

FRAMES: FROM DECORATION TO RESTORATION AND BACK

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<https://doi.org/10.18485/smartart.2022.2.ch11>

Abstract: Frame, mostly used for decoration, and then for protection of the painting is an integral part of experiencing artwork, and acts as an extension of the piece. It makes displaying safer and sets the painting apart from its surroundings but again aesthetically integrates it with the interior. Over the years and art periods, frames went through the ups and downs of their existence, resulting in being almost always ignored as a work of art. Having both practical and decorative functions, the frame balances between the applied and decorative art, serving the painting, sometimes more or less, in that way.

In restoration practice, the restorer, in general, restores paintings with their accompanying frames that succumb to damages and losses thus fulfilling the overall appearance of the restored work of art. But what happens when frames are in such a bad condition that they are not functional anymore, are lost, or do not exist? The solutions vary depending on the historical and artistic values of the painting and the frame, their location and setting, and in some cases the owner's wishes and sensibility towards art. The possibilities are multiple and sometimes exceed the field of restoration by adjusting or creating some new art solutions. New art solutions use the knowledge, tools, and materials from a conservation-restoration profession in general and the frame restoration process such as adjusting the current frame by adding new decorative mouldings, or making copies of historical frames, thus, creating new art at the service of restoration principles.

Keywords: painting frames, conservation-restoration, framing, reframing, decoration

INTRODUCTION

To fully understand the role of the frame is hard; it is even hard to summarize and to define it because of the constant connection, interaction, shifting, and relationship with the setting and painting which it frames. But the view from different angles of art history, development, makers, clients, to design, materials, methods, and possibilities could define its categorization, functions, and the answer why the frame is so often overlooked and what exactly it does to a painting.

Presenting the frame in its art form working as a supplementary element to the setting, differently, for better or worse, at different time and in different contexts¹ cannot be mentioned without the conservation-restoration profession with its protective role towards the frame and the restoration process that fulfils the overall appearance of the restored work of art.

FRAME – THE NEED TO EVOLVE AND DEVELOP

Throughout (art)history, the picture frame has always been experienced and observed along with the elements around it – the surrounding architectural setting, altarpiece, picture or painting – and because of that its development and change took place in a very “hidden in plain sight” way.

In ancient times, before the picture frame as we know it today existed, framing borders² were used to divide scenes and ornamentation into sections on pottery and in wall paintings. Even then, its task was mostly functional and in the service of that what was depicted, and not minding what type of support it was subjected to.

It was in the late Middle Ages that the first carved wooden frames appeared on small panel paintings. These panel paintings and frames were made from one piece of wood, decoratively framing the painting. It was because of the costly and time-consuming production from one piece of wood that led to the use of mitered moulding strips that were attached to the panel, which gradually led to the development of the engaged frames.³ The mitered moulding strips had at the same time a functional (structural support) and decorative role because they covered the joints between panels in altarpiece construction.

Throughout 14th and 15th centuries in Europe, these simple mouldings became more and more elaborate, but were still largely church-commissioned and thus attached and used to decorate altarpieces, the church’s architecture, and other unmovable religious artworks.

It was the rise of Italian art patrons who commissioned and brought art into their estate that created the need to speed up the production and ease the transport, so paintings with portable frames had to be developed. It is considered that the first separated frame for the panel is used in the altarpiece by Gentile da Fabriano’s *Adoration of the Magi* (1423)⁴ that was commissioned by the Florentine literate and patron of the arts Palla Strozzi (Fig. 1 A).

1 G. Alabone, “The picture frame: knowing its place”, in: *Art, conservation and authenticity: Material, concept, context*, ed. E. Hermens, T. Fiske, international conference, University of Glasgow, 12–14 September 2007, 61.

2 D. Day, “A Survey of Frame History, part 1”, *Picture Framing Magazine*, 1998, 82.

3 D. Day, “A Survey of Frame History, part 1”, *Picture Framing Magazine*, 1998, 82.

4 I. Geraghty, “The Reconfigured Frame”, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney, 2008, 29.

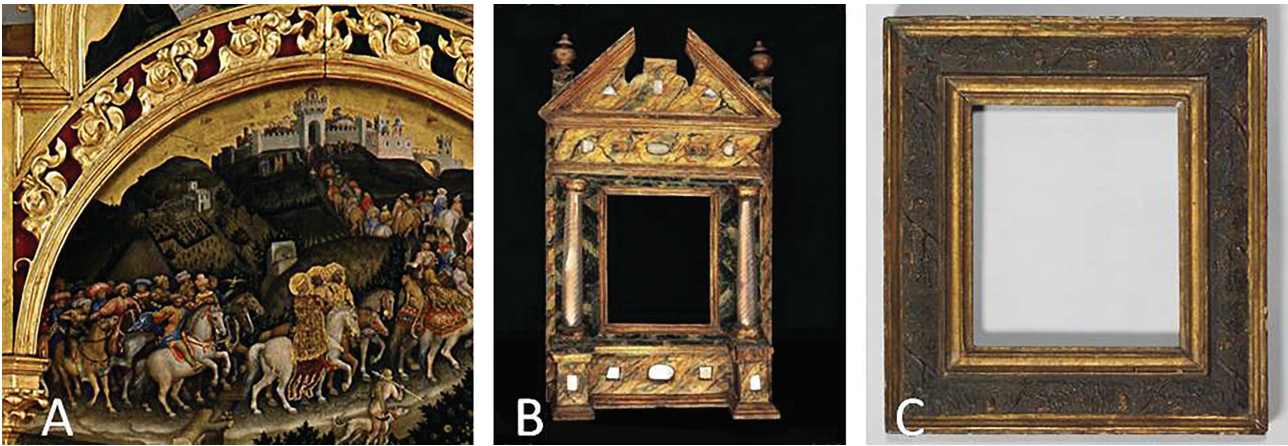


Fig. 1

Introducing art into homes led to the need for more “secular” subject matter or “worldly” themes. Developed in Italy during the late 15th century, it was the *cassetta*⁵ frame that was especially used for non-liturgical paintings. It evolved from the so-called tabernacle frame that had architectural elements – such as columns, pilasters, and pediments – that gradually disappeared, giving rise to the *cassetta* frame that incorporated the same moulding on all four sides and thus becoming the prototype of the basic picture frame that we know today (Fig. 1 B, C).

THE PRODUCTION

In Medieval and Renaissance times, altarpiece frames were made by teams of carvers, gilders, and painters.⁶ These carvers/frame makers were unknown craftsmen who belonged to workshops and each craftsman had his own specialty. The process of making these types of altarpiece frame was opposite to today’s – carvers made the wooden frame and panels, it was gilded by a gilder and when finished it was given to the painter to paint the framed panel. All these men would work as equals in the production of the finished work, and would be considered by the client as craftsmen of the same status. The carver would design the frame; and if carved ornament had been required, he would design that as well, probably with reference only to the commissioning client and none at all to the painter. This was the accepted way of proceeding, and it established the fact that the carver (who might often be a well-known architect, interior designer, or furniture-maker) was as important in the production of an altarpiece as the painter.⁷

Along with these large altarpiece frames, at first smaller devotional panels with engaged frames had been regularly produced for domestic use and slowly replaced

⁵ Julius Lowy Frame and Restoring Company, “What is a Cassetta Frame and Why Should You Consider it for Your Contemporary Artwork?”, March 27, 2020 <https://lowy1907.com/what-is-a-cassetta-frame-and-why-should-you-consider-it-for-your-contemporary-artwork/>

⁶ D. Day, “A Survey of Frame History, part 1”, *Picture Framing Magazine*, 1998, 84.

⁷ L. Roberts, “How artists have used the frame in the past, & how they can use it now”, *The frame blog*, 2016, <https://theframeblog.com/2016/06/09/how-artists-have-used-the-frame-in-the-past-how-they-can-use-it-now/>

with movable frames – the *cassetta* frame – that was probably the first example of a mass-produced⁸ frame.

In Baroque and Rococo times, when frame mouldings and design became more elaborate, it was still the age when several people were involved in the making of a single piece – the master carver, the repairer who recut detail into the gesso which coated the mouldings before gilding and the gilder himself.⁹ However, the arrangement in the acquisition of a framed painting slowly shifted introducing the artist as the most important role in making arrangements with the clients, but also deciding on the style of the frame.¹⁰

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, numbers of carvers and framers fell radically.¹¹ The majority of frames were no longer labour-intensive works of art but mass-produced in factories by skilled, yet inartistic, production workers. These frames were often poorly made with little care taken in their construction. This resulted in bad joints, poor finishes and poor quality decoration.¹²

However, frames still made in workshops by fine craftsmen were high-quality frames.¹³ Rather than executing a single frame in the form of a unique sculptural work, carvers were now required to produce the wooden moulds for applied composite ornament. Labour-intensive carving was replaced by moulded ornament. This mass-produced moulded ornament grew in popularity from the end of the eighteenth century, through the nineteenth, and is still in demand (if not quite in such quantities) today.¹⁴ The Old Master paintings were also reframed with these types of frames; so long as something was gilded and ornate it was seen as appropriate and often anachronistic since Revivalist styles predominated, as it was simpler to copy than to innovate.

Types of frames were sometimes called after the painters whose works were often housed in them and the fact that some painters repeatedly used the same types of frames today can help with the identification of the author.

The second half of the 19th century was the era of artist-designed¹⁵ frames that happened as a reaction to cheap manufacture allied to the lack of imagination but also to differentiate their work from academic paintings in conventional gilded frames.

This kind of thinking continued into the 20th century when finally, modern art severed the ties with centuries-old tradition of using frames and created the movement where both artists and curators minimised the use and the style of frame to focus

8 Julius Lowy Frame and Restoring Company, "What is a Cassetta Frame and Why Should You Consider it for Your Contemporary Artwork?", March 27, 2020 <https://lowy1907.com/what-is-a-cassetta-frame-and-why-should-you-consider-it-for-your-contemporary-artwork/>

9 P. Mitchell, "A Concise History of Frames", <https://www.paulmitchell.co.uk/frames/a-concise-history-of-frames/>

10 L. Roberts, "How artists have used the frame in the past, & how they can use it now", *The frame blog*, 2016, <https://theframeblog.com/2016/06/09/how-artists-have-used-the-frame-in-the-past-how-they-can-use-it-now/>

11 P. Mitchell, "A Concise History of Frames", <https://www.paulmitchell.co.uk/frames/a-concise-history-of-frames/>

12 D. Day, "A Survey of Frame History, part 6", *Picture Framing Magazine*, 1999, 58.

13 D. Day, "A Survey of Frame History, part 6", *Picture Framing Magazine*, 1999, 58.

14 L. Roberts, "On Art and its Margins: the Frame in the Centre: an exhibition at the Dordrechts Museum", *The frame blog*, 2015, <https://theframeblog.com/2015/10/20/on-art-and-its-margins-the-frame-in-the-centre-an-exhibition-at-the-dordrechts-museum/>

15 P. Mitchell, "A Concise History of Frames", <https://www.paulmitchell.co.uk/frames/a-concise-history-of-frames/>

just on the painting. Simplification in decoration as well as mass manufacture production and technological advance enabled experimentation with colour, material, and shapes that resulted in a vast array – from wood, metal, plastic, modern colours and finishes (especially matt) to non-traditional shapes (heart, oval, and even many-sized geometric or organic shapes and multi-opening frames¹⁶).

Today the production of frames is widely manufactured or is done in the form of small family trades with a varying range of produced designs and quality.

FINDING INSPIRATION

The development of today's frame rests on the foundation of architectural inspiration and the creation of its forms. Inspiration was often found in impressive architecture styles that were popular at that time. In the late Post-classical period in Italy, the panel on top of the altar gradually began to extend upwards and to take on the silhouette of a church, at first in the form of a simple Romanesque chapel.¹⁷ As the styles changed through time, altars were shaped in form of the gothic architecture (the form of churches and cathedrals with features like trefoil arch and pinnacles with crocket were used as a template for creating decorative moulding strips on altarpieces). If done in embellished way, they resembled an architectural tracery that uses painted panels instead of stained glass windows.

The Renaissance, which was a rebirth of classicism in all the arts, influenced also architects (and through them frame makers) to employ the rectangular forms and harmonious proportions of classical temples that used the Roman orders types of columns and entablatures so the frames resembled condensed and minimized renaissance buildings.

It was the adding of many architectural shapes and elements that created the first frames, accordingly becoming physically dependable with reference to the assembly such as the altarpiece, and that had to be connected together to achieve structural stability. It was when the adding was replaced with subtracting the shapes and elements that the frame was made more independent and in the basic quadratic shape as we know it today. That can be traced down to the creation of the *cassetta* frame that was inspired by a simpler architectural element such as the architectural borders of classical doors and windows.

In the Baroque period buildings employed stepped and receding rather than flat façades, and the same dramatic light-sculpting profiles were used for Baroque frames.¹⁸

In addition to mimicking architectural elements, in 17th and 18th centuries inspiration was found in organic materials (auricular ornaments, decorative foliage), fashionable clothing, stucco, architectural panelling, furniture, metalwork (silverware), and jewellery.

Classicizing & NeoClassical frames used ornaments, patterns and elements from the past, gradually bringing radically innovative geometric forms – straight lines and squares, triangular sections and canted sloping planes.

¹⁶ USA on canvas, https://www.usaoncanvas.com/include/guide_history_picture_frames.php#sec3

¹⁷ L. Roberts, "An abbreviated history of Italian frames from the 12th to the 20th century", *The frame blog*, 2018, <https://theframeblog.com/2018/08/11/an-abbreviated-history-of-italian-frames-from-the-12th-to-the-20th-century/>

¹⁸ P. Mitchell, "A Concise History of Frames", <https://www.paulmitchell.co.uk/frames/a-concise-history-of-frames/>

From 19th to 20th century custom-made patterns with decorative and symbolic elements, as well as artists frames designed according to their own settings and their own inspiration, were frequently connected to the painted subject. By including the composition and subject of the painting into the frame design, inspiration expanded beyond imagination, especially with technical development that introduced new materials other than wood or gold.

Today inspiration is generally drawn from interior design, modified historical decorations and basically, everything, depending on the market demand.

CONSTANT CONNECTION

The independent picture frame, which is also referred to as the ‘applied’, ‘separated’, ‘moveable’ or ‘literal’ frame,¹⁹ is a relatively recent invention with its origins stemming from twelfth-century carved wooden frames that were modelled after architectural forms and designed to display, celebrate and support the altarpiece.

With the separation of the frame from altars construction the frame lost the burden of physically being connected to the structure, but it did not lose its burden of being incorporated into the design of the interior and its long-lasting addiction – the painting.

THE INTERIOR DESIGN

With the use of the frame, the painting is set apart from its surroundings but again aesthetically integrated with the architectural setting of the interior. Throughout history, more attention has been paid to making frames fit into architectural setting²⁰ than to creating frames to complement the paintings they surrounded. For example, in the 17th and 18th centuries, the carvers and gilders worked in close communication with artists, architects, cabinetmakers, and other designers,²¹ and the frames they produced fitted into contemporary interiors. These craftsmen understood the relationship between framed painting and its surroundings.

Fitting frames into the interior setting (no matter what the purpose of the interior was) primarily emphasises the decorative function which is subjected to the interior, making it more beautiful and decorative.

Today, when the interior is being decorated, the importance is also given to the frame and its interconnectedness with the entire décor of the interior. It is noticeable that a room without wall art looks incomplete, and something remains missing.²² Tips on how to decorate the interior, from the type of colour scheme for the walls to what kind of frame on the wall will give a focal point and a finishing touch to a room today, are very popular.

19 Custom frames Canada, “A (not so) recent history of custom framing“, 2021, <https://www.customframescanada.ca/blogs/news/history-of-custom-framing>

20 D. Day, “A Survey of Frame History, part 1”, *Picture Framing Magazine*, 1998, 82.

21 L. Roberts, “How artists have used the frame in the past, & how they can use it now”, *The frame blog*, 2016, <https://theframeblog.com/2016/06/09/how-artists-have-used-the-frame-in-the-past-how-they-can-use-it-now/>

22 Universal arquati moulding, “The importance of picture frames in the interior design of your property”, 2019, <http://universalarquati.com/blog/the-importance-picture-frames-interior-design-property>

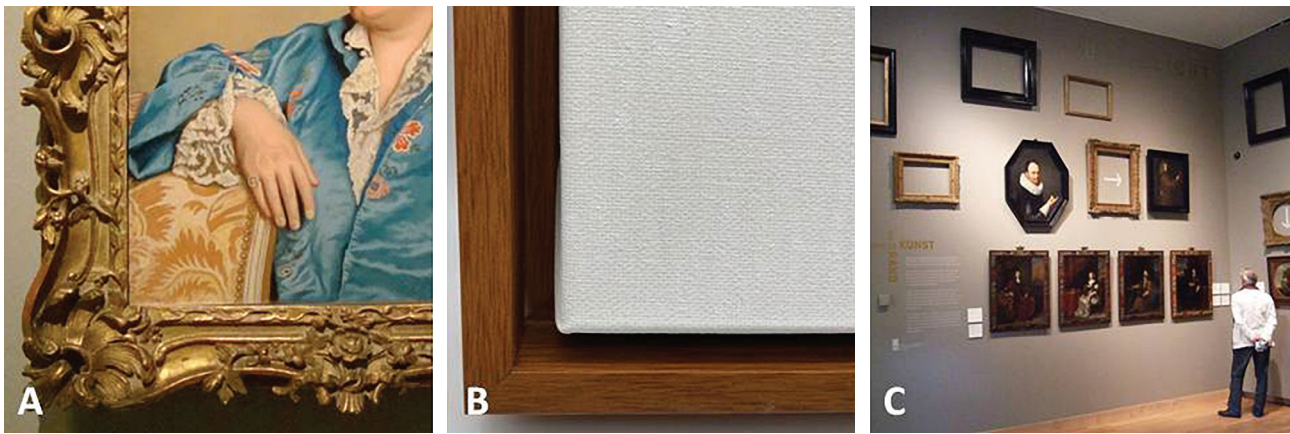


Fig. 2

IT WORKS HARD FOR THE PAINTING

In the past, the style of the new frame usually conformed to the prevailing fashions in interior decoration, as well as the painting's received significance. By bestowing order on the room in this way the frame serves to subdue the painting.²³

When painters were finally given a much greater role in deciding with what kind of frame their paintings should be framed, the frame's sympathy for the interior design shifted to the painting's depicted subject. The focus was no longer just and entirely on the interior design, but the frame's style, materials, and decorative elements started to serve the painting.

Baroque frames tend to have large and assertive corner ornaments; and it is noticeable that a great many Baroque paintings conform to the invisible focal lines suggested by this sort of design, and very rarely have skewed or asymmetric compositions which would undercut the geometric forms suggested by these lines.²⁴ Spanish baroque frames are noted for their polychrome finishes, which further emphasize the carved panels of the frame, enabling these to create an optical interplay with the compositional lines of the paintings they contain.²⁵

It was not just the well-placed ornament that complemented the painting; it was also the form of the decoration that could connect and emphasize the painted subject with the frame. For example, asymmetric swirling motifs and scrolling lines of the ornaments echoed the curvaceous folds of hair and costume of the painted figure. In Rococo, styled frames, whose forms echoed the sweep and swirl of the 18th-century costume, stucco, furniture, and metalwork,²⁶ did not just inspire but were also used as part of the painting's composition (Fig. 2 A).

Types of materials that were used on the frames had not just the decorative role but at the same time enhanced the painted subject. The gilded surfaces that were used on the panels and the engaged frames in Medieval and Renaissance times help to illumine paintings with candlelight, and designs of some Neoclassical convex

23 G. Alabone, "The picture frame: knowing its place", in: *Art, conservation and authenticities: Material, concept, context*, ed. E. Hermens, T. Fiske, international conference, University of Glasgow, 12–14 September 2007, 61.

24 L. Roberts, "How artists have used the frame in the past, & how they can use it now", *The frame blog*, 2016, <https://theframeblog.com/2016/06/09/how-artists-have-used-the-frame-in-the-past-how-they-can-use-it-now/>

25 P. Mitchell, "A Concise History of Frames", <https://www.paulmitchell.co.uk/frames/a-concise-history-of-frames/>

26 P. Mitchell, "A Concise History of Frames", <https://www.paulmitchell.co.uk/frames/a-concise-history-of-frames/>

shapes across the rail pointed inward to the painting, helping to focus²⁷ the spectator's eye on the subject.

From the popular symbolism in the 19th century to the individually-designed artists' frames, the design and structure of the frame were inspired by paintings that resulted in creating unique and imaginative frames.

In the 20th century, the time of artists' frames, there evolved a different conception of framing altogether. The painters either carefully chose and designed or fabricated and painted frames for their paintings. Integrating frame with the painting resulted in an inseparable and unique piece of art.

Modern and contemporary design created a minimalist setting both for the architectural, interior, and painting style that also affected the design of the frame – simplicity with straight lines and angles, coloured and without detailed carving. This could have been due, in part, to the popularity of framing photographs instead of paintings and other more traditional forms of art.²⁸ The most acceptable frame was one that did not call attention to itself, for example, the canvas Floater frames,²⁹ which were created to avoid obscuring any of the canvas painting or print, not even a small portion of the edge that a traditional frame hides, since it served as the distinction between art and wall, but without distraction from the artwork as a whole (Fig. 2 B). Though picture frames, both ornamented and modern, are still purchased by artists and decorators for personal and corporate displays, there has also been a shift in recent years to a style even more simplified – “frameless frames” – consisting of two panes of glass or plexiglass that are less expensive, easier to hang and transport and bought with no worry that the frame will not fit the decor. It can be said that history has repeated itself by going back to the dominance of architectural and interior design and beyond.

DID IT FINALLY BREAK FREE?

When evolution proceeds from the attached to the independent frame, and from manufacturing that resulted in covering every inch of the walls with framed paintings to the rediscovery of the frame as part of the painting, artistically designed without rules and boundaries, the logical thing would be that, at the apogee of its existence, the frame should finally break free from architecture and painting and become an independent work of art.

This was never entirely done but there were some cases that put the frame in the spotlight: the sculptures honouring the frame, exhibitions of displayed frames without paintings were held, the interior decorated with frames without the paintings, but altogether the frame unquestionably remained the trustworthy servant to paintings and interior design (Fig. 2 C).

27 L. Roberts, “How artists have used the frame in the past, & how they can use it now”, *The frame blog*, 2016, <https://theframeblog.com/2016/06/09/how-artists-have-used-the-frame-in-the-past-how-they-can-use-it-now/>

28 USA on canvas, https://www.usaoncanvas.com/include/guide_history_picture_frames.php#sec3

29 Victoria on canvas, “The picture frame”, https://www.victoriaoncanvas.com/include/guide_history_picture_frames.php

FRAME'S FUNCTIONS AND TASKS

The multiple tasks that one frame has and carries out are often put aside when looking at the painting. The frame, mostly used for decoration and then for the protection of the painting, acts as an extension of the painting that physically and aesthetically links the piece to the interior setting. Having both practical and decorative functions, the frame balances between the applied and decorative art, serving the painting, sometimes more or less, in that way.

The frame's creation begins in a workshop and it was once done by a craftsman, driven by a purely decorative thought and intention. This decorative side of the frame helps to enhance the experience of an artwork, allowing its beauty to be sacrificed in the service of the painting.

With the frame serving the painting just in the form of decoration, we often disregard the other purposes of the frame – its protective function – protecting the corners and giving more stability to the stretcher (or altarpieces when engaged frames were used), and the fact that the frame literally hangs on the wall so the painting could be displayed, making the display much easier and safer for the painting.

Frames retain evidence of the circumstances in which they were first used for their paintings. Alterations to the front or back of a frame can result in the loss of basic information and make it difficult to ascertain its age or provenance. Close examination, supported by scientific analysis of the materials and techniques used in the frame's construction, can help us identify any changes that have taken place.³⁰

A PLACE FOR FRAME

When defining the terms fine art, decorative art and applied art, it may be difficult in some situations to find a perfect place for frame due to constant evolution of styles and forms of decorations or absence of them, the shifting object of inspiration, and the constant physical and visual connection to other objects of art.

The definition of decorative arts³¹ defines frames the best – arts or crafts whose object is the design and manufacture of objects that are both beautiful and functional. It includes most of the arts made for interior design. In practice, applied arts – defined as arts that apply design and decoration to everyday and essentially practical objects in order to make them aesthetically pleasing – largely overlaps with decorative arts.

Throughout history, the painting, sculpture and architecture – arts that were linked in one way or another with the frame – are categorised as fine art. The term fine art denotes art developed primarily for aesthetics or beauty with no practical use, distinguished from decorative art or applied art.

Having the decorative and the functional role, the frame could, thus, not be a part of fine art and, even though the shapes and forms of the frame were taken from architectural elements, it has always been subjected to the interior design and literally connected to the wall. Therefore, being a part of the architecture, the frame has not been categorized as fine art.

³⁰ Tate, "Frames and workshops", <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/conservation/frames-workshop>

³¹ Wikipedia, Decorative arts, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decorative_arts

The elaborate decorations and ornaments carved in wood by a sculptor, again, did not categorize the frame as part of the sculpture or as fine art.

The constant fixation to painting, with the aim of its protection and help to show off its qualities – even at the apogee of its service when it was designed and created by the same artists that made the frame be one with the painting – still did not place frame as part of the painting even in fine art.

Being part of the interior decor, always connected to it aesthetically and literally, a frame can be seen as an item of furniture, especially because today they are designed by furniture builders rather than the artists, sculptors or architects, as it was the case in the past.

THE ROLE OF CONSERVATION – RESTORATION

The frame was in general considered mainly functional, subject to wear and tear, thus expendable and easily replaceable with the changing fashion trends in interior design.

In the late 19th century the situation gradually started to improve, when the fields of science and art became increasingly intertwined. Those were the beginnings of conservation-restoration as we know it today, which started with the protection of ancient buildings and later on spread with the preservation of other visual, applied, and decorative arts.

Of course, frames were still functional objects that were more or less mass-produced and often thrown away when damaged or replaced with new fashion trends.

With the introduction of international conservation-restoration charters, the foundations for the profession were laid, hence the way of preserving artwork and the understanding of the original's integrity, and conservation-restoration in general, evolved for the better. Regarding the frame, often ignored as a piece of art itself, this was something to look forward to.

THE VALUE

Information regarding the way an object is valued is crucial to its characterization because values affect the choice of treatment goals. There are many different kinds of values.³² An object can have different kinds of values and the way it is valued can change over time, but because of the fact that the object has values, it is preserved. The frame, for example, could have art value, aesthetic, use, historical, and monetary value; or values divided into two categories, personal (held by owners) and cultural (held by a broad group of people or society at large). Looking at the terminology and categorization of objects can reveal certain values and provide another set of clues for the decision-making treatment.

CONSERVATION-RESTORATION PRINCIPLES AND TREATMENTS

Paraphrasing the Venice Charter³³ and the more recent E.C.C.O. guidelines,³⁴ conservator-restorer is a professional with knowledge and skill to preserve artworks carrying out treatments while respecting professional ethics that does not involve

32 B. Appelbaum, "Conservation treatment methodology", Elsevier, 2007, 87

33 ICOMOS, The Venice Charter, https://www.icomos.org/charters/venice_e.pdf

34 E.C.C.O., Documents, http://www.ecco-eu.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ECCO_professional_guidelines_I.pdf



Fig. 3

creating new artwork and representing the restorer's interventions while respecting historical integrity, perception, and understanding of the original. But then again, can being "opposed to the creation of new objects or maintaining or repairing objects in a functional sense" be in the service of frames since they are functional in so many aspects?

The frame as a functional component of most art collections/households is subjected to wear and tear as it provides the housing for paintings. Damage to painting frames could occur during exhibitions, storage, travel, and it is caused by handling, hanging processes, environments, neglect, and irreversible restorations.³⁵ Damages of the frame's technological layers include loose structure and decorations, losses in the wooden structure, decoration, preparatory layer, gilding and paint layer, and damaged coatings and varnishes. Also, previous treatments such as overpaint, over-gilding, and crude fillings are considered unwanted; therefore, they need to be removed and properly reconstructed (Fig. 3 A).

In restoration practice, the restorer, in general, restores paintings with their accompanying frames that are susceptible to mechanical damages and losses over the years. Restoration consists of direct action carried out on damaged or deteriorated objects with the aim of facilitating their preservation and perception of unity (Fig. 3 B, C, D).

35 H. Glower, "A Description of 19th-century American Gilded Picture Frames and an Outline of Their Modern Use and Conservation", WAG Postprints—Providence, Rhode Island, 2006,¹

The frame's role, as being primarily to serve as a transition between the painting and its surroundings while at the same time, enhancing the artwork, must be respected when the process of restoration is planned. The restoration of the painting must also include the frame because the restored frame, as well as the right frame, is used to add to the overall appearance of the (restored) work of art and could also increase its monetary value.

In collaboration with other professionals dealing with cultural heritage, the conservator-restorer must follow the highest standards regardless of any opinion about the market value of the frame and take into account the requirements of its social use.

Following the Guidelines, to restore what is broken or lost must be integrated harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence. Materials that are used in the process are traditional and modern, the efficacy of which has been confirmed by scientific data and proved in practice.

Knowing the technological aspect of the frames, what kind of damages and subsequent interventions can occur and the restoration process, a great similarity can be noticed between panel paintings and polychrome wooden sculpture. But are frames really treated with the same care as the works of fine art today?

Following the Guidelines, the objects to which society attributes particular aesthetic, artistic, documentary, environmental, historic, scientific, social, or spiritual values are called cultural heritage that is entrusted to the care of the conservator-restorer. Knowing this, being a part of the cultural heritage, frames deserve a professional approach in every way.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

The restorer usually restores frames that enclose paintings when the painting has to undergo a restoration process, or when the frame itself is damaged. But what happens when frames are in such a bad condition that they are not functional anymore, are lost, or do not exist? Solutions vary depending on the historical and artistic values of the painting and the frame, their location and setting, and in some cases the owner's wishes and sensibility towards art.

The possibilities are multiple and sometimes exceed the field of restoration by creating some new art solutions that use the knowledge, tools, and materials from the frame restoration process, or by adjusting the current frame by adding new decorative mouldings, or making copies of historical frames. Thus, creating new art is at the service of restoration principles.

Restorers, conservators, curators, framers, art historians, owners, and clients are often involved in this process and in decision-making with different roles.

It is the question of the owner's inclination to art and understanding of the "benefits" of the restoration principles and treatment that needs to be addressed and that creates issues that could have the most effect on the existence of the frame.

THE OWNER EFFECT

Medieval and Renaissance frames, as part of the interior design (altarpieces) of churches, were built to inspire awe and transport the spectator/believer from the mundane to the transcendent. Frames were so closely related to contemporary architecture, the effect was like that of a door or window frame: the spectator could

now imagine that he or she was looking through an opening in the church wall onto a realistic scene taking place in another room, or in the landscape outside.³⁶ Highly decorated cathedrals and churches were used as propaganda and attracted more believers, especially pilgrims, whose donations provided more wealth that again was used for interior decoration and building.

The use of frames extended beyond the church into households, which provided more space for its development – development in design and various styles regarding the materials that were used, which, among other things, depended on the wealth of the client. In every household, the functional element of a frame was always present but the decorative element depended on the status, i.e. the amount of money one had. It was the wealthy ones that took the leading role in supporting and engaging artisans and craftsmen to create inspiring cultural artefacts and produce decorative styles and innovative techniques. Hence, frames (and decorated carvings) could range from very complex and elaborate to very simple and small, with gilded or painted elements; hence elaborated and gilded frames indicated wealth and status.

In the 19th century, with the rise of the middle class that wanted decorations to fill their homes, the demand for ready-made, inexpensive picture frames increased. Unfortunately, many people did not know enough about the history of frames to make informed frame selections. This lack of knowledge resulted in a low standard of taste with paintings being placed in frames that today seem inappropriate. Paintings often became an excuse to purchase or display an elaborate frame; ornate frames had always been, in part, a way to show off the owner's wealth.³⁷

Though many collectors and decorators still seek out the ornate frames of the past centuries to suit “classically” decorated rooms and to outfit paintings and prints from those periods, the trend has certainly turned toward a plainer style.³⁸

The quick and mass production of frames and the revolution in economic materials made the frame available to the wider enjoyers regardless of their status and wealth, thus creating cheap frames, without cultural value and authenticity.

Today, the attitude towards frames depends on the owner's connoisseurship of cultural (mainly art, aesthetic and historical) values and sensibility to preserve the frame for the future. This is difficult to carry out in today's consumer society that regularly launches something new and affordable. At the same time, the owner's personal artistic taste (frame styles that are popular or frame styles that will fit the interior design or the painting) and financial possibilities are the main factors that could affect the frame's future and the perception of the frame's value.

The framing or reframing dilemma should always be thoroughly considered – how can an old/original frame be preserved, and is the new frame aesthetically and stylistically appropriate? This will help make good choices when, for example, framing a *trompe-l'oeil* painting that already includes an integral painted frame, or knowing that it was a painter's intent to frame a modern painting with a historical frame. The decisions should always be accompanied with the professional opinions of the conservators, restorers or art historians.

36 L. Roberts, “How artists have used the frame in the past, & how they can use it now”, *The frame blog*, 2016, <https://theframeblog.com/2016/06/09/how-artists-have-used-the-frame-in-the-past-how-they-can-use-it-now/>

37 D. Day, “A Survey of Frame History, part 6”, *Picture Framing Magazine*, 1999, 58–59.

38 Victoria on canvas, “The picture frame”, https://www.victoriaoncanvas.com/include/guide_history_picture_frames.php

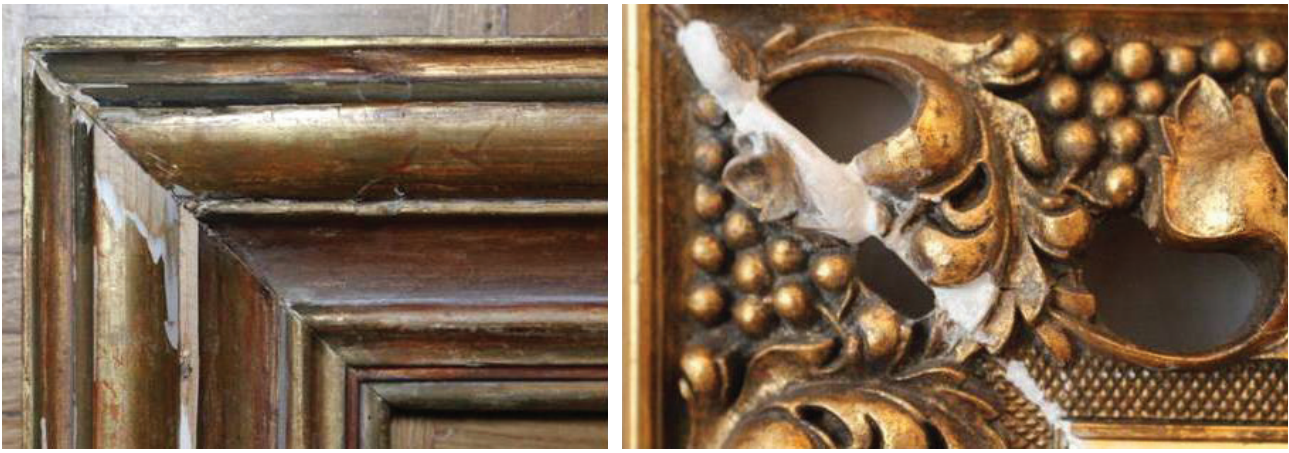


Fig. 4

CONSERVATION-RESTORATION, FRAMING AND REFRAMING

Changing tastes in framing overtime brought a choice of frames in different shapes, sizes, forms, and decorations, and sometimes new tendencies and trends were not accepted.

In the late 19th and early 20th century when individually-designed artists' frames appeared throughout Europe and America, the frame design changed from using gilding to neutral painted finishes.³⁹ Often, the collectors⁴⁰ and the dealers would reframe these paintings in antique gilded Baroque-styled frames producing inappropriate combinations that we know so well today. In the 20th and 21st centuries, these solutions appeared less and less satisfactory from a viewpoint of the context and historical authenticity.⁴¹ Also, from the conservation-restoration point of view, it is considered to be very unsuitable in terms of the maintenance of the authenticity and the original material as well as in terms of preserving the physical integrity of the cultural heritage.

The paintings that are housed in most unsuitable frames, especially in galleries and museums – wrong art period and completely wrong in terms of national appropriateness, the gilding that presents too great a contrast with the overall tonality of the work – are gradually being reframed by curators and restorers in more aesthetically and historically appropriate frames.

Some antique dealers find and buy old frames from the same art period that they then adjust in size for the paintings they plan to sell. This raises some questions from the conservation-restoration standpoint. Sawing the original and then throwing the unwanted part away is completely opposite to the conservation-restoration principles that are based on respect for the original material (Fig. 4).

The acquired (sawed) frame is most likely taken from another painting that was left without its original frame and was reframed with another. Was that new frame historically suitable and aesthetically appropriate or was it chosen solely to go with the interior decoration? Similarly, if we merge the second painting with the right kind of frame, are we not “facilitating its perception, appreciation, and understand-

39 D. Day, “A Survey of Frame History, part 6”, *Picture Framing Magazine*, 1999, 62.

40 P. Mitchell, “A Concise History of Frames”, <https://www.paulmitchell.co.uk/frames/a-concise-history-of-frames/>

41 L. Roberts, “Reframing the Renaissance: Museums and Madonnas”, *The frame blog*, 2014, <https://theframeblog.com/2014/12/21/reframing-the-renaissance-museums-and-madonnas/>

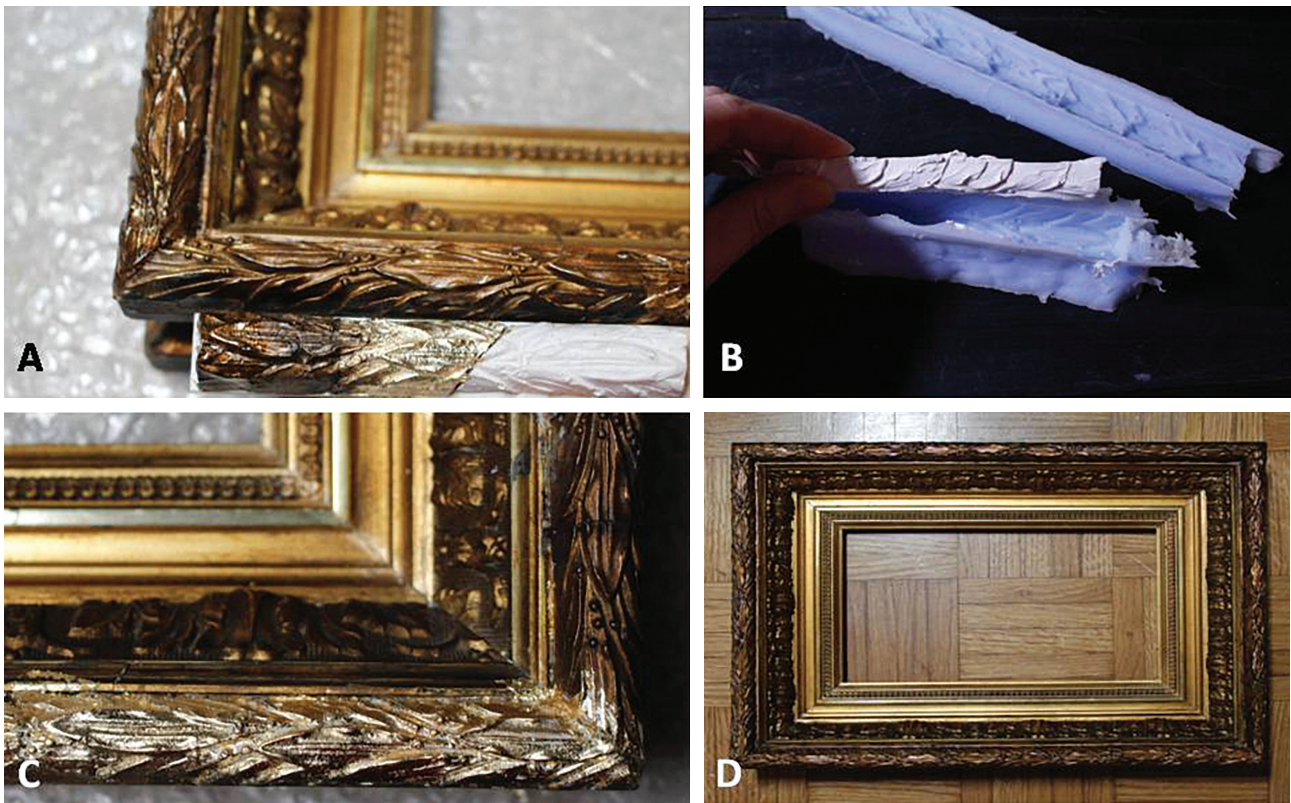


Fig. 5

ing, while respecting as far as possible its aesthetic, historic and physical properties”, as it is said in the Guidelines?

When an artwork is in private ownership it cannot be supervised as much as it is in the case of the (object that is part of the) cultural heritage that is under supervision of the ministry and conservators. Especially when something is as “insignificant” as a frame a functional object, not fine art.

The antique dealers have the knowledge of art history that is proved by choosing the right kind of frame but do not have the knowledge of the conservation-restoration guidelines and principles.

When the structure of the wooden frame is so weakened and infested with wood-worm that the frame no longer fulfils the functional task, a new frame should be considered. In collaboration with the supervisor and other professionals, a copy of the original frame could be made. The complex process of restoration uses materials to reconstruct missing mouldings (Fig. 5 A, B), and ground layers, gilding or paint layers (Fig. 5 C) can be used in the making of a new frame – the technological and visual copy (Fig. 5 D).

In that way, the conservator-restorer respects the aesthetic components and takes into account the requirements of its social use.

To make a good technological and visual copy thorough restoration research and previous documentation of the old frame is necessary. Documentation consists of the accurate pictorial and written record of all procedures, interventions, and observations and it is always necessary to carry it out.

But, what happens if the original frame is lost and a copy has to be made? Determining what frame is appropriate for the time and style period demands



Fig. 6

extensive research in a field that is still young in terms of connoisseurship.⁴² Research that ensures the historical credibility the style and technique regarding the time when the painting was created for making the replica frame is always a challenging project.

By creating a new bespoke frame (from the materials and with the knowledge from the conservation-restoration profession), practically, new artwork (new applied/decorative art) was created, but in the service of preserving the aesthetic value of the painting.

Issues occur when acquiring the new frame for a private owner whose choice most often is conditioned by the financial capacity and current interior decoration or taste. The terms fine arts, decorative arts and applied arts are used in different kinds of museums, while for private owners, objects may be *object d'art* or part of their décor or interior decoration, or just household possessions.⁴³

If the client chooses “the price”, the restoration of the old (original) frame is not considered, nor is a hand-carved or bespoke hand-made frame, but a manufactured one with a lower price and somewhat likable appearance. If the price or interior decoration is dictating, then the choices can be limited and often wrong. But if the price is not the issue and the owner’s sensibility towards the art exists, the research that ensures the best or even partial historical accuracy of style and aesthetic is needed and a new manufactured or hand-made frame can be acquired.

Conversely, what happens when a new painting is in a need of a frame and the owner simply wants a profiled old manufactured frame to be adjusted for the painting and not thrown away? The restorer whose aim is opposed to the creation of new objects has to “leave some of the Guidelines behind” in the search for the aesthetic solution. Being a restorer – having the knowledge of historical frame styles and decors – is helpful and useful for creation and finding inspiration for the new frame

42 Tate, “A replica frame for Henry Fuseli’s Percival Delivering Belisane from the Enchantment of Urma exhibited 1783”, <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/replica-frame-henry-fuseli-percival-delivering-belisane-enchantment-urma>

43 B. Appelbaum, “Conservation treatment methodology”, Elsevier, 2007, 162.

(Fig. 6). This kind of bespoke frame made by the restorer is always better than the new one that the owner, without any background knowledge, would choose.

After the design proposal is made and approved of, the old or new wooden structure can be decorated with mouldings, even combined from different art periods and painted or gilded creating some newly designed elements – while using materials from the conservation-restoration profession and art in general.

CONCLUSION

Frames are often ignored as a piece of art but at their best, they are works of art. Their own brilliance serves that of the painting they encase and provide a decorative and harmonizing transition to the outer world.

Today, collective blindness is still present, in one way or another. In books of art history, in auction catalogues, the frame is expunged. In museum shops, postcards feature the artwork alone, without the frame that has been a critical part of the visitor's experience of the artwork.⁴⁴

The development of the conservation-restoration profession unquestionably set the ground rules for preserving the cultural heritage that, of course, includes frames. The restoration of the painting should not exclude the restoration of the frame if it is needed, not just to make the overall appearance of the restored artwork aesthetically and physically integrated, but also to preserve the values of the frame itself.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1 A, B, C: Evolution of the frame as we know it today: example of the altarpiece separated frame, "tabernacle" frame, "cassette" (www.metmuseum.org, www.khanacademy.org)

Развој оквира каквог познајемо данас: примјер одвојеног оквира од олтарне пале, „табернакул” оквир, „касета” оквир (www.metmuseum.org, www.khanacademy.org)

2 A, B, C: Frame in the service of the painted figure; example of the "floater" frame; frame exhibition (www.theframeblog.com, www.usaoncanvas.com)

Тип оквира прилагођен на сликаној фигури; примјер "floater" оквира; Изложба оквира (www.theframeblog.com, www.usaoncanvas.com)

3 A, B, C, D: Before and after the conservation-restoration process: damages; reconstruction of the ground layer; reconstruction of the gilding; after varnishing and applied patina (Photos by Maja Sučević Miklin)

Прије и након конзерваторско-рестаураторских радова: оштећења; реконструкција подлоге; реконструкција позлате; након лакирања и патинирања (Фотографије: Маја Сучевић Миклин)

4: Examples of the fitted frames and the resulting damage and alterations (Photos by Maja Sučević Miklin)

Примјери оквира промијењених димензија с резултираним оштећењима и промјенама (Фотографије: Маја Сучевић Миклин)

5 A, B, C, D: Making a copy of the frame: making mock-ups; reconstructing decorative elements; reconstruction of the patina and varnish; finished copy of the frame (Photos by Maja Sučević Miklin)

Израда копије оквира: пробе; реконструкција украсних елемената; реконструкција патине и лака; готова копија оквира (Фотографије: Маја Сучевић Миклин)

6 A, B: Making adjustments to the new frame: decoration reconstruction and applying bole; metal leaf reconstruction (Photos by Miljenko Zvonar)

Израда прилагођеног новог оквира: реконструкција украса и наношење болуса; реконструкција металних листића (Фотографије: Миљенко Звонар)

44 E. Crichton-Miller, "What goes around: The art of framing", Christies, 2015, <https://www.christies.com/features/Frames-in-Focus-5815-1.aspx>

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Резиме: Оквир који се углавном користи за украшавање, али и за заштиту слике, саставни је део доживљавања уметничког дела и делује као продужетак истог дела. То чини екран сигурнијим и издваја слику од околине, али је опет естетски интегрише са унутрашњошћу. Током година и уметничких периода оквири су пролазили успоне и падове свог постојања, што је резултирало тиме да се готово увек игнорише као уметничко дело. Имајући и практичну и декоративну функцију, оквир балансира између примењене и декоративне уметности, служећи слици, понекад више или мање, на тај начин.

У рестаураторској пракси, рестауратор генерално рестаурира слике са припадајућим оквирима који су подложни оштећењима и губицима, испуњавајући тако укупан изглед поново усклађеног уметничког дела. Али шта се дешава када су оквири у тако лошем стању да више нису функционални, изгубљени или више не постоје? Решења се разликују у зависности од историјских и уметничких вредности слике и оквира, њихове локације и поставке, а у неким случајевима и жеље власника и сензибилитета према уметности. Могућности су вишеструке и понекад надилазе поље рестаурације прилагођавањем или стварањем неких нових уметничких решења. Нова уметничка решења користе знање, алате и материјале из конзерваторско-рестаураторске струке уопште и поступак рестаурације оквира, попут прилагођавања тренутног оквира додавањем нових украсних лајсни или копирањем историјских оквира. Дакле, стварање нове уметности у служби принципа рестаурације.

Кључне речи: сликарски оквири, конзервација-рестаурација, урамљивање, инверзија, декорација