

# Oil Paintings Restoration

By: DiAnna Tindell

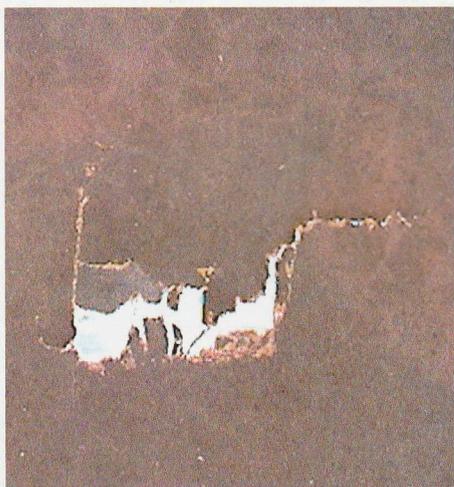
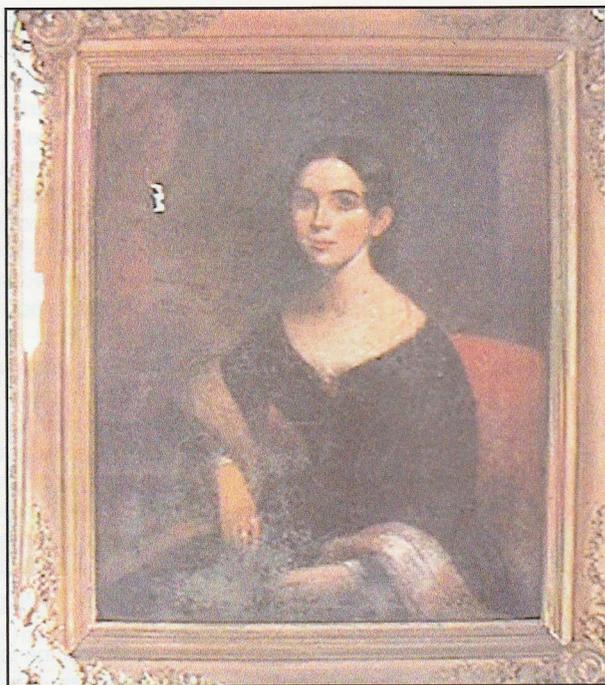
Our studio has seen numerous oil paintings with a variety of problems needing some form of restoration. Most problems require normal restoration processes such as cleaning, patching, inpainting and re-lining. However, we have also been faced with other more challenging restoration of paintings. For example, a short time ago a number of paintings that had been trapped in a fire were brought in for restoration. The fire had melted the bubble wrap around some of the paintings, leaving smokey circular imprints on both the front and back of the canvases. Paintings have also been brought in that needed restoration of canvases torn open by some type of blunt force. Unfortunately, individuals without restoration training will sometimes try

to repair a distressed painting, often creating a far greater need for restoration in the process. It is amazing to know that, in the hands of a skilled restorer, a painting that has suffered from mishap or abuse can still be returned to its original beauty.

The cleaning of old oil paintings involves many different products and processes for removing household dirt, tobacco smoke, yellowed varnish and other substances. Many paintings have been ruined by well intentioned amateurs who attempted to clean them with soap and water, kerosene, linseed oil, 409 and other home remedies. More often than not, it is better to do nothing and let an experienced professional do the work. They are knowledgeable in the use of the best proprietary chemical formulas that have already been proven safe. Many of these products are old European Museum formulas, carefully compounded with the finest ingredients, manufactured to the original specifications under scrupulous batch by batch control. An experienced restorer will use only time proven organic based formulas of the type used to preserve the oldest artifacts in the world's leading museums.

Before the restoration of an oil painting is begun, it is important to take several detailed photos of both the front and back of the painting. If there is any writing on either side of the canvas, one should be sure to take close up shots of the written areas. Photos are also recommended at various stages of the restoration to ensure that a more complete historical record will accompany the artwork.

Because the restorer will probably be using various chemical



"test" will aid in determining which cleaning formula to use for the best results. An important caveat comes to mind - don't "over clean" a painting. If tests are done and the processing applied carefully, a painting can actually be cleaned in various levels to maintain all, some or none of the original aging components that give the painting its overall aged patina. It is important to consult the client and provide detailed photos of the test in various stages to be certain the goals are mutual on the overall completed appearance before proceeding on to the next step(s). Otherwise, a dramatic difference in the painting after cleaning may be misunderstood and shock the client.

Once the "test" has shown the restorer which products would be best to use, the cleaning of the oil painting can begin. A wooden Q tip (cotton swab) dipped in the cleaning product should be utilized, applying the cleaner with a rolling motion (not a circular scrubbing motion). Watch the swab carefully to ensure that only dirt or varnish is being removed and not paint. It is best to only clean a 2" square area at a time, neutralizing the area before proceeding to another 2" square area. Preferably, a restorer will clean the paint-



formulas, he will need surgical gloves to protect the hands and adequate ventilation for a clean breathing environment. Care must be taken not to press down on the canvas. Supports should be placed under the area of the painting being restored to help bring it up to the height of the stretcher bars and prevent undue pressure on the canvas. If the canvas is in need of new stretcher bars, the painting may be removed from the old ones before cleaning.

A "test" is a must before proceeding on any piece. Starting with the least aggressive cleaning product, use a cotton swab to test a corner of the oil painting. Depending on the level of cleaning, the