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THE ART NEWSPAPER

Former Met director sparks Instagram spat over \$450m Leonardo da Vinci

Thomas Campbell posted an image of the Salvator Mundi before conservation, triggering a row with its former co-owner Robert Simon and Christie's Loic Gouzer

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Following the [\\$450.3m sale](#) of the Salvator Mundi at Christie's New York last week, Thomas Campbell, the former director and chief executive of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, has sparked controversy after posting an image on Instagram of the painting before restoration.

Below the image of the Leonardo da Vinci, [Campbell, who left the Met at the end of June](#), wrote the caption "450 million dollars?! Hope the buyer understands conservation issues..." followed by "[#readthesmallprint](#)".

Campbell's account [@thomaspcampbell](#) has 37,400 Instagram followers and, at the time of writing, the post had over 2,800 likes. But those less impressed with it include Robert Simon who, along with fellow New York-based dealers Alex Parish and Warren Adelson, bought the painting after it [appeared at a small provincial auction in the US in 2005](#). The consortium, known as the R.W. Chandler company, then tasked New York-based restorer Dianne Dwyer Modestini with conserving the painting.

In the comments below Campbell's Instagram post, [@robertsimonfineart](#) wrote: "Dr. Campbell, this is an incredibly ill-informed and mean-spirited comment about one of the most respected painting conservators in the world, one who incidentally spent many years diligently working at your former institution. I personally observed the conservation process on the Salvator Mundi and can attest to the absolute honesty, modesty, and respect that Dianne Modestini brought to her work on the painting—carried out at the highest ethical standards of the profession. Given the prevalence of so many foolish remarks in both serious and social media, I have refrained from responding, but feel compelled to do so now."

Campbell then responded: "I have [the] greatest respect for Modestini. Was simply remarking, as so many others have, on extensive amount of conservation. Seems to be a lot of over-sensitivity out there."

Another who, presumably, took exception to Campbell's post is Loic Gouzer, Christie's co-chairman of post-war and contemporary art in the Americas, who consigned the Salvator Mundi. Although no public comment from Gouzer appears, perhaps in response to a direct message Campbell writes: "[@loicgouzer](#) my comment was a legitimate response to an extraordinary price. Christie's doesn't need your abusive bullying to defend itself. And my comment certainly wasn't an attack on a highly competent conservator. If you don't enjoy my occasional Instagram posts then don't follow me."

The copyright for the original image posted by Campbell (along with others of the painting) is owned by Salvator Mundi LLC,

managed by Robert Simon, but the company licensed the exclusive use of these photographs to Christie's for the period around the auction. Before the sale, Christie's included the image in a video explaining the history and restoration of the Salvator Mundi. The photograph also appears in the book *Leonardo da Vinci's technical practice: Paintings, drawing and influence* by Michel Menu, published by Editions Hermann.

