MAX SCHWEIDLER

The Restoration of Engravings, Drawings, Books, and Other Works on Paper (1950)

Among paper conservators, Max Schweidler (1885–?) was renowned for his ability to make virtually invisible cast pulp fills, usually on Old Master prints, that fooled many collectors and bedeviled paper conservators, one of whom is Roy Perkinson (1940–), formerly of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Before its translation by Perkinson in 2006, Schweidler's treatise was only periodically consulted by American paper conservators eager to master the magic behind "Schweidler-ized" prints.[1] *Alternatively, reconstituted paper pulp techniques could be learned from German- or Viennese-trained paper conservators, including Christa Gaedhe (1922–2002) and Lilly Hollander (1928–2011).*[2]

This reading reveals Schweidler's desire for more transparency in treatment procedures. How much detailed information to reveal about treatments has always been a thorny issue in the field of conservation and would seem to vary from country to country. For example, as noted in the introduction to this part, American paper conservators have been eager to share information, albeit in a controlled manner in professional conferences and academic publications, since the 1970s. Other conservators remain reluctant. In a book with a similarly narrow audience, Paper and Water, *the editors, Banik and Brückle, deliberately decided against using actual works on paper as demonstration pieces in case they would stimulate "thoughtless imitation on the part of the uninformed" or "raise controversy about preferred treatment approaches among professionals."*[3] *In the fact sheet for the DVD, it is unequivocally stated, "No conservation treatment is featured." The handful of tattered prints, pieces of sheet music, and newspapers that do appear in the videos are described as "a few judiciously selected expendable paper objects."*[4]

From MAX SCHWEIDLER, *The Restoration of Engravings, Drawings, Books, and Other Works on Paper*, trans. and ed. Roy Perkinson (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2006), 204–5.

It seems that Banik and Brückle are responding to a widely held prohibition against publishing detailed descriptions of conservation treatments. As Chris Caple exhorts, "Advocacy can be a powerful tool; however, there are risks on describing conservation work, as unqualified individuals may attempt to copy some of the things mentioned and through lack of skill and understanding damage objects. Consequently, conservators should provide minimal details of materials and practices for widespread public consumption."[5]

For the Banik and Brückle publication, in lieu of stained artworks, highly soluble red food coloring was used on blank sample papers to demonstrate the mechanics of water diffusion and transfer, reminding one of virtual dissections of frogs or the practice of CPR on manikins. Paradoxically, the use of mock-ups has resulted in case studies that demonstrate the interaction of paper and water (i.e., how to remove efficiently discoloration from paper or how to flatten paper successfully) far more clearly and reliably than actual but physically and chemically unique works of art ever could do. In reality, Paper and Water *is filled with forbidden "details of materials and practices" but in a way that deftly deflects accusations of irresponsibility. Whether or not one agrees with the prohibition is an entirely different matter. Surely increased professionalism and shared decision making would go a long way toward addressing conservators' fear of the consequences of overdisclosure.*

Summary

I have arrived at the end of my book but certainly not at the end of all I could say about restorations. Caution prevented me from talking about some things. I wanted to avoid making a bad situation worse. My book should not be regarded as a cookbook that contains instructions for all circumstances. A restorer has to be a very sensitive person who avoids harmful methods of treatment and knows how to adapt useful treatments to his object. This is how my remarks should be understood and used. The reader is free to try other methods on his own. He should, however, do this as a responsible connoisseur and lover of the arts and experiment with his new methods first on worthless things and try them over and over again before he treats valuable works and perhaps exposes them to destruction. The reader will have noticed that I took a similar road. My friends have a great advantage: I have revealed to them the experiences of my fifty years of professional life. The responsibility of the restorer to objects of cultural value is the same as that of the physician to human beings. My book cannot be a cookbook, for the cook can throw out the soup if it does not taste good. But when the physician or the restorer has made an error, frequently all is lost. And we restorers often deal with a dangerously ill patient and are happy when we succeed in bringing it back to life again, when we succeed in saving a culturally valuable work of art not just for decades but for the foreseeable future.

Some time ago, in a monthly publication for bibliophiles, an article appeared under the title "Clinics for Antiquities." This is a title after my own heart. The restorer should feel in his workshop—his clinic—like a medical chief of staff who recognizes with an experienced eye whether treatment or an operation is indicated. There is a certain amount of basic knowledge that definitely has to be followed by the physician; this is also true of the restorer. In medicine much depends on the experience of the physician and everything on the constitution of the patient, and the same applies in restoration. The restorer has to collect experience and possess it. His success or lack of success often is dependent on the object he is working on. A lack of success is not always his fault; it is also not a consequence of the methods of treatment recommended here but can depend on the treated material with its mortal weaknesses.

Only he can become a restorer who enjoys his occupation, who treats the objects of his work with love. This love of the object caused me to write down my experiences. It has forced me to explain why I work a certain way and what dangers I have avoided, to help others and to spare them lost efforts and destructive methods.

I emphasized in the foreword that I would like to exchange experiences. I would be happy if in a later edition I could distribute suggestions that others have worked out and would like to make them available to the public just as I have done with mine. In the path toward the preservation of works of cultural value there should not be any professional secrets, for we owe it to our nation and mankind to preserve the few treasures that have been handed down to us from past times.

Notes to Introduction

1 From Irene Brückle, "Der notwendige Blick zurück: Max Schweidler," *Papier Restaurierung* 8, no. 3 (2007): 9–13.

2 Otto Wächter, "Methods of Restoring Old Prints, Documents and Drawings Using Liquid Paper Pulp," in *Conservation of Paintings and the Graphic Arts: Preprints of Contributions to the Lisbon Congress, 9–14 October 1972* (London: International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 1972), 971–74.

3 Gerhard Banik and Irene Brückle, eds., Introduction to *Paper and Water: A Guide for Conservators* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2011), xx. See also readings 77 and 83.

4 Ibid., accompanying DVD, Fact Sheet.

5 Chris Caple, *Conservation Skills: Judgment, Method and Decision Making* (London: Routledge, 2000), 196. See also reading 79.

Readings in Conservation

Historical Perspectives in the Conservation of Works of Art on Paper

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