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A SOUTH END GALLERY OWNER OFFERS A LOOK INSIDE HIS INTERNATIONAL ART BUSINESS

BY MICHAEL J. SOLENDER • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN SMITH

When Massoud Shiraz left Tehran, Iran, in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the 19-year-old art student couldn't possibly imagine his journey over the next two decades would find him settling 6,700 miles away in Charlotte, advising some of the most well known fine art collectors in the city.

Shiraz numbers collectors Andreas Bechtler, renowned surgeon Dr. Francis Robicsek, and former Charlotte Pipe CEO, Roddy Dowd, amongst his clients—a testament to his vast knowledge of pre- and post-Renaissance period art and an internationally recognized reputation as a restoration specialist. In 2002, Shiraz partnered with banking scion and fine art collector Hugh McColl to open a retail gallery in Charlotte's South End, the McColl Shiraz Gallery.

Shiraz's improbable solo journey led him through Istanbul and onto Rome where he built upon his natural talent as an artist and learned the painstaking craft of painting restoration and repair.

"While I was in Italy in the early '80s," Shiraz says. "I had a chance meeting in the small café where I worked with a master art conservator who did extensive work for the Vatican's art collection. After he learned of my art history background in Iran and my interest in fine art, I ended up apprenticing for him. I have worked in restoration as a conservator ever since."

Shiraz followed his brother to the United States in search of more and better opportunity. It wasn't long before he found both. Arriving in Charlotte in 1984, Shiraz joined his brother, who was a student at CPCC, and set out to make his mark.

"I knew no one in the city other than my brother," says Shiraz. "I did some paintings to sell







at flea markets and had some flyers promoting my restoration services printed. I distributed them by hand along a residential stretch of Queens Road assuming the residents of Charlotte's finest homes likely had fine art within them."


Ten thousand flyers later, Shiraz had his first assignment, a torn painting repair from one of Charlotte's most prominent CEOs. Though the assignment was small, it was one that would markedly set his future course as Charlotte's most prominent art conservator and restoration specialist.

"Massoud knows fine art, has a talented eye, and is well disciplined," says Andreas Bechtler, who's used Shiraz to clean, frame, and repair many pieces from his family collection, many on display in Uptown's Bechtler Museum of Modern Art.

Shiraz specializes in Renaissance-era Italian art and has worked on paintings dating from 1480 through 1620. He's also worked on many 19th century restorations and on pieces by contemporary artists. Work by Picasso, Matisse, Max Liebermann, and Giacometti are representative of the scores of pieces he's worked on.

When asked about the most expensive restoration project he has ever worked on, he can name the artist but not the collector or the exact painting for privacy reasons.

"A private European collector came to me with a self portrait by Hans Holbein," Shiraz says. "I estimated its value between \$15 and \$25 million."

Just another day at Massoud Shiraz's office. 

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MASSOUD A. SHIRAZ
RESTAURATOR
SINCE 1979

