

# COUNTRY LIFE®

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EVERY WEEK

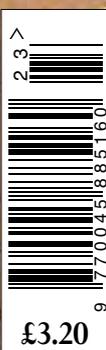
## Collectors' issue

Fine art, classic tractors, antique books and fast racehorses

Is your stamp collection now worth a fortune?

The day we opened our garden to the public

Save our country pubs, says Max Hastings



£3.20

**H**AVE you noticed how often an old oil painting appears to be bubbling up across its upper surface or how marble sculptures frequently look pitted and dull? The problem could be as simple as the picture light or method of cleaning, yet it's surprising how often these things are overlooked when one considers the pride and investment that goes into owning valuable works of art. Indeed, many owners have little to no knowledge about the management and welfare of their collections, let alone the issues they should be considering when negotiating a purchase or a loan.

Julia Toffolo and Freda Matassa are only too aware of the pitfalls, having worked with a range of private, public and corporate collectors and, between them, managed the collections of two major national art institutions. Recently, they decided to pool their experience and set up an art-collections management service, having noticed a gap in the market.

'There are lots of art consultants out there helping clients to buy and sell art, but, as far as we know, nobody else is providing expertise in the practical logistics and after-sales care that are so important when buying and owning a collection,' says Freda, adding that, despite the Italian ring to their eponymous company Matassa Toffolo, the two are, in fact, both British.

With a clutch of history and art-history masters and diplomas in museum studies and art law between them, and both with a professional museums background, they certainly have blue-chip credentials. Freda was a former registrar at the Royal Academy of Arts and then Head of Collections Management at Tate before becoming a freelance art consultant.

Julia was Deputy Director of the UK Government Art Collection, which involved caring for some 13,500 works and overseeing their display in Government buildings across the world, from 10 Downing Street

# Behind the scenes at the museum

A surprising number of art owners know little about the nuts and bolts of managing their collection. Mary Miers meets two specialists who might be able to help them



**Ask the experts: Freda Matassa (left) and Julia Toffolo**

to the British Ambassador's Residence in Washington DC. 'Things got particularly busy when there was a change of Prime Minister or Ministers; it was very interesting to see the different artistic tastes of the opposing political parties.'

Based in London, the pair offers what they call a 'very hands-on' consultancy, working to museum standards and using the best specialist consultants when required. Their list of services is impressive, ranging from advice on international art law and help with drawing up contracts for sales and loans to organising insurance and indemnity, conservation,

lighting, installation, display, storage and research.

Clients range from high-level private and corporate collectors to public bodies such as the DCMS, the RIBA and the Society of Antiquaries. Traditional collections, such as one they have recently been cataloguing for the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists, generally require management and the more academic skills of tracing documentation, provenance and conservation history, whereas their involvement with contemporary works tends to be more to do with advising purchasers.

Surprisingly, contemporary art can raise some of the most challenging conservation issues. 'We always advise clients who are thinking of buying a new work to find out from the artist exactly what it's made of,' says Freda. 'They should consider its longevity and also what strings might be attached to the way it's displayed, particularly with time-based media such as films, videos and anything with an electronic component—kinetic sculptures, things that move or flash. You need to consider how you'll replace parts in the future. If you don't ask these questions before you buy, you've missed your chance.'

Too often, they've seen valuable works on paper damaged by daylight or paintings impaired by the heating/cooling effect of old-fashioned picture lights.

Lighting technology is changing so rapidly; even LED is now controversial. Modern picture lights must be UV-screened and non-heat generating; windows and picture glass should have a UV-protective coating. Then, there are atmospheric conditions to take into account, the special materials that can be incorporated into frames to combat heat and damp.

Julia and Freda also specialise in arranging safe packaging, transportation and installation, citing horror stories such as the incident of the untrained handler who inadvertently sliced through a Constable while attempting to open its casing with a Stanley knife or the 6ft Picasso that they encountered hanging from one nail by a thin piece of wire.

**‘An untrained handler sliced through a Constable while attempting to open its casing with a knife’**

'It's remarkable how dangerously valuable pictures can be hung; often, you'll find them above a fireplace or radiator,' says Julia, whose hang of the Print Hall in the Washington DC Ambassador's Residence confirms that she is also well qualified to advise on the aesthetics of displaying art.

With tips on everything from hanging pictures to negotiating Immunity from Seizure for foreign loans into the UK, these two directors are also in demand running training courses for collectors, fine-art agents and others in the business. And if you wondered how Adam Dant came to be the official artist for the General Election—well, Matassa Toffolo managed that project, too, and the completed work is due to join the Parliamentary Art Collection later this summer.   
[www.matassa-toffolo.com](http://www.matassa-toffolo.com)