



Conserving Art for Your Future

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7th Nov 2012



To behold a work of art that touches you viscerally is a rare and wonderful thing.

Art is something timeless, something eternal.

That's why art conservation is vital to ensuring its enduring legacy. Its practice is uniquely positioned between art and science, with the purpose to maintain and preserve all original materials. Yet, in many instances, art conservation remains low on the collector's list of priorities.

That said, the arena is ever-evolving. Greater interest in owning art, whether passion driven or strictly for investing purposes; more viable career options due to growth across industry and technology contribute to its upward movement.

Art has become infinitely more accessible, partly driven by the internet, enabling art appreciation as a quick study. This transcends simply viewing it at a museum or gallery and leaving it behind at the door when you exit.

Art is No. 1 Investment for UHNWIs

In 2011, according to ArtPrice, the global art auction market generated 21% more than in 2010. Compared with 2010 figures, Modern art added \$1.2 billion, Post-war art added \$372 million, Contemporary art added \$291 million, Old Masters added \$124 million and 19th century art posted an increase of \$43 million.

London-based Viola Raikhel-Bolot, co founder and managing director of 1858 Limited Art Advisory, says art is the number one investment for ultra high net worth individuals. "As a result, we have seen an increase in clients looking at art for investment purposes, "It has become more important for collectors to access their art acquisitions/investments with the same degree of due diligence they apply to their other investments and hence why they require our independent advice to mitigate risks at each transaction."

Art conservation should reap the benefits.

Afterall, the consensus is that people really value their fine art. And they want to take care of it, especially where family heirlooms are concerned. It seems that people are taking more interest in preserving those things they hold dear.

So why would art conservation not be deemed a priority?

Part of it is a lack of understanding of the potential risks. And perhaps it's that art has a kind of low maintenance component built into it. But, often is the case that people either believe that disasters can't happen to them or simply don't want to think about the "tragic possibilities," says Elizabeth Jablonski, an art conservator based in Nova Scotia, Canada. "People tend not to look for conservators until the damage is already done. But, few



people are aware that conservators can actually help prevent damage," she says.

She also emphasizes that unlike dealers and appraisers, art conservators are not concerned with the market value of a piece, but, instead, base their fees on the conservation work needed. "This is because market values can fluctuate and what is considered important or unimportant today can change, over time," she says. "As well, some pieces might not have high monetary value but may have great sentimental or educational value."

The Minutiae

What is art conservation exactly? It boils down to this: the treatment and care, including the preventive care, of a cultural property. Furthering the point, Jablonski says: "Many collectors see themselves as temporary custodians of the art, as the art tends to outlive us. As caretakers, they wish to preserve it to make it available for the appreciation of future generations. Conservators are an essential part of this."

Part of the mission of conservators is to "create awareness on the importance of collection maintenance protocols," says New York's Gloria Velandia, an art conservator and founder of GV Conservation. "Periodic collection assessment and maintenance will extend the longevity of a collection and prevent issues that can lead to loss in value."

Warren Winegar, a New York-based art advisor and dealer, says he incorporate conversations on art conservation from a very early stage.

"If we're buying things we are going to look at what their lighting system is, and where the clients potentially want things hung. and make recommendations accordingly, so the right pieces go in the right kinds of spots," he says. For instance, if there's a great deal of sun pouring through the room, attention is placed on window treatments and skylights, he says. If it's not a hung piece of art but rather on paper, the recommendation would be to have ultraviolet plexiglass on it, which should be replaced

within 10 to 12 years, adds Winegar.

It's the minutiae, perhaps the mundane, that art conservation is concerned with. Is the glass completely fogged up? Are works near acidic materials in the home? Are they hung above a fireplace? Do you reside in a place where temperature fluctuation occurs (humid summers to harsh cold winters)?

Art maintenance tends to be a consistent problem. For example, works kept in the same frame for over 20 years is not wise for a collection, due to its inherent value. One of the issues here is that many works that come in don't have ultraviolet glass on the front. That will contribute to an artwork's deterioration in value, which may go unnoticed for decades. When discoloration has set in, the damage is irreversible.

1858 Ltd.'s Raikhel-Bolot says the most common conservation issues her firm comes across are temperature, humidity and exposure to light. "These elements are so often overlooked once art works are hanging on the walls, she says." So when it comes to a matter of restoration, for Raikhel-Bolot, it is always important to confirm with collectors if they wish the work to be restored to its original appearance or for the restoration to be visible in order to clearly establish what is original and where the hand of the artist ends and the restorer begins, she says.

With regards to the conservation of contemporary art, one of the greatest challenges faced by conservators is the materials and concept of the artworks themselves.

"Artists are forever pushing the boundaries of creativity," says GV Art Conservation's Velandia. "Artwork can be constructed from anything from elephant dung to chewing gum. As conservators we need to apply our knowledge of materials and the degradation processes and constantly stay up to speed with the latest research to best inform our treatments of these non-traditional materials."

There are some exciting new challenges facing art



conservators. These involve the use of new and non-traditional materials by artists in the creation of contemporary works, says Jablonski. This can be the incorporation of new electronic media, plastics, ephemeral materials, time-based installations and decay of the materials as intended by the artists. "Sometimes, the artist's creative intent is contained in the gesture of creating the piece, but not necessarily in the physical materials, themselves," she says. "A conservator needs to understand the artist's intent and determine how best to preserve it—either through the actual materials or through documentation of the piece, including written descriptions and photography/videography."

The references to new technologies is important. Technology is directly tied to the growth of the industry. "Technology has really done wonders to invigorate and excite people into getting involved in the arts in a way that they hadn't been able to in the past," says Winegar. It is the scope of what can be achieved. These include infrareds and different kinds of scannings to understand what "under painting" looks like, as an example. "Those technologies can be translated into other kinds of preservation forces," says Winegar. Technology has certainly led the discussion and the interest in getting more people to see this as a viable career option, rather than just a casual 'Indiana Jones type' interest.

Cross Section of Conservation and Science

1858 Ltd.'s Raikhel-Bolot says she and her team have taken an avid interest in some of the new digital art technology coming out of the UK. One is (s)edition art., which is perceived to be a revolutionary new way to collect art by the world's leading contemporary artists in digital format and is accessible to collectors at every level. The digital art works are bought and viewed only on digital media.

The firm has also recently partnered Identidot, also out of the UK, which provides unique DNA coding for the firm's clients' art work. "The invisible DNA is applied to the artworks and the code is unique to each client," she says. "With over £3 billion worth of art and antiques stolen

globally each year these sort of innovations are important to our clients."

There is an interesting cross section here; that of art conservation and conservation science. Conservation is defined as "the interdisciplinary study of cultural heritage conservation through the use of scientific inquiry and analytical equipment. General areas of research include the technology and structure of artistic and historic works and the materials and media from which they are made."

It is often referred to as art forensic analysis, used to prove (or disprove) authenticity. James Martin, a Williamstown, Mass.-based conservation scientist says that new materials and new technology help art conservation and conservation science to evolve. For example, conservation science research has provided art conservators new chemicals and methods to remove old varnish in a way that might be safer than the tools and methods utilized before, he notes. Another example is museums take advantage of new filters and lighting systems that allow visitors to see the art so colors remain the same, but the light isn't as damaging to the work of art as it was before," he says.

"Conservators and conservation scientists continually look to new technology in other fields to help us preserve that cultural objects and works of art for future generations to learn from and enjoy," he says.

Jablonski agrees. "Sometimes it is necessary to study an art material within the piece in even greater detail, involving scientific analytical techniques," she says. "In these cases, conservation scientists strive to use non-destructive techniques that do not require removing any sample material from the art. That being said, however, sampling is sometimes necessary and, after strong justification, only the tiniest amount is removed and, following analysis, the sample is retained, whenever possible. Conservators borrow and adapt technology from other fields, as scientific equipment is developed for much larger and commercial industries than the art world."

Regarding DNA analysis of hair or residue on works of



art, Martin cautions that such materials should only be sampled and analyzed by qualified DNA analysts, and adds that "analysis of a hair or residue do not tell one about the work of art itself; any DNA analysis in an authenticity study should be performed in conjunction with a comprehensive chemical analysis of the work of art."

A good start in the authentication process is to investigate provenance (readers: this is the documented history of the work of art), because of the scale of misrepresentation, misunderstanding and complete fabrication. Martin points to the recent example of a gifted German painter who, over the course of 20 years painted and sold fake works of art. To help persuade buyers that the works were genuine, the painter and his wife invented a fake provenance, which included photographs of the wife, dressed in 1920s costume, seated in a period room, in front of some of the fake paintings.

Winegar recounted a story from last year when he was asked to find an appraisal company to act as the experts on two Impressionists works. one small painting and one work on paper that had been damaged in shipping.

"I was brought in to inspect the work. They had already been conserved and I was coming in to establish what the loss of value might be. And in my assessments, I proved that these were actually fakes; they were forged items that the owner had purchased in good faith many years before, but were indeed not at all what they were reporting to be."

His advice? Understand what you are buying, is always the first thing. Ask the right questions is the second. 'Is this an authentic work?' 'Is it from a good period in the artist's work?' 'What's the quality of the work?' 'Does it have the hallmarks of the artist's hand?' 'Can the provenance be substantiated.? This can have impact on the value. And once you have it, make sure that you become the next good steward of that work," he says, adding: "art history is a great brand history that is a global concern."