

To clean or not to clean

Weekly Times Column

By Warren Joel

There are countless stories about people cleaning vases or furniture and cleaning away thousands of dollars. So what can we clean, when and with what?

There are no hard and fast rules about what you can and can't clean when it comes to your collectables. But I do want to steer you in the right direction. With items that are porcelain or china it is possible to clean these with simple warm water and a mild soap. That does not mean putting them in the dish washer, but a soft brush, like a small paint brush to get into all the small spaces, small quantity of water and a cake of that old yellow soap. You would be amazed just how many vases I have come across over the years that are just about black with 50 plus years of grime.

Cleaning glass and crystal is very similar to way we clean porcelain. Now here is where it can become hard to know what is dirt and what is original finish. Lalique, the French glass maker, used a stain on the glass to show off the pattern in the design of the vase. So, how do we know if it is original stain or just dirty? So again, the motto is clean with care and do less, not more. Gentle soap and water is best.

Silver is a much more stable base and much harder to break, but even that requires a certain amount of care. There are the commercial silver cleaning products on the market that do an excellent job, but don't leave any of the cleaning liquid on the silver. Now some of your silver just won't clean, and always looks "dirty and grey". This can't be cleaned because there is no silver left to clean. Over the years all the silver plate has been worn off leaving the base metal to show through.

Cleaning your antique table with the wrong polish will eventually turn it a dark muddy colour. Again, as with any collectable, doing nothing may be better than the wrong cleaning agent or polish. So next time somebody complains in your house about the dirt just quote this article: less is best!

Next week: Will the gum tree painting ever come back?

Warren Joel

Warren is a third generation auctioneer and valuer specialising in Art, Antiques and Collectables, accredited by the Commonwealth in 2002 different areas of collectables.

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