ANNEX: STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORT

This report documents the state of conservation of eight paintings from the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception Jesuits Church, Valletta that have been earmarked for conservation and restoration treatment.

REPORT DATE: 12th October 2021

This report collates the observations and documentation carried out on-site in: visible light by polarised strobe lights; raking (tangent) light to better observe the presence of surface deformations; and with the use of ultraviolet light in order to identify the presence and extent of varnish and non-original paint – such as retouching and repainting. (The presence of thick varnish layers might hinder the observation of additional underlying non-original paint, even when observed in ultraviolet light.) Some artworks are partly faced. Moreover, the inspection was partly hindered by the presence of facing that was applied during past treatments for some artworks.

INFORMATION PRESENTED FOR EACH ARTWORK

INVENTORY NUMBER: the artwork's reference number.

TITLE/SUBJECT: description of the depicted image.

MEASUREMENTS: measurements of the artwork's width and height expressed in meters.

ARTIST(s): attribution based on stylistic ground and/or signatures.

PERIOD: the century in which the artwork was created, based on stylistic ground and ageing of the painting's constituent materials.

MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUE: description of the artwork's constituent materials and the artist's technique, based on visual examination of the artwork in: visible light; raking light; and ultraviolet light.

PAST TREATMENTS: description of alterations carried out in the past, based on visual observation of the artwork in: visible light; raking light; and ultraviolet light.

STATE OF CONSERVATION: description of both the artwork's deterioration and damage, based on visual observation in visible light and raking light.

INVENTORY NUMBER: JCV / P 142

TITLE/SUBJECT: The Immaculate Conception

MEASUREMENTS: 2.16 x 2.97 meters

ARTIST: Filippo Dingli

PERIOD: 17th century

MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUE: oil-based painting on canvas support. The original canvas consists of different canvas parts sown together. The painting is attached to a curved strainer frame. The strainer does not have bevelled members. The painting appears to have a dark red ground layer. The canvas was secured to its strainer frame with cane nails. Due to its curved structure, several parts of the canvas support seemed to have been tied to the strainer frame, with the intention of retaining the canvas pulled inwards.

PAST TREATMENTS: The painting is not lined. Small textile parts were adhered to the canvas support to hold strings that are tied to the strainer frame. It is evident that the original varnish was removed in the past. Investigations with ultraviolet light revealed several dark areas that may not necessarily consist of non-original paint. The latter could also result to the presence of thicker varnish layer combined with surface deposits. The painting was then varnished with a brush. Few metal nails were inserted along the perimeter of the painting to adhere a decorative wooden frame.

STATE OF CONSERVATION: The painting is significantly soiled. The strainer is seemingly free from deformations, although some joints have weakened. Several small punctures were noted that caused canvas and paint loss. Minute punctures caused by the insertion of nails along the entire perimeter of the painting were noted. Several strings - used to attach the canvas to the strainer - are loose. The paint layer has cracked and cupping was observed. However the paint layer is still secured to the canvas support. The canvas is not taut, whereby some parts of the painting deformed and are sagging with the painting's own weight. The varnish has yellowed and some parts have bloomed, appearing as white surface alterations. Further surface alterations occurred on several local areas. The latter appear as dark yellow or brown alterations that appear to have been caused by excess varnish and surface deposits. The non-original paint has darkened and discoloured. The outer gilt wooden strips have been infested with insects, weakening them till causing significant losses.

Figure 1: General front view of the painting in diffused visible light.

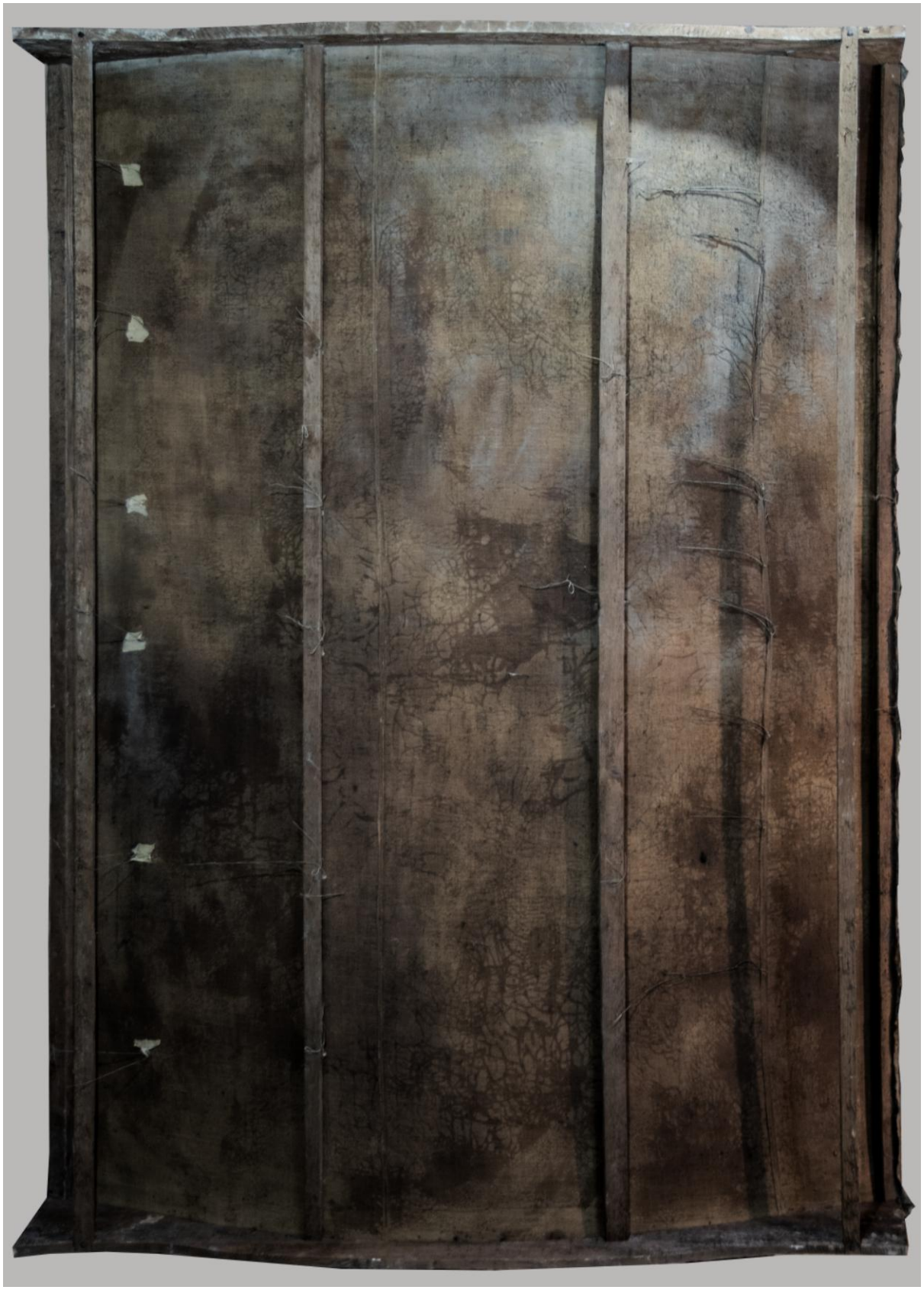

Figure 2: General reverse side view of the painting in diffused visible light.

Figure 3: The upper half of the painting in diffused light.

Figure 4: The bottom half of the painting in diffused light.

Figure 5: Detail of the central part of the painting in diffused light, showing the yellowed surface alterations.

Figure 6: Detail of the central part of the painting in diffused light showing local dark surface alterations.

Figure 7: Detail close to the bottom right corner of the painting in diffused light, showing the surface white alterations - probably blooming.

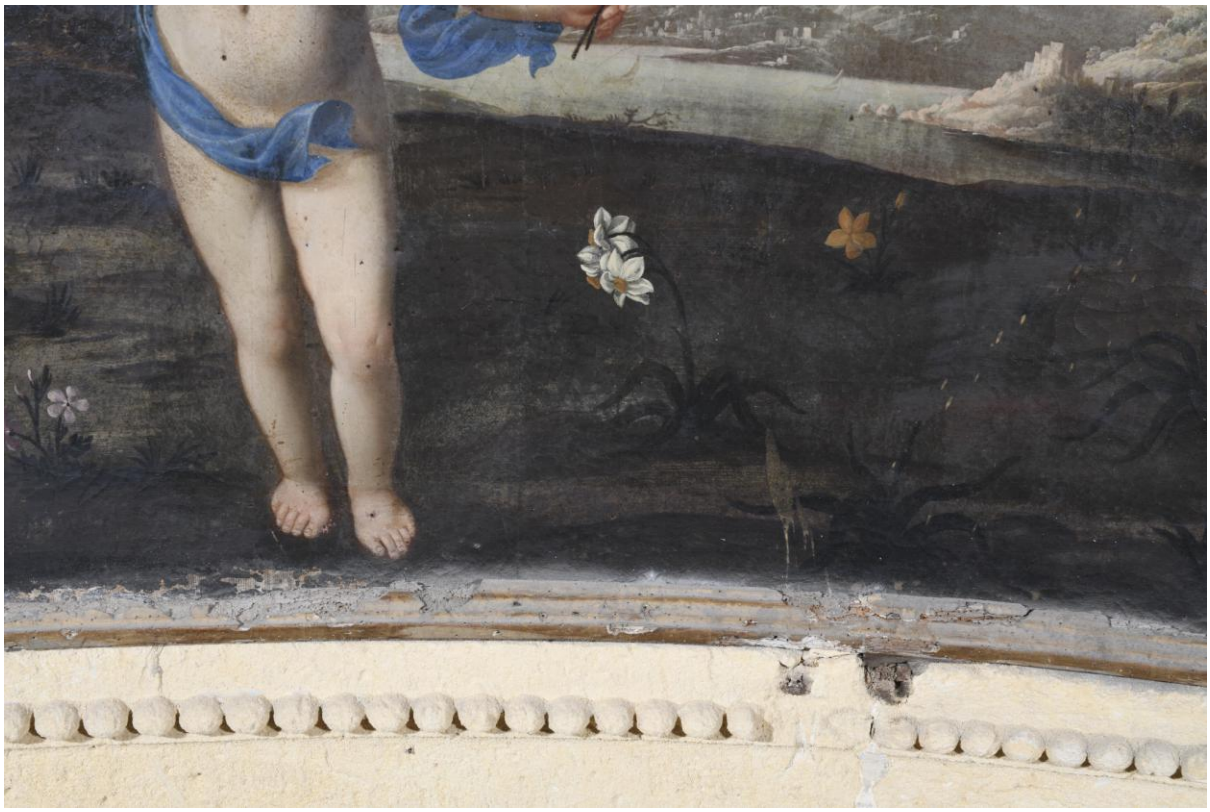

Figure 8: Detail of the bottom mid part in diffused light showing small punctures and the brittle, insect-infested decorative gilt strips of wood nailed directly to the painting.

Figure 9: The upper half in raking light showing the canvas and paint deformations.

Figure 10: Detail close to the Virgin's face showing deformations and presence of small punctures.

Figure 11: Detail of the upper part of the painting in raking light showing deformations and presence of small punctures.

Figure 12: Detail of the mid right part in raking light showing deformations and puncture on one of the angel's face.

Figure 13: Detail of the bottom right corner in raking light.

Figure 14: Detail of the bottom left corner in raking light.

Figure 15: Detail from the central part of the painting in ultraviolet light.

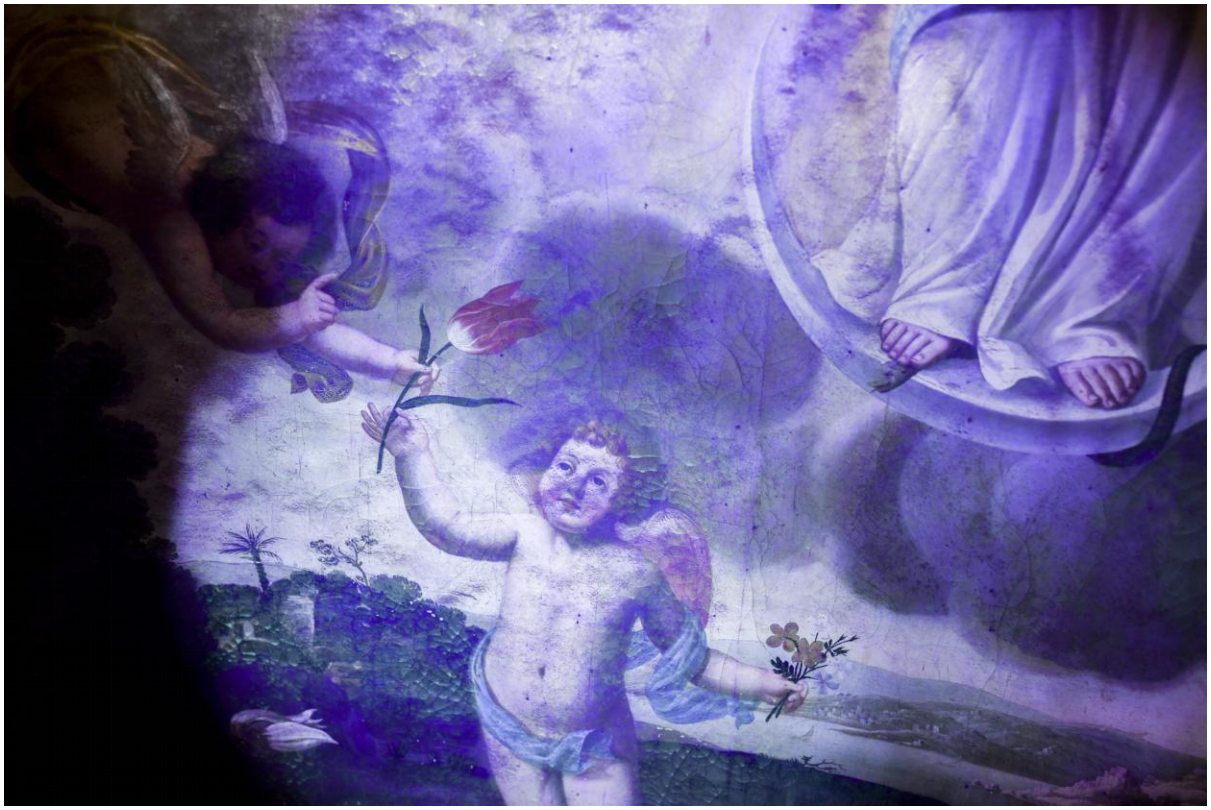

Figure 16: Detail of the bottom left corner in ultraviolet light.

Figure 17: Detail from the mid bottom part of the painting in ultraviolet light.

Figure 18: Detail adjacent to the Virgin in ultraviolet light.

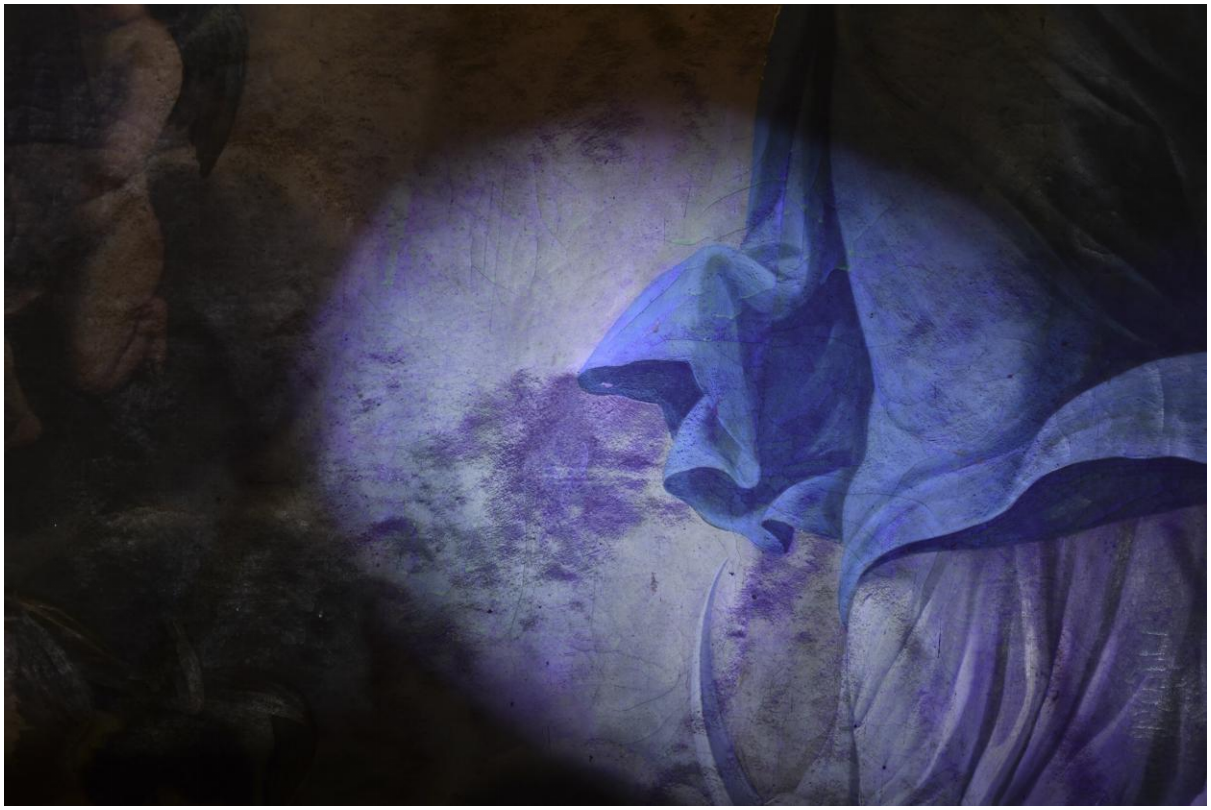

Figure 19: Detail adjacent to the Virgin in ultraviolet light. This seemingly dark area is caused by the surface alteration.

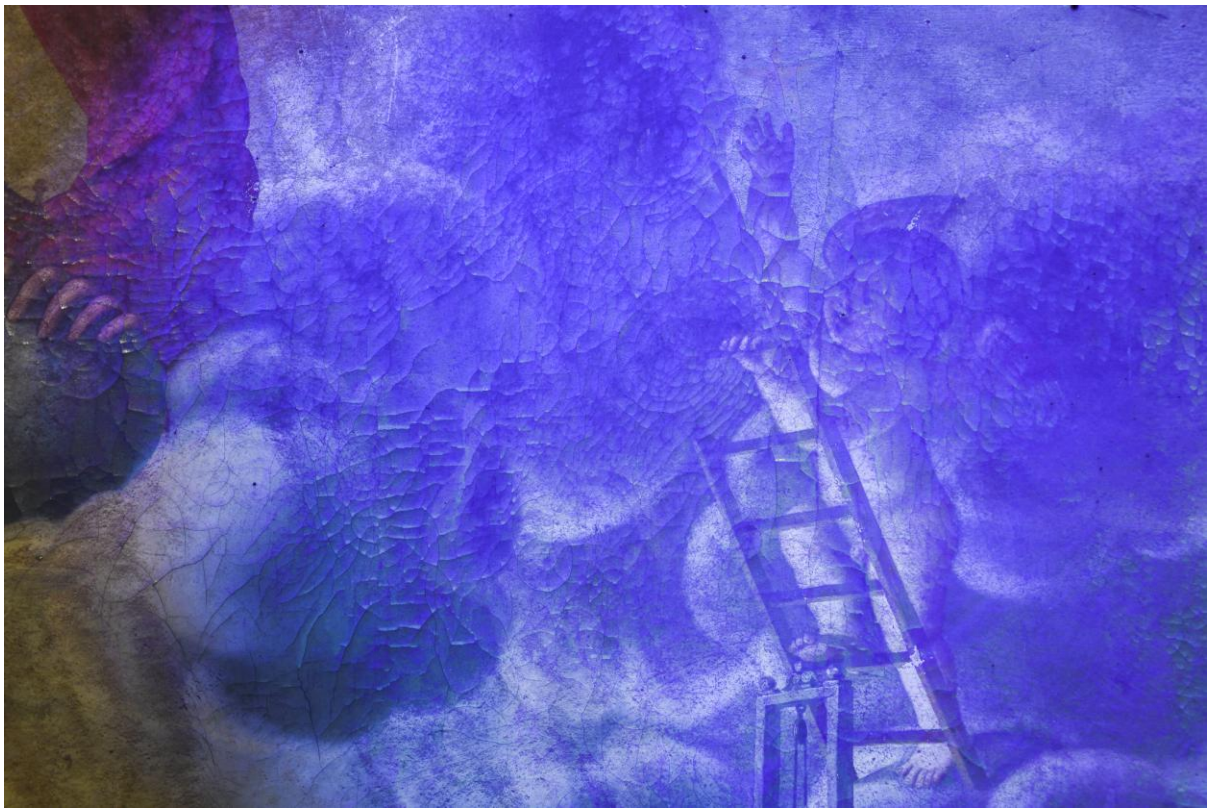

Figure 20: Detail in ultraviolet light.

Figure 21: Detail of the putti in ultraviolet light.

INVENTORY NUMBER: JCV / P / 147

TITLE/SUBJECT: The Birth of Our Lady

MEASUREMENTS: 2.86 x 1.99 meters

ARTIST/attribution: Filippo Dingli with the assistance of Stefano Erardi

PERIOD: 17th century

MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUE: oil-based painting on canvas support. The original canvas consists of two vertical canvases sown together along the central part of the painting. The painting is stretched on a wooden strainer frame having a central horizontal crossbar and four diagonal members to reinforce the corners. The strainer does not have bevelled members, though the internal edges of the frame, crossbar, and the diagonal members at each corner are chamfered, apparently to limit marking the painting. The painting has a dark red ground layer that has penetrated through some parts of the original canvas. The canvas was secured to its strainer frame with cane nails.

PAST TREATMENTS: The painting was not lined and is still stretched on its original strainer. The original cane nails are present, although some additional metal nails were added along the painting's tacking margins. It is evident that the original varnish was removed in the past. Minimal retouching was detected with UV light. The painting was then varnished with a brush.

STATE OF CONSERVATION: The painting is significantly soiled. The strainer appears to be still functional and no significant deformations have been noted. The paint layer has cracked and cupping was observed. However the paint layer is still secured to the canvas support. The canvas is still kept taut and is still flat and without apparent deformation and sagging.

The varnish layer has yellowed and non-original paint has discoloured. Minimal paint losses and abrasion was noted at the extreme upper sides as the painting fits tightly inside a groove within the wall at its original location.

Figure 22: General view of the painting in diffused visible light.

Figure 23: General view of the painting’s reverse in diffused visible light.

Figure 24: Detail of the central part of the painting in diffused light.

Figure 25: Detail of the upper left corner in diffused light.

Figure 26: Detail close to the bottom left corner in raking light showing the texture of cupped paint.

Figure 27: Detail close to the painting's left bottom corner in ultraviolet light showing the presence of minimal retouching.

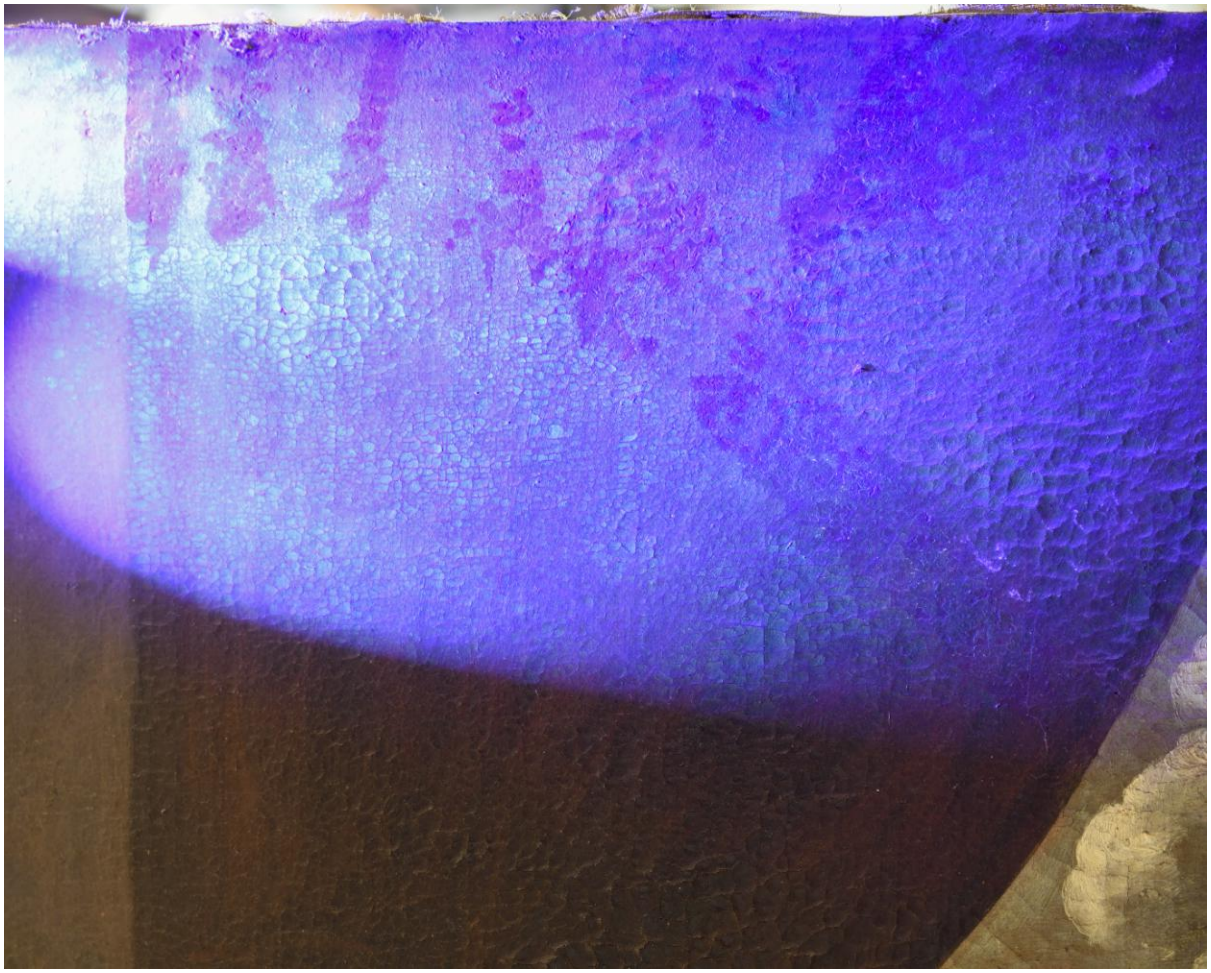

Figure 28: Detail close to the upper left corner in ultraviolet light showing the presence of retouching.

INVENTORY NUMBER: JCV / P / 148

TITLE/SUBJECT: The Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple

MEASUREMENTS: 1.98 x 2.87 meters

ARTIST/attribution: Filippo Dingli with the assistance of Stefano Erardi

PERIOD: 17th century

MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUE: oil-based painting on canvas support. The original canvas consists of two vertical canvases sown together along the central part of the painting. The painting is stretched on a wooden strainer frame having a central horizontal crossbar and four diagonal members to reinforce the corners. The strainer does not have bevelled members, though the internal edges of the frame, crossbar, and the diagonal members at each corner are chamfered, apparently to limit marking the painting. The painting appears to have a dark red ground layer. The canvas was secured to its strainer frame with cane nails.

PAST TREATMENTS: The painting was lined and still stretched on its original strainer. The original cane nails are present. After lining, the central bottom part of this painting was cut and the bottom member of the strainer frame was removed in order to accommodate a wooden pulpit located exactly beneath the painting. New wooden parts were added to the frame in a crude manner, only to sustain the physical integrity of the said frame. Moreover, the bottom cut margin of the painting was left unattached to the frame.

The canvas support was also patched at the bottom part.

It is evident that the original varnish was removed in the past. Significant retouching and over-paint was noted at various parts of the painting. Retouching paint was found on losses of the original paint losses. The presence of thick layers of varnish hindered the ultraviolet investigation. In other words, the full extent of non-original paint can not be easily detected even when the painting is illuminated with ultraviolet light. The painting was then varnished with a brush. Few metal nails were inserted along the perimeter of the painting to adhere a decorative wooden frame.

STATE OF CONSERVATION: The painting is significantly soiled. The strainer is in a bad state as deformations and dislocations at its joinery were noted. As already stated, the bottom part of the painting and of its strainer frame are missing. It also appears that significant paint was lost that was eventually retouched.

The paint layer has cracked and cupping was observed. However the paint layer is still secured to the canvas support. Local paint detachments were noted particularly where the painting was cut. The canvas is not taut. The lower part of the painting was not adhered to the frame, leaving the painting to sag and deform. Paint abrasion was noted at the upper margins as the painting fits tightly inside a groove within the wall at its original location.

The painting has a small paint loss and dent in the canvas, probably caused by a blunt object, that is approximately 3cm in diameter. The latter damage is located close to the central part of the painting.

The varnish layer has yellowed and non-original paint has discoloured.

Figure 29: General front side of the painting in diffused visible light.

Figure 30: General view of the painting’s reverse side in diffused visible light.

Figure 31: Detail of the painting in diffused light.

Figure 32: Detail of the painting in diffused light. The colour change of the brown can be noted.

Figure 33: Detail in diffused light.

Figure 34: Detail of the bottom, cut part of the painting in diffused light.

Figure 35: Detail of the bottom cut part of the painting in raking light.

Figure 36: Detail of the upper part of the painting in raking light.

Figure 37: Detail in ultraviolet light.

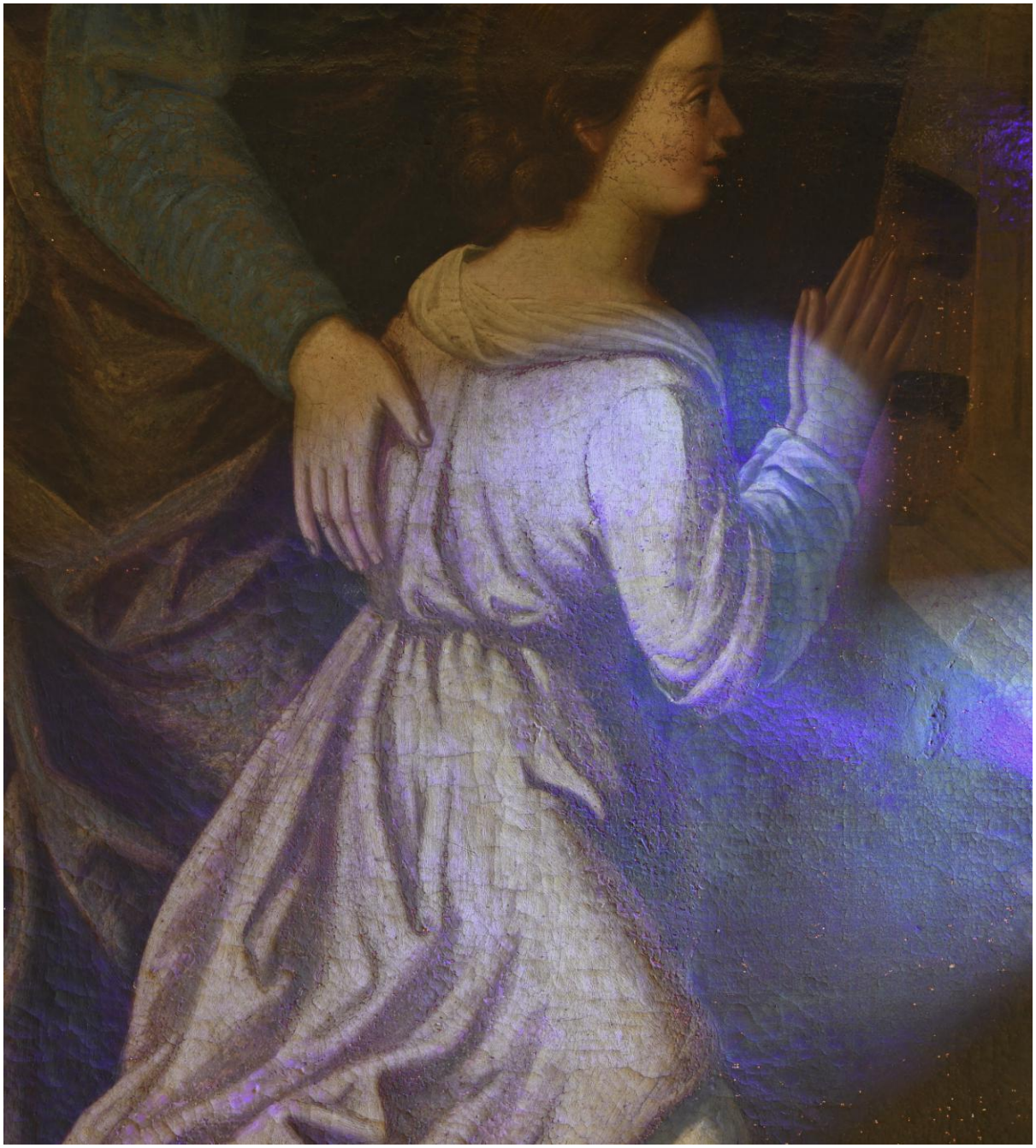

Figure 38: Detail of the painting in ultraviolet light.

Figure 39: Another detail in ultraviolet light.

Figure 40: Another detail in ultraviolet light showing the presence of retouching and varnish.

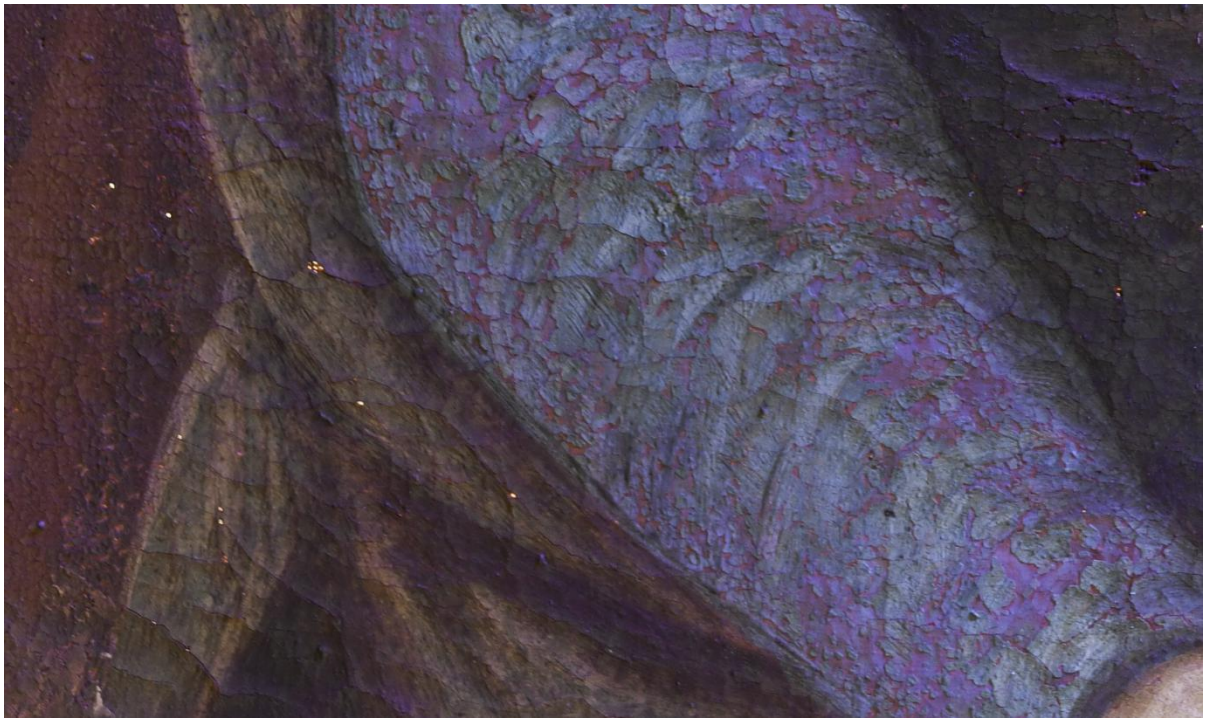

Figure 41: Detail showing the presence of retouching paint applied directly on losses of paint layer.

INVENTORY NUMBER: JCV / P / 149

TITLE/SUBJECT: The Annunciation

MEASUREMENTS: 2.86 x 2.01 meters

ARTIST/attribution: Filippo Dingli with the assistance of Stefano Erardi

PERIOD: 17th century

MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUE: oil-based painting on canvas support. The original canvas consists of two vertical canvases sown together along the central part of the painting. The painting is stretched on a wooden strainer frame having a central horizontal crossbar and four diagonal members to reinforce the corners. The strainer does not have bevelled members, though the internal edges of the frame, crossbar, and the diagonal members at each corner are chamfered, apparently to limit marking the painting. The painting has a dark red ground layer that has penetrated through some parts of the original canvas. Minimal and very small canvas punctures were noted. The canvas was secured to its strainer frame with cane nails.

PAST TREATMENTS: The painting was not lined and is still stretched on its original strainer. The original cane nails are present. It is evident that the original varnish was removed in the past. Minimal retouching was detected with UV light. The painting was then varnished with a brush. Few metal nails were inserted along the perimeter of the painting to adhere a decorative wooden frame. Also tape was used as small patches, that were adhered at several areas of the painting's reverse side.

STATE OF CONSERVATION: The painting is significantly soiled. The strainer appears to be still functional and no significant deformations have been noted. The paint layer has cracked and cupping was observed. However the paint layer is still secured to the canvas support. The canvas is still kept taut and is still flat and without apparent deformation and sagging. Small local canvas deformations were noted.

The varnish layer has yellowed and non-original paint has discoloured. Minimal paint losses and abrasion was noted at the extreme upper sides as the painting fits tightly inside a groove within the wall at its original location.

Figure 42: General front view in diffused light.

Figure 43: General reverse side view in diffused light.

Figure 44: Detail of the canvas support showing stains due to absorption of varnish coatings applied during past treatments and the application of small patches.

Figure 45: Detail in diffused light.

Figure 46: Detail in diffused light.

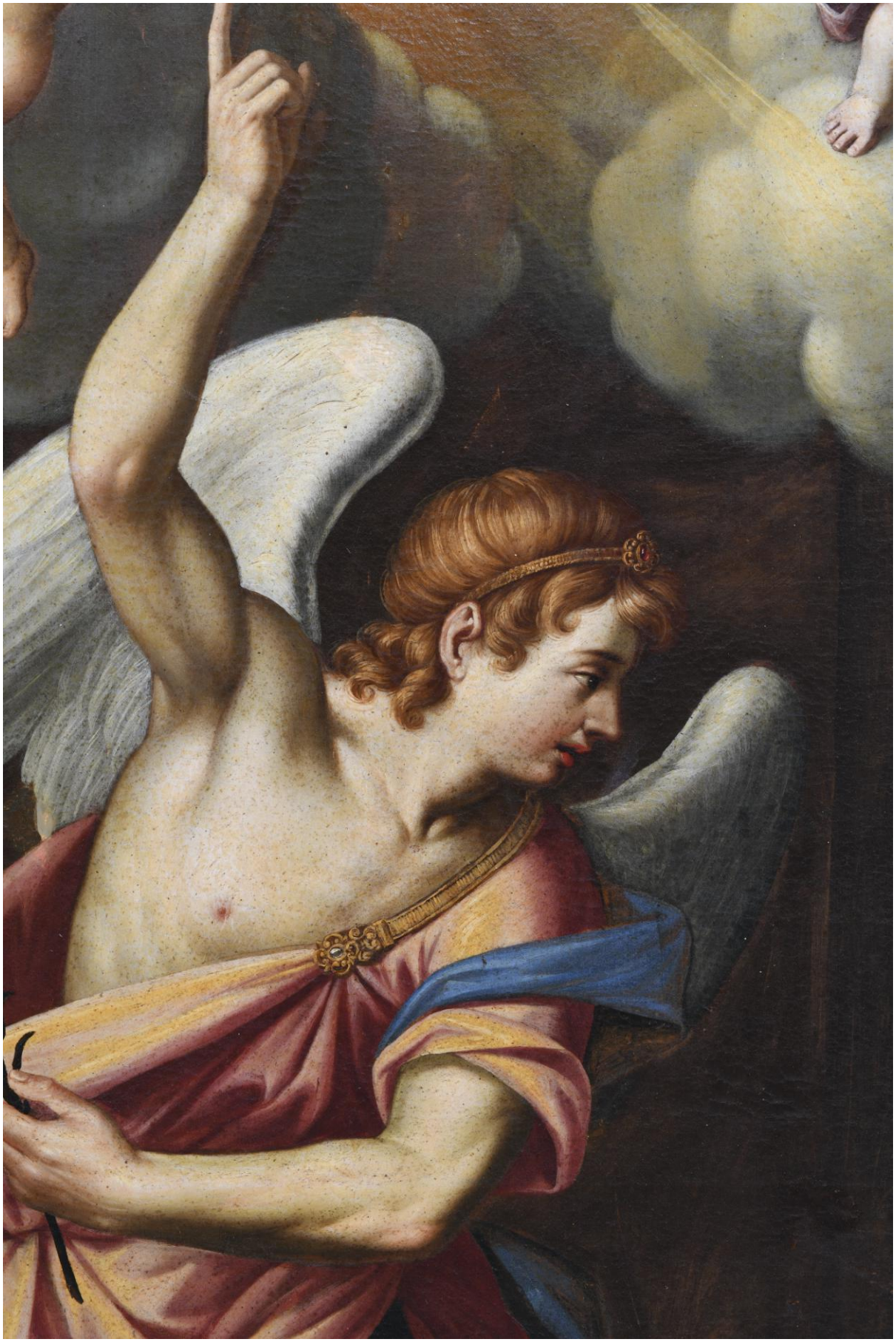

Figure 47: Detail in diffused light.

Figure 48: Detail in raking light.

INVENTORY NUMBER: JCV / P / 150

TITLE/SUBJECT: The Visitation of Our Lady to St Elisabeth

MEASUREMENTS: 2.86 x 2.00 meters

ARTIST: Filippo Dingli

PERIOD: 17th century

MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUE: oil-based painting on canvas support. The original canvas consists of two vertical canvases sown together along the central part of the painting. The painting is stretched on a wooden strainer frame having a central horizontal crossbar and four diagonal members to reinforce the corners. The strainer does not have bevelled members, though the internal edges of the frame, crossbar, and the diagonal members at each corner are chamfered, apparently to limit marking the painting. The painting has a dark red ground layer that has penetrated through some parts of the original canvas. Minimal and very small canvas punctures were noted. The canvas was secured to its strainer frame with cane nails.

PAST TREATMENTS: The painting was not lined and is still stretched on its original strainer. The original cane nails are present. It is evident that the original varnish was removed in the past. Local retouching was noted particularly to camouflage small paint losses at various parts of the painting, particularly at the upper right corner, upper central part and along the margins. Additional, minimal retouching was detected with UV light. The painting was then varnished with a brush. Few metal nails were inserted along the perimeter of the painting to adhere a decorative wooden frame. Accidental dripping of white paint deposited on the painting can also be noticed.

STATE OF CONSERVATION: The painting is significantly soiled. The strainer appears to be still functional and no significant deformations have been noted. The paint layer has cracked and cupping was observed. However the paint layer is still secured to the canvas support. The canvas is still kept taut and is still flat and without apparent deformation and sagging. Minimal paint losses and abrasion was noted at the extreme upper sides as the painting fits tightly inside a groove within the wall at its original location. An abrasion that caused small paint losses and dented the canvas was located at the lower central part of the painting. The latter scratch is approximately 17cm in length. Signs of past water infiltration can be observed along the central part of the painting, although this did not appear to have affected the canvas and paint layers.

Figure 49: General view of the painting in diffused light.

Figure 50: General reverse side view in diffused light.

Figure 51: Detail of the painting's reverse in diffused light.

Figure 52: Detail in diffused light.

Figure 53: Detail of the upper right corner in diffused light.

Figure 54: Detail showing the paint abrasion in diffused light.

Figure 55: Detail in diffused light showing water marks.

Figure 56: Detail in raking light.

Figure 57: Detail showing the abraded paint in raking light.

Figure 58: Detail in ultraviolet light showing the presence of non-original paint.

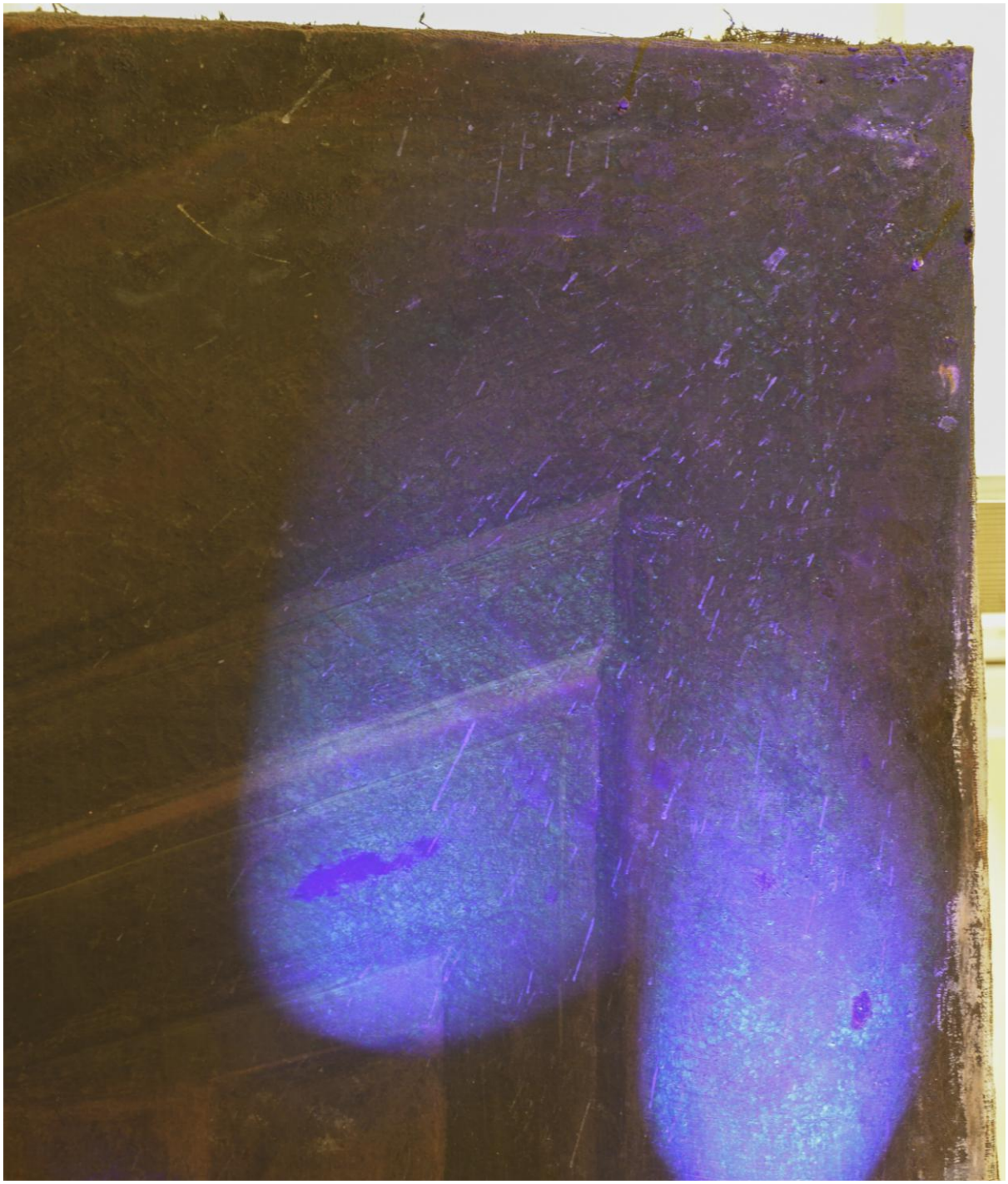

Figure 59: Detail in ultraviolet light showing the presence of retouching paint, varnish, and accidental deposits of white paint.

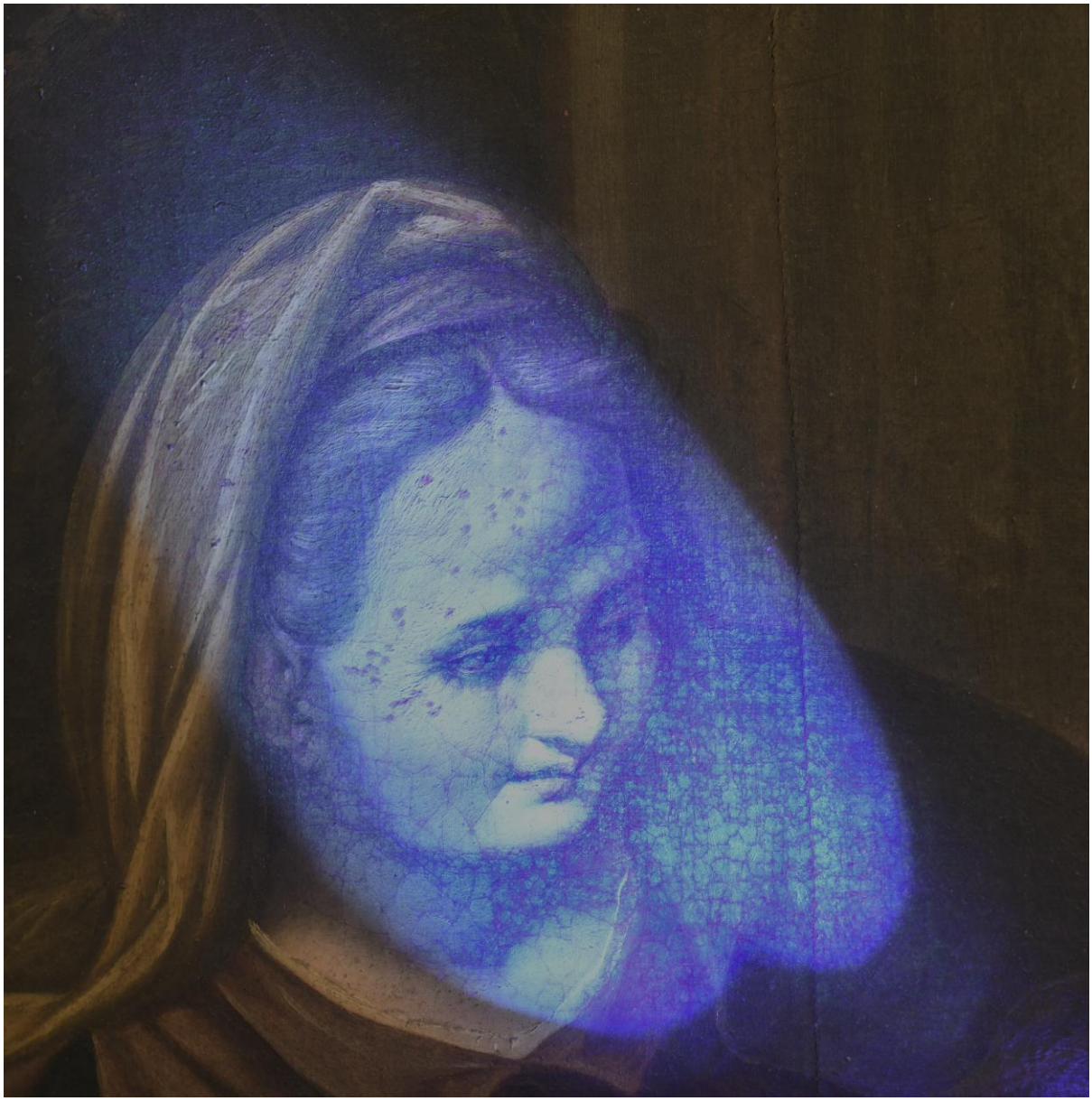

Figure 60: Detail in ultraviolet light showing the presence of non-original paint.

INVENTORY NUMBER: JCV / P 151

TITLE/SUBJECT: The Presentation of Our Lord (The Circumcision)

MEASUREMENTS: 2.86 x 1.99 meters

ARTIST/attribution: Filippo Dingli with the assistance of Stefano Erardi

PERIOD: 17th century

MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUE: oil-based painting on canvas support. The original canvas consists of two vertical canvases sown together along the central part of the painting. The painting is stretched on a wooden strainer frame having a central horizontal crossbar and four diagonal members to reinforce the corners. The strainer does not have bevelled members, though the internal edges of the frame, crossbar, and the diagonal members at each corner are chamfered, apparently to limit marking the painting. The painting has a dark red ground layer that has penetrated through some parts of the original canvas. The canvas was secured to its strainer frame with cane nails.

PAST TREATMENTS: The painting was not lined and is still stretched on its original strainer. The original cane nails are present. There is a small piece of wood that was nailed to the bottom It is evident that the original varnish was removed in the past. Local retouching was noted particularly to camouflage small paint losses at various parts of the painting, particularly at the upper right corner, upper central part and along the margins. Local retouching was noted mainly at the lower left corner, the central part at the left margin of the painting and on the face of the old priest. The painting was then varnished with a brush. Few metal nails were inserted along the perimeter of the painting to adhere a decorative wooden frame.

STATE OF CONSERVATION: The painting is significantly soiled. The strainer appears to be still functional and no significant deformations have been noted. The paint layer has cracked and cupping was observed. However the paint layer is still secured to the canvas support. The canvas is still kept taut, flat and without apparent deformations. As in the majority of the other paintings, the varnish applied during past treatment penetrated through the paint layer, particularly through the paint cracks, staining and further oxidising the original canvas support. The presence of retouching might be indicative of past paint losses. Paint abrasion was noted at the upper margins as the painting fits tightly inside a groove within the wall at its original location.

The painting has a small paint loss and dent in the canvas, probably caused by a blunt object, that is approximately 3cm in diameter. The latter damage is located close to the central part of the painting.

The varnish layer has yellowed and non-original paint has discoloured.

Figure 61: General front view in diffused light.

Figure 62: General reverse side view in diffused light.

Figure 63: Detail of the canvas stained by the absorption of varnish (applied during past treatments).

Figure 64: Detail of the dent and paint loss.

Figure 65: Detail in raking light.

Figure 66: The lower part of the painting in raking light.

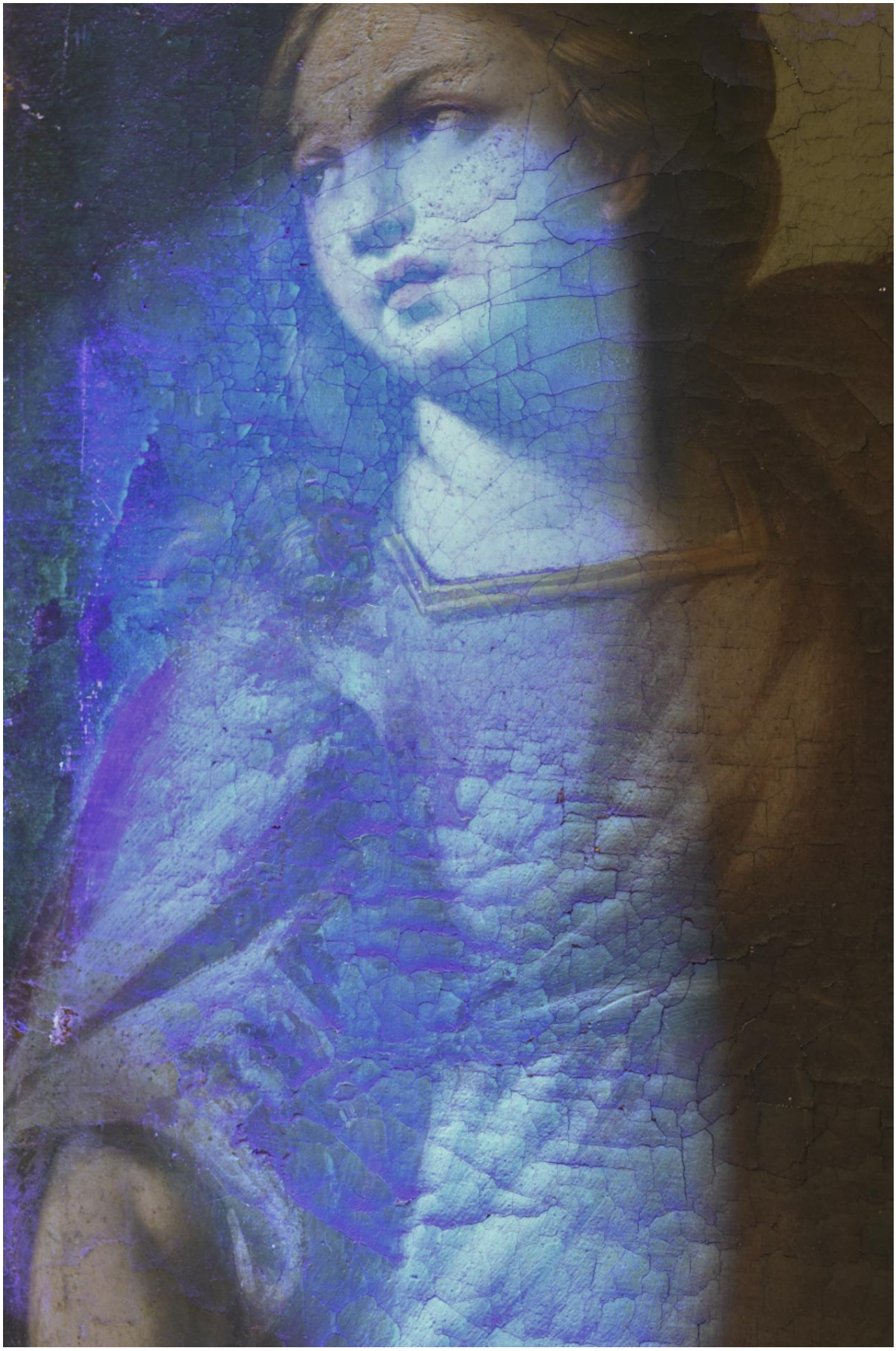

Figure 67: Detail in ultraviolet light showing the presence of non-original paint.

Figure 68: Detail in ultraviolet light showing the presence of non-original paint.

Figure 69: Detail in ultraviolet light showing presence of non-original paint.

INVENTORY NUMBER: JCV / P 152

TITLE/SUBJECT: The Assumption of Our Lady

MEASUREMENTS: 2.86 x 2.00 meters

ARTIST/attribution: Filippo Dingli with the assistance of Stefano Erardi

PERIOD: 17th century

MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUE: oil-based painting on canvas support. The original canvas consists of two vertical canvases sown together along the central part of the painting. The painting is stretched on a wooden strainer frame having a central horizontal crossbar and four diagonal members to reinforce the corners. The strainer does not have bevelled members, though the internal edges of the frame, crossbar, and the diagonal members at each corner are chamfered, apparently to limit marking the painting. The painting has a dark red ground layer that has penetrated through some parts of the original canvas. Minimal and very small canvas punctures were noted. The canvas was secured to its strainer frame with cane nails.

PAST TREATMENTS: The painting was not lined and is still stretched on its original strainer. The original cane nails are present. It is evident that the original varnish was removed in the past. Local retouching was noted particularly to camouflage small paint losses along the perimeter of the painting's bottom left quadrant area. Additional, minimal retouching was detected with UV light. The painting was then varnished with a brush. Few metal nails were inserted along the perimeter of the painting to adhere a decorative wooden frame.

STATE OF CONSERVATION: The painting is significantly soiled. The strainer appears to be still functional and no significant deformations have been noted. The paint layer has cracked and cupping was observed. However the paint layer is still secured to the canvas support. The canvas is still kept taut and is still flat and without apparent deformation and sagging. In the past the painting lost some paint particularly along the margin at the bottom left quadrant of the painting. Minimal paint losses and abrasion was noted at the extreme upper sides as the painting fits tightly inside a groove within the wall at its original location.

The varnish layer has yellowed and non-original paint has discoloured.

Figure 70: General front side view in diffused light.

Figure 71: General reverse side view in diffused light.

Figure 72: Detail in diffused light that still shows the presence of discoloured non-original paint.

Figure 73: Detail in raking light showing the surface texture of cracked paint.

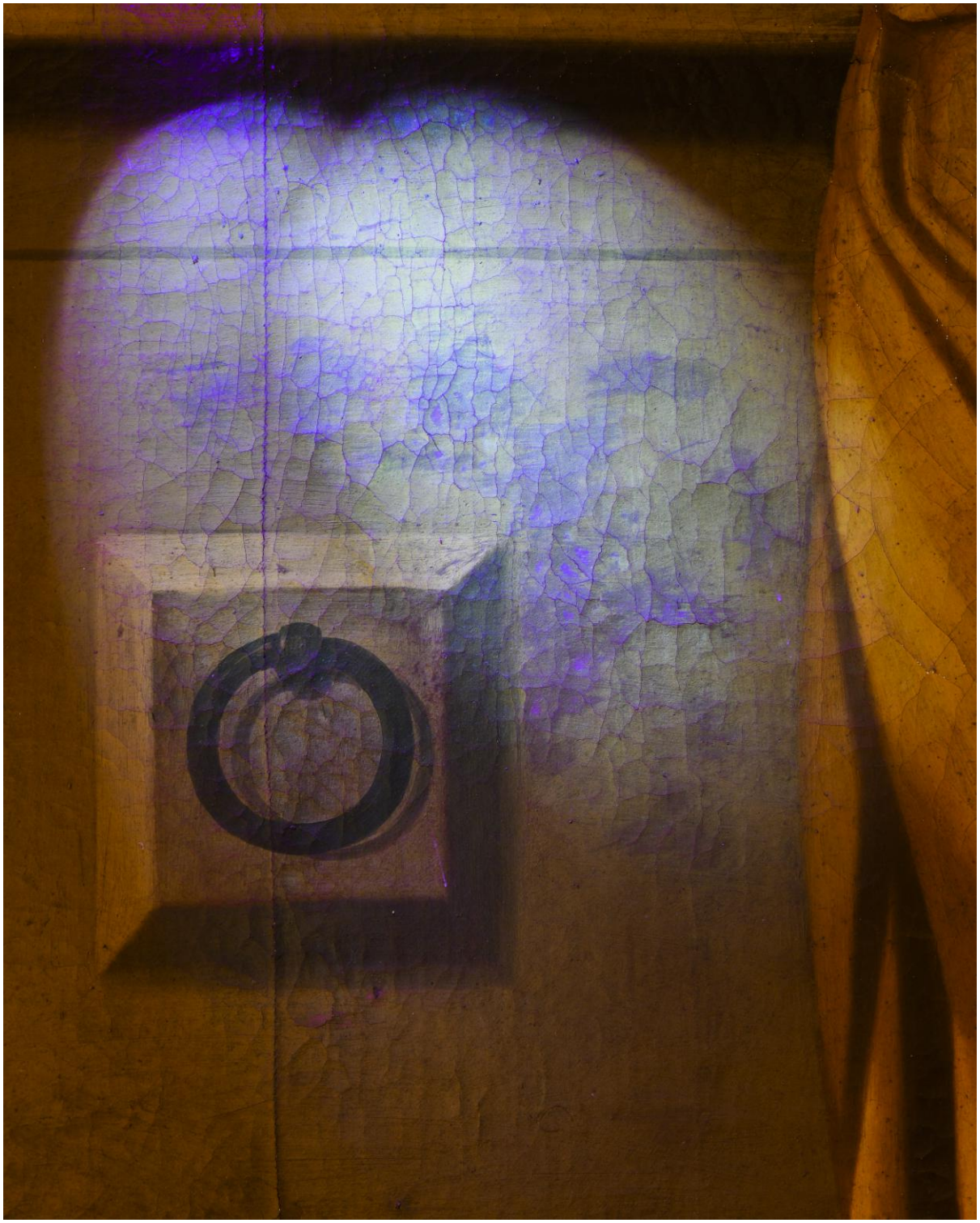

Figure 74: Detail in ultraviolet light showing the presence of varnish and non-original paint.

Figure 75: Detail in ultraviolet light showing the presence of non-original paint.

RE-INSTALLATION

Following conservation and restoration treatments of the above paintings, the artworks shall be re-installed back to their original location (wall recesses within the Oratory) without problems. The Contractor shall note that the paintings fit exactly inside their recess, where the top part of several artworks have to slide within a narrow slot carved in the wall. The latter is indicated with a red arrow in the following figure.

Figure 76: The wall recess of the paintings. The red arrow shows a slot carved in the stone that permits the top part of the paintings to slide through.

Moreover, as stated earlier, the painting titled “The Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple” has its bottom part cut in a curved perimeter to accommodate the presence of a wooden pulpit directly beneath the said painting. The modified strainer, or newly-manufactured stretcher frame, has to accommodate the presence of the pulpit and shall not present problems during the re-installation of the artwork back to its original location. The following figure shows the wall recess of this painting where the presence of the wood pulpit can be observed.

Figure 77: Presence of the wooden pulpit beneath the painting titled "Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple".