

DOER

ART CRACK
DIVE DEEPER INTO THE ART



HELLO ART CRACK!

Today you are the restorer, taking on the role of art doctor. You will scrutinize artworks for damage and find out where any problems lie. You are required not just to think, but also to act. You will move works of art, identify damage and come up with clever solutions to prevent problems arising in the future. There is not always a single good answer: sometimes you learn most by trial and error.

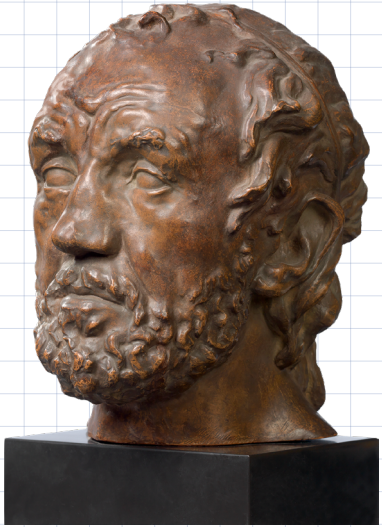
Without doers nothing happens.

Works of art need people who know how to approach the given situation.

MAN WITH BROKEN NOSE

BUST BY RODIN

It is a restorer's job to repair damaged artworks, but preventing damage is of course preferable to repair. So restorers help ensure that artworks are kept in a **safe and stable environment**. When a work has to be moved, they put a great deal of thought into the best way to do this. Because it can be risky.



As you saw on the research table, this statue was damaged while installing a new heater in the museum. It fell off its plinth and broke into a thousand pieces! So it is important to **work out in advance** the safest way to move an artwork and avoid obstacles.



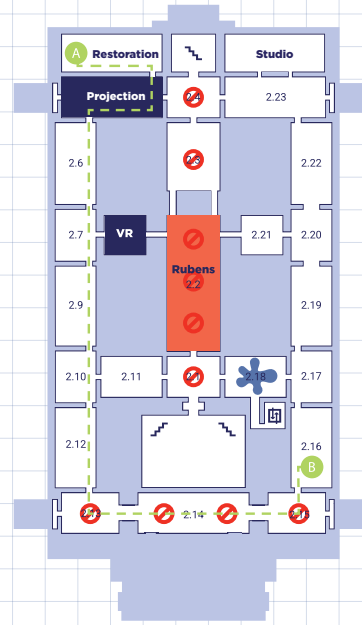
Have a good look at the plan view: imagine you have to take this precious statue from point A to point B. Which route would you choose and why do you think it is the safest?

■ dark area

■ busy area

✦ wet floor

⊘ obstacles



Route A is not a bad choice. It is a rather long route with lots of obstacles, including a dark area, where you could easily stumble. However, it does take you in an almost straight line and avoids the busy Rubens Gallery, so you are less likely to have a mishap.



Route B is one option, but not without its risks: dark areas, a number of turns and a busy Rubens Gallery increase the risk of stumbling or bumping into something. And on this route you will encounter a large number of visitors, over whose movements you have little control. Another route might have been safer, but we live and learn!



Route C is the shrewdest choice and the winner. Short and safe! It avoids busy and dark areas and is the least hazardous. Congratulations, art transporter!

ANNUNCIATION

UNKNOWN ARTIST



Imagine: you are the restorer... and suddenly you are sucked into the painting, where you meet its various components! They enlist your help:

As the research table revealed, **this work has been tampered with**. This came to light during a thorough inspection of the artwork by the researchers. They found that some layers had been overpainted using modern paint, indicating that they were not part of the original work.

But why did the restorer use modern paints on this work? Why not the old formulas? That's what we are going to find out!

- **The wooden panel asks for old, familiar materials.**
"Please only use original materials. I am centuries old and cannot tolerate any chemical modernity!"
- **The white base coat (ground) wants something durable.**
"Give me something appropriate and stable. I want a paint that adheres well, like the original!"
- **The layers of paint want 16th-century-type pigments.**
"Use authentic pigments. I want to be as radiant as I was in the 16th century!"
- **But the coat of varnish wants something modern/new:**
"Just give me something that protects the layers of paint as effectively as the original varnish did, but more modern so that it is easier to remove and slower to yellow."



You are the restorer, so what do you decide?

- ▲ You choose **only historical materials** so as to remain as true to the original work as possible.
- ◆ You go for **exclusively modern materials**. Durability and reversibility are the main criteria.
- You **listen to each component** and choose an inspired mix of old and new.

EXPLANATION

If an old painting is damaged, a restorer has to repair it. But then comes the big question/the conundrum: do you use old materials as before, or do you go for modern products?

Old materials (historical recipes)

⊕ Advantages:

- The restoration remains as true as possible to the work's original appearance.
- The materials are an exact match for the original artwork.
- The artwork retains its historical value.

⊖ Disadvantages:

- After a while, some old pigments may turn yellow or discolour.
- The old pigments are rare or no longer available.
- And some of the old pigments are poisonous!

Modern materials

⊕ Advantages:

- The modern pigments and varnishes are stronger and more stable. So less likely to fade or discolour.
- These materials are easier to remove. So any intervention is reversible.
- The materials have been well tested for toxicity and are more readily available.

Disadvantages:

- ⊖ • We are not 100% certain how the old and new materials will age together.

So what do restorers choose?

Restorers usually choose **a judicious mix of old and modern materials**. Their choice depends on the condition of the artwork, the resources available, and the international guidelines for restoration. Their number-one objective is to protect and preserve the artwork for the long term, while respecting its history and the vision of the artist.

So restoration is **not just repair**. It is a careful combination of science and art.

BUST GEORG PETEL PORTRAIT OF RUBENS

Fortunately, this work by Georg Petel is still in good condition. But that does not mean damage is not a threat. Artworks can sustain gradual damage from **less discernible threats**: damp, heat, sunlight, dust, pollution and even tiny insects, which creep inside or eat away at the material.

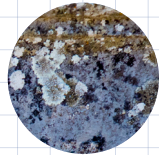
So restorers keep a close eye on artworks, regularly checking them and the environment.



Assignment 1: You are a restorer and you inspect a sculpture in the museum. At first, everything seems to be in order, but then you suddenly spot some damage.

Can you figure out the possible cause and link the damage to the cause?

- A. Air pollution
- B. Age-related wear and tear
- C. Insects
- D. Air too humid
- E. The canvas was not properly secured in the transport case and so rattled around



Mould



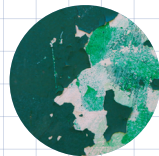
Cracks in the canvas



Pinholes



Black discolouration



Gaps (lacunas)

Visualize: What would the artwork look like in 10 years' time if we didn't change anything in the environment?



Assignment 2: As the restorer, you must decide how to avoid damage in the future. Colour in the radio buttons (circles) next to the action you, the restorer, would take to avoid damage or spot it sooner.

1. Drape a cloth over it
2. Use an air purification system
3. Ventilate by opening a window
4. Position the artwork away from the sun
5. Blow enough fresh, dry air into the space
6. Dust the sculpture regularly using a soft, dry cloth or brush
7. Clean the sculpture regularly using soapsuds and a damp cloth
8. Use measuring equipment to check the atmosphere
9. Lift the sculpture regularly to inspect it

- ◆ Less than 2 correct answers
- 2 to 3 correct answers
- ▲ More than 3 correct answers

EXTRA INFO

At the KMSKA, we do everything possible to keep artworks safe and in the best possible conditions. For example, we ensure that the artworks are **not exposed to direct sunlight** and that there is a **good ventilation system**. This preserves the beauty of the artworks for longer so that future generations can admire them too.

Solution: A: black discolouration, B: lacunas, C: pinholes, D: mould, E: Cracks in the canvas

Solution: Correct answers 2,4,6,8

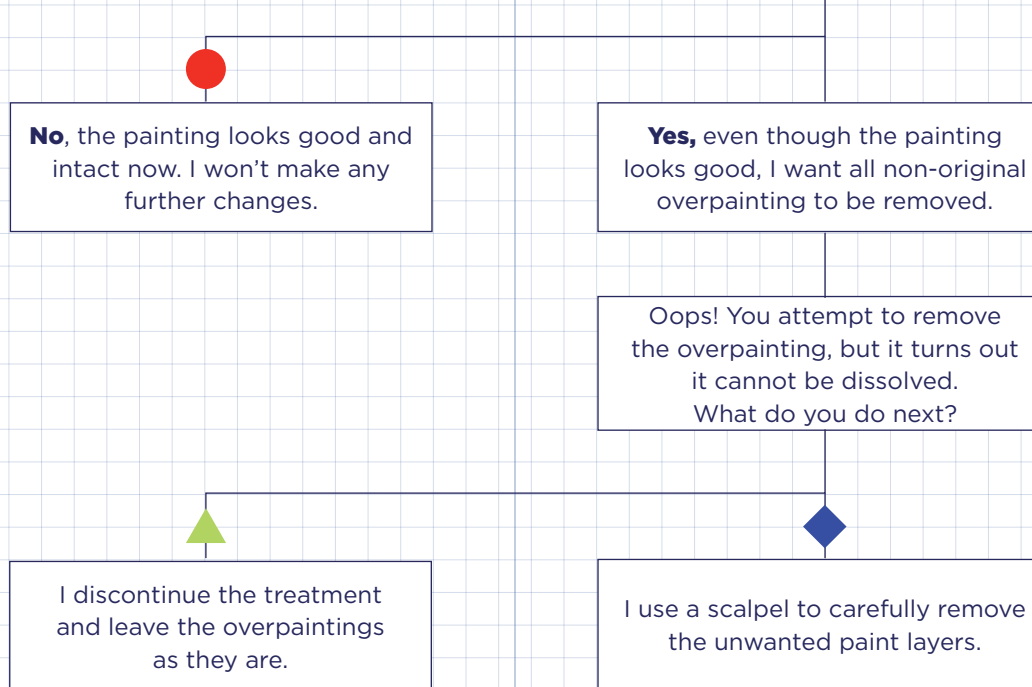
SKELETONS ARGUING OVER THE BODY OF A HANGED MAN

JAMES ENSOR

As you saw on the research table, Ensor's painting was damaged on 13 October 1944 when a V-2 rocket landed near the museum. Ultraviolet light revealed that **the damage had been repaired** and, indeed, in 1945 the tears and the missing paint were retouched. But when researchers examined the painting again in 2013, they discovered that the restoration had been rather too invasive. Not only had the damaged spots been repaired, but they and the area around them had been overpainted. Consequently, **some original parts of Ensor's brushwork are no longer visible**.



Assignment 1: We are going on a brief journey back in time. Back to 2013, when a researcher consults you, the restorer, about a strategy. What would you do about the non-original overpainting?



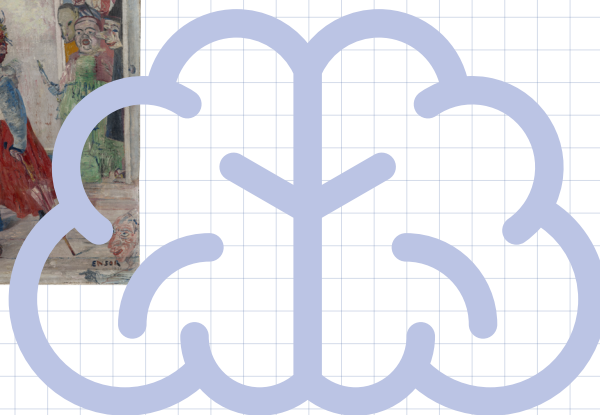
Assignment 2: But back to our time travel. Imagine, you are that 1945 restorer and you can listen in to what 2026 restorers say about your work.

What do you do when years later you hear that your overpainting was excessive?

Do you explain why you did it that way?

How do you feel?

What would you do differently today?



EXTRA INFO

Nowadays restorers aim to carry out only necessary work, changing the artwork as little as possible so as **to retain its integrity**. When Ensor's work was restored in 1945, the restorers did not fully adhere to this principle. The 2013 restorers were **unable to remove the overpaint safely** without damaging the original. So they decided to leave the overpaint and to communicate this transparently to the public. Nowadays, restorers use only materials and techniques that will be **safely reversible** in the future.

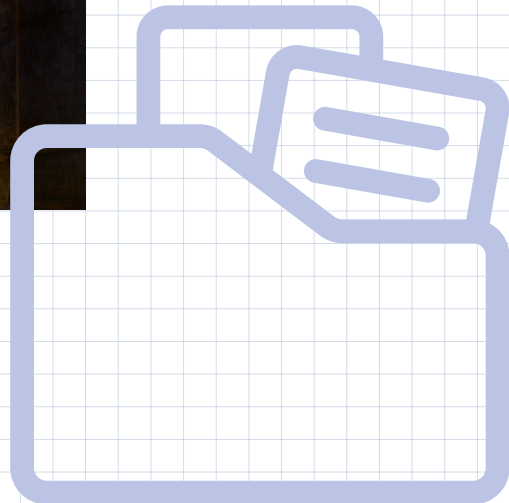
ALEHOUSE SCENE

JOOS VAN CRAESBEECK

When restorers study an artwork close up, they learn not only who made it and who commissioned it. They identify **the materials, techniques** and tools that were used.

The back of a painting may reveal of lot of information too. Some works are painted on canvas, some on a wooden panel, and they also gain an understanding of how former artisans, such as panel makers, went about building it. **Traces of the tools** used are still clearly visible on the back of this painting.

In the 17th century, panel makers worked with hand tools. Every scratch, cut and groove tells us something about how the panel was made. But that mark may be a sign of damage or wear and tear or it could just be the natural appearance of the wood. Under oblique light (light from a sideways, slanting angle), you can detect the fine scratches, gouge lines, saw cuts and chisel marks. These are **a valuable source of information.**



Assignment: Can you link the right tools to the marks? Look at the different tools and marks and pair them.



profile mouldings



planed surfaces



groves



notches

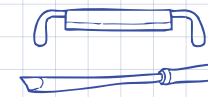


moulding plane

drawknife or gouge

axe

hand plane



What do you think? Who or what does the real work here?

- ◆ The materials and tools are **merely an artisan's aids** and do not affect the end result.
- ▲ The materials play a part: the type of wood and **the tools used affect the result.**
- Only restorers regard materials as important, but **materials tell us nothing about the quality** of the end product.

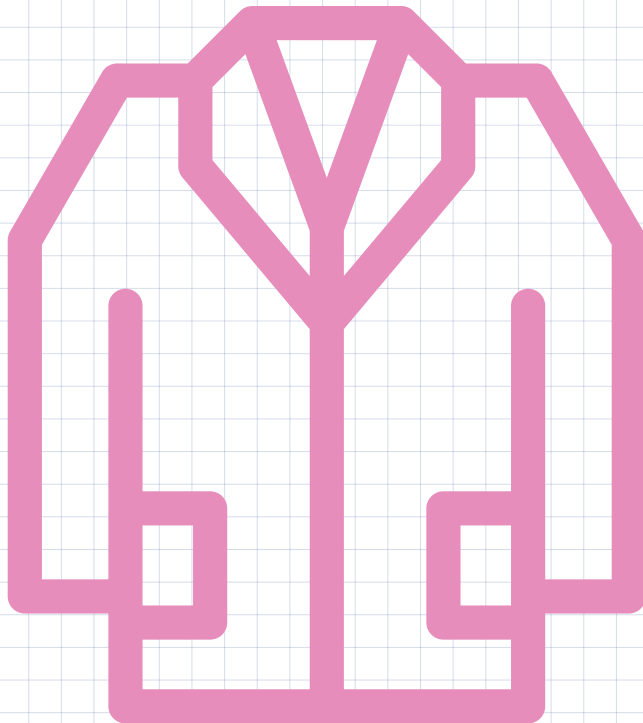
EXTRA INFO

Materials **play an active role.** The type of wood, e.g. oak, determines the size of the painting, how it can be worked, what it might be used for, etc.

The woodworker uses his tools skilfully to prepare the panels, creating a smoothly finished surface for the artist to paint on. So the woodworker, the tools and the painter himself **all influence** what we the viewers/visitors eventually get to see.

Solution: a moulding plane makes profile mouldings, a drawknife or gouge make groves, an axe makes notches and a hand plane makes planed surfaces

Yes! You cracked all 5 assignments: you safely moved a sculpture, chose smart materials, prevented damage, read traces in wood, and devised a restoration plan for the Ensor painting. With a hands on approach, you've shown just how important craftsmanship and precision are in the art world. Maybe there's a future restorer in you?



DOER PERSONALITY TYPES



You chose mostly rhombuses!

You are a **true artisan** with a thorough grounding in your field. You exude self-knowledge and tackle every assignment head-on. Plans and endless explanations are not your thing – you prefer to set to work immediately. You have the confidence to try out new techniques, which helps move the profession forward. This makes you an innovator. Do, however, stop occasionally and think before you begin. Proper preparation is the key to success!



You chose mostly circles!

You are a **focused and cautious restorer** with a keen, analytical eye. You weigh up your every step, well aware of the great responsibility you shoulder. You work carefully and judiciously, thereby ensuring that you never take a restoration too far. You may sometimes be rather reticent, but that also means you respect the boundaries of the profession. You maintain a balance between thinking and doing.



You chose mostly triangles!

You **care deeply about old materials and techniques**. You are inquisitive and know a great deal about how art is made. You like to do your research and you approach each object with respect. You ponder the ethical questions that restoration throws up. At times, you could be rather more open to modern techniques – look not only to the past, but also to what is possible today!

