known dates of invention, their presence in a picture can establish the earliest date at which it could have been produced. This technique is said by Prof. Clark to have been known to Sotheby's by 1992. The Chagall painting, he pointed out, could have been exposed as a fake at any point in the last 20 years. He further reported that the painting was exposed as a forgery in his UCL laboratory in July last year in the presence of its owners and the presenters of Fake or Fortune:

*"I am disappointed that neither of the presenters of Fake or Fortune made this clear. The conclusion that the painting is a forgery is based on our spectroscopic results, which showed that at least two of the key pigments had not been synthesized until the late Thirties, putting the earliest date for the painting at 1938, long after the supposed date of 1909-10."*

It is not clear why the BBC chose to re-run this controversial programme.

(For that original post, see: [Good Science](#); [Over-Reaching Science](#); [Over-Promoted Science](#).)

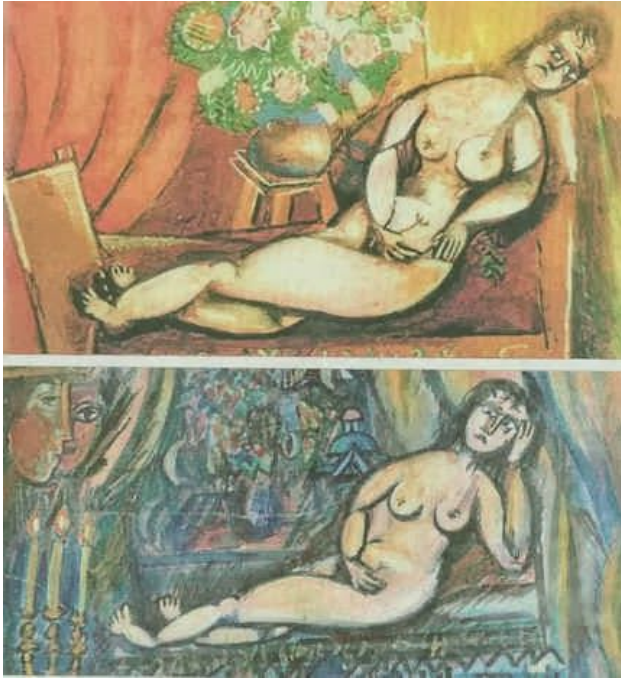


Fig. 1: Above, top, Marc Chagall's "Reclining Nude 1911?" which is said to have been the source for the fake Chagall, "Nude 1909-1910?" (above), as reproduced together in the *Sunday Telegraph* (2 February 2014).

**Michael Daley. 9 August 2015**

## THE ELEPHANT IN KLIMT'S ROOM

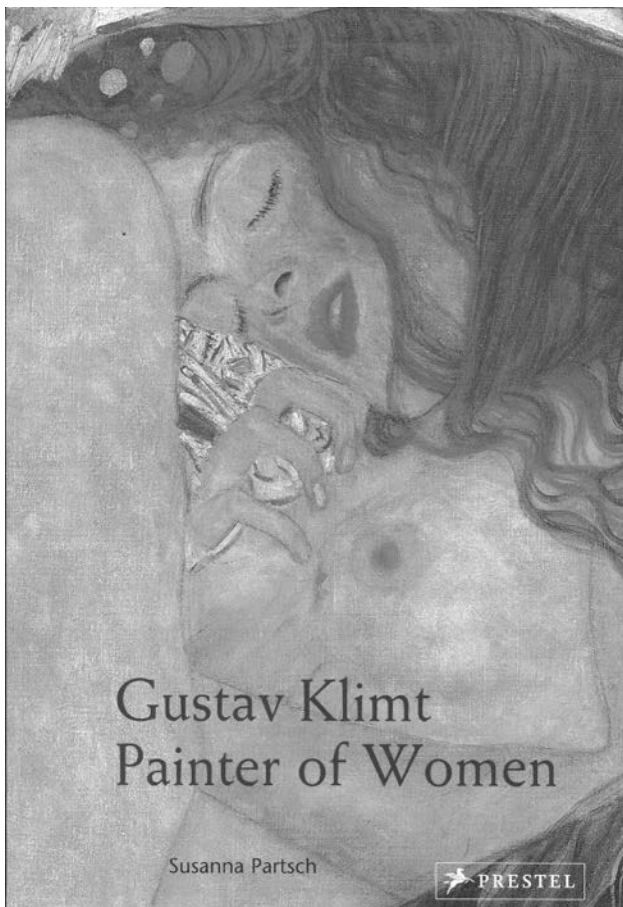
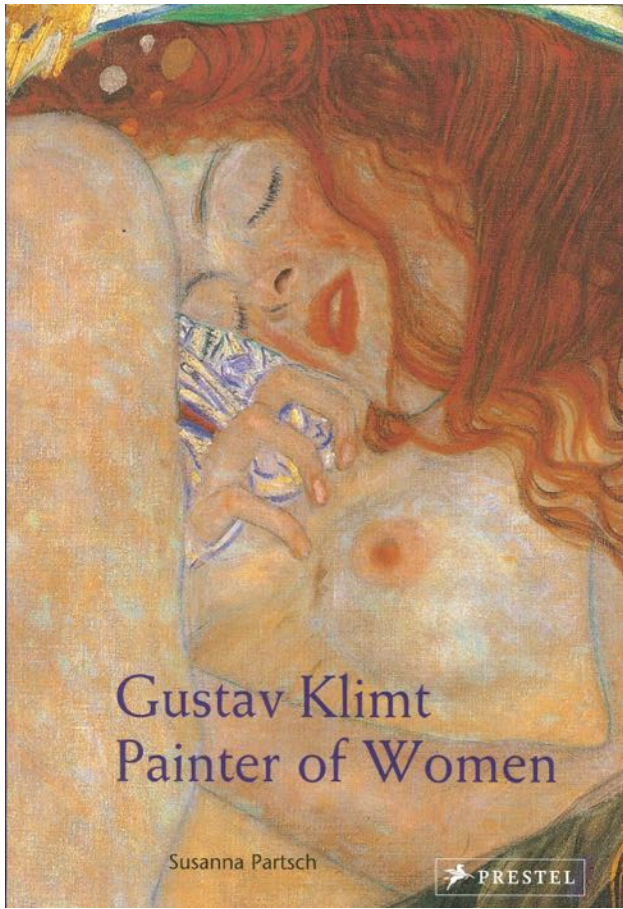
In a recent post ("Now Let's Murder Klimt", 5 June), we let photographs speak for themselves on the widespread debilitation of Klimt's paintings at the hands of picture restorers. Here, we discuss the precision – and the consistency – with which the surviving photographic record of his oeuvre testifies to a progressive and irreversible deconstruction of the artist's original statements.

**"I can paint and I can draw... Whoever wants to know something about me – as an artist, which is the only thing remarkable – should look at my paintings and try to find out through them what I am and what I want."**

~ *Gustav Klimt, as quoted by Serge Sabarsky in his introduction to the "Gustav Klimt" exhibition he had selected at the Isetan Museum of Art, Tokyo, 1981. (See Fig. 1 below.)*

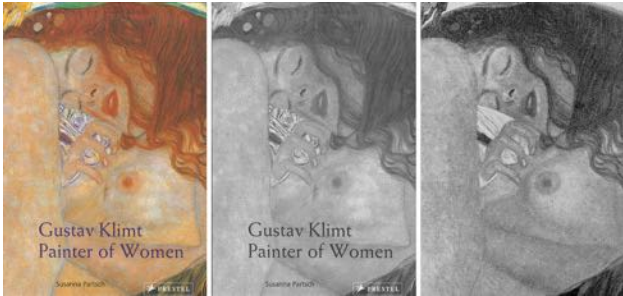
**"After his death, his plea not to be made the subject of biographical inquiries was ignored: 'I am convinced that I am not particularly interesting as a person...if anyone wants to find out about me – as an artist, the only capacity in which I am of any note – they should look carefully at my paintings and try to learn from them what I am and what I have tried to achieve.' Increasing interest in his work over the years has made his many-sided personality a subject of unremitting interest. Artist or upright citizen, bohemian or middle-class bore, sex-obsessed tyrant or sympathetic son and brother? Fantasy was given free reign...."**

~ *Susanna Partsch Gustav Klimt Painter of Women, Munich, Berlin, London New York, 2008*





Above, Figs. 1, 2 and 3: Susanna Partsch's book and (Fig 3) the detail of Klimt's 1907-08 *Danae* as published in Emil Pirchan's 1956 *Gustav Klimt*, Bergland Verlag Wien.



The above and all succeeding multiple photo-compilations were assembled by Gareth Hawker, who drew our attention to Sickert's letter below.



Above, Figs. 4 and 5: a detail of a large detailed illustration in the 2007 book *Gustav Klimt*, edited by Alfred Weidinger.

The illustration shown above in colour and in greyscale (Figs. 4 and 5) appears on p. 190 of the 2007 book *Gustav Klimt* and faces a sub-part by Susanna Partsch of a section headed “On Flowers in Bloom and Radiant Women”. Given that this photograph was likely taken in preparation for the book (see below), the question arises: What accounts for the differences between this image and that used on the cover of Susanna Partsch’s own book the following year? Were they both derived from the same photograph but with the image on the book cover having been digitally manipulated by a designer to heighten the saturation of colours so as to increase graphic force and “attractiveness”? Or, is the image in the slightly earlier book made from a somewhat later photograph? If, when comparing individual photographic reproductions, such problems arise from insufficient knowledge of their origins and handling, what can be seen as clear as day when surveying the Klimt literature is that the earliest photographs and the most recent depict works in profoundly different states. If presently we cannot for logistical reasons hunt down the pedigree, the history and the reproductive variations of every Klimt image-in-public-circulation, we can with confidence flag-up some of the glaring discrepancies of testimony that are encountered in the photo-records of the artist’s *individual works*. These discrepancies urgently need to be addressed.

### WHY PHOTOGRAPHS ALONE MUST NOW SPEAK FOR KLIMT, NOT HIS PAINTINGS – NOR HIS SCHOLARS

Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to let Klimt’s paintings speak for themselves. In barely more than a century, his works, like those of many other modern artists, have been traduced by restorers (see *Taking Renoir, Sterling and Francine Clark to the Cleaners*). The Klimt literature is rich in photographs showing his paintings when new and unspoiled but scholars seem persuaded that today’s photographs offer the best record of his work even though early photographs make it easy to identify subsequent restoration injuries – and even though nothing could be simpler or more to the point for art critical purposes than comparing old and recent photographs [Endnote 1]. This apparent aversion to the historic visual record is perplexing in two respects.

First, in all contexts other than art restoration there is grateful acceptance of photographic testimony by scholars. Attributions are made on the evidence of photographs. Art dealer/sleuths hunting attribution upgrades buy works on the strength of online photographs [2]. Paradoxically, as today’s scholars effectively turn a collective blind eye to restoration injuries, restorers are seeking permission to declare their errors on a “without-liability” basis [3].

Second, by not noticing – or sometimes seemingly flaunting – patently injured works, Klimt scholars betray the artist and sell the public short. The detail carried as a book cover illustration at Figs. 1 and 2 is of a horrendously mutilated painting that no longer functions as Klimt had intended. In a world where art mattered for what it is, not for what might be said about it and its backstory, scrubbing paintings to the point where under-drawing emerges would properly count as a crime against art, if not in law, and the restorers, owners, curators, sponsors and trustees responsible for diminishing and adulterating its content would be censured, not celebrated.

### WHAT COUNTS AS INJURY?

Consider Danae’s right eye. In 1956 (as at Fig. 3) if one had drawn a line of cross-section through the brow and the eye down to the cheek it would have passed through distinct tonal values which varied to a chiefly anatomical, partly expressive purpose. The eyebrow was depicted by a mid-tone (not by the present mess of preparatory lines). Immediately below the eyebrow, the brow was given a light tone. Then came the tones of the upper eyelid, passing from dark to light before reaching the line of eyelashes. Below the eyelashes, the form of the lower lid, where the bulge of the eye re-entered its socket was dark. This dark was separated from the tones of the cheek by a strip of light toned flesh. By its relationship to a light source, this tonal sequence explained the forms of the brow, eye, cheek. Today the upper and lower lids are undifferentiated, with both reduced to the same flattening tone, whereas the eyelashes – which no longer attach to discernable edges of eyelids – have been hardened into a series of sharp parallel strokes to the point where the eyelids now seem stitched together. Where formerly the sleeping woman had drawn a white sheet partially across her face with a claw-like, scrunching hand, that piece of stretched sheet is no longer designed drapery but an incoherent jumble of lines and colours (Figs. 1 and 2). The accenting highlights on the fingernails have been dulled and the light on nail of the little finger has disappeared – as has the much broader tonal distinction between Danae’s right breast and her chest. The narrow dark tones articulating the interiors of the lips have disappeared...

### ...A PAINTER’S VIEW OF RESTORERS:

**“Sir,-‘Il faut laisser mourir un tableau de sa belle mort.’ The English equivalent is only ‘Let a picture die a natural death.’ There remains always the recommendation, ‘Thou shalt do no murder.’**

**A curator should wipe, but he must not flay. Galleries should be dry, but not too dry. They should be warm, but not hot. On Friday, Dec. 18, the rain was being captured in pails as it dripped from the skylights of the National Gallery. Perhaps money had better be reserved for the integrity of ‘the fabric’.**

**The attackers of the painters’ position as meddlers with the job of the restorers are in the right. There should not be such meddlers, because there should be no restorers. Voilà le mot lâche.”**

~ Walter Richard Sickert, Letter, *Daily Telegraph*, 31 December 1936

### SOME FURTHER CASES OF KLIMT ABUSE...



To help identify Klimt's original purposes in today's hyper-active conservation world it is essential to study the photographic record of his works, as with, for example, the unfinished 1917-18 *Portrait Head of a Lady* below.





The detail at Fig. 6 (top) is from the work as published in Werner Hofmann's 1972 *Gustav Klimt*.

The detail at Fig. 7 (middle), is from the work as published in the catalogue to the above-mentioned "Gustav Klimt" exhibition at the Isetan Museum of Art, Tokyo.

The detail at Fig. 8 (above) shows the work as published in the 2012 book *Gustav Klimt ~ The Complete Paintings*.



## READING PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES

Do the startling differences seen above not speak of injury to the painting? If such (apparent) changes in paintings were illusory products of the vagaries of photo-reproductions, reproductions would come and go in their narratives, leaning a bit this way one minute; a bit the other way the next. Some changes certainly are of that order (and particularly so in terms of colour fluctuations) but others are simply too great to be reproductive variations. Moreover, the wider photo-record contains recurrent *patterns of change* and these are seen to run across the histories of individual works and entire oeuvres alike. Patterns are always significant and eloquent. In the particular recurring pictorial pattern of concern here, paintings become lighter, brighter, thinner and flatter with successive restorations. (See Figs. 9 and 10, and Figs. 17 and 18 for non-Klimt, single-restoration examples.) A rigorous examination of patterns provides a helpfully focussing diagnostic method. If paint losses are not occurring, why should the net effect of picture cleanings be to compress relationships and minimise values rather than to widen and enrich them?

With this particular unfinished Klimt painting, the most dramatic change occurred prior to 1981 and yet, after over a third of a century and very many more photographic reproductions, no subsequent image has resembled its pre-1981 predecessor – those recorded differences have proved permanent and irreversible. Notwithstanding the promise of one restorer in the US to "*make your paintings look as good as new – or better*", no restoration can recover what has been lost. In aggregate, art restoration is a one-way street that runs away from authenticity, original conditions, and artists' express intentions.

Shortly before the abruptly changed state of the painting seen at Figs. 7 and 8 was published, the picture had been sent from Linz to Tokyo. Loaned works are often "restored", "put in order" and made to "look their best". "Putting in order" often includes "lining" or gluing an additional new and reinforcing canvas to the back of the painting. The bond between the two canvases is usually achieved with glues or waxes and hot irons in a notoriously hazardous procedure that was condemned by restorers themselves in the 1970s. Supposedly ameliorative or "preventive" procedures often produce disastrous material and aesthetic changes with first-time restorations. Scholars rarely nowadays discuss such consequences and seem not to notice, even, when paint is removed from the most vulnerable and exposed parts of the picture surface leaving rows of white dots along lines of canvas weave. Such can clearly be seen to run across mid-tone and dark passages alike at Fig. 8. Restorers euphemise

such losses as “abrasions” when what most “abrades” paint is solvent-loaded swabs.

#### **THE DEVIL IS IN THE *DETAILS* AS WELL AS IN THE *PATTERNS***

The inner corner of the eye on the left of Klimt’s painting (Fig. 6) was formerly marked by two short vertical dark accents. As seen in Figs. 7 and 8, by 1981 those marks had been reduced to a single patch of lighter tone. No photograph or reproductive variation could produce such an alteration. The lips too became lighter and less clearly drawn and modelled. Presumably, good photographic records survive of all treatments to this late unfinished but important work in which Klimt’s working transition from drawing to paint on canvas can be studied? With the losses of a comparable magnitude seen on the Renoir below (Figs. 9 and 10), there can be no question about the veracity of the photographic record.

#### **PROPER RECORD KEEPING, FULL DISCLOSURE**





Above, Figs. 9 and 10: A detail of Renoir's *Umbrellas* before cleaning (top) and after cleaning at the National Gallery.



The two photographs above were made at and by the National Gallery immediately before and immediately after cleaning. The evidence of injury is manifest and our claims on it have never been contested. But again, so far as we know, no Renoir scholar has ever addressed these losses. With this painting we know when, by whom and with what materials the damages were made: the National Gallery has given us full access to its picture treatment records and those disclose that prior to this restoration the only cracks present in the painting occurred along the line of a horizontal central stretcher bar against which the canvas vibrated during its regular travels to and from Dublin. The extensive cracking that emerged on the face was entirely attributable to the conservation "treatment".

### FRIGHTENING SCHOLARS OFF

If scholars are reluctant to discuss restoration damage for fear of upsetting owners (public or private), it is less understandable that they should defer to the professional claims of restorers. When picture restorers insist that the testimony of photographs is not to be trusted they betray professional hypocrisy. Restorers make great use of photography for their own promotional purposes – as when (routinely) claiming some restoration "discovery" or "recovery". They also use old photographs of works to guide their own repainting of losses incurred during a cleaning. On these occasions no health warning against an inherent unreliability of photography is ever issued.

Restorers have now enjoyed criticism-free positions for so long in museums that they lay unchallenged claims to special technical expertises and powers of divination on the authority of which they feel entitled to determine how works of art should "be presented". They freely admit that they restore works *differently from one another* and, yet, contend that *all* of their various improvisations on art are co-equally legitimate, providing only that they are "*safely*" executed. They do not explain how various impositions of "interpretive alteration", might all somehow be artistically

and historically tenable. It is time curators called their bluff.

### COMPARING OLD PHOTOGRAPHS WITH RECENT, MORE RECENT, AND MORE RECENT STILL...

Occasionally scholars do discuss old photographs and do accept the veracity of their testimony. In the above-mentioned 2007 book *Gustav Klimt*, the catalogue of works includes an entry on Klimt's *Portrait of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein*. It carries a 1905 photograph of the painting next to a recent photograph (see Figs. 11 and 12). The author notes that this early photograph shows that "*Klimt later reworked the background*". Acknowledgment is given that "*Klimt made no alterations to the figure itself*". This being the case, why then is there no discussion of the subsequent restoration changes to the figure? Above all, why is there no word on the subsequent incremental washing away of the figure's (recorded) original values that is shown below throughout the sequences of photographs at Figs. 13 to 16 and Figs. 23 to 25?

As with Renoir, there is more interest in the feminism and the sociology of the time than in today's state of the work of art itself: "*This lively, intelligent lady who was described by her sister as being amazingly active, with an exceptional mind and rejecting any form of convention, could not recognize herself in Klimt's portrait. Here, she is shown removed from reality, captured in ornamentation, frozen.*" Again, as in Renoir studies, the scholar is attentive to frocks, noting that Klimt "*depicted the young lady with great virtuosity in a velvet moiré dress and silk scarf. The pleats of her dress are shown in sophisticated nuances of grey which give an impression of the structure of the fabric.*" Then follows a plaint that "*The billowing lengths of material clothing the figure make it impossible to recognize any corporeality beneath them*", seemingly not noticing that a century earlier there had been a markedly greater sense of interior corporeality.

### LOOK AT THE RECORD



179.1 *Portrait of Margarethe Stonborough-Wittgenstein*, unfinished state, shown at the Künstlerbund Exhibition, 1905



179.1 *Portrait of Margarethe Stonborough-Wittgenstein*, unfinished state, shown at the Künstlerbund Exhibition, 1905

Above, Figs. 11 and 12: The joint illustrations to the entry in the 2007 book *Gustav Klimt*, Prestel Verlag (Munich, Berlin, London, New York), on Klimt's 1905 oil on canvas *Portrait of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein*, as shown in colour and, here, converted into greyscale.

With the colour reproduction at Fig. 11 converted to the greyscale version at Fig. 12, the extent of the losses in the painting of the dress as seen in 1905 and in c. 2007 is manifest: the darks in 1905 were darker and the lights were lighter. Within this greater tonal range Klimt had disposed his forces to masterly and vivacious effect. The picture's strongest contrasts at the head were better balanced by the escalation of contrasts towards the bottom of the dress, the treatment of which, truly, was a painterly tour de force.

### GOING, GOING, GOING, GOING...



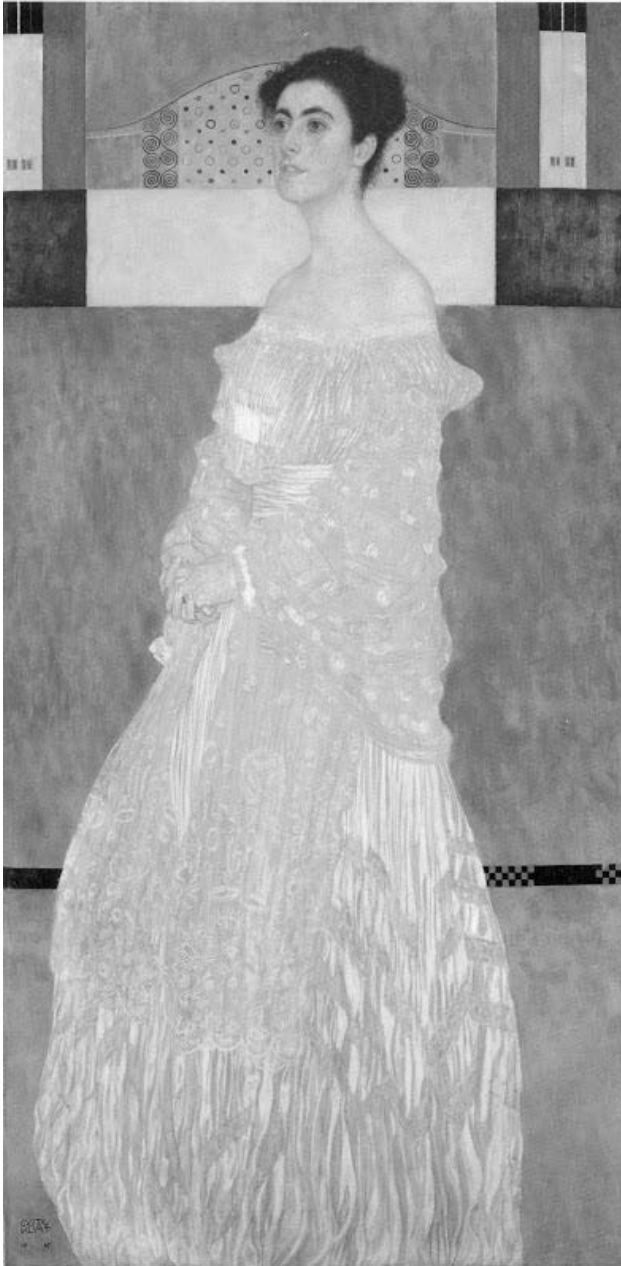
Below: the sequence of same-size, all greyscale, photographs charts the progressive debilitation of values and diminution of pictorial vivacity that has occurred in this painting within a century. One can only shudder at the prospect of another hundred years of conservation treatments in which the corporeal is converted to the ethereal. We can see for example how much the progressive lightening of the background and floor has robbed the figure of its former "relieving" support. Has no one asked why the strategically dynamic pool of darkness in the bottom left hand corner has been removed when it was present in the photographs of 1905, 1911 and 1956?











Above, Figs. 13, 14, 15 and 16: Klimt's *Portrait of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein*, as seen respectively in:  
 1905, when exhibited (unfinished) at the Kunstlerbund Exhibition, as shown in the 2007 *Gustav Klimt*, Alfred Weidinger (Ed.);  
 1956, as published in Emil Pirchan's *Gustav Klimt*, Bergland Verlag Wien;  
 2000-01, as in the catalogue *Klimt's Women*, Tobias G. Natter and Gerbert Frodl (Eds.), for an exhibition at the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna;  
 2012, *Klimt ~ The Complete Paintings*, Tobias G. Natter (Ed.), Taschen, Cologne.

### **BEARING, GRACE, DIGNITY – AND THEIR UNDOING**

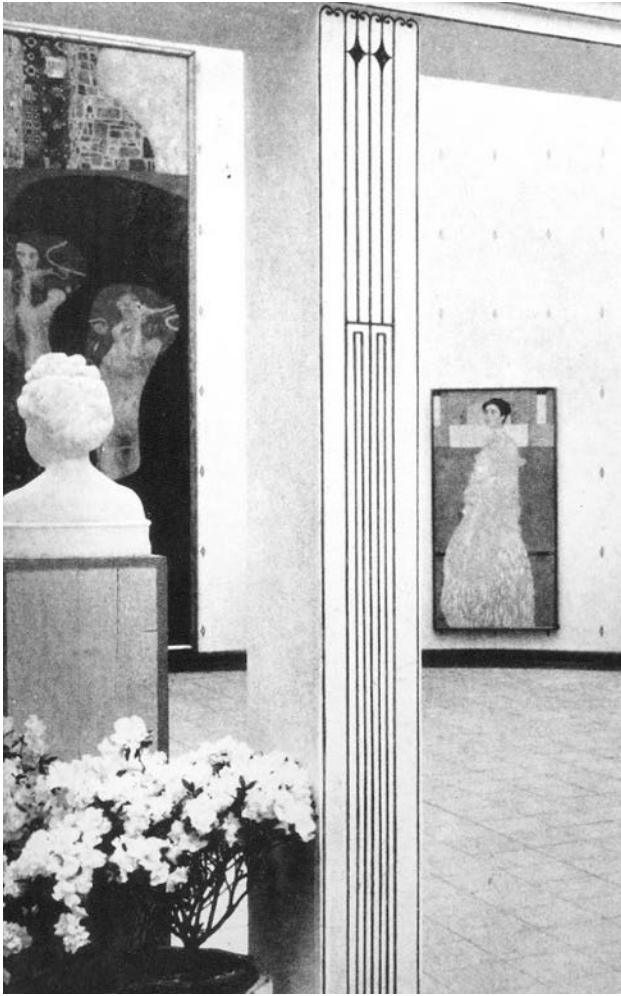
The glimpse below of Klimt's portrait on the walls of the International Art Exhibition in Rome, 1911 (Fig. 20), evokes the stately dignified presence and bearing of a Van Dyck – in which great artist it can also be seen that a single cleaning can have remorseless brightening, flattening, space-suppressing consequences. (For the cleaning consequences for Lady Lucy's face and hair, see [Ghosts in the Lecture Room: Connoisseurship and the Making, Appraising, Replicating and Undoing of Art's Images.](#))





Above, Figs. 17 and 18: Van Dyck's portrait *Lucy Percy, Countess of Carlisle*. Fig. 17 (top) is as reproduced in the Tate Gallery's 1992 catalogue to the 1992-1993 exhibition organised by Andrew Wilton, "The Swagger Portrait". Fig. 18 (above), is from the catalogue to the Tate Gallery's 2009 exhibition, "Van Dyck in Britain".





Above (top) Fig. 19: Two recently published states of Van Dyck's portrait *Lucy Percy, Countess of Carlisle*. Above, Fig. 20, a detail of a view of the Klimt Room at the International Art Exhibition in Rome, 1911; showing on the walls Klimt's *Jurisprudence* and his then finished *Portrait of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein*. From the catalogue of the exhibition, 1911.

### ANYTHING BUT ART AND ITS CONDITION...

We mention scholars' neglect of *condition* in favour current obsessions with the sociological and with feminist correctitude, but it sometimes seems there is imperviousness, even, to the self-validating clout of sheer artistry. One after another offers "grounds" for the dissatisfaction felt by Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein and her family with the portrait. Thus, Susanna Partsch, in her *Klimt ~ Life and Work* of 1989, notes: "*Margarethe Stonborough-Wittgenstein is known to have possessed a good measure of self confidence, but Klimt saw her differently, He applied 'his' view of woman to her, and had to accept that the result did not please her.*" It may not have pleased her, but affront today at a male artist's (perceived) imposition of 'his' view of woman onto the subject is a politicised indulgence. How the subject might have preferred to see herself may be a matter of some interest, but more so for a novelist or a social historian, perhaps, than for a historian of art who has at hand the artist's material artefacts that were intended to carry all necessary information and thereby avoid need for speculation.

Besides which, it is quite possible that the source of dissatisfaction was something altogether smaller (and less mentionable). Perhaps the subject and her family did not welcome a too-heavy evocation of down in the shading over the upper lip as it turned from the viewer (see Figs. 27, 28 and 29)? A hint of such had been present in the more frontal 1899 portrait of Serena Lederer. The reported feelings of the subject herself aside, the drawing in this portrait was brilliant. Even at this historical distance – and notwithstanding restoration vicissitudes – this portrait stands remarkably fresh, sympathetic and respectful. We see and sense intelligence, brightness and alertness to the world. She is depicted not lustfully but with grace, self possession and dignity. If the opulent, massively High Fashion Statement skirt on her dress is put aside and consideration given to the upper half of the figure, its sculptural presence is quite astonishingly accomplished and attractive (see Figs. 23, 24 and 25) – albeit in bas relief, so to speak, so as to relate more comfortably to the emphatically flattened and decorated background. In its drawing, this upper figure recalls – and could live in the company of – Holbein's portrait of the young Anne Cresacre (Fig. 22) and even the more luxuriantly plastic (now) Raphael portrait of a young woman in profile at Fig. 21. Of how many 20th century portraits might such parity be entertained?

In truth, the sense of the body within the costume is subtly but superbly evoked. The massive tulip-shaped skirt certainly conceals the legs – but

then who bought and wore this dress? Was the subject making no statement of her own? Did she not dress herself? Partsch observes that the *“bearing and facial expression make her seem coolly aloof with an air of expectancy, but also far removed from reality.”* But removed from which or whose reality? Should Klimt have set her in an opulent domestic interior? Did this very rich, culturally privileged and intellectually aspirational young person never betray a degree of aloofness? Was she quite without social expectations and sense of entitlement? On what grounds does one scholar after another complain of the in-corporeality of the body underneath the costume? Partsch once more: *“Again the human figure takes up almost the entire picture. The principles which Klimt had developed since the painting of Sonja Knips have been sustained. Again the figure is veiled in a long dress, revealing only head, shoulders and hands. This time it is a dress of white moiré velvet that negates the corporeality of the human figure, and again the dress reaches right down to the ground and is cut off by the frame in the vicinity of the feet.”* And how is it that so many avid connoisseurs of the corporeal should miss the fact that, in Klimt, this very feature is diminished every time his works go into the conservators’ wash?





Above, (top) Fig. 21: *A Young Woman in Profile*, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, presently Raphael but formerly Mino da Fiesole and “sixteenth century Florentine”;  
Above, Fig. 22, Holbein’s 1527 drawing of Anne Cresacre (reversed).







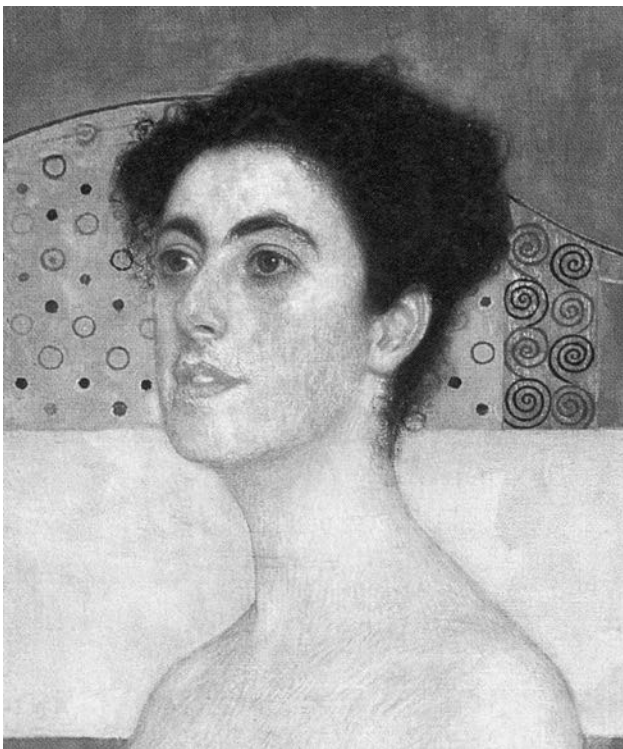
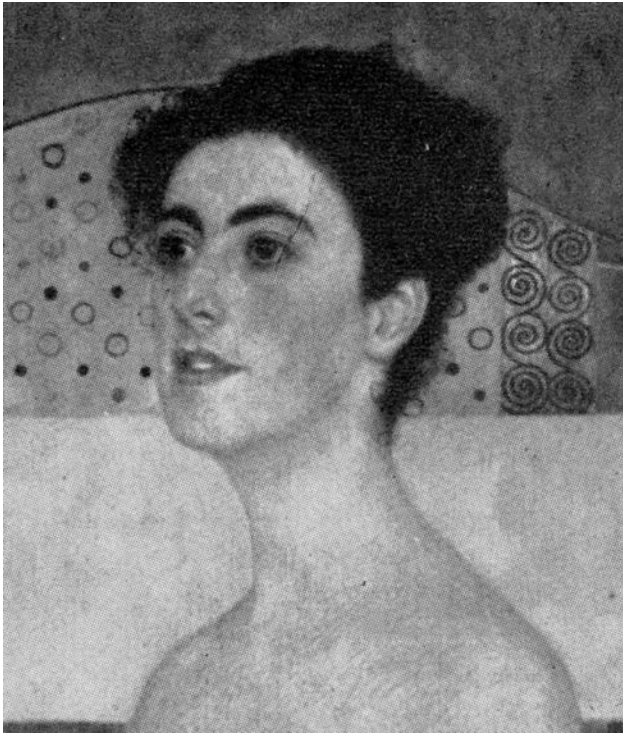


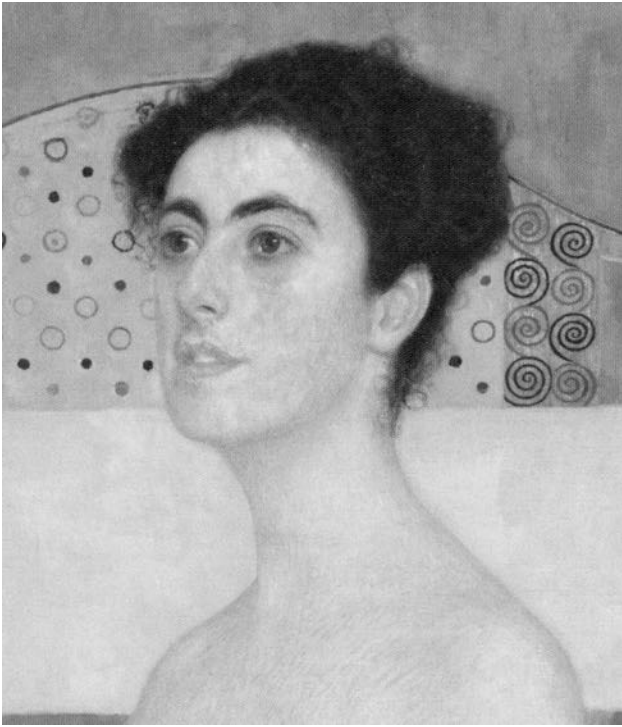
Above, Figs. 23, 24 and 25: Details of Figs. 14, 15 and 16 – and so, from no later than: 1956; 2000-01, and, 20012 respectively.

**BELOW: IT'S A WASHOUT – IS IT NOT?**



Above and below, Figs. 26, 27, 28 and 29: Details of Figs. 14, 15 and 16 – and so, again, from no later than: 1956; 2000-01, and, 20012 respectively.

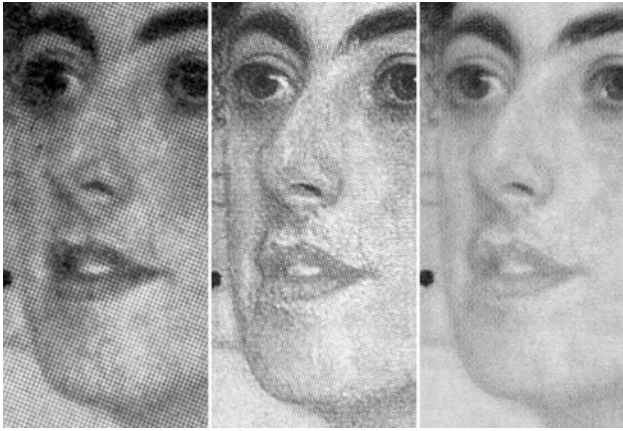




#### WHAT MORE CAN BE SAID?

The sequence of three states of the head shown above and below shows why commenting appropriately on the qualities of the portrait made by Klimt in 1905 can no longer be done solely on the basis of the painting as it is encountered today. Klimt's last intended word has *departed* involuntarily. What is left is an impersonation of the now lost original and superior state. We should not appraise or speak of the present work without reference to the testimony of its photographic history. For such reasons it is a matter of urgency that the full photographic record of Klimt's work be assembled and made available to all scholars and art lovers. If we were talk about the portrait today on the selection of three reproductions above, to which image should greatest credence be given: the most recent, the earliest, or the one in the middle? It is not really a difficult question to answer – *is it?* Graphically-speaking, the three images resemble successive states of an etching – but here with the states running in reverse with less material to hand, not more, at each stage.

If we analyse the changes to the original in detail, we can see for example that the mouth/nose relationship has been mangled by restorers. Assuming that no injury had occurred before the first recorded state (when the painting was no more than fifty years old), we can see among many losses and alterations that the design of the nostril aperture was altered from its original sharply turned upper contour to a blander formulation. Such differences are immensely significant in terms of expression. The greatest student of the pinched, translucent, breathing nostril in women was Rubens. Klimt was very good at and attentive to nostrils. He was also good at mouths. Both are products of astonishingly complex anatomical forces (see Fig. 34 for an entirely unrestored graphic attempt by the author to grapple with just such plastic complexities). Here we see that by 2000/01 the mouth had met with an accident. Both the upper and the lower lip had been garbled in restoration. The loss of definition in the relationship between the lower lip and its surrounding surfaces has resulted in a most unfortunate appearance of an emerging 'Hapsburg Lip', the product not of some physical deformity but of an anatomically illiterate restorer who reconstituted beautifully nuanced tonal modelling as a crass, plastically misread linear simplification. More recently, attempt has been to mitigate the previous errors but the general washing-away process continued. Such rapid undoing and redoing of botched restorations is a growing phenomenon, even at the highest levels of the "museum community" (see Fig. 40).



Above, Fig. 30. Note: we are straining below at the edge of enlargements of details of the record as published. Imagine how much more eloquently horrific this comparative investigative exercise would be if we were able to work from high quality copies of the original photographs.

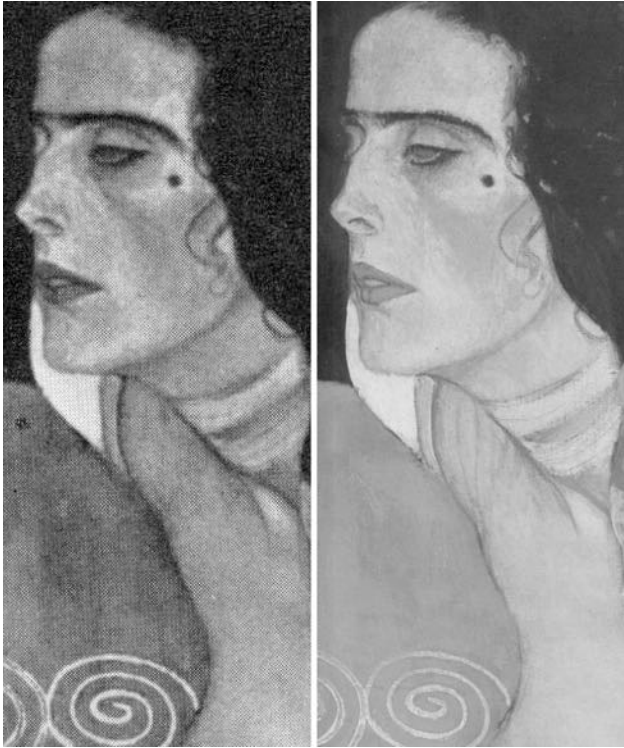




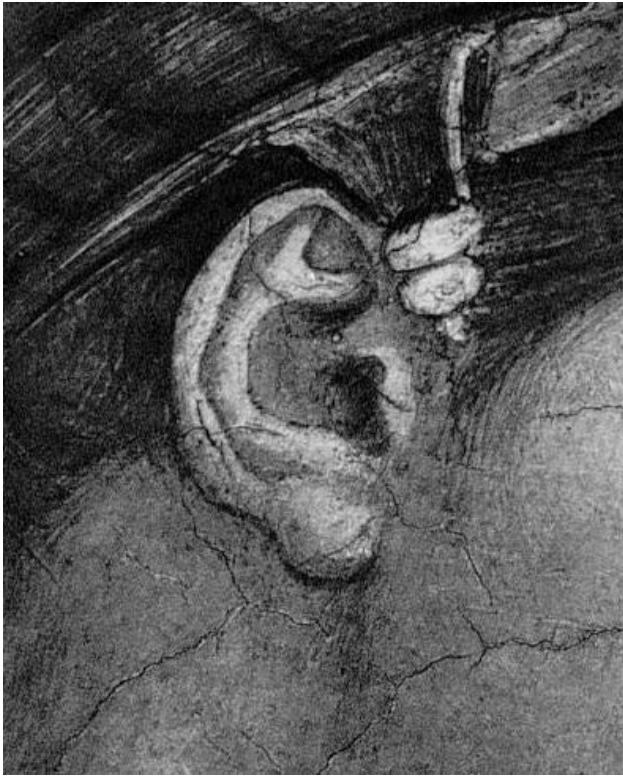
Above, Figs. 31, 32 and 33: Details from no later than: 1956; 2000-01, and, 20012 respectively.

Above, Fig. 34: a detail of a [caricature](#) drawn by the author for the *Independent on Sunday*.

Below, Fig. 35: a detail of a paraphrase of Klimt's *Judith II (Salome)* made by the author in an illustration for the *Independent*, 3 June 1992. Note the similarity of the arched nostril apperture and upturned nose with that seen in the painting of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein until 1956. It has been claimed, however, that the model for both of Klimt's *Judith* paintings was Adele Bloch-Bauer – see Susanna Partsch, *Gustav Klimt ~ Painter of Women*, p. 78. Even as a young woman, Bloch-Bauer did have markedly heavier eyelids – perhaps Klimt was fusing features from different models when composing invented characters?

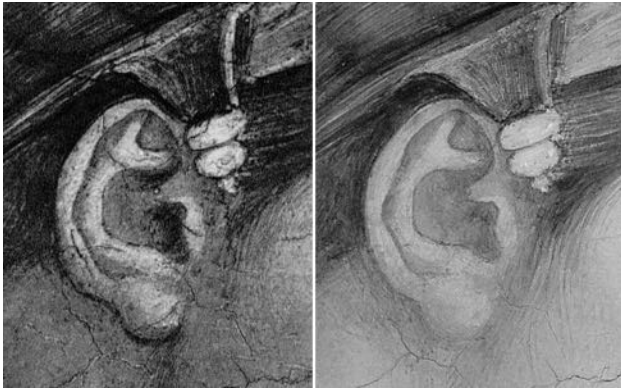


Above, Fig. 36: A detail of Klimt's *Judith II (Salome)* of 1909, as published in 1956 (left) and in Angelica Bäumer's 1985 *Gustav Klimt ~ Women*.



Above and below, Figs. 37, 38 and 39: The ear from Michelangelo's Erythraean Sibyl on the Sistine Chapel Ceiling, before and after cleaning. Those responsible for the losses in the Sistine Chapel claimed in response to criticisms that the disappeared material had not been Michelangelo's own finishing adjustment but arbitrary accumulations of centuries old dirt, soot and restorers' glues. Klimt's restorers are luckier: the losses have yet to be acknowledged.





Morelli famously held that attributions lay in the details of figures – ear lobes, finger tips and such. Which of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein's ears might best now be taken as carrying the fingerprint of Klimt – the earliest, or the most recent?

### A botched nose job in Paris



The Louvre in Paris stands accused of carrying out “two botched nose jobs” on a character in a Renaissance masterpiece, says Dalya Alberge in *The Observer*. French and British experts agree that the face of a woman in Veronese's *Supper at Emmaus*, painted in the 1550s, has been distorted by “vulgar” cosmetic surgery. Michael Daley, of ArtWatch UK, said that her nostril had been “obliterated” and the tip of her nose “fuzzed and

mutilated” during restoration (see picture 2), so that it “hovers disconnectedly over an anatomical void”. Worse still – in an attempt to undo this damage – the Louvre then undertook a “phantom restoration”, which was not publicly acknowledged, and which gave the woman a “grottesquely large nostril” (see picture 3). A Louvre spokeswoman shrugged off the criticisms, saying that, in this second operation, the work had been merely “*bichonnée*” – scrubbed up.

Above, Fig. 40: *The Week's* summary of Dalya Alberge's June 13th 2010 *Observer* article “Louvre masterpiece by Veronese ‘mutilated’ by botched nose jobs”.

For the source discovery of the Louvre's conservation car-crash, see: “A spectacular restoration own-goal: undoing, re-doing and (on the quiet) re-re-doing a Veronese masterpiece at the Louvre Museum”

**AN UPDATE: THE FINE ART OF SELLING KLIMT**



Fig. 41: “Two employees of Sotheby’s auction house pose by a portrait of Gertrud Loew (Gertha Felsovanyi) by Austrian artist Gustav Klimt painted in 1902” ~ *The Daily Telegraph* 19 June 2015.

On June 5th we examined the photographic record of Klimt’s 1902 painting of a young Jewish woman (Gertrud Loew) that had been restored to the heirs of her family ([Now Let’s Murder Klimt](#)). Despite its manifestly degraded condition (see below), the portrait sold at Sotheby’s on June 23rd for £24.8m (on a £12-£18m estimate). The July/August *Art Newspaper* attributes the high price not to the picture’s condition – which it does not discuss – but to the history and poignancy of its backstory which Sotheby’s held to have “added to its value” (“The Lure Of A Backstory”, *The Art Newspaper*, Section 2, p.12). Restoring works to families whose forbears were robbed and murdered is an indisputable good. Questions of ownership, however, like questions of attribution, are less urgent than questions of *condition*. Whatever their gravity, ownership or attribution disputes might always be resolved at some future point. With restorations, injuries are irreversible and cumulatively compounding. Nothing might now return Gertrud Loew to the beautifully nuanced condition in which she was bequeathed to posterity by Klimt.





Above, Figs. 42, 43 and 44: (Top) Holbein's portrait of the fifteen years old Henry Howard. (Centre) Klimt's 1902 portrait of Gertrud Loew, as seen before 1956, and (above), as seen today.



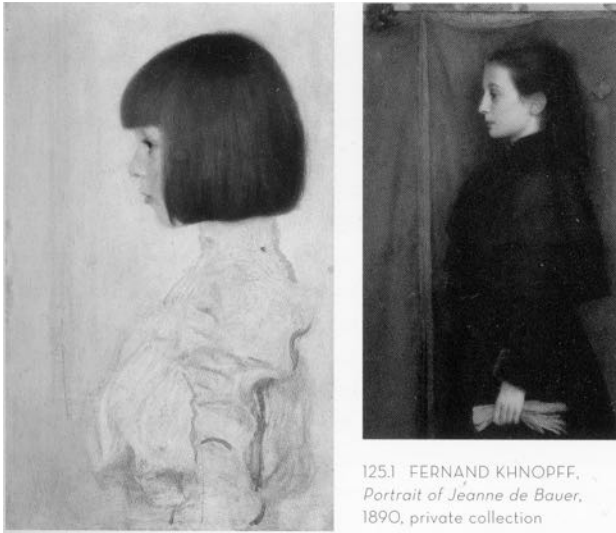
Note, among many alterations, how the definition of the eyebrows and the shading around the eyes have been debilitated. Note, too, how changes to the line of parting in the lips have altered the subject's expression; how an eyebrow has been cocked; how the eyes are now open wider. Note how the loss of shading at the sides of the nose makes the present nose larger than its original self. Note how credibly and well this portrait once lived in the company of Holbein's full-on portrait of the young Henry Howard and ask if this picture might not have had the mother-of-all 'cosmeticising' restorations? Perhaps it's backstory is richer than Sotheby's and the *Art Newspaper* have appreciated?

**Michael Daley, 25 July 2015**

#### ENDNOTES:

1) In the massive, ambitious and welcome 2007 book *Gustav Klimt*, the editor writes: "*It was a major concern of ours to see, as far as possible, all Klimt's paintings in the original, and to take new photographs of all them.*" With so many recent photographs of Klimt's works the authors' were perfectly placed to make comparative studies with the earliest photographs. As seen above, one such a photographic comparison was made with a portrait to show the differences before and after its completion. So why not show some, if not all, of the earliest visual records against their most recent counterparts? In the catalogue, another photo-comparison is made with Klimt's portrait of his niece Helene – but this is with a portrait by Fernand Khnopff, and not with the picture's own earlier recorded self. This was a terrible lost opportunity: as shown below, there are such great differences between the Helenes seen in 1956 and in 2007 as to suggest the existence of two versions of the portrait. There are dramatic differences of design in the dress. In 1956 the lightest part of the hair was at the crown and the back of the head. The hair got progressively darker as it ran down and as it approached the girl's face, which it emphatically framed. That logic has been reversed. The darkest part is now at the crown and the hair lightens as it approaches the face.





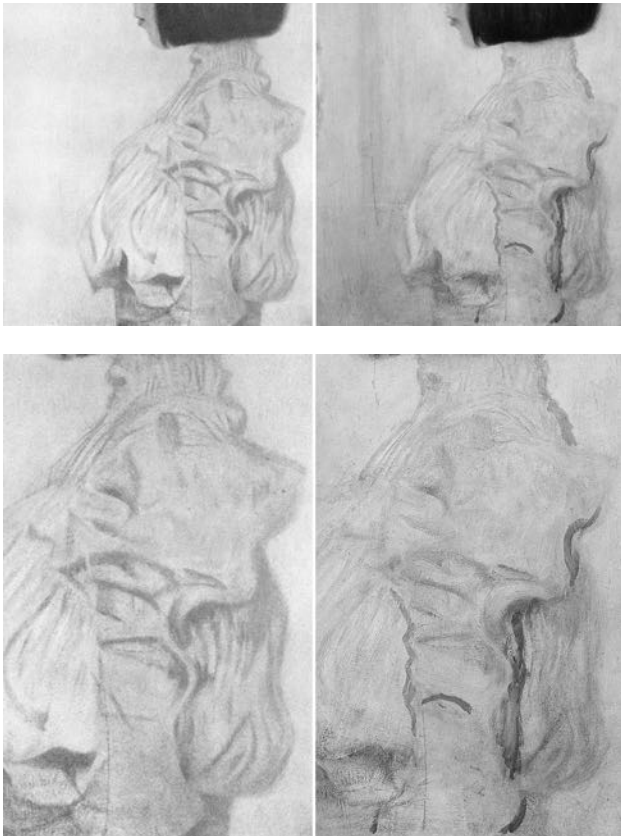
125.1 FERNAND KHNOPIFF,  
*Portrait of Jeanne de Bauer*,  
1890, private collection

Above, (top) Fig. 45: Klimt's portrait of his niece Helene in 1956.

Above (centre) Fig. 46, showing the niece as seen in 2007.

Above, Fig. 47: The juxtaposition of photographs of Klimt's and Khnopff's portraits made in the 2007 *Gustav Klimt* catalogue.

Below, figs. 48 and 49: Further comparisons of Helene's drapery.



Does the treatment of the drapery now present (above, right) on this privately owned work on loan to the Kunstmuseum, Berne, seem worthy or typical of Klimt in 1898?

2) In a recent BBC "Fake or Fortune" television programme the resident art sleuths faced the challenge of proving that three small Lowry paintings (all of which which carried labels and numbers on the back from the reputable gallery that had sold them) were authentic Lowrys even though the present owner had no paperwork showing right of ownership. What proved to be the programme's MacGuffin was the presence in the paintings (revealed by technical analysis) of the wrong kind of white paint – zinc not lead. To surmount this hurdle the sleuths examined old photographs of Lowry at work in his studio. A bit of digital enhancement of one showed a whole boxful of the 'wrong white' in use. The question still to be resolved still was whether these labelled, numbered paintings really were Lowry paintings. Another old photograph of Lowry's studio was found to show the three presently 'homeless' paintings. When a small image of one of the paintings was digitally enhanced and superimposed over a photograph of the painting today, it proved a perfect match, "brush stroke by brush stroke". This accumulation of photo-evidence was taken

to be so clinching that it trumped both the potentially lethal absence of any paperwork and the scientifically established presence of a 'wrong' pigment. When the Big Four Lowry experts were duly assembled to examine the three paintings (away from the cameras) they emerged after a couple of hours to give the trio of paintings the thumbs up. And so, it was *photo-evidence* that carried the day, not science, not documents. Things might, however, have been very different had the Lowrys been restored to the point where their brushmarks no longer coincided with those recorded in the artist's studio.

3) At the 2011 ICOM conference in Lisbon, two conservators complained in a joint paper ("To Err is Human: Understanding and Sharing Mistakes in Conservation Practice") that because a belief exists that it is unacceptable for conservators to damage objects, members of the conservation fraternity are hampered in their desire to make a "*collective acknowledgement and sharing of mistakes*". The experience of other fields, such as medicine and aviation, it was explained, demonstrates the value of admitting and sharing errors so as to "*reduce the risks of their occurrence*". This proposal/demand will be discussed in the Autumn issue of the ArtWatch UK *Journal* by Michel Favre-Felix, the president of ARIPA (association for the respect of the integrity of artistic heritage).

## A Broadside at Bankside

Time was, when to get into art school, nothing was required other than a collection of drawings that demonstrated to the educated eyes of the art school's teachers clear talent in the visual art fields. It is impossible to explain to those who cannot see it for themselves why this was such a good and sensible means of selection.

It so happens that at the moment there is an exhibition – "Drawn Together" – of works in a variety of graphic and pictorial media produced by a body of people who love to draw and who see drawing itself as a sufficient vehicle for artistic realisations. These artists are all members of the Society of Graphic Fine Art and their works are on display, free of charge, until Sunday, July 5, at the Bankside Gallery on the South Bank, hard by Tate Modern (for full details, see below, bottom). Many visitors to the Bankside Gallery, having wandered in after a visit to the Tate's adjacent cavern of Official State Art Emptiness, express delight and surprise at the richness, variety and manifestly *engaged* – and therefore engaging – quality of the art on display. The society was founded in 1919 and aims expressly today, as then, to promote fine drawing skills.



# SOCIETY OF GRAPHIC FINE ART

THE DRAWING SOCIETY





*We invited the society's president, Jackie Devereux, to comment on a few of the works by artists who have parked their easels on what some might take to be hostile and culturally alien terrain. She has kindly done so and writes:*

**The Society of Graphic Fine Art exhibition 'Drawn Together' runs at the Bankside Gallery, London, until 5 July 2015**

When I took over as President in February 2014, I felt the time was right for the SGFA to be launched into the heart of London, and where better than at Bankside Gallery, within a nib's width of Tate Modern. Effectively, I wanted to put drawing in its rightful place – firmly on the map in the creative heart of the capital and on the doorstep of Tate Modern, the home of Abstract and Conceptual Art.

Proudly displaying our very distinctive LOGO on the Bankside Gallery facade, I walked in, and although I had been present at the handing-in and hanging of the show the day before, on passing through the main entrance just before the exhibition officially opened to the public, I was transported into another world – a world of contemporary creativity and exquisite craftsmanship. I was just left standing by the impression of a wonderfully diverse, strong and at the same time uncompromising display of newly created work by Members of the Society.

Our in-house exhibition designer and member, Stuart Stanley, has created a visual journey by cleverly juxtaposing traditional with modern, colour with monochrome, strength with delicacy, captivating the spectator.

Coming out now after too many years of having been relegated to the shadows of conceptual and abstract art, drawing is increasingly claiming its rightful place where it should be, at the very core of the creative process. To put on an exhibition such as this, with over seventy professional artists displaying over 200 individual new works, and 'making it work' visually, has been no mean task. I knew from the outset that the quality would be there, I also knew that there would be an amazing range of ideas, subject matter, size and media, each displaying exceptional skills in the craft of drawing. I should have liked to mention everyone, but I have been asked to comment on the following selection which I think gives a fair indication of the variety and skill on show. All of these works will ultimately be displayed on our Society website – [www.sgfa.org.uk](http://www.sgfa.org.uk), and more new work will be exhibited in our annual Open Exhibition in October at the Menier Gallery in Southwark. So, in alphabetical order:

**Bob Ballard** sketches from life directly onto etching plates, and for this show has produced coloured etchings as though 'in conversation' with his sitters. It seems almost impossible not to be pulled into the mysterious lives beyond the powerfully drawn lines. I am drawn back to them, each time feeling I am getting to know his people, and one forgets they are just lines on a flat surface!





Above (top): Bob Ballard, *Study of Head 1* 29.5 x 26 cms

Above: Bob Ballard, *Study of Head 2* 29.5 x 26 cms

**David Brooke** has a very distinctive style, and for this exhibition he has produced highly resolved coloured pencil drawings which can be visited and re-visited and yet always be discovering something new.



David Brooke, *Fiddler on a Pig*, Coloured Pencil Drawing. Size, including frame: 17 X 17 inches (43 X 43 cms).

My own works (**Jackie Devereux**) – Venice under re-construction and Windswept, are part of an adventure I am having with ink line & wash, creating 3D works on cut and torn paper – some of these works occasionally break out of their frames – like me, not wanting to be restrained by convention.





Above (top): Jackie Devereux, *Venice under Re-construction*, b & w, 52 cms square.

Above: Jackie Devereux, *Windswept*, 52 cms square.

**Pat Harvey** has had a lifetime love affair with Paris – indeed France in general – and will sketch there whenever possible, and recently has produced a new series of works in watercolour which transcend merely recording a scene, but which embrace ‘la vie en france’. Having lived there myself for many years, I am transported back through her images and her mature use of colour and tone.





Above (top): Pat Harvey, *Ca, c'est Paris!*

Above: Pat Harvey, *Cafe 'Le Royal Pereire', Paris.*

**Vincent Matthews'** works always transmit his feeling for quiet, wide open spaces, and these masterly minimalist aquatints with breathtaking compositions say it all with very little – Vincent is completely at one with his environment.

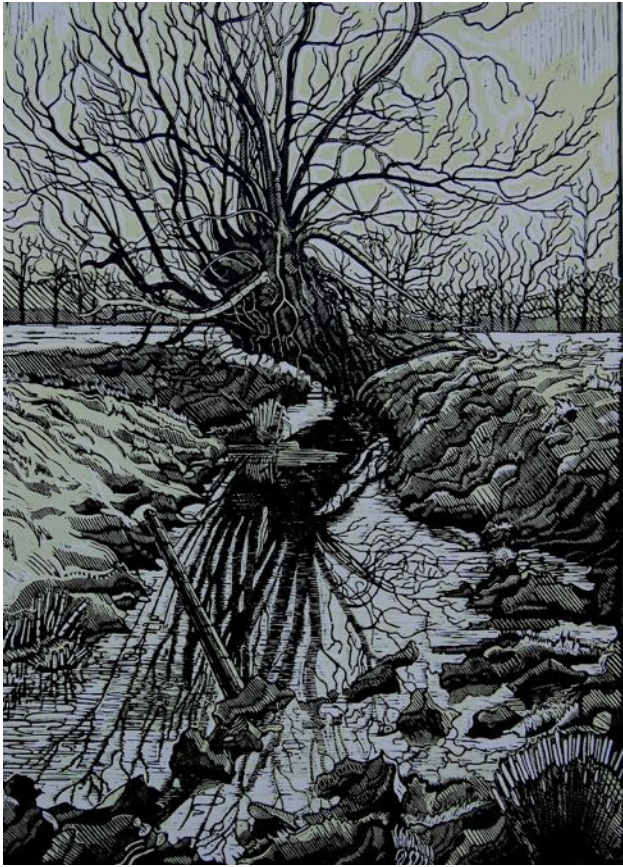


Above (top): Vincent Matthews, *Dungeness Chimney*, 49.5 x 53.5 cms.

Above: Vincent Matthews, *River Rother – Rye*, 49.5 x 53.5 cms.



**Myrtle Pizzey** and her incredible linocuts speak with every line. Her work is sometimes far taller than herself, and the technical prowess to achieve such beautifully crafted hand pulled prints is nothing short of amazing.



Above: Myrtle Pizzey, *Jim's Rhyne* 97 x 77 cms.

See also, above (below the SGFA logo): Myrtle Pizzey, *Willows by the Sheppey*, 77 x 97 cms.

**Susan Poole**, through her passion for sketching wherever she travels, creates etchings and wood block prints from these sketches with a great deal of skill and feeling. Her Black Rhino woodcut comes alive in a way that could so easily be lost without the studied understanding of her subjects – gained only through looking and recording in great depth.



Above: Susan Poole, *Black Rhino*, wood engraving.

**Clive Riggs** and his amazing mezzotint *Toad* – I can almost feel the flesh! Clive's study of two hares 'Offspring' was chosen for the image on the invitation for this exhibition and his work always displays amazing skill not only in portraying the chosen subjects, but in his use of this classic but rarely seen engraving technique.



Above: Clive Riggs, *Toad*, 33 x 37 cms.

See also, above (below Myrtle Pizzezy's, *Willows by the Sheppey*), *Offspring* – a detail of a pair of hares, up to no good, perhaps, in the moonlight, by Clive Riggs.

**Annie Ridd** always portrays her subject matter blending strength with delicacy usually life size, and I am always drawn in to find what I know is there and yet cannot immediately see! I never want to find insects in my own undies, but in Annie's unique works they are exquisitely portrayed.



Above: A drawing by Annie Ridd.

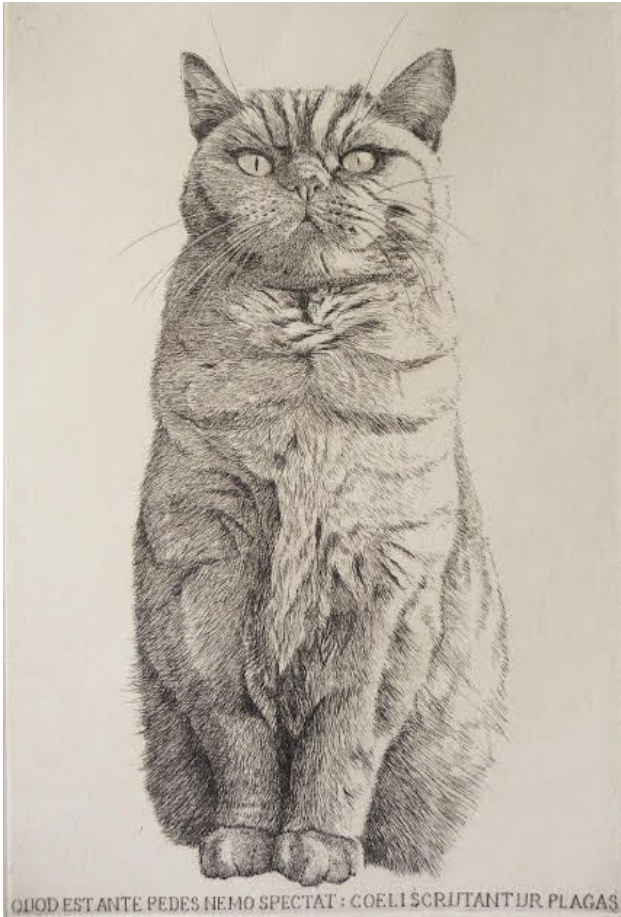
**Claire Sparkes** and her 'Point Guard' graphite and watercolour larger than life drawing demands multiple visits to take in the depth of thought and work that has gone into its creation. 'Chapeau' Claire, you've done it again!



Above: Claire Sparkes, *Adams Point Guard*, 164 x 111 cms.

**Will Taylor** has produced as always, some beautiful etchings, but it is 'Spectat' the amazing cat with the 'big stare' that I can't take my eyes off! Perched dead centre on the plate – the uncompromising attitude and composition is fabulous.





Above: Will Taylor, *Nemo Spectat*, 59 x 48 cms.

Evident throughout this entire exhibition – as, in fact, in all exhibitions the SGFA puts on, is the passion for drawing – drawing with anything, drawing on anything, drawing made anywhere and any time, and, drawing that demonstrates that the strength and power of the work we as a Society create is uncompromised by market forces, and is unstinting on quality and application. We move with the times and yet uphold traditional values. As we head towards our Centenary in 2019, we continue to challenge ourselves, our own ideas, and perhaps, the productions of the others.

**Jackie Devereux** PSGFA President, Society of Graphic Fine Art  
**3 July 2015**

Below: The **SGFA** show *Drawn Together* at the **Bankside Gallery**, 48 Hopton Street, London, SE1 9JH, 020 7928 7531.

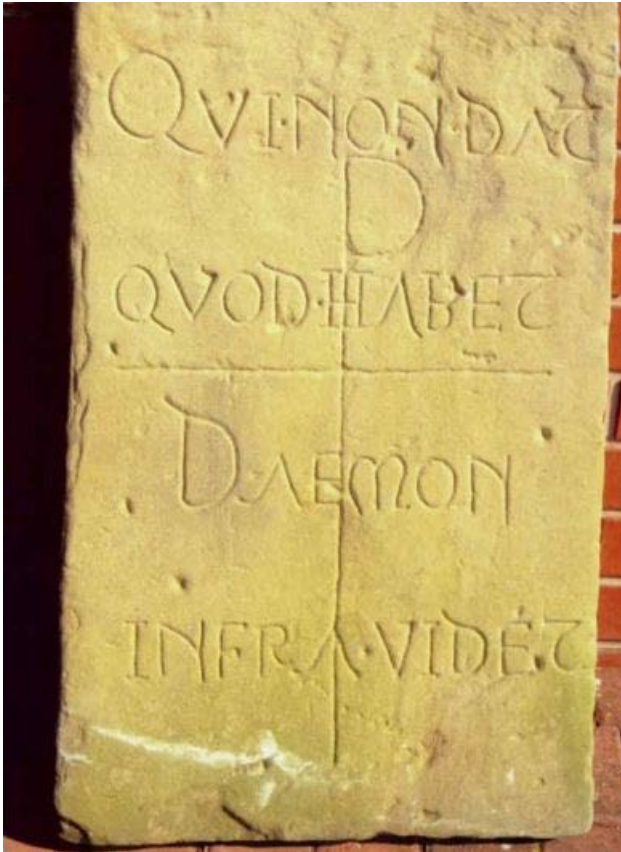


## Does the art trade turn a blind eye to church thefts?

While attention is currently focused on the epic destruction of ancient sites in the Middle East, with looted artefacts regularly surfacing on the European art market and, as [previously reported](#) by Einav Zamir, in European museums, a police investigation has revealed that the systematic plundering of churches in England and Wales has gone largely unnoticed for up to ten years.

### FLORENCE HALLETT REPORTS:

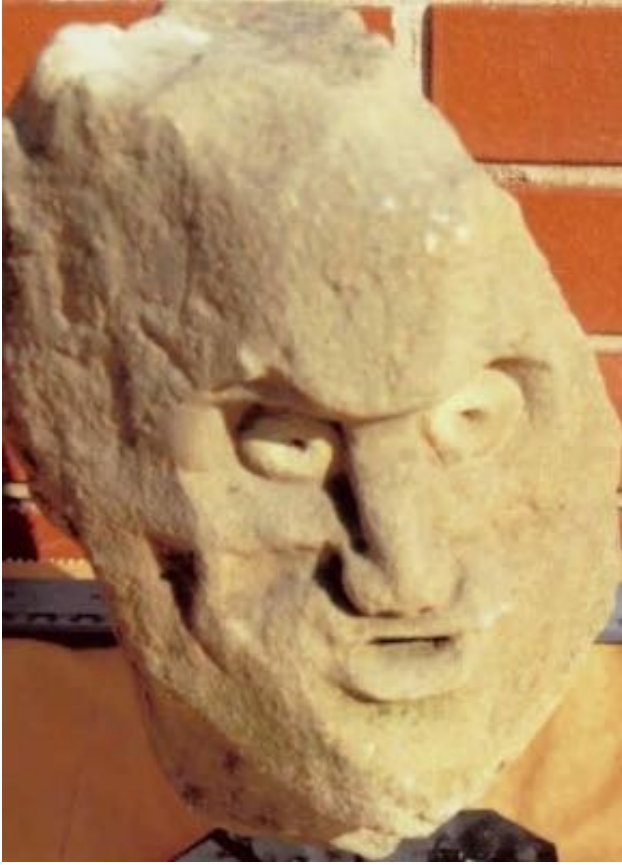
Treasures ranging from masonry to tapestry to stained glass have been taken from isolated churches, often in the notably rural counties of Devon and Herefordshire, feeding a trade in ecclesiastical objects facilitated by art dealers' failure to carry out due diligence.



Speaking to ArtWatch UK ahead of television appearances this week, the head of Operation Icarus, Det Insp Martyn Barnes of West Mercia police said that investigations had led them to art dealers and collectors across the south of England. He said that while he believes most collectors would have bought items in good faith, the dealers involved were not doing enough to ensure that objects were on the market legitimately. He said: "Our general consensus is that their records are woefully inadequate. They say they comply with the law and they probably do – just – but do they turn a blind eye? I would say, yes they do."



Police have already returned some high profile losses, including the misericords from St Cuthbert's, Holme Lacy, in Herefordshire and painted panels violently removed from the 15th century rood screen at Holy Trinity Church, Torbryan, in Devon. Some 45 objects are yet to be returned, however, and officers from Operation Icarus will appear on BBC One's The One Show on Tuesday, and the Crimewatch Roadshow later on this week in an attempt to reunite churches with objects they may not yet be aware they have lost.



Florence Hallett, 8 June 2015. ([florence\\_hallett@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:florence_hallett@yahoo.co.uk); @FlorenceHallett)

## Now let's murder Klimt

We have [seen](#) that works of art are under physical threat and that proper contemplation of them is becoming impossible through commercial exploitation and lax administration. (We will return shortly to the [especially alarming](#) case of the British Museum.) Aside from institutional mismanagement, all the while the stock of art is being debilitated in the name of its conservation.

It goes without saying that it is easier to destroy art than to create it. Gothic churches can be razed in an afternoon (and without explosives). With restoration injuries it is easy to recognise them but impossible to reverse them. Restoration is a one-way street: every little hurts; the harm that restorers can do individually and do do cumulatively can never be undone.

It was long ago contended that every picture restoration is a partial destruction, but every restoration is also a falsification. When destructive subtractions of material are completed, the restorer's own painted additions begin. Restorers do not make the soundest judges of their own performance. Their accounts claim lots of different things simultaneously. First, that their additions (somehow) help to recover lost original conditions. Second, that their additions/ "recoveries" are made with removable synthetic materials so that the next restorer can easily impose his or her own interpretation of the lost original state. Worse, not only is there an expectation that each generation of restorers will have a different estimation of lost original states, *within* generations one restorer will have a different understanding from another. At the National Gallery (London) [relativity](#) has been written into the institution's "philosophy" of restoration practice. It does not matter, the gallery claims, if restorers do their own things when attempting to recover authentic original states, so long as each version is realised "safely".

### **Use your eyes – everything is in *the looking***

The proof of picture restoration's pudding is not in self-protective philosophising or proclaimed professional "ethics". It is in *the looking* – pictures are made by hand, brain and eye to be looked at, not to be bombarded by solvents, swabs, scalpels, heat-inducing imaging techniques, hot irons, adhesives, synthetic materials and such. In this regard, every day brings a new alarm.



Yesterday, the *Daily Telegraph* and many other media outlets [reported](#) that a painting made in 1902 of a young Jewish woman (Gertrud Loew) by Gustav Klimt has been “restored” to her family. Such cases are heartening and just, but so often the accompanying photographs of returned works are, as here, disturbingly unlike early photographic records. The image shown above of this returned painting is from a printed paper copy of the *Daily Telegraph*. Newsprint photography is never of the highest quality but, with all allowances made, the strikingly washed-out appearance of the painting is evident also in the higher quality online reproductions, as below where all images are shown in greyscale to facilitate fair visual comparisons. What can be seen in all of these comparisons is a progressive and debilitating loss of values in the painting’s design, drawing, modelling and spatial ‘envelope’. Such sequences invariably run chronologically from darker, richer, sharper and better-modelled depictions, to lighter, brighter, flatter, more abstract, less plastic, less life-like arrangements. If dirt alone had been removed, the opposite effect would be obtained: all values would be more intense; all relationships would be more vivacious in their effects.





Above, these details show the painting as successively recorded a) before 1956 (top), when it was at most 54 years old and probably never previously restored; b) as before 1986 (centre); and, above c) as it is today (albeit, here, in an over-enlarged detail).







Above, top, a detail of the painting as before 1956; above, the detail as seen today. In this comparison we see, for example, that the contour of the subject's left arm was more clearly drawn and shaded before 1956; that the shaded modelling around the eyes was more emphatic before 1956 than it is today; that the costume had two distinct parts – a darker over-garment and a lighter undergarment; and, that the tone of the flesh at the neck and above the undergarment was appreciably darker before 1956.





Above, a detail of Klimt's 1910 picture *The Black Feathered Hat* shown (top) before 1956; as seen on a Dover postcard (centre); and (above), as seen today.



*The Black Feathered Hat*, as used on a CD cover of music accompanying an exhibition at the Neue Galerie, New York.

Below, a detail of Klimt's *Danae* of 1907-08.





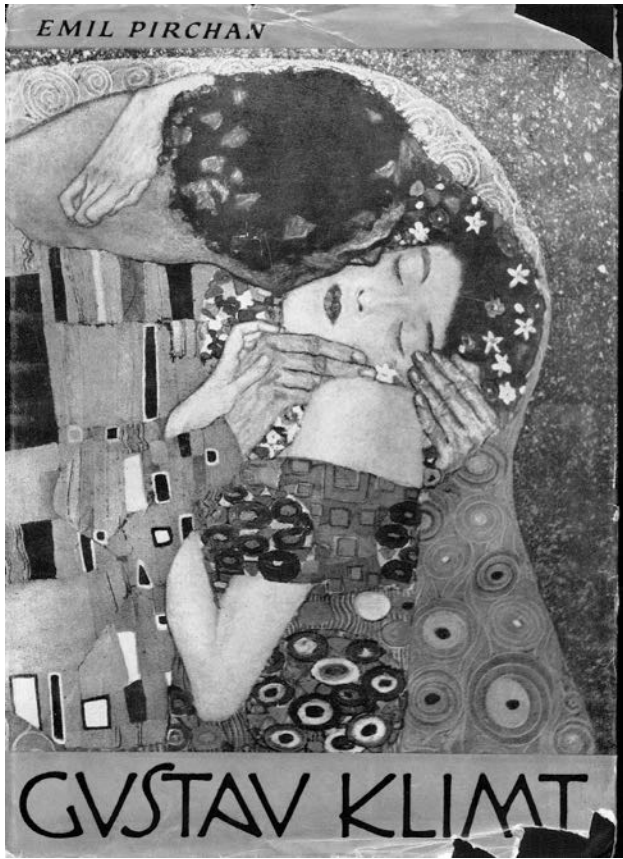
Above (top) *Danae* before 1956 and (above), as seen today. Note in particular the radically altered (and weakened) relationships at the crucially intense and psychologically-charged face/sheet/hand/breast configuration.

Below, the figure Poetry from Klimt's 1901-02 *Beethoven Freeze*, before 1956 (top) and today (bottom).

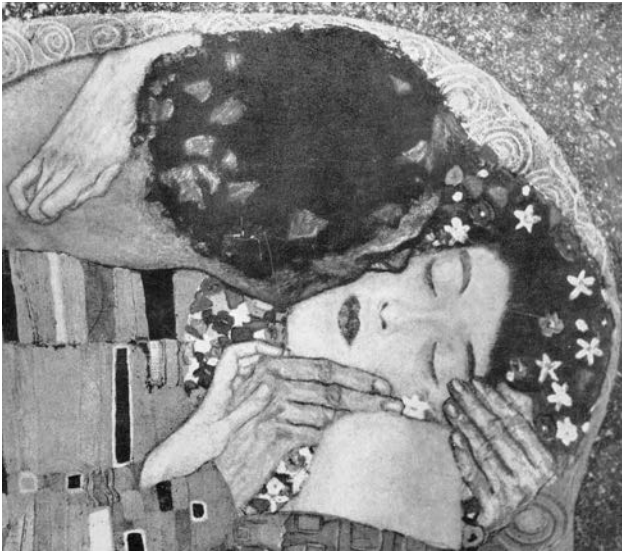




Below, finally: **SPOT THE DIFFERENCES – AND WEEP**









**Michael Daley, 5 June 2015.**

## Whatever happened to “Do not touch”?

Works of art are under physical threat as never before and proper contemplation of them is being made impossible. Aside from the absolute nihilistic depredations of Isil, within the West itself it is now feared that the long-chronicled growth of mass-tourism and its associated delinquent behavioral patterns – is about to create cultural gridlock in Europe.

### **SPECIES OF ABUSE**

Something has to give. As things stand in the visual arts, the pressures for endless year-on-year growth in visitor numbers are irresistible even though the deleterious consequences are already manifest. While theatre, concert hall and cinema venues are designed (and behaviour therein is regulated) so as to permit all present to see, hear and think their own thoughts in companionable collectivity, in galleries and museums there are no such constraints on numbers or behaviour. In the remorseless drive to increase the “through-put” of paying visitors, people are packed and jostled into over-heating galleries in conditions that deny time and space for contemplation. The magnitude of this deterioration is shaming. The effects are exacerbated by restricted hours of paying-public access in order to provide privileged evening viewing to, for example, the clients of corporations which sponsor exhibitions or restorations – which organisations find the accruing good will to be a cost-effective form of self-promotion (see “Leaving your mark” below). The unfolding arithmetic of crush is terrifying.

In 2012 the annual number of international tourists passed one billion for the first time. In Britain what the Arts Council terms “The UK arts and culture industry”, generated £12.4billion in 2011. The Museums Association [reports](#) that in 2013 visits at the National Gallery were 14% higher than in the previous year and were 20% higher at the British Museum. Such rates of increase are unsustainable but for administering directors and trustees this “rising footfall” is taken to testify to the “enduring success” of museums. China is now the world’s largest contributor to this growth with its tourists spending over \$100 billion in 2012. According to World Tourism Organization statistics, the Chinese are projected to take some 100 million overseas trips a year by 2020 – a twenty-five per cent increase on present levels. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that with the U.S. dollar about twenty-five per cent stronger against the euro than this time last year, bookings at the Louvre and the Sistine Chapel are sixty per cent higher this year than last ([Europe Braces for a Summer Travel Crush](#), *WSJ*, 28 May).

### **The threat to the Sistine Chapel frescoes**

With regard to the Sistine Chapel, the prospect is truly horrendous: we have already had confirmation of how the present visitor numbers are exacerbating the partial destruction of the frescoes that was begun in 1980 by the multi-million dollars Nippon TV-sponsored cleaning (see [Michelangelo’s disintegrating frescoes](#)).



Above, top: The Sistine Chapel ceiling during cleaning showing (at the bottom, below the scaffolding) the last surviving section of Michelangelo's original *two-stages* painting.

Above, the stripped-down, first-stage ceiling, as experienced in the chapel today.

### Systemic overcrowding in museums





Above, top: The *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre.

Above, centre: Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* at the Rijksmuseum.

Above: The temporary exhibition "Late Rembrandt" at the Rijksmuseum. [The Grumpy Art Historian](#) described the over-crowding at this blockbuster as "the worst I can recall" and reported that the museum's director, Wim Pijbes, had responded to criticisms by saying that "*if you want a contemplative experience you should buy your own Rembrandt*".

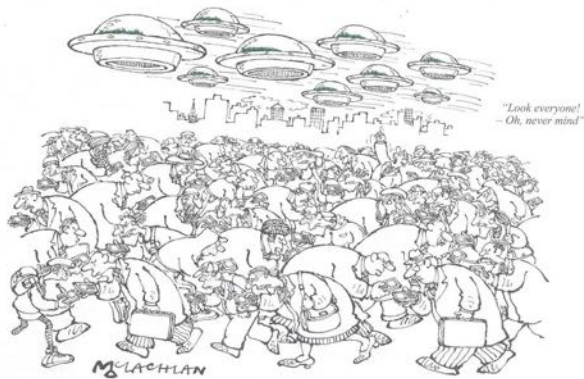
**"Roll up! Roll up!"**



Above, top: A poster on the London Underground showing Turner's (restorations-wrecked) painting *Rockets and Blue Lights* in the promotional campaign that accompanied the launch of the National Maritime Museum's exhibition "Turner and the Sea". For an account of that and other advertising campaigns, see "[From Veronese to Turner, Celebrating Restoration-Wrecked Pictures](#)".

Above: One of "many plugs for the Rijksmuseum's 'Late Rembrandt' exhibition" spotted at Amsterdam airport on May 14th by the [art history blogger](#) Bendor Grosvenor.

"Eyes down!"



Above, top: Otherwise engaged teenagers at the Rijksmuseum.

Above: McClachlan's masterly take in *Private Eye* on other otherwise engaged victims of the near-universal mobile phone addiction.

### Taking Possession of the Past



Above, top: Morgan Schweitzer's illustration for the Ellen Gamerman, Inti Landauro and Liam Moloney *Wall Street Journal* article "Europe Braces for a Summer Travel Crush".

Above, and above centre: Images from *bing*'s feature "Properly Posing with Statues"

### Leaving your mark



Above: A (French) visitor at the National Gallery who, following reductions in warding staff, had time to deface two Poussin paintings with spray-paints on 16 July 2011. See "[Dicing with Art and Earning Approval](#)".



Above: In 1999 the National Gallery allowed the Yves Saint Laurent fashion house to shoot a display of art-inspired clothing at the unveiling of the gallery's Room 22, the £1m refurbishment of which had been met by the French fashion house. Not long afterwards we encountered a wall stripped of paintings and bearing massive water stains caused by rain which had overwhelmed the new guttering. We indicated the extent of water damage with white paint in the spring 1999 ArtWatch UK newsletter. The hastily removed paintings had included Le Valentin's *Four Ages of Man* and Philippe de Champaigne's *The Vision of St Joseph*.

### Assaults on sculpture







Above: the Huffington Post [reported](#) in August last year that an American tourist broke a finger off a statue at the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Firenze, Italy. A security guard monitoring the exhibit had intervened immediately but, apparently, a moment too late.

On 3 June 2015, [THE LOCAL](#) reported that “Vandals in Florence have broken a finger off Pio Fedi’s famous statue of the Rape of Polyxena, Italian media has reported [See below]. It’s only the latest act of vandalism by careless visitors to the city.”

Florence’s mayor Dario Nardella is said to have called for harsher punishments for vandals.

*“Damaging art is one of the most horrific and cowardly acts possible. I hope that the vandal who damaged the Rape of Polyxena yesterday in the Loggia dei Lanzi will be brought to justice soon,”* Nardella wrote on Tuesday.

*“Whoever strikes culture strikes at the heart of history and the identity of a community. I will be promoting harsher punishments for crimes against artistic heritage in parliament, as with environmental crimes, with imprisonment of up to 15 years and double the limitation periods.”*





Above: On May 4th *artnet* reported that in Cremona, Italy, the *Statue of the Two Hercules* (circa 1700 and now, with its central coat of arms, effectively a symbol of the city itself) had been damaged as: “*The scourge of the selfie has struck again: over the weekend, a pair of tourists accidentally broke an Italian sculpture while taking a photo with it, knocking off a portion of the statue’s crown, which shattered on the ground.*” For other instance of selfie-takers’ damage, see [Selfie-Taker Smashes Priceless Historic Italian Statue of Hercules](#)

#### “Ding Minhao was here”



Above: The *International Business Times* has reported that a 3,500-year-old Egyptian carving in the Temple of Luxor had been defaced by a Chinese teenager with the words “Ding Minhao was here”. The paper also [reported](#) that China’s Vice Premier Wang Yang had earlier contended the country’s reputation overseas was being tarnished by the “uncivilized behavior” of some Chinese tourists. Wang made the remarks about the nation’s tourists during a teleconference held by the State Council, China’s cabinet, stressing that tourists need to be on good behavior when traveling abroad, according to the state-owned Xinhua News Agency.

Wang was reportedly referring to the poor manners and low “*quality and breeding*” of some Chinese tourists, saying they have harmed China’s international image, *People’s Daily* reported. “*They speak loudly in public, carve characters on tourist attractions, cross the road when the traffic lights are still red, spit anywhere and [carry out] some other uncivilized behavior. It damages the image of the Chinese people and has a very bad impact.*” In the wake of Wang’s words, the identity of the Luxor vandal emerged on Chinese social media. In an interview with Nanjing newspaper *Modern Express* on Saturday, the parents apologetically said it was the lack of education and supervision that led to their son’s mischievous behavior.

“*We have taken him sightseeing since he was little, and we often saw such graffiti. But we didn’t realize we should have told him this is wrong,*” the boy’s mother said in the interview, adding that she hopes China’s relentless Internet users stop tracking down her son, who had “*cried all night.*” The boy’s father said the boy had realized his mistake, and hopes that the public will give his young son a chance to fix his mistake and move on.

#### Nothing is sacred or inviolable



Above: Sadly necessary security measures in a Cotswold church.

**Michael Daley, 1 June 2015**

Grumpy Art Historian draws our attention to a further delinquency encountered among Chinese tourists: "Nature Vandalism". In a *Shanghai Daily* report, ([City's parks tormented by 'nature vandals'](#)), it is said that:

*"SHANGHAI Chenshan Botanical Garden is enhancing park patrols and adding volunteer monitors to address a growing problem of nature vandalism. Among recent incidents are Chinese characters carved onto the giant leaves of aloe and American century plants. The garden isn't the only park in Shanghai suffering from public abuse. Other popular sites report problems arising from people who don't seem to respect the native environment"*.

Below: A yucca plant at Shanghai Chenshan Botanical Garden is covered in Chinese characters carved by vandals.



And the World's Worst Restoration is...

WHICH COUNTRY, might you think, has produced the World's Worst Restoration – Spain? Italy? The UK? India? France? China? Egypt? The United States? Consider the evidence.

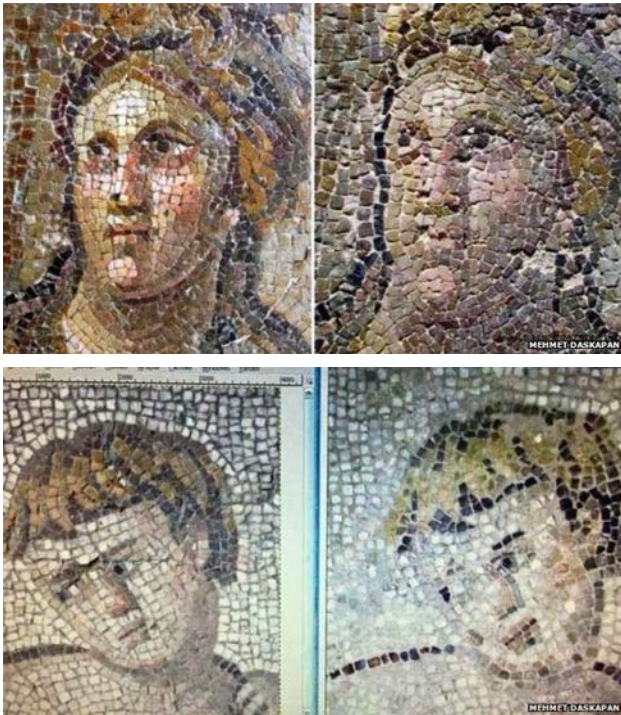
THE EVIDENCE IS ABUNDANT and the answer is “All of the above”. There are more contenders than there are countries. No country and no professional stratum is free of recurrent restoration injuries. This evidence can only suggest that injuries are intrinsic to *the practice* of restoration. Manifestly, no restorers *anywhere* can “treat” a Renoir – or a Veronese – without injury (see below). Restoration error is the by-product of a singular un-regulated sphere where the distinct languages of art, aesthetics, technology and “science” are conflated in support of presumptuous would-be improvements to the works of others. The official response to demonstrations of error is not engagement but intensification of promotional hype. This dynamic must be reversed and the necessity of criticism ceded.

In response to the latest “restoration” blunder (on the classical heritage in Turkey) we revisit our accumulating chamber of horrors and invite nominations to [news.artwatchuk@gmail.com](mailto:news.artwatchuk@gmail.com) for the title of The World's Worst Restoration.

### Contender No. 1: Turkey

The [BBC reports](#) that Turkey's culture ministry is investigating claims that valuable Roman mosaics have been badly damaged during botched restorations at an archaeological museum:

*“Authorities are looking into the claims of a local craftsman who raised concerns over the condition of at least 10 mosaics at the Hatay Archaeology Museum, the Hurriyet Daily News website reports. Mehmet Daskapan first spoke out in an interview with a local paper in February, but the news was only picked up by mainstream Turkish media on Monday. ‘Valuable pieces from the Roman period have been ruined,’ Mr Daskapan told the Antakya Gazetesi website at the time. ‘They have become caricatures of their former selves. Some are in an especially poor condition and have lost their originality and value.’”*



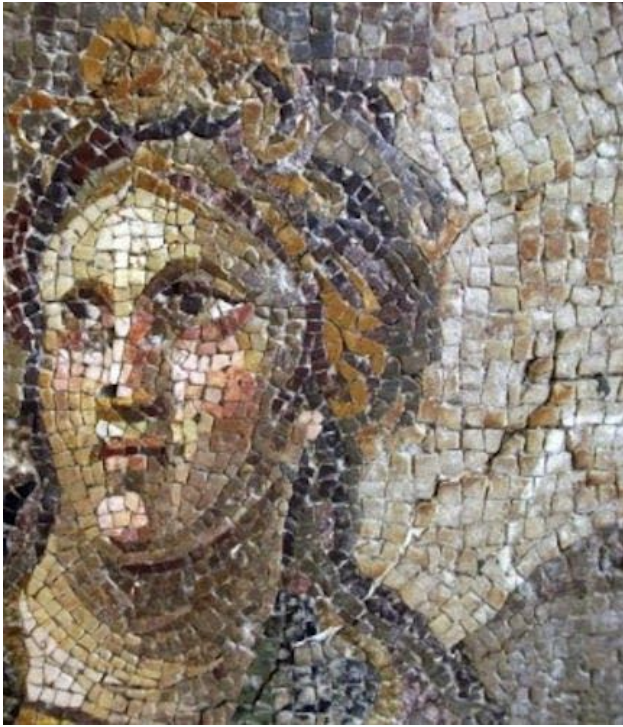
Above, Figs 1 and 2: Before restoration (left) and after (right) photographs by Mr Daskapan testify to devastating iconographic, pictorial and plastic injuries during supposed “conservation” treatments of mosaics held in the Hatay Archaeological Museum in Turkey.

The *Guardian* reports that (as so often in these disputes) the restorers deny error and allege that the testimony of before and after photographs has been [rigged by the press](#). However, a culture ministry official has confirmed that “*erroneous practices*” caused injury by *adding pieces* of mosaic. As always, the restorers further allege that today's damage had been done by *previous* (French) restorers in the 1930s who added material which has now been removed because past practices have now been outlawed. The culture official confirmed that today's restorers at the centre of controversy have had years of experience “*including the restoration of the renowned mosaics at Zeugma Museum in south-east Turkey*”. Notwithstanding this assurance, all restorations have been halted and investigation is underway. A spokesman from the opposition Nationalist Movement party (MHP) called the restored work a “*massacre of history*” and blamed the Islamic-rooted ruling AKP for a “*bureaucratic scandal*”. The BBC reports that the allegedly shoddy restoration “*has been compared to an incident in Spain in 2012...[when an] attempted restoration rendered the image of Christ unrecognisable and became a global laughing stock.*”



Above, Figs. 3, 4 and 5: The above STR/EPA photographs all testify to simultaneous enfeeblement and vulgarisation.

**This below is *not* a “restoration” or a “conservation”, it is precisely what Mr Daskapan has claimed it to be: the travesty and rendering inauthentic of an ancient classical image.**



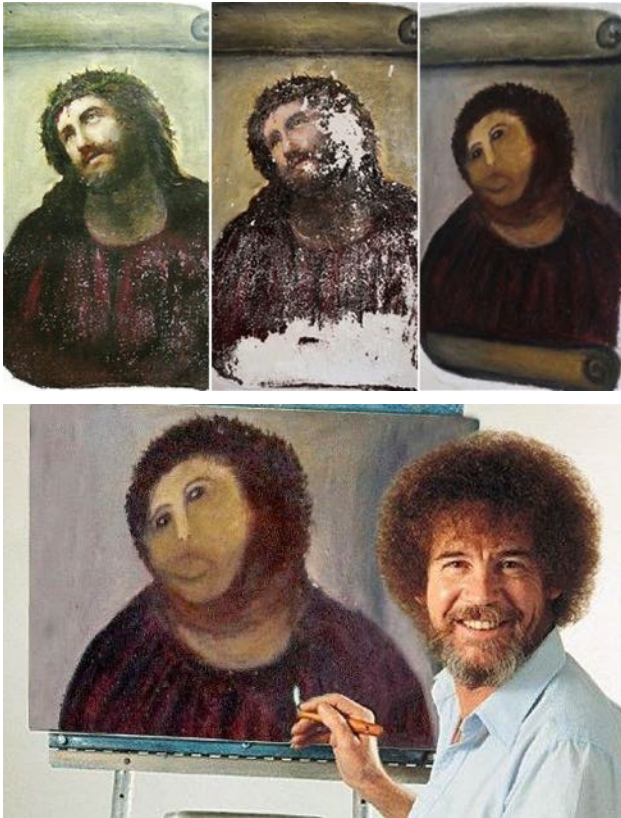
Above, Figs. 6 and 7: Details of Fig. 1 showing the subject before (top) and after “treatment” (above). (Photos: Tamer Yazar/AP)

When horrendous things are done to art in the name of its “conservation” people struggle – vainly – to divine a possible motivating rationale. In the face of inexplicable actions, truly awful restoration abuses frequently provoke/generate humour. In Turkey, *The Hurriyet Daily News* reports that the botched restoration has indeed become a matter of humour: “Perhaps, the restoration’s target was to liken him to Erdoğan [President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – see Fig. 7b below],” joked famous cartoonist Selçuk Erdem, from the weekly magazine *Penguen*.” The *Huffington Post* fleshes out the joke with the photo sequence below. Doing so in Turkey might carry a risk. As the *The Hurriyet Daily News* adds, two other cartoonists at *Penguen*, Bahadır Baruter and Özer Aydoğan, were jailed for 11 months in March over a satirical piece on free speech in which they were convicted of including a hidden gesture that was considered to be “insulting” to the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.



### Contender No. 2: Spain

When a granny in Spain, Cecilia Giménez, indulged in a bit of do-it-yourself restoration in her local church, Santuario de Misericordia, in Borja, north-eastern Spain, the whole world fell about laughing. Ms Giménez's unauthorised restoration of "Ecce Homo – Behold the Man" caused the work to be dubbed "Ecce Mono – Behold the Monkey". The church threatened to sue and restoration experts from around the world converged to advise on how or whether the damage might be undone. This prompted thousands to petition for the wreck to be left untouched for all to see for all time. The publicity greatly boosted tourism and the church levied a charge on visitors. The "restorer" then sued in protection of her intellectual property rights. (See [The "World's worst restoration" and the Death of Authenticity](#) and [The Battle of Borja: Cecilia Giménez, Restoration Monkeys, Paediatricians, Titian and Great Women Conservators.](#))





Above, top, Fig. 8: This shows the head of Christ before (left and centre) and after (right) restoration.

Above, Fig. 9: One of many spoofs carried on [Upi.com](http://Upi.com) was this of the late TV painting instructor Bob Ross.

Above, Fig. 10: A satirical news blog ([pocho.com](http://pocho.com)) saw a resemblance between Cecilia Giménez's monkey-faced Christ and a newly discovered species of monkey...The Church has left the desecration of a sacred image in place.

### Contender No. 3: Egypt

As shown here recently ([A bodge too far: "Conservation's" catalogue of blunders](#)), whenever ineptitude strikes, those responsible – curators, conservators, trustees, art bureaucrats – run for cover, slinging blame to every other quarter. When news of a bungled repair to the beard of Tutankhamun's death mask in Cairo's Egyptian Museum leaked out, three conservators, speaking anonymously, gave three different accounts of the injury, but all agreed that orders had come down for the repair to be made quickly. The *Daily Telegraph* reported that while some said the beard had been broken off by cleaners, other said that it had simply come loose. The *Guardian's* account went as follows:

*"Did bungling curators snap off Tut's beard last year, and if so was it stuck back on with with the wrong kind of glue? These are the allegations levelled at the Egyptian Museum, the gloomy, under-funded palace in central Cairo where Tutankhamun's bling is housed. Employees claim the beard was dislodged in late 2014 during routine maintenance of the showcase in which Tut's mask is kept...The director of the museum, Mahmoud el-Halwagy, and the head of its conservation department, Elham Abdelrahman, strenuously denied the claims yesterday. Halwagy says the beard never fell off and nothing has happened to it since he was appointed director in October."*

Although this gaffe caught the western world's imagination (because of intense abiding interest in ancient Egyptian culture), the incident was of relatively trivial significance: neither the beard nor the head were damaged. When it emerged that "a few little conservation things had to be done" to Assyrian carvings from the Nimrud Palace after the British Museum had irresponsibly flown them to China, the international press looked the other way.

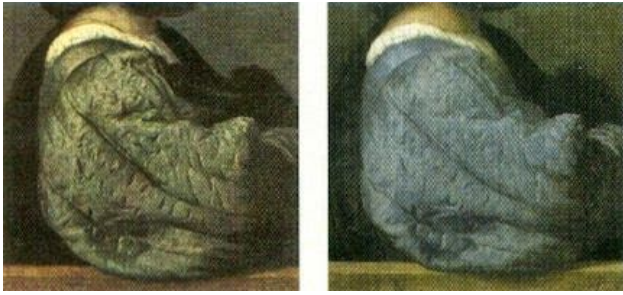
### Contender No. 4: The United Kingdom

One of the greatest all-time serial offenders as pioneer in technically advanced but artistically destructive "total cleaning" techniques has been the National Gallery, London. For an account of the falsifying art historical consequences of such aggressively intrusive restorations, see [The National Gallery's £1.5 billion Leonardo Restoration](#).





Above, Figs. 11 and 12: A detail of the National Gallery's Titian *Bacchus and Ariadne*, shown (top) before restoration by Arthur Lucas in 1967-69, and (above) after restoration. Notwithstanding such dreadful injuries throughout the painting, the restoration was hailed a triumph and the restorer took to boasting to painting students at the Slade School of Art, London University, (where he taught painting techniques) that there was "*more of me than Titian in that sky*". One of Lucas's "advanced" technical wheezes (which was concealed from the trustees and the public) was to iron the canvas painting onto a double laminate ('Sundeala') board of compressed-paper. Such boards were used on many of the gallery's largest paintings and have now become unstable.



Above, Fig. 13: Titian's *Portrait of a Man* (detail) at the National Gallery, before being restored by Arthur Lucas (left) and after restoration (right). As part of his preparation for repainting the subject's head, Lucas hired a bearded student at the Slade School of Art to model for certain "preparatory" studies that he wished to make of hair and beards.





Above, top, Fig. 14: A detail from the National Gallery's Renoir *The Umbrellas* before cleaning in 1954.

Above, Fig. 15: The detail from the National Gallery's Renoir *The Umbrellas* after cleaning in 1954, showing pronounced solvent-induced paint losses and new cracking when the picture was barely seventy years old.

### **The Courtauld Gallery, London**

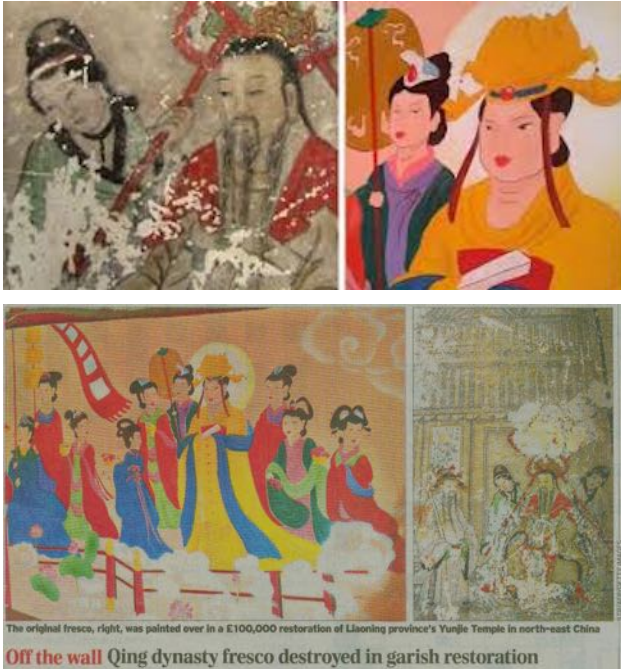
That Renoir is exceptionally vulnerable to solvent-cleaning can also be seen in this example below from Courtauld Gallery, London.



Above, Figs. 16 and 17: A detail of Renoir's *La Loge*, as seen (top) in 1938, and as seen in the Courtauld Gallery's 2008 exhibition catalogue "Renoir at the Theatre – Looking at La Loge".

**Contender No. 5: China**

On 23 October 2013 the *Daily Telegraph* reported the outcome of a Chinese Government-approved, £100,000 restoration during which a Qing dynasty temple fresco was entirely obliterated by luridly coloured repainting. This crime against art and historical patrimony only came to light when a student posted comparative photographs online. In the resulting furore, a government official from the city responsible for the temple described the restoration as “*an unauthorised project*”. Wang Jinyu, an expert on fresco restoration from the Dunhuang Academy, had said the intervention could not be called “*restoration, or [even] destructive restoration*” because “[*It is*] the destruction of cultural relics since the original relics no longer exist”. It was noted that the case had echoes of a headline-grabbing incident when an elderly parishioner performed “*a disastrous restoration*” on a 19th century fresco of Christ in the Spanish town of Borja (- as shown above at Figs. 6, 7 and 8 ). One Chinese website user echoed charges made against the restored Sistine Chapel frescoes of Michelangelo: “*They have turned a classic painting into graffiti. It looks like something out of Disneyland, doesn't it?*”



Above, Figs. 18 and 19: The devastating falsification/obliteration of ancient temple murals in China.

See Qing dynasty fresco ruined in botched restoration which makes work look like garish cartoon; and China sackings over ruined ancient Buddhist frescos; and, A restoration project that turned a Qing dynasty fresco into a series of “sloppily drawn” modern paintings has drawn outrage in China; and Assaults on History: Dishing Donors; a Vatican Wobble; and, Reigniting an Old Battle of Hearts, Minds, Interests and Evidence.

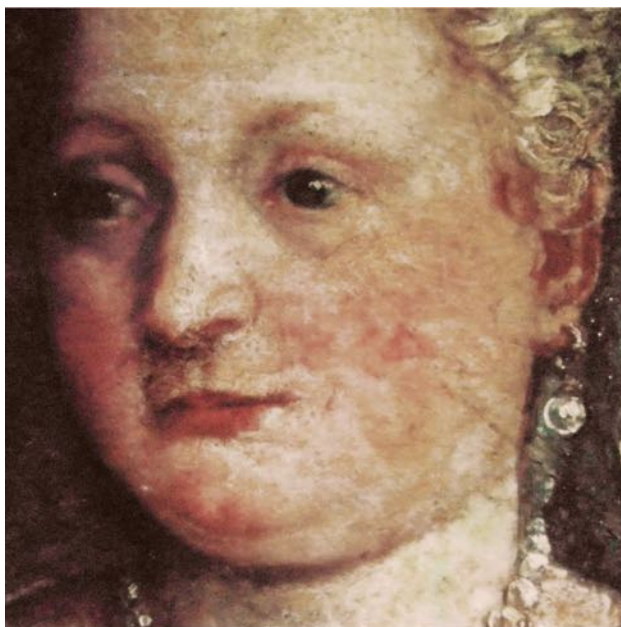
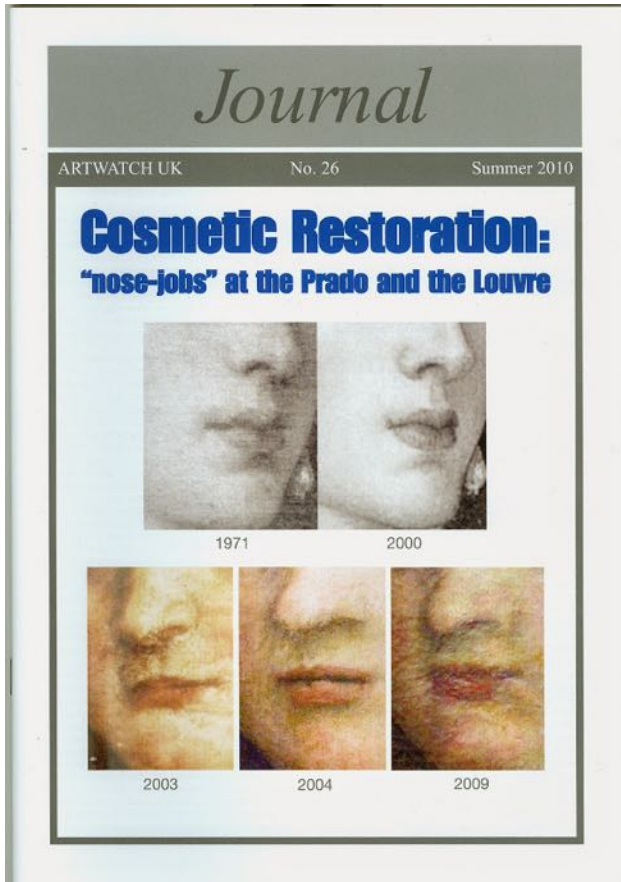
**Contender No. 6: Austria**

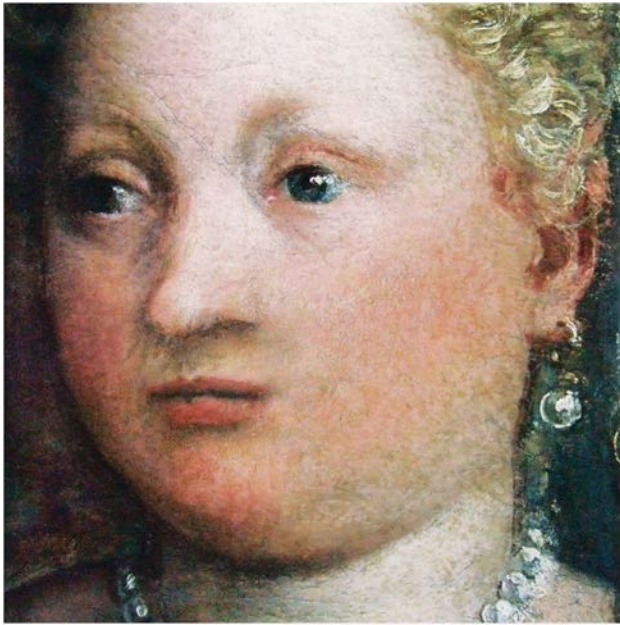
Below, Fig. 20: A detail of Gustav Klimt's Beethoven Frieze (the figure *Poetry*), as seen before 1956 (left) and today (right), as featured on the cover of the Spring 2008 issue of the ArtWatch UK *Journal*.

**Contender No. 7: France (principally, and Spain)**

Picture restorers inflict two kinds of injury by first removing material that is *integral* to paintings and then by adding *their own repainting* so as to

bring works up to what they consider to be acceptable degrees of finish and artistry. When paintings suffer this double combination of subtractions and (“corrective”) additions, the impositions frequently betray gross artistic and anatomical ignorance. This deficiency is found not just among jobbing restorers at the bottom of the art trade, but in even the most technically advanced, scientifically supported, and institutionally prestigious institutions such as the Prado and the Louvre, as we explored in the *Journal* No 26, shown below. (See also: [A spectacular restoration own-goal: undoing, re-doing and \(on the quiet\) re-re-doing a Veronese masterpiece at the Louvre Museum](#), and [From Veronese to Turner, Celebrating Restoration-Wrecked Pictures](#).)





### A botched nose job in Paris



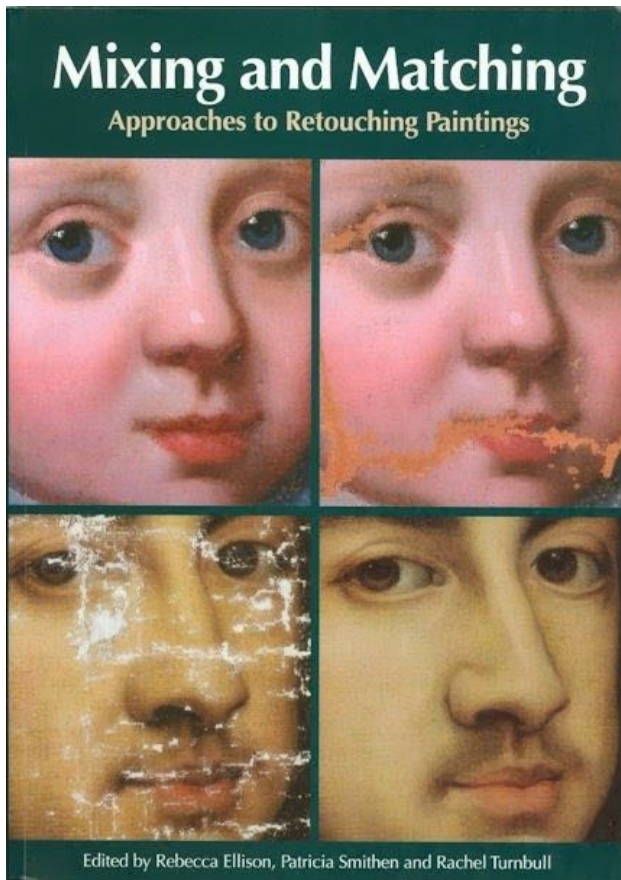
The Louvre in Paris stands accused of carrying out “two botched nose jobs” on a character in a Renaissance masterpiece, says Dalya Alberge in *The Observer*. French and British experts agree that the face of a woman in Veronese’s *Supper at Emmaus*, painted in the 1550s, has been distorted by “vulgar” cosmetic surgery. Michael Daley, of ArtWatch UK, said that her nostril had been “obliterated” and the tip of her nose “fuzzed and

mutilated” during restoration (see picture 2), so that it “hovers disconnectedly over an anatomical void”. Worse still – in an attempt to undo this damage – the Louvre then undertook a “phantom restoration”, which was not publicly acknowledged, and which gave the woman a “grotesquely large nostril” (see picture 3). A Louvre spokeswoman shrugged off the criticisms, saying that, in this second operation, the work had been merely “bichonnée” – scrubbed up.

Above, Figs. 21, 22, 23 and 24. These illustrations show, respectively, from the top down:

- 1) The ArtWatch UK *Journal* No. 26 with before and after restoration details of Titian’s *Empress Isabella* at the Prado and Veronese’s *Pilgrims at Emmaüs* at the Louvre;
- 2) A face from Veronese’s *Pilgrims at Emmaüs*, as seen before the first of two restorations in five years;
- 3) The same face from Veronese’s *Pilgrims at Emmaüs* after the first restoration (that is, after the first stripping down and subsequent repainting);
- 4) Press coverage (in *The Week*) of the controversy over the two botched repaintings of the Veronese face that had been monitored and disclosed by Michel Favre-Felix, the painter and president of the Association Internationale pour le Respect de l’Intégrité du Patrimoine Artistique (ARIPA). Favre-Felix’s discoveries had been laid out here [on 29 December 2010](#).

...meanwhile, in London:



An implicit acknowledgement by restorers of certain professional insecurities in this area was made in the above 2010 book on different “approaches to” the retouching of cleaned paintings. This publication was a by-product of three one-day workshops organised by two restoration groups, the Icon Paintings Group and the British Association of Paintings Conservator-Restorers (BAPCR). The organisers were taken aback by the demand for the events which “exceeded our expectations. The lecture theatres were packed...” It was explained in the book’s Foreword that the subject of the three events emerged because, although it could have been:

*“...consolidation – or structural work...the general consensus in the brainstorming sessions was that retouching (or inpainting for those across the pond) was the topic for which there was a burning desire to expand knowledge, exchange ideas and gain more practice. There was a need for a practical kind of conference, dealing with the actual techniques involved in the conservation of paintings. With retouching, every conservator-restorer tends to harbour preferences for materials and practices based on experience, types of artworks as well as what is available to hand. This series of events was envisioned as a showcase for the knowledge and skill of individuals in a welcoming and supportive environment that would provide an opportunity to learn by listening and looking (in the morning lecture series) and by doing (in the afternoon practice sessions)...”*

The conscientiousness of the participants is not in question and the enthusiasm brought to the task is touching. What is alarming is the sense that emerges of the absence of any artistic and anatomical expertise and guidance. The preponderance of activity addressed the acquisition of technical skills not of artistic comprehension. Some indication of the sense in which conservator-restorer speaking unto conservator-restorer is tantamount to the artistically blind speaking to the artistically blind is found on p.127 in one of the case histories (the conservation-restoration of a painting at the Rijksmuseum):

*“...shortly after purchase [in 1976] the picture was cleaned to remove some discoloured varnish layer(s) [- the presence of which material is the most frequent pretext for restorations] and some clearly visible retouches. At the time of the restoration under discussion here, the only known record of how the painting looked before the cleaning was a black and white photograph taken at the Rijksmuseum. It was during that initial cleaning that the restorer [not Arthur Lucas] removed the clouds from the sky exposing blue underpaint. Though he claimed to be removing only over-paints, a shocked curator stopped the restoration and the picture remained in storage until 1995 when it was decided to examine and subsequently restore the picture for an exhibition planned for 1997...since the restorer who had cleaned the painting died in the late 1980s and left no account of the cleaning it can never really be known what had been removed or how...”*

On the absence of artistic expertise among conservator-restorers, see Review: [Who Cleaned the Queen’s Windows and the Lady’s Pearls?](#)

**Contender No. 8: Italy ~ The Vatican**

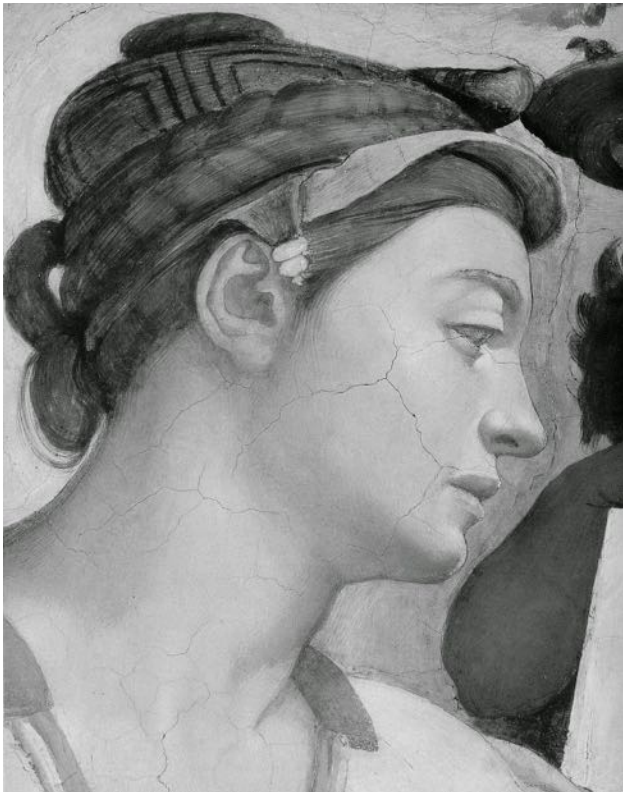


The most controversial restoration in modern times has been that of Michelangelo's frescoes for the Sistine Chapel, a subject on which we have published many times. In addition to the restoration injuries, the fame of the restored frescoes has drawn (paying) crowds to the chapel of such magnitude as to imperil the physical fabric of the frescoes. For a summary listing of our previous coverage on all aspects of that continuing debacle, see [Michelangelo's disintegrating frescoes](#).





Above, Figs. 25 and 26: Details of Michelangelo's *Cumaean Sibyl* on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, as seen before restoration (top), and after restoration (above). The explanation for the otherwise inexplicably profound changes that occurred during this cleaning, is that Michelangelo had finished off and elaborated his frescoes (when dry) with painting consisting of pigments bound in animal glue or size. With this painting Michelangelo adjusted and enriched his colours while, at the same time, greatly increasing their dramatic lighting and shading. (The revolutionary nature of this theatrical lighting is explored in this post: [Coming to Life: Frankenweenie – A Black and White Michelangelo for Our Times.](#)) However, on the authority of technical analysis of the glue-paint, the Vatican treated all of this surface painting by Michelangelo as if it were dirt and soot and washed it off. In this comparative detail above, the loss of shading on the bag and around it is immense.



Above, Figs. 27 and 28: The head of Michelangelo's *Erythraean Sibyl* on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, before restoration (top) when showing Michelangelo's systematic and consistent modelling of forms via a transition from light to dark from the top of the head to the neck and shoulder, as it had survived from 1512 until 1980; and (above), after the restoration in which all of Michelangelo's supplementary painting had been removed.

#### **Contender No. 9: Italy ~ Milan**

If any Renaissance mural might be thought to rival the importance of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling it would be Leonardo's *Last Supper* in Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan. Unfortunately this great work has suffered badly from its experimental technique and subsequently from multiple

restorations over the years. It was thought, by Bernard Berenson among others, to have received the best-possible, final and definitive act of rescue in a two-part restoration of 1947-49 and 1952-54. (See [The Perpetual Restoration of Leonardo's 'Last Supper' – Part 1: The Law of Diminishing Returns](#) and [The Perpetual Restoration of Leonardo's Last Supper, Part 2: A traumatic production of "a different Leonardo"](#).)

Just twenty-one years later in 1975 a former student of the previous restorer reported falling fragments of paint. Two years later another (and \$8m Olivetti-sponsored) restoration began with the express intention of *undoing every trace of all previous restorations*. In entirely predictable consequence, vast areas of bare, pictorially disfiguring wall were exposed. To return a semblance of iconographic coherence and legibility to the by-then devastated sacred images, the restorer colourised all of the exposed wall (which constituted *most* of the mural), not in any semblance of Leonardo's original pictorial method, but *flatly*, "abstractly" with water-colours that took their values from the local colours (but not *the forms*) of adjacent areas. This technique, therefore, imposed an entirely alien and ahistorical modernist sensibility on the remains of a once-supreme Renaissance evocation of real figures, in action, in real spaces. The operation thereby constituted an artistic misrepresentation and a cultural falsification: once-living *theatre* was effectively pulled onto a decorated backdrop. Aside from the conceptual unaptness of the enterprise, the restorer made errors – or took liberties – *within her own terms of operation*. (See below.) This was not a restoration and nor was it a recovery. Moreover, as an imposition of a markedly 20th-century sensibility and mindset, it will "date" rapidly and therefore licence those who will next wish to intervene on a world renowned work.





Above, Figs. 29, 30 and 31: The central section of the *Last Supper* is here shown (top) before the last restoration; during restoration (middle); and (above) after restoration and repainting. One error made at the repainting stage was to the central figure – Christ. Leaving aside what happened to

His Face, the restorer decided against all historical testimony (see below) that Leonardo had painted the drapery of Christ's right arm so that it came to rest on the table cloth among the food and crockery. When our challenge to the decision was reported in the press, Professor Pietro Marani, the Leonardo expert who directed the *Last Supper* restoration, sarcastically downplayed the criticism – “*A small piece of drapery. Oh, my God.*” (See [Have art restorers ruined Leonardo's masterpiece?](#)). It might have seemed a small error to the director of the restoration, but it has left drapery in place that Leonardo had not painted. How seriously, then, should we take assurances about the high “ethical” standards of today's restorers?







Above, Figs. 32, 33, 34 and 35: Details showing (top) the restored [sic] drapery of Christ's right arm and, below it, two copies of the original arm, as painted by Leonardo's associates Andrea Solario and Giampietrino (whose copy is shown above in colour and in greyscale).

#### Contender No. 10: The United States ~ The Clark Institute

The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, has high scholarly aspirations and was generously founded on Sterling Clark's passionate and well informed love of art. In his will of 1946 Clark expressly prohibited any restoration of his own to-be bequeathed pictures:

*"It having been my object in making said collection to acquire only works of the best quality of the artists represented, which were not damaged or distorted by the works of restorers, it is my wish and desire and I request that the said trustees...permanently maintain in said gallery all works of art bequeathed hereunder in the condition in which they shall be at my death without any so-called restoration, cleaning or other work thereon, except in the case of damage from unforeseen causes, and that none of them be sold, exchanged or otherwise disposed of..."*

Sterling Clark's greatest love was for Renoir – he owned thirty-eight of his paintings, including the once magnificent *A Box at the Theater (At the Concert)* shown in two details below. Sterling died first in 1956 and his widow Francine died in 1960. Within three years of her death, pictures from the collection were being "restored" and (some) sold in breach of the terms of their generous bequest. The consequences were as horrendous as the deeds treacherous.







Above, Fig. 36: A detail (top) of the Clark's Renoir *A Box at the Theater (At the Concert)*, as seen as recently as in the Clark's 1996/7 exhibition catalogue "A Passion for Renoir: Sterling and Francine Clark Collection, 1916-1951",

Above, Fig. 37: *A Box at the Theater (At the Concert)*, as seen in the 2008 Courtauld Gallery catalogue "Renoir at the Theatre" exhibition. In all likelihood, the (typically disastrous) Renoir cleaning will have been carried out in so-called preparation for travel to and from the London Exhibition – and in all probability, this would have been the first time the picture had been cleaned and "restored". (For more information on the systematic institutional abuse of the Clarks' bequest, see [Taking Renoir, Sterling and Francine Clark to the Cleaners.](#))

On Francine Clark's death the first of what were to be two radical and utterly deranging restorations of Turner's *Rockets and Blue Lights (Close at Hand) to Warn Steamboats of Shoal Water* was under way at the hands of a then leading restorer, William Suhr (below, Fig. 38) after which only traces of the nearer steamboat survived.





Above, Fig. 39: Turner's *Rockets and Blue Lights*... after its 2003 restoration by David Bull during which the last traces of the nearer steamboat were removed.

For every restoration there is an apologia. With this picture's second restoration in forty years (which restoration, once again, preceded a loan across the Atlantic) the story went like this: The painting had been falling apart; and, besides, seventy-five per cent of it consisted of earlier restorers' repaint which had been applied to "*disguise the evidence of some unknown earlier trauma*". Only by removing most of the present paint, could "*a full understanding of what lay beneath*" be achieved. After the removal – on the authority of the Clark Institute's trustees – all parties responsible proclaimed a "*resurrection*" which had created "*effectively a new picture*".

Brass cheek does not come bolder than that. This was indeed a new picture, no longer a Turner, more a Suhr-Bull. For one thing, one of the picture's two original storm distressed coal-burning steamboats had disappeared under the waves with its former belching smoke converted nicely into a white water funnel. When our criticisms (initiated by the painter Edmund Rucinski) were first aired, a feeble, soon-abandoned, claim was made to the effect that the disappeared steamboat had been a 19th century restorer's addition – another brazen defiance of reality given that the picture's original title referred to *boats*, not *boat*, in distress. The evidence of there having indeed been an original second boat was overwhelming (see below) but there was no apology. Instead, the entire museum establishment, as if in complete solidarity with the Clark Institute (which lends loads of paintings), bigged-up the official line that this was somehow-still-a-Turner by proclaiming that the manifestly wrecked work had now become an *especially desirable Turner*.

At the time of the UK trip, the Tate Gallery issued a press release claiming that the picture comprised "*one of the stars of the show...[having] recently undergone major conservation*". Credulous British art critics lapped up and regurgitated the claims. And they did so once again when this "Turner" returned to the UK for a Tate Liverpool show where Cy Twombly's solipsistic scribbles and dribbles were flatteringly permed with works by Turner and Monet, no doubt helping the former's reputation more than Turner's or Monet's. We repeated the criticisms to no discernable effect. In 2014 an extraordinary publicity barrage accompanied the launch of the National Maritime Museum's "Turner & The Sea" blockbuster. It centred on a single painting – yes, the now notorious *Rockets and Blue Lights*. The decision to celebrate that particular wrecked and critically challenged work had passed beyond the brazen. As Maurice Davies observed in the spring 2014 issue of *Turner Society News*:

*"The most unnecessary loan is Rockets and Blue Lights... The catalogue talks diplomatically of 'alterations to some areas of the painted surface.' It is in fact so horribly damaged that there's little value in seeing it in the flesh. ArtWatch talks of the picture as an example of 'the bizarre and perverse phenomenon of promoting demonstrably wrecked paintings in special loan exhibitions.' It would have been quite enough to include a small illustration in the catalogue and move swiftly on."*

By this point the museum establishment had, in truth, passed beyond all reason. The wreck was not just billed as a star of the show, it was flaunted in every advertisement, publication cover, billboard and online marketing venue – see [From Veronese to Turner, Celebrating Restoration-Wrecked Pictures](#). The message to critics seemed Clinton-esque: "*We do it, because we can*".

#### **For the record: Proofs that Turner really had painted *two* Steamboats**





Above, (top) Fig. 40: Detail of an 1852 (14 stages) chromolithographic copy by Robert Carrick of Turner's 1840 oil painting *Rockets and Blue Lights (Close at Hand) to Warn Steamboats of Shoal Water*. Note particularly the detailed depiction of the distressed steamboat and crew members on the right.

Above, (centre) Fig. 41: The steamboat as recorded in a photograph of 1896 (shown by courtesy of Christie's).

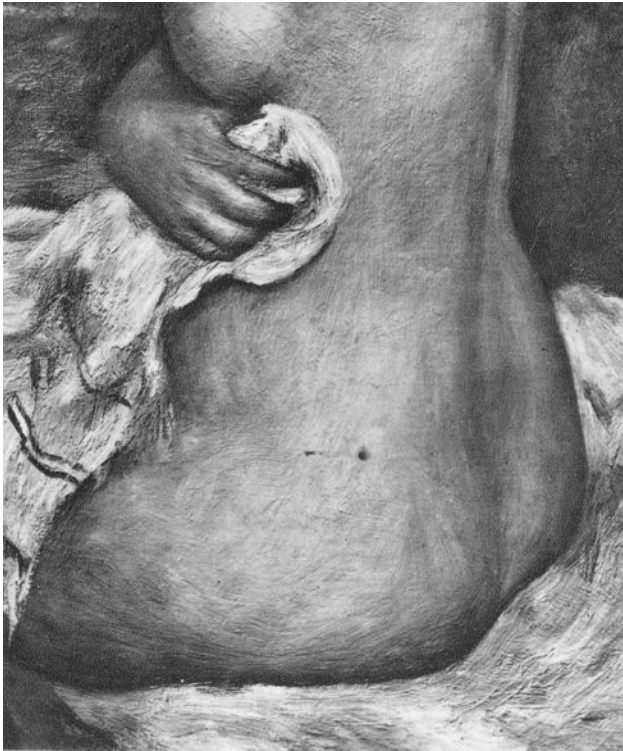
Above, Fig. 41: Turner's *Rockets and Blue Lights...* (detail) after its 2003 restoration by David Bull when the last traces of the nearer steamboat had been removed and the painting was fast approaching the appearance of a 20th-century abstract painting.

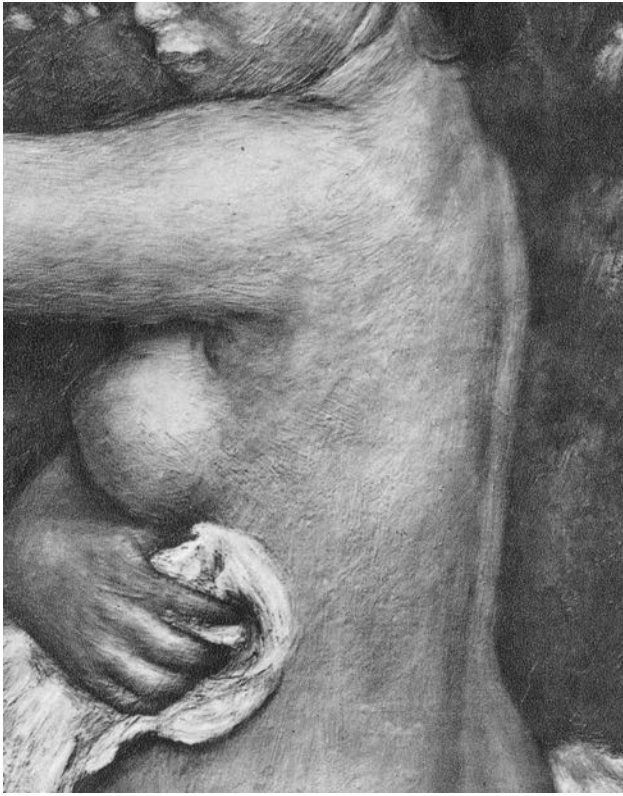
#### Contender No. 11: Location unknown

We knew at a glance that something was amiss. On 16 June 2012, a newspaper photograph trailed an imminent auction sale of Renoir's *Baigneuse* of 1888. Even on the evidence of a single de-saturated newsprint reproduction it seemed clear that the privately owned masterpiece had gone through the picture restoration wash cycle a time (or two) too often.

Renoir's *Baigneuse* had been given star billing (on a £12/18m estimate) at Christie's June 20th Impressionist/Modern sale. While much was made in the eight pages long catalogue entry of an impeccable and unbroken provenance through ten successive owners, not a word was said about any restorations of the painting, and although many early photographs were identified in the picture's literature, none was reproduced. It was disclosed that the Renoir was to be included in a forthcoming "catalogue critique" of the artist's work being prepared by the Wildenstein Institute from the Archives of François Daulte, Durand-Ruel, Venturi, Volland and Wildenstein.

On the night of the sale, an announcement that the picture had been withdrawn drew gasps of surprise. *Artinfo* reported that the vendor had accepted a private offer from an unidentified buyer for an undisclosed sum somewhere within the estimate. Trade and press eyebrows have been raised at such secretive, pre-auction sales and the withdrawal was the more confounding because expectations of a big auction house "event" had been raised by extensive – and quite stunningly fetching – pre-sale press coverage with photographs of the painting enlivened by the seemingly routine inclusion of beautiful young female staff members. We wondered whether the present condition of the picture might have contributed to the withdrawal. Without any knowledge of by whom the picture is owned, or by whom and how often it might have been restored, we are content to leave the photo-evidence of condition to speak, as it properly should, for itself. The three *then* and *now* pairs of photographic details below (Figs. 42-47) are drawn respectively from Michel Drucker's 1944 "Renoir" and the 2012 Christie's "Impressionist/Modern" sale catalogue cover.







**Michael Daley – 8 May 2015.**

## Bags and Abuses of National Trust – Florence Hallett reports:

*Our recent report on St Bride's, Fleet Street, highlighted the way that the Heritage Lottery Fund favours boosting visitor numbers over preserving architectural treasures.*

*Indeed the Heritage Lottery Fund, which is advised by historic buildings experts at English Heritage (now Historic England), is quite candid about its commitment to swelling visitor numbers by engaging new audiences, an aim that apparently trumps any interest it might have in preserving historic fabric.*

*Key to securing new audiences, it seems, is the provision of facilities designed to maximise the entertainment value of the visitor experience. If this all sounds a bit Disney, it is worth noting that less than a year ago, in an interview for the Guardian, chief executive Simon Thurley told Will Self that English Heritage was in the business of providing “entertainment” and a “holiday experience”. In 2011, ArtWatch UK reported on Thurley's enthusiastic response to a [highly speculative reconstruction at Stirling Castle](#).*

*While Historic England and the HLF are in a position to exert unparalleled influence on the treatment of historic buildings, the hijacking of cultural and historical assets as lucrative entertainments is a practice that extends beyond their sweep. In Chester, a city replete with history, plans to add folding iron gates to the Eastgate, a structure that according to Chester Archaeological Society was “specifically designed not to have gates” have been proposed exclusively because of their potential appeal for tourists. The opening and closing of these bogus gates each day by Roman and Commonwealth soldiers is, we are told, intended to provide a “tourist spectacular”, predicted (surely optimistically) to bring “millions” to the city (on which more to follow).*



*Chester's Eastgate St, looking towards the Eastgate. Louise Rayner, 1924, watercolour*



*Pretendy Roman soldiers for Chesterfield next?*



### **More Pretendy Soldiers for Chesterfield, some with not-pretendy glasses**

*Such fatuous interventions are not just confined to the built environment, and art dealer Bendor Grosvenor has recently locked horns with the National Trust, whose Director General, Dame Helen Ghosh told the Daily Mail that there were plans to simplify the exhibits at some properties, saying: “We make people work fantastically hard – we could make them work much less hard.” Writing on his blog [arthistorynews.com](http://arthistorynews.com), Grosvenor revealed that in a seemingly contradictory step, beanbags have been introduced at Ickworth Hall, Suffolk, so that visitors can better enjoy the paintings in the library.*

*While Bendor Grosvenor is right to be appalled by the Trust’s activities, he should not be surprised. Of all the cultural organisations in this country, the National Trust has been an enthusiastic pioneer of interventions that patronise visitors on grounds of inclusivity, and in 2011 ArtWatch UK expressed concern about the relaxed attitude taken by its (then) chairman, [Sir Simon Jenkins](#), to interpreting the past. The present NT chairman is Tim Parker, a former Treasury economist – and [a serial CEO](#). He is presently also chairman of Samsonite.*

*There are countless examples of the National Trust treating the past as a narrative to be bowdlerised in order to enhance the visitor experience. Its stage-management of the past extends to having a Visitor Experience Director, quoted as saying: “If you charge for the feelings customers have because of engaging you, then you are in the experience business” , a phrase, bizarrely, that manages to be meaningless and alarming in equal measure. In the interests of creating a “more immersive visitor experience” audio installations, produced by a company called [Blackbox-AV](#), have been introduced in a number of Trust properties, with the sound of a dog barking at Little Moreton Hall, Cheshire, elucidating the idea that: “actual people once lived in this amazing building”. No less ludicrous is the bogus “soundscape” in a drawing room at [Tyntesfield House](#), Somerset, where snippets of conversations and the chink of glasses “recreate the atmosphere of some good old fashioned get-togethers”.*



### **Tyntesfield House**

*While such interventions make persuasive claims for accessibility based on soaring visitor numbers, they actually implant quite a different set of assumptions, cultivating the toxic idea that art and culture are beyond the grasp of most people, unless heavily mediated. Visitors cannot be allowed to look and draw their own conclusions, deciding if and when they wish to read more or research something further, but must be drip-fed carefully selected tidbits of easily-digested, if phoney, information.*

*The National Trust’s now well-advanced mission to baby the nation serves to crystallise how worrying a trend this is overall. Attempts to dismantle historic interiors suggest, at the very least, a misdirected embarrassment about the startling inequalities that have existed in this country, and at worst, an attempt to misconstrue the past driven by a paternalistic, class-obsessed ideology. More broadly, the insistence that historic buildings and works of art need endless simplistic and historically suspect interpretation not only threatens their individual integrity; by*



*denying them the right to speak for themselves, cultural objects are easily marginalised as irrelevant and elitist which in an era of financial crisis, is nothing short of a death sentence.*

**FLORENCE HALLETT** ([florence\\_hallett@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:florence_hallett@yahoo.co.uk); [@FlorenceHallett](#)), 13 April 2015.

## *The Conservation Laundering of Illicit Antiquities*



*by Einav Zamir*

*Marion True, former curator of antiquities at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles [Fig. 2], once hailed as the “heroic warrior against plunder,” [Endnote 1] was indicted in 2005 for violations against Italy’s cultural patrimony laws.[2] True became the first American curator to face such charges [3] — not coincidentally, it was also the first time that a source country had the means, financially and politically, to investigate and prosecute violations of their cultural patrimony laws [4]. The Swiss police and Italian Carabinieri’s raid on Giacomo Medici’s warehouse in Geneva a decade earlier [5] exposed an elaborate system, designed to avoid suspicion from authorities [6]. The subsequent investigation threw a spotlight onto the dubious activities of museum curators.*

*Conversely, restorers are rarely expected to account for their participation in concealing the evidence of clandestine excavation. Articles and books that focus on conservation’s role in the illicit trade of artifacts often take a very sympathetic stance — according to these accounts, conservators are unwilling participants, forced to comply with faulty acquisitions policies and overly aggressive museum personnel.*

*In many cases, this is certainly true. When the Getty’s Conservation Institute was asked to examine the infamous Aphrodite of Morgantina [Fig.3] before the Getty finalized its purchase, the staff observed that the object had been broken into three sections and speculated whether this was done by looters. They also noticed fresh dirt in some of its crevices, and Luis Monreal, the director of the institute, subsequently advised John Walsh, the Getty’s director, and Harold Williams, CEO of the Getty Trust, not to acquire the statue [7]. Nevertheless, no one alerted the authorities. Instead, the object was cleaned and restored, effectively removing the physical proof of its origin. Clearly, protesting to the museum board was not enough.*

*Of course, this issue is hardly cut-and-dry. According to *Conservation Skills: Judgement, Method, and Decision Making* by Chris Caple, there are two reactions a conservator might have when presented with a potentially looted object. He or she may choose to conserve it, thereby ensuring that information about the object, though devoid of archaeological context, becomes available to the public [8]. In an interview for the *New York Times*, Timothy Potts stressed, “If [the ancient art] goes on view with other like objects, then scholars get to see it and study it; the public gets to come; the claimant, if there is one, gets to know where it is and file a claim.” [9] Whether this information is enough to ensure an object’s return to a source country is questionable, however. It took over twenty years for the Getty to return the Aphrodite of Morgantina, and that was only after the raid on Giacomo Medici’s warehouse and increasing demands from the Italian government and numerous media outlets.*

*If a conservator turns away a looted object, however, he or she may be dooming it to obscurity, thereby diminishing the possibility that it will ever*

be returned. According to Jason Felch, author of *Chasing Aphrodite: The Hunt for Looted Antiquities at the World's Richest Museum*, "Lots of museum folks are unhappy because of the so-called orphan issue, and pressure is mounting." [10] This pressure is likely felt both by museum curators and their colleagues in conservation. According to Caple, if a conservator refuses to work on an artifact, he or she denies it any "respectability." He notes that it is difficult to deny an object in need of care, and that "refusal to treat one object will do little to suppress the trade in stolen or looted art." Caple concludes by stating that "often the conservator's suspicions may only be aroused during the conservation process," [11] thus giving the conservator an out. Yet, if a curator suspects that an object has been looted, even after that object has made its way into the collection, he or she is expected to alert the authorities. Conservators are not held to the same standard. In a recent interview, Oscar White Muscarella, archaeologist and outspoken opponent of the antiquities trade, stated, "If someone is asked to conserve an object, and then he is asked to report on it, he doesn't have to discuss that it's a plundered object in his technical report — it's a given that if it's not from an excavation, it's plundered." He later added, "Conservators are as honest or dishonest as any other craftsman, but they contend that they're scientists, and therefore, not dishonest." [12]

Even the ethical codes of the American Institute for Conservation (AIC) and the International Institute for Conservation (IIC) do not strictly prohibit the conservation of stolen objects. Article II of the AIC "Code of Ethics" states that "all actions of the conservation professional must be governed by an informed respect for the cultural property, its unique character and significance, and the people or person who created it." [13] However, their "Guidelines for Practice" stipulate that a member need only be "cognizant of laws and regulations that may have a bearing on professional activity," [14] and it is merely recommended, not mandated, that "conservation professionals report suspected violations of applicable laws to the proper authorities." [15] Similarly, one of the IIC's primary goals as outlined in its "Memorandum of Association" is to "maintain standards in the practice of conservation and to combat any influences which would tend to lower such standards." [16] Taking part in the laundering of illicit objects could be considered a blow to such principles. Yet, their mission to "take any action conducive to the bettering of the condition of Historic and Artistic Works," [17] coupled with a rather vague definition of "standards of practice," leaves a wide gap for interpretation. One might reasonably infer that "any action" includes the preservation of looted antiquities in order to safeguard their physical condition.

Jeanette Greenfield, author of *The Return of Cultural Treasures*, believes that "the purity of purpose of the conservators is to restore, protect and preserve objects.... Their work is a necessary singular task regardless of the method of acquisition. That is a separate legal matter for which the museums should be answerable." [18] However, the conservator, as Professor Ricardo J. Elia of Boston University points out, should realize that his or her obligation is not to the object in its physical form, but to its overall integrity as a record of cultural history. [19] Because of this factor, loss of context outweighs any perceived gain in performing restorative work. "No self-respecting professional should have anything to do with the antiquities market," he argues. "You are either with the looters or against them." [20] There are a growing number of conservators who seem to agree with this sentiment. Catherine Sease advocated in 1997 for a more stringent code of ethics among conservators. In particular, she believed that grassroots efforts, including the refusal to work on objects of dubious origin, have the potential to change future endeavors of both museums and the dealers who supply them. [21] More recently, at the



Above, Fig. 1: Looters' pits at the archaeological site of Isin, Iraq.



Above, Fig. 2: The Getty Museum, unlike institutions such as the Met or the British Museum, is a fairly new establishment. Confronted by an enormous endowment that needed to be spent within a limited amount of time, they aggressively acquired antiquities throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. Dubious collecting practices led to both a criminal trial against Marion True, then curator of the Getty Museum's Classical Art department, and negotiations for the restitution of forty ancient objects to Italy and Greece. Since then, the Getty has adopted a new acquisitions policy with far greater restrictions than the policies of many other comparable institutions.

*Appraisers Association of America's annual conference in 2011, James McAndrew, a forensic specialist, delivered a keynote address entitled "A Decade of Transition in the Trade of Art and Antiquities," in which he discussed the issues surrounding the conservation of looted art. [22] However, the question remains whether refusal to work on such objects is enough. Museum professionals, regardless of their rank, should also consider making their objections more public. From a purely practical standpoint, one must realize that many conservators will find it difficult if not impossible to do either. According to Elizabeth Simpson, an archaeologist and professor who has also been a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "those employed as conservators by museums and private collectors are likely to lose their jobs if they don't toe the line." [23] Several conservators who were contacted about this article declined to comment on the issue, supporting Simpson's contention.*

*While it is clear that Marion True participated in the acquisition of looted artifacts, many believe that she became a scapegoat for an issue affecting several major institutions. Violations of the 1970 UNESCO convention were, and still are, widespread. As Felch states in his book, "True, at once the greatest sinner and the greatest champion of reform, has been made to pay for the crimes of American museums." [24] Curators are held responsible for what has become a collaborative offense — anyone who has knowledge or suspicion of illegal activities, regardless of their intentions, should be expected to take action. According to Felch, the only way to ensure future adherence to ethical codes is by promoting "vigilance and education of the museum-going public about these issues. Museums will stop buying loot if and only if they feel the practice is culturally unacceptable in the public's eyes." [25] It would seem that the solution, much like the problem itself, needs to be collaborative.*

## ENDNOTES

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- 2 Sharon Waxman, *Loot: The Battle over the Stolen Treasures of the Ancient World* (New York: Times Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 305.
- 3 *Italy v. Marion True and Robert E. Hecht*, Tribunal of Rome. 13 Oct. 2010. IFAR: Art Law & Cultural Property Database. 30 Feb. 2012. .
- 4 Peter Watson, and Cecilia Todeschini, *The Medici Conspiracy: The Illicit Journey of Looted Antiquities, from Italy's Tomb Raiders to the World's Greatest Museums* (New York: BBS Public Affairs, 2006), 28.
- 5 Neil Brodie, "Uncovering the Antiquities Market," in *The Oxford Handbook of Public Archaeology*, edited by Robin Skeates, Carol McDavid, and John Carman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 247.
- 6 Tom Bazley, *Crimes of the Art World* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 129.
- 7 Ralph Frammolino, "A Goddess Goes Home." *Smithsonian Magazine* Nov. 2011: 43.
- 8 Chris Caple, *Conservation Skills: Judgement, Method, and Decision Making* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 194.
- 9 Hugh Eakin, "U.S. Museum Guidelines Defend Ties to Collectors." *New York Times*. 28 Feb. 2006. .
- 10 Jason Felch, "Getty Policy." *Message to Einav Zamir*. 19 Apr. 2012. E-mail.
- 11 Caple, 194.
- 12 Oscar White Muscarella, *Telephone conversation with Einav Zamir*. 25 Jul. 2012.
- 13 *American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works*,



Above, Fig. 3: The so-called "Aphrodite of Morgantina" from the fifth century BCE, was acquired by the Getty Museum despite its dubious origins for the sake of expanding the collection. The Museum purchased the goddess in 1988 for eighteen million dollars from Robin Symes, a former antiquities dealer who spent seven months in prison in 2005 for involvement in Medici's illicit operations. It remained on display at the Getty Villa until 2010, returning to Italy in May of 2011. It is now on view at the Museo Archeologico Museo in Aidone, Sicily.



AIC Code of Ethics And Guidelines For Practice (Washington, D.C., 1994).

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, Memorandum of Association (London, 1992). Originally signed in 1950, amended in 1959 and 1992.

17 Ibid.

18 Jeanette Greenfield, email to Einav Zamir. 7 Aug. 2012.

19 Ricardo J. Elia, "Comment on "Irreconcilable Differences?": Scholars for Sale." *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 18 (2007): 17.

20 Ibid., 18.

21 Catherine Sease, "Conservation and the Antiquities Trade." *Journal of the American Institute of Conservation* 36.1 (1997): 56.

22 Appraisers Association of America, "2011 National Conference." Accessed 25 July 2013. .

23 Elizabeth Simpson, email to Einav Zamir. 6 Aug. 2012.

24 Felch and Frammolino, 312.

25 Felch, "Getty Policy."

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Comments may be left at: [artwatch.uk@gmail.com](mailto:artwatch.uk@gmail.com)

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Above, Fig. 4: The Euphronios krater presents one of the most infamous cases of the trade in looted antiquities. It was removed from an Etruscan tomb near Cerveteri in 1971 and sold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1972 by Robert E. Hecht, who claimed to have purchased it from a Lebanese art dealer. After incriminating evidence turned up describing the circumstances of the sale of the krater, Italy demanded the return of the vase, and the Met entered into negotiations with the Italian government. The Met returned the Euphronios krater to Italy in 2008..

#### LOOTERS, THEIR CLIENTS AND THEIR MARKETS:

"Aggressive collecting curators were more than a little larcenous. To land something great, they were perfectly willing to deal with shady characters. Though they wouldn't, they could tell you every smugglers' ploy ever concocted. In extra-legal matters they could be sophisticated, but they were often naive about the subtleties of bargaining...An intact red-figured Greek vase [the Euphronios krater – at Fig. 4] of the early sixth century B. C. could only have been found in Etruscan territory in Italy, by illegal excavators..."

– Thomas Hoving, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, (1967-77), in *Making the Mummies Dance*, N.Y. 1993, pp. 309 and 69.

1GM Monday March 16 2015 | THE TIMES

**Letters to the Editor should be sent to [letters@thetimes.co.uk](mailto:letters@thetimes.co.uk) or by post to 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF**

## Looted art and Isis

Sir, The West's trade in looted antiquities that are funding Islamic State should have been shut down years ago (Opinion, Mar 13). The late director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Thomas Hoving, used to boast of how his "favourite smuggler" could get medieval treasures out of Belgium and into Zurich "in four days — at the usual 4 per cent commission".

Moreover, western museums increasingly trade and traffic their own art in lucrative "once-in-a-lifetime" temporary exhibitions. Although not remotely of the same order as bulldozing the remains of the ancient city of Nimrud, in 2006 the British Museum risked sending its entire collection of fragile Nimrud Palace alabaster carvings in cargo jets to Shanghai, via Azerbaijan. And the Tate Gallery had to pay a £3.5 million ransom to Serbian gangsters for the return of two Turners stolen in 1994 when they were loaned to a provincial museum in Germany.

MICHAEL DALEY  
Director, ArtWatch UK

*“A RARE Greek Sculpture worth up to £2m was smuggled into Britain after being looted from a UNESCO world heritage site in Libya, a court heard yesterday.” ~ The Daily Telegraph 28 March 2015.*



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**CONTENTS**

- 2 Introduction: by Michael Daley
- 4 The James Beck Memorial Lecture:  
by Martin Eidelberg
- 12 The Dispute over Turner's Will  
by Alec Samuels
- 14 Conservation in the Age of Conceptual  
Art by Alexander Adams
- 16 Conservation and Looted Antiquities: A  
Collaborative Crime by Einav Zamir
- 19 Centenary of a Fateful Report  
by Selby Whittingham
- 22 Immaculate, or Not?  
by Ann C Pizzorusso
- 23 The Art of Tullio Lombardo  
by Anne Markham Schulz
- 26 El Greco, Rubens and Connoisseurship  
by Peter Cannon-Brookes
- 28 Director's Report
- 30 Archived web postings

*Above, Figs. 6 and 7: The Spring 2015 issue and contents of the ArtWatch UK members' journal. On travel risks, see [Introduction](#). For membership*

details, please contact Helen Hulson, Membership Secretary, at [hahulson@googlemail.com](mailto:hahulson@googlemail.com)

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## The Spring 2015 ArtWatch UK Journal

The forthcoming ArtWatch UK members'\* Journal examines restoration problems; betrayals of trust; the role of conservators in the illicit trade in antiquities; and, the escalating commercial scramble by museums that is disrupting collections and putting much of the world's greatest art at needless risk.

\* For membership details, please contact Helen Hulson, Membership Secretary at [hahulson@googlemail.com](mailto:hahulson@googlemail.com)

ArtWatch UK Journal No. 29



Preview ~ Journal No. 29's Introduction:

### **MUSEUMS, MEANS and MENACES**

**Museums once provided havens** for art and solace to visitors. They were cherished for their distinctive historically-given holdings and their staffs were answerable to trustees. Today they serve as platforms for conservators to strut their invasive stuff and as springboards for directors wishing to play impresario, broadcaster or global ambassador. Collections that constituted institutional *raison d'être*, are now swappable, disrupt-able value-harvesting feasts. Trustees are reduced to helpmeet enablers of directorial "visions". No longer content to hold display and study, museums crave growth, action, crowds and corporately branded income-generation. For works of art, actions spell danger as directors compete to beg, bribe and cajole so as to borrow and swap great art for transient but lucrative "dream" compilations. Today, even architecturally integral medieval glass and gilded bronze Renaissance door panels get shuttled around the international museum loans circus.



Above, a window that depicts Jareth – one of no fewer than six monumental windows depicting the Ancestors of Christ that were removed from Canterbury Cathedral (following “conservation”) and flown across the Atlantic to the Getty Museum, California, and then on to the Metropolitan Museum, New York. (For a report on how such precious, fragile and utterly irreplaceable artefacts become part of the international museums loans and swaps circuit, see [How the Metropolitan Museum of Art gets hold of the world’s most precious and vulnerable treasures.](#))

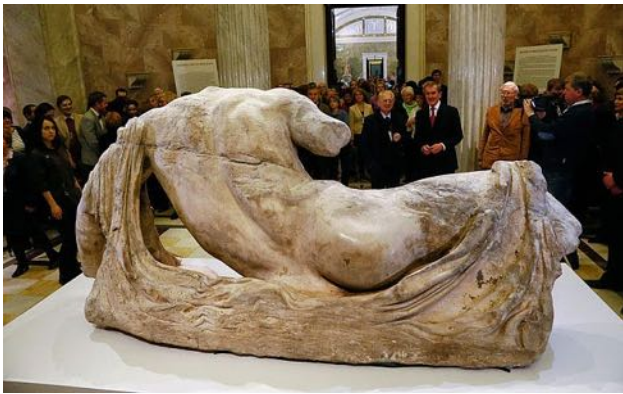


Above, top, one of Ghiberti's Florence Baptistery doors (which were dubbed "The Gates of Paradise" by Michelangelo) during restoration. Above, one of three (of the ten) gilded panels from the doors that were sent from Florence to Atlanta; from Atlanta to Chicago; from Chicago to the Metropolitan Museum, New York; from New York to Seattle; and, finally, from Seattle back to Florence. To reduce the risk of losing all three panels during this marathon of flights, they were flown on separate airplanes.

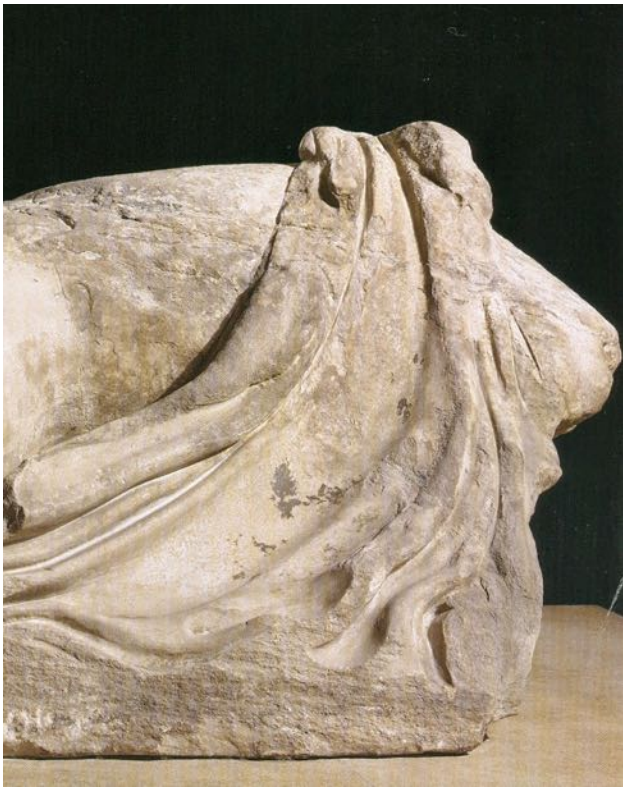
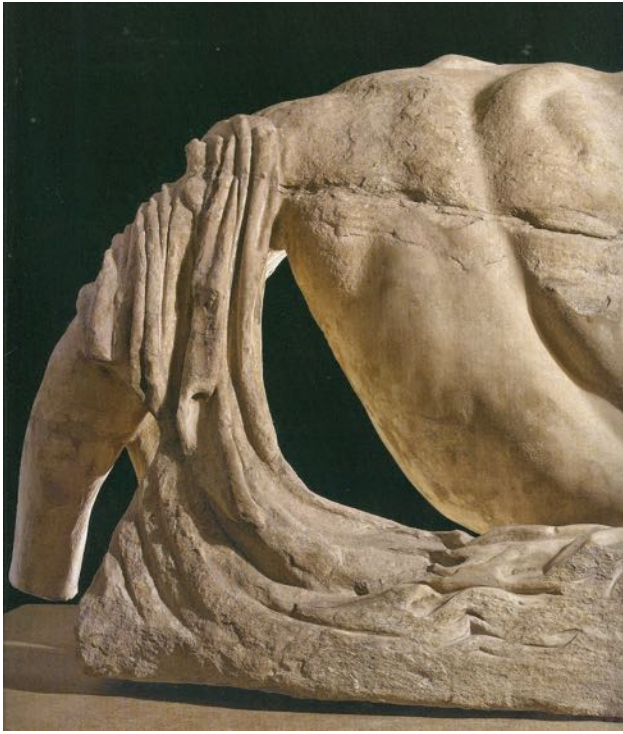
**In such an art-churning milieu** this organisation's campaigning becomes more urgent. Fortunately, our website (<http://artwatch.org.uk/>) has increased our following fifty-fold – and see, for example: "How the Metropolitan Museum of Art gets hold of the worlds most precious and vulnerable treasures". Here, we publish an abridged version of the fifth lecture given in commemoration of ArtWatch International's founder, Professor James Beck, and examine persisting betrayals of trust, errors of judgement and historical reading, problematic "conservations", and questionable museum conservation treatments of demonstrably looted antiquities. For these we warmly thank Martin Eidelberg, Alec Samuels, Alexander Adams, Einav Zamir, Selby Whittingham and Peter Cannon-Brookes. We commend two books, one for its freshness of voice, the other for a pioneering combination of high-quality images and scholarly texts in coordinated print and online productions. We also reproduce our online archive and related letters to the press.

**Last July the outgoing chairman** of the British Museum's board, Niall Fitzgerald, disclosed in the *Financial Times* that because the director, Neil MacGregor, "obviously isn't going to stay for ever" it was right that a new chairman [in the event a long-standing BM trustee and former editor of the *Financial Times*, Sir Richard Lambert] should lead the search for his successor. In December – and with levels of secrecy that would have thrilled his one-time mentor at the Courtauld Institute, Anthony Blunt – MacGregor dispatched one of the most important free-standing Parthenon sculptures, the carving of the river god Ilissos, to the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. In lending Ilissos to St Petersburg just months after Russian troops had annexed part of Europe and Russian-armed separatists in Eastern Ukraine had brought down a Malaysian Airlines Boeing with a loss of 298 lives including around 100 children (see cover), the British Museum conferred an institutional vote of confidence in Putin's Russia at a time when the West has mounted economic sanctions against his incursion and his continuing de-stabilisation of Eastern Europe. Moreover – and in a gratuitously provocative manner – by subjecting one of its most precious and controversially held works to needless and inherent risks, the British Museum presented its institutional a\*\*\* to everyone in Greece who is seeking to re-unite all of the surviving Parthenon carvings. On 9 December 2014 we protested in a letter to the *Times* ("Where should the Elgin Marbles be housed?" – see p. 29) that the action had gravely weakened the case for the British Museum retaining its controversially held "Elgin Marbles" and that it constituted a failure of imagination and a dereliction of duty on the part of the museum's trustees.





*Above, the carved figure of Ilissos, as displayed (top) at the British Museum, in the context of the surviving group of free-standing figures from the West pediment of the Parthenon; and, (centre and above) as displayed when on loan to the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.*



*Above, details of the back of Ilissos, (as photographed by Ivor Kerslake and Dudley Hubbard for the 2007 British Museum book, “The Parthenon Sculptures in the British Museum”, by Ian Jenkins, a senior curator at the museum) showing the faultline in the stone that runs through the entire figure.*

*Perhaps the provocative loan was a piqued riposte to Mr and Mrs George Clooney’s attempts to have the British Museum’s Parthenon sculptures returned to Athens? Or, perhaps, simply a flaunting confirmation that nothing within the museum’s walls is now considered sacrosanct. In any event, 5,000 objects were put at risk (see below) last year in pursuit of MacGregor’s desire to transform the great “encyclopaedic” museum into a glorified lending library – or, as he puts it, into “a universal institution with global outreach”. The loan to Russia breached a two centuries old honouring of the original terms of purchase which required the Parthenon carvings collection to be kept intact. We now learn that those sculptures are to be further denuded with three more loan requests under consideration. We have supported the British Museum’s retention of the Elgin Marbles for over a decade, in print and in debates in New York, Athens and Brussels. (See Journals 19, 20, 25 and 26.) A key consideration was*

*the relative safety of the sculptures in London and Athens. This latest policy reversal tips that balance in favour of Athens and thereby blows the moral case for the retention of the sculptures in London. It makes it impossible for us to maintain our previous support.*

**Such was the secrecy of this operation** that the British Government was informed of it only hours before the story broke in a world-exclusive newspaper report. Under its new chairman the museum's board proved supine, authorising the manoeuvre despite its own concerns over the sculpture's safety. Officially, the museum betrays an almost delusional insouciance on the inherent risks when fork-lifting, packing, fork-lifting, lorrying, fork-lifting, flying, fork-lifting, lorrying, fork-lifting, unpacking – twice-over – an irreplaceable world monument on a single loan. Art handling insurers testify that works are at between six and ten times greater risk when travelling. Against this actuarial reality, the museum's registrar variously boasted that “museums are good at mitigating risk”; that the loan had needed undisclosed insurance; and that, if intercepted by thieves, “they would be unable to sell it”. The source of this institutional confidence is unclear. As we reported in 2007 (*Journal 22*, p.7), in 2006 the British Museum packed 251 Assyrian objects – including its entire collection of Nimrud Palace alabaster reliefs and sent them in two cargo jets to Shanghai, with stop-overs in Azerbaijan, thus subjecting the fragile sculptures to four landings and take-offs. On arrival in Shanghai the recipient museum's low doorways and inadequate lifts required the crated sculptures to be “rolled in through the front door”. Three crates remained too large and had to be unpacked “to get a bit more clearance”. One carving was altogether too tall and “we had to lay him down on his side” to get him in, the British Museum's senior art handler said. It was then found that the museum's forklift truck was unsafe (and needed to be replaced), and, that “a few little conservation things had to be done”.

**When the resulting quid pro quo** loan of Chinese terracotta figures was sent to the British Museum the following year, two dozen wooden crates were held for two days at Beijing airport because they were too big to enter the holds of the two cargo planes that had been chartered. When the crated sculptures arrived at the British Museum, they were also found to be too big to pass through the door of the Reading Room (from which Paul Hamlyn's gifted library had been evicted – then temporarily, now permanently). The door frame was removed but three cases were still too big. These had to be unpacked outside the temporary exhibition space in the Great Court. The “temporary” misuse of the Reading Room became a permanent fixture until the new £135m (on a £70-100m estimate) exhibition and conservation centre in the antiseptic style of a Grimsby frozen food factory was opened last year (see back cover). Having insultingly evicted the Paul Hamlyn art library, it is now being said that the Reading Room “lacks a purpose” and that Mr MacGregor is musing on possible alternative uses to ... reading books in a fabulous library previously occupied by national and international literary and political luminaries. One of these alternatives would be to raid the museum's own diverse and encyclopaedic sculpture collections so as to tell a singular, MacGregoresque multi-cultural world story. Were he to be indulged in this (English Heritage witters alarmingly that the Reading Room's Grade 1 listing does not necessarily preclude changes of uses), the director would leave a monument to himself achieved by subverting the historically-resonant, listed purpose made classical building in order to patronise and spoon-feed future visitors who might better have made their own judgements on the relative merits of the artefacts held in the museum's various assembled civilisations.

**If the present lending policies** are not curtailed a further monument to MacGregor's reign will be found in the art handling facilities of the new “improbably large” conservation and exhibitions centre. These are such that a crated elephant would now “arrive elegantly, the right way up”. What – surprisingly – did not arrive was the exhibition of treasures from the Burrell Collection that is being sent on a fund-raising world tour. This tour was made possible by the overturning in the Scottish Parliament of the terms of Burrell's bequest which prohibited foreign loans. The overturning was made with the direct support and participation of Neil MacGregor and the British Museum was to have been the tour's first stop. (Only three voices against the overturning were heard in the Scottish parliamentary proceedings: our own; the Wallace Collection's academic and collections director, Jeremy Warren; and, the National Gallery's director, Nicholas Penny, who attacked the “deplorable tendency” for museum staffs to deny the grave risks that are run when works of art are transported around the world.) As we reported online (“[A Poor Day of Remembrance for Burrell](#)”, 11 November 2013, Item: MR MACGREGOR'S NO-SHOW AT THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT HEARINGS), after a reproach in the Scottish Parliament, Mr MacGregor replied: “It was suggested by the Convener on 9th September (column 33) that as the British Museum might be involved in helping organise the logistics of a possible loan, and as works from the Burrell Collection might be shown at the British Museum, I might find myself in a position of conflict of interest. I think I can assure the Convener that this is not so. The British Museum would not profit financially from either aspect of such co-operation with our Glasgow colleagues...” In the event, the first stop of the world tour was at Bonhams, the auctioneers, not the British Museum.

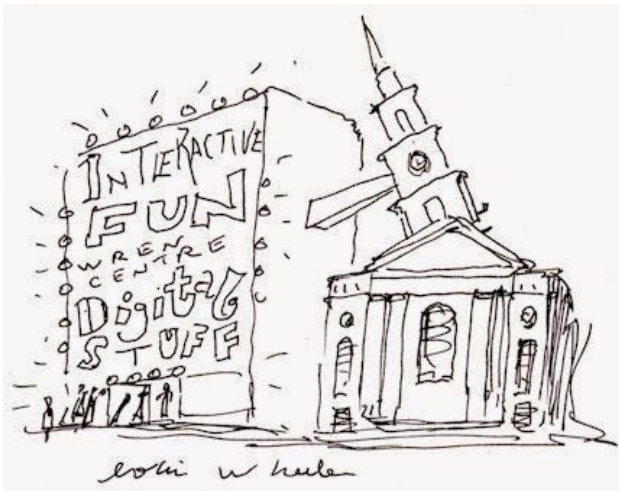
**Michael Daley. 1 March 2015.**

## ***Heritage at Risk – from the Heritage Lottery Fund***

*Less than three years after St Bride's, Fleet Street, one of Sir Christopher Wren's most famous buildings, was advised against applying for lottery money to save its famous spire from collapse, the church has once again been refused assistance from the Heritage Lottery Fund.*

### ***Florence Hallett reports:***

*Having gambled with the very survival of St Bride's, one of the earliest of the 52 city churches built following the Great Fire in 1666, the Heritage Lottery Fund, advised by English Heritage, appeared to be more favourably disposed to an application submitted in September 2014 relating to the development of a Wren Centre at the church. The application outlined an ambitious project to “reconfigure and refresh the crypt to create an exciting new exhibition space with digital interactive educational models on a range of topics”.*



*Speaking to us in May last year, Architect in Residence John Smith said that the HLF had indicated that by applying for funding to redevelop the crypt but also remaining on the Buildings at Risk register, St Bride's might have a better chance of receiving money to complete the outstanding structural repairs. He said: "the advice from them was, that particularly if we associated the two projects, that there might be some additional funding for the restoration of the rest of the church."*

**SAVE  
THE CITY'S  
HERITAGE**

**St Bride's Church, Fleet Street**  
Registered Charity 1131311  
[www.stbrides.com](http://www.stbrides.com)  
020 7427 0133

ENGLISH HERITAGE

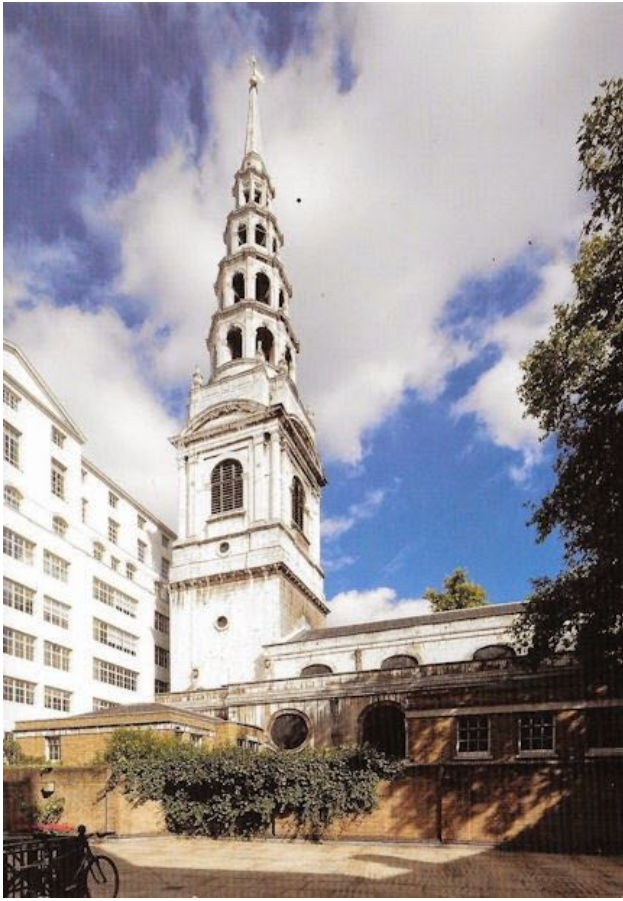
HERITAGE AT RISK

*What was perceived as the HLF's enthusiasm for a project aimed at increasing footfall at St Bride's, apparently regarding it more favourably than unglamorous but essential repairs, chimes with changes made in 2013 to the funding criteria for places of worship. Until then, the Repair Grants for Places of Worship scheme, administered by English Heritage but financed by the HLF allocated funding according to the urgency of the work and financial need. The new Heritage Lottery Fund Grants for Places of Worship scheme, run entirely by the HLF but still dependent on English Heritage for its specialist advice, places equal emphasis on projects achieving both "outcomes for heritage" and "outcomes for communities". Since 2013, applicants have been required to show that a grant will have the effect that: "more people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage."*



*Above, St Bride's interior, from the east*

*Accordingly, St Bride's, in its September 2014 application to the HLF, looked beyond its urgent structural issues and Mr Smith explained the church's strategy to: "tie it in with the work we might be doing in the Wren Centre so that the public benefits, the international benefits, the benefits for the immediate community are seen holistically, that's one of the ways it affects the approach." Nevertheless, Gerald Bowey, Chairman of the INSPIRE! Wren Centre Legacy, is adamant that St Bride's was not pressurised by the HLF or EH to broaden their ambitions beyond securing the church's failing fabric, in order to meet these new criteria. "English Heritage intimated that there is nothing wrong with a business plan and there is nothing wrong with footfall, but they certainly didn't labour it." Even so, HLF guidelines make it clear that unless proposals include schemes like the Wren Centre, designed to attract greater numbers of visitors, they will simply not be considered.*



*Above, St Bride's from the south*

*In the event, despite submitting an application that seemed to fulfil the HLF's new criteria, the St Bride's application was rejected in December, but Mr Bowey is confident that it will be resubmitted in June this year, describing the queries raised by HLF as "not insurmountable". While St Bride's may yet receive money towards its Wren Centre project, it remains the case that in order to sustain this historic church, whose significance extends far beyond that felt by its congregation, it has had to rely entirely upon its own fundraising efforts despite being on the at risk register, and despite the perilous state of the spire in 2012. Adrian Ward, of builder Baker's of Danbury, confirmed the extent of the problem, describing the spire as having had "bits falling off it" and that prior to repair, the possibility of the building having to be closed down was "realistic".*



**Heavy staining and  
bird pollution**



**Ferrous cramp damage**



**Heavy erosion forming  
hole in cornice**



*Above, St Bride's – damage to the fabric (1-4)*

*Gerald Bowey is remarkably philosophical about the stance taken by the HLF in 2012, perhaps because he is confident that St Bride's will eventually receive funding. Nevertheless, he said: "the wet fish in the face was being told that 'we do not sustain church buildings.'" However, according to the HLF, communicating via the English Heritage press office: "St Bride's was discouraged from applying for that particular grant because the restoration work had already started so the proposed project was ineligible".*





**Rusting cramps  
damaging ashlar face**



**Pollution deposit  
on spire steps**



**Fallen stone**



*Above, St Bride's – damage to the fabric (5-8)*

*However the HLF may presently choose to justify its decisions, for now, St Bride's remains on the at risk register, relying on its own fundraising to address pressing structural issues like the restoration of the outside walls. Mr Bowey said: "Other areas of the church structure are being attended to on an add hock (sic) basis where a temporary repair is usually effective. We continue our fund raising activities, which is slowly adding to the contribution we would need to make in any case to the overall cost of the major works".*



**Rusting cramps  
damaging ashlar face**



**Parapet cracks; sculpture  
erosion; inappropriate pointing**



**Damage by rusting cramp**





**Staining and parapet cracks**



**Cement mortar fillet;  
ferrous cramp damage**



**Loss of sculptural detail**



*Above, St Bride's – damage to the fabric (9-16)*

*Florence Hallett is a writer and a critic at [theartsdesk.com](http://theartsdesk.com). Cartoon by Colin Wheeler ([colinswheeler@gmail.com](mailto:colinswheeler@gmail.com)).*

*18 February 2015*

## *A bodge too far: “Conservation’s” catalogue of blunders*

*Throughout the world, Museum folks will go to any length to achieve a “good press”. Press releases are never issued announcing freshly dropped, smashed, trampled or restoration-injured works of art but are confined to Good News stories. Bad news about the condition of works only ever...leaks out.*

*Accidents in museums are concealed for as long as possible or are artfully spun when disclosure is unavoidable. The National Gallery’s director, Nicholas Penny, disclosed in 2000 that “museum employees are obliged to stifle their anxieties”. When, for example, a brand new state-of-the-art conservation standard synthetic board plinth collapsed under the weight of an important Renaissance marble sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, smashing it into a thousand pieces, photographs of the injuries were withheld and a suave assurance was given that all would be put back together *within a couple of years*. In the event, it took twelve years not two to reassemble this irreplaceable Humpty.*

*In museum circles even prolonged setbacks in conservation treatments provide eminently spinnable opportunities.*

*When restorers at the National Gallery in London were unable to reconfigure a skull they had stripped down during a BBC televised restoration (see *The new relativisms and the death of authenticity*), a long research programme was launched which resulted in a piece of computer-generated virtual reality being painted (along with fake lines of craquelure) into a Holbein picture.*

*At this very moment, the Met’s prolonged patch-up is being celebrated as a triumph of modern conservators’ scientifically aided collective brilliance. It is being said that the world is now much better prepared for the next marble figure to fall off its plinth. (It might be preferred that conservators build structurally sound plinths in the first place – or leave ancient sculptures on their ancient, period plinths.)*

### **A TURNING TIDE?**

*In Egypt a lightning-swift but mysterious treatment of an injury far less serious than those at the Metropolitan Museum – where plinths collapse and sculptures fall off walls – has captured the imagination of the world’s press (see below). It would seem that by grossly over-selling modern, “scientifically” armed conservators as infallible miracle-workers, museums have succeeded in making their routinely and successive mishaps all the more newsworthy and ever-richer providers of public merriment.*



*Above: a detail showing a repair to the beard of Tutankamun’s death mask, which is housed and displayed in Cairo’s Egyptian Museum. The Daily Telegraph reported that while some say the beard had been broken off by cleaners, other say that it had simply come loose (“*Museum’s quick fix for King Tut’s broken beard: stick it back on with glue*”). Three conservators, speaking anonymously, had given three different accounts of the injury, but all agreed that orders had come down for the repair to be made quickly. A tourist reported that the (“slapstick”) repair had been made last August in the museum, in front of a large crowd and without proper tools, as seen the Associated Press photograph below.*



*Above, top, the death mask before the accident.*

*Above, centre, the beard being re-attached to the mask. The Daily Mail reported:*

*“This is the moment the blue and gold braided beard on the burial mask of famed pharaoh Tutankhamun was hastily glued back on with the wrong adhesive, damaging the relic after it was knocked during cleaning...*

*The mask should have been taken to the conservation lab but they were in a rush to get it displayed quickly again and used this quick drying, irreversible material,’ they added.*

*The curator said that the mask now shows a gap between the face and the beard, whereas before it was directly attached: ‘Now you can see a layer of transparent yellow’.*

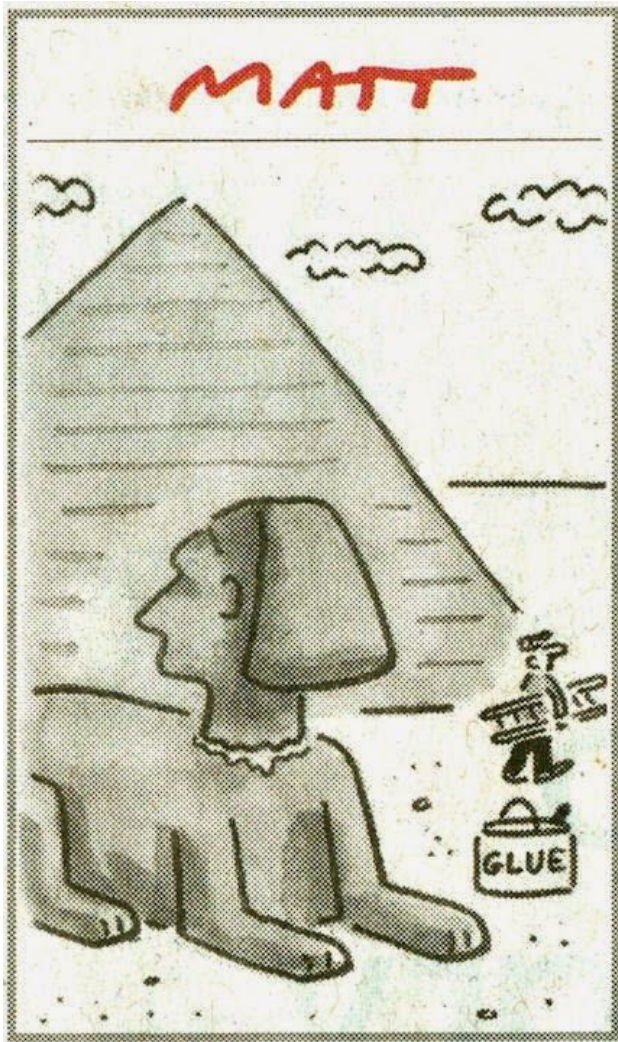
*Another museum curator, who was present at the time of the repair, said that epoxy had dried on the face of the boy king’s mask and that a colleague used a spatula to remove it, leaving scratches.*

*The first curator, who inspects the artifact regularly, confirmed the scratches and said it was clear that they had been made by a tool used to scrape off the epoxy.”*

*Above, the repaired mask showing the ugly and disfiguring bodge. Mystery fuels both speculation and conflicted accounts. The Guardian’s take went as follows:*

*“Did bungling curators snap off Tut’s beard last year, and if so was it stuck back on with with the wrong kind of glue?*

*These are the allegations levelled at the Egyptian Museum, the gloomy, under-funded palace in central Cairo where Tutankhamun’s bling is housed. Employees claim the beard was dislodged in late 2014 during routine maintenance of the showcase in which Tut’s mask is kept...The director of the museum, Mahmoud el-Halwagy, and the head of its conservation department, Elham Abdelrahman, strenuously denied the claims yesterday. Halwagy says the beard never fell off and nothing has happened to it since he was appointed director in October.”*



*Above, the Daily Telegraph’s (incomparable) “Matt”, 24 January 2015. See also: “By Tutankhamen’s beard: worst ever botched restorations”; and, “King Tut’s broken beard and other art disasters”; “King Tut’s beard ‘hastily glued back on with epoxy”’.*

## Beard in restoration comedy



### Making matters worse

- An elderly woman in Borja, Spain, became an internet sensation last year after she “restored” a 125-year-old fresco at her church. The morphed face of Jesus was compared to a hedgehog.
- Two Chinese officials were fired last October when a Disney-style cartoon was painted over a Qing dynasty fresco in a £100,000 “makeover”.
- The Louvre in Paris faced a torrent of

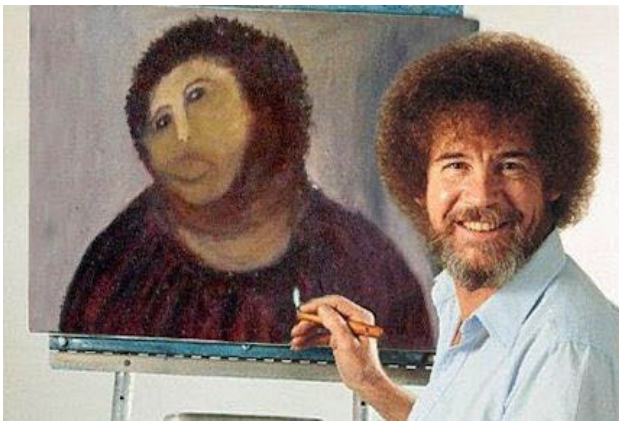
- abuse in 2010 when the restoration of a Veronese painting included two botched nose jobs.
- The 4,600-year-old Step Pyramid of Djoser in Egypt nearly collapsed after contractors sent to steady its structure added to the damage.
- Visitors are also a threat. In 2006, Nick Flynn accidentally shattered three Qing vases worth £100,000 at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

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Above, the Times (“Tut’s beard in restoration comedy”) produced the most elaborate accompanying graphics, showing (top) a fresco from Tutankhamun’s tomb that is being devoured by the pollution and humidity introduced by as many as 1,000 visitors a day, as well as the mask and its injury to the beard. In the April 19/20 FT Weekend Magazine, Peter Aspden (“Welcome to the age of ‘Facsimile tourism’”) described an attempt to thwart the destructive cycle of decay and damaging restoration inside the tomb by diverting its visitors to a life-size three-dimensional facsimile. (Our complaint that restorers have long been “turning unique and irreplaceable artworks into facsimiles of their supposed original selves” was cited in the article.)





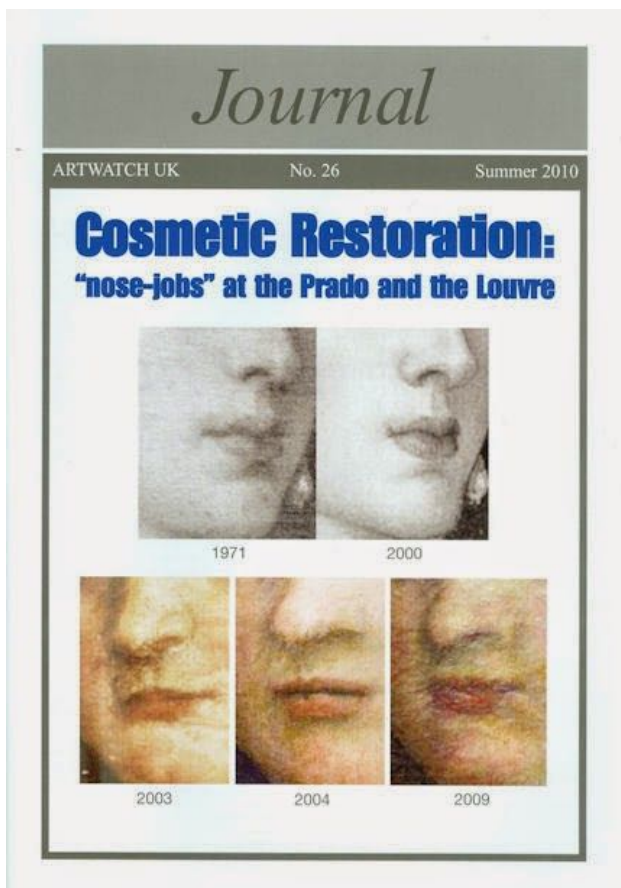
When news broke of the 81 years old painter Cecilia Gimenez's disastrous restoration of a painting of Christ in her local church, the world fell about laughing (see *"The 'World's worst restoration' and the death of authenticity"*). The distressed restorer took to her bed as people queued to see her infamous monkey-faced Christ and, wishing to preserve the hilarity, over 5,000 wags signed a petition to block Professorial Conservationists attempts to "return the painting to its pre-restoration glory" – as if such an outcome might credibly be in prospect.

When Ms Giménez's unauthorised restoration of *Ecce Homo – Behold the Man* caused the work to be dubbed *Ecce Mono – Behold the Monkey* the Church authorities threatened to sue – and then quickly levied a visitors' charge when the church became an overnight tourist attraction with Ryanair offering cut-price flights from the United Kingdom. With everyone in the world beginning to appreciate that restorations really can damage art, conservation lobbyists swiftly attempted to counter the professionally menacing dawning realisation. What caused particular alarm was recognition that although Giménez's restoration may have been an extreme case, it was not an aberration within wider professional conservation practices – as we demonstrated in *"The Battle of Borja: Cecilia Giménez, Restoration Monkeys, Paediatricians, Titian and Great Women Conservators"*. (See also *"Restoration Tragedies: A ruinous attempt to repaint a Spanish fresco has highlighted the dangers of art restoration"* in the 23 August 2012 Sunday Telegraph.)



On 23 October 2013 the Daily Telegraph reported how a Chinese Government-approved, £100,000 restoration of a Qing dynasty temple fresco (above) left the work entirely obliterated by luridly coloured re-painting. That crime against world-ranking art and heritage came to light when a student posted comparative photographs online. In the resulting furore, a government official from the city responsible for the temple claimed that the restoration had been "an unauthorised project" – in China, as if. (See [NEW YEAR REPORT](#).)

#### **BODGES AND RE-BODGES IN THE WORLD'S HIGHEST INSTITUTIONS (SUCH AS THE LOUVRE AND THE PRADO)**



## A botched nose job in Paris



The Louvre in Paris stands accused of carrying out “two botched nose jobs” on a character in a Renaissance masterpiece, says Dalya Alberge in *The Observer*. French and British experts agree that the face of a woman in Veronese’s *Supper at Emmaus*, painted in the 1550s, has been distorted by “vulgar” cosmetic surgery. Michael Daley, of ArtWatch UK, said that her nostril had been “obliterated” and the tip of her nose “fuzzed and

mutilated” during restoration (see picture 2), so that it “hovers disconnectedly over an anatomical void”. Worse still – in an attempt to undo this damage – the Louvre then undertook a “phantom restoration”, which was not publicly acknowledged, and which gave the woman a “grotesquely large nostril” (see picture 3). A Louvre spokeswoman shrugged off the criticisms, saying that, in this second operation, the work had been merely “bichonnée” – scrubbed up.

### HOW MUSEUMS HARVEST THE VALUE OF THE ART THEY HOLD IN TRUST

*The present museum world rupture between words and pictorial realities is the product of an over-heating international scramble to produce money-spinning blockbuster exhibitions. The director of Metropolitan Museum of Art, Thomas P. Campbell, boasted that:*

*“no one but the Met could have pulled off the exhibition of Renaissance tapestry we had here a few years ago, where there were forty-five tapestries on show. The politics involved, the financing involved, the leverage, and the expertise involved: No one else had that. We bribed and cajoled and twisted the arms of institutions around the world – well, we didn’t bribe, of course – but politically it was very complicated negotiating the loan of these objects”.*

*After prising and pulling together works from all corners (see “How the Metropolitan Museum of Art gets hold of the world’s most precious and vulnerable treasures”), curators of temporary exhibitions write as if blind to the most glaring differences of condition seen in the assembled works of an oeuvre, and as if ignorant of all restoration-induced controversies. This critical failure to address the variously altered states of pictures manifestly corrupts scholarship and confers international respectability on damaging local restoration practices. (See “From Veronese to Turner, Celebrating Restoration-Wrecked Pictures”.)*

*In our 2 February 2011 account of the European Commission’s desire to speed the “trafficking” (as it were) of art objects between European museums (“The European Commission’s way of moving works of art around”), we cited the following rationale by Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, in her introduction to the brochure “The Culture Programme – 2007-2013”:*

*“I am especially happy to highlight the importance of culture to the European Union’s objective of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. At a time when many of our industries are facing difficulties, the cultural and creative industries have experienced unprecedented growth and offer the prospect of sustainable, future-oriented and fulfilling jobs.”*

*Michel Favre-Felix, President of ARIPA (Association Internationale pour le Respect de l’Intégrité du Patrimoine Artistique), drew our attention to the work shown below. It is a 14th century polychrome sculpture of Saint-Bernard. During the Benedictus Pater Europae exhibition (Gand 1981), the statue was knocked over, with the resulting loss of the major part of its face. Insurers insisted that the injuries stemmed from “pre-existing fragilities”. In 1991 the art insurer Hiscox stated that risks for works of art were ten times higher when on loan than when left at home. In 2007 Axa Art in France estimated the risks in loan venues to be six times higher than in permanent residences.*

*(The photograph by courtesy of © R.H.Marijnissen.)*



### **BELOW, HOW THE NATIONAL GALLERY DID BAD, THEN GOOD, THEN BAD AGAIN**

*In 2008, the National Gallery's Beccafumi panel Marcia (below) was dropped and smashed when being removed from a temporary exhibition at the gallery. (See [Attacked Poussins at the National Gallery](#).) Insurance cover was not involved but the consequences of the accident were enormous. The panel was immediately re-glued (without authorisation by any other than the chairman of the board of trustees and the head of conservation who was also the then acting director) and repainted. The painting is one of pair from a larger suite of works. The Marcia and her sister panel, the undamaged Tanaquil, were not returned to the main galleries after the incident. Instead, they were both consigned to the gloom of the gallery's reserve collection which could be accessed by the public for only a few hours each week. (The reserve collection galleries have recently been turned into a gallery proper that shows fewer works – and not the Beccafumi Two. Other restoration embarrassments have disappeared from view. On an embarrassingly well-preserved Giampietrino, see [The National Gallery's £1.5 billion Leonardo Restoration](#).)*

*Some time later that incident was disclosed on the gallery's website among the board minutes. After we reported the accident in our Journal, the gallery's director, Nicholas Penny, made a copy of an internal report and photographs of the smashed painting available to us. For once, there was no cover-up, and the lesson seemed clear to all. But the damage done to an important pair of paintings is forever. Any movement of a fragile Renaissance panel – even within a gallery – constitutes a risk. Unnecessary movements constitute unnecessary risks. The National Gallery's restorers made a whole series of mega-bungles with some of its greatest large works, such as Titian's Bacchus and Ariadne, Sebastiano's The Raising of Lazarus, and Seurat's Bathers at Asnières. Such works were glued down – flattened – onto sheets of Sundeala Board – a proprietary board made of compressed paper. That board has proved unsuitable. It has lost its initial rigidity and now flexes alarming when handled or moved. Not all of conservation's clowns live in Egypt, Spain or China.*

*Instead of retreating, museums are advancing. At the British Museum even the holdings of Parthenon sculptures are now being harvested for exchange loans of irreplaceable masterpieces. Calamity awaits. The Vatican, having wrecked Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, is to loan one of the great classical works that informed the artist's treatments of the nude figure – the Belvedere Torso – to the British Museum. Museum directors are presently binging on the institutional benefits of playing global impresarios/ambassadors with the greatest art that is held in trust. Museums are increasingly being turned from havens into transit depots. Such practices are unthinkable irresponsible. They would not likely be indulged if trustees were held personally liable for losses and injuries.*



24 January 2015

## *The Consequences of “Cleaning” Pictures*

*Pride and Prejudice and Patina* ~ A most welcome – and potentially explosive – art cultural event is to take place in New York. Professor Salvador Muñoz Viñas is to discuss the great complexities and the (often adverse) consequences of “cleaning” pictures.

Those lucky enough to attend this lecture might wish first to read Professor Muñoz Viñas’s own philosophically intriguing (and art-politically fair-minded) 2005 book *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (see below), and an account of the significance of (even discoloured) varnishes in the proper apprehension of paintings that was given and published by our French colleagues in ARIPA as: “*The pictorial role of old varnishes and the principle of their preservation*” and “*Le rôle pictural des vernisanciens et le principe de leur conservation*”.

**PRIDE AND PREDJUDICE AND PATINA** ~ a Lecture in New York



**Salvador Muñoz Viñas**

*Professor and Head of Paper Conservation  
Universitat Politècnica de València*

**Monday, February 9, 2015, 6:00 PM**

*The Institute of Fine Arts  
1 East 78th Street  
New York City*

**Seating is limited – RSVP required: [click here](#)**

*Seating in the Lecture Hall is on a first-come, first-served basis with RSVP. There will be a simulcast in an adjacent room to accommodate overflow.*

**About the Lecture:**

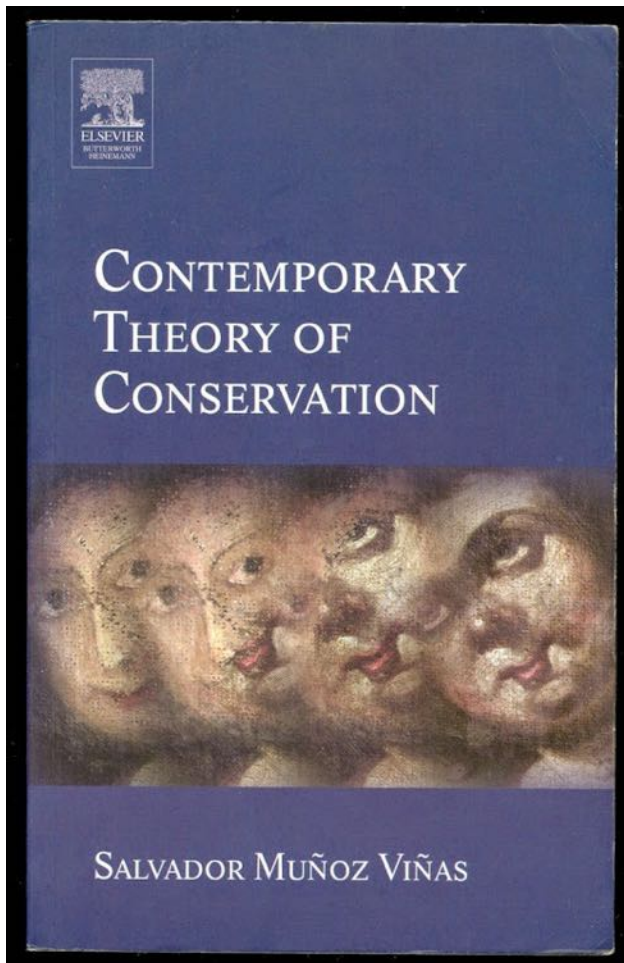
*The decision to clean a painting may seem relatively straightforward upon first glance. However, when the decision-making process is carefully analyzed, different, unexpected variables are bound to arise. One of the main problems in this regard is that it may be difficult to precisely ascertain what “clean” means when speaking of paintings. The kaleidoscopic notion of patina is perhaps a consequence of this basic indetermination, and thus reflects the varied attitudes towards what we call the “cleaning” of artworks. Yet, however different, these attitudes share a basic trait: they are all based on a standard classical conservation narrative. Borrowing from Caple’s “RIP model,” this classical narrative can be summarized by describing the main goals of conservation as the “revelation,” “investigation” and/or “preservation” of truth. This widespread narrative, however, is not devoid of problems. As any reader of Sherlock Holmes (or any CSI fan) knows, dirt may be very important when it comes to determining truth. Cleaning, i.e., the removal of dirt, may thus askew the truth, and mislead the observer in some way. The classical conservation narrative is at odds with this potential incongruence; and, in turn, it suggests there may be certain reasons for cleaning that vary from those which are commonly accepted in the heritage world.*

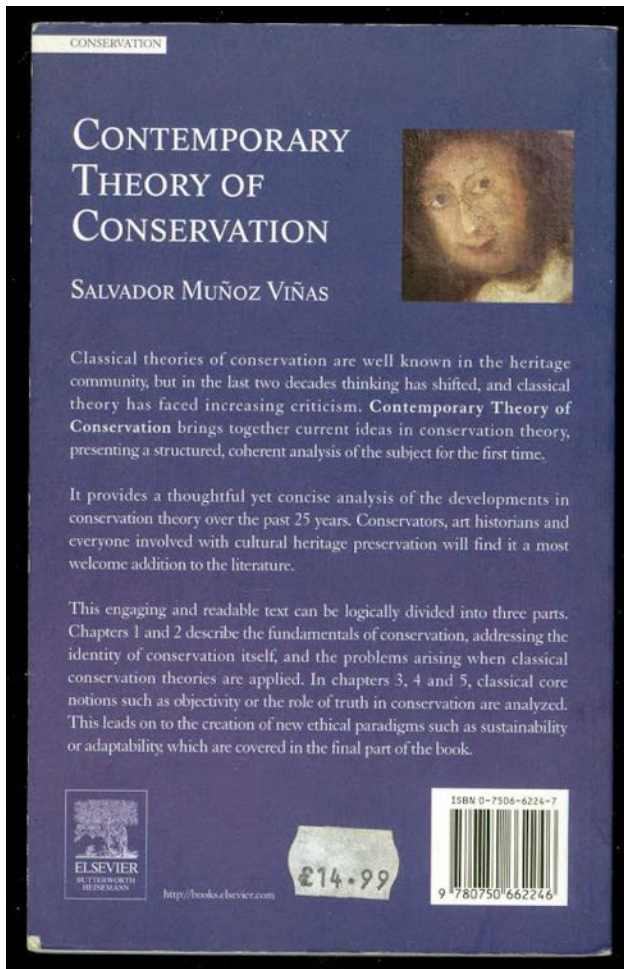
**About Salvador Muñoz Viñas:**

*Dr. Salvador Muñoz Viñas is a Professor at the Universitat Politècnica de València and the head of Paper Conservation at the University’s Conservation Institute. He is also a Fellow of the International Institute for Conservation. His teaching and research work revolves around both the theory of conservation and the technical aspects of paper conservation. He has published several books on these topics, including *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (Oxford, 2005), which has been translated into several languages, such as Chinese, Persian or Italian, and has been said to “bring conservation into the 21st century” (C. Hucklesby, *An Anthropology of Conservation*).*

For more information on the *Judith Praska Distinguished Visiting Professor in Conservation and Technical Studies*, [click here](#).

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22 January 2015

## *Je suis CHARLIE*

*Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules.*

*Of Hector and Lysander, and such great names as these...*





### 'Dad is gone, not Wolinski'

The daughter of one of the cartoonists murdered in the Charlie Hebdo attack has shared a poignant photograph of his empty desk.

The image posted on Instagram by Elsa Wolinski, daughter of Georges Wolinski, shows an office where a pen lies at the ready on a sheaf of paper beside a black notebook. The caption says: "Dad is gone, not Wolinski."

Her 80-year-old father, known by his last name in France, was shot dead on Wednesday in the

offices of the satirical magazine with which he had a long association.

Elsa Wolinski said yesterday that he had brought her up in the knowledge that he was in a "risky profession" in which he had to defend his ideas. "I thought that you could stop him in the street, show disagreement, but I never thought you could kill artists," she told Europe1 radio. "I don't think you can kill ideas."

Anne Penketh Paris



..Elsa Wolinski has lost her Dad (as the Guardian reported) but, indeed, he is not gone. Evil might still a pen but it cannot expunge the courage of those who dared to use it. Her Dad and his brave colleagues will be remembered: the very blackness of the deed makes their light the more brilliant – and their example the more certain of enduring.



#### An ArtWatch member in France reports:

"It has been an extraordinary week here in France. The marches yesterday were incredibly moving, and it was wonderful to see such a positive spirit emerge from such appalling and shocking circumstances. In our home town of Rennes alone, there were 115,000 of us on the streets – well over half of the city's population; people of all ages and from all backgrounds, all quiet and respectful throughout. We had to wait an hour from the planned start, just standing still, before the procession got moving, probably because there were apparently three times as many of us as they expected, so in the end the whole of the centre of the city was cordoned off for it – there wasn't room for all of us on the initially planned route! I have never known such a feeling of togetherness among so many diverse people, and I don't expect ever to feel it again. It was a moment to treasure; it makes me well up to think about it – and the feeling must have been even stronger in Paris." ~ Abigail Grater.

12 January 2015

*Art's Toxic Assets and a Crisis of  
Connoisseurship ~ Part II: Paper (sometimes  
photographic) Fakes and the Demise of the  
Educated Eye*



**“...Works on paper, however, have not been so completely studied and categorised, so there remains scope for mis-identification and skulduggery.”**

~ Michel Strauss, *“Pictures, Passions and Eye: A Life at Sotheby's”*, London, 2011.

**An anonymous bidder has reportedly acquired a manuscript by the late forger Eric Hebborn for more than sixty times its reserve price – “Mystery bidder buys forger's key to fakes in top museums”,**

*The Times*, 25 October 2014.

**“The only attributions that I have discussed neither in the text nor in the Catalogue Raisonné are of drawings. We have no assurance that any of Domenico's drawings has survived. None was given to him in Berenson's *Drawings of the Florentine Painters* (1938) or by Salmi (1936 and 1938). The ascription of a group of drawings to Domenico by Degenhart and Schmitt (1969) lacks credibility, and scattered earlier attributions by Wickhoff (1899), Böck (1934), Geiger (1948), and Grassi (1961) seem equally implausible. The absence of drawings – Domenico Veneziano must have been a tireless as well as a brilliant draftsman – is the oddest of the many gaps in our knowledge of this great artist.”**

~ Hellmut Wohl, *“The Paintings of Domenico Veneziano”*, Oxford and New York, 1980.

**“The state of methods and protocols used in attribution is a professional disgrace. Different kinds of evidence, documentation, provenance, surrounding circumstances of contexts of varied kinds, scientific analysis, and judgement by eye are used and ignored opportunistically in ways that suit each advocate (who too frequently has undeclared interests). Scientific evidence is particularly abused in this respect. The status of different kinds of evidence is generally not acknowledged, particularly with respect to falsifiability. It is generally true to say that the most malleable of the kinds of visual evidence are those that bear in most specifically on issues of attribution (e.g. the individual artist and precise date), while those that are least malleable (e.g. pigment analysis) are only permissive (i.e. nil obstat) rather than highly specific. I will attempt to bring some systematic awareness into this area, which is a necessary first step in establishing some rational protocols. The case studies will be drawn from Leonardo.”**

~ Martin Kemp, a synopsis for a paper – *“It Doesn't Look Like Leonardo”* – delivered on May 7th, 2014 at a congress at the Hague on *“Authentication in Art: What happens when the painting you are buying, selling, investigating, exhibiting, insuring – Turns Out to be a Fake or a (Re)Discovery...”*

***In the early 1990s we noted that damaging restorations and misattributed***

works stemmed from common failures of visual discrimination, or lapses of connoisseurship – which are the same thing. Almost an entire generation of scholars had swallowed official defences of the controversial Sistine Chapel restoration and, generally, had seemed to have stopped appraising restorations – and especially those at the National Gallery (London) where cleaning controversies had run from the institution's earliest days. In the late 1960s, the gallery had broken the spirit of many scholar-critics with its artful spinning of the (ruinous) restoration of Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* as a triumph of the restorer's art (see ...*Titian and Great Women Conservators*). In 1977 a former director of the National Gallery, Kenneth Clark, declared picture cleaning to have been a battle won by restorers and pro-cleaning museum curators like him.

Scholarly failures to respond to restoration-induced injuries ran in tandem with failures to “read” pictures when assigning authorship. The National Gallery's curators had made extraordinary contortions to sustain the attribution to Michelangelo of an unfinished painting (*The Entombment of Christ*) that was clearly the product of two separate hands working perhaps a generation apart. At first it was claimed that the two radically different manners of painting stemmed from separate campaigns of work by Michelangelo, one during 1504-08 before work began on the Sistine Chapel ceiling and another sometime after 1515. In the first stage of work, it was said, Michelangelo had painted smooth and enamel-like, as in the *Doni Tondo* of c. 1507. In the second stage his looser freer brushwork was said to reflect the experience of having painted the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Later, it was claimed that this unfinished painting in two styles and manners had been entirely painted by Michelangelo when he was only twenty-five years old in 1500. Cecil Gould had held that such technical and stylistic anomalies stemmed from the fact that the young Michelangelo was: “...ranging forwards or backwards within his own development, reworking one motive...or anticipating another”.

The doyen of British Michelangelo scholarship, Michael Hirst – a key supporter/adviser of the Sistine Chapel restoration – has endorsed this reading (of Michelangelo's sole authorship). Professor Hirst's stance in both cases seems visually obtuse: during the restoration Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel paintings had lost many unquestionably original features that had been copied during his own lifetime; the *Entombment's* so-called “anticipations” were not of Michelangelo's subsequent work but of later work by artists like Rosso Fiorentino and Pontormo (who were both six years old at the time – see Figs. 7 and 8). We said of such visually unsupported hypotheses: “The fact that our scholars and technical experts flit quite so promiscuously through time and space might suggest uncertainty of connoisseurship and ability to ‘read’ paintings” (“How to Make a Michelangelo”, Michael Daley, *Art Review*, October 1994). We had appealed earlier that year to the authority of the educated eye in the May issue of *The Art Newspaper* in response to a restorer's hostile review of the James Beck/Michael Daley book *Art Restoration ~ The Culture, the Business and the Scandal*:

“...this concern [over restorations] is shared by others. The current director of the Prado, Calvo Serraller, has condemned the Sistine Chapel restoration as a misguided ‘face-lift’. A restorer in St Petersburg complains of the ‘perniciousness of radical British restoration techniques’. A curator of New York's Metropolitan Museum condemns the ‘strident tones’ produced by ‘the exuberant cleaning of paint surfaces, for which the National Gallery has unfortunately become famous’. It is a pity that the National Gallery staff are not prepared to debate these matters directly. It is a pity that discussion should be necessary at all when, to educated eyes, the evidence of injury contained in before and after cleaning photographs is so unmissable.”



#### A RECENTLY EXPOSED FAKE LEONARDO/VERROCCHIO

Above, Fig. 1: A Young Woman bought in 1936 by the Detroit Institute of Arts as a work by Andrea del Verrocchio or Leonardo da Vinci. The attribution was made on the strength of correspondences with a sculpture in the Bargello (Fig. 3a) which is given to Verrocchio (or, sometimes, Leonardo), and with the treatment of curls in Leonardo's painting *Ginevra de' Benci* (Fig. 3b).

Following technical examination, this work is now described as being by an “Imitator of Andrea Verrocchio in about 1880-1920” – a polite, museum-world way of saying “it is a rotten forgery”.

Three years later, in connection with another visual evidence-denying National Gallery attribution (its Rubens *Samson and Delilah*) we wrote: “In recent years the art of connoisseurship has become entangled with the scientific analysis of paintings. Problems of attribution, once resolved by the educated ‘eyes’ of individuals, are increasingly seen as the property of interdisciplinary teams of curators, restorers and scientists who enjoy the technical, financial and professional support afforded by large museums. But how sound are the new procedures – and how reliable are the published accounts given of them?” (“Is this really a Rubens?” Michael Daley, *Art Review*, July/August 1997).

### Mixed campaigning results

After two decades of campaigning on these cross-linked issues, there are signs of resurgence in old-style connoisseurship – or at least, of support in principle for it. In May 2014 the Mellon Centre hosted a conference titled “The Educated Eye? Connoisseurship Now” and one speaker, Bendor Grosvenor, the editor of the *Art History News* blog, cited the restoration of Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling as proof of failures of connoisseurship among restorers. At the same time, the art market is processing more upgraded and elevated studio works and copies than ever before, almost always doing so on the authority of some conservation “investigations” and treatments. “Rediscovered” Rubens’s, van Dycks, Michelangelos, Caravaggios or Leonardos are appearing on an almost monthly basis. Autograph preparatory drawings or studies have undergone similar expansions: with Michelangelo, where only 250 sheets of drawings were accepted in the 1960s, over 600 sheets are accepted today. In the same month, as indicated above, a congress was held on the great problems of establishing authenticity today: “Authentication in Art: What happens when the painting you are buying, selling, investigating, exhibiting, insuring – Turns Out to be a Fake or a (Re)Discovery”.

It is hard to exaggerate how far and how fast we have moved away from visually alert and sound scholarly practices. In 1980, as the Sistine Chapel restoration began, Hellmut Wohl published a monograph on Domenico Veneziano as a study of Florentine art in the early Renaissance. It was the fruit of three decades of researches. As indicated above, Professor Wohl made no attempt to discuss drawings that had been attributed to the artist for the simple reason, he explained, that surprising as it was, there was no evidence that any (of the very many) drawings he must have made had survived. In his catalogue raisonné, Wohl discussed sixty-two attributions to Domenico, his workshop and his immediate followers, which he considered to be apocryphal. The force of that analysis is still accepted (see caption at Figs. 4a and 4b). His study offered no new attributions or documents and confined itself to a re-examination of the artist himself through his known works, documents and sources in the light of various art historical readings. Judging Domenico to have been one who was “centrally involved in the artistic process of his time and place”, Wohl began his study not with consideration of the artist’s early works but of his *St. Lucy Altarpiece*, which stands chronologically and conceptually at the centre of his extant oeuvre. His reason for doing so was because the work’s *sacra conversazione* and *predella* “provide the richest, most complex and most revealing testimony of the anatomy of his art.” In discussing this crucial work, Wohl saw that it was artistically imperative to acknowledge its condition:

“In its original state the *sacra conversazione*, which was drastically overcleaned at the end of the nineteenth century, must have been one of the most luxurious examples of tempera painting in its time. Even in its present condition we can follow the shaping of its forms in untold layers of brushstrokes, responsive to the subtlest directional nuances, and weaving a pattern within which each form emerges as spatially alive and as a



Above, Fig. 2: A marble bust at the Frick Collection, *A Young Woman*, given to Andrea del Verrocchio.

After an early challenge, the Verrocchio attribution was reasserted on the bust’s resemblance to the Bargello Lady with a bunch of Flowers in Florence (Fig. 3a) which most scholars accept as a product of Verrocchio’s maturity at c. 1475 (although some attribute it to Leonardo, as shown below). Nicholas Penny challenges the Frick Verrocchio’s attribution on its author’s interest in “evanescent effects” and the extensive use of drilling in the hair. Eleonora Luciano, in the catalogue to the Washington National Gallery 2001-2002 exhibition, “Virtue and Beauty”, adjudicates as follows:

“While the Frick lady is more softly modelled, especially in the face, and endowed with a greater gentility of expression than the Bargello sitter, her affinity to the latter is evident in the overall proportions of the head and torso. Perhaps some shop intervention may account for the less innovative character of the sculpture and the more extensive drilling of the hair.”

However, the marked differences of appearance and handling in the two sculptures do not speak of a lack of care or finesse but of different sensibilities and purposes. Aside from the uncertainties of authorship, scholars variously date the Frick bust to the 1460s, the 1470s and, to c. 1480.



Above, Figs. 3a and 3b: Left, the Lady with a Bunch of Flowers. Right, Leonardo’s *Ginevra de’ Benci* (hypothetically extended).

Some have attributed the Bargello sculpture to Leonardo on the grounds that its subject was *Ginevra de’ Benci*, the subject of Leonardo’s painting at Fig. 3b. In *Leonardo da Vinci and the Art of Sculpture*, 2010, Gary M. Radke holds that the works show differences between the two artists that emerged in the mid-1470s. Against this, it has been suggested that the

bearer of light.”

If this seems like exemplary visual and conceptual analysis, it gets better:

“The nature of Domenico’s modelling is such that light seems to be embedded in the fabric of each coloured surface – a method which is one of the unmistakable indications of Domenico Veneziano’s hand, and one that contributed much to that ‘change of vision’ by which the figure was no longer seen in isolation, but as part of a given field,’ which Offner (1924) recognized in Piero della Francesca...”

Such writing and scholarship not only illuminates, it arouses curiosity, whets the visual appetite, makes one want to see for oneself. There are fourteen excellent black and white plates of the altarpiece in Wohl’s book. The now forever restoration-damaged work itself is in the Uffizi, Florence – the scene of this particular crime against art: it had been in a good state until taken to the Uffizi, where, as the scholar Cavalcasselle had protested it had been subjected to:

“so disgraceful a cleaning and to so many retouchings as to lose much of its original quality, and thus to produce a disagreeable impression, having been left with a cold tonality, with its paint surface laid bare (‘posto allo scoperto’) unevenly in several places, and gone over.”

Wohl meticulously and eloquently lays out the hazards to interpretation that are presented by bad and restoration-damaged condition:

“The present condition must be kept in mind as a corrective in estimating style. The blue mantle covering the knees of the Virgin has been reduced to a state of semi-transparency, its barest patches have been filled in with a flat tone that roughly matches the remaining original blue. The Virgin’s dress and part of the mantle around her left arm are similarly worn. The extent of the damage to the faces of the Virgin and the Child can be gauged from the relative rigidity and opaqueness of their expressions as compared with the mobility and subtlety of expression in the head of Madonna at I Tatti. The transparent veil which originally covered the hair and forehead of the Virgin has disappeared except for a remnant of its fringed border on her shoulder. The niche behind the Virgin, especially its shell, is so heavily repainted that it no longer functions properly as a hollow in the pictorial space. The figures of the saints have suffered somewhat less, the Baptist very little. The habit of St. Francis is worn in the shadows, and there are repairs above his tonsure and around his ear and lower lip. There is damage along the left edge of the face of St Zenobius. The contour of his skullcap has been redrawn. The dress and mantle covering the shoulder of St. Lucy are very threadbare. The contour of her profile has been reinforced, and her face retouched, especially to the left of her eye. The background above and to the right of her head is also extremely thin. The effects of the ‘disgraceful’ nineteenth-century cleaning and retouching of the sacra conversazione are not, however, confined to these areas, where they are particularly conspicuous, but show throughout the panel...”

If a scholar could still write so aptly and freely in 1980, how had the cat got the tongues of so many by 1990? Why had so many been blind or indifferent to the even more disgracefully injurious and art historically corrupting “restoration” of Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling? Is it not shaming to the profession that it took a sculptor, Venanzo Crocetti (who had worked as a young man on the restoration of the Sistine Chapel ceiling during the mid 1930s), to blow the whistle in the 1980s? Is it not shaming to the profession that when James Beck, an esteemed scholar and a brilliant, popular teacher at Columbia University, sided with the artist critics of the restoration and advanced an art historically informed critique that the art historical sky fell on him?

painting might have borne a closer relationship to the sculpture with a possible inclusion of hands in a fuller length treatment. A study of hands by Leonardo was incorporated in a hypothetical and digitally realised extension of the painting by David Alan Brown (Fig. 3b). Against that, Frank Zollner sees the painting as marking the point (1478-1480) at which Leonardo broke away from “the profile view traditionally employed in Florence for portraits of women” in favour of the three-quarters view in order to impart “a psychological dimension to his sitter – something that would become the hallmark of Renaissance portraiture”.



Above, Figs. 4a and 4b: Left, the right-hand side (here mirrored) of the Frick A Young Woman; right, the Detroit A Young Woman.

The Detroit young woman’s remarkably close correspondence with both the Frick bust’s profile and the curls on Leonardo’s *Ginevra de’ Benci* might have aroused suspicion rather than reassurance. Pronounced correspondences with traits found in different works are classic give-away signs of “Portmanteau Forgeries” in which disparate motifs are individually mimicked and fused into a synthetic whole. With the (now all but acknowledged) existence of a photograph of the Frick bust under the Detroit painting, another more credible explanation for the stylistic correspondences is to hand: a forger, painting over a photograph of the Frick sculpture, embellished his handiwork by mimicking (too-profusely – see below) Leonardo’s painterly treatment of curls in the *Ginevra de’ Benci*.

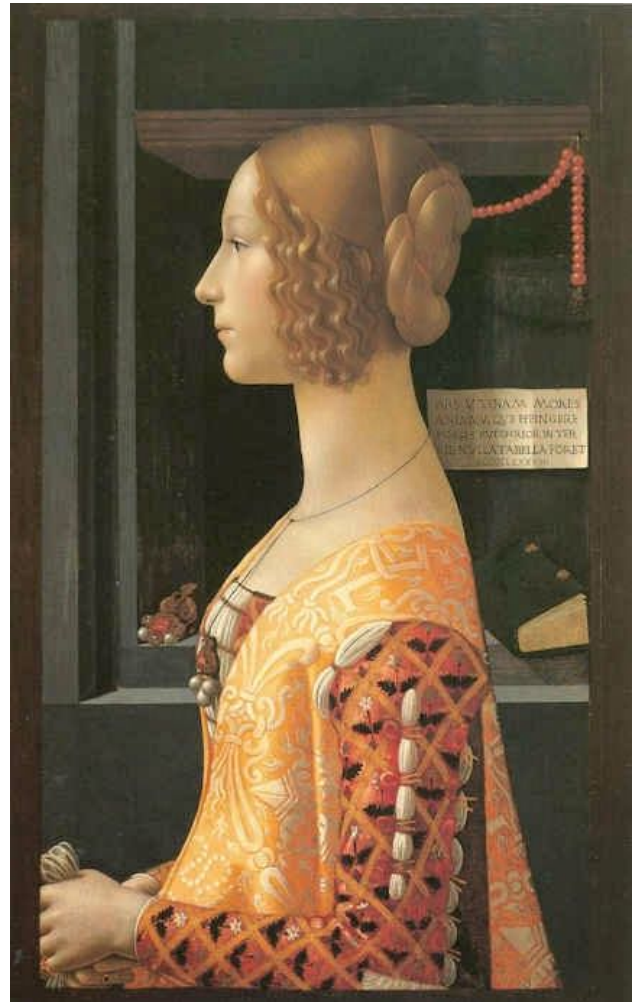
Caution might have been thought the more urgent given the great popularity of this portrait type at the turn of the twentieth century which triggered what Alison Wright (in her 2005 monograph *The Pollaiuolo Brothers*) describes as “a market for copies, fakes and over-ambitious attributions”. Dr Wright cites Hellmut Wohl’s monograph on Domenico Veneziano in which he “listed the myriad attributions under which surviving Florentine female profiles have passed...”, and gives thanks that “Wohl’s study absolves me from a repetition of this unrewarding task.”

Crocetti's testimony on the AB 57 cleaning method (a thixotropic cocktail of solvents and detergents) then being used on Michelangelo had been as percipient as it was damning. He noted that while the first 3 minute-long application left the frescoes looking cleaner, the second on the following day left them with altered and considerably degraded colours. He believed that the first applications effectively "degreased" the surfaces leaving them open to greater penetration by the second applications. He was convinced that the immediately apparent visual effects of these twin applications would not be their final outcome. He argued – correctly, it has turned out, see below – that their corrosive actions would continue because of the absorption of the water rinse operations (after each application of the chemically-loaded thixotropic gel) to a depth of half a centimetre. Some days after the second applications he noticed (from the scaffold itself) the appearance of "whitish oxidations of variable intensity" over large zones. These have been reappearing throughout on a massive scale since 2010 and have created panic measures and diversionary technical "initiatives" at the Vatican. (See "[Michelangelo's disintegrating frescoes](#)" and "[Sistine Chapel frescoes turning white](#)".) The official explanation for the oxidations is that they are caused by the combination of humidity given off by the press of visitors (up to 2,000 in the chapel at any one moment) and the atmospheric pollution in the chapel itself. At least as likely a cause is that the humidity is activating the water-soluble ammonium and sodium salts that were washed into the fabric of the frescoes.

### **The unfounded restoration premise**

Crocetti considered the restorers' claimed discovery of "stratifications of dirt gathered on the frescoes over the centuries" to be both exaggerated and misleading, and he held that the early photographs of the lunettes by Anderson made the extent of this exaggeration clear. He believed that the ferocity of the AB 57 cleaning agent made any finely tuned cleaning graduated to meet local conditions impossible. He believed that the greatest injury was to the chief feature of the frescoes – their disposition of lights and shades, and not their local colours. He believed that the restorers, in their pursuit of more intense colours, had penetrated the frescoes to their brighter, less modulated preparative layers. He felt confident that he had seen at first-hand how, with "cleaning", the figures in the lunettes had been remade, becoming "false in form and colour" alike. He saw that many of the shadows from which the figures had formerly emerged had simply disappeared. He saw that corrections which Michelangelo had, with mastery, made invisible, had been exposed. Above all, he confirmed that the condition of the frescoes had remained "excellent" at the time of the restoration, and that this in part had been due to the absorption over the centuries of greasy substances of chapel smoke which had "strengthened the colour. Leaving upon it a glittering shift of the lightest varnish [thereby counterbalancing] the aridity and fragility" of old fresco. Having worked on the restoration in the 1930s and known Michelangelo's work intimately, he found himself in despair.

We believe that today's independent scholars are even shyer to speak against bad restorations and misattributions because of the above mentioned grip of restorers, scientists and curators in museums under the new collective ground rules of the so-called Technical Art History. This hybrid activity is not so much art history as an art historical gloss that is put on whatever state pictures are left in by museums' technical 'conservators' whose own actions, for art-political reasons, can never be gainsaid. This collectivist or interdisciplinary practice precludes external input and appraisal and does not recognise the legitimacy of other independent sources of disinterested criticism. It may also be because many scholars and curators today have been educated under the so-called



Above, Fig. 5: Domenico Ghirlandaio's 1488-1490 Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

Below, Fig. 6: The obverse (here mirrored) of a bronze medal of c. 1486 attributed to Niccolo Fiorentino. This tiny portrait might suggest that the forger of the Detroit lady at Fig. 1 was not a hair-dresser. As evident at Figs. 4a and 4b, the sculptor clearly understood that the curls belonged to hair drawn from the temples and allowed to hang like spaniels' ears. The forger, not appreciating the logic of this fashion, carried not-hanging but sprouting curls around and onto the nape of the neck – a fatal, hirsute solecism because in this portrait type the hair from the top and back of the head was drawn tightly together and braided before being assembled into a decorative, be-jewelled 'sculptural' arrangement, as both the Frick sculptor and the medallist below appreciated. Modern forgers – like restorers – rarely grasp Renaissance connections between the thing depicted and the thing made. They also suffer the handicap of having to depict portraits not from life but on impoverished, out-of-period assumptions. They betray wider and more profound deficiencies of aesthetic and cultural understanding when, as here, they fail to appreciate the symbolic role and plastic purity of the unnaturally long columnar neck on which is counter-pointed, Brancusi-like, the richly adorned head and coiffure. Hairy necks were not considered emblematic of spiritual purity and classical grace in young Renaissance ladies. As Ingres noted, "Never is a woman's neck too long".

*New Art History – a species of study that seems to leave students ideologically averse to the very notion of connoisseurship – which practice is held synonymous with snobbery, amateurism and art market shenanigans. For scholars in today's academic world, it would seem to be professionally safer to view art through the distancing sociological prisms of Marxism, Feminism and such, rather than to heed and appraise its physical and, therefore, aesthetic condition (which action can upset owners, public or private). It can seem safer, too, not to scrutinise attributions (which can upset owners, public or private). In some countries, and the USA in particular, scholars harbour legal anxieties about challenging an attribution.*

### **Running the Risks**

*At our annual memorial lecture (see CODA below) in honour of Professor James Beck of Columbia University, the Renaissance scholar and founder of ArtWatch International, a modest prize is awarded for services to art in memory of another founder member of ArtWatch, the painter Frank Mason. In 2014 the prize was awarded to [Martin Eidelberg](#) for the launch of his excellent [Watteau Abecedario](#), a developing online catalogue raisonné of the artist. In an ArtWatch International interview, [A Weight of Evidence](#), Professor Eidelberg said of the problem of misattributions:*

*“First of all, the oeuvres of Watteau’s followers have been clouded over because works not worthy of their master have been assigned to them in a haphazard manner. It takes time to sift it all out. Wrong attributions have serious repercussions for our understanding of these artists. Impartiality is the key to it all. The dealer, auction house, and collector alike don’t want to hear bad news about paintings being downgraded. That’s one of the major dangers these days for the catalogue raisonné-er. There are cases where people whose works of art were downgraded became belligerent or litigious. Legislation currently pending in the New York State Assembly would prevent people from suing someone who is preparing a scholarly catalogue raisonné just because they disagree with your opinion.”*

*On the reluctance of some scholars to say as much as they might on the subject of attributions and misattributions and the possible effects of the pending New York State legislation, Eidelberg noted:*

*“There are important questions surrounding this pending New York legislation. Whom will it protect? Will it protect only an art historian working in New York State? Or will it protect Americans in general? And what about on the international scale? I don’t think France or Germany will abide by New York State legislation. That needs to be dealt with. What if an ordinary person like myself, who has no financial investment, gets involved in a lawsuit? The expense involved is incredible. Lawyers charge several hundred dollars an hour, and a case can go on for several years. The opposition can wear you down just by the incredible demands they put on your lawyer, whom you are financing. And if you win, what do you win? You don’t win money to pay even for your legal representation. That is a serious issue, because there are a lot of people in the art world who are dealing with large sums of money. When a painting sells for millions of dollars, there is strong motivation for wanting positive attributions.”*

### **The Consequences of Bad attributions**

*One reason why professional neglect of condition is so unfortunate is that paying due attention to it increases capacities and skills when making or appraising attributions. It is too easy to mock the notion of the connoisseur. If its more peripheral exponents can sometimes resemble the narrator of the classic Croft Original Sherry advertisements (“One instinctively knows when something is right”) we should note that Daumier’s depictions were as affectionate and respectful as they were wry.*



ANTICIPATIONS OR RECAPITULATIONS?

Those collectors and dealers who can identify not only the author of an engraved print but its state and edition have eyes and scholarly expertise running in harmony. The high costs of neglecting the development of the ability to recognise by eye the difference between one thing and another in an otherwise very similar grouping; and of vacating the entire arena of condition to restorers who, like the professional aristocrats they have been allowed to become, never apologise for or acknowledge any of their errors, has become apparent within the last two decades at the Sistine Chapel where what little was left of Michelangelo's work is now disintegrating. Any professional culpability for this outcome, however, would be joint and not restricted to the restorers (who, for all we know, may have been "under orders"). The initial, almost universal art historical acceptance of the apologia for the visible consequence of that restoration's singular cleaning method, as offered by the Vatican and its prominent adviser/supporters, permitted a contested folly to continue when it might still have been halted. The original peddling of claims to have discovered a "New Michelangelo" (for whom no corroboration is to be found in art history or in the many copies that were made of the Sistine Chapel ceiling) was as egregious a pollution of scholarship as the actions of the restorers were artistically destructive.

If, as might seem to be the case, many of today's art historians still cannot recognise a gross adulteration that left Michelangelo's ceiling as a false witness to its own original state, how likely are they to be able to distinguish between an autograph work and a very good studio copy – or a clever forgery? In a field where, as every blockbuster exhibition and new monograph now testifies, the consequence of successive restorations is that the great majority of works have been left as restoration-reduced shadows of their former selves, how are scholars to formulate and retain mental pictures of an artist's distinguishing "bedrock" traits so as to avoid errors of attribution? With so many now many-times restored and progressively adulterated works failing to resemble their original selves, scholars are effectively left making judgements on the authority of works that have themselves become partial fakes. In an aesthetically corrupted critical milieu fakes can be extremely seductive. They spring fully-formed with artfully planted reassurances (see below and Fig. 1). They enter our world not emaciated and debilitated by successive restorations but freshly minted and at the peak of their calculatedly deceiving powers. When scholars lack the confidence even to acknowledge the grossest restoration injuries and adulterations; when they have lost the habit of appraising condition, how secure might their critical defences be against outright forgeries?

### The value of fake drawings

Drawings, as the former auctioneer Michel Strauss has noted, are an especially sensitive and forgery-prone sphere, being both easier and cheaper to produce than paintings or sculptures. They can also be more pernicious in their effects. A badly attributed, supposed preparatory drawing can trigger a chain of misattributed paintings (as with the National Gallery's Rubens Samson and Delilah and the Art Gallery of Ontario's Rubens Massacre of the Innocents). And, yet, visual warnings are always present: the supposed preparatory drawings on which questionable painting attributions stand frequently display features that are unusual or unprecedented within the artist's oeuvre. The National Gallery's Michelangelo Entombment and its Rubens Samson and Delilah are two such cases – see below and opposite. With the latter, the supposed original sketch drawing shows distinct signs of being a 20th-century forgery, as does also the recently claimed Leonardo drawing that has been dubbed "La Bella Principessa" by its principal art historical supporter, the Leonardo authority, Professor Martin Kemp (see below).



**Michelangelo drawings linked to The Entombment**

Both the Louvre's pen study of a kneeling girl holding a crown of thorns (below right), and the Albertina's red chalk drawings of Christ supported from behind (above right), have been taken as studies for The Entombment – but they have been dated as much as 30 years apart. Michelangelo's red chalk drawings have been dated between 1506 and the early 1530s – which means that the Albertina Christ could not have been a study for a work Michelangelo is said to have painted in 1500. The attribution of the pen study of a kneeling girl has frequently been challenged – by, among others, Bernard Berenson – and its case for being a Michelangelo rests largely on its clear connection with The Entombment; they must stand or fall together.

Above, Fig. 7: A comparison of two drawings said to have been made in preparation for the National Gallery's Entombment of Christ which is given to Michelangelo, as discussed left.

Below, Fig. 8: An accompanying comparison in the Art Review of a detail from the unfinished Entombment (left) which painting, despite being in two distinct hands, is now given to Michelangelo in 1500, and (right) a mirrored detail from Rosso Fiorentino's The Betrothal of the Virgin of 1523.

Current claims that the attributed author of the "Michelangelo" had, at the age of twenty-five, somehow anticipated by a quarter of a century the design and forms of the later Mannerist artist are not credible.



*With drawings, the need to maintain vigilance against fraud is particularly urgent precisely because the field itself is insufficiently studied. As for the success of forgeries (which always seems inexplicable and incredible in retrospect) Michel Strauss offers this explanation for the phenomenon of initial too-ready acceptance of problematic works:*

*“It is a strange and curious factor that looking now at de Hory’s fakes, they seem so facile and such obvious, unlikely pastiches. It turned out that Frank Perls, with whom I compared notes, and I, were the only ones, to my knowledge, among many experienced international experts and dealers, who sussed him out at that time. I can only explain this as an example of the herd instinct: if one accepts, then the rest will follow...”*

### **Artists’ assistance on spotting fake drawings**

Fortunately, in the detection of fake drawings, much assistance can be had from artists (whose own eyes are constantly educated through engagement in the practices of art). Drawings are the most purely autographic category of visual works – successful artists might delegate parts or stages of paintings to assistants but rarely do so at the crucial designing or drawing stages. The skilful faker may get many things right but to escape detection he (- it invariably is a he?) needs to get everything right. Conversely, the connoisseur needs to spot only a single disqualifying error. This task should be made easier by the fact that drawings are the most direct and speedy manifestations of thought and purpose. How plausibly a drawing speaks of its role as an aid to the production of another and more substantial work constitutes a crucial indicator of authenticity. The forger might mimic a given artist’s graphic effects but, like a restorer (which he often is) he can never enter the mind of bona fide creative artists so as to grapple with and replicate an original and imaginative purposive graphic intent.

By long tradition artists have been outspoken on dud attributions. In the early 1900s the artist, M. H. Spielmann, F.S.A., wrote a series of articles for *The Magazine of Art*, which he edited. In one, “Art Forgeries and Counterfeits”, Spielmann listed no fewer than eight members of “the picture-trickster’s profession”. His second category was that of *The Cleaner*, who “unhappily includes the restorer; and both, in the vast majority of cases are the sworn enemy of a picture’s quality. Though the cleaner may skin the picture of its glazes as well as of its dirt and discoloured varnish, though he may destroy the work of art, aesthetic criminal though he be, he is, more’s the pity, no law-breaker. He may scrape a picture to the under-painting, and he may ‘restore’ what was never there; still, in the eyes of the law, he is as honourable as the original artist.”

Another forgery specialist was *The Monogrammist*, a student and scholar of art history who “knows exactly how an artist signed his name at different periods of his career, in what portion, on what spot...in what manner...” His cousin *The Sealer* acquires “quite a little gathering of [...] seals from the most important collections, and he can then command a fair price for attaching one or other of his ‘certificates of quality’ to any picture that may be brought to him for the purpose.” The erudite old *Genealogist* then steps in: “to make things more certain still. He, too, is a student of the movement of art, and he uses his knowledge to determine what lineage he may safely attribute to a picture, and what he may not attempt...”

### **Scholars beware**

Spielmann articulated the most critically instructive category of all, that of *The Portmanteau Picture*, the work in which motifs plundered from a number of authentic works are fused into a temptingly plausible synthesis.

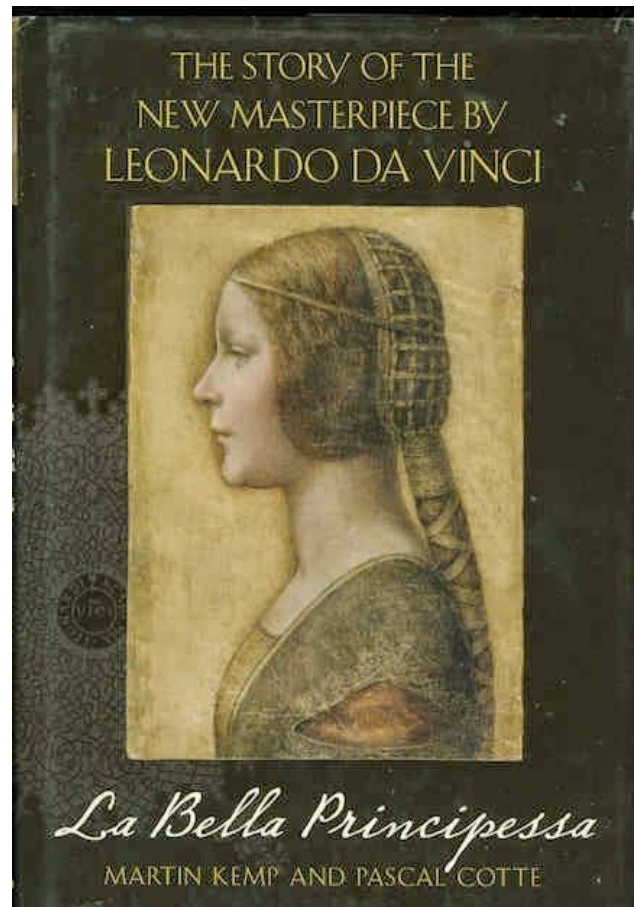


### **REVIEW:**

*The Story of The New Masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci – La Bella Principessa – The Profile Portrait of a Milanese Woman*  
Martin Kemp and Pascal Cotte, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2010  
ISBN 978-1-444-70626-0

*New Leonardo da Vinci Bella Principessa confirmed*

*Lumiere Technology Press Release*



*If a work looks reassuringly familiar at first glance it might well be because, in its component parts, it is already familiar from a number of “borrowed” sources. In the case of the putative Leonardo “La Bella”, a useful question to consider would be this: “If a twentieth century forger had wished to produce a profile female portrait in the manner of Leonardo, where would he most likely have found useful motifs that might plausibly be assembled into an identikit Leonardo-like whole?” (We suggest a number of candidate works opposite.)*

*If there is one source of advice potentially more helpful to connoisseurs than that of an artist, it is that of an artist gone-bad. There is a literature of garrulous fakers who have exulted in their powers to deceive professional experts. One, the notorious forger of drawings, Eric Hebborn, single-handedly left a small library of instructions to forgers and connoisseurs alike. In his 1997 *The Art Forger’s Handbook*, Hebborn effectively provides a Guide for the Connoisseur on the detection of fake drawings.*

## TWO CASE HISTORIES

*In art criticism, as in the appraisal of restorations, comparisons can be instructive. In the [previous post](#) we discussed a “van Dyck” drawing that became a Rubens ink sketch and, a “Veronese” – from the same dealers – that collapsed after sixty years and presently stands on offer as an attributed Agostino Carracci. Here, we reconsider that supposed, upgraded and now accepted Rubens ink sketch which recently sold for more than £3 million, along with a claimed autograph Leonardo, the so-called “La Bella Principessa” which sold in 1998 as a not-Leonardo for \$21,850. On its current Leonardo claims it has been estimated, perhaps optimistically, to be worth some £150 million.*

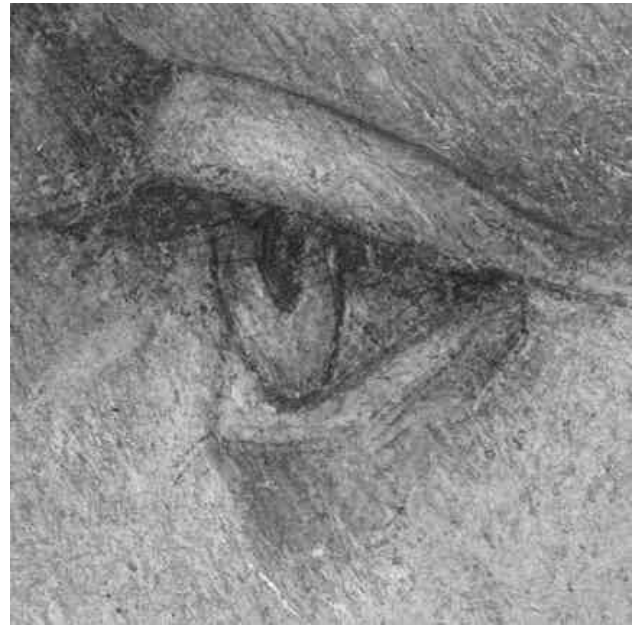
*The two attributions were made nearly a century apart. While the now-Rubens has been officially accepted with the previously described chain of consequences, the latter is locked in an increasingly acrimonious international battle for critical acceptance. In both cases, espousal of the work has generated implausible art historical narratives and an overriding of technical and aesthetic alarms. In both, indications of modern forgery are present, and – apropos Hebborn’s disclosures – in both there happens to be a strong close-by candidate as a potential forger.*

### **The history or “provenance” of two dubious works**

*Both drawings were foundlings deposited on the art market’s doorstep. The now-Rubens ink sketch emerged in dealers’ hands in 1926, as a van Dyck (it is initialled V. D.) and with no history of prior ownership or existence, some 316 years after its presently claimed date of execution. The would-be Leonardo appeared in 1998 – a full five centuries after its now-claimed 1496 execution – and, again, with no history of prior ownership or existence. It was offered in a 1998 sale of old master drawings at Christie’s in New York as “German School, early 19th century” and “the property of a lady”. It only later transpired (after a vain legal tussle launched against Christie’s by the anonymous vendor on hearing of the drawing’s claimed worth of £150 million) that the lady in question was Jeanne Marchig.*

### **Giannino Marchig**

*Jeanne Marchig was the widow of the painter and restorer Giannino Marchig (1897-1983). For some years she had been selling works under cloak of anonymity from her late husband’s collection to fund animal*

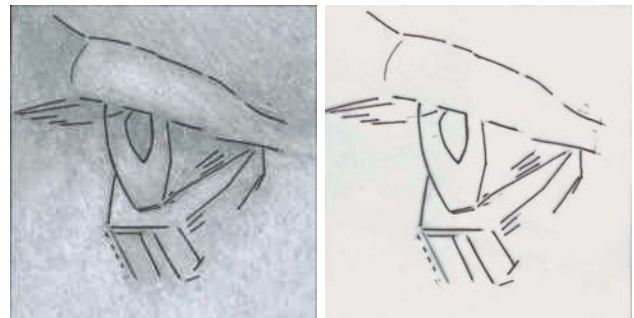


Above, Figs. 9 and 10: Top, the Kemp/Cotte book and, above, the eye of the so-called “La Bella Principessa”

*The closer one looks, the more apparent it becomes that this eye was not drawn by Leonardo. The perspective is wrong for the formal type of this work. This strictly sideways-on portraiture enforced a uniformity of perspective over all parts and required an eye that looked straight ahead. Here, the eye has shifted from that straight-ahead gaze. It is not drawn in strict end-on elevation, but as if seen from a slightly higher and more frontal viewpoint, thereby showing the edge of the lower lid – much as in this author’s drawing at Fig. 30 in which, because the perspective was not strictly in profile, both of the ridges that border the philtrum (the vertical groove under the nose) are visible, and the lashes of the second eye have moved into view. The appropriate, sideways-on treatment of the visible eye is encountered in every other Renaissance profile portrait shown here. The eye of “La Bella” is a disqualifying aberration.*

*The lower lid of “La Bella” is far too thick and far too planar in its construction (i. e. it is almost Cubist in its severity). Worse, there is no sense of the eye’s anatomical function and physical properties. Leonardo, a supreme anatomist, appreciated that the eye is an orb set in a protective socket bounded by the brow, the nose and the cheekbone. It is further protected by retractable flesh in the form of the upper and lower lids. When drawn back to expose the iris and pupil, the lid coverings bulge softly and form little pouches, even in the very young. Because the eyeball is relatively hard, its softer, fleshy protective covering takes its forms from that ball – which is to say, it takes on a double curvature and never the crystalline forms seen on “La Bella Principessa”.*

*This drawing possesses no such anatomical grasp. Ergo, it cannot have been drawn by Leonardo. From the far too-thick and planar edge of the lower eyelid, the flesh drops away abruptly like cliff but then fizzes into a fudged ambiguity. No attempt is made to articulate the demarcation found in Leonardo’s faces between the flesh of the cheek and that of the lower lid (see Figs. 12, 13 and 14). The author of “La Bella Principessa” was not alert to Leonardo’s treatment of those differences.*



Above, Figs. 11a and 11b: Left, a diagram traced over a reproduction of the eye to indicate the excessively, straight-edged, angular and planar method of depiction. Right, the resulting diagram.

charities. Marchig was said by his widow to have kept the now-claimed Leonardo drawing in a portfolio and to have held it to be by Domenico Ghirlandaio (see Fig. 5). As the only known owner of a work with a five centuries-long provenance lacuna, Giannino Marchig must be considered as a potential Leonardo forger. He was a talented artist who worked with facility in a variety of manners and showed in his own drawings a fondness for female figures with faces in profile (see Fig. 17). He had studied in the studios of artists in Trieste and became Professor of Drawing at the Florence Academy of Fine Arts in the 1920s, immersing himself in works that reflected his studies of the old masters. After achieving some success as an artist, winning prizes, exhibiting in Paris, Berlin and the USA, as well as participating in the 13th Venice Biennale in 1922, in the 1930s he met Bernard Berenson and, thereupon, switched from art to art restoration and publishing. He spent the war assisting Berenson who had remained in Italy under aristocratic protection. At the end of his war time diaries (written in 1947 and published in 1952 as *Rumour and Reflection*) Berenson thanks his “dear friend, the delicate restorer and picture expert, Giannino Marchig” for helping to conceal his collections from the Germans.

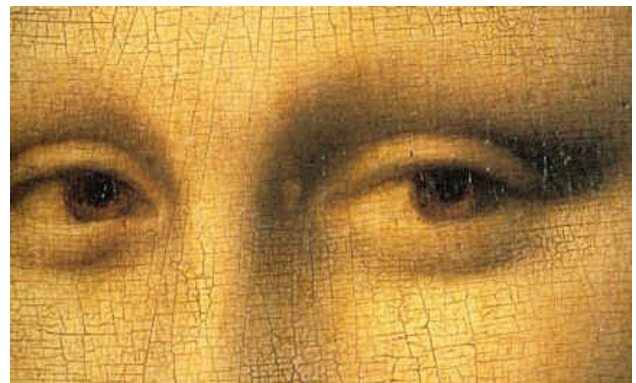
The Berenson connection hardly augurs well for the drawing. Kenneth Clark, himself a former assistant of Berenson, recalled in 1977 how the great scholar “sat on a pinnacle of corruption” and that “for almost forty years after 1900 he did practically nothing except authenticate pictures”. Clark knew of what he spoke: his own extremely youthful positions as director of the Ashmolean Museum and then of the National Gallery had been achieved on the commendations of Berenson’s partner in attributions, the dealer Lord Duveen. In the 1950s, after some sort of crisis, Marchig abandoned Italy and moved to Geneva where he met his wife, Jeanne, and began practising as an international picture restorer.

(It should be said that none of the above was known when “La Bella” first began to attract support as a Leonardo, and that one of the drawing’s earliest advocates, Nicholas Turner, a former curator of drawings at the British Museum and the Getty Museum, has a courageous record of challenging misattributed drawings in museums – including those of Eric Hebborn. If the present battle between camps of experts over this proposed attribution is sharply contested and heated, it is being fought by all parties as a matter of scholarly/artistic judgement and advocacy.)

### **The spectre of forgery**

Although the identity of the vendor emerged late, among the chief present supporters of the Leonardo attribution, Professor Martin Kemp and Pascal Cotte of Lumiere Technology (the joint authors of the 2010 book *The Story of the New Masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci: La Bella Principessa* – see review opposite), have said that: “At the time of the writing of the book, the ownership of the portrait before 1998 was not known, leaving it’s supporters open to the charge that it might be a recent forgery undertaken with knowledge of modern technical examinations of Leonardo’s paintings – even though the modern technical examination of the portrait itself seemed to preclude this.” Given those initial suspicions, it might be wondered how the subsequent disclosure of an intimate connection with a restorer and confidant of Berenson had laid them to rest.

For Kemp and Cotte, the fact that Marchig had “worked internationally as a respected restorer, and in 1976 undertook major conservation on one of the two prime versions of Leonardo’s *Madonna of the Yarnwinder*, then owned by Wildenstein’s in New York”, the possibility of the drawing being a modern forgery can now be ruled out. This is upside down: when artists work as restorers on old master paintings, they are licensed precisely to forge original work at their “retouching” stages. (At the National Gallery,



Above, Figs. 12, 13 and 14: Three pairs of eyes painted by Leonardo. Respectively, from the top, these are those of:  
The Lady with an Ermine of 1489-90;  
The Belle Ferronniere of 1493-4;  
and, The Mona Lisa of 1502 onwards.

If “La bella Principessa” were to be accepted as a Leonardo of 1496 it would mean our believing that Leonardo first depicted eyes in the manner seen in the first two of the above paintings and that he then abandoned his developing manner during a brief Cubist period, before reverting a few years later to his earlier artistic evolution, so as to produce the even softer, more “evanescent”, more curvilinear eyes of the Mona Lisa. Seen against the manifest stylistic progression in the treatment of Leonardo’s eyes in the above three paintings, the manner encountered in “La Bella” is neither part of that progression nor compatible with its – or any other Leonardo – eyes.

restorers even paint *false lines of craquelure* onto their own fresh and speculative synthetic repaints, in a technique known as “deceptive retouching”). Marchig’s experience of working on one of the two prime versions of Leonardo’s *Madonna of the Yarnwinder* would hardly disqualify him as a forger able to work “with knowledge of modern technical examinations of Leonardo’s paintings”.

### The material composition of the drawings

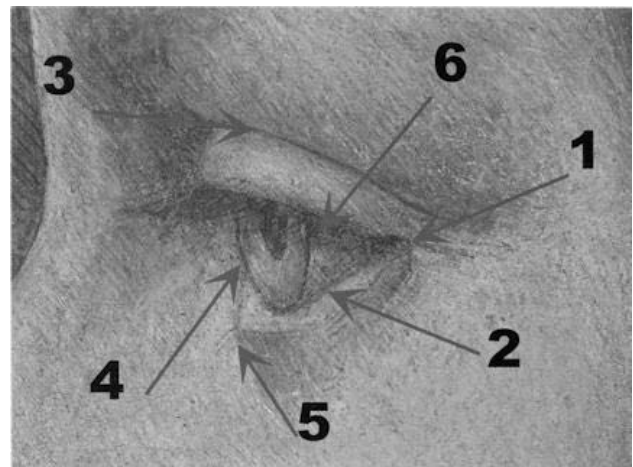
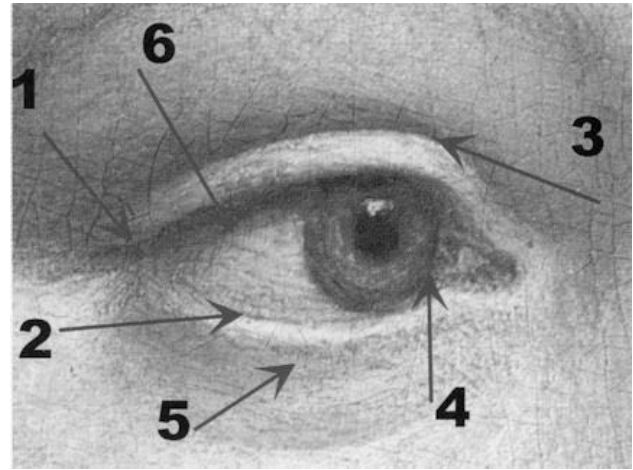
With both the “Rubens” and the “Leonardo” drawings only the front of the sheet can be examined. Both have been glued onto secondary supports. The “Rubens” ink drawing has been glued onto a second sheet of paper. The visible side of the second sheet is heavily abraded in a manner that might suggest a ham-fisted attempt at its removal. In one corner, part of this “backing” sheet has been removed, exposing (unintelligible) chalk lines on the “recto” of the ink drawing. It is never safe to take signs of age and previous treatments as proofs of antiquity, let alone of authenticity. In his section “Creating an atmosphere of age” (p. 51) of *The Art Forger’s Handbook*, Hebborn writes:

“If our work is to convince it must have a feeling of having a past. That is to say it should show signs of having been through the hands of former dealers and collectors... Three forms of protection for drawings have traditionally been used: pasting them into albums, putting them into mounts for storage in boxes, and framing them... the most obvious sign of a drawing having once been stuck down is when the work is still attached to the page of an album. This, of course, is very easy for us to imitate. We simply paste our drawing on a blank page taken from an old book. A nice refinement is to show signs of another drawing having once been stuck on the back of the page, and to do this you really do stick a drawing on the back. Wait for a week or so until the ‘old’ glue or paste has hardened, then remove the drawing. There is no need to be over-careful about this procedure. If you should leave a little of the paper of the drawing adhering to the mount, or of the mount to the drawing, it adds a very convincing touch...”

### An unusual support

The claimed Leonardo “La Bella” is made with three coloured chalks, body colour and brown ink on a sheet of vellum. That is to say, this work was executed in mixed-media of a kind nowhere encountered in Leonardo and on a support never encountered in Leonardo. Much has been made of the fact that it has been established by Cotte’s technical examinations and by some astute art historical research that the vellum may be of a late 15th century origin, one of a number of vellum leaves – some of which were blank – removed at an unknown date from a Renaissance volume or “codex” held in Poland. If correct, this circumstance would be no proof of the authenticity or antiquity of the drawing that is presently found on the only recently encountered sheet. Even if the presently hypothecated origins and antiquity of the support were somehow to be established, neither the date when the sheet might have been removed (by knife or razor) from the book, nor that of the drawing executed upon it would be known. By coincidence, Jeanne Marchig was Polish and, it has been said, an artist of sorts herself. She proudly preserved the box of pastels with which she said Giannino restored the “Principessa”. So, the Marchigs themselves claim responsibility for a restoration that might otherwise have implied a degree of antiquity in the drawing and the fact remains that the first and only known owner of this supposed Leonardo of 1496 was a 20th-century artist/restorer whose widow put works on to the market anonymously.

### Wide margins of error



Above, top, Fig. 15: The (true) right eye of *The Lady with an Ermine*  
Above, Fig. 16: The eye of “La Bella Principessa”

In the Kemp/Cotte book, Pascal Cotte writes that “Leonardo understood the anatomy and inner workings of the human eye” and, that “Despite differences in media, for instance, the elements of the eye are constructed with a distinct and identical logic” in both of these eyes.

Cotte is a brilliant (and charming) man whose invention of the multi-spectral camera has revolutionised the capacities of photography and earned him a place in its history. Unfortunately, there are two problems here. First, methodologically, the comparison is loaded in “La Bella’s” favour. That is, of the three painted works we illustrate above, it is compared with the earliest one, which was made six or seven years before the supposed date of “La Bella” and is the most ‘linear’ of the three in its treatment of forms.

Second, even on this comparison, the crucial tell-tale differences are stark and counter-productive. Cotte shows in his detailed, point by point comparisons that his own eye is not sufficiently attuned to detect and identify crucial pictorial differences in ostensibly similar images.

We would expect that a forger would attempt to mimic features in extant Leonardos, but what always betrays such efforts is the extent to which they fall short of completely successful mimicry and thereby introduce fatal differences.

Cotte claims and diagrammatically pinpoints six of what he takes to be “identical” features. In his first example, “The outer corner of the eyelid (1)”, he does not notice that while in the Leonardo the point at which the lower eyelid runs under the upper is not delineated and pinpointed but is only implicit in the softly melded tones. In the “La Bella” by contrast, this lower lid is articulated by three individually distinct and sharp straight lines. There is one for the edge of the upper eyelid; one for the outer edge of the lower eyelid; and, a third line that drops as a perpendicular so as to establish a sharp and entirely un-Leonardesque facet at the side of the lower eye. This treatment is a travesty simplification of form.

Cotte’s second point draws attention to the fact that in both images the inner edge of the lower eyelid meets the lower edge of the iris. This is certainly the case, but Cotte does not notice that in the Leonardo that edge is shown to curve because of the form of the eyeball, and not to run in a straight line, as in “La Bella”.

In his third point, “The fold of the upper eyelid”, Cotte does not notice that in the Leonardo eye that particular fold again follows the form of the eye’s orb (is in fact dictated by it) and that it drops as the upper lid ceases to be

In addition to Pascal Cotte's "La Bella" examinations, carbon dating tests of the drawing's vellum support were made by the Zurich Institute for Particle Physics. The dating itself came with a customarily wide margin of error. There was said to be a 95 per cent probability of the vellum having been made at some point between 1440 and 1650. Note: in betting parlance, this is to say only that the odds, on this technical evidence, were three to one against it having been made before or by 1496, the now-contended date of execution. Suggestions that this analysis has somehow determined "once and for all" that the drawing is not a later pastiche are hardly credible. Kemp himself says no more than that the carbon dating "greatly diminishes the possibility of the drawing being a clever forgery". Much, too, has been made of the fact that this drawing bears signs of age and restorations, but old supports can be bought and "evidence" of restoration can easily be forged (see below).

### **Cod antiquity and dodgy backs**

This particular vellum sheet has been glued onto an old oak panel – on the face of it, an improbable and inappropriate treatment, given that wood expands and contracts and would therefore threaten to tear or buckle an affixed sheet. The presence of the panel is taken by Pascal Cotte to testify to the drawing's antiquity:

"The vellum was at some point laid down on an old oak board, which has been repaired on two occasions with butterfly joints. Jeanne Marchig identified the later pair of untinted joints as characteristic of those made by hand by Giannino. The portrait has been subject to at least two campaigns of restoration, including that by Marchig over 50 years ago. It seems likely that the vellum had been laid down on the panel long before it entered his hands. On the reverse are two customs stamps: DOUANE CENTRALE/ EXPORTATION/ PARIS. This stamp seems to have been introduced in 1864 but it is unclear when it ceased to be used in this form. The likelihood is that it is not later than the early 20th century. In any event, the stamps indicate the presence of the panel in France, presumably with its attached portrait and probably framed (as indicated by the brown paper strips around its margins). Whether it was owned for a period in France or imported temporarily is unclear."

Again, nothing here helps to establish the antiquity let alone the authenticity of the drawing. The unsupported phrases, "seems likely" and "presumably", have little force because anything can be stuck to anything at any point. In terms of making an attribution, the primary support (the vellum), and the secondary support (the panel), should be kept conceptually apart. The source of neither has been established and nor has the date at which they came together. All that we know is that if Marchig had repaired splits in the panel as well as carrying out one of the "restorations" on the drawing, his finger prints are everywhere on this artefact. His widow advanced no information on any possible owner before her late husband but did once hint that it might have been "acquired" from Berenson's collection. Berenson himself had been taken in by forged paintings and kept one of them in his home as a means of testing the art critical credentials of his visitors. Nothing material here might refute a suggestion that Marchig was the drawing's author, working on old vellum that was at some point attached to an old, previously repaired and labelled panel, thereby conferring a spurious antiquity and concealing the back of the vellum.

From the time the work was presented by Marchig's widow for sale in 1998 no owner has thought to remove the vellum from the panel as a precautionary conservation measure or to permit an examination of the sheet's recto. Cotte says of this: "Unfortunately, since it is laid down on panel (and separation would be hazardous) the verso of the vellum is not

visible. In contrast, in "La Bella", at the point where the upper lid ceases to be visible, the line of demarcation does not curve downwards but takes off upwards in a short sharp and straight little graphic flourish that, once again, is quite detached from the forms and the constructional logic of the eye. And so on, and so forth. Perhaps the most serious omission, is that it is not noticed that in "La Bella" the iris is drawn with an emphatic bounding line that imparts flatness and makes it resemble a metal washer, rather than the translucent, reflective and doubly curved surface that it comprises – and which Leonardo so brilliantly captured in his depictions of eyes.



Above, Fig. 17: A drawn portrait (mirrored and of low resolution) by the painter/restorer Giannino Marchig.

We see here Marchig's fondness for female profiles and his insecurity when placing eyes. Just as in "La Bella Principessa", this eye has a small, "piggy" aspect – which trait subverts his more generally confident graphic treatment. We also see in Marchig's own drawing that hatching need not all run in the same direction. Nicholas Turner, one of the first scholar/supporters of "La Bella", took its "extensive left-handed parallel hatching (most conspicuous in the background behind the girl's profile)..." to be second only to the drawing's quality as proof of "Leonardo's authorship (however extraordinary such a conclusion might seem on the face of it)". The phrase "on the face of it" resonates.

visible". Hebborn commends the acquisition of old panels to forgers:

"...and this brings us to one of the big problems with panel pictures: their tendency to bend out of shape or split due to changes in humidity. The best precaution against warping and cracking is to use thoroughly seasoned wood, and no wood is more seasoned than that of a truly old panel picture. Artistically worthless old pictures on wood do come up for sale from time to time, and these provide the support that suits our purpose best. Panels from old furniture are also desirable. Unfortunately they are no less desirable to our colleagues engaged in the making of new 'antique' furniture, so we have to pay quite a lot for them... Just like old paper, old panels and canvases need no ageing..."

### Left-handedness

Much has been made of the seeming left-handedness of the drawing's author when such indications are easily forged (sheets can be rotated). The hatched shading of the background was not spontaneously drawn in the manner seen, for example, in Leonardo's drawing at Fig. 18, but comprised a careful, deliberate "inking-in" of previously drawn ultra fine chalk lines. How often, if ever, did Leonardo work in such a slow and deliberated manner carefully and fastidiously shading in one medium and then even more fastidiously covering and concealing his first efforts? For a copyist or a forger to proceed in such a cautious manner would be quite unremarkable.

### Uncharacteristic features

Drawings that are said to have been made as preliminary studies for what are problematic upgraded paintings commonly contain features found nowhere else in the claimed master's oeuvre. Two drawings have been especially associated with the National Gallery's *Entombment* (see Fig. 7). One is widely accepted as autograph and the other is not. The two are drawn in different manners that correspond to different stages of Michelangelo's graphic evolution (the earlier being in ink, the later in chalk) and they have been dated as being as much as thirty years apart – which constitutes a considerable problem as claimed preparatory studies for a painting which itself is now said to have been entirely made by Michelangelo when he was twenty five and had not yet started drawing in chalk. The more challenged of the two, an ink drawing, is claimed to be a study for a kneeling figure in the painting, but even supporters of its attribution acknowledge that it contains problems as a Michelangelo: it is clearly drawn from a girl, not from a man; it is drawn very carefully on a pink ground in three separate stages; the plane of the ground is, uncharacteristically for Michelangelo, indicated; its Michelangelo ascription has often been challenged. Bernard Berenson took it to be by Passerotti or to be an engraver's copy.

Although it is owned by the Louvre, it is not accepted as a Michelangelo by the museum. As with the supposed Rubens *Samson and Delilah* ink sketch, its chief perceived qualification is its close resemblance to a figure in a separately problematic and challenged painting. Both of these challenged and problematic National Gallery paintings (the *Samson and Delilah* and the *Entombment*) happen to lean on their problematic and challenged supposed preparatory ink sketches. Thus, the attributions of both drawings stand in circular fashion on their close resemblance to figures in the challenged paintings. As attributions, these two drawings and two paintings are as sand built upon sand.

### A once well-accredited "Portmanteau" fake goes down...

Less than four years after the publication of Hebborn's guide to connoisseurs and forgers, another small profile portrait, *A Young Woman*



Above, Fig. 18: A Leonardo ink study for a head of Leda.

This image at Windsor is, as the Poussinist, David Packwood, observed on his *Art History Today* website, a "wonderful drawing... a meditation on the movements and rhythms of nature captured in the elaborate coiffure of the woman. When Leonardo drew hair he studied in line and mass the dynamics of water and the wind."

The drawing's animation is indeed truly remarkable. Much of the exhilarating graphic dynamism stems from the speed and confidence of drawing and from the great directional variety of hatching (i.e. showing both "left" and "right-handed" hatching) which is used not only to shade but also to indicate the directional curvature of a form's surfaces (as in the neck). Such graphic vivacity contrasts greatly the consistently uniform, officiously "left-handed" directional hatching of "*La Bella Principessa*". Even though left-handed draughtsmen (like this author) naturally favour a top-left to bottom-right stroke, their drawing hands rotate easily at the wrist so as to give different directions to hatched strokes, as required. Repositioning the arm by moving the elbow outwards, makes yet other directions of hatching realisable. Further, hatching can be given virtually any direction for left or right-handed draughtsmen by the simple expedient of rotating the sheet. Disney cartoon artists used to (may still do) draw on sheets fixed to inset circular surfaces on drawing boards that rotated freely enabling any part of an image to be made swiftly and boldly with an optimal stroke.

(Fig. 1), was down-graded at the Detroit Institute of the Arts to “Imitator of Verrocchio” (after sixty-five years good years as a Leonardo/Andrea del Verrocchio), by David Alan Brown, curator of Italian Renaissance art at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. Brown describes the painting as having been revealed as “a probable forgery by its anachronistic materials and unorthodox construction” (– see the catalogue to the Washington National Gallery of Art’s 2001-02 exhibition, *Virtue and Beauty*, p. 18). Thus, this work can now be considered a product of the 1930s, the period when Marchig was working for Berenson. One disqualifying feature that it has in common with “La Bella Principessa” is its depiction of an abnormally beefy “stevedore’s” arm in a young woman.

“La Bella Principessa” (13 x 9 and 3/4 inches) and *A Young Woman* (14 and 1/4 x 10 inches) are small works on panels of almost identical format. The “unorthodox construction” of *A Young Lady* really does seem to have been most unorthodox, even in the realm of the forged. Technical examination shows it to have been painted on “what appears to have been photographic paper applied to a wood panel that was repaired before it was readied for painting”. Also working against any possible retention of a Verrocchio or Leonardo attribution is the fact that at least one of the pigments on the painting is modern – zinc white. Further, what is described by Brown as “preliminary” examination disclosed the fact that worm-holes, which appeared to testify to the antiquity of the panel, had been filled before the gesso ground was applied.

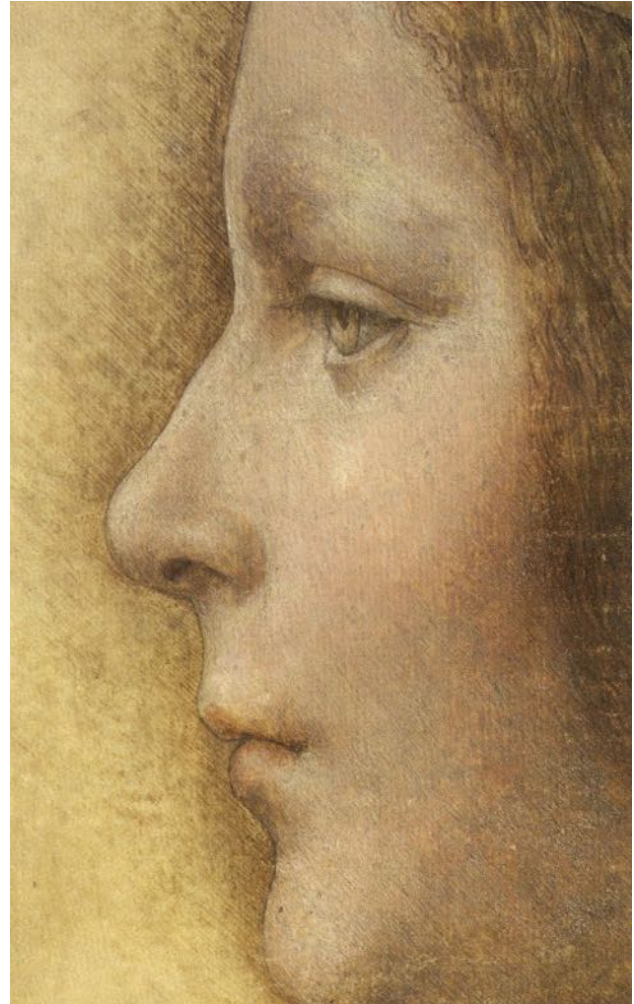
Hebborn had another word to say on the importance of obtaining old wood. In his section “Ageing old panels” he advised “If you have not been able to procure a period panel, then you must find the oldest wood available. Even for a decorative painting, plywood and such stuff is anti-aesthetic, so at least have sufficient respect for your work to get a real piece of timber. This acquired, you may make worm holes and darken the wood to match the age required. Nevertheless, there is no way that these things can be artificially achieved well enough to deceive the connoisseur.”

The Detroit *Young Woman* was acquired in 1936. It was one of a group of three works judged by the Detroit Institute’s Director, W. R. Valentiner, to be (“tentatively”) by Leonardo. Valentiner was struck – and reassured – by a similarity between the curls in the painting and those encountered in both Leonardo’s *Ginevra de’ Benci* painting and the Verrocchio marble *Bust of a Lady* in the Frick Collection (Fig. 2), which attribution is doubted by Nicholas Penny, the director of the National Gallery, London. Carter Alan Brown suspects that “further examination” might confirm that the painted profile of *A Young Woman* was indeed made over a photograph of the profile of the Frick’s marble *Bust of a Lady*. In truth, the reassuring curls, properly read, constitute a disqualification – see opposite.

### **How to obtain old paper**

As for the no-provenance van Dyck drawing that was immediately upgraded to a no-provenance Rubens, obtaining paper of the desired antiquity (it was described simply as “laid” paper by Christie’s) would have posed no problem for an early 20th century forger. As Hebborn testifies:

“The best places for handling genuinely old sheets of paper prior to buying them are: the saleroom, where you can rummage through the unframed lots of prints and drawings; the print-seller, who has similar folders of unframed pictures, and the antiquarian bookseller, where you may find the end-papers more interesting than what lies between them... Books are particularly useful for the beginner because the date and the place of publication are normally to be found on the title page, and these



more often than not indicate the date and the provenance of the paper on which it is printed...”

### Previous restorations

The ink drawing on the “Rubens” sheet bears little sign of restoration or rubbing – the ink lines have a lovely glossy chestnut colouring – but the sheet on which the drawing was made shows signs of acute physical distress for reasons described opposite. Concerning wear, tear and earlier restorations, Hebborn counsels that old drawings must always show signs of rubbing. This may be achieved for drawings in soft media by “a soft cloth (an old woollen sock serves admirably)”, and for ink drawings by means of “a gentle rubbing with pumice powder or the application of the very finest grade of sandpaper”.

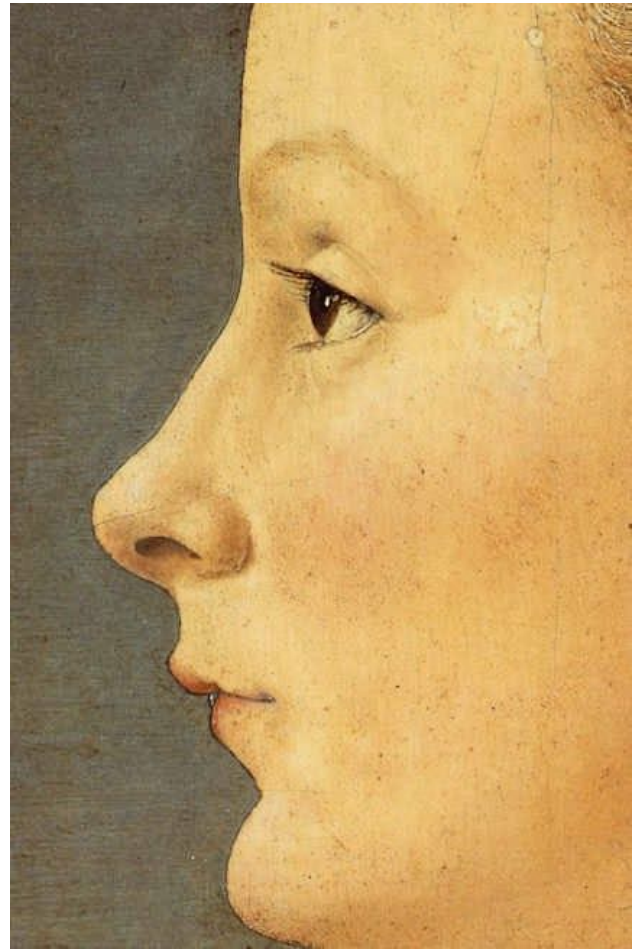
### Potential executors of fakes

A question often posed by defenders of challenged attributions is: “If not by artist X, then by which other artist?” This ploy precludes the possibility of the author being a forger. A question that might always be considered prudent with unsupported attributions that emerge from nowhere centuries after their supposed creation is: “If not by artist X, then by which artist, copyist or forger?” Although it is not necessary to identify a faker when suggesting that a work might be a forgery, it so happens that in both of our cases a highly graphically competent artist and teacher of art hovered close by at the moments of “discovery” in 1926 and 1998 respectively.

The then van Dyck but now-Rubens and the then Veronese but now hopefully-Agostino Carracci emerged in the hands of a firm of dealers “R. W. P. de Vries, Amsterdam”. There were two R. W. P. de Vries’s. Reinier Willem Petrus de Vries Senior lived from 1841 until 1919 and was a respected antiquarian dealer (chiefly books and maps but also drawings and other works of art). With relatives, he ran the firm “R. W. P. de Vries, Amsterdam”. When de Vries Snr. died the firm continued until its liquidation in 1933. Reinier Willem Petrus de Vries Junior was born in 1874 and lived until 1953. He was a talented painter, graphic artist, book cover designer, print-maker and author. Like Giannino Marchig, de Vries Jr. was also a teacher of drawing (at a high school in Hilversum from 1913 to 1953).

We have no firm grounds for suggesting de Vries Jr. to be the author of the now-Rubens Samson and Delilah ink drawing that has sold for over £3million to an anonymous buyer, or of the no longer-Veronese drawing, but given that there are strong grounds for considering the Rubens drawing to be fake (see right), and that de Vries Jr. was, at the time the drawing emerged in his family’s business, a fifty-two year old teacher of drawing, he might properly be considered a candidate, if only because he was perfectly placed both to acquire the necessary materials to forge period drawings, and to offload them safely onto the market. Even if the firm was generally honourable, would it be inconceivable for an in-the-family forger to be indulged in a certain extra-curricula activity?

In any event, for reasons given in the previous post the drawing is quite implausible as a Rubens first-thought sketch. What makes it such an immediate suspect as a forgery (quality aside) is that when it came onto the market from nowhere it contained a feature that is nowhere encountered in Rubens’s many surviving ink sketches: a drawn enclosing box that implies a pre-determined format for the painting, and an artistic intention on Rubens’ part from the very beginning to crop the toes of Samson in just the manner of those found in a painting that was very shortly to come onto the market, not (yet) as a Rubens but as a Honthorst. This might have been taken as a coincidence, were it not for the fact that the immediate upgrading of the Honthorst painting to Rubens was made



Above, Figs. 19 and 20: Top, a detail of “La Bella Principessa”. Above, a corresponding detail of Antonio del Pollaiuolo’s Profile of a Woman (oil on panel), Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan. (Note, respectively, the anatomically incorrect and correct placements of the eyes.)

The similarities of profile treatment in these two works tell against “La Bella” the precision of whose profile reads as an assembled succession of autonomously conceived shapes – a kind of ‘identikit’ composite. These discrete portions do not flow together in a manner that conjures a vivid sense of an individual personality, as found in the Pollaiuolo and other portraits shown here. Rather, they resemble graphic inventions, not observed anatomical features. In the Pollaiuolo profile the outer contour does not seem “an abstracted thing in itself” but a by-product of the forms of the head; a record of the succession of points at which the forms turn away from the viewer’s gaze. Note how lucid and plastically expressive is Pollaiuolo’s delicate shading around the eye, as compared with that of “La Bella” where the author had been unable to resolve the form of the brow and the position of the eyebrow. While it can easily be imagined how “La Bella’s” author might have taken Pollaiuolo’s portrayal as a template for a profile variation, it is stylistically inconceivable that Pollaiuolo might have used a “La Bella-like” image to the same end. It might seem remiss of Martin Kemp not to have introduced this particular Pollaiuolo work – arguably the finest and the most beautifully resolved example of the type – into his discussions of “La Bella”.

Alison Wright’s account of the Pollaiuolo Profiles examines the extent to which they were physically accurate records or products of idealised conventions. For example, she questions whether or not the suprising number of “prominent overbites” encountered in Florentine female subjects of the 1460s and 1470s reflected familial relationships or (as she favours) were incorporated because the trait “must have been considered attractive”. However, her excellent sequence of plates of profiles by the brothers shows that this was not a uniformly “applied” feature – and, certainly, much of the portraits’ force stems from their plausible, vivid and attractively human presence. By comparison, “La Bella’s” features seem pedantically laboured.



on the authority of the then recently upgraded drawing. The scholar who upgraded the painting, Ludwig Burchard, was the man who had upgraded the ink drawing from van Dyck to Rubens – and he is now known to have made many (over sixty) Rubens attributions that have subsequently fallen. Moreover, in upgrading the drawing and the painting, Burchard knew that the two contemporary copies of the original and long lost Rubens' Samson and Delilah painting show that the toes of Samson had not been cropped at all; that they were set well and comfortably within the painting. The persisting institutional determination (despite informed protests) to retain the attribution of this implausible drawing, and of the equally implausible painting it was swiftly pressed to validate, has generated a sub-set of scholarship that flies in the face of visual evidence. That this untenable position is held without any attempted account being offered for the contra-testimony of the two contemporary copies of the original painting speaks of a contempt for the historic record and a preparedness to lower the bar of artistic quality for inclusion within Rubens' oeuvre.

### **Barriers to any acceptance of La Bella Principessa**

As for the so-called "La Bella Principessa" being an autograph work by Leonardo da Vinci, there is a single feature in it that should be seen by any educated eye to be instantly disqualifying – the drawing of the subject's eye. This particular eye is so anatomically weak and ill-conceived; so out of perspective; so improperly wandering in its gaze; so planar and "Cubist" in its articulation; and, so comprehensively out of character with both Leonardo's treatment of eyes and those of other artists working within the strictly regulated female portrait profile type that generated entirely sideways-on elevations of the head and bust of young ladies in emulation of likenesses on ancient coins, as to be inconceivable as a work of the period let alone one executed by Leonardo. At the supposed date of execution (1496), the profile portrait type attempted in "La Bella Principessa" had virtually run its course. By that date portraits – and most especially Leonardo's own – favoured more complex perspectives and increased levels of psychological engagement with the subject. One Leonardo scholar, Frank Zollner, sees Leonardo's 1478-1480 painting Ginevra de' Benci (Fig. 3b) as the point at which Leonardo broke away from "the profile view traditionally employed in Florence for portraits of women" in favour of the three-quarters view, previously the preserve of portrayals of men, and in order to impart "a psychological dimension to his sitter – something that would become the hallmark of Renaissance portraiture". If Leonardo really had opted to work against his development and artistic practice by working within an archaic form he had superseded, in this proposed drawing he would have been eclipsed by lesser artists, as is shown right.

The fact that in addition to its technical shortcomings, this singular drawing resembles nothing within (or adjacent to) Leonardo's oeuvre obliges Martin Kemp to make his art historical case for its inclusion on the grounds that it "reveals a previously unknown dimension in the way in which he [Leonardo] fulfilled his duties at the court of Duke Ludovico Sforza". This hypothesized rationale for a (regressive) departure within Leonardo's oeuvre is given a defence that might itself be taken for special-pleading: "Any important new work, to establish itself, must significantly affect the totality of Leonardo's surviving legacy over the longer term." Acceptance of this drawing would certainly expand that totality but it would do so in an art historically injurious manner.

This previously unknown work and its hitherto unsuspected manner of working which a (minority) group of scholars would situate within the oeuvre is a mongrel work. It is a drawing that thinks it might also be a painting. In terms of graphic and pictorial laws it is neither fish nor fowl but something of both. That this conflation is a not a product of Leonardo's



Above, Fig. 21: Portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza, c. 1493, by Ambrogio de Predis, The National Gallery of Art, Washington.

We believe that this work (and, specifically, its costume) may have provided a key part of the forger's 'armature' for "La Bella Principessa". In many respects, "La Bella" can be seen as a skimmed or condensed variant of features found in this (and other) authentic works. Certainly, Martin Kemp acknowledges "La Bella's" close similarities with this portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza. He holds that "La Bella" is a wedding portrait of another and younger member of the Sforza family, Bianca, the illegitimate daughter of Ludovico Sforza, who was the uncle of Bianca Maria. The daughter Bianca was married in 1496 at 13 or 14 years of age. Bianca Maria's portrait is thought to have been made around the time of her wedding in 1493 when she was 21 years old. In the catalogue to the (London) National Gallery's 2011-12 Leonardo exhibition, Arturo Galansino said of Bianca Maria's portrait that the artist's focus on the sumptuous clothes testified to the luxury of "the most opulent court in Italy". How credible can it be, therefore, that the strikingly impoverished, jewellery-free attire of Bianca had been commissioned in celebration of the wedding of the Duke's own daughter to a powerful ally? Kemp hedges against this implausibility with a further suggestion that the portrait might, instead, have been a memorial record made after her death – which followed very shortly after her wedding: "It may be that the restraint of her costume and the lack of jewellery indicates that the portrait was destined for a memorial rather than a matrimonial volume".

Kemp's twin-hypotheses rest on many begged questions: "If the Leonardo drawing [i.e. "La Bella"] is Bianca, it is likely to date from 1495-6". Aside from the weakening "if", and "is likely", "La bella's" problems force Kemp into circumnavigation: "In style, it seems at first sight to belong with his earlier works rather than to the period of the Last Supper." The recurrence of such phrases as "on the face of it" and "at first sight" is not reassuring and the net effect is that a drawing is being presented as an entirely autograph Leonardo that might have been executed from life as a wedding celebration, or, was made from some other image or memory as a funerary memorial; and that, which ever might have been the case, it was executed in an either early or late Leonardo manner. But which? Was it a wedding celebration in a late manner – or a memorial in an early manner? Again, how plausible is it to suggest that after executing the revolutionary (and non-profile) portraits of the Lady with an Ermine (1489-90) and The Belle Ferronniere (1493-4), Leonardo, when asked to celebrate a wedding (or

hand is evident in the laboured, stilted and monotonously uniform handling. It purports to constitute a kind of “presentation” drawing of which Michelangelo made a (dazzling) few but Leonardo none. The depicted figure is static, ponderous and matronly for a supposed child bride who had died by her fourteenth year (see Figs. 23a – 24b).

The anatomy is poorly realised and evasively handled – where might the arm be situated? And what are its dimensions? The drapery is perfunctorily and unconvincingly evoked and might seem positively designed to shirk the problem of depicting a convincing arm that would give life and expression to the pose (see Figs. 22a and 22b). The pose here is bereft of lateral movement in the body/neck/head equation. This is true even of the individual features of the face’s profile where the features seem to be individually conceived and stacked one on top of another rather than to mark the “terminus” of a unique and humanly distinctive head, as seen for example in Figs. 20, 21, 23a and 25. There is nothing to convince one that is a drawing made from life. The treatment of the coiffure is monotonous and crude. In its formulaic treatment it is bereft of the adornments that are characteristic of this particular portrait type which fused notions of the classical “ideal” and literary “virtues” with ostentatious displays of wealth. (See Figs. 21, 25, 27 and 28b.)

As if in an insurance policy safeguard against this glaring lacuna Martin Kemp assigns a second, alternative historical moment of execution, suggesting that this may not, in fact, have been a drawing made from life in celebration of a fabulously privileged child bride, but was instead a commemorative work made after her death. If it had been so the question would arise how might so-detailed and laboured a study of a head have been made from memory? Or was it made after some other, now-lost, portrayal? If one dons a forger’s hat and asks which other works a twentieth-century forger might have selected to assemble a “portmanteau” image for such a purpose, it is quite easy to identify candidates – see Figs. 20, 21, 23a, 25 and 27.

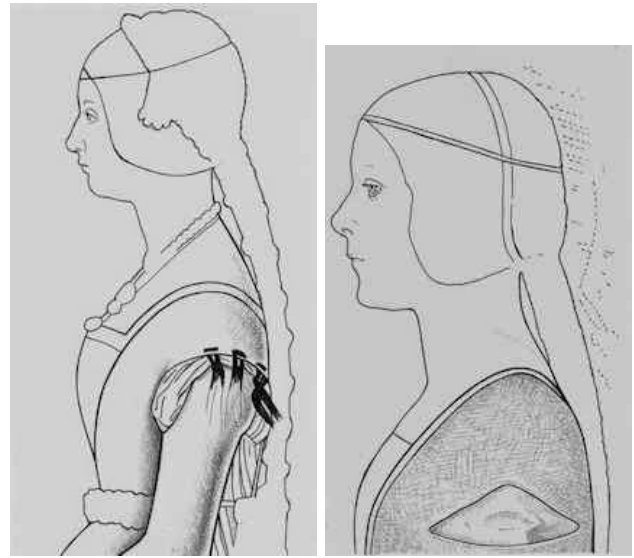
Some might be bemused that among many experts, a small group should have become such impassioned partisans of so eccentric and problematic a work. Perhaps Michel Strauss has it right: there exists an ingrained human herd instinct to which even the most distinguished figures might not be immune. Perhaps the indicator of inauthenticity lies in this: although the quality varies, with every other work of this type shown here, something novel, fresh or idiosyncratic is brought to the party. Not one work looks as if derived from any other, or from any small group of others, or – and least of all – from “La Bella Principessa”. Did Leonardo ever make a portrait of a woman that made no waves; that left no trace; and that aroused no comment in half a millennium?

## CODA

### **The Inaugural James Beck Memorial Lecture**

Our annual memorial lecture (which alternates between London and New York) is given by distinguished scholars in honour of Professor James Beck of Columbia University, the Renaissance scholar and founder of ArtWatch International. The inaugural lecture was given most fittingly in London in June 2010 by Hellmut Wohl, a scholar whose methodological rigor and scrupulous connoisseurship is widely considered by his peers to be exemplary (as in the review below, and the caption at Figs. 4a and 4b). Professor Wohl’s lecture, “The Integrity of the Work of Art: The case of the Early Michelangelo”, comprised a demolition of a group of early

mark a death) would have resorted to such an archaic formula? Such art historical problems are dwarfed by the purely visual ones.



Above, Figs. 22a and 22b: Tracings taken from the Portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza by Ambrogio da Predis (left), and “La Bella Principessa”, the claimed Leonardo portrait of Bianca Sforza (right). With both tracings pencil shading has been added to indicate the respective treatments of the arm.

This costume of “La Bella” is not just bereft of sumptuous adornments, it is quite implausible as costume. It is clearly not drawn from life – the costume conceals rather than discloses. Its gross simplification smacks of a forger “faking it” and looking for short-cuts that might evoke an impression of the requisite period and class. The overly-emphasized, shield-like one-piece unit of sleeve and shoulder-covering does not follow the form of a young subject – as in the manner seen, for example, in Fig. 21 above and in Figs. 6, 5, 24a and 25a. This section of drapery carries insufficient shading to indicate the position and the width of the arm. This obfuscation is in marked contrast with the lucid treatments seen in the Ambrogio above at Fig. 21; the Domenico Ghirlandaio at Fig. 5; and the Raphael (former Mino da Fiesole) at Fig. 26. The single triangular split through which an undergarment (chemise) is glimpsed on the sleeve of La Bella is the most perfunctory, non-form-disclosing, artistically lazy minimum that might allude to what was clearly an artfully contrived restrained eroticism in the highest fashions of the period and place. The portrait of Bianca Maria (Fig. 21) is said by Kemp to have been painted, probably, around the time of her betrothal in 1493 to the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, when she was twenty-one years old. With the drawing of Bianca (aka “La Bella”) being said by Kemp to have been made on her marriage in 1496 when she was thirteen or fourteen years old, is it conceivable that a girl of that age would have had so matronly a figure? Compare “La Bella” with the portrait (now given to Raphael) at Figs 23a and 26.



*Michelangelo attributions and it was published in the ArtWatch UK Journal No. 27, as shown on this [attached pdf](#).*

**Review of Hellmut Wohl's *The Paintings of Domenico Veneziano* by Anne Markham Schulz, in the June 1981 Art Bulletin.**

*Anne Markham Schulz, an independent scholar and Visiting Scholar at Brown University, is a prolific author of books on Italian Renaissance sculpture, including Antonio Rizzo: Sculptor and Architect (1983) and Giambattista and Lorenzo Bregno (1991). Her Art Bulletin review began:*

*"This monograph is exemplary in every way, it treats with respect the works of a supreme painter and by way of its percipient and lucid analyses of their techniques, style, and iconography demonstrates their high artistic worth. It is thorough: there is no source of information it overlooks and every particle of evidence provided by the documents, the sources, the paintings themselves and the works of Domenico's contemporaries is made by judicious scrutiny to yield its quota of meaning. To the extent that words can interpret the characteristics of a painter's style, this book does so. That Wohl should have conceived this a goal worth pursuing he no doubt owed to the tutelage of Richard Offner, under whom his dissertation on Domenico Veneziano was prepared many years ago; indeed, Offner's scrupulous method informs this book. For Wohl, as for Offner, definition is its own justification: Domenico's art is not correlated with historical events, and even its impact on contemporary artistic currents is narrowly portrayed. But to have explicated, to the extent possible, the subject of each painting, when and under what circumstances it was made, the sources and the characteristics of its style, and the evolution of its composition, is to have amply fulfilled the obligations of a monographer."*

Michael Daley

Comments may be left at: [artwatch.uk@gmail.com](mailto:artwatch.uk@gmail.com)

[Printer-friendly PDF version of this article](#)



Above, Figs. 23a, 23b, 24a and 24b: The Pollaiuolo and Raphael works, left; "La Bella Principessa", right.



Above, Fig. 25: A portrait of Beatrice d'Este tentatively attributed by Martin Kemp to Ambrogio da Predis. In discussing this portrait and its opulent costume and jewellery, Kemp suggests a third possible reason for the restraint of finery in "La bella":

*"When set beside the pearl- and gem-festooned creations worn by Bianca Maria and Beatrice, the hair of 'La Bella' is finely and formally dressed, but relatively modest in its materials. Surprisingly, she has no jewellery. And her dress, with its simple triangular aperture, has none of the knotted ties that adorn the costumes of the two other Sforza ladies. Leonardo has consciously simplified the costume and accoutrements, compared to the other court portraits, possibly because the context was one in which less ostentation was fitting."*

*Thus, we have three explanations for two possible contexts in which Leonardo is claimed to have opted (of his own volition?) to strip a very grand young lady of the customary accoutrements of her most elevated and powerful family. At this point it might be wondered what, if anything, would count for Kemp as evidence against his proposed attribution. Is it really*

conceivable that Leonardo might had (uniquely) been permitted to act on a notion that ostentation was un-fitting in an image made to celebrate an extremely grand wedding?



Above, Fig. 26: Raphael (but formerly Mino da Fiesole and “sixteenth century Florentine”), *A Young Woman in Profile*, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

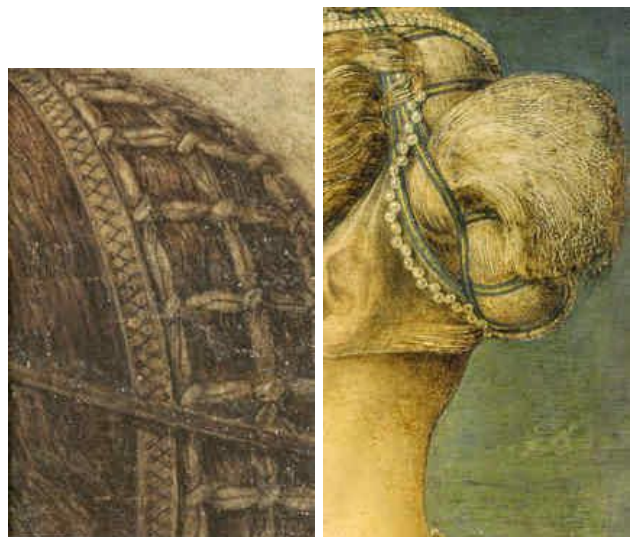
In the 2001-2002 “Virtue and Beauty” catalogue, David Alan Brown says of this (cropped) study of c. 1504 made with chalks and partly reinforced with ink, that it reflects the transforming study Raphael had made of Leonardo. Did the young Raphael really have to show Leonardo, as “La Bella” would suggest, how the lines of drapery might assist a depicted realisation of the forms and posture of a young girl, so as not to conceal them in armadillo-like encasements of implausible costume? Note, in this respect, how beautifully the top edge of the bodice serves to launch the journey across the forms of the upper body, from the breast, over the shoulder, and down and around to the shoulder blade – in precisely the form-describing convention that was seen in the tiny bronze relief (at Fig. 5) a full decade before the claimed date of “La Bella Principessa”.

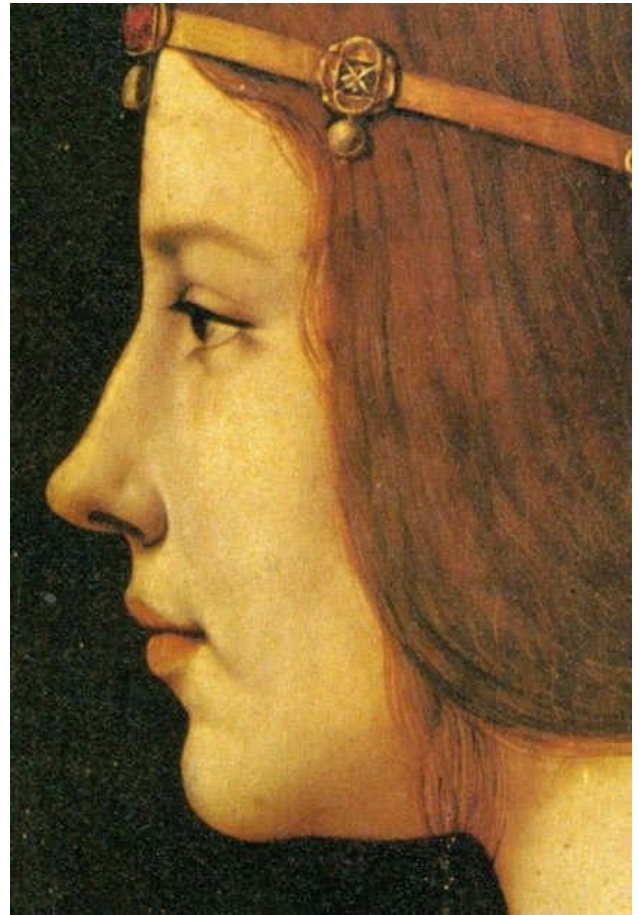


Above Fig. 27: A detail of a painting (Portrait of a Woman, in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan) that is said by Martin Kemp to be by an unknown artist, possibly Lorenzo Costa, and possibly to be a portrait of Anna Sforza.

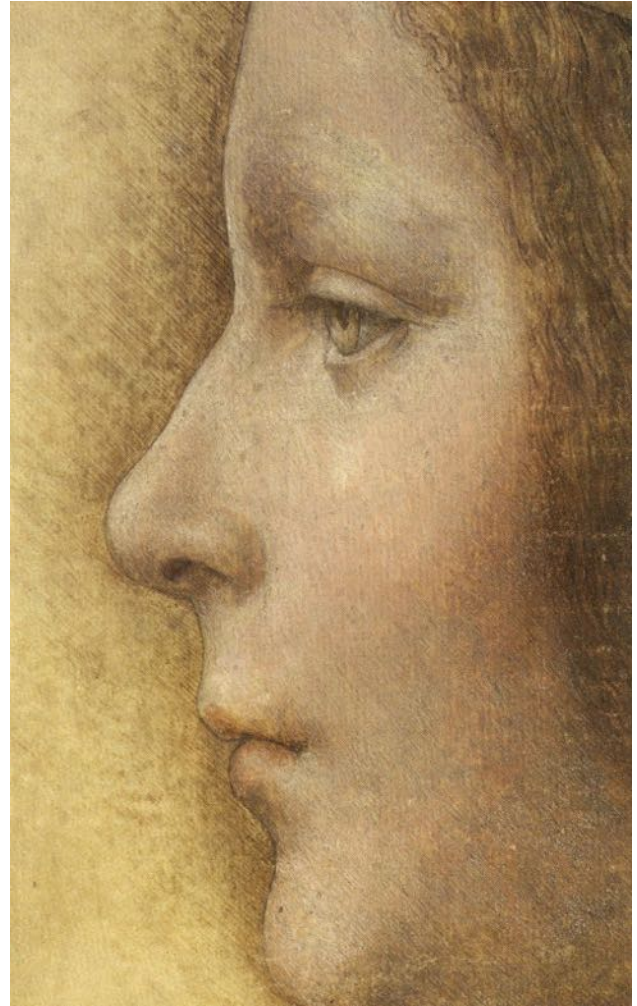
Although Kemp holds that the above portrait “bears a close relationship to ‘La Bella’” and concedes that the subtlety of the profile is greater than that normally found in Leonardo’s followers, he moves it away from Leonardo’s orbit with his suggestion that, although authorship is a puzzle, “it might have been made by an accomplished artist working outside Milan (e.g. Lorenzo Costa)”. On the strength of his own “might have been”, Kemp then feels assured that “this would explain why it it does not fit convincingly into the work of Leonardo or his contemporaries”. But why should it not? He concedes that its knotted ribbons are beautifully characterised. He counter-implies that the hairnet (“caul”) is inferior to that in *La Bella* when the knots in the Milan picture (above) are supremely well realised, being individually perfect with each and every one showing how two pairs of two strands of material produce a knot that is larger than the individual bands of material – unlike the inconsistently sized knots of “*La Bella*” below at Fig. 28a. In any event, more generally, this work has been attributed to Ambrogio da Predis – and sometimes to that artist with Leonardo’s own participation.

Below, Figs. 28a 28b: Left, a detail of *La Bella Principessa*. Right, a detail of Antonio del Pollaiuolo’s *Profile of a Woman*.









*Above, Figs. 29, 30 and 31: Top, a detail of Portrait of a Woman (- as discussed at Fig. 27).*

*Centre, an ink drawn illustration of 1991 by Michael Daley, published in The Independent in celebration of a newly cultivated rose.*

*Above, a detail of "La Bella Principessa".*

**A NOTE ON THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF AN INK DRAWING**





Above, Fig. 32: The former (attributed) van Dyck drawing that was upgraded to Rubens and accepted as his preliminary ink sketch for Rubens' (lost) original *Samson and Delilah* painting. It was sold at Christie's on July 10th for a world record Rubens drawing price of £3,218,500 despite many problems which include:

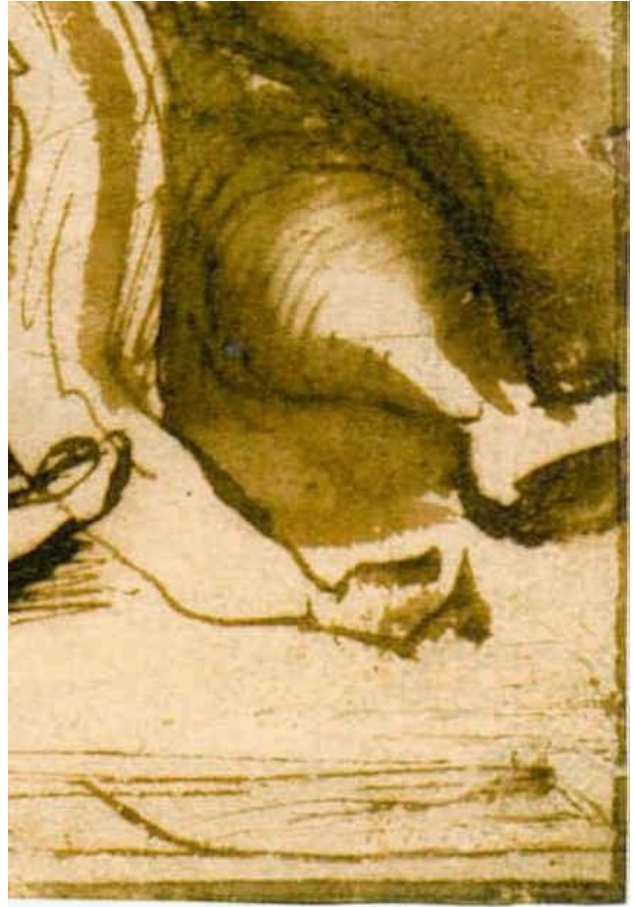
1) It is too poor to be by Rubens. Note Delilah's right arm; note the barber's legs, which are splayed as if in jumping a hurdle; note the barber's left arm where the artist could not decide whether it was to be bare or partially enclosed within a piece of drapery which has no counterpart on the right arm and no connection with any drapery on the torso.

2) It would suggest that Rubens designed the picture to be enclosed within a specific format, the right-hand edge of which would crop Samson's toes in a manner that is not encountered in the original Rubens painting where, as [previously shown](#), Samson's foot was painted whole and set well away from the edge of the painting.

3) It emerged without provenance in 1926 with another un-provenanced "Veronese" drawing that has subsequently fallen. The *Samson and Delilah* drawing emerged shortly before the appearance of the studio work with the cropped foot that is now held by the National Gallery to be the long-lost original Rubens – even though it lacks that painting's original (and twice-recorded) complete foot.

4) None of the presently claimed suite of three *Samson and Delilah* works (the ink sketch, the oil sketch and the finished painting) emerged before the 20th century and none did so as a Rubens. All three were upgraded without any provenance. The ink sketch and the finished painting have lost or concealed backs. The back of the oil sketch is visible but it shows that the panel was made of a (soft) wood found in no Rubens panel. The drawing, as mentioned, has been glued onto a second sheet of paper which covers all but a small corner of the ink sketch's verso. It is, therefore, impossible to learn what might or might not have been on what is presently presented as the back of the ink sketch – but which might originally have been the verso of some other work altogether. It is not possible to see if anything might have been present on the backing sheet because its visible surface has been abraded and its reverse is concealed.

5) The most disturbing feature is the ruled box that bounds and constricts the drawing. It might be thought to be a later box made by a framer prior to mounting, and, therefore, not part of the original drawing. Determining whether or not this was the case is impossible because the sheet of paper was trimmed immediately outside the edges of the ruled box, leaving no way to determine whether the drawing once extended beyond its present confines. Examination of the edges of the sheet produces incongruous and conflicting evidence. In parts, the ruled box appears to have been integral to the drawing itself and must, therefore, have been made before the drawing was laid onto the present second backing sheet. At the same time, parts of the ruled box would seem to have been drawn after the sheet was laid down because some of the ruled lines run over losses on the upper sheet and onto the backing sheet (see Fig. 34 below). Other breaks in the sheet have resulted in misaligned ruling (see below). This is perplexing and concerning: the forger Eric Hebborn has disclosed that pasting a drawing onto a second sheet can be a forger's ruse to prevent any examination of a verso by holding the sheet up to the light (or by placing it on a light box).



*Above, Fig. 33: In this detail of the bottom right-hand corner of the drawing, the vertical edge of the ruled box can be seen to pass over Samson's foot and then over tears in the sheet of paper (and onto the exposed surface of the backing sheet). This would seem to suggest that the drawing had first been cut down through Samson's foot and then pasted onto a backing sheet before the ruled border was made.*



Above, Fig. 34: In this detail of the left-hand edge, a tear to the left and slightly above Delilah's elbow disrupts lines within the drawing but the rule on the left passes over the tears and onto the backing sheet. In other words, the chronology was as follows: 1) the drawing was made; 2) the sheet was injured; 3) the torn sheet was pasted down onto a second sheet; 4) the left hand rule was drawn, passing over both the original sheet and the sheet to which it was attached.



Above, Fig. 35: In this detail from the drawing's bottom edge, the ruled border is seen to be broken in several places as if the sheet had been injured prior to or during pasting. No attempt has been made ink over these broken and mis-aligned sections of border. It is possible that these injuries were made in accord with Hebborn's instructions on the "ageing" of paper: "...Finish this process by rubbing the edge between your thumb and forefinger. This is the time it might be accidentally torn but no more than is necessary to match it with the other edges. You can take a nick out of the two corners with your thumbnail or round them off with the edge of a razor..."

The intended or accidental net result of the treatments and presentation of this drawing is an implicit suggestion that its author had intended the foot to be cropped in exactly the manner found in what is now the National Gallery's painting. At the time this drawing upgraded to Rubens, a studio copy was about to come onto the market as a Honthorst fifty years after it

had been de-accessioned (as a copy) from the Liechtenstein Collection. This painting was swiftly upgraded from Honthorst to Rubens by Ludwig Burchard on the authority of the present ink drawing which Burchard himself had only recently upgraded from van Dyck to Rubens. While the painting had been a “disappeared copy” for half a century, the drawing had no history at all on its emergence.

Thus, Burchard who is now known to have misattributed over sixty works to Rubens, upgraded in close succession both of the works with cropped toes, even though he knew that both of the contemporary copies made after Rubens’ original and long-lost Samson and Delilah painting had shown that Samson’s toes had not been cropped. Institutional attempts by three museums to maintain the credibility of Burchard’s twin Samson and Delilah attributions against challenges have generated poor and self-contradictory scholarship.

Click on the images above for larger versions. NOTE: zooming requires the Adobe Flash Plug-in.

## Chartres Cathedral Make-Work Scheme

A Columbia University trained architectural historian, Martin Filler, has reported (*A Scandalous Makeover at Chartres*) his great shock when visiting Chartres Cathedral to discover that:

“In 2009, amid a rising wave of other refurbishments of medieval buildings, the French Ministry of Culture’s Monuments Historiques division embarked on a drastic, \$18.5 million overhaul of the eight-hundred-year-old cathedral. Though little is specifically known about the church’s original appearance—despite small traces of pigment at many points throughout the interior stonework—the project’s leaders, apparently with the full support of the French state, have set out to do no less than repaint the entire interior in bright whites and garish colors that are intended to return the sanctuary to its medieval state. This sweeping program to ‘reclaim’ Chartres from its allegedly anachronistic gloom is supposed to be completed in 2017.”

Filler (correctly) notes that:

“The belief that a heavy-duty reworking can allow us see the cathedral as its makers did is not only magical thinking but also a foolhardy concept that makes authentic artifacts look fake. To cite only one obvious solecism, the artificial lighting inside the present-day cathedral—which no one has suggested removing—already makes the interiors far brighter than they were during the Middle Ages, and thus we can be sure that the painted walls look nothing like they would have before the advent of electricity.”

At Chartres, although the interior had initially been painted, Filler further notes that:

“...the exact chemical components of the medieval pigments remain unknown. The original paint is thought to have flaked off within a few generations and not been replaced, so for most of the building’s eight-century history it has not been experienced with painted surfaces. The emerging color scheme now allows a direct, and deeply disheartening, before-and-after comparison.”

Shocking though the case is it is no aberration. To the contrary, it is part of a well-established mania for the execution of aggressively radical transformations of world heritage buildings, the most dramatic of which was the notorious so-called restoration of Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling frescoes in the 1980s. In his *New York Review* blog, Martin Filler maintains – despite all criticisms and evidence – that the restoration of Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling did no harm and he declares that “in the opinion of many, myself included, the ultimate emergence of characteristically high-keyed Mannerist colors—acidulous pinks, greens, yellows, and oranges—from beneath the Sistine ceiling’s long-predominant blues and browns confirmed the project’s correctness”. (For the material and historic evidence of injuries published on this site, see [Michelangelo’s disintegrating frescoes](#))

At St Paul’s Cathedral in London, the opposite process to that underway at Chartres was executed. Here, parts of the original painted interior applied by Sir Christopher Wren had survived and their pigments had been analyzed. It was known that Wren had applied three coats of oil paint to produce a uniformly warm not-white, not bare-stone finish. The cathedral’s present architect surveyor, Martin Stancliffe, harboured a modernist infatuation with dazzling white interiors and, accordingly, he stripped St Paul’s of the last vestiges of its original painted interior surfaces. Having done so, he then greatly increased the amount of artificial light to heighten the effects of his own historical falsification. See our accounts:

[Brighter than Right, Part 1: A Modernist Makeover at St Paul’s Cathedral](#)

[Brighter than Right, Part 2: Technical Problems of Protection, Health and Safety at St Paul’s Cathedral](#)

Concern on the repainting of the Chartres Cathedral was first raised in the *Spectator* on 12 May 2012 (*Restoration tragedy ~ Alasdair Palmer questions the ill-conceived makeover of Chartres cathedral which robs us of the sense of passing time that is part of its fascination and mystery*). The contempt for history in Grandiose Conservation Projects is as much a constant as their high costs. Against the estimated \$18.5m at Chartres the whitening at St Paul’s Cathedral (inside and out) cost £40m.

*Self-evidently, major transforming restorations serve substantial vested material and professional purposes. They also take place in economic and cultural climates. The now long-running attempt to create a United States of Europe is an economically and politically failing enterprise. As manufacturing jobs flee the continent and democratically elected governments are replaced by bureaucrats, make-work schemes in the cultural sector are finding great favour as a means to stimulate compensatory economic growth. Not only do such grand and labour intensive restoration schemes make jobs for their duration, they stimulate tourism which is now one of the world's greatest industries.*

*According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (See [the future of tourism](#)), the UN's World Tourism Organisation reckons that, by 2020, the number of travelling tourists will approach 1.6 billion, double the number who packed their bags this year. Those directly employed by tourism worldwide will rise from 238 million this year to 296 million, or one in every 10.8 jobs, by 2018. The USA will build 720,000 new hotel rooms over the next ten years, and a further 432,000 will be built in Asia over the same period. In this respect, we discussed the pressures to create blockbuster exhibitions and increase the velocity of borrowing and lending works of art by disregarding the known risks in two posts in 2011:*

*[Why is the European Commission instructing museums to incur more risks by lending more art?](#)*

*[The European Commission's way of moving works of art around](#)*

*In 2001 we complained of the role being played by heritage bodies in stimulating tourism with recreations of long-lost historic interiors – see:*

*[Applying recreated authenticity to historic buildings in the name of their conservation](#)*

*In addition to boosting tourist revenues, another benefit of major restoration projects is that they continue to make work further work down the line. At Chartres, the interior was untreated for 800 years but its new and speculative livery will rapidly go dingy and need re-doing every twenty or so years. As we have recently seen, within twenty years at the Sistine chapel, urgent restoration measures have been carried out (in part in secret) because Michelangelo's frescoes are physically disintegrating following the destruction-by-restoration of his final coat of secco painting. As for the resulting over-bright "restored" colours, to compensate for their already fading appearance, a new, immensely brighter artificial lighting system (with thousands of LED lights) has been installed. As the great "conservation" merry-go-round goes round, lightening, brightening, physically undermining and aesthetically falsifying, it is becoming increasingly necessary for those concerned for the integrity of our common artistic heritage to join the dots and to "follow the money".*

**M. D. 15 December 2014**



*Above, top: Chartres Cathedral, with repainted vaulting in the choir contrasting with the existing nave and transepts in the foreground, Chartres, France, July 11, 2012*

*Above: The ambulatory of Chartres Cathedral, with repainted vaulting visible (right), July 11, 2012*

*Photographs by courtesy of Hubert Fanthomme/Getty Images. For more photographs and for treatment of statuary, see [Art History News](#)*

**UPDATES: 16 December 2014. The painter and former Rhodes Scholar Edmund Rucinski writes:**

*This even further compounds the damage done during the horrid “restoration” of the stained glass. Instead of doing the proper thing and sandwiching the original glass between protective layers of modern clear glass and re-leading the windows, the original glass was impregnated with some acrylic which filled in all the tiny irregularities that gave the original glass its famous quality.*

*Bear in mind that the leading naturally deteriorates and needs to be re done every so often (like replacing deteriorated stonework).....so none (if any) of the original medieval leading is there anyway.*

*The result of the glass ‘restoration’ was to give the appearance of a garish plastic reproduction of the originals. This impregnation with the offending plastic may never be able to be reversed.*

*Fortunately, I managed to see Chartres before the vile attack on the windows. [See below]*



*For a grossly irresponsible and exploitative treatment of glass from Canterbury Cathedral, see [How the Metropolitan Museum of Art gets hold of the world's most precious and vulnerable treasures](#) viz:*

*“An exhibition of stained glass that has been removed from “England’s historic Canterbury Cathedral” has arrived at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, after being shown at the Getty Museum in California. The show (“Radiant Light: Stained Glass from Canterbury Cathedral at the Cloisters”) is comprised of six whole windows from the clerestory of the cathedral’s choir, east transepts, and Trinity Chapel. These single monumental seated figures anticipate in their grandeur and gravity the prophets depicted by Michelangelo on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. They are the only surviving parts of an original cycle of eighty-six ancestors of Christ, once one of the most comprehensive stained-glass cycles known in art history.”*



## *A New Threat to the Warburg Institute*

*It had looked in light of a recent High Court judgement as if the future of the Warburg Institute's survival as an uniquely valuable and internationally cherished autonomous body had been secured. Big Institutions, however, can prove bad losers and capable of behaving thuggishly and, sadly, the University of London would seem to be one such.*

*We have received the following disturbing note from Professor Margaret McGowan, the Chair of the Warburg's Advisory Council.*

*"I am writing again to keep you abreast of matters relating to the recent court judgment. The Advisory Council of the Institute met last week and agreed that an open letter should be sent to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the University of London, Sir Richard Dearlove, inviting the University not to submit an appeal but to join the Institute in seeking mediation to agree ways to implement the terms of the judgment.*

*That letter was sent to Sir Richard today and a copy is attached for your information. We will also be posting a copy on the Institute website and hope that our many supporters will feel able to help us in raising the profile of our position and to encourage the Board of Trustees of the University to resolve the dispute through negotiation.*

*With our very warm thanks for all your support and for your continued interest in the Warburg Institute and our efforts to secure its long term future."*

*The (19 November) Letter to Sir Richard Dearlove KCMG OBE, the Chair of Trustees at the University of London, reads as follows:*

*"Dear Sir Richard*

*We are writing this open letter to you in the sincere hope that we can work together to resolve the long-standing dispute with the University concerning the Warburg Institute and its trust deed.*

*We are sure that you and your colleagues have been as greatly touched as we have been, by the outpouring of support and affection for the Institute over the last few months. Now that judgment has been handed down in the recent litigation, the parties have an opportunity finally to end the dispute and agree a way to deal with matters in the future.*

*In the context of respecting the terms of the trust deed and judgment, we see no reason why we cannot settle matters once and for all, and to that end we would like to extend an invitation to you to join us in a mediation in the near future to agree ways to implement the terms of the judgment. It may not be an easy process, and there are undoubtedly strong feelings on both sides (and amongst our supporters), but if we all commit to participate in sensible, good faith discussions, we dare to believe that it can be accomplished.*

*In making this public approach, we are motivated by our desire to secure the long-term future of the Institute as a fully cooperative and viable unit (as defined by the trust deed) within the University of London. We are mindful of our many thousands of supporters who have openly demonstrated the esteem in which the Institute is held, not only in the UK but worldwide; we feel that the eyes of the world are on us, and on the University, at this time.*

*When the judgment was handed down we declared, through our press release, that we were very satisfied with its essential findings. The University's press release made a similar declaration. That the judgment should be welcomed by both sides seemed to augur well, so far as the amicable and constructive settlement of any remaining disagreements was concerned.*

*And yet, at the same time, the University's lawyers sought leave to appeal against the judgment. This development contrasts with the statement by the Vice-Chancellor of the University, quoted in the press release, which regretted that the matter had gone to court at all, and observed that 'the financial and opportunity cost' to the University had been 'serious'. Similarly, in a blog article posted on the Times Higher Education website on 25 October 2014, the Chief Operating Officer of the University, Chris Cobb, noted that "Legal fees have been eye-watering, diverting valuable resources that could otherwise have been used to fund research and teaching." We understand, from Mr Cobb's statement, that the University uses funds for its legal costs that could otherwise be used to further the University's primary charitable purposes in the field of education and research, and we very much regret this.*

*We also consider that prolonging the legal action could only exacerbate whatever damage may have been done, during the course of this dispute, to the University's reputation. And we believe that both the Warburg Institute and the University would be harmed by subjecting both to another long period of uncertainty in these matters.*

*For all these reasons we very much hope that you and the Board of Trustees will decide not to exercise the right of appeal. Instead, we hope that you will agree to our proposal of mediation, and we look forward to discussing suitable mediators with you. The use of a mediator should make possible the resolution of any remaining disagreements in a constructive spirit, and certainly in a way that was less costly, less time-consuming and altogether less damaging to both sides than a return to the courts.*

*In the University's press release the Vice-Chancellor was quoted as saying: "Now, we must look forward, and get back to the task of supporting this unique institute and the academic community who value it so highly." We very much hope that the University will now act in the spirit of that very positive and encouraging statement. For our part, it is our view that the "battle" Mr Cobb referred to in his blog ought to stop, and that includes accepting the judgment and beginning to work constructively with us.*

*So, for the good of the Warburg Institute, the University of London, and all those worldwide who care so deeply about the Institute's future, we hope that you will on reflection decide not to submit an appeal, but instead to accept our proposal, the underlying aim of which is to secure the Institute's future so that it can prosper and grow under the University's continued trusteeship.*

*We look forward to receiving your response at the earliest opportunity.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Professor Margaret M. McGowan*

*Chair, Warburg Institute Advisory Council"*

**20th November 2014. Michael Daley**

## *Michelangelo's disintegrating frescoes*

*As we predicted at the time of the last restoration of the Sistine chapel ceiling, by removing all of the glue-painting applied by Michelangelo to finish off and heighten the effects of his frescoes, the Vatican's restorers exposed the bare fresco remains for the first time in their history to new dangers from the atmospheric pollution that is exacerbated by huge numbers of paying visitors.*

*Then, 2 million visitors entered the chapel every year. Now, that figure is 6 million. The Vatican has been carrying out secret attempts to remove disfiguring calcium deposits building up over the remains of Michelangelo's painting. These deposits are caused when moisture given off by tourists and air-borne pollutants are absorbed by the plaster. This now-acknowledged process will also activate, as we specifically contended, the remnants of the cleaning agents (sodium and ammonia) that were washed into the frescoes during the rinse cycles of their last so-called restoration and conservation treatments. At the time, the use of the ferociously aggressive cleaning agent AB 57 was justified by the Vatican on the grounds that it was necessary to remove, among other things... ordinary solvent-resistant calcium deposits that had built up over the centuries in parts of the ceiling exposed to leaks in the roof.*

*Then, the Vatican promised that special air-conditioning systems would protect the newly exposed fresco surfaces in perpetuity. That system had failed even before the Vatican recently celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the end of the last restorations of Michelangelo's paintings. Today, as the new physical threat is seen to be turning the frescoes white, the Vatican promises new, improved air conditioning units (from the same firm). To counter the new pale appearance, the Vatican recently installed thousands of LED lights, each individually attuned to heighten the colours in Michelangelo's painting. Michelangelo's now twice-injured painting has been left a colourised but still lucrative wreck – and an EU-funded (EUR 867 000) showcase ("This made the Vatican City's Sistine Chapel the ideal venue for LED4ART") for a company that shows in its advertisements that it has no idea what the Sistine Chapel looks like.*

*We said at the time that the restoration constituted a crime against art. Now, the Vatican promises to limit the numbers of visitors inside the chapel to 2,000 at any one time. But that means allowing a crowd as big as a full capacity audience at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, London, to pack into the small chapel all day long. The Vatican's administrators – who have known of the present problems since 2010 – now concede that the glue coatings (that were in truth Michelangelo's own final painted adjustments) had served as a protective barrier against all air-borne pollutants. The tills will continue to ring. Art lovers remain weeping. Shame on the Vatican's administrators.*

*For our previous coverage, see:*

*Misreading Visual Evidence – No 2: Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel Ceiling;*

*The Sistine Chapel Restorations: Part I – Setting the Scene, Packing Them In;*

*The Sistine Chapel Restorations, Part II: How to Take a Michelangelo Sibly Apart, from Top to Toes;*

*The Sistine Chapel Restorations, Part II – CODA: The Remarkable Responses to Our Evidence of Injuries; and Thomas Hoving's Rant of Denial;*

*The Sistine Chapel Restorations, Part III: Cutting Michelangelo Down to Size;*

*The Twilight of a God: Virtual Reality in the Vatican;*

*Sistina Progress and Tate Transgressions;*

*ArtWatch Stock-taking and the Sistine Chapel Conservation Debacle;*

*Coming to Life: Frankenweenie – A Black and White Michelangelo for Our Times*

**11th November 2014. Michael Daley**



UPDATE: 16 November 2014

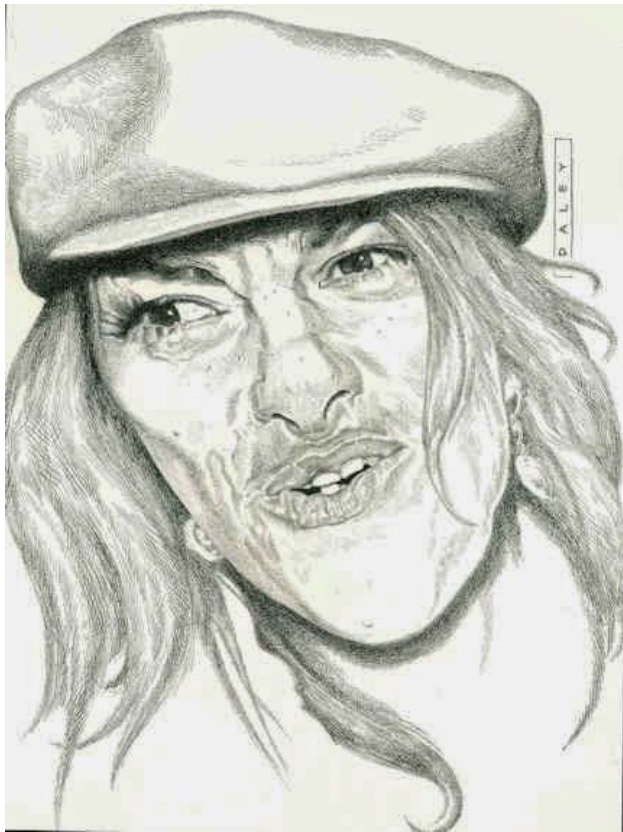
While the Vatican now admits the hitherto concealed fact of the damage that is being caused to Michelangelo's frescoes by the massive increase of tourist numbers, it remains in denial about the destruction during the last restoration of the final a secco adjustments that Michelangelo had made to those frescoes. That autograph last-stage painting – which was observed and described with perfect, detailed clarity by the painter Charles Heath Wilson in the 1881 (second) edition of his book *Life and Works of Michelangelo Buonarroti* – is characterised, preposterously, and against the evidence of all contemporary and subsequent copies of the Sistine ceiling, as consisting of “centuries of built-up candle wax, dirt and smoke”, as if such substances might somehow have disported themselves along the lines of Michelangelo's design so as to reinforce his modelling and depict shadows cast by his figures. This latest apologia is carried in an Associated Press article “[Sistine Chapel frescoes turning white ~ Humidity, tourists' CO2 to blame](#)”.

A paperback facsimile of a 1923 edition of Wilson's milestone book (in which he describes his close examination of the ceiling on a special portable scaffold) [is now available](#). It is time for the Vatican to acknowledge that Michelangelo had indeed finished his frescoes with secco painting, and that its curators, restorers and conservation scientists had blundered badly and inexplicably when, having judged Michelangelo's specific, purposive pictorial enhancements and modifications to be nothing other than arbitrary accumulations of polluting material, removed it – and, thereby, exposed the lime plaster surfaces of the frescoes to their present dangers. That initial error and the subsequent falsification of art history that was made on its back, have both now been maintained for two decades.

## Jonathan Jones over-heats, again

Jonathan Jones, the Guardian's visual art blogger, has taken a second swipe at ArtWatch UK (- he was livid some years ago when leading scholars and conservators in Poland appealed to this organisation for support – [An Appeal from Poland](#).) His viciousness then seemed bizarre – see [Response to Attack](#).

Now, we are just collateral damage, caught in his (very, very) cross wires for having been cited by one of Fleet Street's funniest (and most trenchant) critics, Quentin Letts, who had observed in his review (“[Tracey Emin's vulgar show proves the art luvvies are dragging civilisation backwards](#)”) of Tracey Emin's current exhibition, that: “The art critic of *The Guardian* almost self-immolated, he was so hot for this show. He called it ‘eerie, poetic and beautiful’, and ‘a masterclass in how to use traditional artistic skills in the 21st century’.” That, in our view, was a fair and moderate account of Jones's own, over-heating review: “[Tracey Emin: The Last Great Adventure is You review – a lesson in how to be a real artist](#)”. Jones may be in thrall to the talents of the Royal Academy's former, short-lived [not current, Ed., 26 Oct.] Professor of Drawing – to the point, even, of likening her to Michelangelo. I (as an alumnus of the Royal Academy Schools, as it happens), am not and would not. Words are Jones' currency. Drawings are mine. He talks about drawing. I do it. Each to his own? – **Michael Daley**





*"And three more descriptions I couldn't resist sharing: 'Framed blue meditations on the human body', 'Flowing and pooling lines of gouache define form with real authority' and 'The rough, unfinished suggestiveness of her style evokes pain, suffering, and solitude'. I agree with the pain and suffering.*

*"I have loved the skill of artists who draw beautifully ever since I was a small boy. In my professional life, I have had the pleasure of commissioning very many great people. So, it was baffling for me when Emin was appointed 'Professor' of Drawing at the Royal Academy a few years back. Emin has said she'd never learnt to draw. But the RA still went ahead with the appointment. In a recent Guardian web chat, she said: 'They sacked me.' I wonder why?"*

#### COMMENTS:

October 26th 2014 ~ The sculptor and draughtsman Michael Sandle responds:

*I read Monsieur Jones's review of Tracey's show – I thought I'd better go to the Bermondsey White Cube and see if there was something I wasn't getting.*

*There is indeed a "bat-squeak" of emotion to be felt in her work – which I suppose is positive compared to the sterility of much Contemporary "art". But the sketches – not really drawings as I understand it – are very definitely formulaic. They are not based on "looking" and she could do them in her sleep. To compare her with Michelangelo is worse than stupid it because it shows a profound ignorance. The poor man doesn't understand that there is something known as "High Art". Her little bronzes are like doodles in clay – they have, I suppose, an "innocence" which, considering the effort (including anatomical dissection) that Michelangelo undertook to master his craft, means it is extraordinarily difficult to see any connection whatsoever. Her problem is, that like that of a lot of people who can't really draw, she can't see "shape" – if you can't see "shape" you can't draw, it's as simple as that. If Jones' comments had any truth it would mean that we are "dumbed-down" beyond hope i.e. "f\*\*\*\*\*" – which I actually think we are.*

**Michael Sandle, R.A.**

October 27th 2014 ~ The painter and critic William Packer (and art critic of the FT from 1974 to 2004) writes:

*I remember a particular moment in the life room when I was a student: the tutor looked over my shoulder and remarked that I had not drawn the feet. "No", I said, "I wasn't really interested in the feet." "Hmmm", he replied, "difficult, aren't they", and strolled off. I could have hit him, but of course he was right, and I've never forgotten, either him or the feet, since.*

**William Packer**

October 27th 2014 ~ The painter Thomas Torak writes:

*I find Tracey Emin, herself, her artistic endeavours and her sex life, profoundly uninteresting. If there were anything in her work that was worthy of criticism I would happily do so. To quote Abraham Lincoln "People who like this sort of thing will find this is the sort of thing they like." As for Mr. Jones's review, well, let me just say if I were to have dinner with someone who made a favourable comparison of the work of Ms. Emin to that of Michelangelo I would not let him pick the restaurant.*

**Thomas Torak**

October 28th 2014 ~ **Who wrote:**

*"Art criticism has become too fawning – time for a best hatchet job award?"*

*"Jenny Saville? A heroic mediocrity. Tracey Emin? Outshone by your average newspaper cartoonist. And art critics, like their literary counterparts, should be encouraged to say so"*

*...and the answer is:*

**JONATHAN JONES**, on 9 January 2013, in the *Guardian*.

## Art's Toxic Assets and a Crisis of Connoisseurship



*"Buy land", Mark Twain advised, "they're not making it anymore". This logic ought to apply to the old masters but does not. Land makes sound investment not only because of its scarcity and its potential for development but because, in law-abiding societies, it comes fixed with legally defensible boundaries. Karl Marx, plundering English classical economists, held that all value is unlocked by human labour – but all labour does not generate equal values. In given periods and places all painters work pretty much with the same materials but their artistic transformations of those materials are various and unequal in accomplishment and merit. Such differences drive reputations and hence the market value of artists' works but they do so in ways that are intrinsically problematic.*

*Artists' reputations may or may not endure. With many surviving works the identities of authors are either not securely established or entirely unknown. In such cases paintings are appraised and then attributed to particular artists or schools. Attributions, however, are neither guaranteed*

*nor immutable. They are made on mixtures of professional judgement, artistic appraisal, art critical conjecture and, sometimes, wishful thinking or deceiving intent. They remain open to revision, challenge, manipulation or abuse. The experts who make attributions exist in professional rivalry with one another (sometimes with vehemence) and while their disagreements are signs of art critical health, a consequence is that legal guarantees for attributions are untenable and non-existent, as some buyers later discover to their costs. Buyers are advised in the small print to beware and to proceed on their own judgement. With art, as we recently pointed out (see **Endnote 1**) it can be safer to buy a second-hand car than an old master painting (- and few people would dream of buying a house without legal searches and a structural survey.)*

### “Scientific” red herrings

*In recent years attempts have been made to impart quasi-legal assurances to attributions by appealing to the authority of supposedly “scientifically verifiable” technical proofs. The exercise is vain and, technically, philistine: by its very nature, art is not reducible to scientifically quantifiable component parts. The technical evidence cult reflects a collapse of confidence in powers of connoisseurship on the one hand and a grab for cultural and institutional power by technocrats and bureaucrats on the other. The new hybrid discipline “Technical Art History” in which restorers, conservation scientists and curators pool expertises in attempt to arrive at professionally impregnable positions, has proved pernicious. Art-politically, this united front seeks to neutralise all charges of art critical and methodological failure with professional mystification and displacement activities – by fostering a “closed-shop” mentality and claiming that its mysteries are beyond the reach of any outsiders [2]. The new technocrats insufficiently appreciate that paintings are no more and no less than the products of artists who, working by brain, eye and hand, fix values and the relationships between values so as to produce specific and unique artistic effects that can be comprehended by others using eyes and minds in response. In the visual arts the visual should remain paramount – what you see is what it is about. Art loving viewers and professional art experts alike might be said to have duties of appropriate response to art itself and not to its shadows and encumbrances. It is the optically perceived quality of artists’ artefacts that drives reputations and market values. Understanding art is not the same thing as poking and poring over the component parts of its fabric – let alone presuming, as “restorers” (or now, “conservators”) perpetually do, to undo and redo its features at regular intervals. What matters is what you see, not what might be said or thought to lie under the surface.*

### Managing lapses of connoisseurship

*This is not, of course, to say that technical examinations can serve no purposes. Rather, it is to say that in matters of art attribution and appreciation technical examinations of the physical composition of works might supplement informed visual appraisals but they cannot stand in lieu of them. Nor can the supposedly disinterested and neutral character of technical examinations themselves be taken at face value. In practice, with every technical investigation and its resulting “findings”, someone, some institution, some interest group, has commissioned/conducted the exercise and controlled its dissemination. Paintings in powerful institutionally-protected locations (particularly major museum) can be afforded dispensations from otherwise injurious findings [2]. It sometimes seems that just as banks are now too big to be allowed to fail, so big museum attributions cannot be allowed to fall, whatever evidence and arguments accumulate against them [3], for fear of undermining public, political and*



Above, Fig. 1: A chalk drawing that originated with the firm R.W.P. de Vries of Amsterdam in 1929 and sold as a Veronese for 750 florins (guilders) or some €6,801.91 at today's exchanges.

Below, Fig. 2: An ink and wash drawing that originated with the firm R.W.P. de Vries of Amsterdam in 1926 and sold the following year as a van Dyck for 26 florins (guilders), or some €235.80 at today's exchanges



*art market confidence.*

## *Follow the money and look at the drawings*

Concerning the frequency of art world upgrades, it would seem easier to grow old master drawings than paintings. Where only 250 sheets of drawings were attributed to Michelangelo in the 1960s, today that oeuvre has been expanded to over 600 sheets. Although drawings do not command the high prices of paintings they can greatly assist their attributions. In the late 1920s a firm of antiquarian dealers in Holland, R.W.P. de Vries of Amsterdam, sold a number of old master drawings some of which have ended in museums, and two of which concern us here (Figs. 1 and 2). Neither of these had a provenance (i.e. a proven history of previous ownership). Both had simply materialised in the dealers' hands with old master attributions. The first sold in 1927 for 26 florins (guilders), some € 235.80 at today's values. The second sold two years later for 750 florins, some €6,801.91 today. The first was attributed to van Dyck, the second to Veronese. Neither attribution survived and the original perplexing ratio of value between them (which approached thirty to one) has reversed dramatically.

The Veronese attribution crashed in 1984 when Richard Cocke published his catalogue raisonné *Veronese's Drawings* and dismissed the drawing with the single (apt) sentence: "The heavy forceful cross-hatching in the drapery and the forms of the head and hands have nothing to do with Veronese." That drawing sold in 1991 at Christie's for £7,000 as "attributed to Agostino Carracci". In contrast, the former van Dyck drawing morphed into the work that sold at Christie's on July 10th as an autograph Rubens ink sketch for a world record Rubens drawing price of £3,218,500. The former "van Dyck" has thus enjoyed a 14,000-fold increase of value since 1927.

The extraordinary success of the van Dyck that is now a Rubens was due only in part to Christie's masterful promotion. It was very much on the strength of its current art-historical position that the drawing was drum-rolled as the starred lot in a sale of part of the prestigious I. Q. van Regteren Altena drawings collection. Most helpfully of all, the drawing was precisely characterised as Rubens's "first thought" preparatory ink sketch for the National Gallery's *Samson and Delilah* painting (Fig. 4). Notwithstanding its anomalous traits (see our previous post), its artistic shortcomings and its dubious provenance, the drawing remains bolstered by its crucial allotted role in a sequence of three *Samson and Delilahs*, two of which have been acquired by museums (Figs. 3 & 4). Although Christie's July 10 sale realised more than twice its highest estimates and broke many records for individual artists, only one of the top ten works went to an art gallery or museum. Two were sold on to the trade. Seven, including the *Samson and Delilah* drawing, went to anonymous individuals.

## *Making four Rubens's*

Christie's catalogue entry burnishes the drawing's pedigree with upbeat optimism. It is said for example: "When I. Q. van Regteren Altena bought the drawing in 1927, he listed it in his inventory under its traditional attribution to Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). That attribution also accounts for an earlier owner's inscription of the letters 'V.D.' in the lower left corner." What traditional attribution? Which earlier owners? Christie's account of the provenance begins: "with R.W.P. de Vries Amsterdam; from whom purchased by I.Q. van Regteren Altena on 20 December 1927 for 26 guilders ('387.t. A. v. Dijck. Samson & Delilah')".



Above, top, Fig. 2: The ink and wash drawing sold on 10 July 2014 as a preliminary ink sketch for Rubens' *Samson and Delilah* painting.

Above, middle, Fig. 3: An oil painting on panel that sold at Christie's for £24,000 in 1966 as Rubens' oil sketch (or modello) for what is now the National Gallery's *Samson and Delilah* painting.

Above, Fig. 4: The oil painting on panel sold for £2.53m at Christie's in 1980 to the National Gallery as Rubens' original *Samson and Delilah*.

The three works above are claimed to comprise an entirely autograph suite of successive stages of Rubens' treatment of *Samson and Delilah*.

And that is all. There had been no previous owners and no evidence exists of any “traditional” reception as a van Dyck – or anything. Any suppositions aside, all that can safely be said is that this drawing emerged from nowhere at a time when forgery was rife and the art world suffered from what Bernard Berenson [!] described as “the universal tendency to ascribe a given work of art to the greatest artist to whom wishful thinking and excited imagination can ascribe it.” (“Essays in Appreciation”, 1958, p. 95.)

Christie’s entry continues: “With the emergence of the finished painting and the connected oil sketch the drawing’s significance rapidly became apparent.” There was no rapidity and the claimed significance is mythic. The supposed second stage oil sketch or modello did not appear until 1966. The claim that, “The picture of Samson and Delilah was only rediscovered in 1929”, also misleads. The painting was not “rediscovered” as a Rubens. It had never been a Rubens. When it appeared in 1929 it was, just like the ink drawing three years earlier, without provenance and it was not judged a Rubens by its German dealers, Van Diemen and Benedict, who were offering it as a Honthorst. It was later upgraded to Rubens in a certificate of authenticity by Dr Ludwig Burchard and it then sold in 1930 to August Neuburg, a German tobacco magnate.

Burchard was a leading Rubens scholar, but today his attributions have a notoriously poor record [4]. Far from the ink drawing being corroborated as a first stage sketch by the arrival of the painting, Burchard had upgraded the painting on the authority of the drawing which he had himself upgraded to Rubens in 1926. In Christie’s catalogue the drawing’s “Literature” begins with Burchard’s attribution: “L. Burchard, ‘Die Skizzen des jungen Rubens’ in Sitzungsberichte der Kunstgeschichtlichen Gesellschaft, Berlin, 8 October 1926, p. 30, no. 2.” At that date no one had previously owned or discussed the work. Burchard thus upgraded a drawing that had never been exhibited and was in a dealer’s hands without any provenance. Notwithstanding his claims on behalf of the drawing, in 1927 both the dealer selling and the collector buying still held it to be a van Dyck.

When the modello eventually appeared in 1966 it had no provenance. Its history consisted of a hearsay account (from the anonymous lady vendor) of an ancestor said to have bought the work for a few shillings in an antique shop in York during the 1930s because she liked the frame. This supposed Rubens oil sketch had been painted on a support that is found in none of the artist’s oil sketches – on a soft, conifer wood, not on his customary oak panel. Its appearance was, for a Rubens oil sketch, disturbingly close in design and effects to those of both the ink drawing and the finished painting (see Figs. 2, 3 and 4). Its arrival completed an unicum in Rubens’ oeuvre: a suite of stages of work without evidence of development. Notwithstanding that problem, the modello on the wrong wood was given to Rubens by Christie’s themselves, to join the company of a panel painting whose back, it later emerged, had disappeared in an operation for which no one acknowledged responsibility, and a drawing whose back was concealed by being pasted onto a second sheet even though it bore drawing itself. The modello sold to a London gallery for £24,000, going to a private collector before passing through Agnews to the Cincinnati Art Museum in 1972. The last of the trio to emerge, this technically problematic work-without-provenance was the first to achieve museum status. At some point, pieces of wood were removed from its sides (creating a closer compositional alignment with what is now the National Gallery painting) and, at another, the Cincinnati museum claimed the panel to be oak. Presently the wood is not identified, the work being described as on “panel”.



Above, top, Fig. 5: An engraved copy (here as a mirror image) made in c. 1611-14 of Rubens’ (now lost) original Samson and Delilah painting.

Above, Fig. 6: A detail of a painting (made before 1640) by Frans Francken of the original Rubens Samson and Delilah as it was displayed in the home of his friend and patron Nicolaas Rockox. This painting and the engraving above both show that Samson’s right foot was originally intact and set comfortably away from the edge of the painting.

## Why? Why? Why? Delilah?

In July 1980, the supposed third stage, the *Samson and Delilah* painting, was sold by Neurburg's heirs through Christie's to Agnews, acting on behalf of the National Gallery, for a then Rubens world record price of £2.53m. In 2002, with two parts of the *Samson and Delilah* trio now secure in museums and the third in a respected private collection, Sotheby's sold a painting, *The Massacre of the Innocents* (see Fig. 13), as an autograph Rubens on the back of its perceived shared characteristics and collections history with the National Gallery's *Samson and Delilah* for £49.5m, to Lord (Kenneth) Thompson. Even though those paintings are riddled with problems (see "Is this really a Rubens?" Michael Daley, *Art Review*, July/August 1997, and "Is this a Rubens?" Michael Daley, *Jackdaw*, October 2002), and the *Samson and Delilah* had been challenged for over a decade [5], the price was an outright old masters' world record. Thompson loaned the *Massacre* to the National Gallery and then bequeathed it to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, thereby making it publicly available and greatly enhancing its pedigree. Thus, today, three high valued well-placed but individually problematic museum Rubens's owe their positions to a belated acceptance of Burchard's initial attribution of what is still a privately (but now anonymously) owned ink drawing.

## Who cut Samson's toes?

The reason why all of these subsequent Rubens upgrades rest on the authority of this ink drawing is because of a glaringly anomalous feature in the National Gallery painting – the fact that the toes of Samson's right foot are cropped by the edge of the picture. This was not because the panel had been trimmed at some point. Rather, it is because the painting simply stops disturbingly, inexplicably, at the beginning of the toes. Thus, without the drawing's seeming testimony that Rubens had planned to crop Samson's toes by cropping his own initial design within a precisely drawn ruled box that anticipated (even before he had executed an oil sketch) the final format of what is now the National Gallery painting, that painting could never have been attributed to him. This is so for reasons that are implicit in Burchard's 1930 certificate of authenticity. It read:

"The photographed painting on the other page is one of Peter Paul Rubens' major works from the time of the master's return from Italy. It must have been painted in 1609 or 1610. With Rubens' agreement, Jacob Matham reproduced the painting with a copper engraving around 1615. As witnessed by the inscription of the painting, the picture at that time was in the possession of Antwerp mayor Nicolas Rockox. Indeed, the inventory of Nic. Rockox' estate, dated 19 Dec. 1640, lists the picture as "Eene schilderne... (Annales de l'Academie d'Archaeologie de Belgique, Anvers 1881, p. 437). On pp. 143-44 in vol. I of 1886, the five-volume catalogue of Rubens' work by Max Rooses, the painting is described in detail as number 115, based on the Matham engraving and mentioning the Rockox inventory. The picture itself remained as unknown to Rooses as to all literature since. It is further notable that a picture of an interior by Frans Francken (Pinakothek Munchen No 720), which appeared to be of mayor Rockox's living room, showing the painting in pride of place above the mantelpiece, while in an adjoining room is the picture of the "Doubting Thomas" which we know Rubens painted for Rockox. According to S. Hartveld of Antwerp, the room with the mantelpiece exists even today in the Kaiserstraat in Antwerp where Frau Gruter-Van der Linden now lives in the Rockox house. A sketch for the *Samson* picture (pen, varnished, 16.4 x 16.2) is in Amsterdam in the collection of Mr J.Q. Regteren, Altena. The picture is in a remarkably good state of preservation, with even the back of the panel in its original condition." [By courtesy of the National Gallery



Above, top, Fig. 7: A larger detail of Frans Francken's c. 1630-35 oil painting *A Feast* in the House of Nicolaas Rockox, showing the original Rubens *Samson and Delilah* in pride of place in Rockox's home.

Above, Fig. 8: The National Gallery Rubens' *Samson and Delilah* when on loan in 2007 to what is now the Rockoxhuis museum, Antwerp.

Archives Department.]

Note, even as Burchard asserts that this is the original painting of the subject that Rubens is known to have made shortly after 1608, he acknowledges that the original painting itself had universally been understood to have been lost since 1641. (To this day, despite detailed and sustained searches, nothing connects the present version to the original painting.) Crucially, Burchard also acknowledges that the appearance of the original Samson and Delilah had been recorded in two contemporary copies, one of which had been supervised by Rubens. Both of these copies by two artists who likely worked decades apart, testify that Samson's original right foot had not been (improbably) cropped at the toes, as in the National Gallery version, but had originally been painted intact and set comfortably inside the composition and consistently with the artist's known manner. See, for example, the almost contemporary, probably pendant (and near mirror-image compositional group) Cimon and Pero – "Roman Charity", at Fig. 9.

### A perplexing silence

It was in defiance of such hard historical testimony that Burchard claimed his own upgraded ink drawing to be not only by Rubens but, specifically, to be his preliminary sketch for the former Honthorst painting that is now in the National Gallery. When attributing that painting to Rubens Burchard executed a sleight of hand by implying but not stating that the ink drawing (which had only recently been sold as a van Dyck) was by Rubens. The truth is this ink drawing from nowhere and without-history had needed to exist if the Berlin Honthorst were to be presented remotely credibly as a Rubens. Had Burchard sincerely believed that the cropped-foot drawing was Rubens' original ink sketch, he would have felt himself the agent of a remarkable double art historical coup: first, for having identified a famous masterpiece that had been lost for 289 years; second, for having further established that both of the contemporary copies of that original Rubens' painting (through which it had been known for centuries), had been compositionally misleading in identical manners.

Conspicuously, Burchard trumpeted neither of these "discoveries" [6]. His diffidence contrasts markedly with the reaction of the day's leading Vermeer scholar, Dr. Abraham Bredius, who believed in 1937 that he had found an unknown Vermeer (in what was the first of a stream of Han van Meegeren fakes). Firstly, Bredius' certificate of authenticity was ecstatically and unreservedly fulsome: "...I found it hard to contain my emotions when this masterpiece was first shown to me and many will feel the same who have the privilege of beholding it. Composition, expression, colour – all combine to an unity of the highest art, the highest beauty". Secondly, he rushed news of his discovery onto the scholarly record via the Burlington Magazine ("A New Vermeer", November 1937).

If Bredius betrayed credulousness as an eighty-two year old scholar, what of Burchard's manoeuvres as a forty-four year old at the peak of his powers? It can only be said that suspicions are in order. When, shortly after the First World War, the great German scholar, Wilhelm von Bode, was reproached for having certificated an implausible Petrus Christus, he replied, "You don't understand the intricacies of the German language. After a brief description of the subject I say 'I have never seen a Petrus Christus like this!'" (- "The Partnership", Colin Simpson, 1987, p. 240). One must suspect that Burchard's twinned and circular Rubens attributions were made sotto voce out of fear that his "attributorial" heist might be exposed by anyone with an alert eye who appreciated that it is surprisingly common for later copies of original works to be cruder compositionally cut-down and abridged versions – and who would,



Above, top, Fig. 9: Rubens' painting Cimon and Pero – "Roman Charity" of 1611-13 (here as a mirror image) in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

Above, Fig. 10: The National Gallery Samson and Delilah painting.

Comparison of the two works shows in the former, the exceptional grace, composure of design and warmth of colouring for which the artist is revered, while the latter asserts an uncharacteristic stridency that required the National Gallery to posit a "special-but-brief" stylistic Rubens interlude.



therefore, recognise the “Honthorst” as a prime member of that type.

We have found that not only are such insensitively truncated pictures frequently encountered (in Rubens twice-over with the Samson and Delilah and the Ontario Massacre, and in artists like Leonardo, Raphael, Caravaggio and Annibale Carracci – see opposite) but, also, that with a little effort they can in almost every instance be shown to post-date the superior models and prototypes from which they derive. As shown opposite, in copyists’ hands, no part of an original composition can be considered sacrosanct. As well as toes, dogs’ noses and cupids’ wings, even portions of dead infants have been cropped to fit pre-existing images to new supports and formats. Mistaking a copy for an absent original is one thing. Disregarding clear and contrary historical evidence, as Burchard would seem to have done, is another altogether. Knowingly elevating adulterated versions to a master’s oeuvre pollutes the well of scholarship and ultimately threatens the credibility of the field.

Such lapses of critical judgement are as common in appraisals of restorations as they are in the making of attributions. How much or little of an original surface has survived the vicissitudes of time and “conservators’ attentions might seem a lesser matter but it is not. Professional art critical failures to spot the tell-tale differences between autograph and studio works are the twins of failures to recognise restoration-induced injuries. The differences of states within individual works can be as pronounced as the differences between autograph and studio works (see Figs. 28a, 28b, 29 and 30). Failures of judgement in both areas are frequently found in even the most high-ranking individual scholars.

## Making two Caravaggios in one decade

Within little more than a decade the late Sir Denis Mahon upgraded two pictures to autograph Caravaggio status. This might seem unremarkable given that Mahon was a prolific finder/maker of old masters. What is remarkable is that he did so with two versions (of more than a dozen) of the same painting – Caravaggio’s *The Taking of Christ*. This Caravaggio survives in two formats, one being a truncated version of the other. Mahon managed to endorse one version of each type, doing so in the wake of two “investigative” restorations in which each team claimed revealed authenticity on the basis of its own “discoveries”. (Mahon had serious form in the double attributions stakes – we discuss opposite a painting of Annibale Carracci where he authenticated one version and later suavely switched to another, less abridged, picture. See Figs. 25-30.)

During the first restoration in 1993 in Dublin, a long-attributed Honthorst copy was found to have been made largely without revisions and it was declared the original autograph Caravaggio by Mahon precisely by virtue of its revisions-light painterly fluency. This version was of the truncated type. In Rome in 2004 Mahon conferred autograph Caravaggio status on a work from Florence (where acquired from the Sannini family) that was found to have been made with many and major revisions taken to be “serious afterthoughts as was Caravaggio’s wont”. This version was composed in the larger format and Mahon reportedly said he had “no doubt that this was now the original work”. Dublin was not best pleased and Mahon promptly rowed his position back and claimed that both versions were now original but that one was rather more so than the other. (See “New twist in the tale of two Caravaggios”, *Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 2004; “A dangerous business”, Michael Daley, letter, *Daily Telegraph*, 19 February 2004; and, “The real Caravaggio is . . . both of them” *Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 2004.)



Above (left) Fig. 11a: Cimon’s feet, as painted by Rubens. Above (right) Fig. 11b: The right-hand edge of the National Gallery *Samson and Delilah*.

It is not credible to suggest that an artist so brilliantly attentive to feet and hands might have painted the foot encountered in the National Gallery.



Above, top, Fig. 12: The version of Rubens *The Massacre of the Innocents* that is owned by the Musée des Beaux-arts in Brussels.

Like the two R.W.P. de Vries of Amsterdam drawings, the two “autograph” Mahon Caravaggios have enjoyed unequal fortunes. In 1993 the (revisions-light) Dublin Caravaggio was loaned to the National Gallery in London and then, permanently, to the National Gallery in Dublin. The later 2004 Florence/Rome Caravaggio with numerous major revisions and other “cast iron” technical proofs enjoyed no institutional protection, being still in private hands. Its cause seems to have fallen into abeyance following legal disputes over ownership. In 2005 the initial 1993 “discovery” of the now institutionally protected Dublin Caravaggio (Mahon enjoyed a long-standing relationship with the National Gallery in London, as a trustee and as a generous benefactor-in-waiting) became the subject of an illuminating, if somewhat parti pris book, “The Lost Painting”, by Jonathan Harr.

In an *epilogue*, Harr has described a falling-out over the ownership of the Florence/Rome version. Technical examinations of the painting were ordered by court prosecutors without the knowledge of the owners. They were carried out by Maurizio Seracini, a leading private technical diagnostician who has examined something like half of Caravaggio’s output. The pigment Naples Yellow, which contains the metal antimony, was found. Because that pigment is presently said not to have been used on paintings before 1630 (or “from around 1620”, according to Wikipedia), and therefore twenty years after Caravaggio’s death in 1610, Seracini held the painting inauthentic. Harr accepts the force of this technical testimony and, concluding that Mahon had demonstrably blundered in his support for the Rome/Florence painting, imagines that that old scholar’s long-time adversary, Roberto Longhi, might now be enjoying “a mirthless laugh” over Mahon’s discomfiture. The conclusion was hasty and perhaps too trusting of technical testimony.

It is certainly the case that the presence of a modern, manufactured pigment within the fabric of a supposedly old painting can safely be considered fatal to an attribution. However, Naples Yellow is not a product of a known and precisely dated modern manufacture – such as Prussian Blue of 1704 – it is ancient and greatly pre-dates Christ. Harr acknowledges that the pigment is found on a painting of 1615 by Orazio Gentileschi – just five years after Caravaggio’s death. Harr further reports that traces of this pigment had been found on another Caravaggio, his *Martyrdom of St Ursula*, which is owned by Banca Intesta in the Palazzo Zevallos, Naples. He reports a suggestion that the offending material might have come from an 18th century restoration that had subsequently been removed. Such hypothetical exculpation would only be necessary if claims that Naples Yellow could not have been used by anyone before 1630 were Gospel and if the painting’s attribution was insecure. Neither is the case. The *Martyrdom* is one of Caravaggio’s most reliably and completely documented works so there can be no question about its authenticity. Further, it was almost certainly his last work. It was recorded as still being wet in May 1610. If this painting contains antimony, and unless evidence exists to support the former existence of a now entirely disappeared 18th century restoration, we should accept that this material has now been found in two Caravaggio paintings and adjust the technical literature chronologies accordingly.

In this episode, we see that negative hard “scientific evidence” can be discounted on the basis of assumptions, hunches, and suspicions. We also see that the claimed chronologies of materials within the literature of technical analysis are moveable and, only ever, provisional feasts. (For such chronologies to be considered reliable it would be necessary for every painting in the world to be analysed at the same time by the most advanced technologies – and even then, subsequent technical advances would require further examinations: it is common for old formerly

Above, Fig. 13: The version of Rubens *The Massacre of the Innocents* loaned to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Just as the National Gallery’s *The Virgin of the Rocks* (below) is a cut-down replica version of the Louvre’s Leonardo original, so the Ontario *Massacre of the Innocents* is a cut-down version of the larger canvas at the Musée des Beaux-arts in Brussels. Although now said to be a “studio replica” the latter was judged original by such eminent Rubens authorities, as Gluck, Held, Van Puyvelde and Michael Jaffé.

The cropping of motifs in the Ontario version seems particularly insensitive as it includes the two murdered infants who, in the Brussels version, were depicted whole and set (like Samson’s original toes) comfortably inside the edge of the painting. How likely is it that Rubens would have cropped his figures in this manner or, if by chance he had, that a copyist would presume to extend and make whole his composition?



Above, Figs. 14a and 14b. The regrettably unequal photographic quality of this comparison does not mitigate the disturbing cropping of the infants in the Ontario version (left) which, like the National Gallery *Samson and Delilah*, spent many years as studio copy in the Liechtenstein Collection.



Above, top, Figs. 15a and 15b: Left, the Louvre’s original Leonardo da Vinci *The Virgin of the Rocks*; right, the National Gallery’s later version of the painting.

Above, Figs. 16a and 16b: The infant St. John in Leonardo’s *The Virgin of the Rocks* (left) and (right) the infant in the National Gallery’s later version of the painting.

In the latter we encounter an uncharacteristic indifference to design, sloppiness of treatment and iconographic brutality in the depiction of an infant saint. While the securely autograph Louvre painting has never been in question, considerable argument has arisen over the extent to which

“advanced” tests to be re-run in conservation departments when new and improved apparatus become available.) We have asked Seracini, in the light of Harr’s comments, if “it is still the case that the presence of antimony is considered an absolute technical disqualification in paintings made before 1630?” Meanwhile, Jacques Franck, the Consulting Expert to The Armand Hammer Center for Leonardo Studies at The University of California, Los Angeles, advises that:

“The best scientific bibliographic reference concerning the history and chemistry of pigments over here is: J. Petit, J. Roire, H. Valot, “Des liants et des couleurs pour servir aux artistes peintres et aux restaurateurs”, EREC éditeur, Puteaux, 1995. Regarding Naples yellow, it says: ‘(Lead antimonate yellow) was rediscovered in Europe at the end of the Middle-Ages and was later mentioned in a document dating from 1540, “Pirotechnia”. The oldest recipes, written in 1556-1559, were supplied by Cipriano Piccolpaso...who was a painter of ceramics”

Although those recipes were indeed written primarily in connection with ceramics, given that they existed before Caravaggio’s birth (1571) it should never have been insisted that knowledge of them could not have been obtained by contemporary painters. As it happens, a study on Lorenzo Lotto’s pigments was made in connection with the exhibition “Lorenzo Lotto” (Venezia, 1480 – Loreto, 1556-57) at the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome in spring 2011. On that occasion, more than fifty Lotto paintings spanning from 1505 to around 1556 were studied using non-invasive techniques by Maria Letizia Amadori, Pietro Baraldi, Sara Barcelli and Gianluca Poldi. The authors’ report (pages 2 and 19):

“About yellows, he uses both lead-tin and lead-antimony (Naples yellow) pigments, the latter found by XRF, in works starting from 1530 to the last years: it can be related to the ‘zalolin da vasarj’ cited by Lotto in 1541 in his account book (Libro di spese diverse)”, and, “As XRF analyses show, in some works, starting from 1530 to the last years of the century, also lead-antimony (Naples yellow) pigments, can be found, together with the previous yellow or almost alone: they can be related to the “zalolin da vasarj” cited by Lotto in 1541 in his account book (Libro di spese diverse).”

Thus, the presence of antimony would seem not to have given grounds for dismissing the Florence/Rome version of the Taking in the courts. Perhaps we can see that it might have been more to the point for the courts to require the production of the best possible photographs of as many of the versions as possible to permit visual comparisons of the two rival versions. There are many indications of the limitations of modern conservation practices to be had in Harr’s fascinating account. On page 169 he describes an encounter between the Dublin National Gallery of Art’s two picture restorers, Andrew O’Connor and Sergio Benedetti (who had re-attributed the Hontorst Taking to Caravaggio, and who had experienced “a fleeting moment of doubt” about his attribution while cutting ever larger ‘windows’ through the painting’s varnish):

“One day, about three weeks after the painting’s arrival, O’Connor and Benedetti crossed paths in the studio. Benedetti was staring at the painting. He stood with his arms crossed, his eyes narrowed in concentration, his mouth compressed into a frown. ‘Look at the arm of Judas’, Benedetti said to O’Connor. ‘What do you think?’ O’Connor studied the painting. ‘What are you getting at?’ he asked. ‘It seems too short, doesn’t it?’ said Benedetti. It did...O’Connor realised that Benedetti was wrestling with his doubts. ‘Well’, said Benedetti finally, ‘he wasn’t a perfect anatomist. He made other errors like this. In the Supper at Emmaus, the apostle’s hand is too large.’”

In this recollection we might be witness to a double failure of art critical

Leonardo’s hand is present in the National Gallery version.

In the catalogue to the National Gallery’s 2011-12 exhibition “Leonardo da Vinci ~ Painter to the Court of Milan”, the gallery’s head of restoration, Larry Keith, (who had restored the Virgin of the Rocks prior to the exhibition), was in no doubt that the London version was entirely autograph. He wrote of “discoveries” made in the course of restoration:

“...What we discover is a painter firmly grounded in traditional practice who was able to stretch his methods and materials to express unprecedented intellectual and artistic concerns. However, these painterly interests were only a part of a larger pursuit; he believed that careful observation of all manner of natural phenomena was essential for both new knowledge and a deeper understanding...The National Gallery Virgin of the Rocks is a painting that is at once unique and highly representative of how Leonardo worked. Produced in fits and starts over the last 15 or so years of a commission that took 25 years to complete, it is a composition of the most artful complexity and an image where local colour was sublimated to the newer demands of tonal unity...The National Gallery Virgin of the Rocks...is manifestly uneven in finish and execution but, perhaps, paradoxically, this quality allows us to explore key issues in his painterly practice – methods, materials, collaboration, delegation and finish – and thereby understand better the larger question of the relationship between his painting techniques and his artistic intent...”

Needless to say, this conviction that the picture is an entirely autograph, unique-but-representative Leonardo is not universally accepted. Even at the National Gallery, Leonardo’s authorship has not always been accepted. In 1947 the curator Martin Davies took issue with the picture’s very many doubters (who included the recently former director of the gallery, Kenneth Clark):

“It has to be admitted at the outset that the identification of Leonardo da Vinci’s pictures is by no means the sure and simple thing one might think. It is a fact that there exists no picture of his Milanese period that has not at one time been rejected by famous critics; except for the Cenacolo, which is ruined, and hardly suitable for stylistic criticism at all! The whole subject of Leonardo’s style is therefore somewhat doubtful; but in the particular case of the Virgin of the Rocks in the National Gallery, there has been a good deal of agreement that Leonardo himself painted little or none of it...”

Davies believed the critics to be wrong, but in making his case he conceded many things germane to our concerns here. He acknowledged that this painting was a replica and that it was “quite likely under these circumstances that he [Leonardo] had no great interest in the work”. Although a replica in the sense that Leonardo had been obliged to paint a second version of a commission, Davies draws an ingenious distinction: “the picture is not simply a replica” because so much time had passed that Leonardo had left one artistic era and entered another, making “the picture [...] the replica of a work in an older and different style”. Leonardo’s new style “was perhaps expressed rather imperfectly, because the picture is a replica.”

The National Gallery’s suggestion that its “Rubens” Samson and Delilah does not look like any of its twenty-odd secure Rubens’s because he had worked for a brief period in a style like none of his others was a desperate denial of the fact that its “out-of-style” traits stem from its true status as a replica. A more frank acceptance of the Virgin of the Rocks’ acknowledged replica status might have spared decades of convoluted apologies. Where Larry Keith sees in the Virgin of the Rocks material evidence throughout that “careful observation of all manner of natural phenomena was essential for both new knowledge and a deeper understanding”, another student of Leonardo and Nature, Ann Pizzorusso (who trained as a geologist before becoming an art historian) took an entirely contrary view. For Pizzorusso, the gallery’s claims of some radical shift of style as a means of accounting for the London picture’s problems were entirely and demonstrably without foundation. She was clear on this site that no shift of style could account the picture’s problems because none had occurred:

“Using a date of 1510 for the Virgin and St. Anne and a date of 1483-86 for the Virgin of the Rocks, both in the Louvre, we have proof that Leonardo did not change his style, and that, if anything, he became more fanatical in his quest for geologic accuracy, developing new paints and techniques for natural depiction and driving his students to deliver the most accurate depiction of nature in their own works. So we must ask the question ‘How and why could Leonardo have changed his style to produce a work so lacking in geological and botanical accuracy as the Virgin of the Rocks in the National Gallery in London?’ There is no evidence Leonardo changed his style and now, with the recently cleaned Virgin and St. Anne, we have that proof. We also know that his students were inculcated with his passion for accurate depiction of natural objects so we must also exclude his students as authors of the National Gallery work.”

Writing nearly a decade earlier than Davies, Kenneth Clark, discussed the head of the angel in the London Virgin of the Rocks in his 1938 book of (marvellous black and white comparative photographs) “One Hundred Details from Pictures in the National Gallery”. Of the angel’s head, he wrote “This is the one part of our Virgin of the Rocks where the evidence of Leonardo’s hand seems undeniable...” For Clark, changes in Leonardo’s work over the years were evident, but unlike Davies later and Keith much later, he seems not to have seen evidence of the Later Leonardo equally and

methodology. Given his doubts, Benedetti might have assembled all available photographs of the many versions of this painting to determine whether or not the short-coming that concerned him was unique or common to (some or all) other versions. A greater lapse may be evident in the fact that while Benedetti expressed anxiety over the arm of Judas, he seems not to have done so over the compositionally and emotionally more important advancing left arm of the fleeing St John who is seen behind Christ and Judas. In the Dublin version, the arm of St John is cropped above the elbow and not above the wrist as it is in the Florence/Rome version. (On the compositional function of the arm in the Florence/Rome version, see comments at Figs. 21 and 22.)

To repeat what should be self-evident: pictures are made to be looked at. When, as with this Caravaggio, multiple versions exist we should make hard detailed visual comparisons of each against the others, if necessary (and it could hardly be otherwise when so many versions exist) by photographic means. When later copies or engravings exist we should make careful comparative estimations of their relationships to the various contenders. Whenever there are cut-down versions of more expansive compositions, we should always consider which state is likelier to have been the primary and which the secondary one. Visual comparisons in attributions, as in restorations, are of the essence. They should never be neglected, let alone discounted, on the authority of some technical evidence that may or may not be soundly framed; that may or may not be selective or loaded in its presentation; and, that will, in any event, soon be rendered obsolete by more up-to-date equipment. The informed human eye is our best “diagnostic tool” in the study of art and will remain so no matter how much money and resources might be thrown into technical studies. It remains the greatest tragedy that Bernard Berenson so badly debased his own critical currency with his shady Duveen dealings. On the primacy of the visual in visual art forms he was peerless:

*“I am here concerned with names in painting. When I pronounce the words Giotto, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Giorgione, Durer, Velazquez, Vermeer, Ingres, Manet, Degas and hundreds of others, each stands for certain qualities which I expect to find in a painting ascribed to them. If the expectation fails, then no argument, no documentary evidence, be it biographical, historical, psycho-analytical, or radiological and chemical will persuade me.”*

*That was and is how it should be.*

Michael Daley

#### ENDNOTES:

*I The Times, letter, 13 August 2014:*

*“Sir, Gerald Fitzgerald (letter, Aug 12), misses an important point when calling for a tiny levy on art sales to fund an independent centre for provenance research. Although such a levy might cost only .05 per cent of annual art sales, currently standing at some \$60 billion, if effective, such a centre would reduce the supply of works on the market by something like 40 per cent – at least in the view of the late Thomas Hoving, a former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The art world is very quick on its feet: when calls were made in the 1930s for an independent centre of art restoration research, then director of the National Gallery in London, Kenneth Clark, promptly established a department of conservation science in order, as he later confessed, to ‘have in the background what purported to be scientific evidence to ‘prove’ that every precaution had been taken’. Although self-policing*

*everywhere across the painting. For Clark, this curate’s egg of a picture was, in only select parts, very, very good indeed. Of the angel’s head:*

*“Beautiful as it is, this angel lacks the enchantment of the lighter more Gothic angel in the Paris version. It embodies the result of Leonardo’s later researches in which ideal beauty and and classic regularity of chiarascuro were combined, with a certain loss in freshness, but with an expressive power which almost hypnotized his contemporaries.”*

*Clark was onto something interesting when speaking of Leonardo’s “hand” – the characteristic touch and surface of his paintwork. It so happens that there was a tool to hand that could have been the greatest boon to those charged with making attributions: high quality micro-photography. Clark, as his own two books of National Gallery details show, was certainly alert to the potency of high quality photographs but he used his comparisons of details to flag up differences between artists in their treatments of similar subjects. That was a perfectly interesting and instructive application. He overlooked, however, the possibility (and the great profitability) of taking, assembling and collating many thousands of details from the most secure, “Gold Standard” paintings, so as to create visual benchmark indicators of artists’ distinctive methods. (Just imagine Morelli and His Ears in an era of digital photography and computers.) If the failure to pursue such programmes in the immediate impoverished years after the Second World War might be excusable, what excuse exists in today’s digital era? The pioneering photographs (shown here at Figs. 18 and 19) by Professor A. P. Laurie in his 1949 book “The Technique of the Great Painters” constituted a perfect template for a means of more accurate visual appraisals – we surely have fewer excuses today than any generation in history for stumbling as if half-blind through the minefield of attribution?*

*Below, Fig. 17: Martin Davies’ 1947 large format essay on the gallery’s Virgin of the Rocks carried 16 highly informative plates (including this one below of the infant St. John which appears to suggest multiple but vain attempts to keep the toes within the picture?*



*Above: an unexplained cropped foot*

#### DOGS THAT DON'T BARK

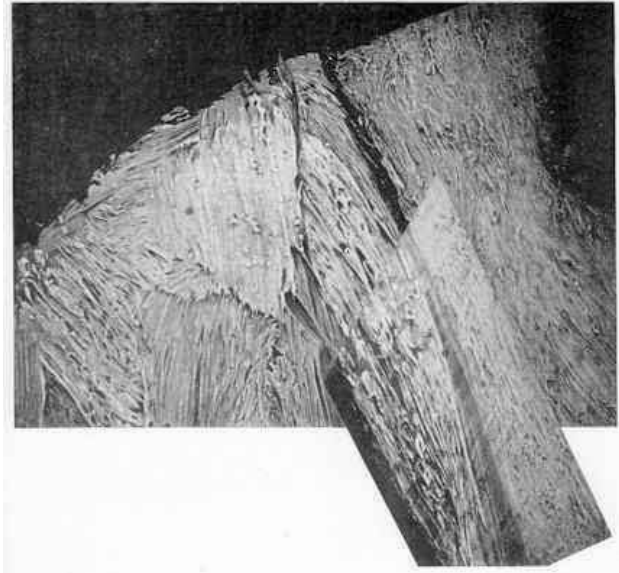
*Below: an almost never-used photographic method of comparing brush strokes*

may be an unrealistic ambition, governments could help considerably and at little cost by making it a statutory requirement that vendors should disclose all that is known and recorded about the provenance and the restoration treatments of works of art. As things stand, it can be safer to buy a second-hand car than an old master painting.”

Michael Daley, Director, ArtWatch UK, London

2 The Massacre of the Innocents which came up at Sotheby's on 10 July 2002 as a very recent Rubens upgrade is a case in point of misleading assurances and over-ridden technical evidence. In a long sale catalogue entry it was said that technical analyses and condition reports had been commissioned and that these were available on request. The implication was clear: we have exercised all possible due diligence and this painting has emerged with flying colours. That implicit reassurance evaporated on a close reading of the material – as we reported in the October 2002 Jackdaw (“Is this £49.5 million painting by Rubens?”). The reports were, by their nature dense and couched in technical language. Nonetheless they clearly contained information that was highly injurious to the attribution and to the picture's claimed early dating of c. 1609-11. One technical fact alone should have sunk the attribution. It was found in the last paragraph of the last report. As we put it: “The author of a report on the tree-ring dating...concludes that a date of execution for the picture only becomes ‘plausible from 1615 upwards’.” In other words, the panel on which this picture was painted could not have been manufactured at the time the picture is said to have been painted – and this dating could not be amended because, like the Samson and Delilah, the picture was only remotely credible on stylistic grounds if seen as the product of a (fancifully claimed) brief stylistic aberration in Rubens' oeuvre said to have occurred on his immediate return from Italy in 1608. As well as being on wood that was too recent, the picture contained the wrong materials: “A pigment, orpiment, that is found in no Rubens is present here. A second pigment, smalt, said to have been in use ‘mainly in the mid-seventeenth century’ and which seems only to be found in Rubens' later works is also present. The orpiment yellow is anomalous not only in its presence but in its manner of application – it is mixed with lead-tin yellow. Such a combination is said to be ‘unusual since it was considered unstable’ and, even, to be a practice ‘not encountered in 17th century works’”. This was not just a twice-over dead attribution: “Speaking of Rubens' debt to classical sources, the anonymous author of the catalogue entry correctly concedes, ‘one of the background figures appears to derive from the Borghese Gladiator’. There follows immediate self-disavowal: ‘it cannot so derive, he/she contends, because ‘though famous in subsequent centuries, the Borghese Gladiator was not excavated until late in 1611’”. This painting on the wrong (too recent) wood, with what would normally be considered disqualifying (out of period) materials, and which contained a miraculous allusion to a future event, was presented to the world as a major art historical discovery. That “discovery” had taken place very shortly before the sale. The upgrading of this centuries old studio work had been made by just five experts only three of whom were identified. We put the question: “Can it be right that we are all being asked to share this leap of faith when the experts, displaying a seeming ignorance of – or disregard for – so much germane material evidence, have yet to declare their hands or publish accounts of their vital endorsements?”

3 Jonathan Harr reports in his 2005 account of the upgrading of a Honthorst to Caravaggio (“The Lost Painting” p. 222) that when the picture, The Taking of Christ, was examined at the National Gallery in London it was found that its ground (priming layer) was anomalous: Ashok Roy, the head of science, observed, as Harr reports, that “the composition of this particular ground was strange – ‘bizarre’ was the



Above, Fig. 18: Professor A. P. Laurie explained the significance of this pair of spliced photographs in his 1949 book “The Technique of the Great Painters”:

“This illustration is a photomicrograph of the highlight on the shoulder of [Rembrandt's] Woman Bathing, National Gallery, No.54. The patch pasted on is from a photomicrograph of a picture whose attribution had to be tested. It will be seen that the brushwork is identical in both cases. It is possible for a skilled forger to imitate a signature, but it is quite impossible to combine the quality of the paint, the nature of the brush, and the handling of the painter, so as to reproduce this complete identity.”

Below, Fig. 19: Prof. Laurie explained the significance of the brushwork below in these terms:

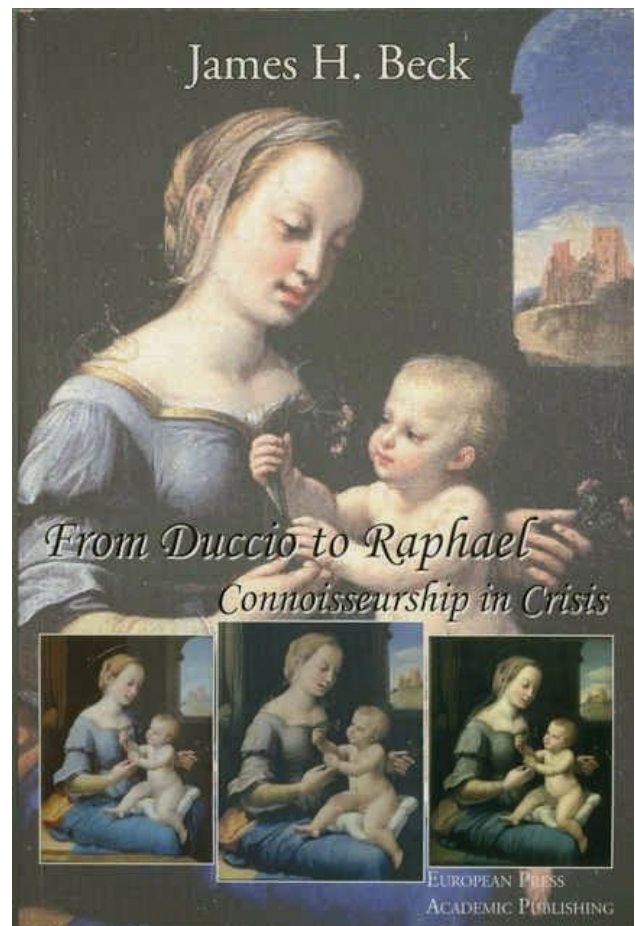
“There is a very interesting portrait of Verdonck [in the National Gallery of Scotland] holding in his hand the jawbone of an ass. It was known from an engraving that such a picture must have existed, but it had apparently disappeared. The Edinburgh gallery possessed a picture by Frans Hals of a man holding a wine glass in his hand. An X-ray revealed that underneath the the wine glass was a painting of the jawbone of an ass which had been painted out by some restorer and replaced by the wine glass. On careful cleaning, the restorer's work was removed...[this photomicrograph reveals] the rapidity with which Frans Hals laid in stroke after stroke with absolute certainty. In fact the painting seems to be alive, and one can almost see the brush moving over the surface. it would be impossible to mistake this work for the brushwork of Rembrandt...”



word used. It contained reds and yellows and large grains of green earth, a pigment composed of iron and magnesium. Grounds usually contained lead-based pigments and calcium, which dry quickly. Green earth dries slowly. This primer looked to Roy like a 'palette-scraping' ground – the painter had simply recycled leftover paints from his palette board to make the priming layer.” Well, yes, someone evidently had – but what in Roy’s detailed technical analysis of the ground might have suggested that on this occasion Caravaggio had departed from his own habits in order to do so? When the painting was exhibited in a special exhibition (“Caravaggio ~ The Master Revealed”) at the National Gallery of Ireland in 1993, the catalogue gave a different spin to Roy’s research: “Analyses have shown that the ground is composed of a brown pigment, heterogeneous and unevenly applied. Several pigments were mixed with it: lead white, red and yellow ochre, umber and large granuli of green earth.” On a casual reading: impressive and reassuring technical detail and expertise. No mention of bizarreness. No acknowledgement of what was for Dr. Roy, a perplexing departure from Caravaggio’s known practices. On page 160 Harr reports that Sergio Benedetti (the Dublin National Gallery of Art restorer who first made the attribution) “saw immediately that the painting had been relined at least once before” and judged the present lining canvas to be at least a hundred years old. In the National Gallery catalogue Benedetti reported that “the picture has undergone at least three interventions, probably accompanied each time by a relining of the canvas. One of these linings caused a shrinking of the surface in some limited areas.” What is not said is that Benedetti two of the three-plus hypothecated linings had been made by Benedetti himself the first having caused cracking. Harr reports that after the first lining “There is much dispute about what happened next. For Benedetti, restoring the Taking of Christ was the greatest moment in his professional career, and to this day he adamantly denies that he had any problem relining the painting. O’Connor and others at the gallery, however, tell a very different story. According to them, he came close to ruining the painting.” Andrew O’Connor, the Gallery’s chief restorer, said that Benedetti had elected to use a densely-woven Irish canvas rather than wait for an appropriately matching loose-weave canvas to arrive from Italy. When Michael O’Olohan, the gallery’s photographer, who had made detailed photographic records of every inch of the picture’s surface, saw the painting immediately after its first relining, he could not believe his eyes and recalled “There were areas that had hairline cracks, like a sheet of ice that has started to melt, a flash of cracks all over it. I was shocked. I couldn’t believe it.” O’Connor explained that because the Irish canvas was densely woven, “it did not absorb the [water-based] glue at the same rate as the old Italian canvas. It had not dried properly and had contracted, pulling with it the Italian canvas and raising ridges, small corrugations, in the paint surface. Along these corrugations, the paint layer had cracked and lifted.”

4 In the ArtWatch UK Journal No. 21, (“The ‘Samson and Delilah’ ~ a question of attribution”), Kasia Pisarek wrote: “Dr. Ludwig Burchard was an active Rubens attributionist in Berlin before the Second World War and in London afterwards. Several paintings formerly attributed to Rubens’s school or studio or even to another artist (such as Sampson and Delilah), were reinstated by Burchard as by the master. I traced many of his attributions – he was not infallible in his judgement and changed his mind. Surprisingly, over 60 pictures attributed by Burchard to Rubens were later down-graded (in *Corpus Rubenianum*) to studio works, copies or imitations.”

5 The principal challenges to the attribution came from two artist/scholars, Euphrosyne Doxiadis, author of the award-winning 1995



Above, Fig. 20: “From Duccio to Raphael ~ Connoisseurship in Crisis”, James H. Beck, Florence, Italy, 2006

In this his last book, the late Professor James Beck of Columbia University, and the founder of ArtWatch International in 1992, wrote:

“Two paintings, a mini aspiring Raphael da Urbino Madonna and an equally tiny aspiring Duccio di Buoninsegna Madonna were sold for record prices in 2004. The first was bought by London’s National Gallery and the second by New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. These objects and the mode in which their attributions to their famous presumed authors were achieved document a breakdown in modern connoisseurship. The two objects represent a total expenditure of public money exceeding 100 million dollars for pictures the size of a sheet of paper. These remarkable sales could not have transpired without the participation of art experts whose role was indispensable in offering authentications of the pictures. This book will seek to define the system of attributing works of art, examine the methodology, treat in depth case studies of recent connoisseurship including the two pictures just mentioned. In addition to what is regarded as a monumental failure on the part of the experts, the use and misuse of public funds is an issue that lies just beneath the surface.”



book *“The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt”*, and Kasia Pisarek whose 2009 doctorate dissertation was entitled *“Rubens and Connoisseurship ~ On the problems of attribution and rediscovery in the British and American collections (late XIX – XX c.)”*. In 1986 Euphrosyne Doxiadis began researching the painting’s credentials with fellow art students Steven Harvey and Siân Hopkinson. Their findings were compiled in a report submitted to the National Gallery in 1992 and which is now held in the painting’s dossiers. (It is also available online at this site: [www.afterrubens.org](http://www.afterrubens.org).) Their challenges to the attribution were covered in reports in the *Times* (*“Artists raise fresh doubts on gallery’s Rubens masterpiece”*, 22 September 1996, and *“Expert denounces National Gallery’s Rubens”*, 25 November 1996), and in *The Independent on Sunday* (*“Tell-tale sign that £40m Rubens could be a copy”*, 21 May 2000). Researches begun in 1990 by Kasia Pisarek prompted two articles on 5 October 1997 by the *Sunday Times*’ art critic, Waldemar Januszczak (*“A Rubens or a costly copy?”* and *“National’s £40m Rubens could be fake”*). In the latter article, the then director of the National Gallery, Neil MacGregor, conceded that *“the scholar raises some serious questions that I cannot easily answer”*.

6 As Dr. Pisarek put it in the *ArtWatch UK Journal 21* (*“The ‘Samson and Delilah’ ~ a question of attribution”*): *“Both the rediscovery and the sale of this early Rubens masterpiece should have been well publicised in the press, yet there are no records of it in any art magazine (I checked most art journals published in 1929-30). However, other, even minor, Rubens discoveries could easily be traced (‘Forgotten Rubens found in Austria’ – Art News, 1930; ‘Van Diemen sells notable Rubens’ – Art News, 1931 etc.) Strangely, the Samson and Delilah was not even included in Valentiner’s ‘Unknown Masterpieces’, co-edited with Burchard, and published in 1930, which presented important little-known and rediscovered paintings. Dr. Burchard only wrote about it briefly in 1933, and only in a short note.”*

Comments may be left at: [artwatch.uk@gmail.com](mailto:artwatch.uk@gmail.com)

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Above, top, Fig. 21: The version of Caravaggio’s *The Taking of Christ in the National Museum of Art, Odessa*.

Above, top, Fig. 22: The version of Caravaggio’s *The Taking of Christ* that was formerly in the Ladis Sannini collection in Florence; was then restored in Rome and authenticated by Sir Denis Mahon; and, is presently being held during legal proceedings.

This small pair of photographs from 1967 is sufficient to show the profound compositional consequences of an extension of one work or a truncation of another. Regardless of the photographs’ poor quality and regardless of the paintings’ relative merits, (both of these, incidentally, have been supported as autograph), the question can be posed in the abstract: Which of the two compositional formats is likelier to be the prime version? Further, if Caravaggio had painted in the truncated format, would he or a copyist then likely have added an extension to the arm of the fleeing disciple in another version? Our feeling is that the Florence format has to be considered to be superior compositionally; more dynamic dramatically; less like a stiff and claustrophobic tableau; and, altogether more expressive of the magnitude of the pandemonium and horror that attended Judas’ fateful act. Whether the Florence picture is the original autograph version has to be established but reports of its pronounced revisions weigh in its favour. Desperately needed is a collation of high quality photographs of all the versions of the paintings, along with detailed photographs of the same, or greater, quality of those published by Prof. Laurie.



Above, Figs. 23 and 24: The Dublin and Rome/Florence versions of

Caravaggio's *The Taking of Christ*, as reproduced in the *Daily Telegraph*. Sir Denis Mahon deemed both of these works – at the same time – to be the Caravaggio original.



Above, Figs. 25 and 26: The Prado's Annibale Carracci's *Venus, Adonis and Cupid*, of c. 1588-90, top, as photographed in 1965 (by Hauser y Menet) and before restoration; and, above, as seen after a restoration funded by The Fundación Reale.

Of the two versions (see a detail of the rival Vienna picture below at Fig. 28b) Mahon has supported both as the authentic original work – but this time did so consecutively, not simultaneously, as with the Caravaggio *Taking*. He championed the Vienna picture until the Prado one emerged. Unabashed, he saw merit in his own mistake, saying (in the 2005 exhibition catalogue) of his critical re-positioning :

“When I first wrote about this composition, some fifty years ago, my observations on style and chronology were based not on the Prado painting, since this was as yet unknown, but on the excellent early copy in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and on the preparatory drawings for the figure of Adonis in the Uffizi. When the Prado painting was first published in 1965, by Pérez Sánchez, it was gratifying to realize that, although all those of us who concerned ourselves with Emilian painting had mistakenly assumed that the Vienna picture was Annibale's original, one's intuitions about the importance of the work and where it fitted in the artist's evolution were confirmed.”

This was dissimulation: had Mahon been alert to what might be called **The Problem of Arbitrary and (otherwise) Bizarre or Inexplicable Croppings**, he would have spotted the tell-tale warning in the cropped nose of the hound on the right of the Vienna version. This would have been the more likely had he consulted, as well as figure studies in the Uffizi, the etched copy of the original made in of 1655 by Luigi Scaramuccia (see Fig. 27, below). This delightful record shows not only that the hound's head (like Samson's toes elsewhere) had been set comfortably inside the picture, but, also, that the landscape at the top right was more extensive and contained an architectural feature (doubtless of some iconographic significance). Curators and restorers too often disregard the testimony of graphic artists, when, within their limits and styles, they are essentially respectful of the works they were paid to copy. (A copyist inclined to go his own way would likely get less not more employment.)

Below, Fig. 27: Luigi Scaramuccia, *Venus, Adonis and Cupid*, 1655, second state, The British Museum (here mirrored).





Above, Figs. 28a and 28b: Details of the Prado's Carracci Venus, Adonis and Cupid (left), and the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum version (right).

If Mahon corrected one error with this painting, he perpetuated others. The catalogue to the exhibition that celebrated the Prado's restoration, produced the customary self-congratulatory sponsor's waffle (here The Fundación Reale). Less forgivable was Mahon's claim that the restoration helped establish the date of the original work. Mahon had been a belligerent champion of National Gallery restorations when at their worst in the post-war years, mocking, in tandem with the gallery's head of science, the objections of scholars like Sir Ernst Gombrich (who had to wait a third of a century for a full technical vindication of his objections – see [How the National Gallery belatedly vindicated the restoration criticisms of Sir Ernst Gombrich and 24 November 2011](#))

What is unsaid in the hype of big business-sponsored restorations, is that a restorer can never recover what has been lost and that by cosmetically dressing up degraded works, imparts a spurious simulation of health and historical veracity. No restoration exhibition should ever take place without the inclusion of all extant visual records of the work(s) in question. If we disregard the testimony that exists in this area, we enter a world of "art conservation" make-believe. In doing so, we leave ourselves ill-equipped to address the most urgent questions of attribution and condition. Sadly, with this Carracci painting, the two versions have experienced what restorers euphemistically call "different conservation histories". Which means is that

they have suffered to varying and unequal degrees, physical assaults on their fabrics and their pictorial skins. We are all obliged to acknowledge and address these terrible truths. Not least because all the inherent difficulties of making attributions are exacerbated by these various histories of "treatments". On the testimony of the etching, it would seem that the Vienna hound lost considerable shading to the side of his head, while his elaborately jewelled collar survived much better than that seen in the Prado version. This tells us that neither work remains a true witness to its own original self and that, therefore, theories and judgements made on the basis of the pictures' present selves should come with careful qualifications and health warnings, and not with some facile celebration of glorious recoveries.

The differences that restorations make to individual pictures can be as great or greater than the differences that might originally have existed between an authentic original work and an extremely high quality copy of it. It should be accepted that one of the consequences of past restorations is that making sound appraisals of the merits of once closely related versions of paintings is made the more difficult. Some indication of how dramatically transforming restoration treatments can be can be might be gauged by the pair of details below (Figs. 29 and 30) from the Prado's records of the same painting. Properly read, their inclusion, and that of the two states of the Scaramuccia etching in the Prado exhibition catalogue might constitute a most useful contribution to knowledge and understanding in this arena.



Click on the images above for larger versions. NOTE: zooming requires the Adobe Flash Plug-in.

## "Art's Toxic Assets" ~ Announcing a new ArtWatch UK website



We have opened our website on a new address:

<http://artwatch.org.uk>

The new site has two additional features. First, a dedicated, one-click NEWS & NOTICES box to carry short, topical items. (Our first announcement is of the sixth annual [James Beck memorial lecture](#) which is to be given on 6 November in New York.) Second, a PREVIOUS ARTICLES feature. This provides a rapid means of locating (visually, as well as by titles and by dates) any and all previous posts in easy one-click succession. All articles previously published on this site are now available on the new site and carry down-loadable printer-friendly pdfs.

We launch the new site with an examination of problematic attributions in the museum world and on the wider art markets ("Art's Toxic Assets and a Crisis of Connoisseurship"). We challenge the attributions of four works –

three Rubens's and a Caravaggio – all of which are professionally supported and are now housed in public museums. We argue that such misattributions are products of unsound and insufficiently-examined modern practices of connoisseurship and art critical methodology. Further, we show how shortcomings of visual appraisal evident in the misattributions of individual works are also widely encountered in professional failures to recognise and acknowledge restoration-induced injuries in pictures. Holding that these failures of artistic appraisal are present in both art restoration and art attribution and considering them to be two sides of the same debilitating coin, we warn that their frequency and their magnitude now threaten the credibility of the wider art market itself (as might be seen, for example, in the [collapse of the Knoedler Gallery](#)), and that they do so in much the same way that the successive and unchecked incorporation of “toxic assets” within investment dealings ultimately led to the recent collapses of confidence in major financial institutions and markets.

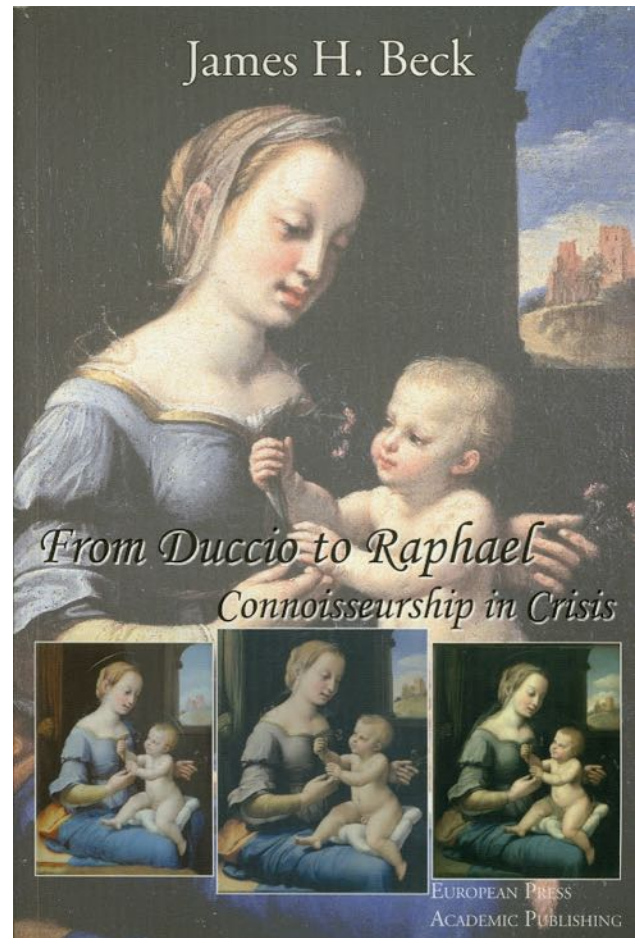
To read the article and to visit the new site, please click on:

<http://artwatch.org.uk>

Michael Daley

Comments may be left at: [artwatch.uk@gmail.com](mailto:artwatch.uk@gmail.com)

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Above, Fig. 1: “From Duccio to Raphael ~ Connoisseurship in Crisis”, Florence, Italy, 2006, the last book of the late Professor James Beck of Columbia University and the founder (in 1992) of ArtWatch International.



Above, Fig. 2: *The Massacre of the Innocents*, which sold at Sotheby's in 2002 as a Rubens for £49.5m even though it contained pigments said never to have been used by the artist, and an allusion to an antique sculpture (the *Borghese Warrior*) that had yet to be excavated. Furthermore, the earliest plausible date for the manufacture of the panel on which it was painted had been found during technical examinations by a leading international authority on oak panels to have been five years too recent for the attributed date of this work.

Click on the images above for larger versions. NOTE: zooming requires the [Adobe Flash Plug-in](#).

## *The Samson and Delilah ink sketch – cutting Rubens to the quick*



Today, in a sale of old master drawings (and on an estimate of £1.5m -£2.5m), Christie's is offering large claims for the artistic and historical significance of a small (roughly 16cms square and shown here at Fig. 1) pen and brown ink drawing:

*“This is the only known preparatory drawing for Rubens's Samson and Delilah in the National Gallery, London (inv. NG 6461), and it was followed by a modello oil sketch now in the Cincinnati Art Museum (inv. 1972.459). Commissioned by Nicolaas Rockox (1560-1640), who was Rubens's most important early patron, this powerful composition dates from shortly after the artist's return to Antwerp from Italy, where he had been from 1600 until 1608, and provides a valuable insight into his developing style and preparatory processes.”*

*This account is conventional but, nonetheless, contentious. No hint is given that the relationships between these three linked works are highly problematic or that all three have suffered cuts or thinning. The authorship of this group has been contested for over two decades. On February 19 2004 the Daily Telegraph published a letter from ArtWatch on the painting's problems (“Is the National Gallery's Samson and Delilah another copy?") We have published two special issues of the Artwatch UK Journal mounting challenges (Figs. 2 and 3) and have written a number of articles on the subject for the Art Review. The principal challenges to the attribution came from two artist/scholars, initially, Euphrosyne Doxiadis, whose findings (made with fellow artist Steven Harvey and Siân Hopkinson) were compiled in a report ([see this website](#)) that was submitted to the National Gallery in 1992 and later covered in the Times and the Independent. In 1997 researches by Kasia Pisarek, prompted two articles by the Sunday Times' art critic, Waldemar Januszczak (“A Rubens or a costly copy?” and “National's £40m Rubens could be fake”). In the latter article, the then director of the National Gallery, Neil MacGregor, conceded that the evidence “is respectable, and the scholar raises some serious questions that I cannot easily answer”. Those questions have never been answered. In October 1997 the National Gallery issued a press release in which it was said that:*

*“Debates of this sort require patient consideration of different sorts of evidence. The best format is for this evidence to be presented at some length for public discussion – and the National Gallery will be arranging such a lecture and debate over the next few months.”*

### *A debate that has yet to take place*

*Within a few days the commitment was dropped when the press release was re-issued and the debate never took place. To this day there remains an enormous accumulation of problems with the National Gallery's “Rubens” Samson and Delilah and, therefore, with its two closely associated works – the ink drawing and the oil sketch. All three works, which are dated to 1609-10, have unusual and anomalous features – and all appeared only in the 20th century. The modello arrived last without name or history in 1966 and was upgraded by Christie's to Rubens even though it is painted on a soft wood and not the oak which Rubens invariably used.*

### *Ludwig Burchard's cunning plan?*

*Behind the successful 20th century elevation of this trio, is the fact that*

both the drawing and the large finished painting in the National Gallery were attributed to Rubens barely two years apart by the same man, Ludwig Burchard. Burchard was a great authority on Rubens who, notoriously, was unable to publish his life-long *Great Work on the Artist* for fear of having to de-attribute very many paintings for which he had supplied unwarranted certificates of authenticity. In the *ArtWatch UK Journal* No. 21 (Spring 2006) Kasia Pisarek, whose PhD Dissertation was on Rubens and Connoisseurship, identified over sixty Burchard Rubens attributions that had subsequently been demoted in the *Corpus Rubenianum* itself.

Dr Pisarek felt that the year of launch for the picture now in the National Gallery might be significant. As she put it:

“That year 1929 was not free of strange coincidences. By a bizarre stroke of luck, the painting re-emerged 48 years after its disposal by the Prince of Liechtenstein in Paris in 1881 (not 1880, as is commonly said), the exact same year as the deaths of the Prince Johannes II, the previous owner of the painting, and of his picture adviser Wilhelm von Bode, the then General Director of the Berlin Museums. The former died in February 1929, the latter a month later, in March. Moreover, we know that the Prince himself had weeded out a considerable number of pictures, Samson and Delilah included. He also financed many research projects, and the collection was accessible to scholars. The art historian Wilhelm von Bode published (in 1896) the first comprehensive and illustrated book on the Liechtenstein collection, so he could have been aware of the Samson and Delilah’s disposal. Why didn’t he identify the picture as the long lost Rubens if he was also a Rubens expert and had even co-signed certificates of authenticity with Ludwig Burchard?

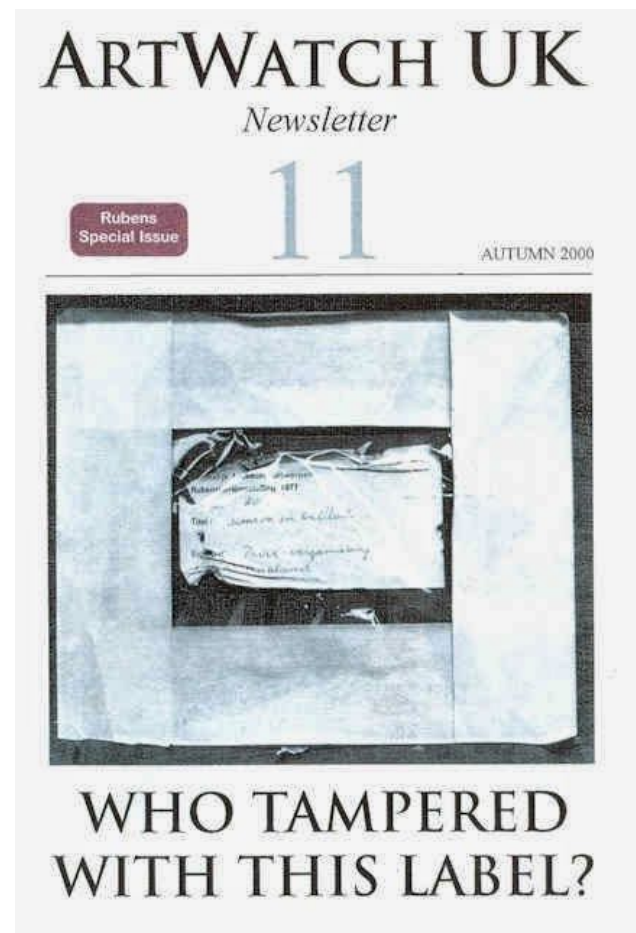
In 1927 the drawing was bought from a private collector by a scholar of drawings and prints, I.Q. van Regteren Altena, for 26 guilders as a Van Dyck (whose initials it still bears). It was promptly upgraded to Rubens by Burchard, who then cited it as such in his 1930 certificate of authenticity for the Honthorst on offer by a Berlin dealer that is now in the National Gallery as an entirely autograph Rubens.

### *A precursor or a successor – or both?*

It is claimed that Rubens’ characteristic stylistic development through stages of work is evident in the three works’ sequence, when the essential motif remains remarkably constant throughout. In fact, the *modello* (see Figs. 5 and 7) is so like the finished work that one supporter of the attribution, the former senior curator of the National Gallery, David Jaffe, has suggested that this oil sketch might be a *ricordo* – a record of the finished painting! However, if the presently accepted 1, 2 and 3 sequence of drawing, oil sketch, finished painting were to become 1, 3 and 2, it would make nonsense of the National Gallery’s technical reports which stated that the finished picture’s uncharacteristic thin, swift and little-revised paint work – paint work which today remains preternaturally fresh and unblemished (see Figs. 10 and 11) – was a product of the fact that Rubens had made such an unusually complete and resolved oil sketch that he had been able to paint the larger panel (which, the gallery claims, itself resembles a large sketch) out of his head and at a stroke and without any need for his customary revisions. Then again, the *ricordo* suggestion constitutes, perhaps, a kind of insurance policy, a way of covering against the possible outcomes of an eventual debate and presentation of evidence? If so, the sequence 1, 2, 3 and 2 again, would make a kind of institutional sense? This might indeed constitute a veritable “belt and braces” insurance: given that the gallery has admitted that its large finished panel is so very swift and sure-footed in its execution (or uncharacteristically sloppy and out-of-character to its critics), that it is itself but an over-



Above, Fig. 1: The pen and wash brown ink drawing that is said to be “the only known preparatory drawing for Rubens’s *Samson and Delilah* in the National Gallery, London”.



blown sketch, the formulation 1, 2/4, 3/2 and 2 might serve perfectly to cover all eventualities.

## The evidence of our eyes

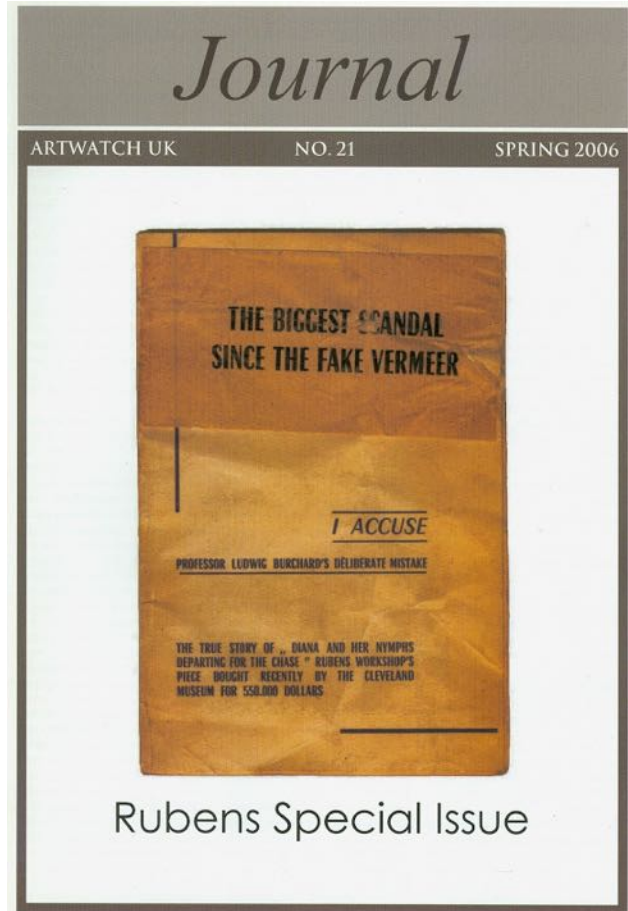
The *Samson and Delilah* ink sketch, as a drawing, lacks the customary force, focus and eloquence of design seen in Rubens' initial compositional ideas (- see Figs. 8b, 9a and 16). This supposed preliminary study has a curiously finished, pictorial air. Iconographically it has a pronounced "portmanteau" quality, showing, for example, Delilah's draped right leg as seen in the secure Rubens oil sketch of 1609-10, *The Taking of Samson* in Chicago, while her draped left leg is as seen in the insecure National Gallery picture. Most disturbingly (to this draughtsman, at least) is that fact that when looking at the drawing in the flesh it is impossible to read an order or purpose to which its many and various components might have been made or to locate the essential, determining compositional and figural point at which Rubens always and brilliantly drove (see Figs. 8b and 16).

A ruled ink border surrounds and compositionally confines the ink and wash drawing (Fig. 1). When seen in reproduction, this border gives an impression that Rubens designed a format from the outset precisely in order to achieve an effect that is the single most problematic feature of the finished painting – the fact that the toes on Samson's right foot were cropped at the edge of the painting. The border, like the drawing, is drawn in brown ink but clearly, as Christie's describes, it can be seen by eye to comprise later framing lines. However, while this usage is seen to be common in the collection where the drawing has lived since 1927 – and while the border lines themselves can be seen to pass over a number of tiny losses on the edges of the sheet – the particular placement of the border is disquieting because the sheet on which the drawing was made has been trimmed at either the outside edges of the border or even within the border lines themselves. Why and when was this done? While some of the ink lines of the drawing can be seen by eye to run into the ruled borders, we cannot calculate where they might have terminated because of the severity of the sheet's cropping. For whatever reason, this is now an artificially constrained and possibly edited image.

## Flouting historical evidence

While the toes on Samson's right foot are cropped at the edge of the National Gallery painting (Fig. 12), both of the contemporary copies that were made of the original Rubens painting show the foot, as painted by Rubens, to have been both whole and set well within the right-hand edge of the painting (see Figs. 4, 5 and 6). It is hard to see on what grounds this testimony might be disregarded: the first copy, an engraving (see Fig. 14), was made in c 1613 and very possibly under Rubens' instruction. The second was a painting in oil commissioned by Rockox to show off his collection of paintings in the grand salon of his home (see Figs. 6 and 13). Is it conceivable that he – and Rubens, who was still alive – would have permitted a man famous for the accuracy of his records, to make a gratuitous, out-of-character "improvement" to the Rubens painting that occupied pride of place above the mantelpiece? Because of the inked box and the trimmed sheet it is not possible to determine whether the drawing's author might originally have drawn the foot whole.

The panel support of the modello, as reproduced in the catalogue (see Fig. 7), is seen to have been cropped on its vertical edges since being sold to the Cincinnati Art Museum by the removal of two strips of wood, thereby conferring a clear crop onto Samson's foot and bringing it into accord with the foot seen in both the National Gallery picture and the ink drawing. At one point the Cincinnati Museum claimed that the oil sketch's



Above, Figs. 2 and 3: The covers of ArtWatch UK journals given to discussions of the attribution of the National Gallery's *Samson and Delilah* panel painting.

panel was made of oak. When the picture was loaned to the National Gallery we asked if the panel was oak or softwood. It was not possible to say, we were told, because the back of the frame was enclosed and the gallery was not permitted to remove it. The museum today ducks the issue by saying that its painting is "on panel".

The National Gallery's picture was doctored at some undisclosed point by planing rather than cutting. The gallery restored the picture after purchasing it and reported that the panel had been planed down to a thickness of 2-3mm and set into a sheet of block-board. We knew for technical reasons that that was most unlikely: block-board is held together by its outer veneer layers and cutting one of them away would have had catastrophic structural consequences. When pressed, the gallery acknowledged that the planed-down panel had in fact been glued onto, and not set into, a larger sheet of block-board, with its edges being concealed by a bevelled putty. The restorer, David Bomford (now of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), said in his report, that the planing had taken place at some point in the early twentieth, or possibly during the late 19th century. That, too struck us as improbable: could there be no record of the back of a panel bought for a world record price (£2.5m) for a Rubens? Had the gallery not made a record of condition when the picture was loaned to it before the sale at Christie's? We asked Neil MacGregor, if the gallery had any record of the back – and he said not. We asked if we might see picture's conservation dossiers and there found Burchard's 1930 certificate of authenticity, which described the panel as being intact and in excellent health.

At Christie's we asked, and were kindly permitted, to examine the back of the drawing which is said to bear other drawings. A little (unintelligible) drawing is present but most of the surface bears the remains of a second sheet of paper to which the ink sketch had once been pasted. Effectively, the drawing's verso is invisible – just as is the back of the National Gallery's picture, any evidence on which has ceased to exist.

As for the contention – made against the evidence of the contemporary copies – that Rubens deliberately cropped Samson's toes at every stage of the work, we know that he was very attentive to his toes. When drawing one of Michelangelo's ignudi in the Sistine Chapel, he ran out of room on the paper for the toes on one of the feet and then drew them separately elsewhere on the sheet. On his return from Italy, and virtually simultaneously with working on the Samson and Delilah, Rubens made the magnificent Michelangelesque study of a nude man kneeling shown at Fig. 17. On that sheet, the right foot was truncated by the edge of the paper and, again, Rubens redrew the whole lower leg so as to include the foot and toes.

### What kind of artist was Rubens?

The National Gallery has admitted that its painting is not typical of Rubens's oeuvre, which fact it attempts to explain by claiming that immediately after his return to Antwerp from a long stay in Italy, Rubens was working "experimentally". Unfortunately, it so happens that at the date of the Samson and Delilah's execution, Rubens was also working on the very large altarpiece *The Raising of the Cross* (see Fig. 10). No one has ever suggested that that great work occupied a position in some experimental mode. To the bizarre and unsupported suggestion that Rubens, on his return from Italy, simultaneously worked experimentally and not-experimentally within the same brief period, Christie's lend support with a contention that:

"The exact date of *Samson and Delilah* is unclear, partly because Rubens experimented with two very different approaches to the same subject in

## The ArtWatch File

XIII

Rubens' *Samson and Delilah* ~ Cousins, Copies



[1&2] Rubens oil sketches, c. 1609-10: The Taking of Samson, The Art Institute of Chicago (above) and The Blinding of Samson, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid  
[3] Jacob Matham, engraved copy, [c. 16], a late, softened impression with added hair on Delilah's neck, c. 1618 (and here reversed) of the original Rubens' Samson and Delilah  
[4] From *Franchon II: The Great Salon of Nicolas Rococo's House*, oil on copper, detail, showing the lost (after 1640) original oil on panel Rubens' Samson and Delilah, 1630 above Rococo's mantelpiece after 1628 and before 1640

22

## The ArtWatch File

XIII

and Claimants: A Chronology of Appearances



[5] The (claimed by Ludwig Burchard in 1926) oil sketch for Rubens's Samson and Delilah  
[6] The National Gallery's is loaned by Ludwig Burchard in 1930: Rubens' Samson and Delilah oil on oak panel that was greatly reduced and mounted on blockboard after 1850  
[7] The (claimed by Brian Sewell and Christie's in 1966) preparatory oil sketch for - or records after, as David Jaffé has suggested - the Rubens/Rococo Samson and Delilah. Here reproduced as found in 1996 on a softwood (now claimed to be oak) panel and before restoration and the removal of strips of wood from the left and right vertical edge

23

Above, Figs. 4 and 5: The two centre spread pages of the ArtWatch UK Journal No. 21, showing the connections between: Rubens' two oil sketches

these post-Italian years.”

The truth is that attempts to keep this Burchard-initiated show on the road require that everything today be considered part of a moveable feast. It is neither a satisfactory situation nor a tenable position. Attribution is a difficult and taxing activity at the best of times and there is no shame in admitting error – and least of all with Rubens. As we put it in the 2006 Spring Journal:

“The upgrading of copies or studio works to autograph status frequently flouts the most elementary visual and methodological safeguards. Identification of the autograph hand of a master requires a ‘good eye’, sound method, and a recognition that comparisons are of the essence, that like should be compared with like. Procedural fastidiousness and visual acuity are nowhere more essential than with Rubens, who not only ran a large studio of highly talented assistant/followers but who famously placed a very high premium on studio works that had been modified or finished off by his own hand. When wishing to claim unreserved autograph status for a ‘Rubens’, it would seem imperative that some plausible connection between the aspirant and an unquestionably secure work be established. With the National Gallery’s *Samson and Delilah*, exemption is claimed on grounds that this work was special product of a peculiar moment in the artist’s career. Unfortunately for the attribution – and the picture’s supporters – this special ‘moment’ coincides precisely with a work of bedrock security – *The Raising of the Cross* of 1609–1610. An artist’s designs and motifs are easily replicated – and with Rubens, were often intended to be so ‘in house’. Pronounced similarities of subject matter or motif, therefore, are no guarantors of authenticity. What is most distinctive to a master and impossible to replicate – even by close associates within his own studio – is what is termed his touch, his individual, characteristic manner and speed of execution. Artistic mastery lies in some particular combination of technical fluency and commanding thought. The quality of an artist’s thoughts and his authorial ‘fingerprints’ are certainly made manifest in and through material – it cannot be otherwise – but only in material as handled, not in terms of its intrinsic, chemically analysable composition. A flat-footed analysis of the material components of pictures can no more corroborate authorship than they can validate a restoration. There are no material tests for authenticity...”

## Update:

**16.00, 10-07-14.** The editor of *Jackdaw*, David Lee, writes to point out that, R W P de Vries, the person who sold the *Samson and Delilah* ink sketch produces this note, when Googled:

“Reinier Willem Petrus de Vries Jr. (Amsterdam , March 3, 1874 – Hilversum , 27 May 1953 ) was a Dutch artist. He was a painter , illustrator , book cover designer , and made ??etchings and woodcuts . He was a student at the State Normal School in Amsterdam, obtained his MO drawing. From 1913 to 1935 he was a teacher at a secondary school in Hilversum.”

The *Jackdaw*’s distinguished editor reflects: “An artist and secondary school teacher who flogs drawings. Not exactly what you’d expect...” No, indeed, but precisely the kind of thing about which we have learned not to expect to be given information.

Michael Daley

Comments may be left at: [artwatch.uk@gmail.com](mailto:artwatch.uk@gmail.com)

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of *Samson being taken and of being blinded*; the engraved copy of the original, now lost, *Rubens Samson and Delilah* made by Jacob Matham, c. 1613; part of Frans Francken II’s painting of *The Great Salon of Nicolaas Rockox’s house with Rubens’ original Samson and Delilah*, as seen above the mantelpiece at some point between 1615 and 1640; the ink sketch said to be Rubens’s original design for the National Gallery *Samson and Delilah*; the *Samson and Delilah* painting on panel at the National Gallery; and, the panel at the Cincinnati museum that is said to be either a preliminary sketch for the National Gallery *Samson and Delilah* painting or a record of it made afterwards.



Fig. 3. Frans Francken II, *Banquet at Burgomaster Rockox's House*. Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemaltesammlungen. Photo: Lutz Braun. © 2014. Photo Scala, Florence/BPK, Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin.



Fig. 1. Sir Peter Paul Rubens, *Samson and Delilah* © Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio, USA / Mr. and Mrs. Harry S. Leyman Endowment / The Bridgeman Art Library.

Above, Figs. 6 and 7: The presentation in Christie’s sale catalogue of a detail (top) of Frans Francken’s copy of the original Rubens *Samson and Delilah*; and (above), the Cincinnati panel as seen after strips of wood on the vertical edges had been removed, producing a more emphatic cropping of Samson’s toes.

Although the Francken painted record testifies to the original ‘wholeness’ of Samson’s foot, the catalogue entry does not discuss this awkward evidence. Nor is the fact of the reduction by the removal of two vertical strips on the Cincinnati panel discussed.

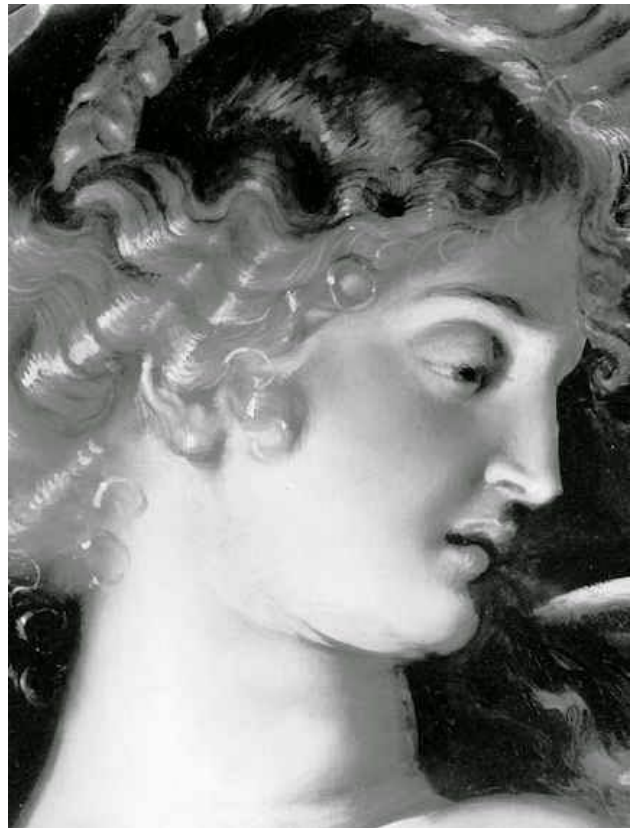




Above, Figs. 8a and 8b: showing a detail (left) of the Samson and Delilah ink sketch, and (right) a detail of Rubens's ink drawing at the Washington National Gallery, Venus Lamenting Adonis, of c. 1608-12. We find the suggestion that Rubens might have been drawing during this period in two such radically opposed styles, and with such great disparities of accomplishment, to be simply beyond belief. Nowhere does one see in Rubens' drawings arms that appear to have digested or acquired disconnected pieces of drapery of the type seen on the barber's left arm and Delilah's right arm in the Samson and Delilah ink sketch.



Above, Figs. 9a and 9b: Left, a detail (flipped) of the British Museum's Rubens Venus Lamenting Adonis, and (right) a detail of the Samson and Delilah ink drawing.



*Above, Figs. 10 and 11: Top, an indisputably autograph version of Rubens' striking blond female head type, as seen on his *The Raising of the Cross* altarpiece, and, above, in a version of that type found in *Delilah's head* on the National Gallery panel. Aside from uncertainties of drawing in the National Gallery head, the differences of paintwork and evidence of age in the two works is striking.*



Above Fig. 12: *The National Gallery Samson and Delilah, as reproduced in our Journal No. 21.*



Above, Fig. 13: *A detail of Frans Francken's record of the original Rubens Samson and Delilah, as reproduced in our Journal No. 21.*



Above, 14: *Jacob Matham's engraved copy in a late impression of c.1613 with added hair on Delilah's neck (and here flipped) of the original Rubens Samson and Delilah, as produced in our journal.*



Above, Fig. 15: A greyscale version of the Samson and Delilah ink sketch.



Above, Fig. 16: The British Museum's Rubens c.1608-12 ink drawing Venus Lamenting Adonis.



Above, Fig. 17: Rubens' study *Nude Man Kneeling at the Museum Boymans, Rotterdam*, which includes a drawing made separately of the right leg so as to show the foot and toes. This drawn study was made in preparation for Rubens' painting of 1609, *The Adoration of the Magi*. It therefore shows that, as with Rubens' *The Raising of the Cross*, Rubens returned from Italy saturated in Michelangelo and classical sculpture, pounding with energy, enthusiasm and inspiration, and altogether in no need of engaging in "experimentalism" of the kind fancifully attributed to wrongly upgraded works.

Julian Held (who accepted the *Samson and Delilah* ink sketch) wrote of the *Nude Man Kneeling* in his critical catalogue in *Rubens ~ Selected Drawings*:

"L. Burchard alone (Cat.Exh.London, 1950) seems to doubt the early date of this drawing, which has always been connected with the *Adoration of the Magi* of 1609 in the Prado (KdK.26)..there is every reason to assume that the drawing in Rotterdam, as well as the one in the Louvre, was made in 1609 when Rubens prepared the Madrid *Adoration*"

Held also accepted the *Cincinnati* oil modello/ricordo even when made aware that it was, unprecedentedly, painted on soft wood and not on an oak panel.

Click on the images above for larger versions. NOTE: zooming requires the [Adobe Flash Plug-in](#).

## The 2014 James Beck Memorial Lecture

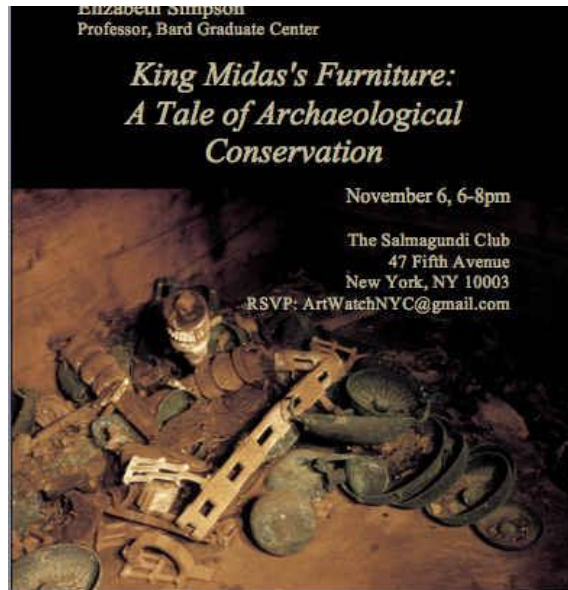


"King Midas's Furniture: A Tale of Archaeological Conservation"

"We don't need a New Michelangelo – there was nothing wrong with the old", so said the late Professor James Beck, founder in 1992 of ArtWatch International. This year's memorial lecture is to be given on November 6th in New York by Professor Elizabeth Simpson of the Bard Graduate Center, New York.

For more information please contact [ArtWatch NYC](#)





24th September 2014. MD

*wibble!*

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3