Collaborators: Sagita Mirjam Sunara, Katarina Hraste
Jurica Matijević, Ivka Lipanović

Authors:
Conservation-Restoration Treatment of the 16th/17th Century Icon Representing the Virgin and Child

The 16th or 17th C panel painting, with a Madonna (the Madre di Consolazione type) and Child by the workshop of the master of the Croatian Venetian school belonging to the Town Museum of Korčula. The painting is rectangular in shape, measuring 182.1 x 122.2 cm, and was executed in the technique of tempera on wooden panels (pinewood)

The Sandy bugs are placed against gold background. The Virgin, represented in three-quarter profile, is gently leaning towards the Child on her right, holding him with both arms. The Child is dressed in a green garment and a dark red cloak (maforion) trimmed with a gold embroidered border with stars inscribed within rhombus frames, at the sides by stylized stars
The ends of the mafion are tied together with a gold buckle, shining on her breast. Her shoulders and head are adorned with richly embroidered stars. The Child wears an orange red himation embroidered with stylized gold flow- ers and stars, holding with his left hand and an unsworn scroll

The meaning of the inscription is unclear, it is certain only that it was written in gold letters. It is assumed that it originally read "THA KUNDV " KDAI " EAI " TIVA " KNDZI " " IPOIC " " " " MEK " meaning “the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me” (Luke 4:18). The same inscription is to be found of several icons in Dalmatia, includ- ing the one by Nikola Zarfoini in Split Art Gallery, to which the Korčula painting bears strong re- semblances
At some time in the past the icon was overpainted in the way that the new painting followed the original form. Since then the overpainting has darkened signifi- cantly, making the picture dark brown, almost black

The state of preservation of the original painting was ascertained by means of test areas. The microchemical investigation showed the presence of size in the overpainting. Although the original varnish was not immediately removed, small damages could not be avoided. During the removal of overpaint, special care was paid to the Virgin's maforion, in order not to incur un- due damage to the red glaze
Since the mechanical cleaning caused damage to the gilding, this area was cleaned chemically. After some experimental testing, it was decided to use formic acid as sol- vent. The original discouloured var- nish was removed with dimethyl- sulfoxide. Since the wood support was severely damaged by insect at- tacks, the worst damaged parts were restored with putty, but not painted. The putty was consolidated with a specifi- cally created excipient and, in order to secure a better bond between putty and wood, the wood was coated with a solu- tion of Klucel E 10% in ethanol. For putty, Klucel E 10% in ethanol was used, with the addition of ethyl- acrolein. This mixture was air- dried inside the holes
In order to re-establish the out- lines of the icon heavily compro- mised by means of telluric glue (pricks), the support at its top edge was re- placed with balsa wood. To secure the reversibility of the process, the new putty layer of the over- paint was varnished, instead of gluing it directly to the panel. The gilding was done with PW glue sold under the market name Drvofix.

The reconstructed areas were re- touched with colours in which pig- ment was bound with Klucel E 10% in ethanol and dacteinol acetate, as medium. This particular bind- er was chosen because it allows easy removal of the retouch, with- out incurring further damage to the original ground. The retouch- ing of the wooden support gave the picture a smoother and more com- pared appearance, without hid- ing information for further re- search, such as traces of diagonal cuts into the wood or traces in the damaged parts of the icon. Besides, in this way the attention of the observer was fo- cused on the representation. On the backside of the icon, the support was locally consolidated with a solution of Klucol E 10% in ethanol. The ground was reconstructed using Klucol E 10% in ethanol, as binding agent, and Champagne chalk, as filler. The underpaint- ing was executed with colours in which pigment was bound with mixture of Klucol E 5% in ethanol, and dacteinol acetate (1:1). For ir- regular damages, varnish PVA Fard 827, 10% in toluene, was used. For retouching, colours in which pigment was bound with Canada gum were used. In order to even out the gloss of the whole painted sur- face, the icon was varnished with the addition of 2% of toluene. The varnish was not air- dried
For additional protection of the picture a special coating of card- board, styrofoam and canvas was applied as a backing, which was then covered with a backing of balsa wood. This is the reason why the overall look and the general appearance were more than well preserved, and the overall look of the icon was the same as when it was presented in the exhibition at the Art Academy in Split. In future, the icon is to be stored with balsa wood. To secure the reversibility of the process, the new varnish layer of the over- paint was varnished, instead of gluing it directly to the panel. The gilding was done with PW glue sold under the market name Drvofix

The conservation-restoration treatment of the 16th/17th century icon representing the Virgin and Child

The conservation and restora- tion treatment of the icon was the degree project of student Inka Lipanović, carried out under the mentorship of professor Jurica Matijević in the Conservation- Restoration Department of the Arts Academy in Split
Immediately upon the arrival of the icon in the studio, the restor- er faced the acute problem of varnishing of the wooden support and tent-shaped lifting of the painting. As this continued even at the slightest changes in relative hu- midity had failed, the ridge of the tent-shaped lifting was removed in order to enable the painter layer to flatten
The painting was cleaned gradu- ally. The overpaint was removed mechanically, under microscope. Although the original varnish was not immediately removed, small- er damages could not be avoided. During the removal of overpaint, special care was paid to the Virgin's maforion, in order not to incur un- due damage to the red glaze
Since the mechanical cleaning caused damage to the gilding, this area was cleaned chemically. After some experimental testing, it was decided to use formic acid as sol- vent. The original discouloured var- nish was removed with dimethyl- sulfoxide. Since the wood support was severely damaged by insect at- tacks, the worst damaged parts were restored with putty, but not painted. The putty was consolidated with a specifi- cally created excipient and, in order to secure a better bond between putty and wood, the wood was coated with a solu- tion of Klucel E 10% in ethanol. For putty, Klucel E 10% in ethanol was used, with the addition of ethyl- acrolein. This mixture was air- dried inside the holes
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