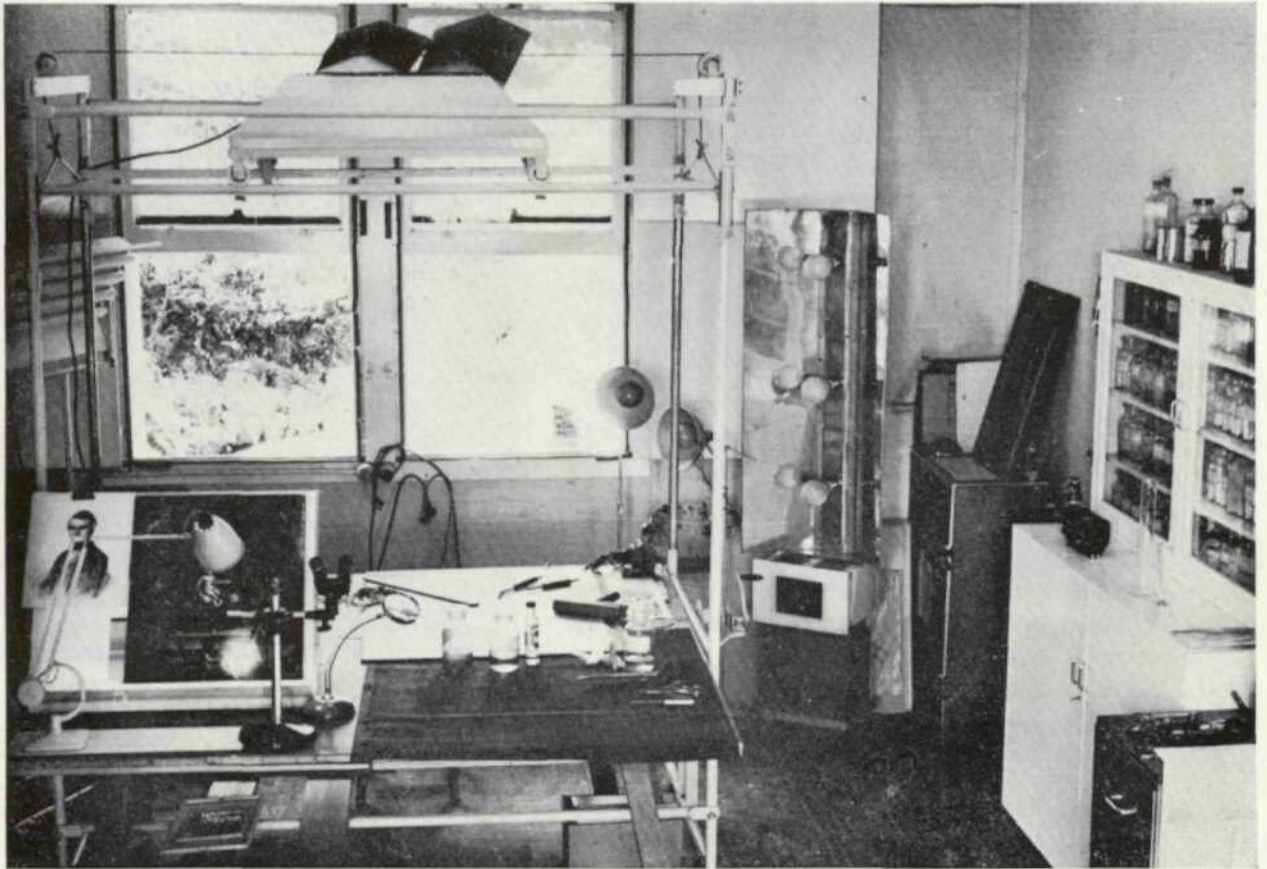


AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY

QUARTERLY



The Restoration Studio

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NUMBER SIXTEEN—1961

EDITORIAL

THIS ISSUE OF THE 'QUARTERLY' is devoted to notes on some of the many works, both in the permanent collection and on long term loan to the Gallery, which have passed through our Conservation Studio.

The Conservation Department is under the charge of Mr L. C. Lloyd, and his notes accompany the illustrations.

THE CONSERVATION OF WORKS OF ART is made rather more trying in this South Pacific latitude by the sudden temperature changes. The relative humidity ranges from 23 per cent to 86 per cent over the year.

At times it is possible to see the condensation of the saturated aqueous vapour on the paintings—in particular, those upon canvas with stretcher, when the surface will be seen to be covered with droplets of moisture.

The canvas having absorbed a great deal will appear limp and sagging. The only complete remedy is, of course, air conditioning.

In the meantime we are gradually working our way through the collection and attaching all suitable paintings to a new, rigid support of compressed fibre-board by means of a wax

resin mixture. With a varnish film on the paint surface, this treatment prevents absorption of moisture both from the front and rear and consequently its limp appearance—which of course tightens again as soon as conditions become dryer.

The subjection of the paint surface to the tension of such a variable support as canvas is bound to become evident sooner or later. The paint attachment becomes weakened and begins to cup and flake, hence the present treatment of isolating the canvas from moisture permeability.

With these humid conditions pictures on paper are prone to a brown mould (or foxing) which grows on these substances which, being hygroscopic, present a suitable medium for the fungus cultures. This brown mould has been proved to germinate above 75 per cent relative humidity—a condition frequently experienced in Auckland. Here again air conditioning would help. However, the Gallery has installed a sterilisation chamber and the whole of the collection is being subjected to routine treatment in order that the more radical treatment of chemical bleaching, and its consequent dangers, will be avoided.



BERNADINO LANINO (1512-1583) Milanese
ST VICTOR
Oil on Panel 46| x 20i
The Grey Collection
This softwood panel picture edged with hard-
wood, has had a life of much damage by wood-



LANINO *St Victor*

worm, damp, repeated cleaning and overpainting. It is backed by a hardwood cradle, probably applied early 19th Century, and the panel is very spongy due to being extensively worm-eaten. Considerable flaking of the gesso ground had apparently been taking place over many

years, as could be seen by the varied materials and colours of the fillings. Much damage has also been incurred by harsh cleaning, which in time required much overpainting in order to conceal the abrasion of paint.

There are indications that this picture was never completed, at least by Lanino, as removal of a crudely painted test section of the armour about the hips revealed only the incised pattern the armour was to take. Gold paint had been liberally and inexpertly used in painting the obviously later lineal pattern on the abdomen and armour; whereas the nimbus was as originally applied with flakes of leaf gold. An intriguing discovery was a large capital letter 'E', scratched into the background area to the right of the head.

The picture has been overpainted a number of times and these additions were inferior in quality and consequently disfiguring.

The treatment included wax impregnation of the soft wood panel and filling of worm holes on the painted surface. Certain areas such as the face and neck were in-painted with watercolour; on other missing parts, tempera with resinous glazes were used and the panel finished with a synthetic resin varnish over which was applied a thin wax varnish as final protection.

PARIS BORDONE (1500-1571) Italian
MADONNA & CHILD WITH ST SEBASTIAN
Oil on Panel 10 x 10
Presented by Mr N. B. Spencer, 1960

This work was very lightly cleaned before it was shown in the Old Master Paintings Exhibition as it was on loan from a private collection and, as was reported in a previous issue of the quarterly, it has since been presented to the Gallery. The painting has now been thoroughly examined and restored, revealing the full brilliance of colour for which Bordone was famed.

The work is on a soft wood panel which has considerable lateral warp and it is painted in tempera with resinous glazes. The draperies in particular are composed of a very gritty and



BORDONE *Madonna & Child with St Sebastian*

After restoration





coarse ground or underpainting, which has resulted in a rather spotty appearance as the tops of the grit particles have been skinned of paint after repeated cleanings. A visual examination before cleaning showed a number of suspiciously opaque areas—notably the headdress and its apparent continuance over the shoulder of Mary; the colour too, seemed out of key. With the aid of ultra-violet and infra-red photography this was proved to be a later alteration and addition, and upon removal some degree of damage was seen to have been part reason for the overpainting. Owing to the nature of the surface of this work it was necessary to remove the varnish layer mechanically, a very lengthy process. The rays of the aureole of the child were overpaints and were removed; the cleaning also made the incised nimbus more apparent. In general the paint surface was in very good order, although the ground was very lightly attached to the support, in places being particularly fragile.

The final result was reward enough for this, at times, rather tedious restoration.

EDWIN LANDSEER (1802-1873) English

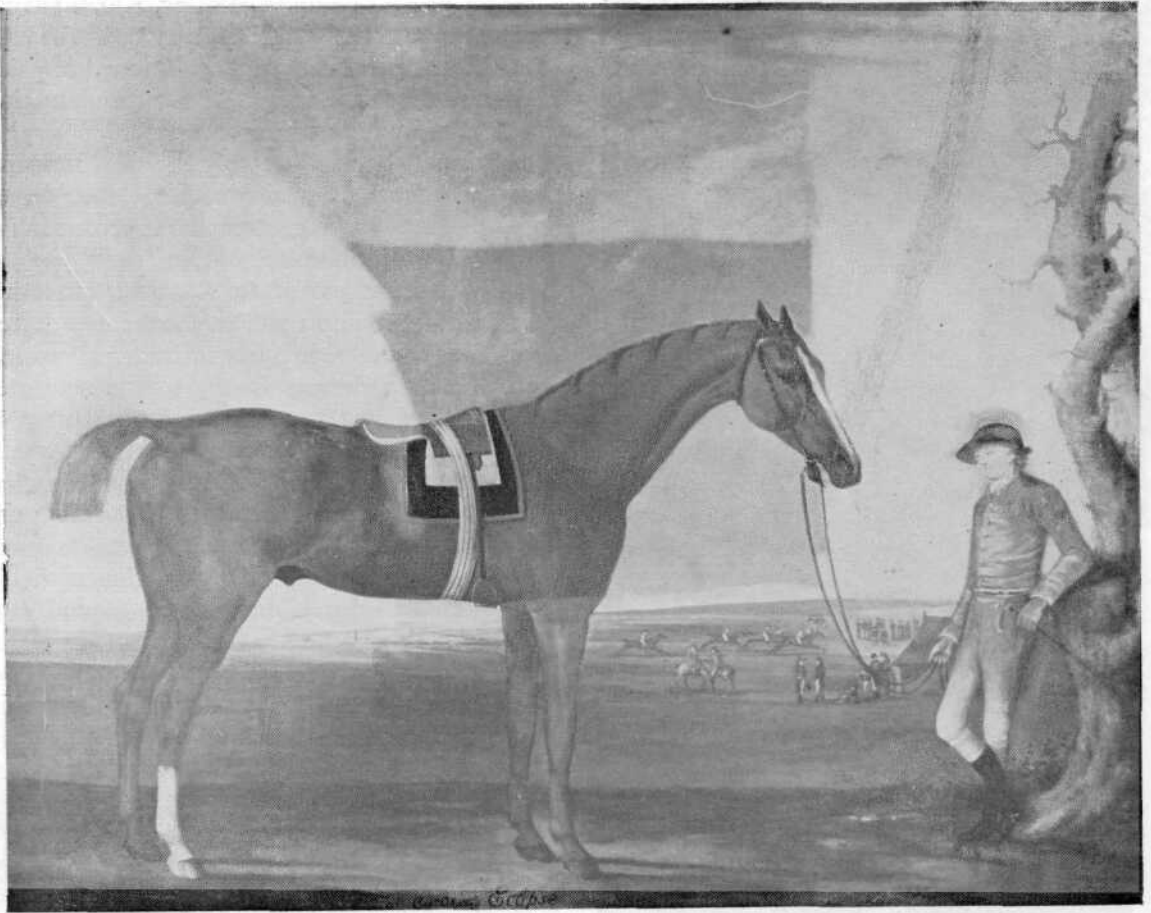
PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Oil on Canvas 292 x 24|

On Loan from Mrs T. A. Ambrose



To bring about a rather dramatic recovery of a work is quite often far simpler than removing an apparently small alteration or overpainting to a work such as the preceding one. This is particularly evident in a black and white photograph. This picture, one of a pair, had been neglected for many years; the canvas support had become damp and badly buckled and also had a very discoloured varnish film. Fortunately there were very few paint losses, the actual paint surface being in good condition. The treatment consisted of shrinking the canvas and so obtaining a really flat surface; it was then mounted on to a compressed fibre board with a wax-resin adhesive. The spirit varnish was removed, missing areas filled and inpainted. The picture was then finished with a synthetic resin varnish.



SARTORIUS *Eclipse*

J. N. SARTORIUS (1755-1837) English
CAPTAIN O'KELLY'S "ECLIPSE"
Oil on Canvas 40J x 51
Presented by Mr Moss Davis, 1931

Sartorius, one of the lesser British sporting artists, shows in this picture both the primitive and the rather laboured realist painting for which he is well known. Throughout this work there are a number of penti-menti and particularly does he show his struggles with the ill proportioned figure, it being difficult to believe the human figure could fit into the riding habit and show such little evidence of form. On the other hand, the smaller distant figures are better proportioned, and they are

also painted with an easy spontaneity that is convincing.

The paint surface of the work being fairly intact, it was only necessary to remove the two distinct varnish layers (as can be seen in the photograph).

The removal of a later overpainting revealed a distant village and hills, perhaps it was felt, by some previous owner, that besides being rather poorly placed, it conformed to the usual rather weak landscape painting of Sartorius. The whole of the landscape area had been rather badly skinned and later over-painted; during cleaning the name and owner of the horse plus a signature also came to light.

**WILLIAM HODGES (1744-1797) &
SAWREY GILPIN (1733-1807) English**
TWO TIGERS IN A ROCKY LANDSCAPE
Oil on Canvas 57 x 43

*Purchased with the aid of the National
Art Collection Fund*

After considerable research this picture has finally been attributed to William Hodges and Sawrey Gilpin.

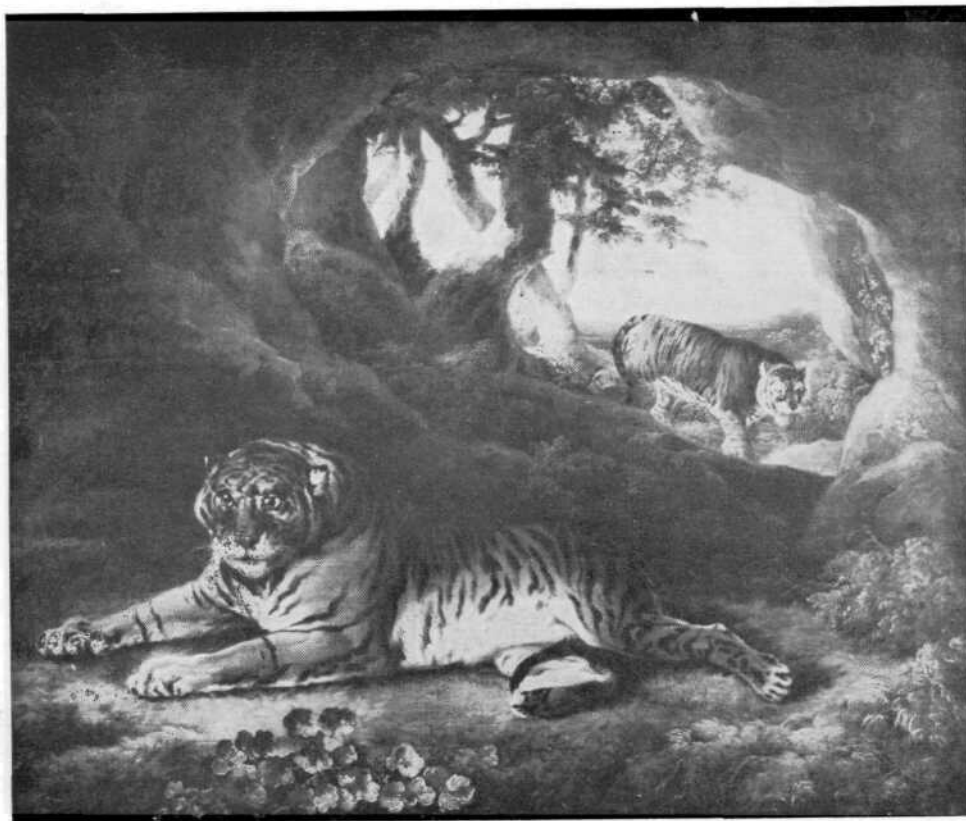
The general condition of the paint surface is very good, and largely intact, except for two or three small areas which appeared to have been originally wilfully damaged.

When this work was bought by the Gallery in 1957, it had just been superficially cleaned, but still had much dark brown varnish, chiefly in the crevices of the portions with impasto. In certain places, such as the hindquarters of the nearer animal and also about its ears, there were discoloured and lifting areas, which in examination proved to be overpaintings and



Detail of paint surface

fillings. As these fillings were obviously insecure they were removed, revealing the dry brush sketch drawing of the animal; this had been painted directly on top of the sizing of the panel, the grain being clearly seen through it. Both artists used their paint in a very liquid state in this *alla prima* work, Hodges employing much glazing and Gilpin using a more fully laden brush.



HODGES & GILPIN, *Tigers in a Rocky Landscape

exhibition calendar

EPSTEIN

Sculpture and Drawings

From 17 March

PAINTINGS FROM THE PACIFIC

Auckland Festival Exhibition

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