

# Cultural Redemption

An exploration of the psychological dimensions  
of Visual Art Restoration  
within Post-traumatic Culture

---

Jeannine Howse

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,  
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in part fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Fine Arts by Coursework and  
Research Report.

---

Johannesburg, 2010

## **Declaration**

I declare that this research report is my own (unaided) work. I am submitting it to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, for the degree of Master of Arts in Fine Arts by Coursework and Research Report. It has not been submitted previously for any degree or examination at another university.

---

Jeannine Howse, on this ..... day of ..... 2010.

## **Abstract**

In this research report I explore the role of visual art restoration as a form of cultural redemption. My temporal focus is the post-traumatic moment in contemporary culture, and the process I am trying to make visible through the idea of restoration is the containment of loss. This process is redemptive in the sense that it saves the artwork from defect or loss through the expenditure of effort.

Speaking out of a post-colonial context, I focus primarily on the psychological impulse in Western restoration practice. While the impulse to conserve objects of cultural value is not limited to Western society, Western practice is my central concern. In my analysis therefore, I make use of different Western discursive histories and philosophies to examine this process and its cultural engagement. These include complex issues around value, trauma, and the therapeutic potential of art. My argument is centred around the psychological aspects of the traumatic crisis of loss. I examine how trauma impacts on the individual to throw some light on the manifestation of this crisis on a social level within the collective. This application of psychotherapy relates to the notions of collective guilt and the working through of loss as presented by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich in *The Inability to Mourn* (1967/1975), where they explore how the psychological functions in similar ways on both levels.

My analysis is motivated by personal interest in art restoration and my own artistic practice. Through my research it became evident to me that very little has been written about restoration beyond its technical and historical range. It is important to note that a limited scope of relevant literature is available locally. Much more regarding the field of restoration is available overseas, as there has been increased interest in this field and the far-reaching after effects of restoration in recent times. Books, journals, and papers addressing the technical aspects of restoration abound. Yet while the technical is imperative for the continued development of restoration practice, it is equally necessary to explore the role this process has in wider psychological and cultural terms. In this research report I hope to present a start to understanding the effect of restoration within the wider cultural moment.

## **Acknowledgements**

Undertaking a research report in this field was an enormous task, and would never have been possible without the help of certain people to whom thanks are due.

I am indebted to my primary supervisor, Professor Colin Richards, whose constant advice, guidance and encouragement was an absolute blessing throughout the many difficult months I experienced in the course of this project. His critical insight has always been invaluable to me, and the working relationship that has developed between us has allowed for many of the subtle intricacies of my work and research to become realisable aspects within this project. Walter Oltmann has been of immense assistance as my supervisor in the finishing stages.

I am also grateful to Jo Burger of the Johannesburg Art Gallery Library, who provided much help with my initial research into the restoration field by making books from the conservation collection available to me. Without many of these texts I would not have been able to proceed with my research.

This project would never have been viable without the assistance of bursary funding from the University of the Witwatersrand. Not only did this allow me to undertake the Masters course, it also financed the practical component of my exhibition.

Many thanks go to my family, and especially my sister who was always a pillar to lean against and a brain to pick. And of course lastly, thanks to my late mother. Without her love and unfailing support over the years I would never even have reached this point.

TO--

Music, when soft voices die,  
Vibrates in the memory--  
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,  
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,  
Are heaped for the beloved's bed;  
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,  
Love itself shall slumber on.

*P.B. Shelley*

[Published by Mrs. Shelley, "Posthumous Poems", 1824]

## Contents

<i>Declaration</i>	ii
<i>Abstract</i>	iii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iv
<i>List Illustrations</i>	vii
<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Chapter 1</b> Art restoration: Technical Aspects and Cultural Motives in the Process of Visual Art Restoration	18
<b>Chapter 2</b> Art and Restoration in Post-traumatic Culture	56
<b>Chapter 3</b> Loss, Restorative Process and the Therapeutic Possibilities of the Creative Process in my Art Production	71
<b>Chapter 4</b> <i>Amaryllidaceae</i>	96
<b>Conclusion</b>	113
<i>Appendix 1:</i> Writing about restoration	117
<i>Bibliography</i>	119

## Illustrations

1. Diego Velázquez (1599-1660) *The Toilet of Venus (Rokeby Venus)* 1647-1651, oil on canvas, 122,5 x 177 cm, National Gallery, London, UK. © Trustees of the National Gallery [19]
2. Detail from a photo published in 1914 (before the repairs) showing damage done to the *Rokeby Venus*; published in *The Times* (front page), March 11, 1914; *The Daily Sketch*, March 11, 1914 (front page--under the headline "How the Rokeby 'Venus', Bought by the Nation for £45,000, was Slashed with a Chopper by a Suffragette in the National Gallery".) (The copyright holder of this image is unknown and therefore the image is unaccredited.) [19]
3. Leonardo Da Vinci's Cartoon *The Virgin and Child with St. John*, photographed in raking light to show the damage caused by the shotgun blast in 1987. © Trustees of the National Gallery. [25]
4. Detail of the area damaged by the blast. © Trustees of the National Gallery. [26]
5. Map recording the locations of paper fragments removed during repair. © Trustees of the National Gallery. [26]
6. The damaged area after the glass and loose paper fragments were removed. © Trustees of the National Gallery. [26]
7. The damaged area after all the fragments were replaced, before retouching. © Trustees of the National Gallery. [26]
8. Leonardo Da Vinci's Cartoon *The Virgin and Child with St. John* c. 1507-8, [after restoration], charcoal and chalk on tinted paper, 142 x 105.5 cm, National Gallery, London, UK. © Trustees of the National Gallery [27]
9. Collage picture showing the restoration of the *Portland Vase* (from top left to bottom right): the vase before dismantled for repair; detail in natural light; the break lines and filled areas were emphasized by flooding the inside of the vase with an intense ultraviolet light – the individual shards of glass could then be identified; resin fill tests (to replace gaps between shards after repair); conservators using UV setting adhesive to join the fragments; vase in fragments laid out ready for reconstruction on a plan; the vase after restoration is complete. © Trustees of the British Museum. [28]
10. Two views of the *Portland Vase* after restoration. H. 24cm. British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum. [29]
11. Roman (antique parts) *The Piranesi Vase*, 2ndC (antique parts), marble, made by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (in present form) H. 271,78 cm, British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum. [41]
12. The Piranesi vase as it appeared at the exhibition *Fake? The Art of Deception*, British Museum, 1990. © Trustees of the British Museum. [42]
13. Exterior of the Arena or Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, Italy, 2004. © J Howse. [51]
14. Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) *The Bedroom* (1888) oil on canvas, 72 x 90 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. (image public domain) [54]
15. Jacopo della Quercia *Tomb of Ilaria del Carretto*, 1406-13, marble, sarcophagus 244 x 88 x 66,5 cm, effigy 204 x 69 cm, Cathedral of San

- Martino, Lucca, Italy. (image public domain) [66]
16. Michaelangelo Buonarroti *Sistine Chapel Ceiling*, 1508-12, fresco, Vatican Museum Complex, Vatican City (image public domain) [67]
  17. A composite image of *The Fall and Expulsion of Adam and Eve* - the upper left is shown unrestored, the lower right is shown restored (image public domain) [68]
  18. *The prophet Daniel* before and after restoration. (image public domain) [68]
  19. Detail of the *Expulsion from Eden* shows the darkening of the colours to a monochrome, cracking of the plaster, metal pins of a previous stabilisation, staining from water flow, salt deposits, darkening by saltpetre and overpainting. (image public domain) [68]
  20. Detail of the same section after cleaning shows the brightness of the colours. The major cracks and metal pins have been filled and coloured to match adjacent areas. Smaller cracks are more visible, by contrast with the bright surface. The rings of saltpetre are irreversible. (image public domain) [68]
  21. Georgia O'Keeffe *Black Iris III*, 1926, oil on canvas, 91.4x75.9 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of New York; Alfred Stieglitz Collection (1969). © 2010 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York [86]
  22. Anne and Patrick Poirier *Fragility*, 1996, cibachrome on aluminium, 170x110 cm. © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris [88]
  23. Anne and Patrick Poirier *Blessure*, 1996, cibachrome on aluminium, 170x110 cm, 50x40 cm. © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris [89]
  24. Anne and Patrick Poirier *S.T.*, 1996, cibachrome on aluminium, 170x110 cm, 50x40 cm. © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris [89]
  25. Anne and Patrick Poirier *Die Trane*, 1996, cibachrome on aluminium, 96x119.5 cm. © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris [89]
  26. Anne and Patrick Poirier *Le mots sont des ombres*, 1996, cibachrome on aluminium, 100x200 cm. © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris [90]
  27. Anne and Patrick Poirier *Wounds*, 1996, cibachrome on aluminium, 170x110 cm. © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris [91]
  28. Jeannine Howse *Amaryllidaceae*, 2005, etching and *chine collé*, Artist Collection, © Jeannine Howse [98]
  29. Installation view of Jeannine Howse *Ratio luctus una: repetitio*, 2005, wax, ink, paper, Artist Collection, © Jeannine Howse [100]
  30. Installation view of Jeannine Howse *Ratio luctus una: repetitio*, 2005, wax, ink, paper, Artist Collection, © Jeannine Howse [100]
  31. Detail: *Ratio luctus una: repetitio*, 2005, wax, ink, paper, © Jeannine Howse [101]
  32. Detail: *Ratio luctus una: repetitio*, 2005, wax, ink, paper, © Jeannine Howse [101]
  33. Detail: *Ratio luctus una: repetitio*, 2005, wax, ink, paper, © Jeannine Howse [101]

- [102]
- 34. Detail: *Ratio luctus una: repetitio*, 2005, wax, ink, paper, © Jeannine Howse [102]
  - 35. Installation view Jeannine Howse *Ratio luctus duo: mora*, 2005, wax on paper, Artist Collection, © Jeannine Howse[105]
  - 36. Detail: *Ratio luctus duo: mora*, 2005, wax on paper, © Jeannine Howse[106]
  - 37. Detail: *Ratio luctus duo: mora*, 2005, wax on paper, © Jeannine Howse[106]
  - 38. Installation view Jeannine Howse *Ratio luctus tres: inexpectatum*, 2005, blind embossing, Artist Collection, © Jeannine Howse[108]
  - 39. Installation view Jeannine Howse *Ratio luctus tres: inexpectatum*, 2005, blind embossing, Artist Collection, © Jeannine Howse[109]
  - 40. Installation view Jeannine Howse *Ratio luctus tres: inexpectatum*, 2005, blind embossing, Artist Collection, © Jeannine Howse[109]
  - 41. Detail: *Ratio luctus tres: inexpectatum*, 2005, blind embossing, © Jeannine Howse[110]