

Context Introduction and Summary of the project for the Questionnaire

Conservation Strategies for Detached Wall Paintings Transferred to Canvas:

Concept development based on the case study of the *Strappi* LM-11991.2 from the Monastery Church St. Johann in Müstair.

The aim of this thesis is to develop a conservation concept for the collection of detached wall paintings from the Monastery Church of St. Johann in Müstair, focusing on those detached using the strappo technique. This concept will be developed using a representative object from the collection¹. To ensure the approach is aligned with the latest advancements, current conservation and restoration practices for similar objects in Europe will be incorporated. For this reason, this survey was created.

The object under consideration is a wall painting that was detached 1908/9 from the north wall of the attic of the monastery church St. Johann in Müstair using the strappo procedure. It was subsequently transferred onto canvas, stretched on a wooden strainer with a rigid intermediate layer (linoleum) between. It is currently stored in the depot of the Swiss National Museum. The dimensions of the object including the frame are 245 centimeters in width, 160 centimeters in height, with a frame depth of three centimeters and the object has a weight of 43.2 kg. The depicted scene portrays a narrative of the life of David from the Old Testament, wherein Absalom is being led by Joab in the presence of David².

This painting is part of a collection owned by the Swiss National Museum of 28 detached wall paintings (*strappi* and *stacchi* procedures), with inconsistent conservation histories complicating their preservation. The Carolingian wall paintings, combining true fresco and secco techniques, were rediscovered in the late 19th century³. Detachment in 1908/09 aimed to make them accessible and ensure preservation.

The detachment process caused uneven thicknesses of paint and mortar layers, compromising stability and adhesion to the canvas support. Significant adhesion issues between the rigid fragments and flexible canvas lead to visible cracks and voids. The canvas support has lost tension and deforms, with the rigid stabilizer also showing deformations, causing points of concentrated force and vibrations. This material incompatibility creates ongoing stress and instability due to different responses to environmental changes. Past restoration interventions have resulted in complex layering, complicating treatment. Additionally, fragments fixed with nails on the canvas edges compromise stability and risk mechanical damage.

Given these complexities, especially the large-scale format and the decision to maintain its current appearance with the wooden strainer and stretched canvas, how can these conservation challenges be best addressed? The issues presented include a mix of typical wall painting and easel painting deterioration phenomena. The questionnaire aims to gather insights from various institutions to develop a strategy that respects the object's integrity and feasible treatment options.



Figure 1 By strappo procedure detached wall painting from Müstair, Object LM-11991.2, front side in raking light, dimensions: height 160cm, length 245cm and width 3cm (frame) (SNM, 2024).

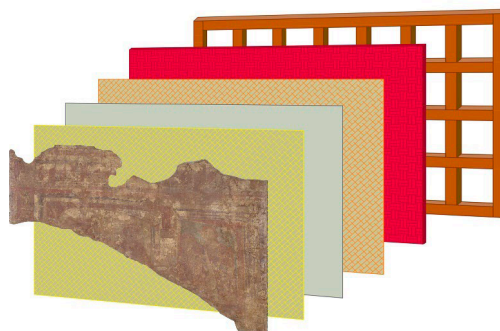


Figure 2 Graphic reconstruction of the components of the detached wall painting. From back to front: wooden strainer, rigid stabiliser, lining canvas, transfer adhesive, transfer canvas, painting. Picture: C. Martinucci, 2022.

¹ This thesis continues the project "Research and Development of a Conservation and Restoration Concept for the Detached Wall Paintings from the Monastery Church St. Johann in Müstair." Conducted from 2019 to 2021, the project aimed to research, analyze, and devise a conservation strategy for these artworks. For further information on the detached wall paintings from the monastery church in Müstair, the article by Ellwanger et al. 2022 is recommended.

² Goll, Exner, Hirsch 2009, p. 5

³ Emmenegger 2002.

References

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