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Ανασυνθέτοντας την Εικόνα: Περί της αποτελεσματικότητας μεθόδων αποκατάστασης σε ζωγραφικές επιφάνειες Θεωρία και πράξη στο Τμήμα Συντήρησης του Μουσείου Μπενάκη

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Reconstructing the Image: A Discussion on the Effectiveness of Restoration Methods for Painted Surfaces. Theory and Practice at the Benaki Museum Conservation Department

RESTORATION, AS A SERIES OF PROCESSES that interfere with the form of objects, intends to bring forth a balanced effect that harmonizes their documentary character with their aesthetic dimension. Its purpose is to enhance the visual interpretation of artefacts and to approximate as closely as possible their former or earlier and more comprehensible state. In that sense, restoration establishes a strong visual language that forms part of the meaning-making process, which takes place in museums, as it equips artefacts with visual accessibility, and thus adds significantly to textual curatorial interpretation.

As a general rule, decisions regarding restoration are made principally on aesthetic grounds and depend on the integrity of the artefact as this derives from its original (or earlier) condition – or to be more precise – from the presumed idea of its original (or earlier) condition in conjunction with the extent and nature of its deterioration, its possible alteration, adaptation, reuse and interpretation as well as its past restoration. Other criteria involve the inherent socio-cultural and art historical context(s) of the object as well as the acquired museological/museographical framework it is to be presented and displayed within, which relates inextricably to the aesthetic requirements of the institution and the particular approach adopted by its conservation department. All these factors may be filtered through the personal aesthetic intuition and choice of the conservator.

Throughout its 37-year history the Icons/Paintings/Woodcarvings Laboratory of the Benaki Museum Conservation Department, in conformity with international standards, has successfully managed to retain the historical

accuracy of the museum's artefacts and the need for their visual contemplation, undisrupted by loss and damage, in equilibrium. The aim has always been to meet the needs for scholarly research and, at the same time, satisfy standard visitors' expectations in favour of aesthetic harmony, but not at the expense of authenticity.¹ Reconstruction is aesthetically sustainable if it intends only to help museum users – current as well as future visitors (experts and non-experts) – see the potential formal unity of the work in a straightforwardly distinguishable manner as to what is original and what constitutes a conservator's intervention.² Hence, restoration stops where hypothesis begins.³

In dealing with paintings conservators see initially images. The predominance of paintings' visuality over any other physical aspect compels conservators (as well as standard museum visitors) to experience them initially from an aesthetic point of view despite the fact that there is a considerable amount of artworks that abandon aesthetic norms;⁴ hence, one way of looking at paintings is to consider them as events unrelated functionally, emotionally and intellectually to anything else, but themselves.⁵ The museum experience cannot be detached from the occasions of its instances. It occurs while looking at the museum artefacts, and because of its visual nature, it becomes aesthetic by definition and, as such, it represents a moment of revelation, an event of coming to see what is at play within a work because the truths of aesthetics cannot be prevailed upon reason alone and their validity resides precisely in their coming to be seen.⁶ The perception of a painting entails the relation between the purely physical process of seeing the object as a spatial phenomenon and the mental

activity of recognizing what that work has evoked in one's mind. The image prevails not as a sensible entity alone, but as an element of perception. Hence, the importance of restoration as a critical visual and, in effect, interpretative act consists in the immediate impact it has on the way this image is perceived, considered and remembered. Linguistic contextualization inevitably comes second and engenders what is held within the image.

Within this framework, the restoration on paintings is prominent for it recovers the aesthetic experience, which the contemplation of their representation brings in, and enables viewers to make direct contact with artistic vision and intent. This latter argument – even though not a pretext – is a sort of criterion (occasionally a deluding one) that helps determine treatment goals and resolve upon choices. However, the conservators' intervention does not guarantee that a work is restored to its original state. The question of artistic intent when it comes to unraveling restoration matters can be a debatable issue because it cannot always be ascertained. This denotes, on the one hand, the irreversible nature of deterioration and, on the other, it indicates the consequential ineffectiveness of restoration to reinstate fully original intention. The notion of original intent, in its contemporary context, may derive to a large extent from speculations and assumptions; therefore, it cannot and should not always be legitimized as a justification for restoration treatments despite the fact that scientific analyses enable conservators to get insights into the creative process of art. Even if there is sufficient evidence on the technical aspects of a work's making, the irreversible changes, which time has brought forth, inevitably efface original intention.⁷ Furthermore, for a painting that has already been conserved and restored more than once in the past there can be no criterion for its 'correct appearance' that is in accordance with originality because the extent of the interference may have altered or erased original materials⁸ (e.g. in an over-cleaned painting it is highly possible that any evidence of glazing has been rubbed off; so the retouching one may perform will have to match a painted surface modified already and in precarious ways sometimes). Hence, restoration deals with material identity in such a way that all the iconographic data entailed in an artwork is disclosed as a result of the visualization of its historical progression and any intervention carried out by others. Relevance to contemporary audiences should at all times be pursued.

In order to reinterpret the relational variables of a painted surface within its structure and appearance, conservators recreate a sense of the material, the medium and the technique and by doing so they do not recreate the object itself, but rather interpret the current state of what has survived.⁹ In so doing, retouching reduces the effects of lacunae, which interrupt the configuration of a painting, not as being gaps, but rather as inappropriate insertions. It is not a question of what is missing, but of what interferes with the unity of the work. Hence, a lacuna is not circumscribed to the spot it is situated, but takes on the part of the figure and messes up with the whole field of vision. As a perceptual experience, the lacuna moves forth, but when filled and retouched properly it recedes into the background.¹⁰ This distorted pattern of perception, which Cezare Brandi (1906-1988) first affirmed being influenced by the Gestalt theory, imposes the need to re-establish the proper relationships within the visual image and to reduce the interruption caused by losses.¹¹ Nonetheless, this does not mean that the lacuna is excluded; instead, it may stay on as a fully integrated element of the aesthetic character of objects.

Some of the core principles Brandi argued for, which have had wide acceptance in conservation laboratories worldwide – namely, the irreversible effects of time and the conservator's considerations not to expunge any such evidence; the aim of restoration to reinstate unity; the significance of an object's original and current context; the inversion of perception, which losses induce to painted surfaces and the discernible nature of retouching – are well-respected and serve as useful guidelines at the Benaki Museum Conservation Department – despite the fact that this has adopted the Anglo-Saxon tradition in terms of the prevailing cleaning policy and retouching completion method. While Brandi rejects imitative restoration in favour of the *tratteggio* technique (which is discussed later in the essay), imitation has become standard practice at the Benaki Museum as the majority of paintings (icons, fine art as well as decorative painted surfaces) have been and are still restored accordingly.

In any way, in any form and in whatever completion method it is performed, retouching is a necessity; to some, it is a necessary evil because the fact that restoration is not a precondition for the preservation of objects makes it optional and this entails the involvement of the conservator's personal and, in effect, subjective aesthetic judgement, which in the past had, on many occasions, lead to arbi-



Fig. 1. The icon of Saint Mathew after the completion of its treatment. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 3735b (photo: S. Stassinopoulos).

trariness.¹² This sort of attitude is in sharp contrast with contemporary conservation and restoration principles, which enable conservators to perform within an ethically acceptable framework, and also qualifies them to critically evaluate their peers' acts. Nowadays, there is a tendency to intervene as little as possible and keep conservation within the limits of preservation, whereas restoration is restricted to simply making the object understandable. Even so, minimalism in conservation and restoration is not regarded as an absolute criterion; it is rather a relative principle that each time depends on the purpose of the action.¹³ The notion of minimum intervention has had a high profile since the 1980's, but as a standard it is incomplete because each time a different question has to be posed and a different goal has to be set. The term emerged as a reaction to inappropriate practices of earlier times, but it is purely a 'context-dependent' issue.¹⁴

Thus, what we choose to in-paint with and how we choose to do that depend on the extent and nature of the

loss in relation to the painting's subject-matter and the degree to which this can or cannot be construed by the museum audience including ourselves.

The case studies that follow reflect a variety of approaches and completion methods employed for the reconstruction and retouching of damaged areas in a range of painted surfaces from the Benaki Museum collections that have been performed within the accepted ethical and theoretical basis of the profession. Their selection and application extend from non-interventive presentations to complex reconstructions, and illustrate the fact that treatments are considered always in relation to the nature of objects and their deterioration over a given time and in given circumstances. Rules apply accordingly; something that is extreme interference for one object may simply be standard treatment for another and vice versa.

Three situations apply: complete reconstruction of damaged areas; selective retouching on those losses that are noticeable and therefore interrupt the continuity of the represented subject-matter; or total lack of any sort of restoration presuming that the object is comprehensible enough as it is or that it is impossible to retrieve any sort of evidence that would allow the reconstruction of its missing parts.¹⁵ The icon of Saint Mathew (inv. no. 3735b, Department of Byzantine Art, middle of 16th century, attributed to a workshop affiliated with the art of Theophanis the Cretan,¹⁶ conserved by Stergios Stassinopoulos in 1975-76) comprises such an example. The extent of its deterioration and the limited evidence regarding the facial features and the garments of the saint, which were extensively damaged, imposed the decision not to undertake any sort of reconstruction on these defective areas (fig. 1).¹⁷ In theory, this kind of 'inaction' may also mirror the notion that the reconstitution of damaged areas devalues the work of art to an everyday commodity – since parts of it can be easily replaced – and therefore restoration makes a concession in terms of historical authenticity. This attitude has been shaped in reaction to the unrestrained and, in most cases, unneeded restorations of the past. Within this context, the artwork is considered an instrument of instruction and learning, hence only conservation of its material structure is undertaken.¹⁸ However, and besides any sort of academic argument that favours such perspective, this non-interventive approach is the one and only response to the predicament, which fragmented works usually entail, and that is the insufficient information as to



Fig. 2. The icon of the Virgin Panhymnetos after restoration. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 27875 (photo: K. Milanou).



Figs 3-4. Details of the Virgin Panhymnetos during filling (top) and after neutral colour integration (bottom). Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 27875 (photos: K. Milanou).

their form; thus, any kind of retouching would bring about fallacious interpretations.

The choice to refrain from restoration may also derive from the particularly high status the artwork under treatment brings with it, as it may have been granted social, cultural and/or artistic significance either as distinctive item or as exemplar of a class of artworks related to the time they were produced or a later period. Nevertheless, the criteria of significance, uniqueness or fame may not always impose total absence of restoration; on the contrary, they may associate with highly restorative treatments. In any way, the work of art is 'sanctified'; it is either venerated as historical document, hence any restoration seems disrespectful, or revered as artistic function, which means that restoration is deployed to

make up for an aesthetic intent that is however long gone.¹⁹

In case it is decided that the object requires restoration conservators have three alternatives to choose from: neutral retouching, visible restoration or total (mimetic) retouching of the defective areas. All three methods have been used either systematically or occasionally for the restoration of numerous icons from the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine collections of the Benaki Museum.

Neutral restoration consists in the integration of an indeterminate colour in extensive areas of loss. The restoration of the icon of the Virgin Panhymnetos (inv. no. 27875, Department of Byzantine Art, middle of 16th century, Cretan workshop, conserved by Kalypso Milanou in 1989-1990) illustrates how a sense of unity of the aesthetic content of the object can be recreated without being explicitly defined (figs 2-4).²⁰ This becomes clearly evident in the way the Virgin's omophorion has been reconstructed – or to be more succinct – has not been reconstructed, as the drapery's folds in the damaged areas remain disrupted in terms of the modeling of their forms and their contours, but concealed in terms of their colours.²¹ The method places emphasis on the historical and material integrity of the work, whereas its aesthetic qualities are understated.²² The visibility of the lacuna is reduced by a neutral tint that usually ranges according to the tonality of the neighbouring original paint.²³

Visible restoration and the completion methods it can be rendered have not had wide application at the Benaki Museum Conservation Department. This approach maintains a good balance between the work of art, the individual spectator and the imitative sense and capacity found in human perception. It considers the documentary significance of the artwork with regard to its expressive potential,²⁴ and appeals to the beholder's input to the reading of an image.²⁵ Even so, colour reality – whether in the actual painting or a reconstructed area – consists in the pigment being a physico-chemical element that can be examined, analyzed and thus ascertained. The pigment acquires its pictorial content within human meaning through the processes of seeing and perception.²⁶ The retouching method of *tratteggio*, which Brandi articulated and restorers of the Istituto Centrale del Restauro, Rome perfected, exemplifies the rationalized approach in which colour of relative to the neighbouring original paint hue is applied to the damaged areas of the work in thin, hatched vertical strokes (*rigattino*). The brush strokes are visible on close

inspection, but hardly discernible if viewed at a distance.²⁷ Thus, the overall pictorial content of the image is visually recreated, as this completion method plays with alternating colour juxtapositions with variable density.²⁸ Alternatives to the *tratteggio* method are colour abstraction (*astrazione cromatica*) and colour selection (*selezione cromatica*) that produce a vibrating impression. Without replicating the original colour itself, these completion methods suggest it. Their aim is not to imitate, compete with or falsify the original; neither do they produce a differentiated imitation, nor do they imitate differentiation.²⁹ Lacunae within the painting are not considered loss, but linkages between the surviving work and the past. Tones are rendered according to the complementary colour mechanism. In abstraction, thorough interpretation of the entire chromatic scale of the painting is required,³⁰ whereas in selection the same mechanism applies, but colours are drawn from the surrounding areas of the loss. In all three cases, since the combinations stand on their own, the final blend does not take place on the surface of the painting, but in the viewers' retina.³¹ The intervention undertaken on the heavily overpainted icon of the Virgin and Child (inv. no. 35261, Department of Byzantine Art, 13th-14th and 18th centuries, possibly Thracian workshop, conserved by Stergios Stassinopoulos) is a sole – yet, vibrant – demonstration of the effects of visible restoration completed on the basis of the *astrazione cromatica* principles (figs 5-6). The treatment was indeed extensive, but not overwhelming or in any way misleading because it satisfied a primary need – that of turning the representation understandable; its retouching is thus a decent and fully integrated reinstatement of the aesthetic value of the icon as a museum object, which, above all, must be visually comprehensible, but at the same time makes a very clear differentiation from the surviving original.

Finally, in mimetic (or aesthetic) restoration the purpose is the reconstruction of the image of the work as an entirety. The extent to which the intervention is carried out is such that the work may regain a seemingly un-aged appearance. For those who oppose full restoration, the method constitutes a reconstruction of an imagined past performed by the restorer in the present. Being guided by the remaining design and colour of the painting the conservator executes a flawless and almost invisible retouching. Contrary to visible restoration, when it comes to small-scale lacunae, total retouching does not take into consideration the mechanisms of perception. It is rather a



Figs 5-6. The icon of the Virgin and Child during visible integration of form and colour (top) and after the completion of restoration (bottom). Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 35261 (photos: S. Stassinopoulos).

‘tautological exercise’ in which the eyes bridge directly the gaps and read the image as a whole.³²

In the case of heavily damaged works, though, such intervention may be carried out selectively only on those losses that disturb continuity; its purpose therefore focuses on reducing distraction without however producing a perfect image. The final result reconciles two extremes. Selective retouching does not offer an illusion of completeness; it is not deceptive – although it could be argued that it may become confusing as to how much of the remaining painting is actually original – but corrective rather. A recent example is the icon of the Enthroned Virgin and Child with Saints Timotheos and Athanasios from the Valadorou bequest (inv. no. 46145, Department of Byzantine Art, *ca.* 18th century, conserved by Alexandros Konstantas in 2010). The icon has been partly restored; its reconstruction focused on the filling and retouching of the large middle split that runs down the centre of the painted surface including the restoration of the exposed wooden support (with tinted balsa wood), the crack on the left, the losses on the top right of the background and some of the losses on the lower part of the Virgin’s dress leaving all peripheral, marginal lacunae intact (figs 7-8).

This is one of numerous instances of icon restoration cases, which have been similarly dealt with. Selective retouching tends to be standard treatment either for icons coming from the museum’s collections or for privately owned relics. In the case of family icons and whenever full, invisible restoration is requested or anticipated by their owners it is the Department’s obligation to discuss all possible options that range from the minimum to the maximum degree of intervention that is, of course, within the context of an ‘ethically sustainable restoration conduct’. This may read rather contentiously because selective retouching eventually derives from subjective judgement, and the characterization of some lacunae as ‘disfiguring’ or ‘more distracting than others’ inevitably acquires a personal undertone. This fact brings into discussion the question of drawing up clear-cut boundaries between the idiosyncratic urge to restore damage and the requirement for impartial presentation.

Alternatively, and depending on the extent and nature of the defective areas, we may resort to transitional or combination forms of the discussed methods.³³ As a case in point the icon of the Virgin and Child with busts of saints (inv. no. 32650, Department of Byzantine Art, 13th century, possibly from Crete, conserved by Kalypso Milanou



Figs 7-8. The icon of the Virgin and Child with Saints Timotheos and Athanasios before (left) and after restoration (right). Athens, Benaki Museum, Valadorou bequest, inv. no. 46145 (photos: A. Konstantas).

in 1994) has been retouched in places in neutral toning, whereas the face of the Christ has been reconstructed in standard retouching.³⁴

The aforementioned examples vividly illustrate a moderate approach to restoration that sets limits. In each and every case, however, there is a different limit that halts restoration from going further. Whatever that object might be, restoration induces alteration in a perceivable way, and regardless of the extent to which it is performed, it is intrusive by nature. Therefore, minimal, as a term, does not signify the minimalization of the intervention, but the effacement of its negative and unwelcome effects and consequences.³⁵ In this context, even in the case of the icon of Saint Mathew in which there was no reintegration of losses, the fact that it was detached from a double sided icon that represents on the other side the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (inv. no. 3735a, Department of Byzantine Art, 2nd half of the 17th century, possible Ionian Islands' workshop) is explicit of a particularly interventive

treatment.³⁶ As for the Enthroned Virgin and Child with Saints Timotheos and Athanasios icon that was partially restored, its treatment raises serious issues regarding – apart from the question of how minimal is minimal – that of original intent, which was discussed earlier in the essay (and this, of course, applies to all objects, which are similarly dealt with). It is obvious that to see finished works in fragmented state has never been the case for the artists who created them (unless we are dealing with some forms of contemporary art in which deterioration or ephemerality are intended), and yet, in works like the Valadorou bequest, which could have been reconstructed to a much larger extent, the treatment had been circumscribed to the 'disfiguring' losses only because a far-reaching and comprehensive restoration of the particular icon (or any object alike) would contradict conservation ethics for it would constitute a fake. This is a standard – and yet, variable – principle of conservation ethics because there can be as many different opinions as to what to retouch and what



Fig. 9. E. Zongolopoulou, *Still Life with a Soup Tureen*, before conservation (photo: D. Doumas).

Fig. 10. The original painting by Paul Cézanne. Paris, Musée d'Orsay, inv. no. RF 2818 [photo: *Cézanne et Pissarro* (n. 40) 90].

Figs 11-12. E. Zongolopoulou, *Still Life with a Soup Tureen*, during filling (left) and retouching (right) (photos; D. Doumas).

not to as the number of conservators in the Department.

On the other hand, and as we will see in the following three examples, this rule does not apply to all sorts of objects. There appears to be an issue of chronological division, since early paintings we seem to accept with lacunae, whereas later ones we seem to prefer 'complete', hence the prevailing notion is that restoration should be in agreement

with the age of the work. This kind of discrimination may also relate to the assumed cultural or artistic significance of the work under treatment, or it may associate with the particular function the object had originally, which, in turn, may shape an attitude, or a preconception that influences restoration intentions. Icons and Early Italian paintings fall within this category.³⁷ They both constitute forms of im-

agery that serve specific religious purposes and, therefore, relate to cult practices. Icons, in particular, have been dealt with as fragments of anthropological and ritualistic interest rather than fine art. This theoretical reflection on their restoration encompasses a debate concerning the variable status of icons from works of art to historic objects and references to the Divinity.³⁸ By contrast, the restoration of secular paintings involves the re-establishment of the work's formal continuity, which total retouching brings forth, and enables the reconstitution of an artwork's 'perfect' image – clearly read and interpreted – provided that any sort of falsehood is avoided and that the legitimacy of the treatment guarantees authenticity.

All three methods previously discussed (neutral, visible and selective restoration) juggle between the current state of the artwork and the improvement of its appearance as far as readability is concerned, whereas by contrast, in mimetic retouching, the aim is to bring back the object to its presumed original or earlier state to the extent that this can be discerned and justified in terms of conservation ethics. Once decided, imitative restoration is not performed indiscriminately to all kinds of painted surfaces in a standardized method, but involves varied degrees of interference that may take on the form of suggestive or simulated reconstruction or it may entail replication.

The next three cases reflect this attitude to the way continuity can be reconstituted. They push integration to the maximum and may reach to a certain extent illusionism; and yet, despite all that, their nature – quite dissimilar from one another – emerges from the very formal structure of the works and their damage.

In 2010 a painting by Eleni Zongolopoulou (1909-1993) from the N. Hadjikyriakos-Ghika Gallery³⁹ reached the Benaki Museum Conservation Department in poor condition (fig. 9). The work (oil on canvas) is a copy – or rather a study – of one of Paul Cézanne's still lifes. Cézanne (1839-1906) paints the original *Nature Morte à la Soupière* (*Still Life with Soup Tureen*, Musée d'Orsay, inv. no. RF 2818) around 1877 in Camille Pissarro's studio at Pontoise (fig. 10).⁴⁰ The copy, by Eleni Zongolopoulou, painted in the 1930s, was seriously damaged probably due to mechanical wear. Nearly two-thirds of the painting on the left-hand side was intact, while one-third of the composition on the right was detached from the canvas support, hence a considerable amount of the background, the fruits and basket



Fig. 13. E. Zongolopoulou, *Still Life with a Soup Tureen*, after completion of restoration (photo: D. Doumas).

and particularly the table-cloth were missing. The painting received full treatment (by the author), which included – apart from consolidation – the lining of the canvas support and the stretching of the painting onto a new stretcher. The areas of loss were then filled with a fine layer of gesso (fig. 11). It was evident that retouching would be completed in an imitative manner, but prior to that, a decision had to be made as to whether the original painting by Cézanne would provide a model for retouching. There are striking differences between the two paintings: Zongolopoulou does not produce an exact copy; hence her composition is more fluid and blurred particularly in the table-cloth motifs – with implications for their reconstruction – and the paintings depicted on the background; the brush-strokes are swift and the foreshortening is distorted, as all represented items seem to be slightly elongated. On the other hand, the original work has a solid structure with acutely defined forms and shapes and pronounced brush-strokes. Cézanne executes his painting in warm bright colours that produce a vibrant and luminous effect, while the palette of Zongolopoulou contains a much lighter and cooler version of the original tonal and colour juxtapositions. Having made such observations it was decided to deal with the work of Zongolopoulou as an autonomous artefact and no reference



Fig. 14. The painting displayed at the N. Hadjikyriakos-Ghika Gallery (photo: D. Doumas).

was made to the original. Evidently, there were particular difficulties in rendering certain sections, particularly the table-cloth. However, small islands of surviving paint were indicative of its colour pattern; hence, despite the extent of the damage, there were still sufficient traces that would enable its reconstruction in indefinite forms of colour that intermingle with each other in a base-coat sense with no primary and secondary modeling. On the other hand, the reconstruction of the fruits and basket entailed a more detailed elaboration of forms. The retouching was completed with ground pigments mixed in Berger's PVA Inpainting Medium.⁴¹ The paint was gradually built up, thinly applied in successive layers so as for transparency to be achieved. The final effect of the retouched areas resulted in a differentiated texture compared to that of the surviving original (fig. 13). Even though acrylics might have suited the matte and, on occasions, opaque quality of the work almost invisibly, the selection of PVA and the deliberate low concentration of the suspended pigments in the medium produced a glaze-like effect at variance with the surface quality of the

original. This discrepancy, imposed by conservation ethics, alludes to the principle of the detectable nature of retouching, even in the case of imitative restoration.

The way the many different stages of a painting's treatment are interlinked is best reflected in the following case. Treatments at the Benaki Museum Conservation Department are individualized, but for each and every case – whether they concern the structure or/and the form of a work – they are considered holistically. The lining process, for instance, which in most cases is considered a highly interfering measure, can be seen as minimal intervention when it secures a weak and badly torn canvas for it aims at the prevention of further deterioration and also has a restorative effect for it is inextricably associated with the form and the texture of the work.⁴² The removal of disfiguring overpaintings is indeed a minimal act if it helps disclose the qualities of a great master's work, but it can be a painstaking, risky and hazardous process, and simultaneously – when no original paint survives underneath – it imposes the extensive retouching of the revealed damages. On the



Fig. 17. During the removal of the varnish and overpaintings (photo: S. Mavrou).



Fig. 15. Male portrait before conservation. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 31167 (photo: S. Mavrou).

Fig. 16. The painting in raking light (photo: S. Mavrou).

other hand, overpaintings may be preserved and/or rectified if they are well executed and properly integrated within the work's entity.

The work under discussion is a male portrait – presumably a leading figure of the Greek War of Independence (inv. no. 31167, Collection of Paintings, Drawings and Prints, 19th century, unknown artist, conserved by Sophia Mavrou and Irene Vlachodimou assisted by Nelly Kouri in 2010). The painting (oil on canvas) presented a range of serious problems affecting both its structure and appearance: a very weak, badly oxidized and deformed canvas support; poor adhesion of the ground and paint layers with consequential fragility, embrittlement and detachment resulting in considerable losses; extensive overpaintings; discoloured varnish and surface dirt (figs 15-16). The painting was lined with Beva 371 adhesive on a hot-vacuum table after being consolidated with Lascaux 498-20X. Hence, structural strength was imparted to both its support as well as its surface. The canvas regained its shape and any blistered paint flakes were firmly reattached



Figs 18-19. During filling (left) and after treatment (right) (photos: I. Vlachodimou).

to the textile support. The removal of the discoloured varnish and a substantial amount of overpaintings (fig. 17) dictated the reconstruction of the work's lost forms and the improvement of the remaining bits of restoration. As the cleaning process progressed, it became evident that the previous restoration, which compensated for sizeable losses and damages – despite its bad quality – kept the painting together. Some of the fillings, retouchings and overpaintings were badly executed (or followed the distorted colour scheme, which the oxidized varnish layers had produced), but some of them served a significant purpose – that of establishing some sort of continuity of design and unity of form. Therefore, and unlike standard practice, traces of that restoration were kept and refined for two reasons: first, if all later additions were cleaned indiscriminately nearly half of the painting would have to be removed; and second, these traces provided guidance for the improvement of defective areas and the reconstruction of missing parts. The retouching was completed with commercial acrylic paints (figs 18-19). On the one hand, this full-scale treatment allows the visual interpretation of

the painting, but at the same time, it endows the work with an ageless image since any evidence of damage has been omitted. One may contend that this simulating method of in-paint application deprives the work of the quality of time, which – to a certain extent – is true. However controversial, simulation does not reverse time, but contrary to the 'theoretical' completion procedures, it recovers an artwork's integrity with the utmost artistic empathy.

The third and final instance of a highly interventive restoration is indicative of our urge and 'greed' (both as museum professionals as well as potential viewers) to achieve and enjoy completeness. The object under treatment (inv. no. 39281, Department of Post-Byzantine and Neo-Hellenic Art, 17th century, possibly from Patmos) forms part of a larger wooden panel with decorative painting (fig. 20) and belongs to a unique group of painted wood revetments that date back to the late 17th century and are found in the Dodecanese Islands and particularly in Rhodes and Patmos.⁴³ The composition of the painting is made up of four sections; the largest part of the left section is missing. A rosette, a couple surrounding a flowery container with a



Figs 20-22. The painted wood revetment after cleaning (top) and during the rebuilding of the wooden support (bottom). Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 39281 (photos: D. Doumas).

grouse on top and a pair of grouse enfolding a smaller florid urn interrupted by three bands of interwoven ribbons (or twisted ropes) comprise the surviving configuration. The man on the left is depicted as troubadour playing the lute whereas the woman is placed on the right and waves at the man. Both of them wear western-style clothes.⁴⁴

The object was in relatively good condition and except for the intentionally cut section on the left, no major damage, deterioration or alteration had occurred. The treatment (performed by the author in 2004) involved mainly the removal of the discoloured varnish and the recreation of the missing section. After cleaning was completed the reconstruction of the wooden support was undertaken. This was done using initially a thin sheet of plywood inserted and glued into slots carved on both edges of the upper left corner, which the loss had created (the process was undertaken by Nikos Smyrnakis). This served as the underlying support upon which the main body of the infill was built up on both sides of the plywood (recto-verso) with successive layers of sheets of balsa wood (of varying thickness) cut to the required shape and finished to the appropriate texture (figs 21-22). A layer of reddish brown underpaint was then thinly applied throughout the surface of the new section, and an imprint of the neighbouring figures and motifs was taken in order to sketch the outlines of the configuration onto the new balsa support (fig. 23). The repetitive nature



Figs 23-25. Details during the reconstruction of the left part of the composition. Forms were gradually put together starting from the initial red undercoat (fig. 23) and progressed through to the rendering of details and final touches (figs 24-25). Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 39281 (photos: D. Doumas).

of the composition provided full evidence on its layout, which could be reconstructed to the finest detail. In terms of the colouration of the new section this was rendered – whenever possible – according to variations, which the surviving scheme implied. Otherwise, colours were replicated. For the male figure, for instance, at the far left of the composition, there were traces of brown paint on the trousers; thus these were executed in a similar tone, whereas the rest of the outfit was done in colours inversely proportional to those of the male figure on the right section. As for the reconstruction of the female figure there was indication of brown paint for the skirt as well, but the upper part of the dress was executed in the exact colouration of the female on the right. Retouching was done with ground pigments mixed in PVA Inpainting Medium and aimed at complete – nearly deceptive – imitation of the original painting (figs 24-25). After the completion of the inpainting process and before the application of the final coating the new section was gently rubbed with a fine sand-paper so as for the surface to acquire a slightly worn-off look (fig. 26).

It could be argued that the degree to which restoration was carried out was overwhelming or even unnecessary. The object still remains incomplete (for it was much longer anyway) and would be understandable enough as it were. Its restoration definitely opposes the dictum of minimalism in every sense; nevertheless, it is enhancing. In this respect, a more elaborate approach can be justified not for the sake of the object's unity only, but on the grounds of aesthetic preference and delight. Furthermore, however extensive the reconstructed in-fill may seem to be, it does not interfere with the work whatsoever; it is an addition, which – if decided – can be safely removed (or replaced) without jeopardizing the original surface.⁴⁵

Whichever the case – whether retouching is circumscribed within minuscule areas of loss or extends throughout large areas within the painted surface – the question is to produce a unified entity, not a perfect one (despite the fact that in some cases we may consciously end up with perfect – or seemingly perfect artefacts). With no modification of the original, restoration can and should be revised, amended, adjusted or replaced if some new and clearer discourse considers it necessary. For conservators, therefore it is a case of self-awareness and knowing where their limits are. Experience has taught conservators (as well as curators) to avoid speak out of a belief in absolutes. In restoring art – apart



Fig. 26. The object after treatment (photo: D. Doumas).

from the obvious adherence to conservation ethics - there can be subjective, relative truths equally legitimate, which nevertheless must coexist with the impartial display canons of the museum. Any kind of restoration can be vindicated to the extent that it fulfills a purpose and functions within the work's entirety being totally respectful of its integrity. As long as the in-paint is restricted within the lacuna and

there is sufficient documentation that enables its easy identification then retouching corrects the image the same way an edition improves a text.

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NOTES

* I would like to thank Ms. Elina Kavalieratou from the National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum, and to express my deepest gratitude to Kalypso Milanou for her invaluable advice.

1. K. Milanou, Η αισθητική αποκατάσταση των εικόνων του Μουσείου Μπενάκη, in: *Η Συντήρηση των Εικόνων: Μια Προσέγγιση στην Προβληματική, τις Μεθόδους και τα Υλικά που Χρησιμοποιούνται στα Εργαστήρια Συντήρησης σε όλο τον Κόσμο (Διεθνής Συνάντηση της Ομάδας Εργασίας Συντήρησης Εικόνων, Αθήνα 10-15 Οκτωβρίου 1995)* (Athens 1999) 103-07.

2. This conservation dictum comes as the result of decades of improper practice, which also points a considerable weakness in harmonizing restoration theory and praxis.

3. P. Mora – L. Mora – P. Philippot, Problems of presentation in: S.N. Price – K.M. Talley – A. Melucco Vaccaro (eds), *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage* (Los Angeles 1996) 345.

4. The aesthetic account of a work of art consists in its potential to bring about a particular effect as a result of its appearance. Nevertheless, aesthetic considerations are not central to all artworks. When it comes to modern and contemporary art in particular and in the case of subversive artists like Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys or Damien Hirst, who intentionally produced

works that do not convey aesthetic properties, as conventionally construed, the perception of artworks becomes dependent upon art historical and theoretical insights that enlighten the concepts behind their creation while the mere contemplation of their form does not seem to suffice. N. Warburton, *The Art Question* (London – New York 2003) 34-35.

5. The same applies to all sorts of objects – natural or man-made. In the case of natural objects it is a question of personal choice to perceive them aesthetically or not. In terms of how man-made objects may or may not be experienced depends on whether they are intended to fulfil a purpose or to convey meaning. Evidently, works of art do not have any practical purpose. See E. Panofsky, *The history of art as a humanistic discipline*, in: Price – Talley – Melucco Vaccaro (n. 3) 60-68.

6. N. Davey, *The Hermeneutics of seeing* in: I. Heywood – B. Sandywell (eds), *Interpreting Material Culture: Exploration in the Hermeneutics of the Visual* (London, New York 1999) 24.

7. M. Filippousi, Τα όρια της αντικειμενικότητας στις επεμβάσεις συντήρησης, in: *Συντήρηση και Έκθεση Συντηρημένων Έργων: Προβλήματα Τεχνικά, Προβλήματα Αισθητικά – Ημερίδα, Αθήνα, Βυζαντινό και Χριστιανικό Μουσείο, Τετάρτη 29 Ιανουαρίου 2003* (Athens 2005) 43.

8. S. Cove – A. Cummings, Restoring the English icon: portraits by William Larkin 1610-1619, in: V. Todd (ed.), *Appearance, Opinion and Change – Evaluating the Look of Paintings, Conference Papers* (London 1990) 49.

9. M. Berducou, Introduction to archaeological conservation in: Price – Talley – Melucco Vaccaro (n. 3) 248-59.

10. A loss has a shape and colour of its own, alien to the depiction of the painting; it has an autonomous body that is extraneous to the represented image, and in that sense – even though it has random structure – a lacuna can become the ‘figure’ and the representation of the painting ends up being the ‘background’ for it. See C. Brandi, *Η Θεωρία της Συντήρησης* (tr. I. Gabrielides, Athens 32009) 33-41, 93-100.

11. Cezare Brandi (1906-1988) with his *Teoria del Restauro* has produced perhaps one of the most comprehensive and well-structured systems of thought on restoration considered from a humanist perspective, and his texts have been immensely influential. Brandi is very much concerned with the relationship between the material and the image of artworks. Between the historical and the aesthetic considerations, which must be thoroughly respected during any restoration intervention, Brandi emphasizes the aesthetic dimension of the work. The fact that he makes a very succinct distinction between the surface of the work, which constitutes its image, and its structure, excludes three-dimensional objects from his theory, unless it is assumed that the appearance of a work is identified with its surface. Because Brandi’s precepts have been conceived for two-dimensional painted surfaces his arguments have been criticized by architects as he delimits the creativity of the architect-restorer. Furthermore, Brandi’s theory can hardly be applied to archaeology. See A. Melucco Vaccaro, The emergence of modern conservation theory, in: Price – Talley – Melucco Vaccaro (n. 3) 202-11.

Brandi’s fascination with ‘the complete image’ derives from the Gestalt theory of visual perception, which advocates the form of an entity as a complete and unified whole. Hence, restoration aims at re-establishing the unity of a work’s image. Based on the figure-and-ground relationship, which differentiates an object (figure) from its surrounding area (ground), Brandi applies this theory to damaged paintings. See A. Melucco Vaccaro, Reintegration of losses, in: Price – Talley – Melucco Vaccaro (n. 3) 326-31.

12. Retouching has always been carried out to make up for damages and losses, but in the past it had been quite frequently performed excessively or imaginatively to change painted surfaces so that these would correspond to the wish of their owners, subsequent owners, art dealers and restorers. In fact, the history of restoration until the mid-20th century has been nothing but a telling illustration of beautifications and adaptations to changing fashions and preferences.

13. Principles in conservation provide a framework within which codes of practice are enshrined; nevertheless, they change as they reflect shifts in attitudes and in the way knowledge and practice evolve. In the case of paintings restoration, they may also be determined by the current canons of art. Many of the conservation principles that appeared during the 19th century derived from the shock that the restoration of ancient buildings

provoked, whereas in the 20th century, much of the discussion on the effect of restoration related to the impact of war. Principles should not be static; otherwise, they may end up in the fossilization of ideas. Similar to minimalism, the question of reversibility is a case in point. For years, it was considered a very important criterion for proper conduct. It took quite a long time before the sustainability of such an argument was questioned. Reversibility can hardly ever be the case for treatments such as consolidation or cleaning for it is practically impossible to undo or cancel them. See E. Pye, *Caring for the Past: Issues in Conservation for Archaeology and Museums* (London 2001) 32-34.

Reversibility was first included in the 1961 American Institute for Conservation (AIC) Code of Ethics. In the 1983 United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (UKIC, now ICON) Guidance reference is still made, but in less affirmative manner. See C. Caple, *Conservation Skills: Judgement, Method and Decision Making* (London – New York 2000) 61, 63.

The concept of reversibility normally alludes to the removal of inappropriate or dysfunctional treatments that interfere excessively with an object’s integrity; and this is perfectly justifiable. However, it may also associate with the conservator’s psychological urge to gain satisfaction from proceeding with complete treatment, which eventually reaffirms the object as a coherent entity. Furthermore, it may also relate to an attitude some conservators (usually in the private sector) or some institutions adopt to redo things, and by their intervention, to stamp their own interpretation on an object. This latter approach may seem rather unethical and can be the cause for criticism, but it is a possible situation particularly when the object under study is of lesser cultural significance, hence the treatment may have fewer restrictions in terms of ethics.

In addition to that, the principle that restoration should be restricted to integrating defective areas only cannot always be the case. It is difficult to delimit retouching when residual dirt or varnish that cannot be safely removed still exists, or when discolouration of the original paint layer occurs in places, or even when a painting has been over-cleaned. See K. Nicolaus, *The Restoration of Paintings* (Cologne 1998) 261.

14. See Caple (n. 13) 64-65.

15. See Milanou (n. 1).

16. N. Chatzidakis, *Εικόνες της Συλλογής Βελιμέζης* (Athens 1997) 140-49.

17. K. Milanou, Η αντιμετώπιση των ζωγραφικών με παλαιές επεμβάσεις από το Εργαστήριο Συντήρησης Εικόνων και Ζωγραφικών Έργων του Μουσείου Μπενάκη, in: *Συντήρηση και Έκθεση Συντηρημένων Έργων* (n. 7) 53.

18. H. Glanville, Introductory essay: relativity and restoration, in: A. Conti, *History of the Restoration and Conservation of Works of Art* (Oxford 2007) xx-xxi.

19. B. Appelbaum, *Conservation Treatment Methodology* (Oxford 2007) 258-59.

20. See Milanou (n. 17) 53.

21. The painted surface suffered serious damages and losses in the gold background and the Virgin’s dress and omophorion, while extensive overpaintings were located in the Virgin’s right

hand and the lower parts of the composition. The icon had been varnished with an oil-based coating and at a later stage it received a second and much thinner layer of natural resin both of which were badly oxidised. Craquelure extended throughout the entire painted surface due to the instability of the wooden support. The treatment of the icon involved the removal of the nailed crossbars, the strengthening of the support, the removal of the two varnish layers and of all later additions, the filling of lacunae, their retouching and the application of the final protective coating of Paraloid B72. Retouching was performed with ground pigments and Paraloid B72 diluted in diacetone alcohol. See Benaki Museum Conservation Department Treatment Card.

Paraloid B72 diluted in diacetone alcohol (and, in a few cases, toluene) has been one of the three binding media used at the Benaki Museum Conservation Department that was widely applied until the mid 1990's (the other two are Gustav Berger's PVA Inpainting Medium and acrylics).

Paraloid B72 has excellent properties in terms of chemical and mechanical stability as well as reversibility. It has been used extensively in major institutions like the National Gallery, London where it has been largely employed from the 1960's through to the late 1990's due to its exceptional ageing properties. See P. Ackroyd, Retouching media used at the National Gallery, London since the 19th century in: R. Ellison – P. Smithen – R. Turnbull (eds), *Mixing and Matching: Approaches to Retouching Paintings* (London 2010) 51-60.

Nevertheless, Paraloid has some limitations. Because of its relatively weak covering power it cannot simulate distinct brushstrokes and impasto and it is preferable that the filler is coloured and textured when possible before the application of the in-paint. Moreover, it cannot be used for large defective areas because of its rapid drying and high solubility; therefore, it cannot produce a unified and flat colour surface unless the underpaint layer of the retouching is executed in different medium (e.g. egg-tempera, PVA etc.). See K. Lowry, Retouching with Paraloid B72, in: Ellison – Smithen – Turnbull (*ibid.*) 87-91.

The use of Paraloid B72 at the Benaki Museum Conservation Department has been superseded by Gustav Berger's PVA Inpainting Medium.

22. See Glanville (n. 18) xx; Nicolaus (n. 13) 290-91.

23. The term neutral is actually misleading because no such colour ever exists, particularly when it is adjacent to others. Professionals who are against the method claim that every neutral retouching eventually affects the entire colouration and forms of a painting. The final result is somehow flat, two-dimensional and rather lifeless. See Nicolaus (n. 13) 290-91.

24. See Glanville (n. 18) xxii-xxv.

25. Art, whether it portrays a representational subject-matter or delineates conceptual aspects that do not belong to the sensible world (like most abstract works usually do) is capable of producing powerful characterizations because it entails the act of imitation. Even a monochrome painting may become a resemblance and/or expression. Imitation is not simply a question of using hands alone to emulate or reproduce reality, but constitutes perceptual interpretation. See E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, 5th edition

(London 1997) 154-55.

26. U. Baldini – O. Casazza, The Crucifix by Cimabue, in: D. Bomford – M. Leonard (eds), *Issues in the Conservation of Paintings* (Los Angeles 2004) 403.

27. The *tratteggio* method is based on the principle of the division of tones. The colour produced is rendered in three stages. Initially, vertical strokes of the basic tint of the reconstructed colour are applied at intervals, which are then filled with a different hue. Finally, a third colour is superimposed. Modeling of forms is performed by means of juxtaposition of pure colours. Transparency is required, whereas the intensity of the strokes remains weak; hence the reconstruction acquires a glaze effect that enhances the integration of the restoration into the aesthetic quality of the original. See Mora – Mora – Philippot (n. 3) 352-53.

Tratteggio has some limitations; in the case of large defective areas and with less articulated forms, the vibrating effect of the strokes may confuse the beholder as regards the various planes within the painting.

28. In Greece, a considerable amount of icons have been restored in the *tratteggio* technique. The method has been favoured by restorers with formal education and training in Fine Art and/or Conservation in Italy. The double-sided icon of the Crucifixion (9th-13th centuries) and the Virgin Hodegetria (16th century) of the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens (inv. no. 000995), conserved by T. Margaritoff, and the icon of the Adoration of the Shepherds (*ca.* 1688-1700), by Stefano Jankarola, of the National Gallery and Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens (inv. no. Π 147), conserved by Konstantinos Koutsouris (1913-1991) have been two prominent examples of the *tratteggio* application in Greek Museums. Both conservators – also qualified painters – graduated from the Istituto Centrale del Restauro, Rome and their background in Italian techniques is evident throughout their professional career.

29. See Baldini – Casazza (n. 26) 396-406.

30. In chromatic abstraction the produced effect results from the intersection of four colours mixed in various combinations: yellow/red/green/black, yellow/red/blue/black or yellow/orange/blue-green/black and yellow/red/blue-green/black. The final result is a vibrating colour effect that gradually steps from yellow to a mixture with black [see Baldini – Casazza (n. 26) 400]. If executed rightly the retouched areas should be on the same physical and optical level as the original. Certain strokes are left visible in their pure colour hue, whereas others are covered with a glaze effect.

31. The success of visible restoration, whether it is executed in *tratteggio*, *selezione* or *astrazione cromatica*, is dependent upon the conservator's manual skill and dexterity as well as on his/her sensibility. A badly performed visible retouching could be as distracting as a loss would be. The employment of such methods requires considerable talent and a painterly attitude in treating artworks that may sometimes exceed the limits set by the technical knowledge needed in the profession.

32. See Glanville (n. 18) xxiii.

33. Conversation with Kalypso Milanou.

34. See Benaki Museum Treatment Card; on the condition

of the icon and its technical analysis see: K. Milanou, Εικόνα Παναγίας Βρεφοκρατούσας με προτομές αγίων στο: *Μουσείο Μπενάκη* 1(2001) 41-58.

35. S. M. Vinas, Minimal intervention revisited, in: A. Bracker – A. Richmond (eds), *Conservation Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths* (London 2010) 47-59.

36. Chatzidakis (n. 16) 290-92; S. Stassinopoulos, Η συντήρηση των εικόνων της Συλλογής Βελιμέζη, in: Chatzidakis (n. 16) 464.

37. The way Early Italian paintings have been treated in the past derives from their comparison with the Renaissance, and their evaluation has been determined by a fixed prejudice that ‘devalues’ their artistic qualities. In fact, they have been seen as historical and cultural signifiers, rather than artistic acts of prominent importance because the system within which they have been considered avoids utility in favour of pure aestheticism. For years Early Italian paintings were considered as having a certain religious function to fulfill; hence, they have often been treated as cultural artefacts rather than fine art of ‘gallery quality’. The general notion has been that damaged areas should not be fully reconstructed, whereas the extent to which losses are concealed in High Renaissance paintings is outstanding. By the mid-20th century a purist approach that favoured the recovery and preservation of the original painted surface prevailed over the indiscriminate performance of imitative aesthetic restorations, which took place in the 18th and 19th centuries. Thus, radical cleaning treatments were responsible for the removal of all later additions and repaints disclosing, on the one hand the quality of the original masterwork, but in such a damaged state that there was very little left to appreciate, as the idea of any new retouching was wholeheartedly rejected. In many instances, such treatments, which look harsh today, have considerably diminished the value of the paintings. As a case in point, a small panel painting depicting the *Madonna and Child* (ca. 1475-85, Yale University Art Gallery, inv. no. 1959.15.11, restored between 1962-1966) attributed to Giovanni Bellini’s workshop, has been stripped off of most of its early 20th century restoration leaving the original in fragments. As a consequence, the painting is no longer displayable and has been in storage ever since. In the 1970s and 1980s there was a gradual shift in attitude that argued for neutral retouching; still the bias was obvious. The restoration of Ugolino di Nerio’s pinnacle panels of *Isaiab* (London, NG 3376) and *David* (London, NG 6485) from the Santa Croce polyptych in Florence (1324-1325) at the National Gallery, London, has been executed in neutral colour matching redrawing the compositional outlines, but with no modeling of the lost forms. Further progress has been made ever since and nowadays the focus is on re-establishing the narrative of the paintings disregarding what was assumed for years to be the hierarchical canon. See C. Hoeniger, The restoration of Early Italian “Primitives” during the 20th century: valuing art and its consequences, in: P. Whitmore (ed.), *Journal of American Institute for Conservation* 38, 2 (1999) 141-61.

38. S. Thomas – J. Greenwood, A view from the outside: Conservation ethics and their application to the conservation of icons, in: *Icons: Approaches to Research, Conservation and Ethical*

Issues, International Meeting, Athens 3-7 December 2006, CD-ROM Proceedings (Athens 2006).

39. The work is on permanent loan from the Giorgos Zongolopoulos Foundation.

40. Pissarro was actually the first owner of Cezanne’s still life. The work was later acquired by August Pellerin who bequeathed it to the Louvre in 1929. Since 1986 it has been on loan to the Musée d’Orsay. See www.musee-orsay.fr; F. Daftari, Regards croisés: portraits et autoportraits, in: M.D. Teneuille (ed.), *Cezanne et Pissarro 1865-1885* (exhibition catalogue, Musée d’Orsay, Paris 2006) 87.

The painting depicted on the far left of the background is a landscape made by Pissarro (1830-1903) himself (*Rue de Gisors, la Maison du Père Gallien, Pontoise*, 1873, private collection). See M. Hoog, *Cezanne: Puissant et Solitaire* (Paris 1989) 53.

41. PVA Inpainting Medium has been an excellent substitute for Paraloid B72 in terms of health and safety, stability and versatility issues. It can be employed for large missing areas with either opaque or transparent colours. With a minimum amount of medium a water-colour wash effect can be achieved without turning underbound. PVA is suitable for traditional oil paintings as well as modern and mixed-media artworks. Yet, its high evaporation rate requires a considerable degree of confidence in handling the material. See S. Cove, Retouching with PVA resin medium, in: Ellison – Smithen – Turnbull (n. 21) 74-86.

PVA is diluted in ethyl alcohol, which wets most surfaces and pigments quite easily due to its low surface tension and high polarity. Its Refractive Index is similar to that of aged linseed oil, which means that if mixed with dry pigments (like the ones used by the artist) it can achieve good colour-matching to the original paint. When applied onto the surface, the retouching paint suffers limited colour change if the conservator works on a fully saturated surface and with paint well-saturated with medium. See G. Berger, Inpainting using PVA Medium: Mario Modestini’s Pioneering Research, in: *Conservation of Paintings: Research and Innovations* (London 2000) 191-216.

All paintings at the Benaki Museum Conservation Department are varnished before retouching begins with an interim layer of 10% Ketone N resin in petroleum spirit so as for glossiness and saturation to be achieved.

42. The restorative effect of the lining process consists in the improved form imparted to the canvas as it flattens and can be stretched again; the process affects the texture and overall tonal impression of the painting, although the latter may associate with negative implications particularly when the method involves wax-based adhesives for they may stain or discolour the paint surface. In any case, lining is not considered merely a structural intervention for it determines the image of the painting.

43. The exact use of such revetments has not yet been elucidated; they were possibly related to the decoration of bridal beds or formed part of long narrow chests also used as settles in the living room of wealthy houses. See A. Delivorrias, *Η Ελλάδα του Μουσείου Μπενάκη* (Athens 1997) 422.

Most of these artefacts are painted in a fixed manner. Their decoration – usually separated in sections – consists of alternating floral motifs, animals, birds and highly stylized human fig-

ures. The paint – made up of coarse ground pigments possibly mixed in egg tempera – is applied either directly onto the wooden support or to a fine ground layer.

44. A. Delivorrias, *Erotic discourse in the iconography of Greek “folk” art*, in: *Μουσείο Μπενάκη* 7 (2007) 95-121.

45. This is a critical parameter for all sorts of objects. The removal of retouchings, which have been applied directly onto original material entails much greater risk than the removal of in-paintings executed on a filling putty that, as a body, is extraneous to the original work and can therefore be safely and

wholly removed (usually mechanically) without meddling with the original surface and material components of the work. Conversation with Kalypso Milanou.

Even though the viability of reversibility is questioned (as discussed in n. 13) when it concerns the removal of ineffective, fallible and therefore unwanted restorations then reversibility becomes a requisite. However, in theory, the risk remains that the artwork may be subjected to changing preferences while for professionals, since their restoration is replaceable, it relieves them of the burden of responsibility. S. M. Vinas, *Contemporary theory of conservation* (Oxford 2005) 183-88.

ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΣ ΔΟΥΜΑΣ

Ανασυνθέτοντας την Εικόνα:

Περί της αποτελεσματικότητας μεθόδων αποκατάστασης σε ζωγραφικές επιφάνειες
Θεωρία και πράξη στο Τμήμα Συντήρησης του Μουσείου Μπενάκη

Η αποκατάσταση ως αλληλουχία διαδικασιών παρέμβασης στη μορφή των μουσειακών αντικειμένων αποβλέπει στην εναρμόνιση της αισθητικής διάστασης αυτών με την ιδιότητά τους ως τεκμηρίων πολιτισμικών, κοινωνικών ή/και καλλιτεχνικών. Με αυτό τον τρόπο θέτει τις βάσεις ενός ισχυρού οπτικού “ιδιώματος” που συνεισφέρει στην αποκωδικοποίησή τους, καθώς αποτελεί αναπόσπαστο κομμάτι της μουσειακής εμπειρίας.

Οι κανόνες που διέπουν κάθε εργασία αποκατάστασης βασίζονται πρωτίστως σε κριτήρια αισθητικά, σε άμεση συνάρτηση όμως με τα δεδομένα που το ίδιο το αντικείμενο μας δίνει. Ωστόσο, κάθε μουσείο και κάθε εργαστήριο διαμορφώνει τη δική του πολιτική, ενώ δεν θα πρέπει να παραβλεφθεί και ο παράγοντας της προσωπικής ματιάς του συντηρητή. Το Εργαστήριο Ζωγραφικών Έργων του Τμήματος Συντήρησης του Μουσείου Μπενάκη έχει επί τηρήσει πλήρη ισορροπία ανάμεσα στην υποχρέωση διατήρησης της ιστορικής ακεραιότητας των αντικειμένων των συλλογών του μουσείου και την ανάγκη της απρόσκοπτης θέασης αυτών κατά τρόπον ώστε η δυναμική ενότητα της μορφής τους να είναι εύληπτη από όλους ανεξαιρέτως τους επισκέπτες (ειδικούς και μη), αλλά με απόλυτα διακριτή την επέμβαση του συντηρητή.

Ο κυρίαρχος οπτικός χαρακτήρας μιας ζωγραφικής επιφάνειας, μας επιβάλλει να την αντιμετωπίζουμε καταρχήν ως αισθητικό γεγονός. Η κατανόηση ενός ζωγραφικού πίνακα απορρέει από τη φυσική λειτουργία της θέασής του

ως φαινομένου στον χώρο και τη συναίσθηση και επίγνωση του θέματος που αυτός αναπαριστά. Έτσι, η αποκατάσταση πλέον, ως αμιγώς ερμηνευτική πράξη, έχει άμεσο αντίκτυπο στον τρόπο που ο επισκέπτης προσλαμβάνει, αφομοιώνει και επαναφέρει στη μνήμη του την εικόνα του ζωγραφικού έργου. Ταυτόχρονα, θέτει τον θεατή σε επαφή με το όραμα του καλλιτέχνη. Το επιχείρημα αυτό καθίσταται ελλιπές, αν και αποτελεί κριτήριο των διαφόρων επιλογών μας, εξαιτίας των μη αντιστρέψιμων αλλαγών που η φθορά επιφέρει σε ένα αντικείμενο, σε συνδυασμό με το ότι η γνώση της αρχικής μορφής του δεν μπορεί ποτέ να είναι πλήρης, κυρίως δε όταν αυτό έχει συντηρηθεί στο παρελθόν. Έτσι λοιπόν, η αποκατάσταση αφορά την υλική ταυτότητα του έργου κατά τρόπον ώστε να είναι προσβάσιμα όλα τα εικονογραφικά του στοιχεία, όπως αυτά διαμορφώνονται ως συνάρτηση της ιστορικής του πορείας με τις όποιες επεμβάσεις έχει υποστεί από τρίτους.

Οι συντηρητές δεν αναπαράγουν το ίδιο το έργο, αλλά ερμηνεύουν την τωρινή του κατάσταση, όπως αυτή έχει διασωθεί. Αυτό καθίσταται δυνατό με τη χρωματική επέμβαση σε περιοχές φθοράς. Η απώλεια είναι καθοριστικός παράγοντας που διακόπτει τη συνέχεια της εικόνας όχι ως κενό, αλλά ως παρεμβολή, κάνοντας το θέμα του ζωγραφικού έργου να οπισθοχωρεί ως φόντο, ενώ η απώλεια αναδεικνύεται ως μορφή. Η χρωματική επέμβαση έχει σαν αποτέλεσμα την εξασθένηση της φθοράς (όχι απαραίτητα ωστόσο την εξάλειψή της) και την αποκατάσταση της συ-

νέχειας του έργου. Η στρέβλωση αυτή της αντίληψης του έργου τέχνης διατυπωμένη από τον Cezare Brandi αποτελεί μέρος της *Θεωρίας της Συντήρησης* – ενός σημαίνοντος κειμένου που θέτει τις βάσεις και τις αρχές που διέπουν το επάγγελμα του συντηρητή και που σε θεωρητικό επίπεδο αποτελεί πυξίδα για πολλά εργαστήρια παγκοσμίως, ανάμεσα στα οποία και το Εργαστήριο Ζωγραφικών Έργων του Μουσείου Μπενάκη, παρά το γεγονός ότι αυτό είναι προσηλωμένο στην αγγλοσαξονική παράδοση σε ό,τι αφορά τους καθαρισμούς και την επικρατούσα μέθοδο χρωματικής αποκατάστασης. Κάθε επέμβαση καθορίζεται από κανόνες που σηματοδοτούν τη δεοντολογία του επαγγέλματος και χαρακτηρίζεται από μια τάση ελαχιστοποίησης των ενεργειών του συντηρητή. Αυτό όμως, ως κριτήριο, είναι σχετικό, καθώς κάθε φορά εξαρτάται από την ιδιοσυστασία του έργου τέχνης, την έκταση και τη φύση της φθοράς του και από τον βαθμό στον οποίο το θέμα του είναι ή δεν είναι εύληπτο από τον θεατή.

Στο δοκίμιο αυτό γίνεται επιλογή διαφόρων περιπτώσεων χρωματικής επέμβασης σε μια ευρεία κλίμακα ζωγραφικών επιφανειών. Οι επεμβάσεις αυτές ποικίλουν ως προς τη μέθοδο εκτέλεσης και το εύρος της παρέμβασής μας. Τρεις επιλογές απαντώνται: ολική ή μερική αποκατάσταση ή και παντελής απουσία οποιασδήποτε ενέργειας. Το τελευταίο ενδεχόμενο αφορά κυρίως έργα που διασώζονται αποσπασματικά και, σαν συνέπεια, δεν παρέχουν επαρκή στοιχεία για την αρχική μορφή τους. Ως ανάλογο παράδειγμα αναφέρεται η εικόνα του αγίου Ματθαίου (αρ. ευρ. 3735β). Σε θεωρητικό επίπεδο η απόρριψη της ιδέας οποιασδήποτε μορφής αποκατάστασης ενισχύεται από την άποψη ότι το έργο τέχνης υποβιβάζεται σε αντικείμενο καθημερινής χρήσης αφού πλέον μπορεί να αναπαραχθεί, γεγονός που συνεπάγεται έκπτωση στην ιστορική του αξία.

Στην περίπτωση που κρίνεται απαραίτητη η χρωματική επέμβαση υπάρχουν τρεις εναλλακτικές: ουδέτερος τόπος, ορατή (ζωγραφική) ή πλήρης (μιμητική) αποκατάσταση. Ως παράδειγμα επέμβασης με ουδέτερο τόνο εξετάζεται η εικόνα της Παναγίας Πανυμνύτου (αρ. ευρ. 27875), στην οποία η χρωματική ένθεση δεν συνοδεύεται από αναδόμηση της φόρμας. Στην περίπτωση της ορατής αποκατάστασης αντιμετωπίζονται τρεις περιπτώσεις (προερχόμενες όλες από ιταλικές σχολές). Ενδεικτικά μνημονεύονται η γραμμική συμπλήρωση (*tratteggio/rigattino*), η χρωματική αφαίρεση (*astrazione cromatica*) και η χρωματική επιλογή (*selezione cromatica*). Οι μέθο-

δοι αυτές δεν διαφοροποιούν τη μίμηση, ούτε μιμούνται τη διαφοροποίηση. Ως μοναδικό παράδειγμα στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη αποκατάστασης με ορατό τρόπο βασιζόμενο στις αρχές της χρωματικής αφαίρεσης, αναφέρεται η εικόνα της Παναγίας Βρεφοκρατούσας (αρ. ευρ. 32561). Με τη σχεδόν μη αντιληπτή μίμηση το έργο “διαβάζεται” ως σύνολο. Ωστόσο, σε έργα με εκτεταμένη φθορά η μέθοδος αυτή μπορεί να εφαρμοστεί επιλεκτικά σε εκείνα τα κενά που προκαλούν τη μεγαλύτερη αλλοίωση της αισθητικής αρμονίας. Η εικόνα της Ένθρονης Παναγίας Βρεφοκρατούσας με τους άγιους Τιμόθεο και Αθανάσιο (αρ. ευρ. 46145) έχει αντιμετωπιστεί με αυτή τη μέθοδο, καθώς οι φθορές που κατακερματίζουν την κεντρική σύνθεση έχουν αποκατασταθεί, ενώ όλες οι περιμετρικές απώλειες παραμένουν ως έχουν.

Τα προαναφερθέντα παραδείγματα είναι ενδεικτικά μιας μετριοπαθούς αντιμετώπισης. Σε κάθε περίπτωση έχουν τεθεί διαφορετικά όρια που αποτρέπουν τις αρνητικές και ανεπιθύμητες επιπτώσεις της χρωματικής επέμβασης. Και αυτό ακριβώς φανερώνει τη σχετικότητα της αρχής της ελαχιστοποίησης. Ακόμα και σε περιπτώσεις όπως αυτή της εικόνας του αγίου Ματθαίου, όπου η μορφή και η ένδυση του αγίου δεν αποκαταστάθηκαν, το γεγονός ότι η εικόνα αποκολλήθηκε από μια αμφιπρόσωπη (που αναπαριστά στην πίσω πλευρά την Υπαπαντή, αρ. ευρ. 3735α) είναι έκδηλο μιας άκρως παρεμβατικής συντήρησης. Αντίθετα, το παράδειγμα της εικόνας της Ένθρονης Παναγίας Βρεφοκρατούσας με τους άγιους Τιμόθεο και Αθανάσιο, η οποία αποκαταστάθηκε μερικώς, θέτει ουσιαστικά ερωτήματα γύρω από την αρχική πρόθεση του καλλιτέχνη που δεν έχει καμία σχέση με την επιλεκτική συμπλήρωση στην οποία καταφεύγουμε σήμερα. Αυτό υποδηλώνει και την υποκειμενική διάσταση που η μερική αποκατάσταση εμπεριέχει, καθώς το ποια απώλεια θεωρείται παραμορφωτική και, ως εκ τούτου, πρέπει να συμπληρωθεί μπορεί να εκληφθεί εντελώς διαφορετικά από τον καθένα από εμάς. Από την άλλη μεριά, η αρχή της ελαχιστοποίησης των ενεργειών του συντηρητή αναιρείται, κυρίως σε ό,τι αφορά έργα κοσμικής ζωγραφικής ή/και νεότερα όπου το ζητούμενο είναι η πλήρης αποκατάσταση της μορφολογικής ενότητάς τους (με την προϋπόθεση ότι η επέμβαση σέβεται την αυθεντικότητα). Εδώ θα πρέπει να σημειωθεί πως γίνεται ένας άτυπος χρονολογικός διαχωρισμός ανάμεσα σε παλαιότερα και νεότερα έργα, καθώς στα δεύτερα η ολική συμπλήρωση μοιάζει να είναι ο κανόνας, ενώ στα πρώτα η όποιος μορφής αποκατάσταση “συνάδει” με την

ηλικία του έργου. Η διάκριση αυτή μπορεί να σχετίζεται με τη θεωρούμενη καλλιτεχνική αξία του έργου ή με την αρχική του λειτουργία η οποία με τη σειρά της είναι δυνατό να διαμορφώσει μια προκατάληψη που αναγκαστικά επιδρά στον τρόπο με τον οποίο το έργο συντηρείται. Σε αυτή την κατηγορία ανήκουν οι φορητές εικόνες, καθώς και έργα της πρώιμης Αναγέννησης τα οποία στο παρελθόν έχουν αντιμετωπιστεί περισσότερο ως δείγματα ανθρωπολογικού και τυπολατρικού ενδιαφέροντος, παρά ως έργα τέχνης.

Σε αυτό το πλαίσιο παρατίθενται τρεις περιπτώσεις πλήρους συντήρησης που φτάνουν την παρεμβατικότητα στον μέγιστο βαθμό. Η αποκατάσταση του πίνακα της Ελένης Ζογγολοπούλου, *Νεκρή Φύση με Σουπιέρα* – αντίγραφο έργου φιλοτεχνημένου από τον Paul Cézanne–, είναι ένα τέτοιο παράδειγμα. Η χρωματική επέμβαση που δεν βασίζεται στο αυθεντικό έργο του Cézanne, ακολουθεί μίμηση της φόρμας και της τονικότητας του έργου, ωστόσο ο τρόπος εφαρμογής των χρωστικών και το συνδετικό μέσο που επιλέχτηκε (PVA Inpainting Medium) εξασφάλισαν διαφορετική πυκνότητα και στιλπνότητα του ένθετου χρώματος από την αυθεντική ζωγραφική. Το δεύτερο δείγμα πλήρους αποκατάστασης είναι ένα ανδρικό πορτραίτο (αρ. ευρ. 31167) στο οποίο είναι έκδηλη η αλληλεξάρ-

τηση όλων των σταδίων συντήρησης. Στη συγκεκριμένη περίπτωση, της αισθητική αποκατάστασης προηγήθηκε επιλεκτική (και όχι ολική) αφαίρεση μεγάλου ποσοστού παλαιότερων επιζωγραφίσεων, καθώς κάποιες από αυτές λειτουργούσαν ως κατευθυντήριο για τη δική μας επέμβαση, αλλά το τελικό αποτέλεσμα παραπέμπει μάλλον σε μια “άχρονη” αφεγάδιαστη εικόνα. Στο τελευταίο έργο που εξετάζεται –τιμήμα ξύλινης επένδυσης με ζωγραφικό διάκοσμο (αρ. ευρ. 39281)– έγινε ένθεση στην περιοχή απώλειας τμήματος στο οποίο αναπαράγεται ζωγραφική παράσταση (με βάση το σωζόμενο θέμα). Το εύρος της συγκεκριμένης παρέμβασης μετριάζεται από την αίσθηση πληρότητας που το αντικείμενο μετά την αποκατάσταση έχει αποκτήσει.

Κάθε χρωματική επέμβαση, είτε περιορίζεται σε μικρές, μεμονωμένες απώλειες, είτε εκτείνεται σε όλη τη ζωγραφική επιφάνεια –από τη στιγμή που λειτουργεί συνεκτικά στον επαναπροσδιορισμό της αισθητικής αρμονίας του έργου τέχνης, διατηρεί την αντιστρεψιμότητά της και, πρωτίστως, σέβεται απολύτως το πρωτότυπο– δικαιώνεται. Ταυτόχρονα, η υποκειμενική αντίληψη του συντηρητή μπορεί κάλλιστα να συνυπάρχει με τα αντικειμενικά κριτήρια παρουσίασης και έκθεσης που το μουσειακό περιβάλλον επιβάλλει.

