

Conservation Treatment Methodology

Barbara Appelbaum

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While many books on the conservation of art and historic objects address preservation methods for various materials (wood, metal, painted canvas), Barbara Appelbaum's *Conservation Treatment Methodology* provides a valuable and comprehensive reference for the complicated decision-making process that precedes any conservation effort. With many years of experience as a conservator, Appelbaum has the knowledge to explain the variables that enter into any treatment plan. She makes what could otherwise be a ponderous volume into a fascinating analysis.

Anyone considering a career in conservation, museum studies, art history, or historic restoration will find this book a great investment. There are many potential pitfalls in restoring or halting the deterioration of an object—removing damaged material that may one day be of historic or scientific interest, confounding museum-goer expectations by gilding or repainting ancient statuary—and the author clearly outlines them with verve and clarity.

To illustrate and enliven the abstract and often philosophical concepts described in her book, Appelbaum uses humor, interesting quotes, and many examples. She covers the factors that professional conservators must juggle in their research and planning before they touch any object. The author provides a good framework, via a detailed and well-explained matrix, to guide the decision-making process, and she emphasizes that conservators must both understand the goals of the current owner of an object and anticipate the goals of future custodians. Scientific testing is given equal weight with thoughtful analysis of an object's cultural meaning, rarity, aesthetics, historic or scientific value, and other factors.

Though the author provides many verbal examples to illustrate concepts throughout the book, her presentation would benefit from visuals. Illustrations would help students and those readers who are new to the world of conservation. A few photos of objects referenced in the text would go a long way toward reinforcing Appelbaum's main ideas. A description of how to approach the conservation of a Native American textile, Egyptian mummy, or 1920 Stutz Bearcat would be much enhanced by a photograph.

While Appelbaum's book is targeted to a select audience, it offers much to interest museum-goers who are curious about what happens behind the scenes, as well as collectors and those who wonder about what to do with a family heirloom. Antiques dealers would be well served to read this book before attempting their own repairs. *Conservation Treatment Methodology* is a must-have for conservators and a valuable addition to the reference shelf of any museum, or historic house.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (July 5, 2011)

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