



FIG. 1. Mario Modestini with his team in the Carnegie Hall studio with *Queen Zenobia Addressing her Soldiers* by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. From left to right: Quarantelli, Robert Manning, Bartolo Bracaglia, Giuseppe Barberi, Mario Modestini, Amleto De Santis, and Angelo Fatta.

Mario Modestini, Conservator of the Kress Collection, 1949–1961

Dianne Dwyer Modestini with Mario Modestini

THE SUDDEN DEATH OF Stephen Pichetto on January 20, 1949 was a grave problem for the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. Had the collection ultimately formed by Samuel Henry Kress and, later, his Foundation been installed in a single museum in New York, as he once intended, it would have constituted, if not the greatest, then certainly the most comprehensive collection of Italian art in the United States, if not the world, studded with hundreds of masterpieces or “leaders” as the retail magnate was wont to call them. The story is well known but, as the lone survivor of those years, I shall briefly recap the events. Shortly before the 1941 opening of the National Gallery of Art its first director, David Finley, a lawyer and advisor to Andrew Mellon, visited Kress to ask if the new museum might borrow 400 paintings. Kress agreed, and an initial group, many taken from the walls of his apartment, was sent to Washington. Samuel himself fell seriously ill shortly after and died in 1955; it was left to his younger brother, Rush Kress, to decide how to best fulfill his brother’s wishes. The Foundation’s commitment to Washington was already strong and the Kress Collection at the National Gallery of Art replaced the idea of a Kress Museum. Samuel Kress had always lent works from his collection around the country, and some paintings had already been given to museums in Denver, Houston and other cities. This precedent developed into a program to donate an art collection consisting of twenty-five to forty paintings and often several sculptures to each of eighteen regional museums.

In 1949, this ambitious art project had just begun to be formulated by the Foundation as one of its two principal missions, the other being medical research, and it was still on the drafting board when Pichetto's untimely death left Rush Kress, the Foundation's president, and Guy Emerson, its art director and a trustee, in a state of shock. A large shipment from Count Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi, the Florentine collector and art dealer, languished in storage, and Pichetto's staff was paralyzed. Meanwhile his widow kept the studio open while bills for rent and salaries, which the Foundation felt a moral obligation to pay, mounted. This was not good business. Emerson assessed the situation and wisely urged Rush to proceed slowly as Pichetto had warned them about the danger of paintings being ruined by "careless and incompetent people . . . in the field . . . experts" rumored to have "ruined" many paintings at the Metropolitan and Boston museums.¹

Rush Kress turned to his principal art advisors, Contini-Bonacossi and Bernard Berenson.² Both suggested that he talk to me and as a result a telegram arrived inviting me to come to New York. At that moment I was in São Paulo, Brazil where I had set up a didactic exhibition for a proposed new museum. I had always wanted to visit New York, and Contini-Bonacossi urged me to go directly since the situation was critical.

I arrived at La Guardia Field on Saturday, March 7, 1949. Gualtiero Volterra, Contini-Bonacossi's buying agent and a trusted friend of Rush Kress, referred to affectionately by both men as "the maestro" because he had been a child prodigy pianist, was already in New York and came to meet me. We stayed at the Plaza Hotel where a lovely room with a large bath and a window overlooking Central Park cost \$8.50 a night. On Monday we went to the offices of the Kress Foundation, a small space in Pichetto's 745 Fifth Avenue studio, a suite of five or six rooms with small windows and low ceilings. There were paintings everywhere. Those that were finished looked as shiny as if they had just come off an automobile assembly line.

With Volterra as my interpreter, I met with Rush Kress and Guy Emerson and eventually the other trustees and officers of the Foundation.

Kress liked to work out the practical details right away, and so we agreed that I would submit an estimate for the work to be done on each painting and invoice each "job," as Pichetto had. In the meanwhile John Walker, chief curator and later director of the National Gallery of Art, suggested that as I planned to stay until early April I might work on some of the Kress paintings that were left in Pichetto's studio, as a sort of sample to show them what I could do.

I chose a panel that had been recently cradled, a *Madonna and Child* by Paolo di Giovanni Fei, a Sieneese artist of the fifteenth century, today in the National Gallery of Art in Washington. It was a tempera painting with a gold background, very dirty, covered with candle smoke, soot and old varnishes. I don't think it had ever been cleaned. The picture was sent to me at the Plaza Hotel where a large north-facing window provided perfect light. My first problem was to find something to use to soften the black deposits. Normally I used an unguent that I made up myself from various ingredients according to a recipe from the manual *Il Restauratore dei Dipinti* by Count Giovanni Secco-Suardo consisting of melted animal fat, linseed oil and Marseilles soap.³ Being without my usual materials, I had to improvise, and I bought a product called Pond's cold cream that women use to remove make-up. I mixed this with a bit of Marseilles soap and some raw linseed oil. I made various tests to see how long it was necessary to leave this creamy emulsion on the painting, removing it with turpentine. In a few days I had cleaned the painting and done some minor retouching with tempera colors. The painting was in a very good state. Walker pronounced himself satisfied and told Kress that I had done a beautiful job.

I stayed on in New York until the middle of April and worked on several other paintings. After Volterra's departure, the research curator of the Foundation, Dr. William Suida, the great Viennese art historian who had resided in the United States since the 1930s, befriended me and helped me in my conversations with Kress. We agreed that I would take on the responsibilities of the Kress Collection for part of the year and would

oversee the men who had worked for Pichetto. Kress was very kind and cordial, which was, in fact, his nature. He seemed very American to me and, in some ways, had a taste for simple things. After we had confirmed our arrangement, he invited me to lunch at Horn & Hardart's, where, he said, they made the best coffee in town. The walls were covered with little boxes with glass doors through which you could see the food offered. You inserted the right number of nickels, and the door would pop open, and you took whatever meal you had chosen. It was an interesting experience, and naturally I never went back there again.

Kress wanted me to move into Pichetto's studio, but I didn't like the space. Although it was on the fifteenth floor, the light was poor since the windows were small, which meant that the restorers always had to work with electric lamps. While Gualtiero Volterra was still in New York, after a lot of searching, we leased a suite of rooms at 221 West 57th Street next to the Art Students League, which would serve both as my studio and as offices for the Foundation. There was a big room with good north light from a large window. The collection at that time consisted of about 1,300 paintings, some on loan to the National Gallery of Art, some at the Kress apartment at 1020 Fifth Avenue, and many in storage at the Morgan Manhattan and Atlas warehouses.

I returned to Rome to tidy up my affairs before

returning to New York in July, as we had agreed. For the moment, not sure how long I would stay in New York, I did not close my gallery.

Shortly after my return to Rome, Kress's secretary Fred Geiger began to cable that the workroom would be ready on April 25th and when will Modestini arrive? After much frantic correspondence between an impatient Rush Kress and a concerned Contini-Bonacossi, I finally booked passage to New York on the Queen Elizabeth to assume my new responsibilities. Among my papers I recently came across a radiogram dated July 12, 1949: WELCOME TO AMERICA SUIDA AND EMERSON WILL MEET YOU AT DOCK R H KRESS. By August 19th a Rush Kress memo asks whether Modestini "needs any more paintings to work on during the next three weeks." Scrawled pencil note: "Now has 30."

The room at the Foundation quickly became too small for the avalanche of work arriving from the storage warehouses. It was evident that the art program devised by the Kress Foundation required my full attention. Kress gave me no peace until I agreed to take a full-time position. Reluctantly, and within a short time, I had to make the decision to close my studio in Rome, which I did with some difficulty and not without regret. Only a few years before, together with Pietro Maria Bardi, a critic and expert on contemporary art, I had opened a gallery and studio of restoration in fifteen rooms in Piazza Augusto Imperatore,



FIG. 2. One of the rooms for restoration of paintings at the Studio d'Arte Palma, Rome, ca. 1947.



FIG. 3. An examination room with equipment for X-radiography and an ultraviolet lamp at Studio d'Arte Palma.

called the Studio d'Arte Palma (figs. 2 and 3). We employed a large staff, had the latest equipment and had already mounted important exhibitions of contemporary artists such as Morandi and Manzù. We also held one devoted to seventeenth-century Italian painting, not then in vogue, and another that was perhaps the first antique frame exhibition anywhere. The gallery was enjoying great success. Although it was difficult to extract myself from these arrangements, for various reasons I was ready for a change despite many ties to my beloved Rome.

My position with the Kress Foundation was formalized. I was named curator and conservator of the collection, for which I was paid a salary; space, materials, and other costs associated with the work on the collection were supplied by the Foundation, while I was responsible for staff salaries, my living accommodations and personal expenses. I sent invoices for each restoration, reframing, construction of shadow boxes, and so on. This was very similar to the arrangement the Foundation had with Pichetto.

By May of 1950 we had moved to a large studio just across the street from the Foundation in the tower of Carnegie Hall. Two of my assistants from the Studio d'Arte Palma came to work with me, Amleto De Santis and Giuseppe Barberi. Amleto had been in art school with me and was a very gifted painter of the *Scuola Romana*. He had worked with me for nearly ten years and had become an excellent restorer. I had also inherited three of Pichetto's assistants. Angelo Fatta was the carpenter who, under Pichetto's direction, thinned and cradled all the panel paintings. The cradles were well made but excessively heavy, and I tried to explain to him that this could cause further cracking of the original panel, but he was difficult to communicate with and set in his ways. Born in Sicily, he had come to the United States when he was twenty years old and spoke his own dialect, a mixture of Italian and Brooklyn English that was incomprehensible to me. Henry Hecht, the reliner, and Paul Kiehart, a restorer, also came to work with me.⁴ From them I learned about Pichetto's techniques and

general practice.

As John Walker relates,⁵ every painting that was offered to Kress was sent to Pichetto's studio for examination and approval and, then, if purchased, returned for cradling, relining, revarnishing and so on. Contrary to popular belief, Pichetto rarely cleaned any of the Kress paintings as they all came from dealers and had been recently restored.⁶ Normally he would correct a few restorations or add some retouches using powdered pigments bound with dammar varnish. Unfortunately he used zinc white that reacts with dammar to produce zinc dammarate, a chalky whitening of the surface.⁷ This blanching process had already begun and we were obliged to remove Pichetto's restorations as early as the 1950s, occasionally on paintings that I myself had restored for Contini-Bonacossi just after the war. In the years that followed, all of the retouches have blanched, and the varnishes have discolored.

In Pichetto's studio every painting on panel was thinned, flattened in a press and cradled. This was standard procedure for most paintings that came to America since centrally heated interiors often provoked warping or splitting of panels accustomed to the high humidity in European churches and palaces. The Pichetto cradles are instantly recognizable: fixed vertical members of varnished mahogany and sliding members of clear pine, lightly waxed, each approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick, although the size varied according to the scale of the painting. The panels treated this way have remained flat over the years, and for all their brutality, the cradles have caused surprisingly few reactions in the original wood panels. Some of the more fragile panels have developed splits along the edges of the fixed members and, in a few instances, panels that originally had pronounced convex warps have continued to flake in areas where the paint was compressed during the flattening process, especially along the joins. At that time, an alternative commonly applied remedy was to transfer paintings from their wooden panel supports to either canvas or to an inert solid support such as Masonite.⁸ Apart from stability, it was also part of an aesthetic: it

was the machine age, and American taste was for flat, mechanically smooth surfaces. Reflecting this preferred look, part of Pichetto's normal practice was not only to flatten panels, but also to reline every painting on canvas whether or not it was necessary. New linings were applied directly to previous ones. Glue paste adhesive was used; the surfaces were ironed on the front with a fifty-pound hot iron and put into a press to dry. This merciless operation flattened the impasto and brushwork of each painting. Every relined painting was furnished with a sturdy new stretcher, the edges bound with gray paper tape.

Whatever surface texture survived was obliterated by a thick layer of varnish built up using alternating layers of dammar in turpentine and shellac in alcohol, so-called "French varnish." This was trickier than it sounds; the shellac had to be applied quickly without picking up the varnish underneath. Small, flat soft-haired brushes were used for applying the shellac, which was brushed on in short strokes in one direction. Sometimes Pichetto built up a sort of dam around the picture onto which he poured varnish. He often reframed paintings with modern reproductions and others, primarily small gold-ground paintings, were fitted with shadow boxes lined with antique velvet. Pichetto contracted this out to the firm of D. Matt, which remained in business until Julius Lowy purchased it in the late 1980s.⁹

I have been asked to describe my approach to paintings, not an easy task since every painting presents its own problems. Since this is so, on consideration, the most important thing is to come to a painting with humility, great respect for the artist as well as a certain fear of touching it with solvents when there is always the risk of spoiling it. Therefore, I habitually begin by making a small test in a corner, in some unobtrusive place, never making a cleaning test in the center of a painting. Once I have cautiously determined the mildest solvent possible, the state of the painting and its sensibility, I begin by removing the varnish as evenly as possible over the entire composition, not paying undue attention to the lighter passages, but developing the relationships

between light and dark. This is particularly important with Baroque paintings. I always stop before going too deep, and prefer to leave a little patina. Many times I have been criticized, in particular by American dealers, for not having cleaned the painting enough. In my opinion, most paintings in the hands of dealers today are terribly overcleaned.

In my experience, for varnish removal, solvents that evaporate quickly are the safest. Chemicals such as dimethyl formamide, benzene, diacetone alcohol, essential oils and cellosolve stay in the paint layer, and their softening action can continue over a long period of time. I only resort to those remedies to remove tough old restorations done with oil paint. Occasionally, with much trepidation, I have used a very strong ammonia solution in certain circumstances, "stopping" it (an inaccurate term but widely used) immediately with turpentine or mineral spirits. Again, its rapid evaporation makes it safer than other choices. This technique requires courage, skill and speed.

My father was a gilder, a frame maker and a restorer of polychrome sculpture. Since I went to work in his shop at the age of fourteen, I have worked with gold leaf and, in the course of my long career, I have had a lot of experience with gold-ground paintings. Many, like the Paolo di Giovanni Fei, haven't been cleaned for years and are covered with a black crust consisting of oil, soot, glue and grime that is extremely difficult to remove. Many of these paintings have been ruined by the use of strong alkaline cleaning agents, such as the caustic soda so popular in the nineteenth century, to remove this black carapace. As I have already mentioned, I have had great success using Secco-Suardo's unguent or some variation of it to soften the hardened dirt and oil. This requires patience, as it does not work immediately. One of my earliest experiences as a restorer was with the Rospigliosi Collection in Rome, before its dispersal at auction in 1931 and 1932.¹⁰ Many paintings from the family's Palestrina villa had never been cleaned and were covered with a hardened black crust of smoke and soot from the fireplaces that

could only be removed with the pomade.

The cleaning of a gold ground is a very delicate operation. Anything containing water has a ruinous effect since the gold leaf is bound to the bole preparation with a mild gelatin solution, easily undermined by moisture. Therefore I also avoid solutions containing alcohol. I have found acetone mixtures to be safe. Sometimes I have used acetone and linseed or mineral oil. Unguents, as long as they are an emulsion containing mainly oil and just a touch of soap, can also be used safely. Often the punched decoration of the gold ground is clogged with dark brown, discolored varnish, left behind by previous cleaning. Usually I try to remove these deposits, softening them with Red Devil waterless paint remover,¹¹ applied with a tiny brush, and then cleaning them manually under the microscope, dot by punched dot. This painstakingly slow method does not harm the gold but requires a delicate touch.

Sometimes, if a gold-ground painting has not been spoiled by harsh cleaning, a gray patina, original to the painting, remains, even under subsequent layers of varnish. This is the temporary varnish described by Cennino Cennini, which was made of beaten egg whites. Originally clear, the gray tonality has developed over time. When the paint mixture is lean, dirt may have also been absorbed into the upper layers, adding to this gray cast. I treasure this and never try to remove it, which would also result in eroding the paint layer and possibly losing some of the delicate final modelling. On some gold backgrounds, a similar layer, which I suspect is the same egg white varnish, can be seen applied over the leaf and around the painted contours, suggesting that this was sometimes done as a separate step to tone down the brash effect of newly burnished gold.¹²

As for varnishing, I dislike thick glossy coatings and have always tried to use the minimum. Many of my restorations have held up remarkably well for over fifty years and I attribute this, in part, to my practice of minimal varnishing. The longevity of a restoration is important, not for the vanity of the restorer, but for the life of the painting itself, since every time the varnish is re-

moved, the solvents leach the medium. Obviously paintings of different periods have different requirements. While early paintings need the thinnest varnish possible in order to obtain a matte surface in keeping with their original appearance, Baroque paintings, particularly those with a dark preparation, require a fuller varnish. I never varnish the gold ground. Despite the treacherous varnish recipes given in early treatises, I do not believe that artists, who intrinsically have good taste, ever liked glossy surfaces on their work.¹³

I abhor the practice of thinning, cradling and transferring panel paintings. Even the warping of a panel is a sign of its age and manufacture, and it is wrong to try to change its appearance. Often I have had frames made to accommodate the curvature of a panel. Sometimes, in situations where the gesso layer has completely lost its consistency, the glue binder having degenerated from excessive humidity over a long period of time, I have had to resort to transfer. Occasionally I have done this myself, although I usually used an expert in Vienna, Wolfgang Kneisel.

Having had many unpleasant experiences with commercial reliners, and having lost several pictures to their inexperienced hands, both at the Studio d'Arte Palma and while I worked for the Kress Collection, I supervised all relining myself. Usually we used a mixture of rabbit-skin glue, Venetian turpentine, and flour that was brushed onto the front of the lining canvas and to the reverse of the original. I always faced the painting first with gelatin glue and tissue paper and cushioned the marble lining table with a thick layer of soft cardboard. The stretched lining canvas was lined up with the original and ironed from the back using normal electric irons at a low setting, continuously checking the front of the original to make sure the surface was not being damaged. I never put the paintings in a press or under heavy weights. Early on I learned through bitter experience that it is extremely dangerous to use water-containing glue paste adhesive on paintings that have never been relined, especially on seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century canvas with a dark preparation; in this case the

original canvas must be isolated with a coat of varnish or shellac, otherwise it will shrink and the color will detach.¹⁴

Returning to 1950 and my work for the Kress Collection, the paintings arrived in such numbers that, even after the move to Carnegie Hall, we were still strapped for space, and I took a second studio for woodworking, framing, relining and so on, reserving the tower for cleaning and retouching. For the moment our needs appeared to be satisfied. I had brought two more of my Roman assistants to New York, Claudio Rigosi and Bartolo Bracaglia, and a wonderful frame restorer from Florence, known only as Quarantelli, a great character of whom everyone became very fond, particularly Rush Kress, despite the fact they could not communicate with each other since Quarantelli spoke in a strict Florentine dialect. Our team was complete (see fig. 1).

The staff of the Kress Foundation consisted of Dr. Herbert Spencer, the director, Guy Emerson, head of the art project, Mary Davis, administrator, and Miss Evans, a secretary. There were six or seven trustees, one of them an Italian-American, Andrew Sordoni, with whom I was able to exchange a few words in my native language. Mr. Geiger was secretary to Rush Kress. The trustees met every two or three months and usually I joined them, particularly when they were discussing projects regarding the collection and acquisitions. I had to learn English to communicate, especially with Kress who was difficult to understand as he always talked with a cigar in his mouth. There were many things to discuss with the employees of the Foundation, all of whom were American, and so I gradually learned to speak English. William Suida helped me very much, especially with Rush Kress, and with time my English improved so much that in meetings Geiger sometimes would turn to me of all people to ask what his cigar-chomping boss had just said!

By the spring of 1950, as Emerson wrote to Kress, "Things have been moving here!" The Regional Gallery Project, as it had been named, was well underway, with collections being formed for San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Seattle and

lists made for the 1951 Kress exhibition at the National Gallery of Art. The art mission of the Foundation had been defined: a large Kress Collection for the National Gallery of Art and smaller ones for eighteen regional museums, the remainder destined primarily for university study collections across the United States. It became clear that to do justice to the reputation of the Collection, important pictures would be acquired for all projects. The National Gallery of Art encouraged this, and Rush Kress was pleased to hear from John Walker that the market was propitious at that moment in comparison to twenty years earlier when Andrew Mellon was collecting. In retrospect it really was golden era for buying art. The goal was to make "the Kress Collection *unique in history*, a *national* collection, and not a Washington collection with eighteen or twenty subsidiary collections of inferior quality."¹⁵

Soon after I arrived Wildenstein offered us two important paintings from Count Vittorio Cini's Collection that had been sold during the war to raise money to ransom Cini from an underground cell in Dachau where he was interned because of his opposition to the Fascist regime.¹⁶ His misfortune was a great boon to us as we were able to buy Botticelli's portrait of *Giuliano de' Medici* and Benozzo Gozzoli's enchanting *The Dance of Salome*, both now in the National Gallery of Art.

Luck again favored us when Baron Heinrich Thyssen of Lugano, in temporary financial difficulty after the war, was forced to sell several paintings from his collection; we acquired the Altdorfer triptych, the double-sided panel by Dürer and Memling's *Saint Veronica*.

Acquisitions were not always so easily come by. For the 1951 National Gallery of Art exhibition and the first three Regional Collections, we scoured the premises of every dealer we knew for suitable paintings. A group of twenty-one paintings was purchased from Contini-Bonacossi, which included the five large altarpieces from the Cook Collection at Richmond. It was a period of frenetic activity as we called at Wildenstein, Knoedler, Mont, Drey, Duveen, Weitzner, Seligmann, Koetser, Rosenberg and Stiebel, and



Fig. 4. Mario Modestini and Robert Manning in the storage room at Huckleberry Hill, Pennsylvania, in the 1950s.

French & Company as well as any number of smaller galleries to select paintings and sculpture for prices that now seem absurdly low.

Sifting through and evaluating all these possible acquisitions, keeping in mind what was wanted by Washington and the Regional Collections with whom we were already in contact, was complicated by the holdings in storage with which the new candidates had to be compared and integrated. Often we found that we already possessed a better painting by the artist. The process was cumbersome since access to the warehoused pictures and especially to the decorative arts was difficult. Lists were vetted and meetings were held, attended by Rush Kress, Guy Emerson, Herbert Spencer, and me for the Foundation and John Walker and sometimes David Finley for the National Gallery of Art.

Rush Kress, who as a businessman liked streamlined operating procedures, was frustrated. He conceived a plan to make a single storage and work space on a property called Huckleberry Hill that he owned in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. In addition to the practicality of having the entire collection together, with the beginning of hostilities in Korea he was infected by the general fear of an atomic attack on New York City and wished to protect the Kress Collection. By October 1, 1951 it was finished, and we went to inspect it prior to the board meeting.

Huckleberry Hill was very remote indeed; the

nearest town, Newfoundland, population 200, was five miles away, an unlikely target. The art facility consisted of three stories. The ground floor was a bombproof bunker large enough to store the entire Kress Collection. It was fitted with rolling racks on which the paintings were arranged by school and period so Foundation and National Gallery of Art staff as well as directors of the prospective Regional Collections could easily examine them (fig. 4). Above the storage was a large restoration studio (figs. 5 and 6). There was a carpenter's shop for Angelo Fatta, fully equipped with woodworking machinery, and a separate studio for Quarantelli, the framer. The X-radiograph machine was in a lead-sealed room in the basement. There was a photo studio although we lacked a staff photographer. Robert Manning, William Suida's son-in-law, had been engaged as my assistant to be in charge of the record keeping, and he engaged a photographer I recall only as Colden to come to Huckleberry Hill for several weeks at a time. We ourselves had photo equipment and whiled away many a winter evening recording the work in progress so as not to lose time waiting for the photographer's visits. The unsatisfactory Colden was ultimately replaced by Angelo Lomeo and his wife Sonja Bullaty—two real artists who made the best photographs of paintings I have ever seen. They became great friends.

The studio was fully equipped with every conceivable tool for restoration and examination to facilitate our work: microscopes, a fluoroscope, a custom-made apparatus consisting of a platform mounted on a hydraulic lift so we could work on oversized paintings, a press for replacing faulty cradles on panel paintings, relining, and so on. When I hired Gustav Berger, later to become famous for his work with adhesives, he built us one of the first vacuum hot tables for wax relining according to the Dutch method.

In addition to Robert Manning, somewhat later, Sandrino Contini-Bonacossi, the nephew of Count Alessandro, was also engaged by the Foundation and both men were a great help assisting me in the overwhelming details of the Regional Gallery Project. Among their many



FIG. 5. The studio at Huckleberry Hill in the 1950s.



FIG. 6. The studio at Huckleberry Hill in the 1950s.

assignments was the record-keeping function. It was essential to know at a glance the location of each painting, its status in terms of the National Gallery of Art and regional gallery directors' choices, its condition, whether or not it had been restored, if it needed restoration, reframing, and to have the appropriate photographic documentation as an *aide mémoire*. In a memorandum from Guy Emerson to Rush Kress, the importance of record keeping is stressed and mention is made of a card kept for each painting, detailing the restoration. Although I have been asked many times about this card file, frankly I do not remember it; if there was one, it no longer exists, either at the Kress Foundation or in the National Gallery of Art Archives. What I do remember is that somewhat belatedly, Mary Davis, who had become the director of the Foundation, engaged Henry Hecht, my former reliner, to make condition and restoration reports, including Pichetto's work, for every painting. The records that he made were all done at more or less the same time, and, as I recall, often from memory. Sometimes Henry asked me for clarification, and it's apparent from the original handwritten restoration reports that I reviewed some of them and made corrections. The information in these reports was transcribed by Fern Rusk Shapley for the Kress catalogues. She often asked me to explain the condition of certain paintings, which, on examination, seemed not to square with the records. At that point, the paintings were already dispersed, and we relied on photographs, X-radiographs, and my good but not faultless memory. Time did not permit me to properly assess the condition of all 2,000 and some odd paintings and, not infrequently, egregious errors found their way into print. For example, the little *Madonna and Child* attributed to Leonardo in Verrocchio's workshop is described as "abraded in flesh tones and hair of the Virgin and Child; the mantle and the landscape have suffered from drastic cleaning." I do not know where this evaluation came from, as I consider the small painting, which I bought from Duveen's, to be in an excellent state, although I never cleaned it. In many cases, the

records are correct and therefore valuable, but they cannot be relied upon entirely, and we continue to find many errors.

Shortly after my arrival Rush Kress asked me to come to 1020 Fifth Avenue to look at the part of the collection hanging there. He proudly stopped in front of a portrait of a woman and asked me what I thought of his "Leonardo." I was sorry to have to tell him that it was by Giampietrino. It had recently been acquired from Duveen. Kress immediately called the Foundation's lawyer, O.V.W. Hawkins of Duer, Strong, and Whitehouse. We all went off to Duveen's, at that time still at Fifth Avenue and 57th Street, in a magnificent beaux-arts building by Carrere and Hastings, now demolished. The negotiation was complicated by the fact that Suida had published the picture as a Leonardo. Notwithstanding this inconvenient detail, since he did not wish to lose an important client, Edward Fowles of Duveen agreed that we could choose something else from their stock. I spotted a beautiful portrait by Peter Paul Rubens of the *Marchesa Brigida Spinola Doria* and a small *Madonna and Child*, called studio of Verrocchio that I believed was by the young Leonardo working in the master's shop. After further negotiations, it was agreed that we could have the two paintings for a small additional payment, and the deal was settled. The Rubens is today in the National Gallery of Art as is the little *Madonna and Child*, attributed to Leonardo. I found an antique fifteenth-century tabernacle for the *Madonna and Child* to replace the Ferruccio Vannoni frame provided by Duveen.

When I visited Washington for the first time with Rush Kress, David Finley and John Walker took us on a tour of the galleries. It was the beginning of a long and strained relationship with Walker. I noticed several fakes on exhibition, two "Vermeers" in the Mellon Collection, and in the Kress Collection, a *Madonna and Child* given to Alesso Baldovinetti that had been bought from Duveen for \$300,000, a huge sum in 1939 when it was purchased on the recommendation of Bernard Berenson who congratulated Samuel Kress on his acquisition of "one of the most beautiful Renais-

sance paintings in America.” “BB” was nearly a god for Walker, who had been his pupil, and continued to manipulate him from Settignano. I saw that the painting had originally been on panel and had been transferred to canvas. I was quite sure that it had come from a famous Italian dealer and forger, Baron Michele Lazzaroni, who sold many pictures to Duveen. Lazzaroni usually bought paintings by minor artists and then had his restorer in Paris, who was called Verzetta, turn them into “masterpieces” by some important Renaissance artist, although sometimes he would also ruin perfectly good pictures just for the pleasure of altering them. Walker was extremely upset by my assertion. To prove my opinion, I offered to X-ray it, and about a month later it was sent to New York. Under the “Baldovinetti” was a quite different *Madonna and Child* which seemed to be by Pier Francesco Fiorentino, a prolific imitator of Pesellino. The forger had copied a photograph, printed in reverse, of a famous Baldovinetti in the Louvre. Even when Walker saw the X-radiograph, he was not entirely convinced, and he asked me to clean the painting. My work revealed the half-ruined Pier Francesco Fiorentino that is still in storage at the National Gallery of Art (figs. 7 and 8).

After the 1951 Kress exhibition in Washington, a moratorium was declared on new purchases while, python-like, we digested the enormous number of paintings already in the collection. Suddenly, in 1952, John Walker learned that a Grünewald *Crucifixion*, privately owned, had been released for sale in Germany, negotiations with the authorities there having broken down. Guy Emerson broached the matter to a skeptical Rush Kress: “an emergency matter has come up which I hesitate to lay before you . . . however our policy of not buying paintings at the moment always had the qualification that we must consider exceptional items when they came on the market.”¹⁷ The price was \$260,000, and if we had not acted quickly any number of other buyers would have snapped it up. Kress was not particularly impressed by the photographs, but was ultimately persuaded, and it is the only Grünewald



FIG. 7. *Madonna and Child*, repainted in the style of Alesso Baldovinetti, mixed media, transferred from wood panel to canvas, 29 1/2 x 21 1/2 in. (75 x 54.5 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Before cleaning.



FIG. 8. *Madonna and Child*, the underlying Pier Francesco Fiorentino, tempera, transferred from wood panel to canvas, 29 1/2 x 21 1/2 in. (75 x 54.5 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. During cleaning.



FIG. 9. Frame exhibition at Studio d'Arte Palma, ca. 1947.

in America.

A second Kress exhibition in Washington was in the works for 1955, and several of the Regional Collections had opened to great acclaim in 1953. We again began to actively acquire paintings, not only in New York but also in London and especially Paris. Walker and I visited the Villa Vittoria in Florence, the magnificent residence and private museum of Contini-Bonacossi (now the Palazzo dei Congressi) where we met with the Count and Gualtiero Volterra. I took Walker aside and made suggestions about what we might choose from the large group of pictures being offered by Contini-Bonacossi; these included a work by the Master of the Badia a Isola, Titian's ceiling of Saint John the Evangelist, Bronzino's portrait of Eleanora of Toledo, and an important Savoldo. Although we tried to be discreet, Contini-Bonacossi realized what was going on and, when Walker left, made his displeasure clear: he was accustomed to selling the entire lot to the Kress Foundation without anyone's interference. Although he and Volterra were old friends, my priority was to buy only

the best for the Kress Collection, and among the paintings offered there were a number of secondary works that we did not need.

I was very keen that the paintings should all have beautiful frames. My father had collected antique frames, as did Contini-Bonacossi, who always tried to find an appropriate period frame not only for works in his own collection but also for the paintings he sold to Samuel and Rush Kress. Over the years I added to my father's frame collection and, as I mentioned earlier, mounted the first exhibition ever of antique frames at my Studio d'Arte Palma in Rome in the late 1940s (fig. 9). When I closed the gallery in Rome I sold my frame collection to Contini-Bonacossi. In 1953 the Foundation bought about 500 frames from him, including some from my collection. We used these to reframe paintings whenever possible, not only for Washington but also in the Regional Collections.

We removed many of the modern frames Duveen had used, especially on the Italian paintings. Duveen had a wonderful frame maker, sometime forger, in Florence, Ferruccio Vannoni,

who designed quirky, beautifully crafted modern interpretations of Renaissance models, each one slightly different. They are interesting in themselves and immediately proclaim their provenance, which was the intention. Quarantelli, our Florentine framer, was a magician at cleverly adapting antique frames so they looked as if they had never been touched. Naturally, it was not possible to use every frame. Those remaining were given to the Metropolitan Museum and the National Gallery of Art.

For years I had used egg tempera glazed with drained oils or watercolor for retouching and dammar as a varnish. Although I had always used varnishes as thinly as possible on the theory that it was the varnish, not the original painting that deteriorated, I still sought a more stable alternative to the traditional materials, all of which altered or darkened. I hoped that some of the new synthetic resins might be suitable as varnishes and retouching mediums. At John Walker's suggestion I contacted Dr. Robert Feller, a scientist at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, whose work on artists' materials was funded by the Mellon Foundation, to collaborate on a project to find a new retouching medium.

He supplied me with a number of different synthetic resins: various methacrylates, polyvinyl alcohol and polyvinyl acetates, all of which were considered to be stable. We began to use the new materials in 1953. In the beginning these synthetic polymers were quite difficult to handle but with persistence and by altering the solvents and the viscosity of the solution, we finally came up with a satisfactory application technique. We settled on a resin, a polyvinyl acetate made by Union Carbide with a relatively low molecular weight classified by the manufacturer as PVA AYAB. An adhesives company supplied it under the name of Palmer's A70, that is, a seventy-percent solution in acetone that we diluted to an eight-percent solution in methyl or ethyl alcohol, approximately the viscosity of a retouching varnish. For certain purposes we wanted a more slowly evaporating solvent as an additive and chose methyl cellosolve, again on

Feller's suggestion.

The degree of matte and gloss could be adjusted by locally varnishing with more medium. The alcohol diluent evaporated very quickly so that it was possible to build up the restoration without picking up the color that had already been put down. At first we added a bit of bleached beeswax, although I later abandoned that practice, as it was really not necessary. I continued to use watercolor for some glazes and to patinate the underpaint.

The first painting I restored using the PVA AYAB medium was a Perugino *Madonna and Child*, now in the National Gallery of Art. When I saw it recently, the restoration had not altered in the slightest way. Hanging nearby is a painting by Signorelli, *Madonna and Child with Saints and Angels*, that I had restored only a few years earlier using egg tempera, watercolor and drained oils; those retouches are now distinctly discolored as are those of the Mantegna portrait I restored with the same technique. Other paintings in Washington restored in the 1950s using PVA AYAB include the severely damaged *Allegory* by Piero di Cosimo, varnished with Talens Rembrandt and wax, the Ercole Roberti, *The Wife of Hasdrupal and her Children*, and the Giovanni Bellini *Madonna and Child*. All of them still look perfect. This is also true of an extensively damaged altarpiece by El Greco in the Metropolitan Museum, *The Vision of Saint John*, that I restored in 1956 with the new resins. The late Dr. Hubert von Sonnenburg, former Chairman of Paintings Conservation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who shared my preference for thin varnishes, revived the dull surface with a spray of solvent many years later.

I also abandoned dammar varnish in favor of one made from a synthetic resin, a polycyclohexanone condensation resin, known as AW 2. I have always used the commercial formulation made by Talens called Rembrandt Varnish, developed as a conservation varnish.¹⁸ Feller was experimenting with other resins. His methacrylate varnish, called Mellon 27H, was colorless and had good handling properties. I used it on a number of paintings until one day an alarmed Feller sent out a general

alert that new aging tests demonstrated that the resin cross-linked under certain circumstances—that is, the varnish might become insoluble over time. The National Gallery of Art was very concerned by this news. In December 1957 I went to Washington to meet with Feller, John Walker, Guy Emerson, Perry Cott, curator of sculpture, and Frank Sullivan, a former Pichetto assistant and preparator at the National Gallery of Art, and the entire conversation was taped. Feller explained the cross-linking of 27H, and he urged us to remove it from all the paintings that we had already restored; he was extremely nervous, not wanting to be blamed for anything that might happen in the future. In fact, I habitually put a coat of dammar, Talens Rembrandt Varnish, polyvinyl acetate or beeswax under Mellon 27H, using it only as a final varnish. I had to sign a paper that I had been advised of the danger and guarantee that I always used an intervening varnish under 27H. So much for artificial aging. Not only has 27H remained soluble in mild hydrocarbon mixtures, but a bottle has sat on my windowsill for fifty years and is still water white. On paintings, I have noticed that it has a tendency to become dull and slightly gray, like all the methacrylates. Along with everyone else I abandoned 27H after Feller's warning.

Pichetto's often gratuitous restorations continued to blanch, an unsightly phenomenon that affected many of the Kress paintings already in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Art. On our periodic visits, we glazed the whitened areas but shortly thereafter the blanching returned. The possible causes of blanched and darkened varnishes and the materials that were subject to these alterations were the focus of much discussion with Feller. In 1959 we made up panels using eight pigments mixed with three different whites: lead white, zinc white, and titanium white in varying proportions. Each of these was painted out with all the commonly used retouching mediums such as egg tempera, dammar, and so on, as well as the new AYAB, along with some other resins supplied by Feller, and the samples were coated with many different varnishes, both natural and

synthetic. Each panel had one section covered with Plexiglas, one with aluminum so it was protected from the light, and one section exposed to direct sunlight.¹⁹ We left these samples under the skylights of the National Gallery of Art for eight months. The results demonstrated, among other things, that the colors bound with AYAB had not altered and that the combination of dammar and zinc white produced blanching. Over the years Feller identified other causes of blanching. In 1959 blanched retouches on a Canaletto, *The Piazzetta*, were found to result from use of the unstable anatase form of titanium oxide, a photochemically active variety of the crystal. This alteration of titanium has given the pigment an undeservedly bad reputation, especially in Germany and Austria. The rutile crystalline form, which one must be careful to confirm, is completely stable.

Feller was one of many visitors to Huckleberry Hill in the early 1950s. By this time the dispersal of the entire Kress Collection was well underway as was our principal task, the preparation of hundreds of paintings destined for the National Gallery of Art and the regional museums. Walker made an occasional day trip, and the directors of the Regional Collections came to choose paintings for their collections. For overnight guests, Newfoundland boasted a small hotel. Some of our more interested clients, such as Walter Heil of the M.H. De Young Memorial Museum of San Francisco, visited often to see the progress of the restoration on their paintings and what was new in the ever-expanding Kress Collection. The winter snows reached two or three feet in height. Often we opened the door in the morning to find a white wall blocking the entrance, and we could not go out until the plow came to clear the drive. This did not impede our work as our living quarters were on the third floor, right above the studio. We worked from Monday morning until Friday afternoon when everyone returned to New York for the weekend. Occasionally we would be snowed in, cursing the beastly weather.

We had a housekeeper and a cook and took all our meals together at a long table. I was at the head, and everyone else sat in their accustomed

place. Relations were not always smooth as the various personalities conflicted: Angelo Fatta and Quarantelli in particular did not get along. Paul Kiehart often fanned the flames of this conflict, and poor Angelo, with his strange Brooklyn dialect, was the butt of everyone's jokes. The atmosphere was a bit like a military barracks; in fact, one of our cooks had been an army chef who made soup using a piece of lard attached to a string. Once a museum director sent us a present of wonderful filet steaks that our cook reduced to tasteless cardboard. He didn't last long. There was a nearby trout stream, and in the good weather everyone fished after work. It was not wise to venture too far into the woods that were inhabited by bears and wildcats.

As word of the program spread, many cities applied to the Foundation. Most of them did not have a museum. One of the requirements was that the recipients provide a suitable space to house the collection. When the project was approved, the directors or representatives of the various regional

museums would come to the Pennsylvania bunker to look at the collection. Some directors had a preference for a particular school that was not represented in the collection or that reflected the ethnic background of their region and would request that the Foundation acquire paintings to fill in those gaps. We made such purchases often. Tintoretto was very popular, and altogether we bought fifteen canvases by Jacopo and his studio. Each museum was given approximately forty paintings. Often a director would ask my advice about the attribution, the condition, and the quality of the works; this I offered dispassionately, not wishing to favor one museum over the other. The normal procedure began with a visit to storage where the paintings hung on numbered sliding screens arranged according to period and school, easy to locate. This initial examination was followed by lunch with the staff during which the paintings under consideration were discussed. In the afternoon we returned to the storerooms and again looked at paintings, making new selections,



FIG. 10. Visiting the National Gallery of Art in 1951. From left to right: Sandrino Contini-Bonacossi, David Finley, Perry Cott, Rush Kress, Colonel McBride, *unknown*, Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi, Fred Geiger, Guy Emerson, Patricia Volterra, Gualtiero Volterra, Mario Modestini, and *unknown*.

eliminating some paintings and adding others.

Rush Kress was obsessed with every detail regarding the display of the Kress Collection at the National Gallery of Art: how the paintings were appended, at which angle, the wall color, the labels on the frames, how didactic material would be made available since he disliked wall labels, the lighting, and so on. Periodically we would go to Washington to make an inspection of the Kress galleries. On several occasions Contini-Bonacossi, whose collection at Villa Vittoria was impeccably displayed and whose advice Kress greatly valued on all such matters, would accompany him to Washington for an inspection tour together with a large retinue (fig. 10). He held the Regional Collections to a similarly high standard. I would travel to each city, accompanied by Guy Emerson and the lighting designer, Abe Feder, to install the Kress galleries, and Kress joined us for the opening ceremonies. On certain occasions he was deeply disappointed, for he had very clear tastes. In Seattle the young curator, Sherman Lee, had painted the galleries black. Kress was furious and shot off memos to all and sundry.

Rush Kress was not autocratic but instinctively generous by nature, as for example when he learned that Contini-Bonacossi's nephew Sandrino was in difficulty, he immediately brought him to New York to work for the Foundation; however, he could also be fanatically parsimonious. Once at Huckleberry Hill, a large number of paintings arrived from Contini-Bonacossi, a two-or-three million-dollar shipment, very elegantly wrapped. As we eagerly cut the ribbons to open the packages, I noticed Kress carefully picking them up and rolling them!

One of the most interesting characters to take part in the regional gallery collections was the legendary Carl Hamilton. He came to Pennsylvania with the director of the Raleigh Museum in North Carolina, to whom, being a native of that city, he had offered himself as an advisor. His credentials were impressive, as he had once been a great collector himself. Rush Kress invited Hamilton to dinner at 1020 Fifth Avenue, where he always asked someone to say grace. Hamilton,

whom Kress had never met, offered to give thanks for the meal and quoted a long passage from the Bible. Kress was a passionate devotee of the scriptures, and he asked his guest if he knew the Bible well. Hamilton replied that he knew it by heart. Kress was jubilant and sent one of the children to get *The Book*. As he began a line, Hamilton finished it. They became great friends after this, and Kress directed me to select a particularly fine group of paintings for the museum in Raleigh. I knew that they already had a good collection of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings acquired by Valentiner and that they needed a collection of early and Renaissance Italian paintings and a few important Baroque canvases. Altarpieces from the Cook Collection by Massimo Stanzione and Domenichino had been offered to the National Gallery of Art. Walker, naturally, was not interested. Nor did he want to take a five-panel polyptych by Giotto and assistants originally painted for the Bardi Chapel in Santa Croce that we had assembled from different dealers. When I offered it to him he refused because, he said, they already had a Giotto. "Mario, we might consider taking the central panel but not the four saints." I bit my tongue but was appalled by his ignorance. A few days later Hamilton came to talk about the schedule for consigning the paintings to Raleigh, the catalogue and so on. I said to him, "Carl, I had a thought. In order to complete the Kress Collection in your museum you should have one painting of world-class importance, the Giotto polyptych from the Bardi Chapel." He looked at me in amazement and nearly fainted.

Like Berenson, Walker did not understand painting after the Renaissance. He turned down the great Caravaggio *Saint John the Baptist* because Berenson considered it a copy of the painting in Naples. On that occasion my distress was so great that Rush Kress authorized me to try to buy the painting anyway. Unfortunately it was too late as Kansas City had already reserved it. Washington has yet to have an opportunity to add a Caravaggio to the collection. Nor was he particularly enthusiastic about the Saint Lucy Altarpiece²⁰ or the great François Clouet portrait

of Diane de Poitiers in her bath (*A Lady in Her Bath*). We decided to buy both those paintings despite his lack of interest and ultimately, if somewhat reluctantly, he took them.

One morning a woman came to the Foundation with a photograph of an unpublished painting by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *The Empire of Flora*, for which she was asking \$15,000. It was in excellent condition under a bit of yellow varnish. After it was cleaned we sent it to Washington. Walker and his curators all agreed that it was by Giandomenico Tiepolo and sent it back to New York. Disgusted by the Gallery's response, at that moment I was assembling the collection for Walter Heil, the director of the museum in San Francisco and a good connoisseur whom I have mentioned as a visitor to Huckleberry Hill. I showed him the picture and explained why the National Gallery of Art had rejected it. "Are they blind?" he exclaimed. The painting is today considered by one and all to be by Giovanni Battista and is one of the masterpieces of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

One day I received a phone call from Walter Hoentschel of Knoedler Galleries asking me to come and see a Titian portrait of the Doge Andrea Gritti that they had acquired in Vienna. My first thought was that it must be a copy of the famous portrait from the Czernin Collection, but I decided to look at it anyway. It was in the Morgan Manhattan Storage Warehouse. The painting had been rolled, fortunately face out, and we laid it out on the floor. It was in excellent condition under an old discolored varnish. It had never been relined, and there was a drawing, a study of the Doge, on the back. Astounded, I thought that it must have been stolen but Hoentschel assured me that the director of the Österreichische Galerie in Vienna, Ernst H. Buschbeck, considered it the work of Palma Giovane, and had granted it an export license. I immediately called Rush Kress who was at the Foundation that morning and told him he must come straight away and bring Suida with him. Needless to say, as soon as they arrived we bought it on the spot. It is exceedingly rare to find a

painting of the sixteenth century that has never been relined. The linen was in good condition. When the painting arrived in my studio I simply had the edges reinforced with strips of canvas and mounted it to a stretcher. I searched among our collection of antique frames looking for something suitable. I found a sixteenth-century Venetian frame by Luca Mombello, Titian's frame maker, which was about the right size. I had the frame sent to the studio and put the painting in it. To my wonder and amazement, it fit perfectly. As paintings were not standard sizes in the sixteenth century this coincidence was almost spooky.

I was often in and out of New York to visit dealers, attend Foundation meetings and also made frequent trips to Washington. So that I could work on as many paintings as possible, in 1954 we took a studio at 16 East 52nd Street, where I worked with some of my assistants while we continued to commute to Huckleberry Hill preparing for the 1955 exhibition at the National Gallery of Art. Finally, after seven years at Huckleberry Hill, my assistants went on strike. The Korean War had ended two years earlier. I talked the situation over with Guy Emerson who brought it up with Rush Kress. We decided to bring the restorers back to New York and found a studio at 250 West 57th Street in the Fisk Building, just across the street from the offices of the Foundation at number 221. This arrangement made it easier for the directors and curators of the regional museums to follow the work on their collections. Storage was still at Huckleberry Hill where framing and panel work continued to be done. Angelo Fatta the carpenter and the Florentine framer Quarantelli were both men of a certain age, one with grown children and the other a widower who didn't mind being in an out-of-the-way spot. After the move the atmosphere of the studio improved greatly, and there was a return to the easy, friendly and sociable relationships that we previously enjoyed and which are essential to any group of people who work closely together.

Throughout the 1950s it was possible to buy important Italian Baroque pictures for \$8,000

to \$15,000 dollars and sometimes for less. We paid \$1,200 for the masterpiece by Donato Creti, *Alexander the Great Threatened by his Father* that was exhibited in the 1955 exhibition along with the early, Caravaggesque Simon Vouet *Saint Matthew*. Both have remained in Washington. Rush Kress was very much in favor of these acquisitions, which he called “bucolic” pictures, partly because they were a great bargain.²¹ One of my favorite dealers in New York was David Koetser, who had great taste for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italian paintings and a large stock. We bought thirty-two paintings from him despite Walker’s indifference. The 1961 exhibition of recent acquisitions at the National Gallery of Art included many of these paintings. Suida and I campaigned for several Baroque galleries in Washington. To my great disappointment, Walker was not willing to take more than two or three of the works we had lent. So the Regional Collections became the recipients of masterpieces by Tanzio da Varallo, Sebastiano Ricci, Gaulli, Ceruti, Traversi, and Magnasco, and other paintings that I had hoped would go to Washington.

Numerous and important acquisitions were also made of non-Italian paintings, among them two portraits by Jacques Louis David, including his full-length Napoleon, three paintings by Ingres, canvases by El Greco, van der Hamen, and Zurbarán to name just a few. Our purchases of Netherlandish paintings were outstanding and of great importance to the National Gallery of Art which possessed only a few works of this school. We added German works by Dürer, Cranach, Holbein, Grünewald, Altdorfer, Baldung Grien, and Flemish, Netherlandish, and Dutch paintings by Robert Campin, Memling, the Master of the Saint Lucy Legend, Hieronymus Bosch, Mabuse, van Orley, Sanraedam, Ruisdael, Jan Steen, Pieter de Hooch, van Beyeren and, of course, Rubens. Most of these paintings were acquired from Knoedler, Wildenstein, Rosenberg and Stiebel, Seligmann, Mont, Koetser, Mitchell Samuels of French and Company, and Schaeffer Galleries.

The final deeds of gift were made and a great exhibition held in Washington in 1961. The col-

lection in Washington consisted of 365 paintings, 82 pieces of sculpture and over 1,300 other works—medals, plaquettes and small bronzes acquired from the Dreyfus Collection. We had accomplished a great deal and were very proud of “The Kress Collection” that we had assembled and dispersed far and wide across the nation according to Samuel Kress’s conviction that art and beauty were essential for the education of young Americans and the formation of good character and values.

I have some regrets. Primarily, of course, that we were not able to form the collection of the National Gallery of Art as we wished. Also I would have liked to have had time to restore many other paintings from the Kress Collection, particularly those in Washington—something we had always intended to do. Consequently many important works still have the thick and discolored varnishes added by Pichetto, now dull, dusty and streaky, and full of blanched retouches.

Another cherished project often discussed was a Kress institute to train paintings conservators and, in particular, young Americans, because, at that time, most restorers came from Europe. Although there are several restorers whom I consider my pupils, the frenetic activity from 1949 to 1961 did not allow time to realize this dream, a great pity since we had the chance at that moment to exert great influence on the approach to restoration of Old Master paintings in this country. It might have been possible to avoid some of the destruction and controversies that later ensued.

I remained consultant to the Kress Foundation and also to the National Gallery of Art for many years, working closely with Fern Rusk Shapley, Ulrich Middeldorf and Colin Eisler on the Kress catalogues and visiting Kress Foundation restoration projects in Europe. The Kress Collection is of great importance to me to this day.

After the deeds of gift had been made to Washington and to the Regional Collections, I was moved by a letter from Franklin Murphy, the long-time Chairman of the Board of the Kress Foundation and a man I greatly respected.

It is dated April 2, 1962:

Dear Mario:

Now that the Kress Gift to the Nation has been consummated and this project draws to a close, I want to express to you personally and on behalf of all of the Trustees our enormous gratitude for your dedication in making this whole thing possible. It is my own view that you have been a crucial enzyme in this entire process. Your competence—indeed, virtuosity in restoration has been the central fact in this project, and, in a way, the collection is as much a monument to you as to anyone else.

Jackals may snarl and vultures may swoop but the reality remains serenely unaware of both.

All of us in the Kress Foundation and, in fact, the American public generally, will always be in your debt.

I was fifty-five years old. For a brief moment I considered returning to Europe, perhaps to London, but soon had more work than I could handle in my studio on 52nd Street and began a new chapter in my professional life.

Through my friendships with Mary Davis, Franklin Murphy, and Marilyn Perry, I stayed in close touch with the Kress Collections and was often called on for advice about the dispersed Kress Collection. Shortly after becoming director, Marilyn Perry wisely decided that a review of the Regional Collections Project was in order. I was most gratified to hear that most of the restorations we had done in the 1950s had held up very well. However, the survey revealed that a number of paintings, primarily those that had had no attention since early in the twentieth century and those that had passed through Pichetto's hands, now required work. As I have said, I always regretted that there was not time to put everything in order. Since then many Kress paintings from the Regional and Study Collections have come to the Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts where I have been happy to follow the restoration. At this point in my life it is a delight to see some old friends again and to pass on my experience to young conservators, and, in particular, the nearly lost skill of restoring gold-ground paintings.

Dianne Dwyer Modestini is a paintings conservator, consultant to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and Adjunct Professor at the Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

Mario Modestini was the Curator and Conservator of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation until 1961. Based in New York, he continued to restore paintings and advise on questions of connoisseurship to an international clientele including important museums and private collections.

NOTES

1. Memorandum of Guy Emerson to Rush Kress, January 22, 1949, Kress Foundation Archives.
2. Letter CCB to RHK, February 9, 1949. "As I explained to you at length in my last letter, the choice of a candidate who possesses the many necessary qualities restricts the horizon considerably. Only one man—in my opinion—has my complete and unconditional confidence; that is the man who has the keeping of my own collection and to whom I have always entrusted the most important works. Naturally I have always been very jealous of this man, as I consider him irreplaceable; therefore I have been faced with a serious case of conscience . . . B.B. whom I believe has always had a very high opinion of the way in which my pictures are kept, did not even think I would be willing to suggest him; but when I told him the news he seemed very pleased and agreed entirely and he has also fully understood and appreciated this solution . . . This man has the temperament of a Master. His technical and artistic knowledge and his ability to inculcate into others love and care in their work make him substantially quite unique . . . I do not think he would be able to dispose of more than six months of the year for the U.S."
3. Count Giovanni Secco-Suardo, *Il Restauratore dei Dipinti*. Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1918, p. 557. "N. 3. Pomata ammolente. Predni sapon bianco di solda, di uello che serve per uso di toiletta, parti una; grasso di vitello stato bollito e stacciato, parti due; olio d'olivo del migliore, parti tre ed acqua parti sei. Tagliuzza minutamente. Meti il sapone e il tutto in vaso di tera vetrato, ed a fuoco moderato, sempre rimescolando, portalo all'ebollizione, e lascialo bollire sino a che quegli ingredienti si siano bene incorporati, ed abbiano formato una pomata di mediocre densità. Versala in vaso di terra o di vetro, lasciala raffreddare, poi coprila e conserva la pe' tuoi bosogni. Dura indefinitivamente."
4. The other Pichetto assistant, Frank Sullivan, was a sort of handyman. By some curious logic, John Walker hired him to be the restorer of the National Gallery of Art. Walker claimed that Sullivan never touched the collection, but several times I saw him working on Paul Mellon's English paintings, relining four or five at one time; he spoiled many of them.
5. John Walker, *Self Portrait with Donors*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1974, pp. 142–3.

6. Although this would appear to conflict with Ann Hoeningswald's paper in this volume, while it seems clear that Pichetto did not clean paintings offered to Kress, he must have cleaned paintings for his other clients.
7. This so-called "Pichetto whitening" was noted quite early by Modestini and further studied with a series of test panels that suggested the role of near-ultraviolet radiation in the chalking of the inpainting film. See Robert Feller, "Problems in retouching: chalking of intermediate layers," *Bulletin of the American Group-IIC*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1966), pp. 32–4. Other phenomena, such as chemical interaction between the basic pigment and acidic binder, may also play a role. Zinc pigments also seem to play a role in the chalking of original painting. See Karin Groen, "Materieel onderzoek aan schilderijen met wit mitgeslagen Parijzen en de (on)mogelijkheden van restauratie" in *Schilderkunst Materieel en Techniek*. Amsterdam: Centraal Laboratorium voor Onderzoek van Voorwerpen van Kunst en Wetenschap, 1989, pp. 38–46.
8. For example, the restorer William Suhr had a Viennese worker, Eduard Kneisel, in his studio, who routinely transferred every painting on panel. Kneisel's name was cited in a recent book, *The Faustian Bargain*, by Jonathan Petropoulos (Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 279), where he is identified as working for the Nazis' art looting program in Poland and where the writer says that Kneisel "reportedly" later worked for The Frick Collection, which he did not.
9. Pichetto's prices for this work were very high. A memorandum in the files of the Kress Foundation records the sum owed to Pichetto's estate after his death and the writer's (presumably Emerson) consternation at the difference between my fees and those of my predecessor, which were three times greater.
10. Mario Modestini, "Le vendite Rospigliosi: i ricordi di un testimone" in Angela Negro (ed.), *La Collezione Rospigliosi: la Quadreria e la Commitenza Artistica di una Famiglia Patrizia a Roma nel Sei e Settecento*. Rome: Argos, 1999, pp. 91–3.
11. The product is no longer made. Sue Ann Chui, with the cooperation of the manufacturer, developed the following formula: to make Red Devil Liquid #99 from Zip Strip Trigger Spray: to 100g of Trigger Spray add 15.4g methanol, 26.1g toluene, and 19g acetone.
12. Painting in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in the Bologna gallery where you clearly see gray varnish applied over the gold ground and skirting the contours of the figures. Newly burnished gold is extremely shiny and metallic and while this may have been acceptable in the fourteenth century, I think some of the more sophisticated formal values that later emerged would have clashed with unpatinated, highly burnished gold. One approach to key the painted passages with the gold ground was the development of elaborately punched, incised and glazed treatments of the background. An egg-white varnish would have made the gold slightly matte.
13. See: Helen Glanville, "Varnish, grounds, viewing distance, and lighting: some notes on seventeenth-century Italian painting technique" in *Historical Painting Techniques, Materials, and Studio Practice* (Preprints of a Symposium, University of Leiden, The Netherlands, June 26–29, 1995). Los Angeles, CA: Getty Conservation Institute, 1995, pp. 12–19.
14. This appears to have happened to the recently discovered painting by Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*, now in the National Gallery, Dublin.
15. See Marilyn Perry, "The Kress Collection" in Chiyo Ishikawa et al. (eds.), *A Gift to America: Masterpieces of European Painting from the Samuel H. Kress Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994, pp. 13–35.
16. Marie Vassiltchikov, *Berlin Diaries, 1940–1945*. New York: Vintage Books, 1988, p. 184. "I had to leave a message at the Adlon and in the hall ran into Giorgio Cini. He has come to Berlin to try and bribe the S.S. into setting his father, old Count Cini, free. When Italy changed sides last year, the latter (a one-time Minister of Finances of Mussolini) was arrested and has been in Dachau concentration camp, in an underground cell, for the past eight months. He suffers from angina pectoris and is in very bad shape. The Cinis have millions and Giorgio is willing to pay anything to get him out. He himself has changed a lot since I last saw him just before the war. He evidently is desperately worried. He adores his father and for many months did not know his whereabouts, nor whether he still lived. Now he was waiting for some big Gestapo man. Who knows? With that amount of determination and will power—and money—he may succeed. He wants them to agree to transfer his father to an S.S. hospital and from there to Italy."
17. Memorandum to RHK from GE, November 24, 1952, Kress Foundation Archives.
18. See: Sarah Fisher, "Talens Rembrandt Picture Varnish" in Sarah Fisher et al. (eds.), *Painting Conservation Catalogue, Vol. 1: Varnishes and Surface Coatings*. Washington, D.C.: AIC, 1998, pp. 99–107.
19. Gustav Berger, "Inpainting using AYAB medium," *Cleaning Retouching and Coating, IIC Brussels Congress, September 3–7, 1990*, pp. 150–55.
20. *The Assumption and Coronation of the Immaculately Conceived Virgin* by the Master of the Saint Lucy Legend and Assistants, K-1689.
21. See: Edgar Peters Bowron, "The Kress brothers and their bucolic pictures" in Ishikawa et al. 1994 (cited in note 15).

PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

Figs. 7 and 8, p. 53. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection (1939.1.214).

