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**Language**

Undefined

## Painting Rx



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In 2006 collector [Steve Wynn](#) put his elbow through *Le rêve*, the 1932 **Picasso** for which he had paid \$48.4 million and was in the process of selling for a cool \$139 million. Sounds like a nightmare. But, then, the tear was repaired.

Good restorers can fix all kinds of minor damage, from chips, tears and scuffs to punctures, dimples and stains. They can carefully tighten canvas that has become loose on the stretcher, get rid of the tiny white dandruff-like dots that appear where paint is flaking from the raised part of the canvas weave or tone down the yellow film that decades of cigarette smoke can inflict on a painting. One thing that may be irreparable is water damage. When exposed to moisture, says Powell, "the canvas shrinks but the paint doesn't," and paint begins to pop off.

A dozen restorers may have a dozen different ways of fixing any one problem. But one thing they will all do is ensure that any repairs made can be undone. "It's the most important principle of restoration," says the New York restorer [Andrei Givotovsky](#). "No matter what you do — in painting,

patching, changing a varnish — it's got to be reversible."

### **Beauty is Skin-Deep**

"An intense cleaning — removing the varnish and overpaint — poses the most risk to a painting, because in doing so, conservers use solvents that can affect the painted surface," says [Marco Grassi](#), a New York-based conservator. Givotovsky suggests that in most cases a light surface wash is all that's necessary rather than full varnish removal. If time-darkened varnish is really masking the image, however, a restorer may carefully remove it and apply another coat. Occasionally a too-shiny new varnish will be replaced with one that is more matte. Grassi and Givotovsky agree that the practice of attaching a new canvas to the back of an old one with glue or wax is overprescribed. "Some restorers tell everyone they have to reline old paintings, but it's just not true," says Givotovsky. "I avoid it because you have to heat the whole painting, and that ages it."

### **Less is More**

The general consensus among conservators and dealers is that as little should be done as possible. "If something is just hanging there and is behaving, it's best not to intervene," says Grassi. [David Hill](#), of New York's [Berry-Hill Galleries](#), agrees: "Cleaning a painting isn't polishing basic pieces of silver." Givotovsky varies his approach in part according to the value and purpose of the picture. "If it's a really important work, we'll recommend the most conservative approach," he says. "If it's just for someone's own personal enjoyment, we might do more." According to [Ken Moser](#), head of the **Brooklyn Museum** conservation department, preventive care is key — storing, handling, shipping and mounting a canvas in a manner that ensures that light, humidity, dust and temperature do not damage it in the first place.

### **Don't Touch Acrylic**

Contemporary pictures, particularly if done in acrylic, should not be cleaned, since solvents can destroy the paint. "Recent paintings really don't require any kind of regular cleaning," says the New York contemporary-art dealer [Leslie Tonkonow](#). "You can easily dust a painting with a feather duster." For getting rid of scuffs and the like, Givotovsky uses dry-cleaning tools — special sponges and erasers. But for serious stains or damage, he says, "sometimes you just have to bring the work back to the artist and have him or her deal with the trouble spot."

### **Be Prepared**

Collectors often seek out professional conservators when preparing to put paintings up for sale. Buyers should likewise consider having third parties assess potential purchases. An expert evaluation is especially important on the secondary market. As Hill points out, by putting a canvas under an ultraviolet light, a conservator can tell the difference between previous restoration work and a change made by the artist — a distinction with major ramifications for a painting's value.

### **Look for the Right Fit**

Restorers' specialties range from Old Masters to contemporary to Impressionists to works on paper. Although collectors can call their dealers for advice, Tonkonow also suggests consulting museums'

conservation staff, who often maintain private practices outside their institutions. Most important, advises Hill, is not to fear the restoration process. After all, he says, the top specialists are "highly respected artists in their own right."