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CHAPTER

3

Charles Eastlake as Director of Conservation

After all, we live at the end of all eras; as we are historically acquainted with them all, it is nearly unavoidable for us to adapt the most varied tendencies to contemporary needs.

Carl Friedrich von Rumohr, *Italienische Forschungen*, 1827

In the mid-nineteenth century, the painter, arts administrator, translator, and scholar Charles Eastlake oversaw an educated approach to conservation at the National Gallery in London (fig. 3.1).²⁹ As the museum's director from 1855 to 1865, Eastlake was responsible for expanding the Gallery's collection, particularly with works of the Italian Renaissance, then considered the height of artistic progress. Under his expert guidance, these new acquisitions were assessed and treated; in them, Eastlake realized his vision of the period. His long experience, coupled with his study of art history, restoration, and continental collections, guided his approach.

Conservation was part of the museum project from its beginning. The 1824 Minute from the British Treasury establishing the National Gallery had appointed a curator, or Keeper, whose duties included "attend[ing] to the care and preservation of the pictures."³⁰ The first was the artist-restorer William Seguier (fig. 3.2), whose work seems to have involved maintaining the paintings in good order—mostly cleaning their surfaces and occasionally coating them with a "Gallery Varnish" composed of mastic and linseed oil, notorious for becoming spotty and brown. "It would be impossible to overestimate his ability as a restorer of pictures; so judicious, so able in his method, no picture was

contours and drapery folds. The central panel and inner wings were framed together to create a perpetually open triptych, while the outer wings were joined in their closed state. The treatment only partly reversed the earlier dismembering: the results suggest a two-dimensional conception of the artwork, prepared for theatrical installation on the museum wall. Hauser's imprecise reassembly was corrected in 1983, but the two sides of the wings remain separate.

Cleaning

When cleaning a painting, Hauser sought to preserve the golden tone of its aged varnish, what he pronounced "the primary appeal of old pictures." This reverence for patina, widespread during the period, led to the reforming (Pettenkofering) of the varnish on many works that must have appeared bloomed, blached, or opaque, which was done for display as well as to facilitate photography.⁵⁹ Still, Hauser observed, cleaning was sometimes unavoidable.

It is not possible in all cases to preserve the old varnish on a painting, as not all varnishes have acquired the glowing golden tone with time, some have become so excessively yellow that nothing of the actual color of the pictures can be recognized, some, particularly if applied later and artificially colored, acquire a dirty, cloudy, opaque appearance. Other pictures, moreover, are so full of bad retouching and other damages that nothing can be effected by the mere gradual removal of the varnish. In these cases it is necessary to completely remove the varnish, despite everything that has been written against the removal of old varnishes (primarily, though, by people who understand nothing or very little of the subject).⁶⁰

Invoices preserved in Berlin confirm that Hauser made use of the materials recommended in his treatise: turpentine, spirits of wine, linseed oil, and copaiba balsam, as well as more caustic agents such as ammonia, potash, and soaps. Cleaning could leave a painting, especially a mediocre one, "hard and sober," and here, as in London, artificial toning offered a means of reestablishing harmony.⁶¹ "The Francia is toned and varnished," Hauser wrote to Bode in 1905, for example. The practice continued throughout his tenure. His successor, Helmut Ruhemann, would later recall, "On my first day at the K.F.M. [in 1929] I found in the restorers' studio a box, about one foot long, full of a brown powder. To my amazement the assistant restorer explained that it was the umber pigment with which the varnishes were normally tinted."⁶²

New purchases were assessed on arriving in Berlin and the older collection holdings subject to renewed scrutiny. When the *Portrait of a Woman* by Piero del Pollaiuolo (1614, then as Piero della Francesca, called Domenico Veneziano by Bode; fig. 4.13) arrived from England in 1894 with a group of other works, for instance, Tschudi told Bode, "[The portrait had] numerous retouchings in the flesh under which the modeling rather disappears, most disturbingly in the nostril. Clothing and background intact. Hauser asks if he should not begin with the restoration." Not all acquisitions were extensively treated, however. Giorgione's *Portrait of a Man* (12A; fig. 4.14), which had recently seen the ministrations

Fig. 4.13 Piero del Pollaiuolo, *Portrait of a Woman*, ca. 1465. Poplar, 52 x 36 cm. Berlin, Gemäldegalerie der Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz, inv. no. 1614.



of the famed Italian restorer Luigi Cavenaghi when owned by the art historian Jean Paul Richter, appears—as much as can be judged—unchanged in photographs made before and after its acquisition.⁶³

Bode's faith in Hauser's capabilities in cleaning and restoration bolstered his willingness to buy works disregarded by others, a boon in light of his comparatively limited funds. For Sebastiano del Piombo's *Portrait of a Woman* (259B; see fig. 4.7), purchased from the Duke of Marlborough in 1885, this involved removing thick soot and "a few small and insignificant retouches" that had allegedly caused English buyers to consider it ruined. Acquisition of Antonello da Messina's *Portrait of a Man* (18A) in 1889, from the Paris dealer Charles Sedelmeyer, was similarly aided by disfiguring overpaint on the

Fig. 4.1 Alois Hauser Jr., Max Friedländer, and Wilhelm Bode in the Italian gallery of the Altes Museum, before 1904.

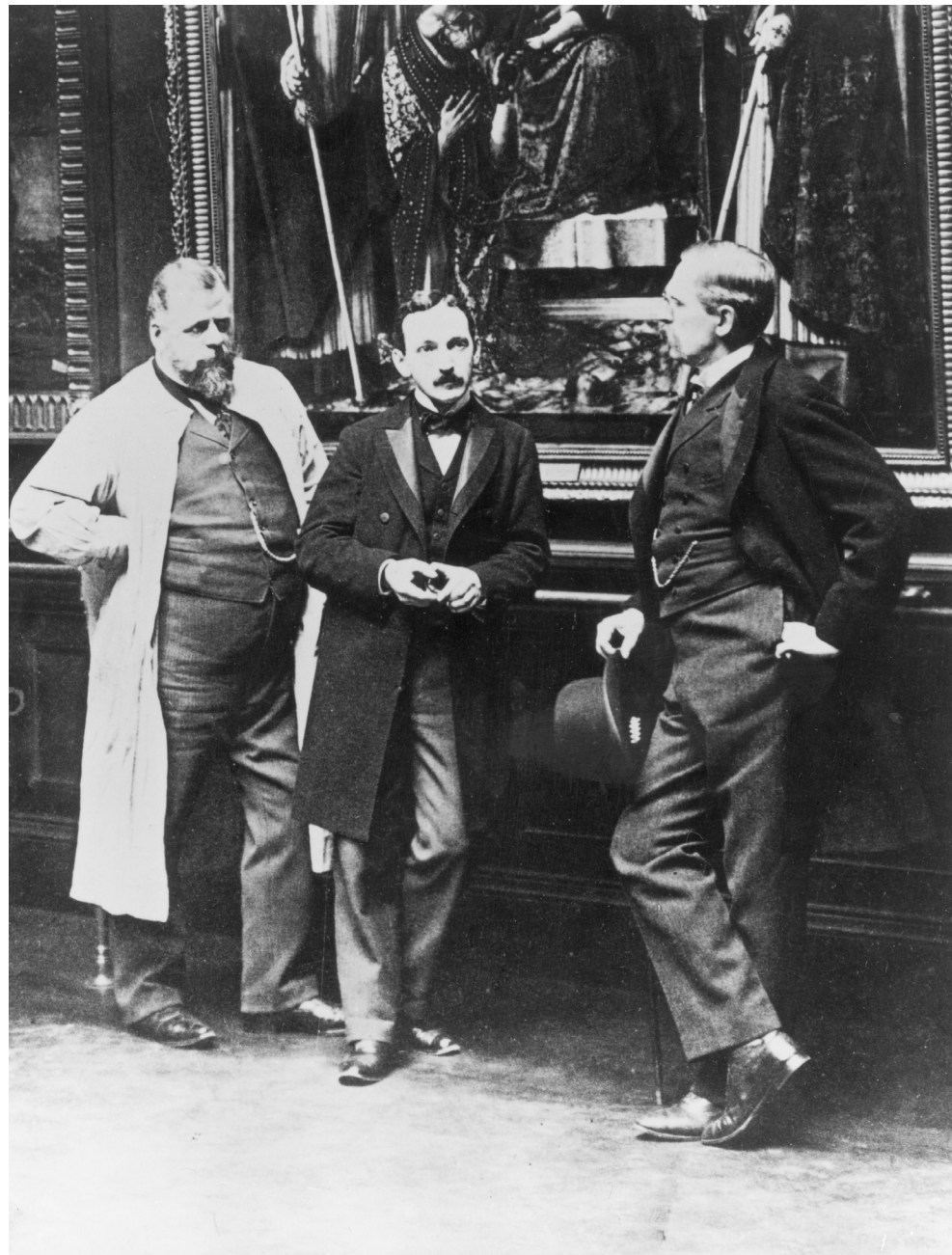


Fig. 4.2 Karl Bennewitz von Löfen the Younger and Curt Agthe, *The Old Picture Gallery in the Schinkel Museum*, 1880–84. Oil on canvas, 100 x 150 cm. Alte Nationalgalerie der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz, inv. no. A III 759.



The earlier installation of paintings in Berlin's Royal Museum, which opened in 1830, organized the works by school and date in densely hung cabinets, reflecting the taxonomic model of art history of the museum's planners, among them, Gustav Waagen and Friedrich Rumohr.⁴ Classicizing frames designed by the building's architect, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, provided a unifying matrix. By the second half of the century, however, this arrangement seemed antiquated. Renovation of the Picture Gallery, which occurred from 1868 to 1884, had brought modernization: more spacious distribution of fewer pictures in larger rooms, improved lighting through the addition of skylights, and new heating and ventilation systems (fig. 4.2). Several paintings were restored, and many more were varnished or had their varnishes regenerated by the Pettenkofer method.⁵ The attic storerooms were emptied and unwanted items removed to provincial collections or sold. Even in the midst of these changes, however, the desire for a new building smoldered. In 1880, the Gallery's director, Julius Meyer, informed a council of administrators "that sooner or later a new Picture Gallery, or really a Renaissance museum would have to be built"; this was the first official articulation of the idea.⁶ A competition for the new structure was announced in 1883, and preliminary plans were completed by 1887, but decades would pass before the project was completed. The palace for art in the Wilhelmine-baroque style, designed by the court architect Ernst von Ihne, was only approved in 1896 and finally opened on 18 October 1904 (fig. 4.3). It was named for the late, briefly reigning Frederick William III, who had patronized the arts while crown prince as Protector of the Berlin Museums.⁷

During its planning phase, the new building was long simply called the "Renaissance Museum," the term referring more to a universal conception of art history culminating in the Italian Renaissance—"the golden age of this millennium," as Nietzsche identified it—than strictly to its contents, which included paintings and sculpture from the thirteenth

Fig. 2.17 Titian, *The Rape of Europa*, ca. 1562. Oil on canvas, 178 x 205 cm. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, P26e1. The image, taken before recent restoration, shows how the alterations to the paint film created atmospheric effects in the sky.



The Rape of Europa • *The Rape of Europa* (fig. 2.17) was one of the *poesie* painted for Philip II of Spain, sent to Madrid in 1562. It arrived in the United States in 1896, at an important period in American collecting of Old Masters. Despite an illustrious provenance, the picture had been slow to sell at the London exhibition of Italian works from the Orleans collection and remained obscure for much of the nineteenth century.⁷⁷ In 1851, when the German art historian Gustav Waagen visited Cobham Hall in Kent, he observed, “The pearl of the collection in my opinion is Europa represented crossing the water on the bull. . . . The great warmth and power of the colouring is somewhat lost in the present neglected state of the picture.” Two decades later, Cavalcaselle and Crowe describe an image of cool illumination, deep-brown shadows and “broader expanses of tinting broken by sparkling red or grey or black, toned off at last by glazing and calculated smirch to a splendid harmony.” The improved appearance perhaps reflects restoration for display at the 1857 *Art Treasures Exhibition* in Manchester. Recasting Vasari’s words on Titian’s old age, they portray an almost photographic *Europa* of dazzling illumination:

Fig. 2.18 The reverse of *The Rape of Europa* showing its old strainer, perhaps from the eighteenth century, which was replaced during recent conservation treatment.



Fig. 2.19 Detail of *The Rape of Europa* from 1926. Abrasion revealing the twill canvas weave and discolored varnish in the paint interstices contributed to an agitated appearance that conformed to ideas about Titian’s brushwork.

