

THE NATIONAL GALLERY

CONSERVATION RISK MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

CONSERVATION October 2011

Policy owner: Director of Conservation

Introduction

The main purpose of the Conservation Department is to ensure the continued preservation of the paintings in the collection.

Cleaning is undertaken for a variety of reasons. It is often a prerequisite of successful lining, panel work or the treatment of loose paint. The removal of discoloured varnish, retouchings and of overpaint so that the artist's original intentions can be seen is a second reason for cleaning, and is often associated with establishing a correct attribution.

Much of the Conservation Department's work is in the area of preventive conservation: housekeeping and minor treatment such as blister laying, surface cleaning and revarnishing. All minor work is discussed with and agreed by the relevant curator.

Except in an emergency, all proposals for major conservation work including cleaning are referred to the Board, both for permission to begin and, on completion, for approval of the work done and for the painting's return to exhibition.

Risks

The principal risks associated with conservation of paintings are considered to be:

- Failure to preserve the collection thereby failing to comply with the Gallery's primary statutory obligation;
- Compromised visitor experience of paintings that are not displayed as close to the artist's intentions as possible;
- Damage to paintings during conservation work;
- Reputational impact of controversial conservation treatment.

Policies and Procedures

1. The whole collection, apart from paintings out on loan but including works in store, is checked twice a year, and fragile panels at least six times. Formal notification of this process is given to the Director of Conservation.
2. Long-term loans from the collection are checked at least every three years.
3. Paintings requested for loan are checked for fitness to travel. If the loan is agreed, the painting is checked again before its departure and on its return.
4. Priorities for major and minor treatment are decided by continual assessment of several relevant factors. Physical deterioration of a painting is given the highest priority. Other important factors include the curators'

- priorities, the display of the collection, the Gallery's exhibition programme, the presentation of new acquisitions, and the need for paintings to be visible enough to identify and catalogue.
5. Proposals for cleaning paintings are discussed by curatorial and conservation staff, the Directors of Collections and Conservation, and the Director before being brought to the Board.
 6. All work is fully documented by appropriate photographic imaging before, during and after treatment. Reports are always written before and after treatment. All this material is kept in each painting's Conservation Dossier. These are normally available to the public on request.
 7. Technical images (x-radiographs, infrared, reflectograms and macrophotography) are used, when appropriate, for examination and recording before, during and after treatment.
 8. Scientific examination is used when appropriate before and during cleaning to inform and guide the process of conservation. When necessary, the Directors of Science, Collections and Conservation will meet to decide on a particular course of treatment. These discussions are documented.
 9. When a painting is undergoing treatment, the curator and conservator directly involved will regularly review and discuss the progress of the work, and if necessary, seek advice from other Gallery staff and from scholars outside the Gallery.
 10. The Board will be shown paintings during treatment if complex issues arise.
 11. All materials and equipment used in conservation are tested for permanence, reversibility, safety and other necessary qualities.
 12. All potential acquisitions are examined by Conservation Department staff.

Responsibilities

The Board of Trustees is responsible for approving all proposals for conservation treatment (except emergency treatment).

The Director of Conservation is responsible for monitoring the condition of paintings whilst undergoing treatment and for the progress of conservation work.

The Director of Conservation, Deputy Director and Director are responsible for prioritising proposals for picture treatment, which then go to the Board of trustees.