

Conservator and art historian Anna Bronzoni Catellani replies

What does a painting conservator do?  
Is it necessary to conserve modern art?  
What is the best way to store paintings?

Barnebys spoke with art historian and  
conservator Anna Bronzoni Catellani.

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Left: 18th century painting damaged by water and fire before restoration. Right: 18th century portrait after conservation and restoration. Photo © Ateljé Catellani (detail). Conservation's work performed by Anna Bronzoni Catellani 2022.

Both classical and modern art are affected by the passage of time - paintings lose colour, get dirty or are damaged. Anna Bronzoni Catellani has 38 years of experience in the profession and tells you everything you need to know about the conservation and restoration of visual arts.



Photo © Ateljé Catellani

17th Century's painting, view of the Campagna Romana ( Atelje' Catellani art collection)

Anna Bronzoni Catellani was trained at Palazzo Spinelli Nicolini, the Institute for Art Conservation and Restoration in Florence. She has also studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Modena, Italy, and obtained a Swedish Master of Philosophy in Art History at Uppsala University. Over the years, Anna has received several awards. She is recognised by the Italian State for her important contributions in the field of art conservation and restoration and was knighted as "Cavaliere alla Croce della Solidarietà Italiana" by Italian President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi in 2005. Anna is an elected member of the Nordic Association of Conservators (NKF) and the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC). She is also an elected surveyor and appraisal in the Swedish Chambers of Commerce.



Anna Bronzoni Catellani.  
Foto © Ateljé Catellani

Established in 1989, Ateljé Catellani has since been working on the conservation and restoration of paintings on canvas and panel, with expertise in European art from the 15th to the 20th century. The studio's more than three decades of work experience in the conservation and restoration of visual art includes paintings from the classical period, such as Titian, Rembrand and Goya, as well as modern art, such as Picasso, Dalí and Magritte. The business targets both the private market and institutions in Sweden and abroad.

Barnebys spoke to Anna about the profession of conservator, fake art, the importance of condition and much more.



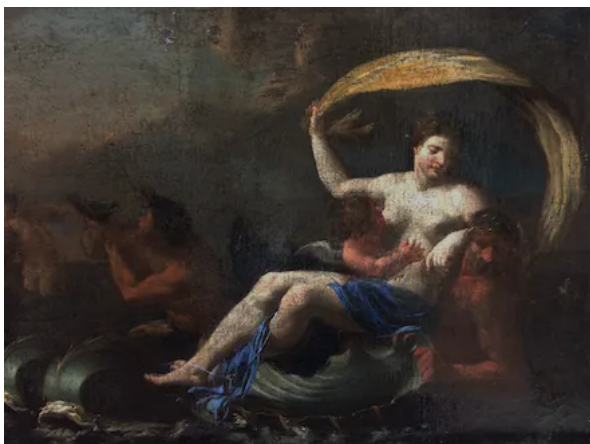


Left: Moisture damaged portrait of Lord Nelson before restoration. Right: Portrait of Lord Nelson after conservation and restoration performed by Anna Bronzoni Catellani. Photo © Ateljé Catellani

Barnebys spoke to Anna about the conservation profession, fake art, the importance of monitoring an artwork's condition and much more.

### WHAT DOES A PAINTING CONSERVATOR DO?

A painting conservator works to save paintings. My day-to-day work as a painting conservator may involve conserving a painting that is old, for example, that has cracked or lost colour due to age or damage, or cleaning a painting that has not been cleaned for hundreds of years, which has become dark and indistinct in color. Conservation is always applied with the aim of keeping the artwork in the best condition for the future. The first step in my work, like a doctor with his patient, is to correctly diagnose the problem. After defining what the problem is, I choose the approach, that is the method to be used to save the artwork.



Left: 'The myth of Pygmalion & Galatea' before conservation. Right: 'The myth of Pygmalion & Galatea' after restoration performed by Anna Bronzoni Catellani. ( Atelje' Catellani art collection)Photo © Ateljé Catellani

## IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE IN THE PROFESSION TODAY COMPARED TO YESTERDAY?

Over the last hundred years, the profession of conservator has undergone a metamorphosis. In previous centuries, many artists also carried out conservation's work on both their own works and those of other artists. In the 19th century, when part of an artist's training was to visit museums and copy famous works, the ambition of conservation work was to 'improve' the painting to be conserved. In practice, this meant that the conservator was often an academically trained artist who could freely alter the original composition with the primary aim of concealing the damage, with the result that the original identity of the artwork was often lost. It was after 1966 and the flooding of the Arno river in Florence, where thousands of important works had to be saved in a short time, that conservation became a distinct profession with ethical rules to follow. Since then, the concept of "renovation", i.e. renewal and improvement, has not existed in our world, but a conservator must respect the identity of the work of art in its entirety, its history and never change its character. Today, conserving and restoring a work of art means maintaining and extending its life. This is why our work is not considered as creative but as a technical discipline.



Detail of a still life. Photo © Ateljé Catellani'

## DO YOU NEED TO PRESERVE MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART?

What may seem strange to many people is that modern and contemporary art is also in need of care. During the early 18th century and the rise of industrialism, art was modernized, and artists started using ready-made paints that could be bought in tubes. Similarly, ready-made canvases were bought already mounted on stretchers. The old and well-established ways of working in art gave way to new and practical methods, but not as tried and tested as those used for hundreds of years. This revolution has not only directly affected the habits and manners of the artist but has also changed the painterly and chemical structure of the work of art, presenting conservators with a whole new set of problems to solve and remedy. This is even more true of contemporary art, where the experimental nature of the artist's use of various means has proved exciting from a cultural point of view but precarious from the point of view of preserving the object in good condition. A conservator is very helpful in preserving modern and contemporary art.





Queen's portrait 18th century, partly cleaned during restoration. Photo © Ateljé Catellani

## **HOW DO YOU KNOW IF A WORK OF ART IS GENUINE OR FAKE?**

Art has become a major forum for investing money. The financial value of certain types of art is skyrocketing, and unfortunately, so are the frauds. The tradition of identifying or verifying who the artist is who has painted a particular work has undergone the expert's eye, method and judgement for hundreds of years. The experts examined the work and with their experience could recognise typical or atypical visual features in a work of art, which in turn proved its authenticity. That is an empirical method subject to the connoisseur's personal opinions, sphere of interest and experience. With the development of science and technology, art today is analysed using chemical and digital optical methods that can identify specific elements of the artwork to distinguish fake from real.

## **IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN THE CONDITION OF A WORK OF ART AND ITS ECONOMIC VALUE?**

When you buy a painting, you want to keep all its values: aesthetic, artistic and, above all, economic. When a work of art is altered by losing its original appearance, losing colour or becoming dirty, it also loses some of its economic value. The realisation that art, including contemporary art, needs professional and regular care is therefore also crucial in order to preserve its economic value.

What is the best way to store art?

Paintings are best preserved by not exposing the artwork to unregulated moisture, not having a heat source nearby, preferably not placing it in direct sunlight, having secure hangings and not having heat-generating lamps near the surface of the picture.

Atelje' Catellani's video

<https://youtu.be/aXyGdeXOQOs>

<https://youtu.be/kMhMEvHV-Fs>

<https://youtu.be/snWUsgmPDUY>

<https://youtu.be/4ksIDRPQXxU>