Aprons Made from Canvas: The Legacies of Marie-Jacob Godefroid, Restauratrice to the French Royal Art Collections, 1741-1775

Eighteenth-century Paris was a site for significant changes in the art world, whether stylistically in the movement from Rococo towards Neoclassicism or socially in the growing presence of female artists. One field that emerged in this milieu was art restoration, here referring to the treatment of easel paintings in order to prevent signs of aging, such as surface discoloration, warping, etc. This paper focuses on Marie-Jacob Godefroid, a female art restorer active in the mid-eighteenth century whose career was unique in several regards, whether in life as a widowed mother or in work as an art restorer-dealer who received royal recognition. Launched from this biographic approach, my paper seeks to identify broader conceptions of womanhood that allowed female artists paths to success in a field hard-set by patriarchal traditions.

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**Marie-Jacob, la veuve Godefroid**

On the night of April 16, 1741, a group of friends from the Académie de Saint-Luc met for dinner in Paris at a restaurant on the Rue Saint-Thomas du Louvre, just in sight of the palace’s eastern colonnade (Figure 1). It was a diverse cast of characters; among those present were a painter of battle scenes, a Belgian sculptor, and a Prussian engraver. Two other attendants, Jérôme-François Chantereau, a young painter to the King of Denmark, and Joseph-Ferdinand Godefroid, a paintings restorer to the French Crown, had argued over dinner about the attribution of a work by the seventeenth-century Italian painter Carlo Maratti.1 Godefroid also sold paintings from his restoration workshop on the neighboring Rue Saint-Germain-l’Auxerrois, and had recently attempted to sell Maratti’s *The Flight into Egypt* (Figure 2) to James Waldegrave, the British Ambassador to Paris. The work’s authenticity, however, remained suspicious to Chantereau, who as a dealer himself likely rivaled Godefroid in serving a similar cliental of art collectors. As the two men were leaving the restaurant that night in 1741, their disagreement somehow became a duel, fought right in front of the Louvre’s entrance gates. Swords were drawn and Godefroid, the older of the two, was fatally struck between the ribs and died in a nearby church.2 Police recorded the murder of Godefroid, whose role as a restorer and

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Although the original witness accounts and police report (NAAF, 1883 – see footnote 2) describe Chantereau only as a “young painter,” he is listed as a member of the Académie de Saint-Luc, labeled as a painter and dealer (Jules Joseph Guiffrey, ed., *Histoire de l’Académie de Saint-Luc*, in vol. 9 of *Archives de l’art français: recueil de documents inédits publiés par la Société de l’histoire de l’art français* (Paris: Édouard Champion, 1915), 217). Michel also cites Chantereau as a notable “marchand de tableaux en chambre” who specialized in the sale of Italian paintings from his home on the Rue Saint-Honoré and served many English clients (Patrick Michel, *Le Commerce du tableau à Paris dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2007), 44-5). Some scholars have even suggested he did amateur restoration work, a side-job common for art dealers of the eighteenth century (Massing, *Painting Restoration before La Restauration*, 64). Godefroid and Chantereau may therefore have been professional rivals prior to the 1741 murder.

2 For a full description of the 1741 murder (including details of the dinner, witness accounts, etc.), see Jules Joseph Guiffrey, ed., “Joseph-Ferdinand Godefroy, maître peintre. – Procès-verbal et information sur sa mort violente...
dealer had made him an active figure in the Parisian art world, in thorough detail, down to the number of coins found in his pocket.

As shown by the fateful dinner’s list of attendants, art circles in eighteenth-century Paris encompassed figures working in diverse fields. One person who did not attend the dinner, however, was the deceased’s wife and business partner, Marie-Jacob Godefroid (1705?-1775). Rather than witness the happy-hour gone wrong, she may have been managing the shop while her husband was out for the evening. Scholars have suggested Godefroid’s connection to a longstanding artistic family in Antwerp, with members in the Académie de Saint-Luc since at least the previous century, but little record exists of her pre-marital life. More certain is that by the late 1720s the Godefroid couple had married and moved to Paris, where they ran a successful restoration business that received commissions from the Bâtiments du Roi and several private collectors. The restorer’s trade, which entailed the treatment of easel paintings for signs of aging

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3 Marie-Jacob Godefroid’s name and year of birth appear in various forms within contemporary literature and more recent scholarship. Variations on her first name: “Marie-Jacob, Marie-Jacobe, or Marie-Jeane,” on her husband’s surname: “Godefroid, Godefroy, or Godefroi,” as well as on her maiden name “Van Merle, Vane Merle, or Van Merlen,” all exist. Sources dated 1743-1775 also refer to her as la veuve Godefroid, “the Widow Godefroid.” As for her date of birth, 1700, 1701, 1702, and 1705 all appear, with her death more securely placed in 1775. The name “Marie-Jacob Godefroid” and 1705 birth year cited in the most recent scholarship by Noémie Étienne have been used here.

4 There is a witness who recounts Marie-Jacob’s distress upon hearing of her husband’s fatal injury and the legal formalities that were quickly organized thereafter. See Guiffrey, “Joseph-Ferdinand Godefroy, maître peintre,” 397-398.

5 Massing (Painting Restoration before La Restauration, 66) has linked Godefroid to a family of Belgian artists/dealers listed in the Biographie nationale de Belgique. See Alphonse Goovaerts, “Van Merlen,” in vol. 4 of Biographie nationale de Belgique publiée par l’Académie royale des sciences, des lettres et des beaux-arts (Brussels: Brulaynt, 1866), 507-522.

such as surface discoloration or structural distortion, experienced unprecedented growth in the couple’s lifetime. This specialization developed in the 1700s alongside the French art market as well as preparations to exhibit the royal collections in newly-public venues. By the time of the widow’s own death in 1775, restoration was no longer considered part of a painter’s repertoire, but defined by a unique expertise.

From 1743 until 1775, Marie-Jacob Godefroid served as one of a few restorers pensioned by the French Crown, treating masterpieces in diverse formats at the various royal residences in Paris and its vicinities. She performed mostly invisible treatments, such as transferring paint layers from old wooden panels onto fresh canvas, relining delicate canvas, and cradling wooden panels. Archival records from the period include numerous mémoires d’intervention, which detail the kind of work she performed. As a widowed mother, Godefroid still ran her own household, which included the care of seven children, while maintaining the family business. In addition to serving a pre-existing cliental from her husband’s time, Marie-Jacob also built her own network that included figures of royal influence, such as the Marquis de Marigny (Directeur general des Bâtiments du Roi, 1751-1773) and Charles-Nicolas Cochin (Secretary to the royal Académie/advisor to Marigny, c. 1755-1770). She also developed commercial relationships with many women, such as the collector the Comtesse de Verrue, the widow of the banker

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7 There is evidence that M.-J. Godefroid treated paintings for public display at the Luxembourg Palace, as well as those in Paris churches (see Andrew McClellan, “The Politics and Aesthetics of Display: Museums in Paris 1750-1800,” Art History 7, no.4 (Dec., 1984): 443-444) and at the Versailles Palace (see Étienne, “La pensée dans la pratique,” 87-88).
9 Mémoires d’intervention refer to a combination of work invoices and intervention reports, with costs itemized for each treatment performed over a given unit area of the picture plane. Étienne, “La pensée dans la pratique,” 82-84; Massing (2012) also transcribes a selection of these archival receipts, see Appendix 3.1 (p. 258-266).
10 Massing, Painting Restoration before La Restauration, 66.
11 Ibid., 66-72.
Charles Godefroy, and even the actress Mademoiselle Clairon. As a dual head of household and head of business, Marie-Jacob thus developed a highly specialized work identity as a marchande publique outside the traditional family economy and received recognition for her work as a restauratrice.

Framing Godefroid’s post-marital life (c. 1741-1775) as a career that reached new heights in the public sphere, this paper seeks to recast female widowhood as a status that could blossom rather than wilt. It will play with “restoration” as a historically-specific term referring to the care of paintings that emerged in eighteenth-century Paris and as an approach to experiencing widowhood and preserving family legacies. Expanding the scholar Noémie Étienne’s argument that Godefroid’s business methods made restoration less an inventive secret and more an artisanal craft, this paper argues that the widow Godefroid took advantage of Enlightenment conceptions of women as caretakers to build her career in the third-quarter of the eighteenth century.

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13 Marchande publique, “female merchant in the public domain,” was a legal denomination that gave women the right to conduct business independent of their husband, father, or male guardian. Women with guild membership automatically received this privilege, as did widows who inherited the mastership of their husbands through legal terms of the marriage contract. According to Hafter (2007), the law authorizing marchandes publiques to run their own businesses was one of the primary instruments of power for working women in Ancien Régime France. As the widow of a maître-peintre in the Académie de Saint-Luc and a guild member in her own right, M.-J. Godefroid exemplified the effects of this legal privilege on women’s economic potential in eighteenth-century Paris. On the marchande publique see Daryl M. Hafter, Women at Work in Preindustrial France (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 11-12, 79-87. On the legal and economic privileges of widowhood, see p. 74, 178, 239-242.

14 The “family economy model” organizes labor based on the contribution of each family member to a household’s complete economic output. Dependent upon women and children to diffuse the workload of a male head of household, the family economy parallels the patriarchal model of social hierarchy. For this reason, scholars have recently critiqued the model as an inadequate representation of women’s diverse contributions to family businesses and as independent agents. On the development of women’s work identity outside the family economy model, see Lanza, From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris, 10, 121-122; Nancy Locklin, “Women and Work Identity,” in Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century France, ed. Daryl M. Hafter and Nina Kushner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 33-51.


Étienne has also examined the widow Godefroid’s business strategies in her joint paper presented at the conference Journées d’Histoire de la Comptabilité et du Management (Paris, 2010 – see footnote 12).
century. It will utilize two already well-established bodies of research, being those on art restorers and women artists as marginalized groups in the late-eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{16} I intend to merge these two discourses and suggest that one can explain the actions of the French arts administration towards the restorer and the women artist as motivated by the same fear of intermixing in professional fields. These two groups, in other words, posed a similar threat to official institutions of artistic training and collections management in Ancien Régime France. Embodying both, the restauratrice Marie-Jacob Godefroid thereby presents the perfect case study—a triple threat, if one considers she also worked as a widow.

Indeed, this paper argues that Godefroid became a successful paintings restorer not in spite of, but in sight of an art world that tried to keep women out with legal, philosophical, and medical justifications.\textsuperscript{17} By caring for the unseen region of paintings, Godefroid fashioned aprons out of canvas, so to speak. Though she was not an artist, she developed an intimacy with masterpieces that became the canon of art history. She disguised her career as a craft considered well-suited to the realm of female tenderness. Still, considering the possibilities unlocked by her unique position, Godefroid has not been fully recognized as a female restorer, with all the tensions implied by that combination. Scholars have yet to situate her within the woman question

\textsuperscript{16} The scholarship on art restoration originating from the eighteenth-century French tradition, and on women working as artists in this period, are each truly rich bodies of research that cannot be adequately captured here. I will simply include a few of the works that have been most useful to the present study. These include works by McClellan (1994) and Émile-Mâle (2008) that have tied restoration to the artistic patrimoine cultivated at the Louvre, paradigm of the modern survey museum. Others such as Chatelus (1990) have similarly linked this specialization to the public’s interest drawn out of Salon culture, and as a marginal profession closely aligned with artisanal craft. Michel (2007) has looked at restoration within the commerce of paintings in late-eighteenth-century Paris, with a focus on the public auction house as a new site of sale and exhibition. All have conveyed its development through a few influential family businesses, with each discussing the Godefroid in varying amounts of detail, the most in-depth accounts given in Étienne (2017) and Massing (2012). Work by Sheriff (1996) and Sofio (2007) have conveyed a similar atmosphere for women artists working in the period immediately following Godefroid’s and into the nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{17} For a look at the field of “philosophical medicine” formulated during the Enlightenment, see Anne C. Vila, “Sensibility and the Philosophical Medicine of the 1750s-1770s,” in Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 43-79.
that captured the minds of Enlightenment *philosophes* during the widow’s lifetime. In particular, I will illustrate how she navigated this era’s ideal of female modesty in the domestic sphere to set her business apart in the public sphere. In doing this, I hope to add eighteenth-century discourse on paintings restoration to the fold of existent conversations about arenas of anti-academic art practice on the eve of revolution.

My focus on the *restauratrice* will also incorporate knowledge on eighteenth-century widowhood and women’s work autonomy more broadly. After all, Marie-Jacob had worked as a restorer alongside her husband from the start of their marriage, but it was not until after his death that her career truly took off. Her professional freedom owed in large part to the Ancien Régime legal system and specifically to its guild system, which both granted rights to widows unavailable to married women. Herself a member of the artist’s guild since 1736, Marie-Jacob had inherited her husband’s status as a master artisan and the property rights to their restoration business upon his unforeseen death. One can glean many details on the widow’s business, including the variety of paintings she sold and treated, as well as her equally diverse clientele, from her *inventaire après-décès* drafted in 1775. This probate record of the widow’s estates was requested just days after her death by Joseph-Ferdinand-François Godefroid, her eldest son and

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18 Research by Hafter (2007) and Lanza (2007) on the socioeconomic privileges granted to the guilds and particularly widows therein has provided a legal framework with which to understand Marie-Jacob Godefroid’s mobility as a woman in the public sphere.
the main beneficiary to her estate. I will weigh this against the contemporary inventory of the royal draftsman Réne-Michel Slodtz (1705-1764), whose own record mentions the widow Godefroid as a creditor for unpaid restorations.²²

A variety of other texts from the period, including catalogues raisonnés, artist’s manuals, and arts administrative correspondence, will factor into my reconstruction of Godefroid’s career alongside an equally-diverse selection of images, from Encyclopédie plates to portrait engravings. Puzzled together, all these pieces speak to the teeming circulation of objects in the period, and to the importance of their physical remains in shaping immaterial legacies. Regarding these sources, I should caution that much of France’s art history has filtered through editions compiled in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. These include Fernand Engerand’s 1899 edition of Inventaire des tableaux du roy and Jules Joseph Guiffrey’s work on the Académie de Saint-Luc, among many other sources in the Archives de l’art français (and later, the Nouvelles archives de l’art français). As a whole, these later publications represent an early stage of historiography on the eighteenth-century art world, attributable to the rococo revival in France that had begun in the mid-1800s. For my purposes, they reveal the gender politics that exist in “un-biased” archives, usually to flatter a history that (unsurprisingly) minimizes female influence. But equally, Godefroid’s appearance in these later editions should serve as further proof of her longevity. In her own time, she left an invisible mark on the reverse side of countless paintings and a signature on just as many business transactions. It should not be surprising then that her name remains etched into the records of art history long thereafter.

Marie-Jacob, *Jill of all trades*

In this first part, I will present Marie-Jacob Godefroid as an agent whose work reached far corners of the art world but avoided the spotlight. This was largely because of the nature of her profession, but also because of her biography. Moving from Antwerp to Paris early in the century, she was a foreigner navigating an international art market under growing French authority. As a widow who chose not to re-marry, she was neither man nor woman in terms of legal rights. And lastly, inseparable from the previous point, as her career matured, she was an old woman deemed useless to the conventions of French sociability. Yet based on the records that mention her work from 1741-1775, it is clear that Godefroid was very useful. Considering that she had a contract with the Bâtiments du Roi and her simultaneous participation in the Académie de Saint-Luc, one can say that Godefroid pursued her profession in multiple spheres. And although no painted portraits exist of her, contemporary images of studio, shop, and exhibition spaces together give shape to Godefroid’s work identity. It is even apt that such a figure, whose job largely entailed working on the flip-side of the canvas, evades visual representation and instead exists as a signature on countless invoices. In compiling these sectors of Godefroid’s milieu, I intend to emphasize her professional range as a restorer. This in turn will allow me in the second part to suggest the disruptive possibilities she posed for the realms of craft, commerce, and the Crown.

Fittingly, scenes specific to the restorer’s atelier are quite rare. A painting of a private Berlin studio dated circa 1830 shows the work space of a pictures restorer, with his table of various solvents, dyes, resins, etc. arranged inconspicuously in the left-hand corner (Figure 3).

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The French artist Hubert Robert also painted romanticized scenes of such a space set in Rome (Figure 4) and in the Grand Gallery of the Louvre (Figure 5). Each of the three exists on a different scale, the first a secluded space dedicated to the trade and the last a makeshift “grand” gallery-turned-studio. Taken together, they indicate the adaptability of the profession in various settings and to various ends, whether to serve a single collector or the entire royal collections. Indeed, another example by the same Robert, which shows the entrance to the artist’s own Louvre studio, suggests a liminality of both space and practice where touch-ups are quickly done beneath staircases (Figure 6).

Any lack of visual evidence dedicated to the restorer’s workspace in the eighteenth-century is redeemed by a specialized literature that abounded in the forms of artistic dictionaries, manuals, and even trade secrets. Many writings from this period discuss art production, sales circulation, and restoration in the same breath. One only needs to read La Font de Saint-Yenne’s 1747 Salon critique or the Encyclopédie entry “Modern Painting” to know that restoration was a concern among artists, dealers, and theorists. Another notable text, the two-volume Secrets concernant les arts et métiers; ouvrage utile non seulement aux artistes, mais aussi à ceux qui les emploient, first published in 1716 and edited several times over the century, includes entries on a wide array of media, from precious metals to porcelain varnish. The chapter “Qui contient les

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Secrets pour les Couleurs et la Peinture,” provides glimpses of the restorer’s expertise among other tips such as painting on glass and using individual pigments. Take one suggestion titled “Another secret for rendering old paintings as beautiful as if they were new”: “Put about a handful of powdered gray soda into an earthenware pot, shred a bit of Gennes soap into it, and boil with water for a quarter of an hour; then let it rest, and wash your painting with it, then wipe your painting, coat it with olive oil, and wipe it well again. The painting will be like new.”

Whether because they were intended for amateurs, or because of the inventive nature of early restoration, these “secrets” often entail using household materials and just as ordinary techniques. Authors sprinkle this advice among more general instruction, thus implying a shared skillset for artists and restorers, albeit usually favoring the former as a more honorable, less financially lucrative, profession. Distaste was indeed the tone of most artists towards restoration, seen to demean one’s integrity by performing unskilled, yet more profitable, labor. The royal Académie had even put rules in place to separate art from the taint of commerce. As McClellan and others have shown, it is not until the Revolution and the opening of the Louvre as a public museum in 1793 that the hierarchy between the artist, connoisseur, and restorer fully emerges, particularly in the careers of men with familial ties to the art world such as Jean-

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26 Original French: Autre secret pour rendre les tableaux vieux aussi beaux que s’ils étoient neufs: Mettez dans un pot de terre environ un quarteron de soude grise en poudre, rapez y un peu de savon de Gennes, & faites bouillir avec de l’eau un bon quart d’heure; puis laissez la tiédir seulement, & en lavez vôtre tableau, puis l’essuyez, passez y de l’huile d’olive, & l’essuyez bien encore. Le tableau sera comme neuf.


28 For a discussion of d’Angiviller’s efforts to separate the royal Académie from any association with the guilds or the art market, see Mary Sheriff, The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 83-90.
Baptiste Pierre Lebrun, Jean-Michel Picault and François-Toussaint Hacquin. However, restoration concerns do exist earlier in the century, particularly surrounding the lifespan of oil painting and techniques for prolonging it, such as using wax rather than oil as a binder in encaustic painting or even painting underwater. Artists here applied the restoration of the past to their own futures and began to produce paintings with aging in mind.

Experiments with new styles and media of painting also correspond well with Enlightenment pursuits of perfectibility and categorization. Plates from Diderot and d’Alembert’s Encyclopédie (Figures 7 and 8) for example, pay homage to tools-of-the-trade in the diagram below every scene, the former taking up most of the space on the already oversized pages. Figure 7 depicts a studio for different kinds of painting, whereas Figure 8 shows a gilder’s workshop where wooden slats (probably carved at a separate joinery) are coated with a metallic sheen. While these two pages would not have appeared together in the multivolume Encyclopédie, viewing them in succession evokes a compatibility between these two recognizable components of a displayed painting: the canvas and its frame. A similar selection of brushes, easels, and blades appears beneath both images and further supports their connection.

The Encyclopédie plates also effectively capture the century’s debate between the mechanical and the liberal arts, expressed institutionally in the royal Académie’s rivalry with the

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30 For a look at one unique method of oil painting, particularly for miniatures, in this period, see Ann Massing, “Arnaud Vincent de Montpetit and Eludoric Painting,” Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung 7, no.2 (1993): 359-368. It should be noted as a disclaimer that the field’s early emphasis on methodology suggests that restoration had existed in practice long before it had existed in theory. This allowed a restorer to experiment with more invasive techniques, many of which would contradict today’s ethical standards.
Académie de Saint-Luc. The Académie de Saint-Luc was the most prominent artist’s association in eighteenth-century Paris outside of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. It was founded in the fourteenth century as a guild corporation and, contemporaneously with the royal Académie, developed a school of artistic practice in the mid-seventeenth century. During the eighteenth century, at the height of tensions between art and commerce, the Académie de Saint-Luc served as an outlet for many artists to learn and exhibit. This was particularly true for all the women and artisans barred from admittance to the royal Académie. In 1776 and more definitively in 1791, the Académie de Saint-Luc was disbanded as part of Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot’s liberal economic reforms that suppressed the country’s prominent guild system.

Scholars have even deduced from 1760s legal proceedings that tensions between the two institutions actually originated as a problem between artists and artisans within the guild body.\(^{31}\) The threat posed by dissatisfied artists floating outside the royal Académie prompted the Bâtiments du Roi to intervene in favor of the guild’s existent leadership.\(^{32}\) In any case, official concern about marginal influence on the art world highlights the intermingling of artistic and artisanal trades, as written into instructional texts or engraved into plates. Moreover, considering their shared iconography, one can imagine that the art restorer’s studio would have looked a lot like the artist’s studio. This connection in turn bridges to a much greater body of visual evidence showing the painter’s studio. Of particular interest here are those of female artists. Women working as artists often depicted the studio-as-subject, which could serve as a portrait of their professional identity and as a rebuttal to accusations of plagiarism. Famous examples by Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard come to mind, but a lesser known self-portrait by Marie-Suzanne


\(^{32}\) Scott, “Hierarchy, Liberty and Order,” 67.
Roslin (1734-1772) dated circa 1760 (Figure 9) contains details particularly relevant to my understanding of Godefroid.

Most telling is how Roslin’s self-portrait ricochets off several surfaces of representation. The artist situates herself here between another pastel self-portrait by Quentin de La Tour done in 1742 (Figure 10) and her own copy. She is shown sharpening a white pastel crayon over the open drawer of a table aux couleurs on which rests a hand towel. The peeling motion she makes with her right hand, her elbow leaning on the drawer for support, aligns with that of de La Tour, who points over his left shoulder in a comic gesture while resting his elbow on the frame to a trompe-l’œil effect. All figures look out to the viewer in conspiratorial unison, yet each has a distinct attire. Roslin wears a turquoise-blue dress with half sleeves cascading in lace over the open drawer and a low bust line framed in ruffles. Her dress is complimented by details in her hair and at her chest, but contrasted by the natural flush of her cheeks and the muddiness of her fingers (presumably covered in pastel residue). De La Tour wears clothing one would expect for an artist at work, while Roslin seems ready for her own proper portrait. The general color pairing, Roslin’s dress and her drawing surface against the wooded tones of her cabinet and the de La Tour portrait, neatly divide the work in two. Moreover, because of this similarity in colors, one can even imagine that the cabinet and portrait are a unit, a boudoir in which de La Tour’s image is not a canvas but a mirror of the sitter, Roslin. An incomplete drawing halves the entire scene with a complete work at its other end, forming a single plane mediated by the figure of Roslin. As her own sitter, she also locates the perpendicular line of viewership and intersects both planes with her gaze. This implies her command as an artist who re-interprets existing

33 There are records of Godefroid making copies of irretrievably-damaged paintings, a clue to her more artistic abilities. See Massing, Painting Restoration before La Restauration, 73, 87n122.
representations, both of herself and others. Three pairs of eyes thus look out, implying many more in infinite reflection.

Roslin’s image of her studio emphasizes artistic production as a process that occurs in stages. Likewise, Godefroid’s workspace would have included paintings in varied states of completion, for individual clients and royal commission. For over thirty years the widow juggled her private family business with a pension from the Bâtiments du Roi. This dynamic is best illustrated by her multiple studio spaces. Godefroid had lodgings in the Louvre’s Galerie d’Apollon beginning in 1743 until 1763-4, when the royal Académie overtook it for additional exhibition space. From then until 1775, Godefroid’s studio was located in the Louvre’s eastern colonnade, on the second floor among the painters.\(^\text{34}\) Louis XIV had begun this tradition of granting palace quarters to academies and distinguished individuals, but by Marie-Jacob’s time the privilege had strained to accommodate an entire bustling community of artists and their entourages. Still, despite accounts of their infamous overcrowding and misuse, rooms in the Louvre remained prime real estate for artists seeking to network among their peers and clients. Indeed, for Godefroid it would have provided an opportunity to advertise her services to the most distinguished circles in Paris. Throughout this time, however, she continued to work out of her hybrid shop-atelier on the Rue Saint-Germain-l’Auxerrois, just across the street from the palace.\(^\text{35}\) The shop was on the ground floor of the cloister opposite the street’s namesake church, with the restoration studio located in one of the family bedrooms upstairs.\(^\text{36}\) In contrast to the

\(^{34}\) This is according to the description M.-E. Godefroid gives of her father’s two-roomed apartment, presumably the same he “inherited” from his mother. See Léon Arbaud, “Mademoiselle Godefroid,” Gazette des Beaux-Arts 11, no. 1 (1869): 41-42.

\(^{35}\) Étienne, The Restoration of Paintings in Paris, 17; Massing, Painting Restoration before La Restauration, 79-83. M.-J. Godefroid had a studio at the Galerie d’Apollon of the Louvre from 1743 until 1763-4, when she was moved to the Eastern Colonnade and remained until her death in 1775. Joseph-Ferdinand-François Godefroid (trained in restoration by his mother and served as her assistant for the last ten years of her career), stayed here at the Louvre with his own family after 1775, but his wife and children were forced to move upon his death in 1788.

\(^{36}\) Étienne, The Restoration of Paintings in Paris, 18.
Louvre studios, a social space connected through extended families, Marie-Jacob’s business location would have served as a kind of separate alcove—a room of her own—to which she could retreat at her own volition.

Based on the inventory of her estates written in December 1775, Godefroid also had a home in Passy, a suburb of Paris then considered the countryside. An inventory of the rooms in this country house, a three-floor property complete with servant quarters and a garden, includes the description of a bedroom serving as Godefroid’s studio. In this studio there are over a hundred paintings of various formats and genres that were in repair at the time of the widow’s death. As was the norm for these kinds of probate records, Godefroid’s inventaire après-décès provides a complete appraisal of all objects found at the widow’s properties (artistic and otherwise), as well as names of her beneficiaries, followed by those of her creditors. Several familiar names, Godefroid’s clients and colleagues, surface in the text, including the dealer Pierre Rémy, the painter Jean-Jacques Bachelier, and the Bâtiments director, the Marquis de Marigny. Another contemporary figure who had apparently contracted the widow for the restoration of three paintings was the sculptor and royal draftsman, René-Michel Slodtz (1705-1764). We know this from Slodtz’s own probate record, transcribed into the Scellés et inventaires d’artistes: 1741-1770 of the Nouvelles archives de l’art français in 1885. Slodtz, who himself came from an artistic family, even had an older brother, Jean-Baptiste Slodtz (1699-

37 Archives Nationales (AN), Paris, France. Minutes et répertoires du notaire Jean Antoine Dosfant, 5 juillet 1766 – 14 octobre 1791. MC/ET/XXIV/885: Minutes, 1775, octobre – 1775, décembre. “6 Décembre 1775. Inventaire de la d. Van Merlen Ve. Godefroid,” 9-14. The date of M.-J. Godefroid’s death was in fact roughly the same time that the new king Louis XVI had gifted Marie-Antoinette a château on the palaces grounds of Versailles. This infamous “Petit Trianon” was a space separate from Paris and from the main residence at Versailles where Marie-Antoinette indulged the fantasies of Rousseauean living popular at the time. In light of this, Godefroid’s home at Passy would have provided the widow yet another space of autonomy, and, especially significant for restoration, fresh air away from the stuffiness of Saint-Germain-l’Auxerrois.

38 For a look at the importance of probate records for judging the financial autonomy of artisanal widows, see Lanza, From Wives to Widows, 131-134, 198-202.
1759) who restored paintings for the Duc d’Orléans. The point to take from these estate inventories is that agents in the art world looped together at various points of connection, whether working as business partners, clients, or referees, weaving a vibrant jacquard of commercial activity.

While Godefroid’s probate record was never transferred into a later edited collection, evidence of all the treatments she performed does remain in Engerand’s reworking of the Inventaire des tableaux du roy.\[39\] Engerand organized this inventory into schools (florentine, flamande, française, etc.) and then alphabetically by artist’s name, every artwork having a brief formal analysis as well as a provenance and treatment history. Godefroid’s role here is emphasized over-and-over by some statement along the lines of: “Restored and relined, (insert date here), by the widow Godefroid.” Take the description of one work by Nicolas Poussin: “30. A painting attributed to Poussin, representing the Death of Adonis; figures 12 to 13 inches; having 19 inches in height and 4 feet in width; in its gilded frame. Chaville.” Followed by its provenance and restoration:

No. 402 in Le Brun’s inventory (1683), with firm attribution to Poussin, and the dimensions of 1 foot 8 inches by 4 feet 1.5 inch [L.B.] – At Versailles in 1695 [P.]. – At Chaville in 1696 [T.M.C.]. Restored, in June 1762, by the widow Godefroid, whose memo is as follows: “To a painting by Poussin representing the death of Adonis coming from Chaville, transferring onto canvas revived the colors that were eaten, cleaned, having repainted, retouching in all the necessary places. 48 livres” (A.N. O1 1993). – Reported in 1784, in the salon of the director of the Bâtiments, at the hotel of the Surintendance, with this note (1788): “to wash and varnish” [D.R.]. – Restored, in 1789, by Martin, whose memo is as follows: “by Poussin. Death of Adonis 48 inches by 21, was dirty and had repainting, restored, 70 livres” (A.N. O1 1931).\[40\]


Like the probate records drafted by royal notaries, these institutional art archives follow their own legalese. The history’s latest editor, presumably Engerand, tucks together all the stages of each painting’s life, following interventions through many hands. Moreover, the inclusion of Godefroid’s name in this painting’s biography, alongside Poussin’s, effectively fuses the restorer’s name to the artist’s, if only peripherally. Godefroid became part of the object’s provenance, an agent in its history. Repeated at every instance of the widow’s intervention, the complete inventory stands as a kind of portfolio, a chronicle of Godefroid’s studio practice and her business transactions.

Another space integral to the Godefroid workplace was the dealer’s shop. For example, a commercial sign (Figure 11) for the eighteenth-century dealer Jean Constantin reads:

“Constantin keeps a shop of paintings, drawings, gouaches, bronzes and other curiosities; he restores and cleans paintings, undertakes the estimation and sale of private collections; he also makes commission. Paris.”

Here the dealer advertises restoration work as one of the many services he offers, further supporting the notion that such agents often developed a diverse skillset to succeed in a competitive market. The atmosphere of the eighteenth-century commercial art scene is better exemplified, however, by another shop sign: that one painted by the rococo artist Antoine Watteau for the dealer Edme-François Gersaint around 1720 (Figure 12).

Watteau’s painting, although idealized, gives a sense of the types of actors on stage in the

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41 See Figure 11 for original image and text. Also in Étienne, The Restoration of Paintings in Paris, 48-49; Michel, Le Commerce du tableau à Paris, 47.

art world of its time. The work was split into two separate canvases early after the artist’s completion of it, as attested by the seam that appears in reproductions. Multiple dualities exist across this lateral divide, such as those between old and new political regimes and the artistic styles they embody. But, there is also a clear allocation of labor between the manual work occurring to pack portraits (see Figures 13 and 14 showing a similar activity) on the left side and the transactional work occurring at the counter on the right. This distinction between front- and back-type shop duties refracts through the open door in the painting’s very center, which presumably goes into a work room that a restorer, such as Godefroid, would have occupied. Gersaint’s shop sign thus functions on two perpendicular planes: that showing the various activities of the shop front and that stretching between public and private shop spaces. In view of Watteau’s painting, this would mean stepping in from the street and walking straight through to the shop’s back room. Put into other terms, the painted canvas has two perspectives. As a visual representation, it exists as regions on the surface—groups of figures each with their own role in the imagined workplace. As a physical object, however, Gersaint’s shop sign exists as layers with actual depth; another front and back dynamic but played out within the material boundaries of the painting itself. Here the canvas’s pictorial surface forms a kind of shop front just as the structural support forms its back room.

Marie-Jacob Godefroid was in fact a structural restorer. This meant that her role in collaborative projects was to prepare a painting for surface treatments by first performing the

44 Once in the collection of Frederick II, the King of Prussia (1740-1786), Watteau’s painting was cut into two pendants to fit an existing arrangement in the salons of Charlottenberg Palace. Adjusting the dimensions of easel paintings to fit a specific wall space was quite common practice in the mid-eighteenth century, and as Étienne has argued, reflected the early function of art as “royal furniture” treated according to its architectural surroundings. By the opening of the Louvre, however, when art developed a more nationalistic purpose, this practice had become taboo. See Étienne, The Restoration of Paintings in Paris, 117-138. On the early provenance of Watteau’s 1720 painting, see Paul Alfassa, L’enseigne de Gersaint (Paris: J. Schemit, 1910), 21-22.
necessary underside repairs. Étienne has insightfully noted that such a division of labor reflects a
gendering of early restoration practice.⁴⁵ After Godefroid performed the manual tasks, it was
always her male partner who did more painterly, iconographic treatments. In Revolutionary-era
discourse, restorers would cite a knowledge on schools of painting or Old Masters’ stylistic
signatures when distinguishing themselves from unskilled laborers.⁴⁶ This dynamic mirrors
broader conceptions of the female artist in the period, whose work was often considered
imitative of or subordinate to a male teacher. Similarly, painters outside the royal Académie were
often downgraded to an artisanal status.⁴⁷ On the contrary, Marie-Jacob Godefroid inserted
herself into some of the highest artistic circles of her time by embracing these traditional ideas of
the female artist and artisan, and even the domestic model of womanhood made popular by Jean-
Jacques Rousseau. By transforming her structural restoration work into a profession with a
powerful backbone, Marie-Jacob maintained a long and varied career that left a legacy within her
family and within the larger field of post-Revolutionary museum bureaucracy. Like the paintings
she treated, Godefroid as a widow “restored” the legacy of her husband while generating a new
one all her own.

Gersaint was one prominent figure from the early-eighteenth century who praised the
widow’s diligence to her craft. In his introduction to the 1748 joint-estate sales catalog of the
banker Charles Godefroy and Marie-Jacob Godefroid’s husband, Joseph-Ferdinand, the dealer
writes:

The superior talents that the painter M. Godefroid had for transferring onto canvas and
for restoring the most damaged paintings, also made him chosen to care for those of his

⁴⁵ Étienne, “La pensée dans la pratique,” 80-81; McClellan, Inventing the Louvre, 224n51.
⁴⁶ Étienne, “Un ‘Ariste Connaisseur’?” 78-83; Tom Holbert, “La fantasie des custodes. De la préhistoire de la
profession de conservateur en France et en Allemagne au XVIII siècle,” in Les musées en Europe à la veille de
l’ouverture du Louvre: actes du colloque organisé par le Service culturel du musée du Louvre à l’occasion de la
Majesty, and for looking after their conservation. The same talents having been recognized after his death in Madame Godefroy, his widow, who had worked with him on the same works for over twenty years, have granted to this widow the continuation that she exercises jointly with M. Colins, both being charged with the same cares. Madame Godefroy is occupied daily with this work for a large number of collectors, who are all extremely satisfied with what they entrust her, and who openly praise the intelligence, the skill, and the patience that she has for restoring the most ruined pieces, of which one would believe should have hope for no resource.  

This excerpt comes from the first few pages of Gersaint’s 1748 *catalogue raisonné*, just after a list of catalogs he had previously published for other estate inventories. Michel has analyzed these publications in the context of public art sales in the second half of the eighteenth century. According to him, the *catalogue raisonné*, an “l’outil promotionnel” developed by Gersaint earlier in the century, contributed considerably to the rise of connoisseurship and art historical canonization. These catalogs were not just lists of works for sale, but often included, as is the case with Gersaint’s 1748 publication, advertisements for the dealer’s business, a biography of the deceased collector, and evaluations of art in the collection. And as the title “Avertissement” of the above excerpt suggests, Gersaint’s description of Godefroid announces her work in a manner analogous to his own commercial promotion. This particular passage states that the widow had worked as a restorer since at least 1720 and continued faithfully with this “daily

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50 Scholars disagree about the familial tie between the banker-jeweler Charles Godefroy and the restorer Joseph-Ferdinand Godefroid; it is certain, however, that the two were joined in the business of selling paintings in the early-eighteenth century. Upon their deaths in the 1740s, their widows collaborated to sell the paintings accumulated from the business and enlisted Gersaint to compose the sales catalog. See Marandet, “The Banker Charles Godefroy and His Dealings in Paintings,” 524-526.
occupation” after 1741 alongside another renowned Belgian restorer-dealer, François-Louis Colins, known for his proficiency with the pointillé\textsuperscript{51} technique. Unlike Godefroid, Colins does leave a portrait, or at least an engraving after a painting by Louis-Michel van Loo. In this 1756 engraving, reminiscent of de La Tour’s 1742 self-portrait, Colins gives a slight smile as he leans with his left arm extended over a ledge, as if gazing out a window (Figure 15). Its caption reads “Mr. Colins Chargé De L’entretien Des Tableaux du Roy.” Something in his pose claims this title with pride and gives off the ease suitable for an art dealer-restorer used to making bargains.\textsuperscript{52}

Once Colins died in January 1760, Marie-Jacob appealed to the Bâtiments administration for the position of sole restorer to the royal paintings collection. In a letter from December 1759, she defends her claim in writing: “Anyone will tell you, Sir, that I was charged with all the work. Mr. Colins, being occupied only with his business travels, had the title of association only to share the product, he held without vanity this place from me…and barely filled our conventions.”\textsuperscript{53} Here Godefroid critiques her long-time partner for his lack of commitment while simultaneously asserting her own loyalty to the Crown. Both restorers were in fact active dealers in the French art market, but according to Godefroid, Colins’ private business of selling paintings

\textsuperscript{51} Pointillé refers to a method of retouching local areas of a painted surface (still used by modern conservators) that have chipped or discolored over time. Writers from the period cite pointillé as an artistic skill—a very detailed job of re-integrating visual gaps—that also required art historical knowledge. For a more in-depth description of the technique, see Étienne, The Restoration of Paintings in Paris, 78-81.

\textsuperscript{52} An agent for prominent French collectors, Colins travelled to international art auctions in Northern Europe and Italy and developed a reputation as both an influential dealer and talented restorer. A poem in the Mercure de France from April 1756 even pays homage to Colins’ skills, on-par with those of Correggio; see Massing, Painting Restoration before La Restauration, 68. Only evidence before 1741 makes mention of J.-F. Godefroid’s similar travels (see Marandet, “The Banker Charles Godefroy and His Dealings in Paintings”), but nothing suggests that his widow ever left France to buy or treat paintings.

\textsuperscript{53} Original French: Tout vous instruira, Monsieur, que j’étais chargée de tout l’ouvrage. Le sieur Colins, n’étant occupé que de ses voyages pour son commerce, n’avait le titre d’associé que pour en partager le produit, il tenait sans vanité cette place de moi…and a peu rempli nos conventions.

Archives Nationales, O1 1909 (22 décembre 1759), quoted from Chatelus, Peindre à Paris, 200-201. See also Massing, Painting Restoration before La Restauration, 267.
had diverted his attention from caring for those in the royal collection. After deliberating in a letter to Marigny, Cochin granted Godefroid the desired promotion, but she agreed to take on another restorer, Hugues-Henri Guillemand, to replace Colins in performing any surface treatments. Guillemand died only a few years later, at which point Godefroid’s eldest son, Joseph-Ferdinand-François (1729-1788), began working alongside her until 1775. These many partnerships could indicate Godefroid’s reliance on other male restorers, a view catering to the stereotype that widows were in physical and moral danger without a husband’s authority. But upon further reflection, the widow’s commitment equally highlights her evolution towards an independent career. Moving from dependence-in-marriage through multiple collaborations eventually to independence, Godefroid climbed the restorer’s ladder as it was built.

A high point in Godefroid’s career came in 1752, when she exhibited four paintings at the Salon of the Académie de Saint-Luc, held that May at the Paris Arsenal complex (See Figure 16 for 1760 map of 4e arrondissement). These works belonged to Godefroid’s private clients and had each been transferred from a wooden panel onto a fresh canvas. The widow’s record in

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54 Massing, *Painting Restoration before La Restauration*, 72, 86n96 (see also Appendix 3.2, p. 267).
55 J.-F.-F. studied painting with Charles-Joseph Natoire in Italy before receiving restoration training by his mother. In fact, continuing the saga of the 1741 murder, J.-F.-F. had apparently killed Chantereau to avenge his father’s death and upon hearing such news, the Marquis de Marigny sent him on a paid sojourn in Rome. Here he attended the Académie de France for seven years in the 1750s, but ultimately did not become a practicing artist (despite this, many records from the 1780s onwards refer to J.-F.-F. as le peintre Godefroid; M.-J. Godefroid has never been identified as such, only as la veuve or la dame Godefroid). By the early 1760s he had returned to Paris and began working alongside his mother at the Louvre in the late stages of her career. J.-F.-F. would keep his mother’s Louvre lodgings, where he stayed with his wife and two children until his death in 1788. See Arbaud, “Mademoiselle Godefroid,” 39-43; Anatole de Montaiglon and Jules Guiffrey, eds., *Correspondance des directeurs de l’Académie de France à Rome avec les surintendants des Bâtiments*, 1666-1793 (Charavay frères [etc.]: 1887-1908), vol. 10 (1742-1753), 328, 420, 458; vol. 11 (1754-1763), 194-195.
56 The Académie de Saint-Luc held seven exhibitions at different locations in Paris over the period 1751-1774. In 1752, 1753 and 1756, the Académie’s primary benefactor and French war minister, Marc-Pierre de Voyer de Paulmy, Comte d’Argenson, arranged a venue in the Cour du Grand-Maître within the Arsenal complex of the 4e arrondissement. In 1775-6, after Turgot/d’Angiviller rooted-out this anti-academic, guild-based activity, the Salon de la Correspondance emerged as a notable replacement to the Académie de Saint-Luc’s exhibitions. See Guiffrey, *Histoire de l’Académie de Saint-Luc*, 33, and *Livrets des Expositions de l’Académie de Saint-Luc à Paris*, p. v-x, 19, 41.
Guiffrey’s membership directory of the Académie de Saint-Luc describes each of these four treatments:

Exhibition of 1752. – No 237. Gouache painting representing a child, four feet high, in the taste of Titian, raised from its wooden base and put onto canvas. The figure remains printed on the wood as proof. One knows well that the genre of this painting must have rendered the operation extremely difficult. The painting belongs to M. the Count de Caylus. – 238. Apollo struck by Cupid’s arrows, painting by Bertin raised from an old canvas and put onto a new one. –239. Painting by Paul Brille that was mounted onto wood, raised and put onto a new canvas. It belongs to M. the Baron de Thier. – 240. A painting by a student of Le Bourguignon, half raised and put onto a new canvas. These four paintings have been presented to the King who appeared very satisfied with the work.57

As noted here, Godefroid’s success with “extremely difficult operations” merited her widespread praise from Louis XV and anonymous viewers.58 It was her method for displaying the last painting by an un-named student of Le Bourguignon that sparked the most interest. Godefroid sawed this panel in two, completed the transfer to canvas for half of the work, and left the other half on its original wooden support. In doing this, Godefroid enacted several layers of disruption. Firstly, she achieved recognition for her competence as a restorer using the newly popular transfer technique, thus ending the secrecy originally associated with it (more below).59 But she also brought new dignity and visibility to a practice consisting of manual labor. The restorer’s structural treatment here replaced the artist’s rendering as the subject of display and brought new light to a “back-of-the-shop”-field of work. This divided picture evoked a response from viewers.

Guiffrey, Histoire de l’Académie de Saint-Luc, 322.
58 Étienne, “La pensée dans la pratique,” 89.
because it showed a painting in the process of surgery. Just like Roslin, who in her 1775 self-portrait sits between two versions of the same image, Godefroid made her own work in progress visible by literally placing her hands at its center. By referencing the wooden panel on which the paint resides, Godefroid’s treatment disrupted the entire illusion that an image claims to represent. No longer a window into another reality, the split panel became an object of physical cleavage—Godefroid was perhaps only out-sawed by the more famous widow, Judith, who beheaded Holofernes.

Shortly after the 1752 exhibition, François-Bernard Lépicié, secretary of the royal Académie, contacted Godefroid to inquire about her transfer technique. In the mid-eighteenth century, the transfer of panel paintings sparked public interest and press coverage in Paris. The technique was initially associated in the 1740s with Robert Picault (1705-1781), who claimed to have invented a magical way of prolonging a painting’s life by replacing its support structure. Indeed, Picault’s secrecy over technique gave him clearance to charge prices comparable to those of artists executing new paintings. As a supposed inventor with intellectual merit, he was initially successful. In 1750-1751 Picault restored key works in the royal collection, including Andrea del Sarto’s Charity, which opened the first exhibition of paintings from the royal collections held at the Luxembourg Palace. By 1752, however, Picault’s non-disclosure drove critiques against the ridiculous prices he charged for routine work. A 1775 engraving (Figure 17) of Picault includes the telling caption:

61 Ibid.
ROBERT PICAULT, born in Paris on October 7, 1705
Only the name of Zeuxis passing from ages to ages,
Centuries have destroyed his superb works:
But time can do nothing to those of Raphael,
Picault found the art of rendering them immortal.  

These poetic lines certainly flatter Picault better than the wrinkled profile above them, but more important is how the caption puts him on the same plane as artists whose works he restored. Great art can only transcend time with the restorer’s skills at retouching or relining. Picault, however, was not alone in these abilities. Rivals, such as Godefroid and Jean-Louis Hacquin, who advertised alternative methods and quoted lower costs, soon eclipsed him. For example, in 1753 when Lépicié asked Godefroid about the details of her transfer method, she confessed it was only a matter of “hot water and patience.” Her frankness dissolved the illusion surrounding Picault’s monopoly over the practice. As Lépicié concluded: “If Madame Godefroid succeeds, as there is reason to believe, one can still be reassured of the expected prices, since she accounts for using only hot water and patience.” A kind of competition was set up between the two restorers over who would transfer a portrait then attributed to Hans Holbein (Figure 18). Godefroid, who quoted three hundred livres less for the same result, was ultimately chosen for the task, and henceforth consulted over Picault. In 1754, the Marquis de Marigny even allowed her to display the Holbein at the recently opened Luxembourg Gallery.

64 Original French:
ROBERT PICAULT, Né à Paris le 7, Octobre 1705
Les Noms seuls des Zeuxis passant d’Ages en Ages,
Les Siècles ont détruit leurs Superbes ouvrages :
Mais le tems ne peut rien ceux des Raphael,
Picault a trouve l’art de les render immortals.

65 Original French: Si Mme. Godefroid réussit, comme il y a lieu de le présumer, on peut encore être rassuré sur les prétendus frais, puisqu’elle compte ne faire usage que d’eau chaude et de patience.

66 Ibid.

Godefroid’s own transfer method, as implied by her confession, was not magic, just ordinary work executed with great care. This specific method, similar to that used by other restorers through the early-nineteenth century, was as follows: she first would have shaved down the panel’s wooden base until only a paper-thin layer remained. This layer contained the surface paint as well as priming layers in the ground. As promised, Godefroid would then have used warm water to soften and remove these preparatory layers and isolate the desired picture plane, which she could later glue onto a new canvas using a flour-based paste. Such use of everyday materials and mechanical processes had a broader impact on the restorer’s status in the art world. Mid-century the restorer, as embodied by Picault, had maintained a sense of charm and mystery that captivated public attention. But by the last quarter of the 1700s, after Godefroid’s death, the restorer became a more domesticated and less favorable figure to the royal arts administration.

As Étienne has proposed, there was a real “deviance” to the way that Godefroid negotiated the pricing and methodology of restoration among her competitors. This approach gave the restorer a new identity, one less mysterious and more unassuming. Yet, Godefroid’s diverse private and royal clientele prove that her approach was still a lucrative one. Cutting across tiers in the artistic hierarchy, her career shows that a female artisan could become visible by performing invisible tasks. A tangible legacy in the form of hundreds of repairs existed

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68 Massing, Painting Restoration before La Restauration, 42-44, 179-180.
70 Étienne, “Veuvage et déviance,” 11. Scott’s analysis of tension between the royal Académie and St. Luc guild over economic privilege offers additional insight into the origins of Godefroid’s practice of underselling her restoration treatments (see footnote 27).
72 Even in other fields, such as in literary and scientific circles, women paradoxically achieved recognition by exploiting similar kinds of anonymity. Note, for example, the diverse corpus of Marie Geneviève Charlotte Thioux d’Arconville as discussed in Julie Candler Hayes, “From Anonymity to Autobiography: Mme. d’Arconville’s Self-Fashionings,” The Romantic Review 103, no. 3-4 (2012): 383.
alongside an intangible memory in the field of museum practice, as felt by Marie-Jacob’s son and later her grand-daughter, Marie-Éléonore Godefroid. Depictions of domestic routines by female workers, in plates from the *Encyclopédie* or in genre paintings by Jean-Baptiste Chardin, thus offer new insight when imagined as the restorer’s studio space. Here a tablecloth smoothed over a wooden counter can become a canvas stretched over an invisible scaffold. A worker who glues book bindings can share her brush with a restorer who uses marouflé to adhere new canvas backings. And a knife used to peel a hundred turnips can bear the same motion to scrape away the old overpaint covering an even older masterpiece.

In light of these possibilities, I would like to conclude this chapter by revisiting the Roslin pastel self-portrait in light of Chardin’s turnip-peeler from 1740 (Figure 19). The dates attributed to these two images, 1740 and 1760, roughly bookend Godefroid’s career working in the third-quarter of the eighteenth century. Here I would specifically like to discuss the importance of the hands in both works (see Figures 20 and 21 for close-ups). Formally, they are central to the two picture planes yet are arranged into different positions. Both women hold knives of equal shape and size, suggesting a similar motion performed with the tool, but with vastly different goals. While Roslin’s hands are propped upright above her open drawer, the anonymous peeler’s rest on the blanket of white forming her apron. One can reduce the obvious

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74 Marouflé refers to the glue, usually made from a mixture of oil, pigments, and resin, used to bind a painted surface onto a new support. Marouflage then, refers to the restoration technique by which a painted canvas is glued onto a fresh rigid support, such as wood or metal, rather than to another fabric support. This transfer to another format can change the appearance of the artist’s texturing on the original surface, as is the case when a painted surface on wood is transferred to canvas. This change in the surface effects was one of the biggest critiques of the transfer method in its time, and still is today. See Massing, *Painting Restoration before La Restauration*, 314.
class difference captured in the two scenes to the appearance of each woman’s skin: whereas Roslin’s pale hands are only temporarily stained by her pastels, the turnip-peeler’s will linger red and raw after long physical labor. An assortment of roots to the left of the peeler and the finished pieces in the dish at her feet form a triangle in which her partially-peeled turnip marks its apex. Unlike Roslin, who looks directly at the viewer, Chardin’s peeler stares in profile more abstractly off to the right. One gets the sense that instead of posing, she has just paused from her work to contemplate a distant thought. Finally, unlike Roslin’s hands that have another pair to mirror, the turnip-peeler’s sit alone without any reference to transform their menial task.

Godefroid would fall somewhere in between these two fields of women engaged in work of distinctly artistic and non-artistic natures. Her career lacked a single definition and therefore occupied its own ambiguous position. It is this ambiguity, caring for works of great artistic quality but herself only performing anonymous labor, that I would argue contributed to administrative fears about the marginal groups lingering outside the Académie. And the greater poetics of restoration are just as ambiguous. On the one hand, treating key paintings by Poussin, Rubens, or Raphael could be an effective way of reinvigorating the royal Académie against the mid-century challenges of Rococo. Yet, restoration could also confound time by making old paintings appear new. Like the problematic associations between make-up and painting that circulated around the Marquise de Pompadour, structural restoration went deeper than just routine transferring and relining—it was cosmetic surgery that tricked the eye.76

75 While it is not possible to confirm that Godefroid ever met or knew Pompadour personally, Marandet (2003) does point out that the Marquise did attend the marriage of Godefroid’s daughter Marguerite-Joseph in 1763. See François Marandet, “Pierre Rémy (1715-97): the Parisian art market in the mid-eighteenth century,” Apollo 157, no. 498 (July 2003): 38.
Preserving Modesty: The Disruptive Ambiguities of the Restauratrice

In the 1760s, the Crown’s financial hardships after the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) and old age did begin to lighten Godefroid’s workload. By this point, she had worked as restorer of the king’s paintings for twenty years, adopting an air of expertise evident in a letter she wrote to the then premier peintre, Jean-Baptiste-Marie Pierre, in June 1774:

Allow me to repeat to you my zeal and disinterested attachment for the King’s services and for your greatness. I dare to instruct you of all the abuses that occur in the general restoration of paintings. I have the honor of telling you that for forty-eight years with my husband and thirty-three years in widowhood, I have worked without reproaches. I have seen such cabals, the protected ones who obtain work boasting of know-how, and using above all lots of mystery and charlatanry to persuade; these talents are not acquired by protection. Today everything depends on your greatness that honors me with its confidence. I can certify to it that I was always opposed to raising Raphael’s Holy Family painted on cedar wood not subject to worms, if this board is a bit mutilated, which is reparable, it is from having been above a fireplace where one had an ardent fire...It is more a question here of honor than of interest, and one cannot entrust without shuddering a similar painting, than to practitioners of many years approved by an entire Academy.

The subject of this letter was the transfer of a Raphael painting on cedar wood proposed by Picault for 10,000 francs. Not only does Godefroid advise Pierre against this commission, she offers her own services instead. To defend this claim over her competitor, Godefroid cites not only her long-standing loyalty to the Crown, but also her more transparent, economical working conditions. She and her eldest son could perform the transfer in less time and for a lower cost; she would also agree to have the work supervised by Pierre and members of the royal Académie.

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77 Massing, Painting Restoration before La Restauration, 72-73.
78 Original French: Permettés moy de vous renouvéller mon zele et mon attachement desinteressé pour le Service du Roy et de votre Grandeur, j’ose vous instruire de tous les abus qui se passent dans la restauration générale des tableaux, J’ay l’honneur de vous représenter que depuis quarante huit ans tant avec mon Mary que depuis trente trois ans de veuvage, j’ai travaillé sans reproches J’ai vu tant de cabales, les uns protégés obtenir les ouvrages se vantant de scavoir faire, et mettant surtout beaucoup de misteres et de charlatanerie pour persuader; ces talents ne s’acquierent pas par protection. Aujourd huy que tous depend de votre Grandeur qui m’honnore de sa confiance je peux lui certifier que je me suis toujours opposée a lever la sainte famille de Raphaël peinte sur un bois de cèdre non sujet aux vers, si cette planche est un peu mutilée ce qui est réparable, c’est d’avoir été sur une cheminée ou l’on faisoit un feu ardent...Il est plus question icy d’honneur que d’interest, et l’on ne peut confier sans frémir un pareil tableau, qu’à des practiciens de longues années approuvés par toute une Accademie.

AN O1 1912 1774: 69; excerpt of letter from Veuve Godefroid to J.-B.-M. Pierre, June 4, 1774. Taken from Massing, Painting Restoration before La Restauration, Appendix 3.3 (p. 267-8).
While feminists cite pay discrepancies as an example of modern sexism, in Godefroid’s case, under-selling her competitors actually worked as an effective business strategy. But perhaps more important is how her letter conveys a willingness to work without any mark of recognition. Especially in old age, Godefroid accepted her humble place in the official hierarchy, ostensibly apart from administrative or academic circles. But even if she had gained her position through alternate channels, she was still respected for her years of experience. At this late stage in her career when she deferred most projects to her son, as well as to other restorers commissioned by the Bâtiments, Godefroid held her title in name more than in practice. Her career nevertheless left a lasting impression on the restorer’s role in larger bureaucratic systems at the end of the century.

Interpreting extracts of the Bâtiments’ records from the mid-1770s, I will suggest how Godefroid’s presence as a royally-commissioned restorer could disrupt plans to open an art museum at the Louvre. In particular, I will use scholarship by Sheriff, who argues that the Enlightenment’s ideal modesty led the cause against admission of female artists to the French Académie.79 She focuses here on the controversy surrounding the portraitist Élisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun’s showing at the Salon of 1783, where her immodest female gaze threatened this exhibition space. Like Sheriff, I will interpret writings by the Comte d’Angiviller, successor to Marigny as the director of the royal arts administration beginning in 1775 until 1789. D’Angiviller’s career began roughly as Godefroid’s ended and thus provides the key to interpreting her legacy. Known for his dream of making the Louvre palace into a museum of the royal collections, d’Angiviller figured himself as the purveyor of a national pride founded on

79 Sheriff, “The Im/modesty of Their Sex: The Woman’s Gaze and the Female History Painter,” in The Exceptional Woman, 105-142.
France’s artistic greatness. His portrait painted for the Salon of 1779 in fact shows the director seated with his precious blueprint of the Grand Gallery trailing around his legs (Figure 22). Considering this alongside the tensions brought out in the first chapter, I will argue that the “disinterested attachment” Godefroid cites in her letter to Pierre actually hid most of its weight behind the conventions of femininity popular in Enlightenment salons.

Shortly after Godefroid’s death in 1775, the Comte d’Angiviller released a mémoire entitled “Note on the legacy of the Widow Godefroid”. In this memo, the director stated that he would not replace Godefroid’s position as sole restorer to the royal collections. He even denied bids made by her son, Joseph-Ferdinand-François, to fill the role. The Bâtiments’ written statement implied that the widow had amassed too much power, performing treatments without regular consultation. Her son’s aspirations further proved the resilience of a Godefroid “dynasty” that had overseen royal collections care since the early-eighteenth century. One should remember that Salic Law ruled the land—no woman could ever reign in France, the Crown always descended through male heirs. In the Godefroid line, however, a royal title had transferred from Joseph-Ferdinand Godefroid to his widow and at her death an eldest son prepared to inherit the position. This power of a single family, especially one headed by a strong matriarch, posed the biggest sticking point for d’Angiviller’s Louvre project, one that sought to build a canon that highlighted French (all male) artists. As a Belgian female restorer, Marie-Jacob Godefroid fulfilled no part of those criteria.

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82 Records do exist of J.-F.-F. Godefroid working for the Crown in the decade after his mother’s death—indeed, he lived in her studio lodgings at the Louvre until he died in 1788—but he was never officially employed by the Bâtiments for restoration work. See Massing, Paintings Restoration before La Restauration, Appendix 3.5 and 3.6 (p. 268-269), for examples of letters written from J.-F.-F. Godefroid to d’Angiviller.
83 Chatelus, Peindre à Paris, 197.
In response, d’Angiviller’s memo outlines in eight points a new committee-based system that would appraise the suggestions of several restorers before proceeding with interventions. These efforts to re-configure the system of collections care within the museum mirror the economic reforms that abolished France’s guild system in favor of a more public, free-market model. The director’s list also stressed the importance of documentation and transparency, refusing the previous associations between restoration and secrecy, here critiquing Picault and guilds more generally: “Any restorer who makes a mystery of his pretend secrets must not be employed at all because it is laughable to believe that extraordinary means be necessary in an operation that only demands patience, address, and care…” This statement applies Godefroid’s approach as a restorer who uses “hot water and patience” to curb Picault’s high-minded pride. To the director, a common laborer whose work depends only on a small set of ordinary skills does not deserve the large sums of money or the royal distinction demanded by Picault. But how then could he fault Godefroid, who did not demand such privileges but stayed in the background for decades, performing hundreds of treatments in preparation for his public exhibitions? In the same memo, d’Angiviller makes a positive example of Godefroid when degrading the profession’s recent history, but makes a negative example of her when looking to the profession’s future. « Notte sur la survivance de la Veuve Godefroy » is thus an abridged outline akin to the one in d’Angiviller’s 1779 portrait. But instead of planning the layout of a gallery space, he plans the landscape of a new kind of restoration, one that does not occur in a shop’s back room but in a

84 On the effect of Turgot’s economic reforms on women in the guild system, see Hafter, Women at Work in Preindustrial France, 145-149.
85 Original French: Tout restaurateur qui fera mistere de ses pretendus secrets ne doit point être employé parsequ’il est risible de croire que les moyens extraordinaires soient necessaires dans un operation qui ne demande que de la patience, de l’adresse, et du soin...
AN O1 1913 (1775) : 273 ; « Notte sur la survivance de la Veuve Godefroy ». Taken from Massing, Painting Restoration before La Restauration, Appendix 3.4 (p. 268). Also in McClellan, “The Politics and Aesthetics of Display,” 463n70.
museum’s illuminated colonnade. This same tone is evident in a letter from d’Angiviller to Pierre, less than one month after Godefroid’s death:

The death of Madame Godefroid, Sir, emptying the position of restorer to his Majesty’s paintings, I have weighed attentively the advantages and the inconveniences of filling it. It appears to me, after a mature examination, that the latter far outweigh the former and that this place could, as it happened, thereafter become a title in hands little or less capable, being charged to the exclusion of others more capable… I have so resolved not to fill it at all and to remove it, my intention is to follow another plan for the restoration of the paintings of his Majesty that are in need of it, and to not make from a work so important a sort of enterprise that in the end turns into the detriment of the thing…86

Like d’Angiviller’s museum-building project, this system would not come to fruition until after the Revolution, when the Museum Commission was established to arbitrate collections management.87 Many old actors would vie for places in this new administrative structure, building a hierarchy that buried the restorer beneath roles such as the connoisseur. Marie-Jacob Godefroid’s legacy thus contributed to a re-evaluation of power within the royal arts administration that remained in its post-Revolutionary form.

Before I go further with my analysis of Godefroid, I would like to provide a more general comparison between the position of the art restorer and that of the woman defined by French Enlightenment thinkers. This is not to suggest that the two cases are directly related, but that they represent two versions of the same social limitation established in this period. It is particularly Rousseau’s brand of domestic womanhood, popular in the 1760s when Godefroid would have

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86 Original French: La mort de Mme. Godefroid, Monsieur, faisant vacquer la place de restaurateur des tableaux de Sa Majesté, j’ai pesé avec attention les avantages et les inconvénients de la remplir. Il m’a paru, après un mûr examen, que les derniers l’emportoient beaucoup sur les premiers et que cette place pourrait, comme il est arrivé, devenir par la suite un titre entre des mains peu ou médiocrement capables, pour être chargé à l’exclusion d’autres plus habiles... J’ai donc résolu de ne la point remplir et de la supprimer, mon dessein est de suivre un autre plan pour la restoration des tableaux de Sa Majesté qui en ont besoin, et de ne point faire d’un ouvrage aussi important une sorte d’entreprise qui tourne à la fin au détriment de la chose...
established her reputation, that interests me. Émile, a bestseller in its time and the bible of modern pedagogy, lays out Rousseau’s vision of the ideal education in nature, away from all the poofs and frills of Paris. In Book V, Rousseau creates his pupil’s perfect wife, Sophie, whose feminine charms rule over the home (and only the home) with a newfound authority. Take the following passage, for example, where he lists the woman’s duties as accorded by her sex:

The male is only a male now and again, the female is always a female, or at least all her youth; everything reminds her of her sex; the performance of her functions requires a special constitution. She needs care during pregnancy and freedom from work when her child is born; she must have a quiet, easy life while she nurses her children; their education calls for patience and gentleness, for a zeal and love which nothing can dismay; she forms a bond between father and child, she alone can win the father’s love for his children and convince him that they are indeed his own. What loving care is required to preserve a united family! And there should be no question of virtue in all this, it must be a labour of love, without which the human race would be doomed to extinction.

As described in this passage, it is motherhood that defines the female life cycle, characterized by innate qualities such as patience and gentleness. It is a woman’s responsibility to maintain a balance within her household and bear healthy children for a prosperous, unified state. The essential or eternal femininity that Rousseau describes then also had a very specific purpose: to nurture children so that they may become strong, productive members in a republic of men. It is noteworthy that art critics such as La Font de Saint-Yenne had used a similar language to describe the importance of maintaining royal art collections against the weathering of time. In 1747, he indeed points out the damaging effects of neglect on paintings displayed in palace galleries:

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88 In another of his well-known works, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750), Rousseau makes his distaste for salon culture most clear, saying the Enlightenment’s obsession with useless arts actually drove its progress into the ground. What then would he have thought about restoration, a field that valorizes ordinary labor in a way he would appreciate, but eventually succumbs to the same theorization? Rousseau, while so good at anticipating criticism, could not have anticipated that Sophie’s skills could apply outside the home. And surely, the influence of working women such as Marie-Jacob Godefroid would have ignited his disapproval.

They are however on the side of the Court in this much esteemed Gallery almost destroyed by the criminal negligence of the concierges who open all the shutters and stained glass of the windows on the most sunny days, and leave to devour by the strength of the Sun since midday until it is completely set, these precious paintings, these beauties that all the riches of sovereigns could not replace today.90

Like the diligent, nurturing mother, the restorer needed a sharp eye and gentle touch to care for such a rich assembly of art. And like Rousseau’s enlightened housewife, the restorer required a specific, yet limited knowledge that perfected manual, practical tasks. Was Sophie, then, primed for a career in art restoration? If not, then what prevented her, and indeed all women apparently born with the necessary tools, from reaching this potential?

Access to an education outside of the home perhaps could have opened up a path for all Rousseau’s women to become art restorers. In the immediate decades surrounding the Revolution, similar proposals for practical education existed across disciplines and social classes. Take in 1789, when the artist Jean-Jacques Bachelier, who in saying “their talents will be their dowries,” proposed a schooling for underprivileged girls.91 Bachelier’s treatise given to the Estates General suggested many subjects, from geography to clock making, that could provide girls a way out of poverty. Godefroid, in her adult life, exemplified the result of these intentions, even though the circumstances of her childhood are unknown. As a widowed mother with professional self-sufficiency, she gained much of her knowledge from the daily experiences of

90 Original French: Ils sont cependant du côté de la Cour dans cette Gallerie si estimable presque détruits par la négligence criminelle des Concierges qui ouvrent tous les volets & les vitraux des croisées dans les jours les plus brûlans, & laissent dévorer à l’ardeur du Soleil depuis le midi jusqu’à ce qu’il soit entièrement couché, ces Tableaux précieux, ces beautés que toutes les richesses des Souverains ne pourroient aujourd’hui remplacer. La Font de Saint-Yenne, Réflexions sur quelques causes de l’état présent de la peinture en France, 41.
Contrary to La Font de Saint-Yenne’s accusation that the Bâtiments neglected many of the paintings in its royal residences, the restoration work performed by M.-J. Godefroid and Colins during the late 1740s and 1750s evidences the administration’s ambition to refurbish its entire collection in preparation for display at public venues like the Luxembourg Palace. See McClellan, Inventing the Louvre, 19-27.
owning a successful business. And while there were plans to open a restoration school after the Revolution, split between structural (transferring, relining) and pictorial (local retouching, surface cleaning) training programs, museum officials mention this idea only sparingly in the period and eventually abandon it. Nonetheless, even its proposal is significant. The idea of publicizing such a niche, technical education indicates a growing interest paralleled in broader pedagogical efforts, an interest that must have included female participation.

Returning to another contentious suggestion in d’Angiviller’s 1775 mémoire: “Firstly to put to work all those who would present themselves with a sort of reputation [my emphasis].” Just what sort of reputation did he have in mind? Surely, he must mean that his administration would only contract restorers with the required skills and experience. More importantly though is that this “reputation” connotes some kind of profiling, determined by official recommendation or just hearsay. This would put Godefroid, and any woman with a career in the art world, in a difficult position. After all, had not Rousseau written in Émile that “a woman’s honor does not depend on her conduct alone, but on her reputation”? Further, that “a man has no one but himself to consider, and so long as he does right he may defy public opinion; but when a woman does right her task is only half finished, and what people think of her matters as much as what she really is.” No matter if she cultivates modesty through her own actions, a woman’s ultimate value depends on others’ appraisal—and therefore, is never fully in her control. D’Angiviller’s statement thereby contains a double exclusivity, the first being the straightforward, merit-based judgment of any restorer who works for the Crown. The second calls out those like Picault, who

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93 Original French: Primo de mettre a l’ouvrage tous ceux qui se presenteront avec une sorte de reputation AN O1 1913 (1775): 273 ; « Notte sur la survivance de la Veuve Godefroy ». Taken from Massing, *Painting Restoration before La Restauration*, Appendix 3.4 (p. 268).
94 Rousseau, *Émile*, 328.
95 Ibid.
had developed a reputation of charlatanry that hurt his professional relationship with the Bâtiments. But it also implies a gender-bias that excludes women because of the inherent corruptness that their sex poses in proximity to men.

This same issue posed by a woman’s reputation surfaces in the controversy of housing female students at the Louvre in the 1780s. On this, Sheriff has cited another of d’Angiviller’s letters from 1785 to the King, in response to the artist Adélaïde Labille-Guiard’s request for studio space at the palace.96 In this letter, the Comte warns Louis XVI that the presence of female students at the palace, especially those not under the authority of a male guardian, would pose a threat to the decency of the (male) workplace and disrupt the academy’s lessons. Only a few years later, in fact, when Joseph-Ferdinand-François died in 1788, his wife and two children were forced to vacate their Louvre quarters, a space that had originally belonged to Marie-Jacob Godefroid.

Bearing in mind this later controversy, Godefroid’s studio at the Louvre from 1743-1775 becomes even more central to d’Angiviller’s concerns. Her workspace, among both the royal family and its Académie, would have placed Godefroid at ground-zero, the place to develop one’s reputation as a successful, officially-recognized artist. But also, according to the Bâtiments, the wrong kind of reputation if you were a young female artist. As an old widow, Godefroid was considered well-past the age of female attraction. Her presence, therefore, should have posed no threat to the Académie. Godefroid had no sex and could therefore work

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inconspicuously. She was in a category all her own; uniquely a restauratrice, her every move became significant, yet impossible to judge by comparison.97

It is this constant, yet distant, visibility that is most striking, especially when considering the nature of Godefroid’s work. As a structural restorer, Godefroid would have had to flip over a painting every time she adjusted its base. This ensured that the surface would remain protected, but also out of sight. Turned away to focus on its reverse side, any nudes or pagan imagery became irrelevant, every panel subjected to the same routine treatment. Her modesty therefore has two meanings. In one sense, it meant living comfortably as a widow, taking over the lowly profession of restorer-dealer from her husband to provide for her family. One could put her commitment to the position of royal restorer in this same category. But, in the second sense, Godefroid embraced modesty as it was specifically tied to the period’s consideration of the female sex, abstaining from remarriage, living out her adult life as a widow. Regarding this latter definition one must also consider Godefroid’s approach to the easel painting as a formatted object. By focusing on the painting’s skeleton, she effectively avoided any controversy that surrounded images of nude flesh in history painting. What this then another instance of the widow’s compliance—her evasion of the subject matter deemed so improper for women artists? Or, was it a rejection of the Bâtiment’s pain-staking curation to highlight the French tradition of painting? Equally, was it a rejection of the entire convention of propriety that faulted her sex and therefore confirmed her critics’ fears?

97 In The Gender of History, Smith has examined the nineteenth-century genre of amateur history by female writers, using Germaine de Stael’s Corinne as its origin, as the launching point into the later scientific approach to history dominated by middle-class men. In this same vein, Godefroid stands as an earlier example of a woman using her family’s history in restoration to shape the course of France’s art historical canon. See Bonnie G. Smith, “The Birth of the Amateur,” in The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 37-69.
In her book on Vigée-Lebrun, Mary Sheriff introduces exceptionalism as a term that both frees and limits the case of female artists in eighteenth-century France. Here the exceptional woman is someone who defies gender conventions to achieve unparalleled success. She is a figure who, thanks to unique circumstances, shines outside the boundaries of tradition. But as the exception, she cannot change tradition. According to Sheriff, no matter how positively one considers Vigée-Lebrun, her unique career only “strengthens the rule” against other female artists. The legacy of Marie-Jacob Godefroid presents a similar dilemma for singularity. On the one hand, Godefroid indirectly blocked other female artisans from following in her footsteps after the arts administration minimized her influence. Equally possible, her humbling approach to restoration shifted down its qualifications, opening the field to more women. Linda Nochlin rightfully said in “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” that exclusion from institutions of training (not a lack of genius) prevented women from becoming “great” artists. But where would this leave art restorers, whose repertoire was built largely in the workshop and never structured into an official educational program? This group included those who, rejected from the royal Académie for a lack of artistic skill, sought other professions in the art world. “Genius” was not a possibility for the restorer, male or female.

Faced with such prejudice, compounded by the limitations of her sex, Marie-Jacob Godefroid should have had no chance of becoming great. And perhaps she was not great—a

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98 The artist Élisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842) poses an interesting comparison with Marie-Jacob Godefroid, specifically where they both convey tensions between art and commerce, restoration, and implications of the marriage contract. Vigée-Lebrun was married to the dealer-connoisseur Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Lebrun, who also dabbled in paintings restoration and whose presence in the art market was one of the biggest critiques of Vigée-Lebrun’s admittance to the royal Académie. The couple eventually divorced in 1793, shortly after Vigée-Lebrun had fled France to escape the same fate as her patron, Marie-Antoinette, during the Revolution. Treating Vigée-Lebrun’s divorce as a kind of artificial widowhood that was followed by a fruitful career abroad strikes a similar cord with the widow Godefroid’s own success later in life.


100 Ibid.
great artist, that is. But navigating in uncharted territory—in life as a widow and in work as a reviver of old paintings—her name remains among the select few who introduced modern conservation theory. Both the unique lives of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and Marie-Jacob Godefroid thus test gender as a variable for success. Still, as a widow-art restorer who worked until her death and reached the highest level of an emergent field, Godefroid generates many exceptional variables. She was the exception to the exception. If little is known about female artists in history, even less is known about female art restorers. Whether this is due to record or reality remains undetermined; yet Godefroid’s career shows that sometimes it is possible to break the rules by following them.
Marie-Jacob Godefroid, the Restorer as Artist?

To end my look at Godefroid, I will borrow words from an author whose fiction-turned-philosophy\textsuperscript{101} figures in her debut “moral tale”:

There she stands, almost resolved to go ahead, weeping tears over the father she is abandoning and the home in which she was born, and which she is going to leave; but she thinks about her lover, and her tears dry up. “So I will be,” she burst out, “so I will be his, forever!” Then she goes back to the window, and looking at it more carefully, she sees that at precisely the place where she’d have to climb down, there is a hole, filled with that day’s fresh rainfall. She would need to fill that hole in; what should she use? Julie looks around her, and seeing the portraits of her forefathers, says to them, “You will do me at least this favor,” and, laughing, she immediately jumps onto a chair to take Jean-François d’Arnonville down off the wall. As she is holding him, still up on the chair, Mademoiselle du Tour comes in—

“What are you doing, mademoiselle?”

“Dear lady…dear lady…am I not right to send this portrait off to the painter for restoration? If I am to be married, as you believe, to a lord from an old chateau, I would like to be able to take the first baron of the family there.”\textsuperscript{102}

Such was the plea of Isabelle de Charrière’s heroine in \textit{The Nobleman}, a French novella published abroad in 1762. The Dutch-born \textit{femme de lettres} made her introduction to Enlightenment circles with this version of the classic flight to forbidden love. Most memorably, Charrière here sets the scene where her protagonist cracks the spines of painted ancestors, rattling their skeletons long in the grave. Just moments before, the cunning Julie had decided to take paintings off the walls of her bedroom and use them as stepping stones to reach her lover who waits below just beyond crumbling castle walls. But before she can escape, she is caught like a thief by the housemaid. Her excuse? Sending the painting off for a routine cleaning, refreshing it for a place in her new home.


Central to my study is this role “restoration” plays in the excerpt, implying a kind of practicality on-par with polishing silver or re-upholstering chairs. An alibi to prevent the protagonist from revealing her true intentions. One can even imagine Julie’s pose in the scene—tippy-toed on a chair, her hands outstretched to lift the portrait off its prized wall space—as similar to others described earlier in this essay. Whether figured as the packers in Gersaint’s shop who make room for new inventory (Figure 12) or the putti who organize a gallery space under the direction of Art (Figure 13-14), all pass the time (out with the old, in with the new) by exerting mindless work. But of course, Julie was no unskilled laborer; she read *Télémaque*, and painted still lifes. Only in Charrière’s fiction can the same ordinary motions transform into a scene of greater theatrics: trampling old portraits beneath her eager heels, Julie flees the traditions rotting within her father’s castle, a sight fit for its own capture in paint.

One can therefore not ignore the biting critique disguised by Charrière’s wit. As Hesse has argued, for Charrière and other women writing in the late-eighteenth century, fiction was a domain used to engage with the Enlightenment ideas exclusive to men. In a similar way, the dealer’s *catalogue raisonné* or the amateur’s book of trade secrets sought a higher place in the artistic order. And to be sure, works of fiction by female authors like Charrière do occupy a different spot on the literary spectrum compared to the artistic manuals and estate catalogs brought up earlier in this essay. My point is rather that both bodies of writing negotiated their genres in a similar way and thus harmonize with my argument about Marie-Jacob Godefroid. That is, that just as female writers disguised their philosophy as fiction, Godefroid formed a career within artistic circles by embracing seemingly inoffensive notions about paintings restoration and womanhood. If these novelists attained philosophy, it was largely by applying moral lessons to their plot’s denouement. In Godefroid’s case, I have argued that modesty—here
meaning her long service to the French state, her business strategies, and the term’s association with femininity—was the conduit for her greater autonomy.

A final note on the translation of *The Nobleman* by Caroline Warman is also worth considering. Even in Charrière’s original French, Julie’s last part of the dialogue reads as: “Ma bonne...ma bonne...ne ferais-je pas bien d’envoyer ce portrait chez le *peintre* [my emphasis]?” The exchange of painter for restorer further serves my point about the fluidity of genres between artistic practice and restoration in the period. Moreover, by interpreting the translator as a kind of restorer who reconstructs texts into a new language, my link with Hesse comes full circle: fiction as philosophy, restoration as art, and translation as restoration. This harkens back to the point I made about the interplay between text and image in early restoration manuals and *Encyclopédie* plates.

*The Nobleman* is of course not about art restoration, but about patriarchy as an outdated, corrupt model of governance within families, royal and noble. But then, neither is my look at Marie-Jacob Godefroid, at least not entirely. While Charrière’s minor nod to restoration comes from a source of general knowledge about painting and their upkeep in family collections, her one mention encapsulates an entire world, one hiding behind the optics of eighteenth-century French art. It has been my intention to introduce an alternative viewpoint to the easel painting, one that questions its shape, left and right, front and back. In turn, I have used Marie-Jacob Godefroid to capture the debates about art versus craft and public versus private womanhood as parallel developments. This has sought to add the *restauratrice* as another perspective to the already diverse scholarship that exists on female artists and art restoration in late-eighteenth-century Paris. And by examining Godefroid’s career as a widow-restorer, I have picked-up where *The Nobleman* leaves off. Marie-Jacob and her grand-daughter Marie-Éléonore Godefroid
both rejected the trajectory common for women in their time. While the grandmother peaked as a widow, the latter chose to remain single. This is not to discredit Charrière, who herself would go on to write several critiques and alternatives to the traditional marriage plot. Rather, it is to emphasize the inventiveness of the widow in carving a place for herself with the tools she already had at hand. Like Julie, Godefroid was quick to reach for the paintings on her walls and turn them over (or step right on them) in sight of another future.
Appendix

Figure 1. Pierre-Antoine Demachy, *Vue de la colonnade du Louvre*, 1772. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 2. Carlo Maratti, *The Flight into Egypt*, c. seventeenth century. Oil on copper.
Figure 3. Berlin School, *Interior of a Studio*, c. 1830, oil on canvas (22 x 33 cm). Private Collection, Thuringia. Taken from: Massing, *Painting Restoration Before La Restauration*,

Figure 4. Hubert Robert, *Studio of an Antiquities Restorer in Rome*, 1783. Oil on canvas. Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio.
**Figure 5.** Hubert Robert, *Une Galerie du Musée*, 1789. Oil on canvas (65 x 81 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

**Figure 6.** Hubert Robert, *Entrée de l’atelier d’Hubert Robert au Louvre*, c. 1790. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
Figure 9. Marie-Suzanne Roslin, *Self-portrait with an image of Maurice Quentin de La Tour*, c. 1760. Pastel.

Figure 10. Maurice-Quentin Delatour, *Self-Portrait at an Æil-de-Bœuf Window*, 1742. Pastels on blue paper, mounted on canvas on a stretcher (59 cm x 49 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.
Figure 11. Commercial label of Jean Constantin. Taken from Michel, *Le Commerce du tableau à Paris*, 47.

Figure 12. Jean-Antoine Watteau, *The Shop-Sign of Gersaint (L’enseigne de Gersaint)*, 1720-1. Oil on canvas (163 x 308 cm). Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin.

Figure 14. Jean-Jacques Lagrenée le Jeune, Allégorie relative à l’établissement du Muséum dans la Grande Galerie du Louvre, 1783. Oil on canvas (52 x 68 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 16. 1760 map of the 4e arrondissement of Paris by the cartographer Didier Robert de Vaugondy. Courts of the Arsenal complex (site of Académie de Saint-Luc exhibitions in the 1750s) highlighted.

Figure 18. Joos van Cleve, *L’Homme au Gant*, 1532, oil on wood panel transferred to canvas, 1753 (67 x 56 cm). Musée d’Arts de Nantes, Nantes, France.
Figure 19. Jean-Baptiste Chardin, *Woman Peeling Turnips*, c. 1740. Oil on canvas (46 x 37 cm). Alte Pinakothek, Munich.
Figure 20. Cropped close-up of hands from Figure 9.

Figure 21. Cropped close-up of hands from Figure 19.
Figure 22. Joseph Duplessis, *Portrait of the Comte d’Angiviller*, 1779. Oil on canvas (144 x 106 cm). Palace of Versailles, France.
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