

# Q. We recently bought a lovely but slightly clouded-looking old painting at an auction. How do we get it cleaned or restored?

**A.** You take it to a painting conservator, who will examine it and write up a proposal, usually free of charge. You will have to leave the painting with the conservator for this initial consultation, because examining a painting involves testing small, inconspicuous areas with solvents to see how the painting reacts, and this takes time.

"First we figure out if it's worth doing," says Rick Strilky, owner of **Rick Strilky Fine Art Restoration** (4225 N. Lincoln Ave., 773-477-0005). He points out that paintings have layers, like an archeological site, and you need to decide which layers you want to deal with. "Let's say it has a dirt layer on top, then varnish, then overpainting, then the original painting," he says. "You could decide you just want to get rid of the dirt layer and leave it at that." Or you could take things further. Almost anything is possible; circumstances vary too much for him to generalize about price, he says.

Agass Baumgartner, owner of **Baumgartner Fine Art Restoration** (1006 S. Michigan Ave., 312-939-7630; [baumgartnerfineartrestoration.com](http://baumgartnerfineartrestoration.com)), says that a simple cleaning of a 22-by-30-inch painting can cost \$350 to \$400 and can take about a week to do, but that complicated projects can take as long as eight months. "We've done paintings that are canvas glued on Masonite and we have had to take a scalpel and shave the Masonite off," he says. "That can cost thousands."

Heather Becker, CEO of **The Chicago Conservation Center** (730 N. Franklin St., 312-944-5401; [chicagoconservation.com](http://chicagoconservation.com)), agrees that a cleaning can start at about \$300 but go up into the thousands of dollars, depending on the extent of the damage. Like Strilky and Baumgartner, the Conservation Center serves museums, universities, and other institutions, as well as individuals. "We handle paintings that are priceless as well as those of mostly sentimental value, but just as priceless to the owner," Becker says.



BEFORE



AFTER

The Chicago Conservation Center restored this 19th-century English painting, a family heirloom, by treating the peeling, discolored varnish.