

Don't scratch it!

Art experts touch up a classic table

By **Klara Kubiak**

IF YOU'VE ever laboured over a spot of home decorating, then spare a thought for these two.

For they won't be grabbing a roller to finish the job off quickly - even if they get tired.

Armed with tiny paintbrushes, art restoration experts at the National Gallery of Ireland got to work on an intricate 18th century scagliola table this week.

Flying in from the Opificio delle Pietre Dure institute in Florence, a

The antique needed a facelift

world leader in the field of art rejuvenation, the experts were on hand to help in the restoration of the beautiful scagliola table, which dates back to 1750.

Francesca Toso and Chiara Martinelli are tackling the painstaking refurbishment of the spectacular table-top, which is usually on display at Russborough House in Blessington, Co. Wicklow.

Russborough's management team sought the help of the National Gallery when the antique needed a bit of a facelift and the



Painstaking restoration: Francesca Toso and Chiara Martinelli tackle the 18th-century scagliola table

gallery turned to Miss Toso and Miss Martinelli for assistance.

Scagliola pieces are made from plaster that is treated to make it resemble more expensive marble or granite.

The plaster is mixed with mineral pigments to produce colour and then polished to give it a marble-like sheen.

The scagliola method became popular in Italy, in particular in Tuscany, in the 1600s and was used

extensively across Europe until the 19th century.

Russborough's scagliola table was made by Florentine painter Don Pietro Belloni in 1750 and usually stands in the front hall of the 18th century house.

When Sir Alfred Beit purchased Russborough in 1952 he discovered the scagliola table-top in an outbuilding, although it was unfortunately missing its original base.

Its owner subsequently commis-

sioned a new set of legs for the antique, ordered from by Hicks of Dublin, before putting the resulting 1750 scagliola top and 1950's base on public display.

The table is expected to be returned in all its original glory to Russborough when the house reopens to visitors in the spring, where it will then be re-united with its splendid gilded Rococo console base.

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