

The Conservation of D G Rossetti's 'La Ghirlandata' and its frame Transcript

0:01

[Music]

0:11

bank of america thrilled to support the

0:14

guildhall

0:15

art gallery with a grant to help them

0:17

conserve

0:18

and restore down to gabrielle rossetti's

0:21

leggy landata

0:23

the grant has come from the bank's art

0:25

conservation project which aims to help

0:28

not-for-profit museums and galleries

0:31

restore works that are in danger of

0:32

deterioration but that are considered

0:34

national treasures

0:36

we're delighted with what the

0:38

conservation team has been able to

0:40

produce

0:40

and i'm just thrilled that this piece is

0:42

now going to be back on public display

0:45

for audiences to enjoy today and

0:48

hopefully forever more

0:50

this is one of the most popular works in

0:52

our collection it's also an

0:53

intensely private and personal painting

0:56

for rossetti

0:57

we're delighted to have the support of

0:59

the bank of america art conservation

1:00

project grant it's allowed us to re-get

1:02

to know one of our paintings through

1:04

technical analysis which hasn't been

1:05

done before in this work

1:07

and it's allowed us to conserve both the

1:09

painting and the frame together so now

1:11

they are at their most powerful and

1:14

they're in their best possible condition

1:15

to be enjoyed by the public

1:16

[Music]

1:21

when the painting first entered the

1:23

studio we assessed its condition and

1:26

it actually is in pretty good shape for

1:29

a painting of its age

1:30

we knew had a number of problems that

1:32

the most important of which was the

1:34

flaking

1:35

issue so the the paint was

1:38

tenting which is where the paint

1:40

actually lifts

1:41

off the canvas and is in danger of

1:44

flaking away

1:47

there was also the issue of the the
1:49
structure of the painting
1:51
the lining that had been done in
1:53
previous years
1:54
it wasn't very good quality it had lots
1:56
of lumps and bumps in it
1:58
the stretcher that the painting was on
2:01
was
2:01
over extended and weakened so that it
2:04
was no longer supporting the canvas
2:06
properly
2:09
we began a technical investigation to
2:11
better understand the artist's materials
2:14
and techniques
2:15
and also to direct our treatment program
2:19
so we looked at the painting in
2:21
invisible light in ultraviolet light
2:23
infrared light and we also had a digital
2:26
x-ray
2:27
of the painting taken
2:43
when the painting is viewed in uv light
2:46
you could very clearly see that it had
2:48
been previously
2:49
cleaned by somebody in the past and they
2:52
had
2:52

concentrated on cleaning the faces the
2:54
flesh the hands
2:56
and the the flowers all the key
2:59
interesting little areas
3:00
but had left the green foliage around
3:03
the figure
3:04
and the perimeter of the figure in large
3:05
parts of the direct green drapery
3:08
we took further samples and did
3:10
cross-section analysis
3:11
to actually work out where we had
3:13
varnish layers
3:15
and where we had resinous paint we have
3:17
ended up with a painting that has been
3:19
preferentially cleaned and is unbalanced
3:22
and that really is what we are seeking
3:24
to do
3:24
to to try and address that in the
3:27
cleaning treatment
3:33
this frame really has a dual importance
3:36
it's a work of art in its own right
3:38
it's got meticulously hand-carved
3:41
medallions and beautifully water-gilded
3:43
flats
3:44
made by the famous pre-raphaelite frame
3:46

makers ford and dickinson
3:48
but it's also got vital importance to
3:51
the painting
3:51
it was designed by rosetti himself even
3:54
down to the color of the gold which he
3:56
specified had to be blonde
3:58
to match with the dark greens of the
4:00
painting
4:01
rossetti saw the frame as a vital
4:04
component of the artwork
4:05
and he sometimes finished his final
4:07
brush strokes with the canvas in the
4:09
frame
4:10
to ensure that the work of art worked as
4:13
a whole
4:15
it was in a very poor state before
4:17
treatment
4:19
as well as being structurally unstable
4:21
the frame was suffering from numerous
4:24
losses in the decorative scheme most
4:26
distractingly there was a thick layer of
4:28
ingrained dirt covering the whole of the
4:30
frame surface
4:32
some processes in this constellation
4:34
treatment were inherently irreversible
4:37

cleaning i won't be able to reapply the
4:40
dirt
4:42
whatever i remove it has to be in the
4:44
effective way and safe for the object
4:47
[Music]
4:49
so when we've examined the painting
4:52
thoroughly
4:52
we're able to approach the treatment
4:54
program for the painting
4:56
the previous cleaning in the areas of
4:58
the faces and the hands
5:00
had rather unbalanced the composition
5:05
[Music]
5:08
we use a range of materials to actually
5:11
think about cleaning and removing those
5:13
the varnish layers that are non-original
5:15
to the painting
5:16
we can use free solvents gelled solvents
5:19
and aqueous gels and you can tailor very
5:22
specifically
5:23
your mixture to remove just the varnish
5:26
layer and not
5:27
affect the paint
5:30
we found that rosetti had mixed some
5:32
pigment into his varnish layers
5:34

in order to create shadows within
5:37
certain passages
5:38
and as that is an original material we
5:41
were unable to
5:42
remove it so in actual fact the the
5:45
cleaning of the lower layers
5:47
was only partial we were able to thin
5:50
and even up and improve upon the
5:52
appearance of the lower layers
5:54
and allow the painting to be more
5:56
balanced
5:57
[Music]
5:59
at some time in its history possibly in
6:02
the early 20th century
6:03
as it becomes weak and brittle with age
6:06
the painting was
6:07
lined that is adhered onto a secondary
6:10
canvas a new canvas
6:11
and then re-stretched onto its stretcher
6:14
now
6:15
by now that that paint that lining has
6:17
actually begun to deteriorate
6:19
itself so we took the decision to
6:21
actually remove the lining canvas and
6:23
that was done by a specialist liner
6:25

and he removed the lining and the
6:27
adhesive and
6:28
then he prepared a new canvas we've
6:31
taken the decision to archive that old
6:33
stretcher
6:34
and we've we've made a new structure
6:36
which will fully support and allow the
6:38
proper tensioning of the new canvas
6:46
for this treatment i had a flexibly
6:48
traditional approach
6:50
where possible i used traditional
6:51
materials which were part of the frame's
6:53
original construction
6:55
and this was to keep the integrity of
6:57
the frame's material makeup
7:03
the aims of this project were quite
7:05
specific
7:06
i had to try and bring back the frame to
7:09
the
7:09
former glory of rossetti's original
7:11
conception
7:13
without airbrushing its life history
7:18
as rosetti was so specific about his
7:20
color of gold
7:21
it was vitally important for the gold
7:24

leaf that i applied to match
7:25
almost exactly to the original gold
7:29
it was vital that on treatment
7:31
completion the frame appeared uniform
7:34
so therefore i had to distress and tone
7:37
my new gilded areas so that it matched
7:40
as closely as possible
7:42
to the original frame surface the aim
7:45
was for it not to be clearly evident
7:47
what was new and what was old
7:52
at this stage the painting has had all
7:55
varnishes
7:56
that have discolored and removed and
7:59
there are damages
8:00
there is abrasion in the surface as a
8:02
result of
8:04
previous cleaning and other accidents
8:07
so any losses of any depth
8:10
have to be filled and leveled the
8:13
abrasion that a painting has suffered
8:15
can be very disturbing and in fact in
8:17
this painting it was a
8:18
subtle difference but it made a lot of
8:20
difference to
8:21
put that aspect of things right
8:26

what you're doing with retouching is to
8:28
look very carefully
8:29
at the perimeter of your loss
8:32
and work inwards from that matching the
8:35
color
8:36
and gradually making that loss disappear
8:40
there were actual losses in her hair
8:43
that i had to put back
8:45
there was abrasion around the profile of
8:47
the face
8:48
in fact abrasion very often happens in
8:50
those very delicate areas
8:52
those soft little areas you know that
8:55
that separate the hair from the face for
8:57
instance
8:58
and that's actually very often over
9:00
restored
9:01
you've got to be very careful what you
9:03
what you put back there and not to go
9:05
too far
9:07
the least you do the better
9:10
the principle of reversibility and
9:12
stability for the materials we use
9:14
nowadays
9:15
is a very important aspect of our work
9:20

we generally speaking use magnetic
9:22
retouching which means
9:23
that we are attempting to match the
9:26
losses in the painting
9:28
as as exactly as possible that's so that
9:31
the spectator
9:32
is not distracted in any way by the
9:35
losses
9:35
[Music]
9:38
the differences are quite subtle but i
9:41
think that the viewer would have a very
9:43
different experience in front of the
9:44
painting now
9:45
making the image neater for instance
9:48
with her face
9:49
i think it does now appear much clearer
9:52
the rather
9:52
beautiful lines of her neck and hair
9:55
are now restored
10:01
on treatment completion the frames
10:03
stable uniform and complete
10:05
it's far more along the lines of
10:07
rossetti's original conception
10:10
and hopefully you would agree that it
10:11
draws the eye towards the painting
10:15

having completed the treatment the
10:17
painting now appears
10:19
much cooler in tone and fresher because
10:22
of the removal of that
10:24
yellowed upper varnish and it is more
10:27
balanced
10:27
the varnish was very thick beforehand
10:30
very glossy
10:31
and you had no sense of the texture of
10:33
the paint beneath
10:34
and now with those varnish layers
10:36
removed and
10:38
the varnish that we have put on to
10:39
saturate the paint it's not nearly so
10:42
thick
10:43
you can actually sense life within the
10:46
texture of the paint
10:59
[Music]