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Holy Family – Giuseppe Cali (1846-1930)

The painting represents the Holy Family and is depicted by Giuseppe Cali. It belongs to the Church of our Lady of Pompeii, Marsaxlokk and measures approximately 200cm x 130cm. It is covered in superficial dirt and grime and a discoloured varnish is also present on the paint layer. The painting could not be observed from the verso during the inspection; as a result, both the canvas and auxiliary frame could not be inspected.

Plate 1: Front view of the painting under normal light

The painting has several deformations in the canvas support mostly around the edges. The top part of the painting seems to be a later addition, possibly indicating that the painting was adjusted to fit the current area and framework. This addition is not adhered well with the rest of the painting and seems to be detached. Some tears in the canvas could also be observed and it is probable that the painting was lined in a previous intervention. Around one of the tears, situated at the lower part of the painting, one could notice old stucco which was applied quite thickly and is currently cracked and detached.

Several retouchings, which appear matt over the varnish layer, can be observed both under normal light and confirmed using ultraviolet light. At the corners, one can notice screws, however some are missing and only the hole is visible. Losses in the paint and preparation layers are also present.

Plate 2: Detail of the painting showing the added and detached top part of the painting and a small tear

Plate 3: Detail of the painting showing deformations in the canvas support

Plate 4: Details of the painting showing matt areas indicating retouchings over the varnish layer

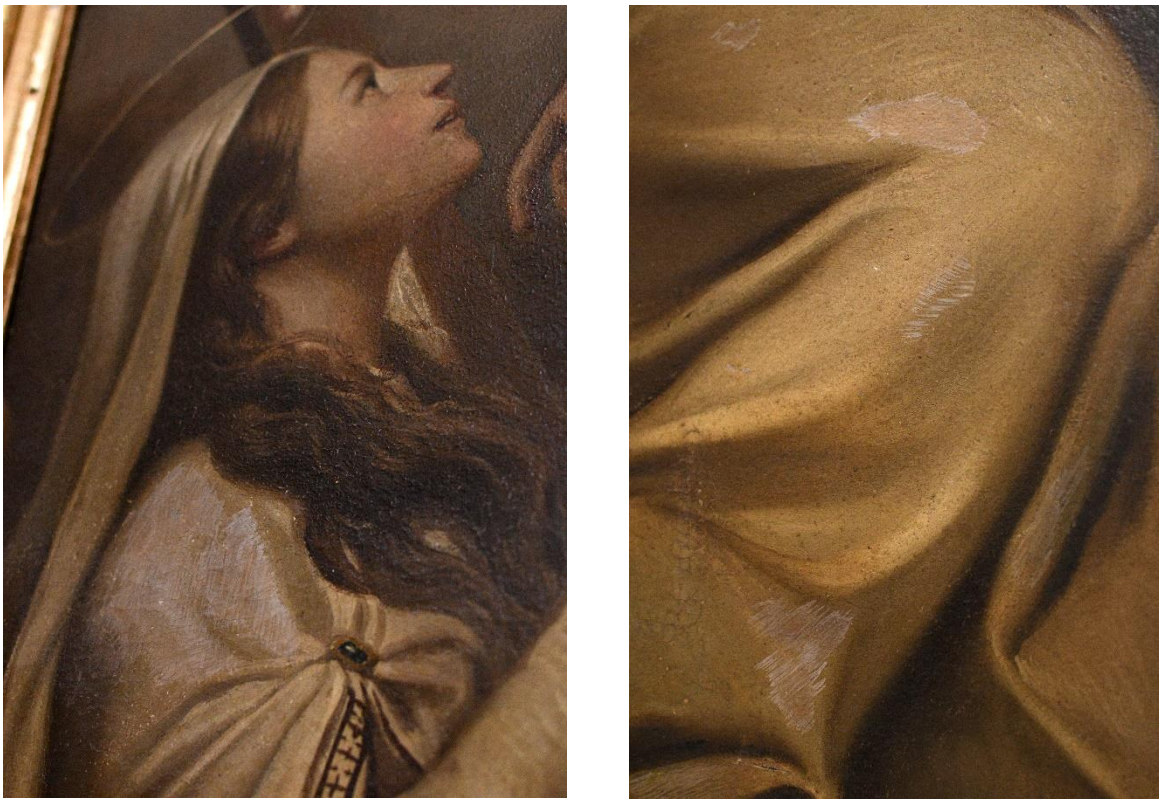

Plate 5: Details of the painting showing retouchings from previous interventions

Plate 6: Detail of the painting showing losses in the paint layer

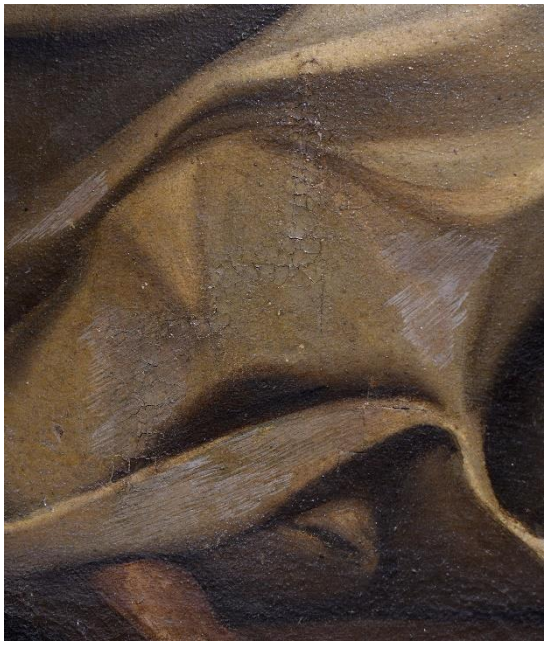

Plate 7: Details of the painting showing small tears in the canvas support and retouchings from previous interventions. One can also notice the thickly applied stucco around a tear which seems to be cracking.

Plate 8: Details of the painting showing the screw and holes at the corners and minor losses in the paint and preparation layers

The gilded decorative frame is nailed to the painting and some holes are present due to the nails. The gilding is also abraded in certain areas and parts of the frame seem to be broken and missing.

Plate 9: Details of the state of conservation of the decorative frame

Plate 10: Detail of the decorative frame

TREATMENT PROPOSAL

1. **Photographic documentation and manufacturing technique**

   General and detailed photographic documentation are to be taken under normal, raking and ultraviolet light before starting the conservation and restoration treatments on the painting. Further photographs are to be taken whilst carrying out the conservation and restoration treatments, and after the project is finalised, to provide a detailed report with the full conservation and restoration process.

2. **Cleaning**

   Cleaning tests are to be carried out before treatment to confirm the ideal solvent/s to remove the varnish without affecting the original paint layer. Removal of overpaint should be done gradually without affecting the original paint layer.

3. **Treating the verso**

   The painting could not be seen from the verso; however, some tears seem to be present in the canvas support and it was probably lined in a previous intervention. The painting needs to be removed from its auxiliary support to address the deformations and re-tensioning of the canvas support.

If necessary, Japanese paper should be applied on the pictorial face prior to any interventions on the verso. In this case, if the painting was lined, the latter should be removed and the painting relined using a compatible canvas and synthetic adhesive. Losses in the canvas support should also be infilled, by making inlays, using a compatible canvas and synthetic adhesive. If lining is not necessary, patches using non-woven polyester should be adhered over the tears and canvas inlays to strengthen the canvas support. If lining is not carried out, strip lining should be done using a compatible canvas and synthetic adhesive.

4. **New addition**

The top part of the painting is a later addition and this should be removed because it is detached from the rest of the painting. One should add an inlay (using a compatible canvas and synthetic adhesive), apply stucco and retouch the new addition using a neutral integration with the puntini or tratteggio technique to easily show that this is an addition to the original painting.

5. **Auxiliary frame**

The auxiliary frame could not be observed from the verso, and it is unknown if it is in a good state of conservation. It is also unknown whether the current frame was altered and extended to match the decorative frame and area it is hanging from. If it is not the original frame (it was extended in a previous intervention) and it is not in a good state of conservation, then a new auxiliary frame should be reconstructed having the same extended dimensions. If the auxiliary frame is still the original and in a good state of conservation, one must not reconstruct a new frame with the new dimensions but rather add an extension to the original frame. If the auxiliary frame is still the original and it is not in a good state of conservation, one should reconstruct a new frame with the new altered dimensions. Should the auxiliary frame need to be replaced or modified it will be constructed from tulipwood having crossbars and stainless-steel expandable devices.

6. **Infilling of losses**

Losses in the paint and preparation layers are to be infilled using gelatine glue and gesso di Bologna and given a similar texture to the surface of the painting.

7. **Reintegration of losses**

Retouchings on all losses in the paint and preparatory layers that were previously infilled with stucco are to be carried out using compatible and reversible materials (watercolour and/or varnish colours) and using the puntini or tratteggio technique.

8. **Varnish**

A synthetic varnish is to be applied as a protective coating by spray. This coating will serve to saturate the original colours and as a protective coating against dirt and grime. The synthetic coating must be reversible, stable, non-yellowing and having UV protection.

9. **Decorative frame**

The decorative frame is to be cleaned from dirt and grime and broken areas are to be fixed using compatible materials. Losses in the gold should be integrated either using gold leaf or another stable, synthetic material, according to the original manufacturing technique of the decorative frame, resembling the colour of gold. That is, if the original gilding was done using bolo and/or mordent and gold leaf, losses or new wooden members should be done using the same methodology. If gold leaf was not used in the original manufacturing technique of the decorative frames, then losses or new wooden members can be reintegrated using stable, synthetic materials representing the colour gold. A synthetic varnish should be sprayed over the gilded frame as a protective coating.

The decorative frame should not be nailed to the painting again and a new hanging methodology should be implemented.