

NEWSFLASH

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ALL AT SEA

A collection of pictures from a private yacht

Although luxury, private yachts on the grandest scale have fantastically complicated climate-control systems, it can be a losing battle looking after works of art that are sensitive to

changes in humidity. The Bortnyik painting, *Man Reading a Newspaper in a Café*, was sent to the Studio in a loosely fitting, open frame. There was a horrible “salty,” grey, grime on the surface of the picture. We found that the painting was oil on a paper board

which had been poorly handled in the past, with a few creases, knocks and uneven repairs. This in turn had been stuck onto another unstable board. The structure was undulating, and the most obvious sign of humidity damage was the micro-flaking in a lot of areas of thinly-applied paint. It is a common misconception that it is fluctuations in temperature

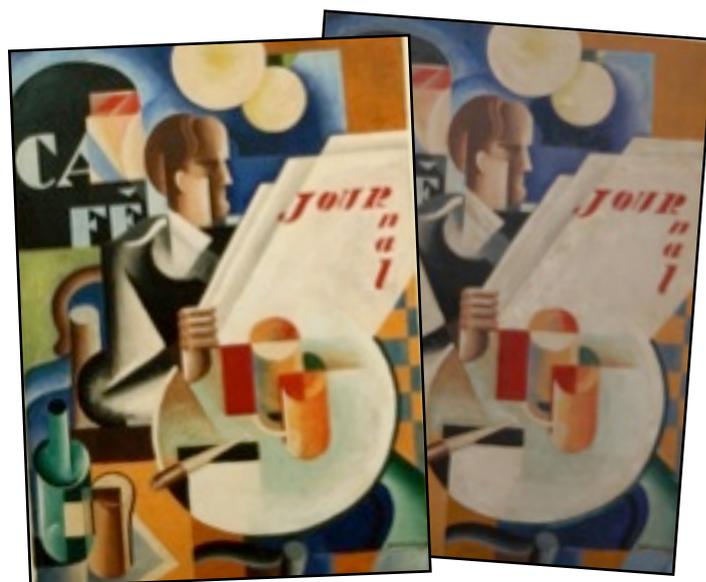


Fig. 1: Cracking and flaking paint in raking light.



Fig. 2: Partial removal of dark overpaint from the bottom half of the letter E

that causes the most damage to works of art. It is in fact humidity changes that cause swelling and contracting of the different elements of a painting. The hard, crisp, fine layer of paint — being quite a stable, non-reactive film — will be under attack from the highly-absorbent paper layer that it was painted on. As the paper shrinks after having been swollen with humidity, the paint has only one place to go and that is away from the substructure, the paper, hence the cracking and flaking (see figure 1). Having been in these conditions, damage had occurred in the past and a substantial amount of repaint had been applied, 99% of which was un-necessary and covered vast tracts of the original (see figure 2).

In a case like this, it is essential to conserve and lay down any loose paint and, more importantly, to then represent in a stable environment. In this case a sealed “micro-chamber” where the picture was placed into it’s modified, original frame, using low-reflective glass and hermetically sealing all of the joints to control humidity changes.

As a bonus, the painting was cleaned, and remarkably the original paint had been beautifully preserved under the old layers of repaint. These were then exposed to reveal the coherent, original scheme to everyone’s satisfaction.

The Artist

Sándor Bortnyik (3 July 1893 — 31 December 1976) was a Hungarian painter and graphic designer. His work was greatly influenced by Cubism, Expressionism and Constructivism. He moved to Weimar in Germany in 1922 and was connected to the Bauhaus. When he moved back to Hungary he founded an art school in Budapest, where he followed Bauhaus principles.

During his long career he worked for many Hungarian and international clients. He was also the director of Hungarian Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design between 1949 and 1956.

Flaking and delaminating paint are among the many examples of paintings analysed and treated at Simon Gillespie Studio. We offer a completely bespoke service and with 25 years of experience we can provide:

- ❖ Advice on conservation & restoration.
- ❖ Preparation of simple or in-depth condition reports.
- ❖ Restoration and conservation treatment, including on-site.
- ❖ Preparation of treatment reports (which can include technical analysis and research) together with digital images of “before”, “after” and “in progress.”
- ❖ Advice on hanging, framing and lighting.
- ❖ Advice and assistance with insurance valuations.
- ❖ Advice and assistance with transport, shipping and storage.
- ❖ Advice and in-situ surveys of works of art prior to purchase.