MUSEI VATICANI

MUSEUMS AT WORK

THE VIRGIN BESTOWS HER BELT TO SAINT THOMAS, THE MASS OF SAINT GREGORY, SAINT JEROME PENITENT
by Antonio del Massaro, known as "il Pastura"

LABORATORY FOR PAINTINGS AND WOODEN MATERIALS CONSERVATION

PRODUCTION TECHNIQUE

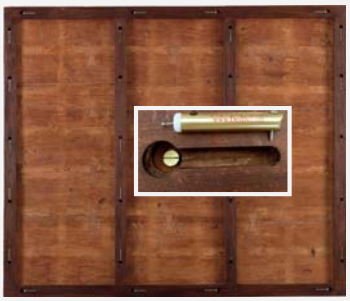
The preparation base of gesso and glue was spread over a support comprised of five poplar wood axels. The design of the whole composition having been drawn, it was then gone over with a fine pointed paintbrush in such a way that it remained visible even during the application of colour. The pigments used, bound by egg tempera, were those traditional to the age in which the work was created.

STATE OF CONSERVATION

Over the course of time, the painting has undergone restorations and localised consolidations, due principally to problems with the wooden base board, which was assembled with second rate materials. The consequences of a major intervention in 1947 were added to this original defect. The support was thinned, and as reinforcement a wooden grating with sliding cross bars was applied. With time these became blocked, obstructing the natural movements of the fibres, generating fractures in the board and numerous swellings in the colour. The reintegrations of previous interventions were altered, and the paint used as final protection, clouded and yellowed.

INTERVENTIONS

To reinstate the possibility of movement to the original wood, the old structure was removed, enabling rehabilitation processes to proceed. On the support, triangular sections were created and wooden wedges of seasoned poplar correspondingly placed, restoring thus the flatness to the pictorial surface. The old grid was substituted by a light perimeter frame that, united to the base board only by means of springs, permits control of the flexibility of the natural movements of the wood fibres.



Regarding the painted surface, after the consolidation, the cleaning of the pictorial film was begun. On the varnish of the 1947 restoration, oil and wax based, enzymes were found to be particularly effective, specifically the protease and lipase. The method of application was also developed with a product from the Department of Molecular Sciences and Nanosystems of Venice University. In addition, those retouches which were surmounting and confused with the original were removed. Those sections covering gaps which had been done historically, were contrastingly maintained, preferring to conserve historic data and appreciating in this case the good execution on the part of our predecessors.

The last phase consisted in the reintegration of lacunae in the film. Paint losses were treated with watercolours of the appropriate tone to a degree less saturated than the original. Further losses, extending to the preparation underneath, were filled with stucco and painted over with the tratteggio technique. Those overpaintings which were agreed upon as maintainable were balanced with varnish colours. A final protective was nebulized all over the surface.

The wooden frame is not the original one: it was realized in recent times and applied in the early 20th century.