

Conservation Report

Object: Painting on canvas (lined)
Title: *Saint Philip and Saint James*
School/ Artist: Niccolò Tornioli (1589-1633)
Measurements (H x W x D): 97 x 134 x 2.5 cm



The painting was examined and treated in studio conditions between 3 December 2018 and 6 March 2019 by Marie Louise Sauerberg and Larry Keith. It was documented photographically before, during and after treatment.

Condition

Painting

The painting is executed on canvas and has an old glue-paste lining. It is tacked onto a six-membered softwood stretcher. All keys are present but not secured. There is some delamination of the original canvas from the lining canvas, most noticeably along the edges.

Extensive overpaint that no longer match in colour covers significant portions of the painting. This is particularly visible in the blue drapery, which now appears quite green. A pronounced pattern of fine craquelure is most evident in the darker, more thinly applied paint of the background and costumes, although these areas are not particularly raised and appear to be firmly attached to the support. There is some wear or abrasion along the edges of the crack pattern within the darkest tones of the composition, presumably resulting from historic cleaning and/or lining. The more thickly applied, denser paint of the lighter flesh tones is for the most part in excellent condition. There is some fading/crazing and discolouration of the red earths and the (assumed) red glazing of the St James drapery.

The varnish layer(s) are very degraded and discoloured. There are at least two significant layers of aged, natural resin-based coatings, one of which fluoresces under UV light in a blueish tone, while the other is more green in colour. The more greenish layer appears to be somewhat discontinuous; it may be an older coating with an oil component which had proved difficult to remove evenly in a historic treatment – this attempt may in turn be related to the abrasion of the thinner applications of dark paint.

Treatment

The front and the reverse were dry surface cleaned dry with brushes; dust and debris caught behind the stretcher bars was removed with spatulas. The painting was then surface cleaned on the front wet with water applied by a Blitz-Fix sponge.

Discoloured varnishes and retouchings were removed using mixtures of organic solvents, primarily propan-2-ol and various aliphatic hydrocarbons. The condition of the blue drapery beneath the overpaint is generally very good. Some of the more tenacious overpaints were left, as they could not be removed safely. A slight greenish fluorescence remains over the surface under UV light; this is the remains of a very aged and insoluble coating described above, which is not visually disturbing and has been left in place. At this point, a saturating temporary varnish of dammar was applied (25% in ShellSol A100 and ShellSol D40 1:3).

Once cleaned, the painting was relined with canvas and BEVA onto the existing stretcher by Lucien Wray of James Wray Picture Conservation. All keys were secured with nylon string and stapled to the stretcher.

Once returned from the liners, the temporary varnish was removed, the cleaning re-addressed and a new retouching varnish applied (dammar). Losses were filled with a chalk/gelatine mixture. Losses and wear were then retouched to match the surrounding colour with Gamblin Conservation Colors. The final surface gloss was achieved by a light spray application of dammar resin (as above).

Marie Louise Sauerberg and Larry Keith
11th September 2020

Materials used

<i>Material</i>	<i>Description</i>
Chalk	Calcium carbonate, used as an inert filler for putty.
Dammar	Natural resin varnish. Low molecular weight.
EVO Stick	Commercial wood adhesive of which Polyvinyl Acetate is a component.
Gamblin Conservation Colors	Commercially ground pigments bound in Laropal® A 81, a synthetic ketone resin.
Gelatine	Collagen-based glue derived from animal bones and skin.
Industrial Denatured Alcohol (IDA)	Formerly known as Industrially Methylated Spirit (IMS). Polar organic solvent mostly consisting of ethanol (C ₂ H ₆ O) but with a small addition of another solvent, such as wood naphtha, or formerly methanol hence the name IMS, so as to render it unsuitable for human consumption.
Propan-2-ol	(CH ₃) ₂ CHOH, polar organic solvent.
ShellSol A100	A non-polar organic solvent with a >99% aromatic content (predominantly consisting of C9-C10 hydrocarbons). Very pure solvent produced by Shell Chemicals. Often used as a substitute for Xylene.
ShellSol D40	A non-polar organic solvent with low aromatic content that consists predominantly of C9- C11 paraffins and naphthenes. Produced by Shell Chemicals.
ShellSol T	Turpentine substitute, mixture of isoparaffinic hydrocarbons, non-aromatic. Very pure solvent produced by Shell Chemicals.
Sturgeon glue	Collagen-based glue derived from the bladders of sturgeon, low viscosity combined with high adhesive strength.
White Spirit (Bartoline)	A highly refined mineral spirit, that is a mixture of hydrocarbons, produced in accordance with BS245:1976.