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First steps and advice

after damage

Flood, fire, impact, damp: what to do — and above all what not to do — in the hours that follow, before a restorer can intervene. These few precautions often decide what can still be saved.

The first protective steps always make the difference.

BEFORE DOING ANYTHING, CALL

06 60 94 82 63

Advice over the telephone costs nothing and prevents the irreparable. Contact a specialist craftsman first: they will tell you what to do with your work, straight away, according to its material and its condition.

1

Move it to safety

Take the work out of the damaged area and keep it somewhere secure, dry, temperate and away from the light.

2

Apply nothing

No product, no solvent, no heat, no rubbing. The surface must not be wiped, blotted or scraped.

3

Call before handling

A specialist restorer will guide you from the first call. Most permanent losses come from the hours that follow, not from the incident itself.

According to the nature of the work

Painting on canvas

Flat, face up, never rolled. If the stretcher is wet, do not dismantle it: the canvas would distort as it dried off tension. Lifting paint cannot be stuck back down: protect it by avoiding all contact.

Wood panel, sculpture, frame

Wood swells, then splits if it dries too fast. Slow natural drying, far from any source of heat. Gather every broken piece, without trying to fit or glue them, and bring them with the work. A work must arrive **whole** — panel, frame, glass, chips, screws, down to the dust at the bottom of the bag. What is brought in will not have to be recreated.

Pastel, drawing, watercolor, paper

The most fragile of all: a wet pastel must not be touched, blown on, or carried upright. Leave the work flat, exactly as it is, and call before moving it at all.

Gilding, ceramic, ivory

Water gilding comes away at the slightest damp contact: do not wipe it. Ivory splits with sudden changes in humidity. Keep every shard, down to the smallest chip.

Contemporary and mixed media

Paper, canvas, wood, plastic and resin behave differently within a single object. Attempt no cleaning: what suits one destroys another.

Painted decor, fresco, large format

Dry nothing artificially and do not cover the surface. Treatment on site is possible: photograph, ventilate, call.

A qualified diagnosis is a necessity

Every work of art is a fragment of our shared heritage. Only a prior diagnosis, made by a **qualified, formally trained restorer**, can establish how the material will react. Acting without experience or scientific knowledge exposes the work to irreversible damage. For the sake of safety and out of respect for the work, **hand it to the restorer exactly as it is**, and contact the insurance assessor without attempting anything yourself.

> **Why the hurry?** After a flood, mould can appear within forty-eight hours and goes on working until it is stopped. After a fire, soot turns greasy and binds more firmly the longer it is left — and the more it is rubbed. In both cases it is the first few days that decide what can be saved.

What not to do

Do not treat it yourself

No product, no solvent, no household cleaner, no implement — and **no test**, not even in a corner. Solvents dissolve the original varnish; water and soap drive the dirt deeper in; pigments and the evidence that had to be preserved are wiped away.

The **onion-and-potato remedy** that circulates online damages works of art irreversibly.

- **Do not roll a canvas on its stretcher**, and never roll the painted surface inward: the paint comes away in flakes.
- **Place nothing on the surface** that could stick to it: newspaper, plastic film, cardboard, bubble wrap, cloth, foam.
- **Use no solvent and no product**: no alcohol, acetone, white spirit, soap, household cleaner or wipes.
- **Do not dry a canvas** with a hairdryer, a radiator, sunlight or hot air: the canvas shrinks and the paint lifts.
- **Do not scrape charred or burnt areas.** It looks like cleaning; it removes original material, and the loss is permanent. Leave them exactly as they are.
- **Do not rub or blot the paint layer**, however lightly.
- **Put nothing on a tear**, and above all nothing on the painted face: no adhesive tape, no glue, no product of any kind.
- **Do not glue anything back yourself.** Commercial adhesives are neither reversible nor suitable, and they complicate any later treatment.
- **Throw no fragment away**, however small, however charred.
- **Do not leave a work in a wet frame or behind wet glass**, and do not put a damp pastel or drawing back under glass.
- **Avoid distortion:** never carry a painting by its canvas, never stand it on one corner, never stack works.

What to do

- **Make the premises safe first:** turn off the water and the electricity, and let the emergency services do their work.
- **Remove the works from the wet area** as soon as it is safe to do so.
- **Keep them somewhere secure**, dry, temperate, ventilated and out of direct light.
- **Lay the work flat, face up**, on a clean dry support, with nothing resting on it.
- **Keep wet works apart** from one another; never stack them.
- **Save every fragment**, flake and chip in a labeled box or envelope. They can be put back.
- **A torn canvas:** if need be, a single easily removable strip of surgical tape **on the back only**, to hold it during transport. Nothing on the tear itself, and no product.
- **Carry a canvas flat**, in a carton that steadies it: that is what keeps the distortions from worsening on the way.
- **If a bare canvas, off its stretcher, absolutely must be rolled:** the painted surface faces **outward** on the roll, never inward — that is what prevents lifting and cracking.
- **A broken sculpture or object:** gather every piece you can find and bring them with the work — ceramic, plaster, wood, ivory. The more original material survives, the truer the reintegration.
- **Bring the humidity of the room down gently:** ventilation, a dehumidifier at a distance. Never heat directed at the work.
- **Photograph the condition of the work** as soon as you can, from several angles: it is the first document in your insurance file.
- **Note the date, the time and the nature of the incident**, and the conditions before and after.
- **Call a specialist restorer**, then your insurer. Ask for a condition report: that is what a claim is founded on.

À L'Atelier — Isabelle Pitre MAÎTRE ARTISAN
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Your insurance file

What the insurer expects — and what À L'Atelier provides

A claim is settled on technical documents, not on a verbal estimate. À L'Atelier prepares:

- the **detailed condition report**, a technical and material description of the work and its damage, with photographs;
- the **treatment estimate**, in the form an insurance file requires;
- the **follow-up of the treatment**, through to the return of the work.

The estimate is at no charge and commits you to nothing. The detailed condition report and the file drawn up for an insurer are another matter: written and photographed documents, they take several hours of research and writing, and are charged for at a figure quoted to you before any of it is begun. À L'Atelier does not carry out valuations and does not give the value of a work: that is the province of an auctioneer or a fine art appraiser.

À L'Atelier carries professional liability insurance and its premises are insured. Insuring the work itself remains the owner's responsibility: for a work of value, through an extension to their own policy.

Why not to improvise as a restorer

Conservation-restoration is a profession in its own right. It calls for knowledge of **science, chemistry, physics and mechanics**: how a binder ages, how a solvent acts, how a canvas behaves under tension, how wood responds to humidity. That is only part of what comes into play: it is the whole of this knowledge, and a great deal more besides, that decides the right method, the right materials and the right gesture — and, far more often, the one not to make.

An improvised treatment leaves **irreversible damage**: a product that sinks into the paint layer, an adhesive that can never be removed, original material lost for good. Entrusting the work to a qualified person is not only the way to the best result; it is what guarantees the **technical and aesthetic quality** of the work and preserves its full value.

It is also a **duty of transmission**. A work of art is ours only for a time: having the good sense not to restore it at random, and to leave it in professional hands, is what allows it to be handed on.

In short

Move the work to safety. Apply nothing. Scrape nothing. Keep every fragment. Photograph. Call. A work left exactly as it is can almost always be treated; a work cleaned in a hurry, far more rarely.

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26 years of practice · 3,000 works restored · 28 rue Traversière, 75012 Paris — Gare de Lyon métro · by appointment

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