

## THE CONSERVATION OF NATIONAL GALLERY PAINTINGS.

Several important pictures belonging to the National Collection have received conservation treatment, during the last six months, by Mr. Harley Griffiths, official Conservator to the National Gallery of Victoria. The treatment was vitally necessary, serious signs of deterioration showing in Rembrandt's "Two Philosophers" (Felton Bequest 1936), and Ruben's "Hercules and Antaeus" (Felton Bequest 1947). Areas of paint were blistering. Sooner or later, these areas, if left untreated, would have flaked off completely. Both pictures are painted on panel. Mr. Griffiths was able, with the aid of an electric spatula and specially prepared wax medium, to secure the danger areas. Heavily discoloured old varnish was removed from Turner's "Walton Bridges" (Felton Bequest 1920), Ruisdael's "Water Mill" (Felton Bequest 1922), Morland's "Farmyard" (Felton Bequest 1911), Boudin's "Havre Harbour" (Felton Bequest 1913), Constable's "West End Fields, Hampstead" (Felton Bequest 1909), and other pictures. The removal of the varnish provided almost a revelation. Some of the works, when half only of the total area was cleaned, were hung in the gallery for inspection. Their effect was almost as though half of each picture was obscured by a very dirty glass or muslin. There could be no question that advantage of effect had been gained.

At one time a rather wholesale method of treatment for old pictures or those in need of attention was adopted by National Gallery curators and others. A liberal coat of warm coloured varnish was applied as a panacea for almost every ill. No regard was held for the facts that varnish, when aged, not only becomes sadly discoloured but can cause drastic physical damage to the very structure of the work. Another foolish practice was to rub linseed oil, with or without turpentine, over paintings which had dried dull.

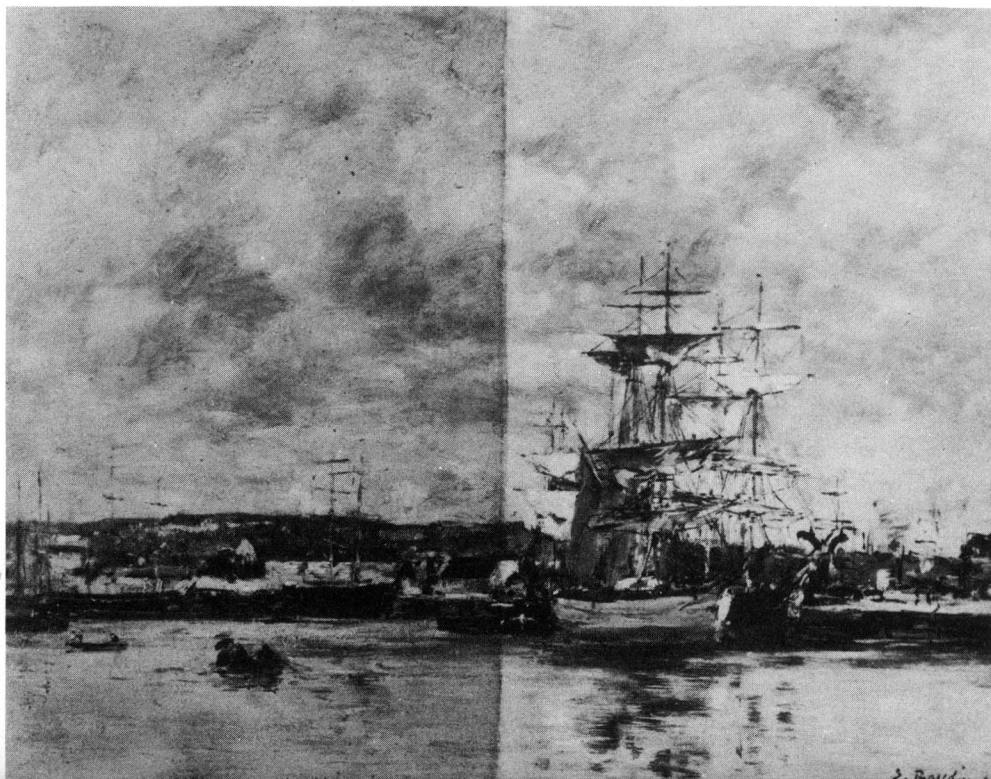
In the present day most authorities agree that removal of old varnish is essential, provided a discreet balance between physical necessity and aesthetic sensibility is maintained. Could anyone wish seriously to see one-time beauty yellowed, blackened, or almost obscured, when a great measure of a work's original quality can be regained?

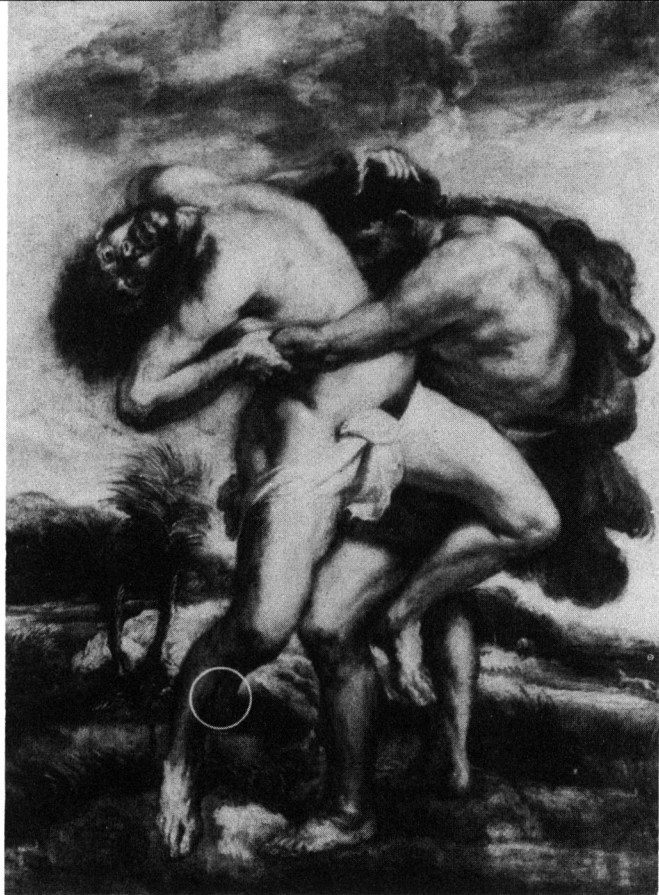
For those who have not the opportunity to examine the cleaned pictures, our illustrations, though only in black and white, indicate the success of Mr. Griffiths's treatment.

ARNOLD SHORE.

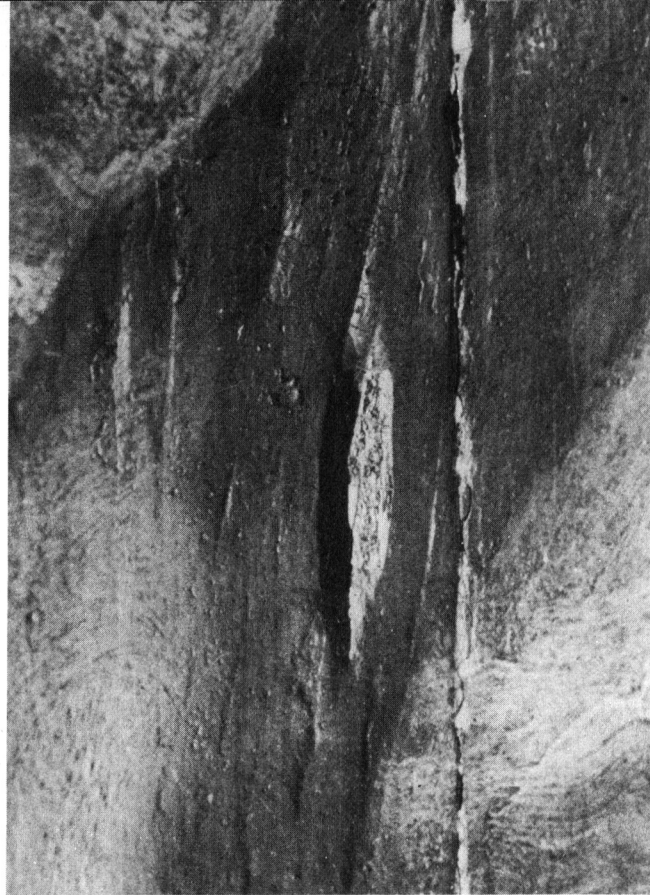
BOUDIN, E. L., HAVRE HARBOUR, Oil on panel, 12½ in. x 15½ in., half-cleaned.

Felton Bequest.



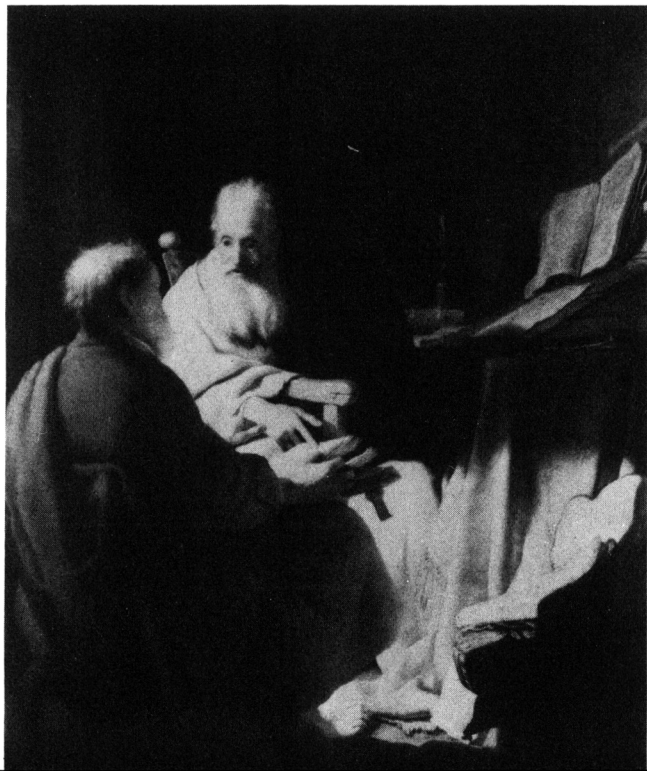


RUBENS, PETER PAUL, HERCULES AND ANTAEUS, *Oil on panel*,  
19½ in. x 25½ in. *Felton Bequest.*



RUBENS, PETER PAUL, HERCULES AND ANTAEUS, *Blister in the paint.*

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN, TWO PHILOSOPHERS, *Oil on panel*,  
28 in. x 23½ in. *Felton Bequest.*



REMBRANDT VAN RIJN, TWO PHILOSOPHERS, *Passage with blistered  
paint.*





JOHN CONSTABLE, WEST END FIELDS, HAMPSTEAD, NOON, *Oil on canvas, 12 $\frac{5}{8}$  in. x 20 $\frac{1}{8}$  in.* Felton Bequest.  
*Above: CLEANED; Below: BEFORE CLEANING.*



ST. CATHERINE, LIME STONE SCULPTURE, Spanish, 13th century, Height 46½ in. Presented by Tomas Harris, Esq., London.



CATALAN  
STONE  
FIGURE

13th  
CENTURY



This figure of St. Catherine must be imagined as part of a church exterior, set against a wall, surrounded by a gothic baldachin above, mouldings at the sides and a decorative base underneath. Like all church carvings she was originally coloured and remains of blue and green may still be found on the stone. She carries the emblems of her Sainthood, the wheel on which she suffered martyrdom and the palm of her spiritual victory.

St. Catherine is carved in the High Gothic style which in the late 13th century had been introduced from France into the Spanish province of Catalonia. The fold motifs, the clear-cut, youthful head, the fine linear treatment of the features and hair are reminiscent of the sculptures which adorn the great French cathedrals of the 13th century. Yet there is a marked difference of mood: the severity of the pose with its strictly symmetrical arrangement of shoulders, emblems and feet reveal the spanish, catalonian origin of this figure.

URSULA HOFF.

## SPANISH FURNITURE

16th and 17th  
CENTURIES



LEATHER FIGURE,  
South American, 16th  
century. Presented by  
Frank Partridge, Esq.,  
London.

This impressive patriarchal figure is one of two very rare pieces recently presented to the Gallery by Frank Partridge, Esq., of London. The figures are of Spanish South American origin and date from the sixteenth century. It was the custom when a member of the household was away, to put at his place at the table one of these effigy-like figures. The structure is upholstered and has obviously served as a chair. The features of the face, although dictated in form to some extent by the material, bear some resemblance to indigenous South American sculpture.

The Vargueno chest is one of the greatest Spanish contributions to the development of furniture, leading from the hinge-lidded box, which in early times was used for practically all storage purposes and served also as a seat, to the *escritoire* which reached such heights of elegance in the eighteenth century.

The term "Vargueno" honours the town of Vargas as the place of origin. The Moors were very skilful craftsmen, and seem to have remained the chief furniture-makers in Spain long after Moorish military power was broken. The methods of joinery used in the Vargueno chest, and many of the decorative features are Moorish in origin.

Our Vargueno chest, which is illustrated, is a typical 17th century example. The upper unit is the characteristic form; it may be carried on an open frame or, as here, on a lower chest. The exterior of this portion is not carved but is decorated with pierced ironwork in panels of tracery (almost completely abstract in motif) which are backed with red fabric. The outer fittings include no less than seven locks, bolts and hooks, of which the great hasp, a fine piece of decorative ironwork, forms the subject of the cover illustration to this Bulletin. The front panel is hinged on its lower edge, revealing, when open, an interior divided into numerous compartments, fitted with drawers of several sizes, some protected by locked doors, the whole splendidly decorated with carving, gilding and bone inlay. The architectural influence in this decoration: plinths, twisted columns, broken and scrolled pediments, suggests some connection with contemporary Italian forms. The timber is walnut: it is lightly oiled.

This candelabrum is of the kind used in the "Tenebrae" service, during which candles are extinguished one by one, leaving the church in darkness except for the light cast by one shielded candle, used for reading the service.

This piece is a fine example of wrought-iron work, of which the Spanish were notable exponents; it presents a rich silhouette pattern, into which are woven the letters which represent the names of The Virgin, Jesus and St. Joseph. The stem is finely proportioned, its decoration entirely suitable to this most resistant material.

G. THOMSON.



VARGUENO DESK CABINET, Spanish, 17th century, Height 60 $\frac{3}{8}$  in.  
Felton Bequest.



IRON TENEBRARIO, Spanish, 16th century, Height  
7 ft. 7 $\frac{1}{4}$  in.  
Felton Bequest.

## RECENT ACQUISITIONS TO THE ART MUSEUM INCLUDE:

William and Mary Side Table, gesso .....	Thomas Moore .....	Felton Bequest
Wall Mirror, carved wood, gilt .....	Chippendale .....	Purchased
Chair, lacquered wood, hand painted, c. 1850 .....		Purchased
Bear and Seal, grey marble .....	Clive Stephen .....	Purchased
Nine Netzukes .....	Japanese .....	Purchased
Eight Horses, watercolour painting .....	Wangkien after Chao Meng-fo .....	Purchased
Landscape, vertical scroll on silk .....	Wang Hui .....	Purchased

## GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE ART MUSEUM INCLUDE:

Oriental textiles and metal work .....	Presented by Mrs. M. Stewart-Webb
Fan, net decorated with spangles, French 19th c. ....	Presented by Daryl Lindsay, Esq.
Fireback, cast iron, French, Renaissance .....	Presented by Martin Boyd, Esq., London

### TRUSTEES OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA:

Sir John Medley, Kt., D.C.L., LL.D., M.A. (Chairman)	J. G. Burnell, M.C., B.E.
Allan R. Henderson, LL.M. (Treasurer)	The Hon. T. W. Mitchell, M.A., M.L.A.
Professor J. T. A. Burke, O.B.E., M.A.	The Hon. Mr. Justice Sholl, M.A., B.C.L.
	A. T. Smithers, C.B.E.

### FELTON BEQUESTS COMMITTEE:

Sir Russell Grimwade, Kt., C.B.E., B.Sc. (Chairman)
The Hon. Sir Frank Clarke, K.B.E., M.L.C.
The Rt. Hon. Sir Owen Dixon, K.C.M.G.
Sir Alexander Stewart, Kt.
A. J. L. McDonnell (Felton Bequest Advisor in London)
Colin G. Rigg (Secretary)

**Director of the National Gallery ..... Daryl Lindsay**

**Assistant and Curator of Art Museum, Gordon Thomson**  
**Education Officer ..... Gilbert Docking**  
**Secretary ..... E. N. Dewar**

**Assistant and Keeper of the Prints ..... Ursula Hoff**  
**Guide Lecturer ..... Arnold Shore**  
**Office ..... Beryl Hollingsworth**

. . . . .

**Acting Head of the National Gallery Schools,**  
**Murray Griffin**  
**Supervisor ..... Hector Williamson**

**Assistant Art Instructor ..... Charles Bush**  
**National Gallery Society ..... Hillary Hunter**

**The following publications and reproductions are on sale at the Swanston Street entrance:**

Catalogue of the Gallery (5/-). Gallery Guide (1/-). Catalogue of Selected Masterpieces with 30 illustrations (1/6). Ten large colour reproductions (25/- each). A selection of small reproductions including Christmas cards.

**"THEATRETTE"**

**DOCUMENTARY FILMS: Every TUESDAY at 1.15 p.m.**  
**LECTURES: NATIONAL GALLERY LECTURE — First Thursday.**  
**PUBLIC LIBRARY LECTURE — Third Thursday.**  
**MUSICAL RECORDINGS — Second and Fourth Thursdays.**

*The cover design in this issue is the lock from the Vargueno Desk Cabinet, Spanish, 17th Century. Felton Bequest.*