The museum of useful things

CEFR C2 | Unit 3: Heritage | Reading

Read the original text. You may underline evidence and reread as needed.

Name _____ Date _____

ORIGINAL EXHIBITION COMMENTARY

The old workshop has been restored to a condition its workers would scarcely recognize: every surface clean, every tool obediently numbered, every inconvenience removed except the steep stairs. Visitors are invited to admire the dignity of labor from behind a cord that keeps them comfortably apart from it.

On a small card, almost apologetically placed, a former apprentice remembers the room differently. The drawer stuck. The window admitted rain. A colleague could identify a tool by the way it fell, which was fortunate because the labels had long since disappeared. The account offers no easy nostalgia. It remembers skill alongside discomfort, companionship alongside the wish to go home.

A visitor asks whether the polished display is therefore false. The question is understandable, but too complete. Conservation necessarily changes an object's conditions. The issue is what the display lets those changes mean. A numbered tool may help a visitor learn its name; a room presented as though it had always been orderly may conceal the improvisation that made work possible.

The commentary's irony is directed at a particular mode of reverence, not at preservation itself. To explain it for readers unfamiliar with the workshop, one must keep that target in view. Translating dignity as a simple compliment would flatten the passage; treating every clean surface as an accusation would overread it. The apprentice's mixed memory supplies the resistance to both.

Original Ilmiya practice text. Scenarios and research examples are fictional.