

MODERN LUXURY

# CS

## ARTS & POWER ISSUE

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Defining Chicago's Scene

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# THE FIXERS

THE CONSERVATION CENTER  
CELEBRATES 30 YEARS OF GIVING  
ART A NEW LEASE ON LIFE.

By Lisa Shames

You would never know it from the outside of the four-story brick building on a quiet West Town street, but through the unassuming doors of The Conservation Center ([theconservationcenter.com](http://theconservationcenter.com)) have passed works from some of the world's most famous artists. Pieces by Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Rembrandt, Keith Haring, Damien Hirst, Claude Monet, Marc Chagall and Alexander Calder have all spent time there. For one of the country's leading private art-conservation laboratories, handling priceless items from the country's most prestigious museums, galleries and private collectors is all in a day's work.

"At the core of what we do here is the marriage of art and science," says CEO Heather Becker of the behind-the-scenes work that goes on at the facility's state-of-the-art 28,000-square-foot laboratory designed by Jeanne Gang of Studio Gang Architects.

"It's about recognizing the intent of the artist."

Conservation (as opposed to restoration, which can be more invasive) errs on the side of minimal treatment, utilizing materials and approaches—a combination of new and old-master techniques—that are reversible. "We honor the history of the piece as well as the piece itself," says Becker.

With a staff of more than 30 experts, The Conservation Center is equipped to handle a



PICTURE PERFECT  
From top: Heather Becker in The Conservation Center's laboratory; a conservator delicately removes grime and varnish from a painting.

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variety of mediums, ranging from paintings to rare books to furniture. It's that broad range of skills that sets it apart, says Becker, who has been with the company for 25 of its 30 years. It's also why the center is a go-to for such places as Christie's, Sotheby's and the Union League Club of Chicago.

Following the California wildfires in 2007 and Hurricane Sandy in 2012, The Conservation Center was called in to help salvage damaged treasures. "We saved thousands of works of art in the heart of Chelsea," says Becker. For the past three years, experts from the Center have operated a pop-up conservation lab on-site at Expo Chicago to assist dealers attending the fair from around the world with any art emergencies arising from shipping and transport.

And it's not just institutions that benefit from the Center's art know-how; plenty of private collectors have taken advantage of its services as well. Becker and her team are often called to do risk-management home tours offering advice on everything from safest display options to storage tips to proper framing. "Every piece has a story behind it," says Becker. "It's our job to preserve and care for them and allow them to have a future life."



PHOTOS BY ERIK LINGER