

damage in the past. During the 1960s and '70s, a curator at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art told Zalewski, the Met applied a new synthetic varnish to several old-master works. "The idea," said the curator, who refused to identify the works involved, "was that the synthetic varnish wouldn't yellow because it lacked organic material. Well, it didn't. It turned gray. And we've since discovered . . . that removal is, if not impossible, extremely difficult."

Great advances in cleaning and conservation methods have been made in recent decades, Zalewski notes. "The techniques used today," asserts an adviser to London's National Gallery, "are as microsurgery is to the methods of the old barber-surgeons." Beck remains, to say the least, unconvinced. Museums, in his view, are inclined to make "invasive cleanings, using newfangled solvents," often on artworks that are "very well preserved." Some of the conservation work, he claims, amounts to "vandalism, even if well intentioned." Horrified by the recent

cleanings of Raphael's *Portrait of Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi* (1518–19) and Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538) at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Beck and ArtWatch are currently trying to prevent the museum from restoring Verrocchio's *Baptism* (circa 1474–75).

"Cleaning controversies are nearly as old as museums," notes Zalewski. "The Louvre's policies were assailed on the day of its public opening, in 1793." Later, French painter Edgar Degas successfully fought the Paris museum's attempts to clean the *Mona Lisa*. Said Degas: "Pictures should not be restored. . . . Anybody who touches one should be deported."

Most restorations, Zalewski observes, "aren't salvage operations for crumbling canvases: Typically, the biggest problem with an old-master painting is dirt and a dulled varnish." In such cases, Beck's recommended solution is to live with the dirt, "because a hands-off policy is the safer route." But in the art world today, that is very much a minority view.

Free Salieri!

"Did Salieri Kill Mozart?" by Agnes Selby, in *Quadrant* (Jan.–Feb. 1998),
46 George St., Fitzroy, Victoria 3065, Australia.

Popular history has not been kind to Antonio Salieri (1750–1825). A favorite of Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II and one of the leading composers of operas in late-18th-century Vienna, he is now remembered as the jealous musical mediocrity who poisoned Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91).

Leaving aside the question of music, the notion that Salieri murdered Mozart is a great injustice, according to Selby, a biographer of Mozart's wife, Constanze. It is the product of Viennese *Kaffeeklattsch* society gossip that was repeated in an 1823 newspaper story and then took wing with Pushkin's 1830 play *The Murderer Salieri* and a later opera. In the 20th century, playwright Peter Shaffer revived the Salieri-as-poisoner theme, and *Amadeus*, the 1984 film made from his play, gave it worldwide currency.

Salieri himself emphatically denied the 1823 story. In fact, Selby writes, he was "puzzled by the accusation. He had resigned from the Viennese Opera in 1790, well before Mozart's death during the following year. What would he have gained by Mozart's death? At the time Salieri's fame as an opera composer was far more widely spread than Mozart's, who was

not even appointed to the position Salieri had vacated at the Viennese Opera."

When the little-known Mozart arrived in Vienna in 1781, Salieri was already touring Europe, conducting one of his own operas at the opening of La Scala in Milan. He returned with the applause of the whole continent ringing in his ears. He had been a favorite of the emperor almost from the day he arrived in Vienna as a teenager recognized for his immense talent. Salieri's place was secure. But as Mozart's star rose—he was named court composer in 1787—so did the level of gossip about the "German outsider," and Salieri has been seen as a source. Some writers have claimed, for example, that he opposed the premiere of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* in 1786.

Nonsense, says Selby. Salieri actually revived *Figaro* in 1789 and frequently conducted Mozart compositions. Although not friends, the two men had a cordial relationship, Selby says. In 1789, Salieri was Mozart's guest at a performance of *The Magic Flute*, and a flattered Mozart reported to his wife that "Salieri listened and watched most attentively and there was not a single number that did not call forth from him a 'bravo' or 'bello.'" In 1822, a visiting journal-

ist found Salieri still enthusiastic about Mozart's work. (Salieri also taught Mozart's son, not to mention Beethoven, Schubert, and Liszt.)

Mozart's untimely death at age 35 aroused suspicions of foul play. But "in the light of contemporary evidence, one can only be amazed that Mozart survived as long as he did," Selby

observes. He had suffered everything from smallpox to rheumatic fever, and colds with "repeated renal complications." Indeed, modern medical investigators believe it was kidney failure occasioned by Henoch-Schönlein purpura, not a dose of poison, that killed the great composer.

OTHER NATIONS

A Democratic China?

A Survey of Recent Articles

Ten years from now, will there still be a state that calls itself the People's Republic of China and that is governed by the Chinese Communist Party?"

No, answers Arthur Waldron, one of 10 specialists taking part in a *Journal of Democracy* (Jan. 1998) symposium on the prospects for democracy in China.

"China's current system is simply inadequate to the challenges it is creating for itself," argues Waldron, a professor of international relations at the University of Pennsylvania. "China's prosperity already depends on the workings of a free market, but without the rule of law such an economy cannot function beyond a very low level. The communist regime is already too weak to impose its will by force alone, but it has no other tool to sway the people. . . . China requires a new government, for reasons that are not only moral but practical." He expects change to come in fits and starts, first from above, then from below, with foreign reaction tilting the process in a democratic direction.

Though Yizi Chen, president of the Center for Modern China in Princeton, New Jersey, agrees, foreseeing the likely "emergence of an electoral democracy in the next decade," the other *Journal of Democracy* contributors, notes Andrew J. Nathan, a political scientist at Columbia University, "generally acknowledge the staying power of what most of them see as essentially the same regime." Yet most also expect democracy to arrive—not soon, but eventually.

None deny that a good deal of liberalization has taken place since the early 1980s, almost wholly under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping (1904–97). One spe-

cialist—Harry Harding, dean of the Elliot School of International Affairs at George Washington University, goes so far as to assert that China has been fundamentally transformed and is no longer a totalitarian country. "The role of both the party and official communist ideology within the political system has been substantially reduced," he points out. "An increasing range of activity is outside the scope of central economic planning, ideological constraint, or political control." In his view, China today can best be described as hard authoritarian.

Robert A. Scalapino, a political scientist at the University of California, Berkeley, notes that China has made impressive economic gains in recent years—including annual productivity increases of more than 10 percent, low inflation, rising exports, and substantial new foreign investment—but that it also has some daunting economic problems. "Banking and financial institutions are in serious disarray due to uncollectible loans," he observes. "State-owned enterprises account for two-fifths of China's industrial output, yet fully half of these enterprises are operating at a loss." There is a "huge misallocation of workers," adds the *Economist* (Feb. 14, 1998). "Perhaps 20 million workers, out of some 110 million once employed by state firms, have been sacked or indefinitely sent home." As a result of the economic problems, foreign investors have been growing cool toward China. "That matters," the *Economist* observes, "because it is the money provided by foreigners that is largely responsible for China's export success. And most recent growth in the economy appears to have come from exports, which rose by over 20