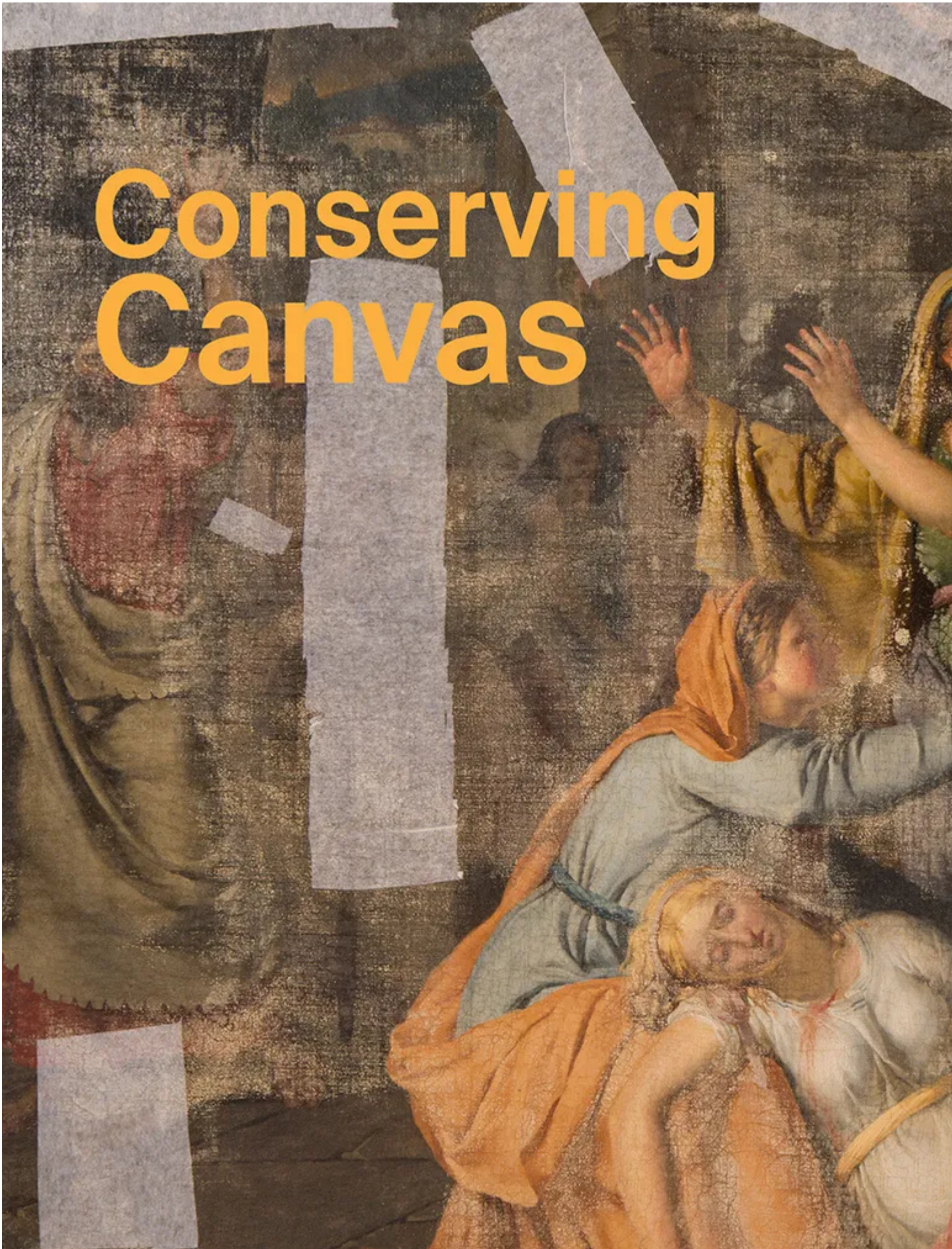


# Book Review: Conserving Canvas

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# Conserving Canvas



Review by Eva Videnska

***Conserving Canvas, Edited by Cynthia Schwartz, Ian McClure, and Jim Coddington, Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles: 2023, 516 pages / \$95.00 (print) / free (digital)***

*Conserving Canvas* is a compilation of papers originating from the proceedings of an international symposium in 2019 under the same title, organized by the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage at Yale University. This symposium received support from the Yale University Art Gallery and Yale Center for British Art, with generous help from the Getty Foundation. The Getty's international initiative, Conserving Canvas, aims to preserve the art of conserving the textile supports of paintings through various stimulating events worldwide. This book is one of the fruits of these efforts, edited by Cynthia Schwarz, Ian McClure and Jim Coddington. Nearly 370 participants gathered at the symposium to discuss one of the most debated techniques in conservation—lining and conserving canvases. This event marked a significant milestone in the theory and practice of lining, following the 1974 conference in Greenwich, England, and represents a more global and open approach to the subject. The book is available [online for free](#).

This year marks the 50th anniversary of one of the most important events in the history of lining of paintings, The Conference of Comparative Lining Techniques held at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England in 1974. This significant event undoubtedly changed the ship's course from invasive practices towards more reversible and structural treatments, and the philosophies established during this era continue to influence contemporary conservation practices. This book sheds light on the subject matter, presenting viewpoints from professionals around the globe and reflecting on past practices, materials and accumulated experiences applied in practice.

Lining is a complex creature that has sunk its claws into most of museum collections worldwide, yet practical experience with these techniques is slowly dwindling among younger generations. This collection of papers deals with various practical problems, documenting methods used and providing lists of materials at the end of most articles. If you seek diverse and current perspectives from restorers around the globe—from both the private and institutional sectors—this book offers exemplary experiences. It provides a comprehensive overview of developments in the world of canvas and textile support conservation, drawing on the expertise of well-established professionals with years of practice and tons of ideas.

Noteworthy contributions include Mateo Rossi Doria's exploration of lining techniques in Italy and his research into adhesive materials like glue-paste. Another amazing paper that caught my eye was written by Elke Oberthaler from the Kunst Historisches Museum in Vienna. She explored non-invasive preservation techniques applied to 300-year-old linings, focussing on works by Caravaggio and Titian. The author highlights the loss of practical lining experience among the current generation of conservators from the museum sector (early and mid-career) and suggests knowledge exchange with practitioners from the private sector as a solution.

Online access to *Conserving Canvas* enables you to zoom in on the amazing details of each restoration project and view rare videos related to the articles. I highly recommend watching the restoration process of Pierre Puvis de Chavanne's Philosophy mural, which offers insights into dismantling, restoring and presenting the artwork using a technique not commonly practiced in Slovakia where I am from. The link is accessible [here](#). Furthermore, a list of videos related to other articles can be accessed [here](#).

The book also addresses the need for greater transparency regarding the materials and techniques used in conservation. It emphasises the importance of comprehensive documentation, as every lost detail represents a

missed opportunity for learning and advancement in the field. At the beginning of my career as a painting's conservator, I remember writing down the modified recipe and procedure for producing "klajster" (glue and starch/flour, etc.), a Slovakian recipe learned from my tutor who was in his 80s. Despite the prevalence of documentation in the modern era, there remain under-documented practices, highlighting the ongoing need for thorough records.

The essay collection offers various approaches to canvas conservation including dismantling marouflage, using water as a heat source, and addressing ethical considerations. It reflects on past, current and future practices as well as ongoing research and material advancements.

Paintings are intricate layered structures, akin to biotopes. Preserving them requires the perfect balance of addressing aesthetic concerns whilst maintaining structural integrity. I commend the insights shared by many senior paintings conservators and restorers whose extensive experience enriches our understanding of canvas conservation. Their testimonies provide valuable perspectives on conservation practices and philosophies.

This book serves as a valuable reference for historical lining techniques and a guide for conserving lined canvases, heralding in an invigorating new era in canvas conservation. As [Antoine Wilmering](#), The Getty's senior program officer, aptly stated, "...knowledge has to continue to exist—and be passed on." This book represents the legacy of 20th-century liners, bridging the gap between generations by imparting practical experience. If there is one message to glean from German conservation philosophy in the 1980s, it is that sometimes doing as little as possible, or nothing at all, is the best course of action; lining should be considered as a last resort.

### **Author bio**

Eva Videnska (MA, MFA) graduated from The Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava (specialising in easel and panel paintings conservation and restoration) and from Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (in fine arts and aesthetics). She works as a private conservator and teaches painting conservation in Slovakia.

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