What lies behind the works of art that we admire in the great museums of the world? What secrets do they hide? What often eventful history has followed them through the centuries to the present? What transformations have taken place with the passage of time, affecting the essence of their nature, such as the shades and tones of a painting's colors? And what is the best way to bring them to life again while remaining faithful to the artist's original intention? "Mario Modestini is a rare, and maybe unique, being: an excellent restorer, he is also, rather unusually, a great connoisseur of paintings with an infallible eye."

Such was the comment of Federico Zeri on describing this great restorer—generally considered one of the foremost of the last century—whose private and professional history is recounted here through the memoirs he compiled towards the end of his long life. Dianne Dwyer is also a renowned restorer and played a key role in the extraordinary recent recovery of the lost masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci, the Salvator Mundi, which is described in detail in a moving Epilogue. Her task in writing this book has not been an easy one. With love and devotion, she has pieced together and organized her husband's memoirs chronologically, interweaving them with a theme that forms a book within a book, and has supplemented the original, fragmentary memoirs with long and detailed research and study, checking and verifying the sources.
The result is a book that can be read on various, different levels: biographical—and Mario's life, divided equally between Italy and the United States, was rich in experiences and fascinating encounters, as well as professional fulfilment; technical, related to the art of restoration and the lively debates on approaches that have roiled the world of art history; artistic (or aesthetic), shedding light on the schools and masterworks of European art from the entirely original and intimate point of view of a great restorer; and not least, historical, in particular through the first-hand account of Modestini's youth, which recalls the events and tragedies of the war years, and how these affected both his own life, the art world, and its national and international markets.

With an insider's eye and a tale to tell, Masterpieces will appeal to a wide range of readers with different interests, from professionals in the field of restoration, to art historians, to simply the curious reader fascinated by the workings of the world of art. For the interested amateur, an informative Appendix by the author provides a concise summary of basic information about the materials and techniques of old master paintings to enhance our understanding of topics recounted in the text and of the delicate problems that confront restorers. [Publisher's text]

Biography of the author's husband M. Modestini (1907-2006), art restorer.

SOGGETTI

Modestini, Mario, 1907-2006
Art restorers -- Italy -- Biography
Art -- Conservation and restoration -- Italy -- History

IN QUESTO VOLUME

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Masterpieces. Based on a Manuscript by Mario Modestini by Dianne Dwyer Modestini '68
A behind-the-scenes look into the world of art and art restoration, by the restorer of Leonardo da Vinci's Salvator Mundi and widow of renowned art restorer Mario Modestini, whose memoir this book supplements. The First Modern Risk: Workplace Accidents and the Origins of European Social States by Julia Moses '01
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Ancient mural restoration based on a modified generative adversarial network. Article. Full-text available.

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