

# METHOD STATEMENT AND CONSERVATION PROPOSAL



## Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish Church

Fgura



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## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Title:** Our Lady of Mount Carmel

**Dimensions:** 140cm x 80cm

**Provenience:** Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish Church, Fgura

**Project No:** 24075L

**Compiled by:**

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Roderick Abela (Warrant number 44)

**Pages:** 30 Pages

**Date:** August 2024

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## PREAMBLE

This document is submitted by ReCoop – The Conservation and Restoration Cooperative Ltd. to the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish Church, Fgura, as a method statement and conservation proposal for the conservation and restoration of the oil on canvas painting depicting the ‘Our Lady of Mount Carmel’. This proposal includes a historical background, a condition report – state of conservation and treatment design for the conservation of the mentioned project.

## DESCRIPTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The painting depicts the Madonna of Mount Carmel, a figure of deep veneration in Christian, particularly Carmelite, tradition. The style is reminiscent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in line with artists like Pietro Paolo Caruana (1794 – 1852), Salvatore Busuttil, (1798 – 1854), Giuseppe Bonnici (1835 – 1900), and Giuzeppi Calleja (1828 – 1905).

The Virgin Mary is shown seated on clouds, holding the infant Jesus on her left side, both of whom are adorned with silver crowns, symbolizing their royal - divine status. These crowns, along with nine small silver stars forming a halo around Mary's head, are not painted but are actually attached to the painting, adding a three-dimensional and preciousness to the painting.

The Virgin is depicted wearing the traditional red gown and a blue mantle. In her hand, she holds Infant Christ and a silver scapular, a significant symbol in Carmelite spirituality. The Infant Jesus is painted in movement, partly resting on the Madonna's lap and one foot down. He also seems to be holding the same scapular, emphasizing its importance.

Additionally, silver sandals are affixed to the feet of the Madonna, further enriching the artwork with prestigious and devotional elements. The painting's background is kept simple, with a darkened brownish colour with an idyllic rural landscape at the bottom. A faint looking circle is present, with the same brown colour scheme of the background around the figures of the Madonna and Child. A simple, yet elegant, silver gilded frame is present adorning the painting.

## CONDITION REPORT

### STATE OF CONSERVATION

A thick layer of dust, dirt and oxidised old varnish are corrupting the overall aesthetic presentation of the painting, giving an overall dark yellow - brown tinge, as an overall finish. The paint layer manifests an alteration of the painted layer, having a milky greyish layer on top, usually resulting from a prolonged exposure to high humidity, altering the colour palette due to the penetration of moisture particles within the paint layer. Several craquelure are also present, originating from the natural drying of the paint layer and movement of the canvas support layer. Some areas of the painting have a darker tinge, indicating old, retouched areas which have aged and changed in tonality. At least two past restoration interventions are visible, identified by the different alteration tonalities, the recent one being the darker. Several tears are present, which have been addressed in a past restoration intervention, flattening them and applying a patch at the back of the painting. The silver embellishments seem to have lost their sheen, also slightly tarnishing. These are holding directly on the painting by means of pins inserted into the canvas.

Several old patches are present stuck at the back and some of them are labelled or have an inscription written in paint upon. These were applied as a means of reinforcement for the several tears present, and also as a reinforcement for the

canvas, helping in holding the weight of the silver decorations. A dark paste is also present at the back of the canvas, around the pins belonging to the silver attachments. This could be an adhesive used to further reinforce the silver embellishments in place.

The wooden auxiliary support seems to be the original one, consisting of a wooden stretcher with one horizontal cross bar. Insect flight holes are present, indicating a past, or maybe still active infestation. The frame does not seem to have bevelling.

A decorative frame is present, consisting of linear relief decorative element with rounded outer perimeter, reminiscent of baroque frames. The manufacturing technique is water gilding with silver leaf finished with layers of shellac, imitating a gold finish. It is in general showing, having several scratches, abrasions and some dents. Tarnishing of the silver is also present, together with some flyspecks and insect flight holes. Some missing parts are also visible.



## PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION OF PRESENT CONDITION



Figure 1: The painting in-situ before conservation treatments.



Figure 2: Detail of the painting in-situ before conservation treatment.



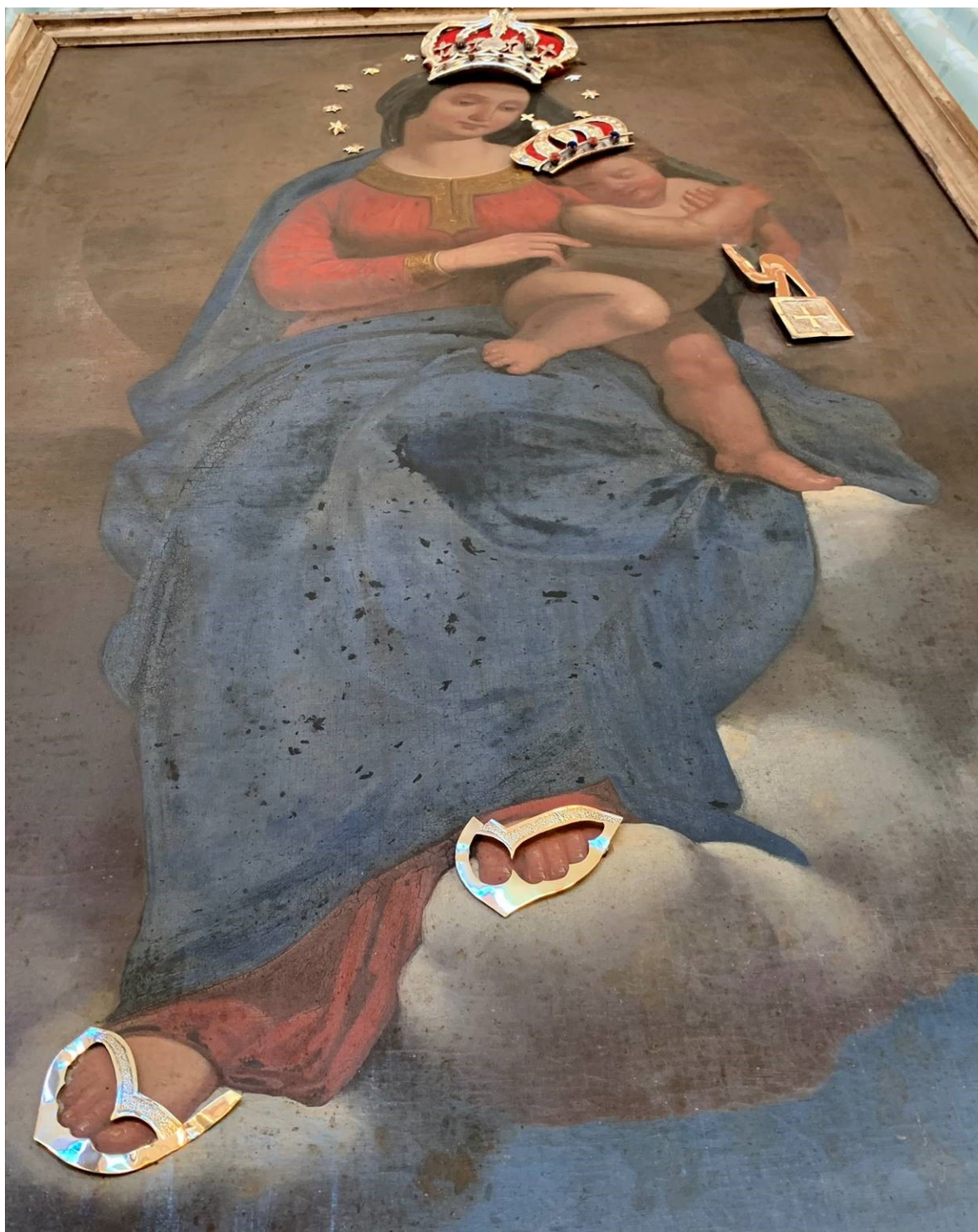


Figure 3: The painting in-situ before conservation treatment seen from beneath.



Figure 4: Detail of the painting in-situ before conservation treatments showing various old retouching.



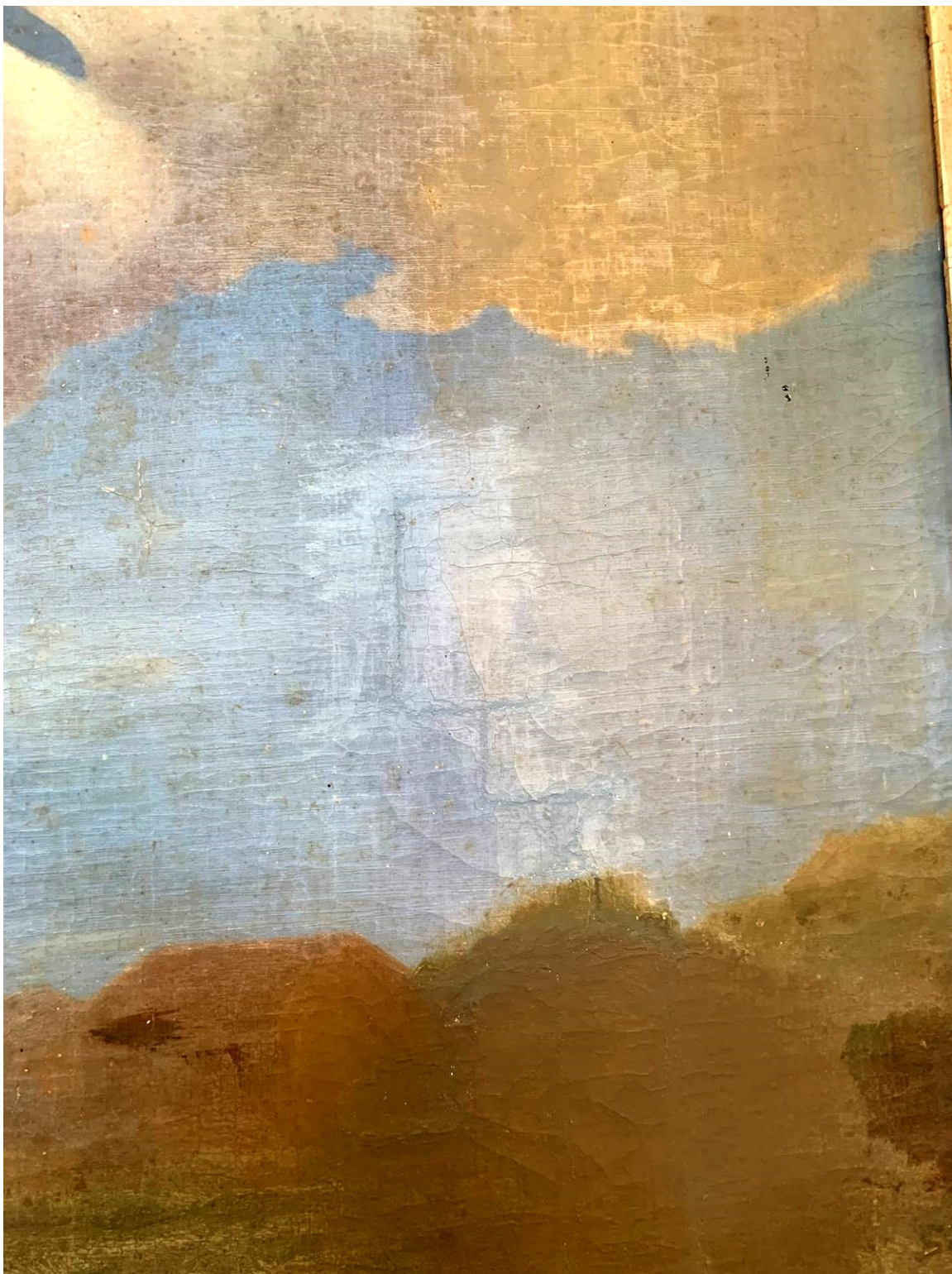


Figure 5: Detail of the painting in-situ before conservation treatments showing old retouching and a torn area.



Figure 6: Detail of the verso of the painting in-situ before conservation treatments showing various patches and metal rods jutting through the painting.





Figure 7: Detail of the verso of the painting in-situ before conservation treatments showing various patches with various inscriptions written above and on top and metal rods jutting through the painting.



Figure 8: Detail of the verso of the painting in-situ before conservation treatments showing various patches and metal rods jutting through the painting.





Figure 9: The verso of the painting in-situ before conservation treatments showing various patches and metal rods jutting through the painting.

## PROPOSED CONSERVATION PROGRAMME – METHODOLOGY

The Interventions carried out will follow the international parameters and conservation principles established by the E.C.C.O. (European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations). The treatments proposed below aim to reinforce the painting's structural stability with the least invading treatments possible and to ensure structural preservation. Furthermore, holistic methodologies used will aid in recovering as much as possible of the original and in improving the aesthetic value of the painting. The proposed treatment would include the following procedures:

## METHODOLOGY OF REMOVAL AND TRANSPORT

Prior to transportation to ReCoop laboratories at Mriehel, the painting will be duly inspected and protected, in order not to create further damage to the painting whilst in transit.

After unwrapping the painting, the non-invasive scientific analysis will be diligently carried out. These will consist in inspecting the painting in diffused light, raking light, with ultraviolet illumination and infra-red camera.

## METHODOLOGY OF CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION

1. **Documentation:** The whole project will be documented before, during and after. Documentation will include digital photography in diffused light, Raking light, Ultraviolet light and Infra-Red light, together with a report outlining the whole of the conservation process.



Figure 10 Ultraviolet and Infra-red Images; Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Titular Painting, Basilica of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Valletta

2. **Removal of Silver decorations:** Special attention will be taken in safely removing the silver crowns, stars, scapular and sandals in order not to create any damage to the silver items themselves and to the canvas painting.



3. **Localised Consolidation:** Consolidation will be executed with the aim of imparting strength and adhesion in between the original stratigraphy. This is done in order not to lose any fragments during further treatments.
4. **Dusting:** The paintings' surface will be gently dusted, removing any dust and/or any other particulates deposited on top of the surface.
5. **Lining :** Refer to the lining process further on
6. **Cleaning:** Cleaning tests will be carried out, choosing the best and safest cleaning agent possible. Cleaning will include removal of the varnish and dirt layers and any unwanted overpaintings.



Figure 11: During Cleaning; Antonio de Saliba, The Madonna Enthroned Panel, Ta' Giezu Church Rabat.

7. **Integration of the ground layers:** Any losses will be in-filled to level out the paint film. Material used to infill will be as close to the original as possible always keeping in mind that it should be of less physical strength than its surrounding original and that it remains completely reversible, even after ageing.



Figure 12: Application of Gesso di Bologna; Anon. 16th Century, Virgin & Child with Saints and a donor, Stella Maris Parish Sliema

8. **Varnish:** A layer of retouching varnish with an ultraviolet absorber will be applied at this stage. Its aim is to saturate the overall paint layer and it will also form a separation layer in between the original paint layer and the pictorial intervention / retouching layer.

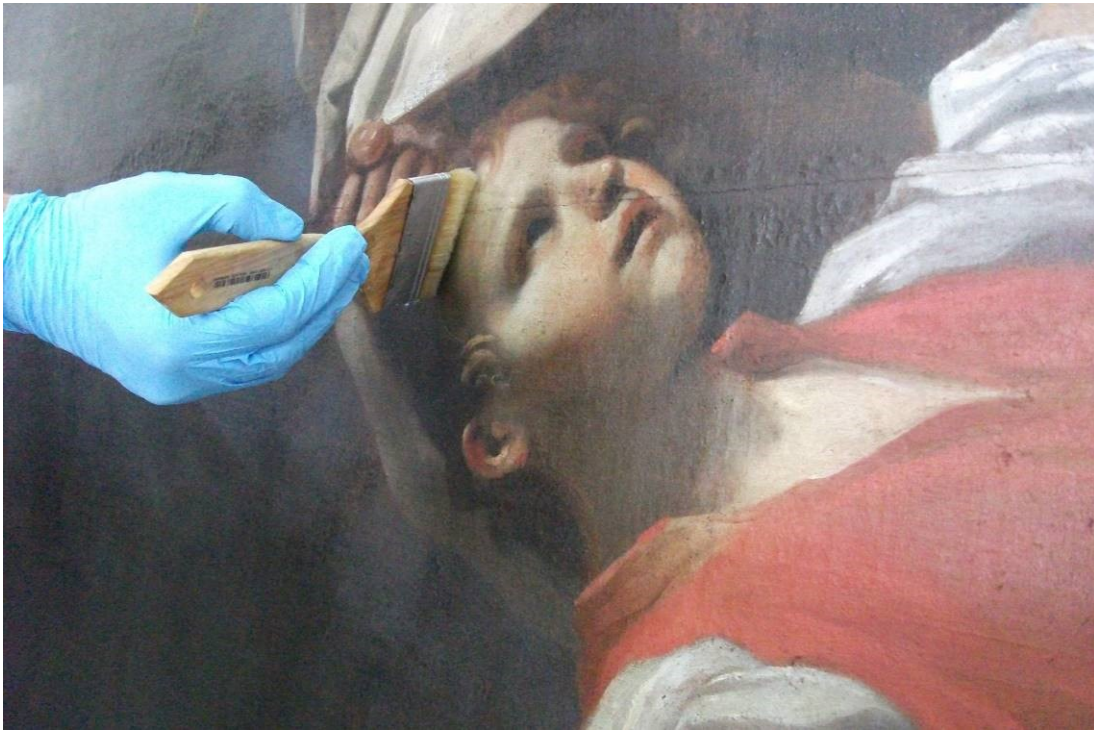


Figure 13: Application of Varnish; Mattia Preti, St Nicholas of Bari, Siggiewi Parish Church

9. **Pictorial integration:** Retouching and reintegration is executed in order to re-establish the potential unity of the work of art. It is thus the final stage of treatment, which determines the aesthetic presentation of the artefact. The in-filled losses, which display a disruption to the readability of the painted image, will be retouched. Re-integration is done using reversible materials and technique.
10. **Cleaning of Silver decorations:** Silver items will be carefully cleaned from superficial dust and dirt by brushing and vacuuming. Any corrosion will be gently brushed off. Depending on the nature of the metal, tests will be carried out, either with very low percentage of formic acid in deionised water and rinsed with deionised water or with citric acid, following the aforementioned procedure. Paraloid B72 will be applied at the end as a protective layer.





Figure 14: Retouching; 17th Century Italian Master, Virtues of Mary Magdalene, Private Collection

- 11. Application of final protective layers:** A final layer of varnish with ultraviolet absorber will be applied giving an overall homogeneous satin / semi gloss finish.





Figure 15: Varnish; Mattia Preti, The Miracle of St Nicholas of Bari, Siggiewi Parish Church

12. **Fixing of Silver attachments:** If possible, the attachments will be stuck to the canvas by means of magnets, hence removing their pins at the back and fixing a magnet instead, avoiding re-creating punctures in the newly lined canvas support. If this treatment will not be possible, another treatment more adequate to the situation will be discussed and implemented in agreement with the person in charge of the project.
  
13. **Conservation Report:** A final conservation report will be presented at the end of the project explaining in detail the conservation treatments carried out.

## Lining Treatment for Painting

1. **Facing:** A layer of Japanese paper will be attached to the surface of the painting by means of reversible organic glue. This will give added strength and support during further conservation treatments.
2. **Removal of wooden support:** The painting will be removed carefully from the wooden strainer auxiliary support. If the painting is found directly attached to the strainer, it will be shaved from the back so that the structural integrity of the upper layers is preserved.



Figure 16: Removal of wooden support, Mattia Preti, Hercules freeing Prometheus, Private Collection.

3. **Cleaning of the verso:** Any old glue and patches will be carefully removed. The verso of the painting will then be dusted and cleaned with a low strength aspirator. Any traces of glue will be mechanically cleaned at this stage.



Figure 17: Removal of old relining; Francesco Zahra, *Presentation of the Virgin*, Senglea Parish Church

4. **Flatting of lifted areas and repair of tears:** Deformation in the canvas will be flattened out using (if deemed safe) moisture and low pressure. This will help in reducing any lifted areas and resulting in a homogenous flat paint layer.

Tears or punctures in the canvas will be treated by, first flatting of the canvas and then by welding the tears together if possible, or in areas where the original canvas is missing a similar canvas will be inserted and welded with the original fibres with an appropriate synthetic glue.

5. **Consolidation of back:** A consolidant will be applied on the canvas support at the back. This will aim to the consolidation of the different layers building up the painting. General consolidation aids in imparting strength to the whole of the painting structure while at the same time preparing the back of the canvas for its adhesion to other new canvases during relining.



Figure 18: Consolidation; Anon. 16th Century, Virgin & Child with Saints and a donor, Stella Maris Parish Sliema

6. **Lining:** A new canvas with similar properties, having same thickness and same warp and weft count will be attached at the back of the original canvas by means of a reactivation cold lining technique, based on methacrylate glue, widely used in conservation lining treatments.



Figure 19: During the vacuum - cold lining treatment. 18th Century, Assumption of the Virgin, Ta' Bernarda Chapel, Gharghur.



7. **Stretching onto auxiliary support:** The present auxiliary support will only be used if it is deemed fit. If not, a made to measure stretcher frame in tulip wood with expandable stainless-steel mechanism will be manufactured.



Figure 20: Stretching; Anon. 16th Century, Virgin & Child with Saints and a donor, Stella Maris Parish Sliema

8. **Removal of Facing layer:** Special care is taken to slowly remove facing layer applied previously for protective purpose.



## ESTIMATE

**Invoice No.** 1821  
**Invoice / Tax Date.** 22/08/2024  
**Estimate Expiry Date.** 22/11/2024

**Account No.** FGURPARI  
**Order No.**

**Client**  
 LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL PARISH CHURCH  
 TRIQ HOMPESH  
 FGURA

ReCoop Architecture & Fine Arts  
 Triq L-Esportaturi  
 Mriehel Industrial Estate  
 Birkirkara  
 VAT Reg No: MT16869616

VAT Reg No:

Quantity Details	Unit Price	Disc Amt	Net	VAT Rate	VAT
1.00 Project no. 24075L - Our Lady of Mount Carmel (140cm x 80cm)					
Documentaion					
Removal of Silver Items					
Removal from Auxiliary Support					
Facing & Removal of Japanese Paper					
Cleaning of Silver Items					
Removal of Old Patches					
Cleaning of Lining Adhesive					
Consolidation of Paint & Ground Layers					
Infill of Support Losses with Canvas or Paper Pulp					
Lining					
Stretching Back onto Auxiliary Support					
Cleaning of Dirt, Varnish & Overpaintings					
Application of Varnish (with UV Absorber)					
Infill with Gesso					
Application with Varnish (with UV Absorber)					
Pictorial Integration					
Application of Varnish (with UV Absorber)					
Re-Mounting of Silver Items					
Packing & Tranport	4,552.50	0.00	4,552.50	18.00	819.45
1.00 Decorative Frame	562.50	0.00	562.50	18.00	101.25

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS:**  
 Payment: 40% deposit required to start work.  
 Balance 60% on completion.

**Total Net Amount** 5,115.00  
**Carriage Net** 0.00  
**Total VAT Amount** 920.70  
**Invoice Total** 6,035.70  
**Euro Total** 6,035.70

Kindly Sign and input your ID number as acceptaces

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