

Bianca Madden
Conservator of Wall Painting and Polychrome Sculpture
The Garden Flat 5 Rawlinson Road Oxford OX2 6UE
07789067364/01865 513144 bianca@biancamadden.com
www.biancamadden.com

STATION 14: ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS CHURCH, ABINGDON

CONSERVATION TREATMENT REPORT

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Report No: BMSAC0218 Date: 4 September 2018 Author: Bianca Madden, Conservator of Wall Painting and Sculpture, The Garden Flat 5 Rawlinson Road Oxford OX2 6UE; T: 07789067364/01865 513144; E-mail: bianca@biancamadden.com

Introduction and Description

Station 14 is a shallow relief plaster panel set within a plain wooden frame. It is the final panel in a series of 14 Stations of the Cross created by Faith Craft¹ at St Michael and All Angels Church, Abingdon, it is titled on the frame 'Jesus Laid Within the Sepulchre'. It dates from the mid-twentieth century. The top of the frame is inscribed 'Mildred Hearn 28.2.43 R.I.P'.

The overall dimensions of the piece (inclusive of frame) are 586 mm h. x 739 mm w. and 35 mm d. The panel is polychromed and gilded. The polychrome appears to have been applied on top of the gilded layer in a number of areas – this gilded layer is now visible in areas of paint loss. It can be seen, for example, under the white cloth on which Christ's head is laid.

The panel was damaged by accidental dropping, which resulted in a long vertical break running the height of the panel at the right-hand side. The break exposed the internal armature, and appeared to run along it. The break resulted in the loss of a certain amount of material along the fracture line, as well as shattered and loose sections of plaster. A number of hairline cracks radiated from this break, across the surface of the panel, with additional loss of material along them. A large chip at the top off the panel appeared also to be associated to the fall.

The polychrome of the panel appears to be generally in sound condition and is well adhered to the surface, with the exception of some localized areas of loss, in particular across areas of raised relief, which are likely be related to dusting or cleaning attempts and abrasion rather than a break down of the adhesion of the polychromy to the underlying layer. Aside from the areas damaged in the accident, the plaster substrate appears in stable and sound condition, and there is no evidence of rust or expansion of the metal armature within. The wooden frame is in sound condition.



Above: the condition of the panel before treatment

¹ Information received from churchwarden Peter Squire



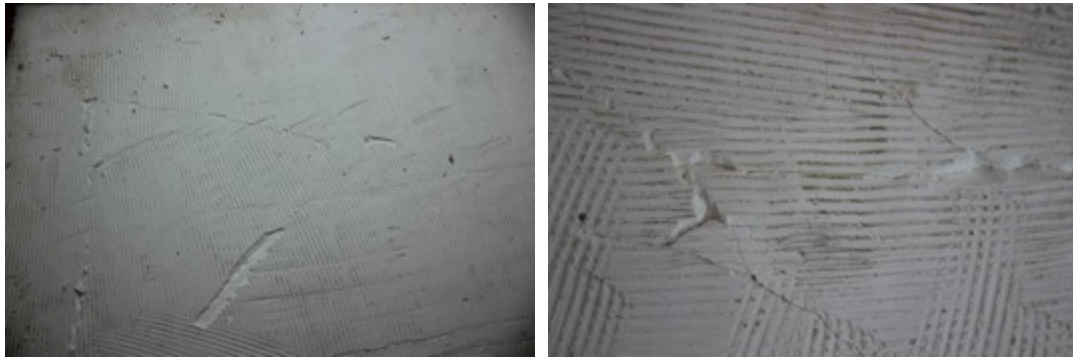
Above top: details of the loss and fracture, with gold evident under the painted layer on the cloth under Christ's head. Above: abrasion of paint layer across the hand and sleeve, with evidence of the gold layer beneath the paint layer on the hand. A large chip is visible at the top of the panel, as well as a crack with associated losses across the star.

Conservation Treatment

Consolidation

The cracks and losses were consolidated, and the detached elements reattached, by application of Paraloid B72 (acrylic resin) at concentrations of 10-20%, as appropriate, in acetone. The exposed metal armature of the panel was also coated with Paraloid to protect it from rust associated to exposure to moisture.

Once the face of the panel was secured, and all loose elements reattached, the panel was turned over. On removal of the backing board, it was revealed that the cracks had, in places, extended right through the depth of the panel. These cracks were rejoined and consolidated using Paraloid resin, as those on the panel face.



Details of damage and cracking on the reverse of the panel

Filling

Working on the reverse of the panel the losses associated to the cracks at this side were then filled using Paraloid B72 resin at 35-40% with a glass micro-balloon bulking agent. This filler provides a light, inert, and reversible conservation grade fill, which has good adhesive qualities to further support the damaged area.



Above: a detail of the filled cracks, left, and an overall view of the reverse of the panel after filling

Once the reverse was supported and repaired, the original backboard was replaced and the panel turned over again. The same Paraloid and glass micro-balloon filler was then used to fill and support the losses on the face of the panel.



Above, detail of filling before retouching on the face of the panel

Retouching

Losses to the paint layer were retouched using light stable, conservation grade acrylic colours.



Above: detail of the left-hand side of the panel before retouching



Above: detail, during, retouching losses of the paint layer

The filled areas within the gilding were reintegrated by re-gilding, over a yellow ochre acrylic ground, using 23-carat loose leaf gold applied with an acrylic size. The new gold was then toned using a range of light stable acrylics to reintegrate the new areas and repairs to the surrounding gold surface.



Above: the reintegration of the gilded areas



Above: after retouching the paint layer and the regilding and the reintegration of the new gold

Conclusions and Recommendations

Station 14 is now repaired, retouched and stable. But it should be noted that the wooden frame which houses it, and is in good condition, plays a significant part in protecting and holding the panel. The panel would be very vulnerable if removed from the frame. Fortunately, the panel is also built around a metal armature, which gives it further structural support, but it remains a delicate object due to the brittleness and weight of the thick plaster of the panel.

The reintegration of the gilded layer has been carried out under daylight lighting at my studio, but as I have mentioned to the churchwarden, Peter Squire, I can undertake further toning of the new repairs if necessary once it is replaced in the church in situ as the appearance of the toning of the newly gilded areas varies according to lighting conditions and angles.



Station 14 after conservation

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