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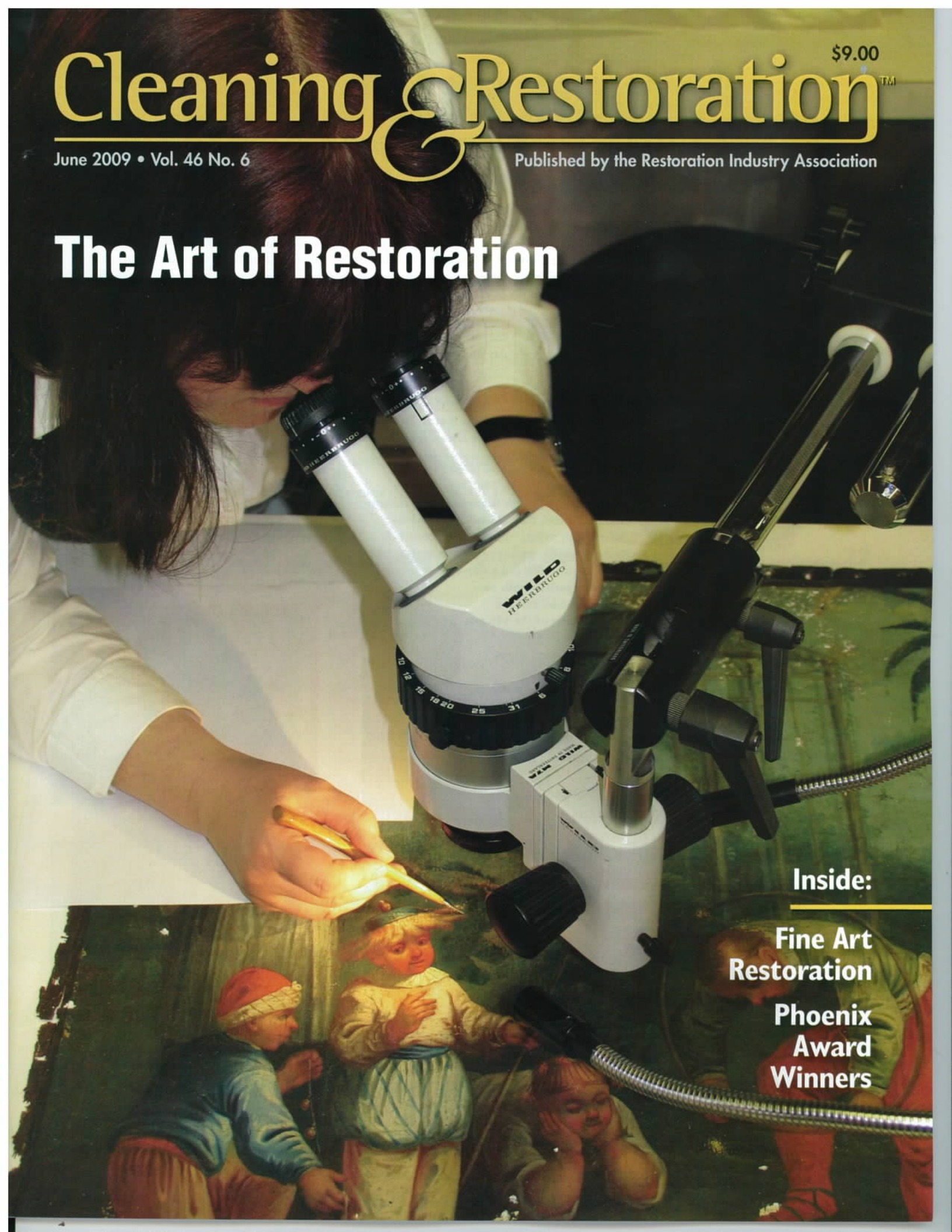
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The Art of Restoration

Inside:

Fine Art
Restoration
Phoenix
Award
Winners





H A N D L I N G

Fine Art

L O S S E S

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Artwork, antiques and collectibles are commonly included with large-and small-sized claims in both private and corporate settings. Since art conservation is such a unique field, it is often overlooked as on-site contractors are unsure of how to handle the items involved. Awareness and education of the basics in this industry are helpful during the adjusting process to determine if conservation is an option, whether items are a loss, and ultimately, how to settle the claim when fine arts are involved.

The quantity and value of fine art will vary greatly in loss situations. A residential site can have anywhere from a few items of sentimental value to a high volume art collection. Commercial sites can also house a few pieces or an extensive inventory. Often universities and other institutions will have voluminous collections that will require additional coordination with professionals.





On-Site Tips Following a Claim

When handling fine art on-site, there are additional details that need to be considered: correct identification (artist, title, medium, dimensions), cause of damage, condition stability, insurance status/coverage during transport, best method of transportation, risk of transportation, and proper packing/crating procedures. A specialist in art handling and conservation can provide instruction and advise how to best manage the situation. However, there are some general steps to follow to best approach handling fine art on-site:

- Once the area is accessible, contact the insurance and experts/conservators. The conservation company will advise on the process of response and removing items of concern. Items with damage or of concern should be moved to a controlled area as soon as possible where they can be kept safely from further damage and harmful exposures.
- As items are removed, they should be inventoried with a brief written notation and then photographed. Numbering each item (or bar-coding if possible) and creating an inventory will assist in the management of the recovery process. Although it is important to address the items in a

timely manner, a few moments spent ensuring precise records are kept can be invaluable going forward.

- During recovery, if items become structurally unsound, be sure to retain all components and keep them together. Bag and label any pieces which come loose for easy identification.
- Never assume an item is a loss. During the recovery stages, all items that can be removed should be considered for examination. A conservator will provide a detailed condition report and treatment proposal which will outline options and reparability.
- Wet or damaged property should be transported as soon as possible to a conservation laboratory or temporary facility. When dealing with significant and/or high-end property, experts can assist with transport in a climate-controlled, air-ride truck. If it is necessary to ship property through a national carrier, begin the process immediately so that items can be assessed by experts prior to the occurrence of any fast drying, which can potentially cause irreversible results. Books and works of art on paper can be shipped in coolers with ice packs so that they can be kept in their current state.
- Any extreme fluctuations in temperature and/or humidity can increase the extent of damage to an item.

- During triage, conservators will carefully review each piece and undertake slow, controlled and monitored drying as necessary.
- Once items are stabilized, a conservator should prepare a thorough condition report of each piece and provide detailed treatment recommendations with photography for the client to review. This process should include consultation with clients to discuss which items are eligible for conservation and expected treatment outcomes, as well as any items that are potentially a loss.

Large-Scale Recovery Strategy

Large-scale art collections can often represent a considerable asset to the private, corporate or institutional owner. Experiences from handling hundreds of high volume disaster scenarios with art and artifacts, including the 2008 Cedar River flooding, provide invaluable knowledge for the future. Below is a large-scale recovery strategy which follows a series of guidelines:

- During disaster situations resources can deplete rapidly. If the client has a disaster response plan in place, the company is encouraged to initiate contact with the preferred resources.
- Assemble a disaster response team and establish protocols.
- Establish safety needs and environmental requirements.
- As soon as the location is secure, visit the area and document the collection in-situ.
- Set up a safe staging area on-site to make an official inventory including medium, dimensions, artist, frame/mount, date, and title if available.
- Photograph every piece individually and offer any triage if required.
- Establish safe packing, handling and transportation based on the material.
- Transport in alarmed, climate-controlled, air-ride vehicles.
- Unload, examine, and test each item for condition and treatment assessment.



- Triage items in need of immediate care and stabilization after written authorization.
- Slowly, under controlled and monitored conditions, return the pieces back to a stable environment of temperature and humidity controls ranging from 68-72 degrees Fahrenheit and 40-50 percent relative humidity.
- Prepare a written report with condition, treatment recommendations, cost and time involved for each item including a collection summary. Please note this includes establishing pre-loss and post-loss damages.
- Await approval of treatment and once written authorization is received, proceed with conservation treatment recommendations.

Case Study 2008 Cedar River Flood

As a result of the massive flooding of the Cedar and Iowa Rivers that occurred in Iowa last June, the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library in Cedar Rapids was flooded with 15 feet of water, well above any historical level. As soon as the water began to recede and the building was safe to enter, the Chicago Conservation Center sent a five-person disaster response team (requested by the adjuster and museum director) to assess and recover the textile collection that had been located on the first floor of the museum, and as a result, completely immersed during the flood. This portion of the textile collection encompassed approximately 1,000 traditional Czech and Slovak costumes and garments, many with detailed colored embroidery, glass beading, embellishments, and metallic thread decorations.

The textiles had been lying soaking wet on the floor and soiled by black, putrid mud that had covered the entire





interior of the building. As a result, they were very nearly destroyed. In addition to the hazardous conditions inside caused by the collapse of showcases, mannequins and sections of wall, there was no electricity. Fortunately, due to exceptionally dry and breezy weather following the receding of the water, mold outbreaks remained localized.

After general assessment of the situation was conducted, triage of the wet, muddy textiles was put in motion in order to stabilize their condition before ultimately shipping them to Chicago. An entire washing station was improvised in the parking lot of the museum, including rows of laundry tubs and 8x4 drying racks.

Prior to rinsing, the muddier textiles were gently washed off. They were then rinsed in successive baths of clean water, separating the whites from the colors to avoid dyes bleeding



and discoloration. Mud deposits were removed with soft paint brushes. The textiles were then patted dry on tables with towels, soft sponges and blotting tissue, and then placed on makeshift drying racks. The textiles were regularly turned and reshaped (especially blouses and large pleated skirts) until fully dry. From there, they were packed and shipped to The Center's facilities in Chicago. Upon arrival, a close examination and inventory of the textiles was undertaken in order to determine the best approach for future conservation treatments.

This operation of triage and stabilization was possible due to ideal weather conditions, a dedicated skillful group of volunteers, and an experienced, well-trained disaster response team of conservators and art handlers. In this case experience, prevention and advance planning ultimately maximized recovery and reduced loss.

When private and corporate assets are held within an art collection, a timely response can make the difference in saving the value of the collection. This can be just as important when handling smaller residential claims. It takes years of experience to build an understanding of what to do and how best to do it. Having an experienced conservator as part of the team for these scenarios can be an invaluable complement to the rest of a company's restoration and recovery services. ■

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