

Conservation and restoration



If an item of cultural property is in good condition, all that is needed is adequate maintenance, whether the item is movable or not.

Stored or exhibited movables can be preserved for many years, if suitable precautions against damage are taken. Immovables are apparently much more exposed to wear, but with good care they may endure for a very long period of time.

When an item is not in good condition, the question is which treatment should be followed, and to what degree restoration should be undertaken.

Restoration work began locally when the first large private collections were formed. In the beginning, the restorer worked alone in his workshop and applied his art, discovering new methods which became guarded secrets. Later on, the public authorities began to show interest but, although that aesthetic surgery gave a work of art a pleasant appearance, it greatly accelerated its deterioration.

It was in the 19th century when the interest in the restoration of historic monuments arose. However, the way in which the restoration was carried out—including the insertion of structural elements, which were certainly not part of the historic structure — caused a reaction against restoration.

Similar practice could be applied in the case of preservation of movables. For example, a pot recovered in an excavation could be restored in such a successful way that only detailed examination would show which areas were original and which restored. It was also not uncommon for a skilled restorer to combine different pieces of pots or sculptures into a composite, producing in this way a spurious object.

The reaction to that point was that for a certain period, pots or statuary were repaired in such a way that the restored section was apparent. White plaster on a polychrome pot was used to make that section completely apparent, and this practice was also adopted for the restoration of buildings.