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Murray Peale

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problems that today face museum officials are complex and fairly fundamental. A flourishing public interest in museums and museum policies has increased the desirability of broader scope and enlarged public services. At the same time, new economic trends have conspired to enlarge public collections and to make available operating budgets. Although perhaps most acute in the United States, the situation is common to all in some degree. One of its results has been a tendency toward mutual co-operation on an international scale. There is a trend toward the pooling of ideas and resources for the good of museums as a whole, and there has been a considerable increase in exchange of museum personnel and loan exhibition material.

Natural secondary development has been a growing awareness of the museum's responsibilities to maintain its holdings in sound physical condition. Technical details are frequently included in the publications of art scholarship. Public interest in problems of conservation has been stimulated by such exhibitions as the "Museum of Fine Arts," Boston, and discussions of museum policy have become subjects of popular debate. There can be no doubt that the air needs clearing over the field of art conservation. The free expression of divergent opinions may help to clarify fundamentals, and to indicate common grounds for agreement on further progress. But always there is some risk in public debate that a natural momentum may carry it into form of all-out controversy. In such an atmosphere a spirit of partisanship may develop, and endanger the hoped-for benefits of open discussion.

In France, it seems happily evident that a mild situation of this nature has developed. Here can be no doubt that the art world needs clearing over the field of art conservation. The free expression of divergent opinions may help to clarify fundamentals, and to indicate common grounds for agreement on further progress. But always there is some risk in public debate that a natural momentum may carry it into all-out controversy. In such an atmosphere a spirit of partisanship may develop, and endanger the hoped-for benefits of open discussion.

It seems unhappily evident that a mild situation of this nature has developed here as well. There can be no doubt that the air needs clearing over the field of art conservation. The free expression of divergent opinions may help to clarify fundamentals, and to indicate common grounds for agreement on further progress. But always there is some risk in public debate that a natural momentum may carry it into all-out controversy. In such an atmosphere a spirit of partisanship may develop, and endanger the hoped-for benefits of open discussion.

Conservation is necessary to the preservation, restoration and repair of museum objects, by scientific and technical knowledge and skills, as practiced by specially trained experts who act as scientific advisors to curators.
certainly foster an already common and misleading impression that the soundness of a conservator’s practices can be judged by personal reaction to the visual results. It has already resurrected a notion that has been responsible for unchecked deterioration of countless works of art—that it is safer to leave them untouched than to “risk” injury by treatment. In fact the general tenor of the controversy harks back to the days when restoration was obscured behind the myths of secret formulas and personal virtuosity, and custodians had some consequent justification for nervous uncertainty about the results. But there is an even more serious and fundamental danger. We cannot escape the logic that attack on the condition of objects in a museum is in fact an attack on the judgment and professional competence of its entire administration, including the trustees. Conceivably the theories of non-technical doctrinaires might gather enough popular support to persuade trustees that they ought to impose categorical restrictive policies upon those responsible for the welfare of their collections. The further dangers in such a situation are fairly apparent. Few critics with the future of museums at heart would wish to see any such precedent established.

It should be evident that the only real safeguard of a painting under treatment is the integrity of competent operators. It follows logically that museum officials, having secured the services of such persons, should do all in their power to foster and protect that integrity. There is much at stake in this matter. The recent considerable advances in museum conservation, and the present high standards of accomplishment have grown out of a large amount of systematic research and study of methods by conservators and their associates. A strong sense of professional responsibility has motivated this effort. Although largely self-generated, it has flourished under the enlightened support and cooperation of various institutions. The imposition of blanket restrictions on details of practice would deny the validity of that approach and would imply lack of appreciation of present standards. Moreover such restrictions would create precedent for an administrative regimentation that would be potentially responsive to uninformed popular pressure. In such an atmosphere there would be little incentive for further independent efforts toward progress, or even toward maintenance of individual standards upon which, nevertheless, museums must ultimately depend.

This is not to suggest that conservators be left wholly to their own devices. Obviously every institution has need for a clear pattern of administrative departmental procedure, with responsibilities sharply defined and fields of authority logically delimited. But such a pattern must be founded on the axiom that each work of art is a case by itself, to be treated individually according to its unique requirements. Formal regulations must be designed to protect the processes of conservation from doctrinaire regimentation. At the same time they can, and should, provide the museum with adequate records and other systematic means for demonstrating that these processes are carried out in accordance with sound technical practice. There is nothing particularly difficult or novel about such a programme. In many fields involving institutions and professional employees its general principles have proved both necessary and successful. They are, in theory at least, illustrated in the conservation programmes of most of the museums associated with this controversy. It is to be hoped that in them can be found a common basis for renewed agreement on primary aims, and promise of a return to a co-operative approach to the broad problems of conservation.

As a sort of appendix to these generalities, it may do no harm to describe briefly a pattern of administration which has operated effectively at a large American museum. This is done hesitantly, and without any intent to imply perfection. It is put forward simply in the belief that within its structure can be found the outlines of a sound philosophy.

The work of conservation at this museum is conducted by trained persons, who are regular members of the staff. The department has full curatorial rank by authority of the trustees, and operates independently under the Director of the museum. In matters specifically related to the physical condition and welfare of works of art the final decision rests with the head of the conservation department.
All decisions are of course subject to review and approval by the Director. The operating routine includes written reports of laboratory examination with recommended treatment, formal approval by a staff executive committee before treatment, and full photographic and written records before, during, and after treatment. All operations are open to continuous observation by the curator, whose role in the laboratory is always welcomed. The principle of joint responsibility is evident in the entire pattern of procedure, and that responsibility is permanently recorded in the records.

It would seem that these policies carry with them inherent safeguards against judgment or of inadvertence. There is some reason to believe that they are dependable variety of safeguard. With the assurance of mature professional responsibility, codes and doctrines become superficial and unnecessary. Without assurance they are but feeble protection.

The thesis of these remarks can easily be summarized. All museums share the problem to preserve their collections. The task is ever increasing. None can hope to cope with it in solitary independence. The problem can be met only by the in co-operative effort, by pooling resources, sharing technical data, and by concentration on common fundamentals. Museums simply cannot afford to waste time and effort bickering over doctrines, or to undermine the stature of conservators by imposing dogmatic regulations on technical practice.

The foregoing, emphasis has been laid upon the need for institutional action to meet the problem of conservation. The burden must obviously be shared by the conservators.
themselves, and it is pertinent to ask how they are prepared to meet this responsibility. A partial answer to that question may be found in the International Institute for the Conservation of Museum Objects. This organization, now established under British law as an international non-profit corporation, is composed of museum conservators and other professional museum persons who are experienced and occupied able to further the progress of conservation. The foundation represents many museums in Europe and America. Its basic objectives are:

(a) to develop programmes for the exchange and dissemination of technical information;
(b) to further specific projects of investigation;
(c) to encourage co-ordinate programmes for technical training;
(d) to define and maintain standards in the practice of conservation;
(e) to provide services of consultation for subscribing institutions.

More than one effort has been made in the past to provide means for dealing with these problems. In 1934 a committee was appointed by the American Museums to report on methods for examining paintings. The International Office of Museums of the League of Nations held conferences on the subject of conservation, and much of the findings have been published in Museum and elsewhere. Papers dealing with art conservation are regularly presented at meetings of the American Museums and are subsequently published in the Museum News. In the period of ten years a quarterly journal, Technical Studies in the Field of Art, was published by the Department of Conservation at the Fogg Museum of Art. In the present the International Council of Museums is conducting a survey of museum practices in conservation. The intent of all these undertakings has been admirable. Some progress has undoubtedly resulted, and more can be anticipated. On the
valuable work has been wasted in the past for lack of a permanent
body devoted to the practical application and systematic continuance of
knowledge already made. The ICOM Commission on the Care of Paintings can
aid greatly on the curatorial and administrative level, but its present field
is limited to paintings, and its organization is not designed to carry out
technical programmes of the International Institute for Conservation.
which is primarily professional, and it seems certain that an organization for
such a purpose must be professional in character. In order to continue as an active
body, it must derive permanent impetus from the experience, knowledge, and
principle of those actively engaged in the practice of museum
profession. The problems in this field, whether technical or theoretical, cannot be
solved by internal rationalization, or by isolated non-technical investigations and
must depend upon and encourage the conservators themselves
need. The International Institute for the Conservation of Museums
seeks itself as a means to this end. As a continuing professional
body, it will be in a position to give regular advice and information on
conservation to individual institutions, and at the same time to co-operate
with bodies such as museums' associations, Unesco, and ICOM. Under these
conditions there is good hope for outstanding progress in the field of museum

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* See footnote p. 235.
* Voir note p. 235.