BUILDING BLOCKS How to Improve a Statue That's

NEW YORK

Been Made to Dazzle? Tone It Down

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artisans still exist — could be found clambering in mid-September over the Sherman Monument at Fifth Avenue and 59th Street, in Grand Army Plaza.

No one has ever accused New York City of understatement.

Yet it was in the service of subtlety that five gilders — such

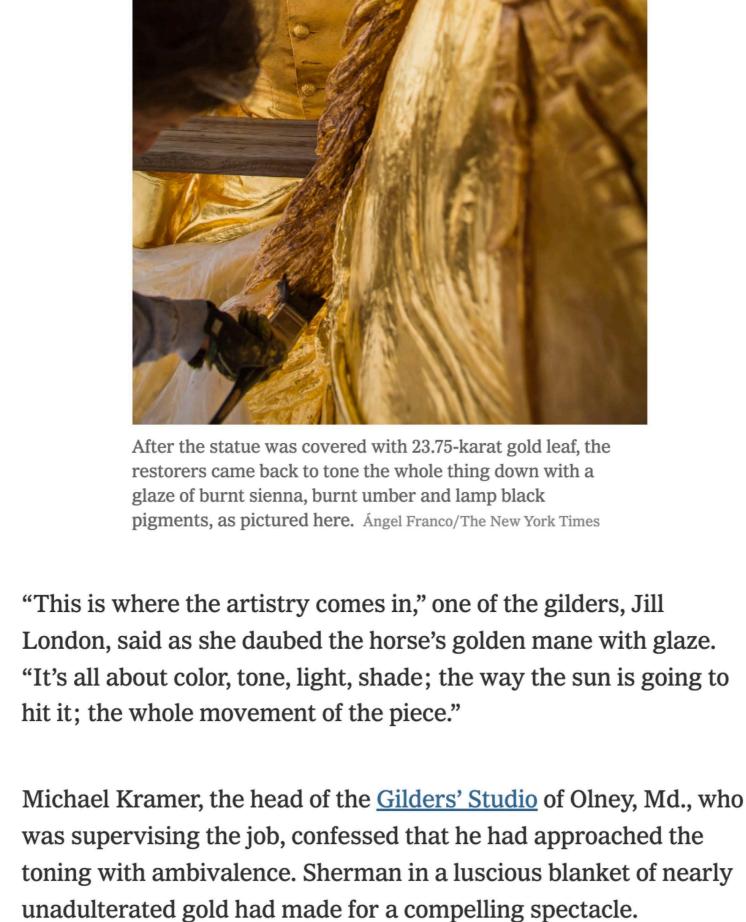
counterproductive. At the end of August, they had painstakingly

heroic equestrian statue of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman by Augustus Saint-Gaudens with 1,200 square feet of 23.75-karat gold

That left the 110-year-old sculpture as breathtakingly brilliant as a newly struck proof coin.

of burnt sienna, burnt umber and lamp black pigments. The glaze was darker than muddy espresso as the gilders brushed it on to the sculpture's undulating surfaces, stippled it into the pores and crevices of the bronze and wiped it gently away with rags.

But then they came back to tone the whole thing down with a glaze



Quickly apparent, however, was that toning did not dull the gold. It

accentuated it. Every crevice in Sherman's battle-weary face and

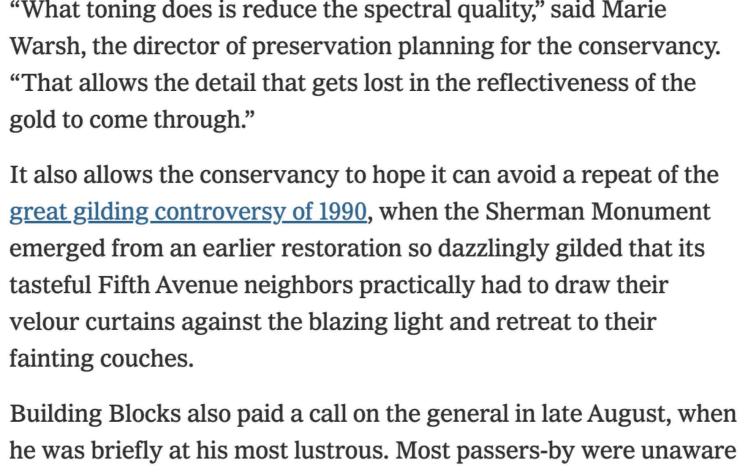
upraised hand of the allegorical Victory figure seemed soft enough

all the grain in the horse's nap had become sharply legible. The

to caress.

from within. One could imagine creatures of flesh, rather than chocolate Easter rabbits wrapped in bright foil.

money was raised privately.



of the transformation, since the monument is enclosed in

scaffolding.

Conserving a General and His Horse

button. It occurred to this reporter to rub vigorously against the fresh gilding and leave the park with enough residue on his clothes to retire early. However, I learned that the leaf is so finely worked that only 12 ounces of gold were used to cover the entire

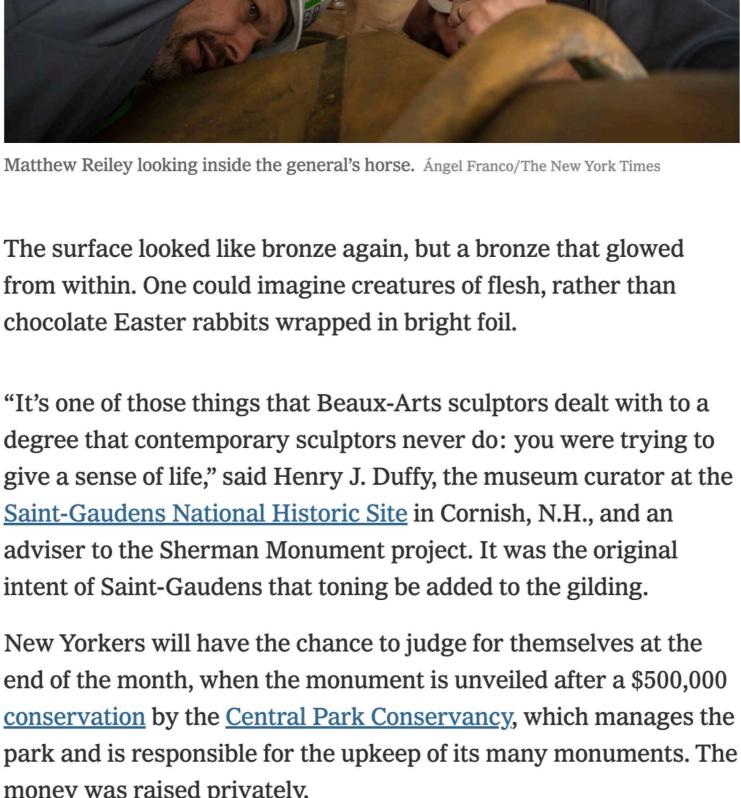
monument. The total bill for the leaf was \$40,000. I would have

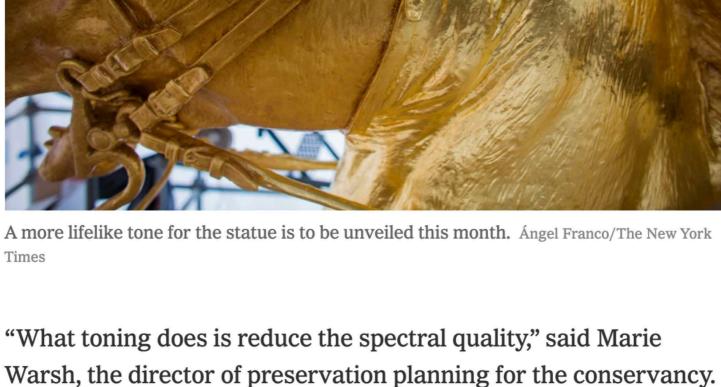
been lucky to get out with 50 cents' worth.

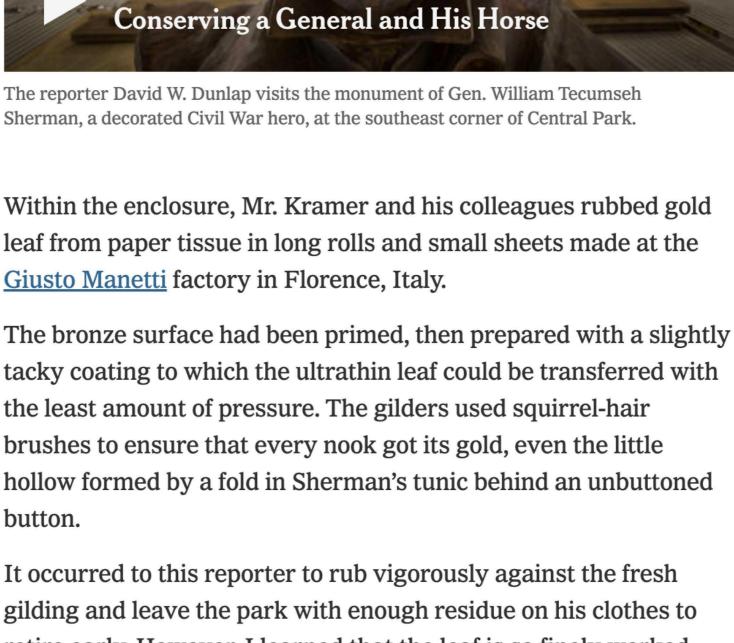
Instead, I asked Mr. Kramer, 61, how one gets into the gilding business. He said he had worked for a master decorative painter when he was an undergraduate at the University of Maryland in the late 1960s. The painter's clients included embassies and churches, and Mr. Kramer learned the joys of gilding. It was that, he said, or social work.

He established the Gilders' Studio 25 years ago. "Exterior gilding is

what we really like to do and exterior sculpture we like to do more







than anything else," Mr. Kramer said. "This is probably the finest piece I've ever worked on. This sculpture is equal to none." A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 3, 2013, Section A, Page 24 of the New York edition with the headline: How to Improve a Statue That's Been Made to Dazzle? Tone It Down. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe

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At first, their work seemed counterintuitive. Or at least covered every bump, hump, appendage and protuberance in the leaf.







