

## Conservation or Restoration?

There are differences between the two fields. The owner of an object should consider both methods before deciding on a course of action.

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The damage to an object can be corrected with conservation or restoration treatments. To determine what choice to consider, it is helpful to understand some of the differences.

The field of conservation includes fine arts, sciences (including chemistry, biology and materials technology), and disciplines such as art history, archaeology, design, fabrication and other special skills necessary for the practical application of that knowledge.

The field of restoration may also include the same knowledge but perhaps without the organizational structure, extensive training and research resources that exist in the field of conservation.

The conservation ethic is to select methods and materials that do not endanger the object. Care is taken not to remove or add any materials that might alter or adversely affect the function, original structure or appearance of the object. Materials of predictable performance are selected and treatments are designed to be as reversible and invasive as possible.

If an object is reconstructed, additions are done as to be distinguishable from the original. Restoration ethic may also include methods to be reversible and invasive as possible, but with allowances made by choice of the owner to enable the object to appear almost like it was new. In other words, the restoration may not have additions that appear different or distinguishable from the original.

Both conservation and restoration involve some common functions. These include documentation of the examination, analysis and research to identify historic relevance; record through written and visual all conditions before, during and after treatment; outline treatment methods and materials used; stabilize and retard deterioration; provide advice as to optimal environmental elements (i.e. levels of light, temperature, humidity, pollutants, pest management); and recommend safe transport and packing.

If the owner of an object is looking to change the appearance of damage as to be non-detectable, a conservationist is not likely to agree to do the work. A professional restoration specialist might advise the client that the object should be left close to its current appearance for historic reasons. Conservation treatment, however, would show additions distinguishable from the original. The restoration specialist may make additions that match near perfection.

Generally, the cost of conservation treatments and the time for completion will be greater than that of restoration. This would all be relevant to how much treatment is required of either. Conservation may need less treatment to stabilize or retard deterioration in comparison to the request for a total restoration. In that respect, the conservation may be less in cost and time.



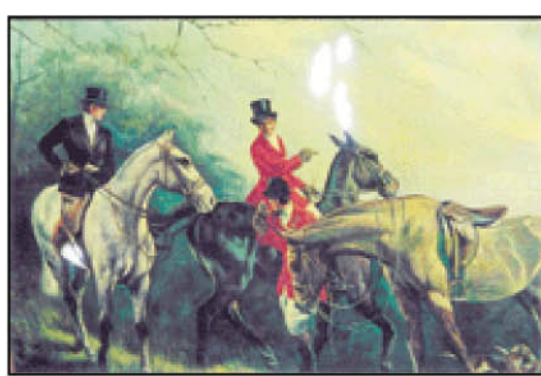
Damaged photo at left shows child with part of a hand and more missing. At right, photo is restored, to include new parts of hand.

I've included a few "before and after" photos to illustrate various restoration treatments:

**Photo #1:** Large damaged original photograph of a child with part of her hand worn away, other spots gone in various areas, some tears, creased wrinkles and faded areas. The owner decided to have a restoration alternative done by using digital reproduction of the original and computerized enhancements for the formation of missing areas.

With the aid of computer technology, the owner was able to have several restored copies produced to share with his family. The original photo was not harmed in any way and the owner still had the option to have a conservationist preserve it as is. The conservation would be an entirely different approach to stabilize the photo.

**Photo #2:** Reproduction of the original child's photo with restored areas to include new parts of hand and correction of other flaws.



Oil painting of Fox Hunt with 4 holes patched and "white" base coated (3 in sky and 1 at horse belly).



Same oil painting restored with holes patched, base coated and over painted.

**Photo #3:** Large oil painting of Fox Hunt with 4 holes patched and "white" base coated. This painting had holes in the canvas to include (3) areas in the sky above the horse and rider and holes in the saddle stirrup and belly area of the horse. The owner did not want added expense and time for a complete conservation of the painting. Nor did he want any cleaning, old varnish removed, and lining.

Conservation would recommend a painting with multiple tears and punctures requiring full lining of the canvas using wax-resin processing. The owner selected individual patching of the holes and restoration "inpainting" to blend and touch up the damaged areas to match the existing old varnish. This was a little faster and less costly, but may not have been the better solution.

**Photo #4:** Same oil painting restored with holes patched, base coated and painted to match without conservation treatment.

It would be preferable for conservation and restoration specialists to exchange ideas and materials for joint projects in a way that would enhance the individual's expertise. The owner of an object with historical significance owes it to future generations to select a method of treatment that preserves the essence of the object.

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