



BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH: VINCENZO PAGANI'S MADONNA DELLA CINTOLA

RESTORATION LABORATORY OF PAINTINGS AND WOODEN MATERIALS

WOODEN SUPPORT

The work is composed of seven poplar wood planks, horizontally superimposed and joined with wooden dowels slotted into holes. On the verso, two vertical wooden crosspieces, in poplar and elm, confer stability to the support (**fig. 1**). This system, reinforced with nails positioned at the level of the joints of the planks, has been shown to be unsuitable since it obstructed the natural movement of the wood determined by variations in thermo-hygrometric conditions, and was the cause of several fissures in the wooden support. In addition, the natural expansion of the panel was countered by the weight of the horizontally arranged planks, which gave rise to increasing compression and deformation of the lower part. After protecting the pictorial surface with Japanese paper, new wedge-shaped poplar wood dowels were inserted, and the existing vertical crosspieces were consolidated and rendered mobile. For the occasion, a new carbon fibre structure was designed, to redistribute the weight of the individual planks on the supporting surface. In the new system, special elements in beech wood, glued to the planks and connected to equally calibrated springs attached to the new crosspieces in carbon fibre, preserve the lower planks of the panel from eventual deformations (**fig. 2**).



Fig. 1, 2

EXECUTION TECHNIQUE

The painting, in oil tempera, was executed on a preparation constituted of two layers of plaster and glue. A layer of "biacca" is followed by a very thin application of paint. The presence of two colourless areas along the upper and lower bands of the panel suggests the possible presence of a frame, since lost. Of note is the use of gold and silver leaf in the realisation of the robes and in certain details.

STATE OF CONSERVATION

Before restoration the surface of the painting was covered with a heavy yellow-brown layer made up of resin-based varnishes, oils and animal glues applied in the past for protective purposes (**fig. 3**). The legibility of the depiction was

compromised by the loss of colour, leaving visible the preparation or indeed even the wood of the planks (**fig. 4**). This deterioration, particularly accentuated in the figure of the Madonna, is attributable not only to various movements but also to the fragility of the pictorial layer and damages due to prolonged accidental exposure to water.



Fig. 3, 4

RESTORATION

The most demanding aspect of the restoration intervention (2011-2016) was the removal of the old varnishes which, as on the robe of Saint Bartholomew (first black, now restored to its vibrant green), had altered the original tones (**fig. 5**). In other cases, as in the cloak of the Madonna, the action of the varnishes had penetrated deeply, making complete removal problematic. For cleaning, both the traditional solvent mixes and new experimental techniques were used, such as the use of enzymes, bacteria and laser cleaning. The pictorial reintegration was carried out by speckling with watercolour (**fig. 6**), delicately lowering the tone of the white colour of the preparation. In this way, it was intended to restore a uniform perception of the chromaticity of the image, without however making any arbitrary reintegration or a form of interpretation of the missing parts.



Fig. 5, 6