

# DEPARTURES



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2011

SHOPPING THE WORLD

## THE ART OF APPROPRIATE ACQUISITION

HERMES REIMAGINED  
AT AUCTION: PICASSO, HIRST ET AL  
VINTAGE L.A. JEWELRY  
LONDON'S BACK • LA DOLCE SICILIA  
HOUSTON'S HAUTE BOUTIQUES  
MOSCOW RIGHT NOW

IN THE STUDIO

# Framer of Reference

**W**hen the fully restored American wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art opens in January 2012, Eli Wilner's most high-profile project yet will be unveiled: a monumental basswood frame for Emanuel Leutze's colossal *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, arguably the most famous painting in the most famous museum in this country. Meet the man behind that mission—Manhattan's most trusted framer. —MARK ROZZO



The project for *Washington Crossing the Delaware* was launched after an 1864 Mathew Brady photograph of the painting resurfaced, revealing the original frame.



The 12-foot triumphal crest was carved by Félix Terán, who hails from San Antonio de Ibarra, an Ecuadorian hill town known for master carvers.



Wilner's frame took two years to complete and is as epic as the painting itself: 3,000 pounds, 12 feet high by 21 across, 15,000 sheets of gold leaf.



Wilner grew up in Israel and Florida and studied at Brandeis University before coming to New York. "I started out as an artist," he says. "I always wanted to have my work hanging in museums, and now I do!"



Wilner framed Frida Kahlo's *Roots*, along with sundry works for the Smithsonian, Corcoran, Kimball and the Met, including John Sargent's *Madame X*.



There's even a Wilner iPhone app, which allows one to upload a photo or a work of art and experiment with different framing options, from sleek to gilded.

ASK THE EXPERT

ELI WILNER

Framing Pioneer

Found a Turner—or a long-lost art school masterpiece—in the attic? Wilner offers advice on how to make any frame, old or new, shine.

**1** "First, determine if the frame is original," he says. Flip the painting over and check out the back (or "verso," in framing lingo): Look for labels, signatures and dates, and see if the corners have been cut down or altered. If the wood looks old and the corners look intact, there's a good chance you have an original frame.

**2** If you do have an original frame, he says, "restore it to its original intended condition." Check closely for water damage, chipping or signs that the surface, whether gilt or wood, might have been painted over. This will determine how much work needs to be done.

**3** "If the frame isn't original," Wilner says, "examine the art by itself." Do this by closing one eye, placing your fist up against the other eye like a telescope and slowly opening the fist to reveal the painting and then the frame. "If the picture looks better without the frame, then re-framing is in order."

**4** "My philosophy is to re-create the framing the original artist would have chosen," he says. To get ideas, visit a museum or read Wilner's book, *The Gilded Edge* (Chronicle Books).

**5** Take your time and always put what's best for the art first. "I would much rather see a painting frameless," Wilner says, "than with a bad frame."

Framing starts at \$6,500. Wilner also does custom projects such as flatscreen TVs (\$22,000 for an 18 x 24-inch frame). 212-744-6521; eliwilner.com.