



Fig. 1

Object: Fresco

Original Location: Breakfast Room at Hotel Mia Cara, Florence, Italy.

Subject: A nun, Saint Giovanni and a noble

Artist: Unknown

Date: Possibly 16th or 17th century

Description:

This fresco is located on the wall of a breakfast room of Hotel Mia Cara, located in the city center of Florence, Italy. The fresco is painted next to another fresco that seems to be have painted around the same time but possibly by a different artist. The artist has painted 3 figures, a nun on the left, what possibly looks like Saint Giovanni and a noble man wearing a gold armor and other gold accessories. The entire fresco is painted using only three huge giornate or day pieces (Fig. 2). The fresco is exposed to tourists and is located in a closed and usually busy room. The bottom half of this fresco is in reach of people with average height. The nun seems to be looking down at a book while Saint Giovanni (possibly) is seen point one finger up and holding a cross in the other hand. The noble man is wearing a gold-gilded, intricately designed armor, holding a gold-gilded bird and a sword. In the background, the artist has painted, what seems to be a Joseph and baby Jesus on his shoulders (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

State of Conservation and degradation analysis:

The fresco is seen to be in a mediocre state of conservation. There is a deposit of incoherent materials like dust and grime, on the entire surface of the painting which is caused due to negligence of conservation of the fresco. As the fresco is located in a breakfast room filled with people, the lower half of the fresco seem to have a lot human interventions that have damaged the fresco (Fig. 4). The pictorial layer seems to have darkened and a lot of aspects of the fresco have faded away causing a loss in the brilliance of the pigments that were originally used. There are signs of previous restoration like some retouching and in-fillings. The material used for previous in-fillings seems to be loose and applied unevenly. There are big cracks that go around the top frame of the entire fresco, where the previous in-fillings were poorly executed (Fig.5). There are holes and losses in various places in the intonaco, some filled and some left un-filled. There is visible abrasion all over the fresco, predominantly on the left corner and around the nun (Fig. 6). There seem to be a patch of plastic-like filling stuck on the nun's eye (Fig.7). The saint and the noble man seem to be in a better condition, compared to the nun. The gold-gilding on the armor and sword seem to be lost in a lot of places, and only little details remain. The entire frame has been remade using a cement like material, causing cracks and an uneven frame. The documentation was done under UV light as well in order to reveal any foreign material on top of the surface layer (Fig. 8).



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Interventions:

To move forward with a potential pre-consolidation of the pictorial surface, the first step is to determine the stability of the pigments. First, dust was removed from the bottom half of the fresco; this operation was completed first with a wishop's sponge, keeping in mind the stability of different pigments, then wet with sponges dipped in demineralized water. Cleaning tests using ammonium

carbonate aqueous solution poultices were carried out to address the sulphation issue and clean the surface layer of the fresco. A saturated 25% ammonium carbonate solution mixed in 1 liter of water, was used to swell paper pulp (wood pulp, pure cellulose fiber flakes), and the resulting mixture was then applied to the surface layer with the help of Japanese paper that acted as a carrier and protected the pigment layer from direct contact with the chemical. The rest of the cleaning is performed with the same saturated ammonium carbonated soaked wood pulp and Japanese paper all over the fresco for fifteen minutes (Fig.9). The rest of the fresco was mechanically cleaned using a sponge dipped in tap water. After cleaning the bottom half, a similar compress patch was applied to the corner frame on the right to swell up the excess uneven plaster, in order to take it completely off (Fig.10).



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

After the bottom half of the fresco was clean and stripped off of any dust, dirt, grime and foreign materials like paint spots and excess plaster, the scaffolding was put in place in order to reach the top half of the fresco. After carefully dry cleaning the top half with a wishop's sponge, the figures of Joseph and baby Jesus as well as the red shawl/cloth around the noble man's body was pre-consolidated using an acrylic resin penetrate the paint layer and bind the loose pigment particles together, providing strength and stability before the cleaning process starts. After pre-consolidation, the entire top half of the fresco was cleaned using the same cellulose compress soaked with 25% ammonium carbonate diluted in 1 litre of water, left for 15 minutes after which, the area was gently scrubbed using a rough brush, releasing all the dirt, making it easy to thoroughly wash the dirt and any leftover ammonia off with a sponge and clean water. First, the entire sky was cleaned using this method which revealed a bright blue and pink sky (Fig. 11,12). Cleaning the right top corner also revealed some text (Fig. 13). A cleaning test was then performed on the armour using a cotton swab dipped in EDTA which resulted in little specks of gold being taken off. Another cleaning tested was performed with the help of a cotton swab dipped in ammonia which resulted in gold stripping off as well. The armour, bird and sword were later gently cleaned using cotton swabs dipped in EDTA, making sure not a lot of the gold gets stripped off (Fig. 14). The scaffolding was then taken off to concentrate again on the lower half of the fresco. A patch of ammonium carbonate was put on the lower right corner of the frame for 20 minutes, in order to loosen the excess uneven plaster that was added during previous restoration (Fig.15). The plaster was then scrubbed off using a sponge as well as scraped off using a scalpel (Fig. 16,17). Next, the rest of the frame in the lower half was cleaned using the same compress which clearly revealed an inscription on the bottom left (Fig. 18).



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

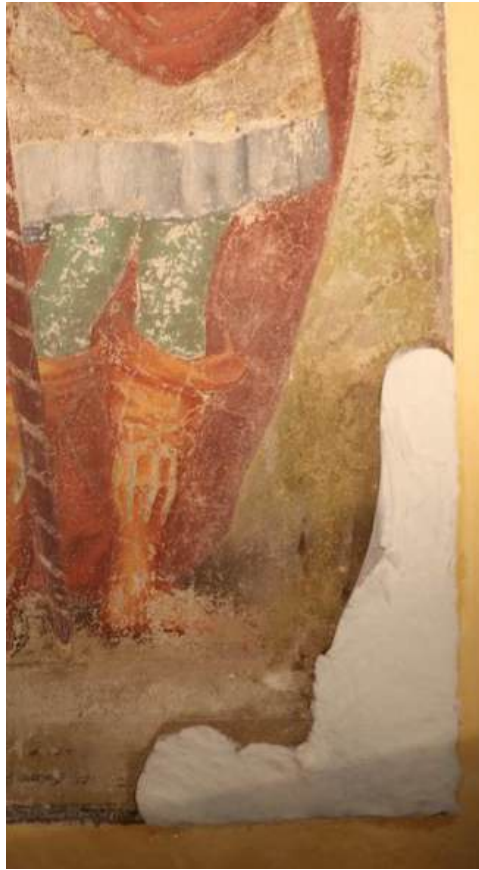


Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

The scaffolding was then put back in place in order to get rid of all the excess uneven plaster that was previously implemented on the outer frame of the entire fresco. The area was first dampened using water and then scraped of as much as possible using a scalpel and spatulas (Fig.19). The hard plaster was carefully broken down using a chisel and hammer, slowly and gently breaking little pieces of the plaster to reveal the original intonaco underneath (Fig. 20,21). All the excess plaster was taken off in order to fill-in fresh new plaster. The deep holes were first filled with 2 parts of coarse big grain sand mixed with 1 part of lime. A few small rocks were placed into these holes, securing them with plaster which was then filled into the holes making sure a 3mm gap is left on top for the fine plaster to be applied. These fillings are then left overnight to dry in order to put the next layer of plaster on top. The next layer and the small holes or surface losses were filled with a plaster mixture of 1 parts of fine grain sand mixed with 1 part of lime and it applied carefully on the surface using a spatula and smoothing it out. Once the plaster is semi-dry, the excess plaster around the filling is wiped off with some water and sponges in order to avoid white efflorescence from the lime.



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

