

## PARROĊĊA MARIJA ANNUNZJATA, HAL TARXIEN

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3 ta' Frar 2025,

118/2025

Lill-E.T. Rev.ma Mons. Charles J. Scicluna  
Arċisqof Metropolita ta' Malta.

Rikors ta' Dun Christopher Ellul  
Arċipriet tal-Parroċċa Marija Annunzjata, Hal Tarxien

Bil-qima kollha r-rikorrent jesponi dan li ġej:

Il-Parroċċa bhall-ghaqdiet l-oħra tar-raħal ibbenefikat minn GRANT maħruġ mill-LESA. Għaldaqstant ħsibna li b'dawn il-fondi jiġu restawrati l-kwadri tal-Immakulata Kuncizzjoni, Madonna taċ-Ċintura u l-kwadru ta' San Anard. Dan ir-restawr se jsir mill-Kumpanija RESTAWR ARTI kif sar fl-aħħar rikors tal-kwadri tal-artali l-oħra datat 24 t' Ottubru 2023.

Għaldaqstant, ir-rikorrent jitlob li:

**Jingħata l-permessi meħtieġa sabiex jibda r-restawr fuq dawn il-kwadri.**

Wagt li nitlob il-Barka pastorali tiegħek,

Għoddni tiegħek fi Kristu

*Chris Ellul*



Dun Chris Ellul  
Arċipriet

Prezentat il-Kurja Arċiveskovili  
Ilum 4<sup>th</sup> April 2025

*Charles Bugay, Kancellier*

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05/06/2024

**Quotation #**

016/24

Tarxien Parish Church

Phone no.

[parrocca.tarxien@maltadiocese.org](mailto:parrocca.tarxien@maltadiocese.org)

Conservation and Restoration – Madonna and Child with St. Matthew  
And St. Leonard, oil on canvas, Gio Nicola Buhagiar ? , 18th Century

## DESCRIPTION OF TREATMENTS

## PRICE (EURO)

Preliminary and final conservation reports	180.00
Structural intervention including consolidation, strip lining or re- lining	600.00
Cleaning and removal of oxidised varnish, dirt, and candle wax	1025.00
Gypsum infills	150.00
Pictorial re- integration and final protective varnish (UV filtered)	390.00

Subtotal exc. VAT 2345.00

VAT 18% 422.10

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**Total (Euro) 2767.10**

This quotation is valid for 6 months from date of issue.

Our Lady and Child with St. Leonard,  
oil on Canvas

Annunciation of Our Lady Parish Church, Tarxien, Malta

## Restoration Method Statement



Semira Gayle Bugeja (M.Sc., B.A. (Hons) (Melit.))

November 2024

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## 1. Introduction

The following report carried out by Restawr Arti provides a description of the required conservation and restoration treatments for the 18th Century altar painting of Our Lady and Child with St. Leonard, at the Tarxien Parish Church. It is unclear who may be the author of this piece, however there are similar traits to the style of the artist Gio. Nicola Buhagiar. Additionally Sciberras Keith makes reference to two altar paintings by Gio Nicola Buhagiar at Tarxien Parish Church; The Holy Family and that of Our Lady with Saints (Sciberras, p. 210).

All knowledge gathered regarding the present condition of the work of art under study is based on a visual inspection. The proposed required conservation - restoration treatments are based both on professional experience, and published research, and may require slight changes in the process or methodology once the conservator/s carries out a close and thorough visual inspection.

The aim will be to present a conservative methodology for the conservation of the painting, and hence preserving the original materials and colours. All conservation materials, and procedures stated will be compatible, and respectful to the original materials in discussion.

## 2. The Painting- General Information

Dimensions - c.155cm x 230cm

The work of art in discussion is an 18th Century oil on canvas painting representing Our Lady and Child in *sacra conversazione* with St. Leonard (Figure 1.). The figure of the Virgin Saint sits on a throne, holding Her baby Jesus as She is surrounded by angels and putti. She looks down to the figure on the left; possibly St. Matthew. Whereas baby Jesus is looking towards and blessing St. Leonard who is kneeling on the last step of the throne.

An angel at the centre bottom of the composition is holding a manuscript and showing it to St. Leonard. One can notice the chains on the foreground, representing the iconography of St. Leonard; protector and patron saint of slaves.

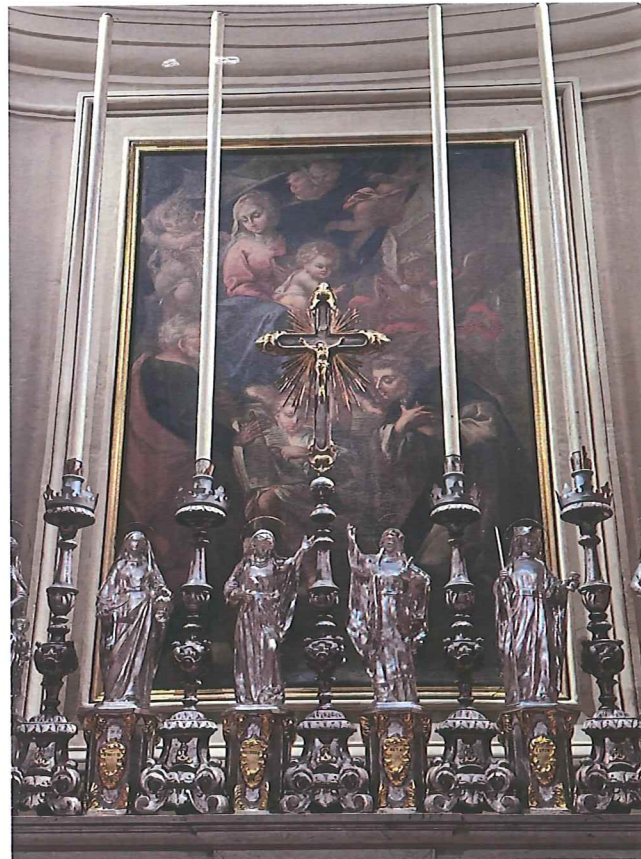


Figure 1. The altar painting of Our Lady and Child with St. Leonard, Gio. Nicola Buhagiar ?, at Tarxien Parish Church, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024)

### 3. Condition Assessment

A visual inspection to understand the present state of conservation was carried out at a distance since the painting is placed on the altar, and the back side could not be inspected at this stage. Hence, a better understanding of the manufacturing technique, original materials, deterioration phenomena and damages may be identified once an inspection is carried out at a close distance, from front and back.

Initiating from the canvas support, the painting seems to be well stretched to the stretcher frame, however the bottom edge is slightly deformed, possibly due to some loose tacks at the top which then result in sagging (Figure 2.).

Several punctures in all the different layers of the painting are present along the edges due to the gilded border frames that are attached to the painting with nails.



It was noted that the paint layer is cracking due to the natural movement of the canvas support during different macro climates along the years. This phenomenon, also known as craquelure is distributed allover the painting (Figure 3.).

Furthermore, several wax drippings are present over the painted surface.

Overall, the painting has a dull appearance due to the discoloured varnish, dirt and grime that is present on the painted surface. This is reducing the three dimensionality and certain details of the figures and background (Figure 1.).



Figure 2. Detail showing the bottom edge of the painting that has deformed due to sagging, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024).



Figure 3. Craquelure present all over the different pieces of canvas support that make up the entire painting, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024).

#### 4. Proposed Conservation and Restoration Treatments

This section will include the different treatments, processes, and methodologies thought to be required at this point based on visual inspection, knowledge from previous projects, and research of published literature. Prior and throughout the stages of the project, all steps and methodologies will be photographically documented with visible light, and some cases also with ultraviolet light. All the treatments, and methodologies will be documented in a final conservation report for future reference.

Archpriest Fr Christopher Ellul and other members of the *Assoċjazzjoni Patrimonju Tarxien* are invited to visit Restawr Arti Studio whenever required and think fit, in order to view and follow the progress of works.



The painting will be taken down from the walls accordingly, packed properly and safely inside the church, and transported to Restawr Arti Studio in Naxxar in an enclosed transport van. Eventually, once the works are finalised, the painting and frame will be repacked properly and safely, and returned back to the church in an enclosed transport van.

The first step is to photographically document the painting from front and back using visible, raking, and ultraviolet light. A thorough inspection will be carried out at close distance in order to evaluate and design a precise methodology for the treatments required.

The focus will move to the lengthy and important treatments addressing the structural support. A temporary facing using Japanese paper will be applied to the pictorial layer to protect it from the handling that is required in the coming stages. The painting will be dismantled from the stretcher frame. The tacking margins and deformations in the canvas support will be flattened carefully through a process of humidification and pressure. This will allow the paint layer to relax and go back to its original position.

A synthetic consolidant will be applied by brush from the backside of the painting. The type of consolidant and its dilution will be determined depending on the requirements of the canvas. A synthetic consolidant is preferred over a natural adhesive due to a higher melting point, and therefore will not disintegrate in the high temperatures of Summer, and also does not attract unwanted pests. Additionally, they are reversible with mild solvents. The consolidant will then be re-activated to reach and re-adhere all the different layers of the painting by the use of heat and a low pressure vacuum table. This system will ascertain homogeneous and controlled heat throughout the painting, and also controlled pressure to aid in better adhesion and consolidation.

All the punctures and holes created by nails will be inlaid with a natural canvas of the same composition, thread, and weave. A fine polyester will be used to patch the inlaid areas. These will provide further strength around the treated areas. At this moment the Japanese paper facing can be removed.

Depending on the strength of the canvas after consolidation, the conservator/s will decide if a re-lining is required. If the canvas is able to support the weight of the painting, strips will be applied only to the edges and tacking margins of the painting in order to give more strength to the edges while providing a longer edge from where the conservator can pull

during the re stretching process. Otherwise, a re- lining will be needed. In any chosen treatment, the adhesive will be compatible with the consolidant used previously. This will eliminate undesirable reactions due to their different physical properties that might reduce the bonding strength between the original canvas and the new lining canvas or strip lining canvas. The type of new canvas chosen will be of a similar composition, thread and weave in order to have similar properties as the original. The painting will be re- stretched and tensioned to the original stretcher frame.

The next stage will be to determine the best possible cleaning methodology or methodologies to remove the oxidised varnish. Various cleaning tests will be carried out to determine the mixture of solvents in liquid or gel state, and the methodology of cleaning. Dirt, grime, and gypsum infills from the previous restoration will be softened and removed by fine scalpel blades. This process will be carried out to expose the artist's original colours once again.

Lacunae and losses in the paint layer, and preparation layer will be infilled with fine quality *gesso di Bologna* and rabbit glue, and eventually levelled to match the rest of the painting's surface. Prior to re- integration, a low molecular weight retouching varnish will be applied to separate the original colours from the retouching restoration colours while saturating the original colours. Then, the pictorial re- integration of losses of the pictorial layer will be carried out using stable varnish based colours purposely designed for restoration. This phase will unify the appearance of the painting. As a final step, the surface will be given a synthetic coating with a satin finish. A synthetic varnish will be chosen over a natural varnish since it is proven to be more stable to high temperatures and humidity levels, does not discolour by time, and also has an ultraviolet filter incorporated, hence it protects the oil colours from the negative effects sunlight may have on the original materials.

## 5. Conclusion

From the observations carried out on site, Restawr Arti suggests that the altar painting of Our Lady and Child with St. Leonard at Tarxien Parish Church is preserved by following a conservation and restoration programme. All treatments carried out will be based on a methodological, and ethical approach in order to preserve the historical materials. Conservation treatments, and procedures must be carried out using established conservation products and tools.



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## References

- Sciberras Keith, Francesco Zahra 1710 - 1773 His Life and Art in the Mid 18th century Malta, Midsea Books, 2010, p. 210.

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05/06/2024

**Quotation #**  
017/24

Tarxien Parish Church

Phone no.

parrocca.tarxien@maltadiocese.org

Conservation and Restoration – The Immaculate Conception,  
oil on canvas, Rocco Buhagiar, 18th Century.

## DESCRIPTION OF TREATMENTS

## PRICE (EURO)

Preliminary and final conservation report	180.00
Structural intervention including consolidation, tear repair, strip lining or relining	600.00
Cleaning and removal of oxidised varnish, previous restoration colours, dirt, and candle wax	1125.00
Gypsum infills	150.00
Pictorial re- integration and final protective varnish (UV filtered)	400.00

Subtotal exc. VAT 2455.00

VAT 18% 441.90

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**Total (Euro) 2896.90**

This quotation is valid for 6 months from date of issue.

The Immaculate Conception of Our Lady,  
Rocco Buhagiar,  
oil on Canvas, 1770

Annunciation of Our Lady Parish Church, Tarxien, Malta

## Restoration Method Statement



Semira Gayle Bugeja (M.Sc., B.A. (Hons) (Melit.))

October 2024

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1. Introduction.....	03
2. The Painting- General information.....	03
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## 1. Introduction

The following report carried out by Restawr Arti provides a description of the required conservation and restoration treatments for the 18th century altar painting of The Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, by the Maltese artist Rocco Buhagiar, at the Tarxien Parish Church. All knowledge gathered regarding the present condition of the work of art under study is based on a visual inspection. The proposed required conservation - restoration treatments are based both on professional experience, and published research, and may require slight changes in the process or methodology once the conservator/s carries out a close and thorough visual inspection.

The aim will be to present a conservative methodology for the conservation of the painting, and hence preserving the original materials and colours. All conservation materials, and procedures stated will be compatible, and respectful to the original materials in discussion.

## 2. The Painting- General Information

Dimensions - 170cm x 260cm

The work of art in discussion is an 18th Century oil on canvas painting representing the Marian figure of the Immaculate Conception. The painting, is the work of Rocco Buhagiar (1723 - 1805), one of the most sought after artists in Malta at that time. According to the artist Raphael Bonnici Cali', this painting was executed in 1770. The figure of the Saint stands in the centre of the composition as She looks down, blessed by the Holy Spirit at the top of the painting. Buhagiar portrays the Saint with the traditional iconography of the Immaculate Conception; the white dress and blue veil. The Saint also stands on the moon while crushing the head of the serpent. The area at the bottom right side is taken over by thick, dark and grey clouds that represent sin on Earth. This corner contrasts significantly with the top area around the Holy Spirit which represents the Divine. The prophet on the left bottom side is holding a scripture that reads "SOLIUM GLORIAE CELSTIDINIS A PRINCIPIO".





Figure 1. The altar painting of The Immaculate Conception, Rocco Buhagiar, 1770 at the Annunciation of Our Lady Parish Church, Tarxien. (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024).



### 3. Condition Assessment

A visual inspection to understand the present state of conservation was carried out at a distance since the painting is placed on the altar, and the back side could not be inspected at this stage. Hence, a better understanding of the manufacturing technique, original materials, deterioration phenomena and damages may be identified once an inspection is carried out at a close distance, from front and back.

Initiating from the canvas support, the painting seems to be well stretched to the stretcher frame, and hence no severe sagging is present. Quite evident is a small tear in the canvas support, the preparatory layer, and paint layer, positioned above the head of the prophet on the left (Figure 2.). This could be the result of a slight hit during manoeuvring around the altar. Additionally, around this tear, most of the preparation and paint layers are lost, and hence only the canvas support is visible (Figure 2.).

Several punctures in all the different layers of the painting are present along the edges due to the gilded border frames that are attached to the painting with nails (Figure 3.). Punctures are also present above the head of the Saint due to the attached crown, which may also be creating unwanted stress on the original support (Figure 4.). Since this crown is a late addition, and evident that it is a source of deterioration and damage, it was decided, together with Archpriest Fr Christopher Ellul and the members of *Assoċjazzjoni Patrimonju Tarxien*, that this crown will not be re- attached after the conservation and restoration process.

It was noted that the paint layer is cracking due to the natural movement of the canvas support during different macro climates along the years. This phenomenon, also known as craquelure is mainly distributed along the seam lines of the three canvas pieces that make the entire support of the painting (Figure 5.).

An elongated patch of discoloured overpaint was noted over part of the blue mantle and brown background (Figure 6.). Possibly, this area was badly affected by a candle burn, and later overpainted to rematch the artists' colours. Furthermore, several wax drippings are present over the painted surface (Figure 7.).

Overall, the painting has a dull appearance due to the discoloured varnish, dirt and grime that is present on the painted surface. This is reducing the three dimensionality and certain details of the figures and background.



Figure 2. Detail of a tear and paint loss located at the left side of the painting, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024).



Figure 3. Detail of puncture holes created by nails used to attach the border frames to the stretcher frame, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024).



Figure 4. Puncture holes created by pins to attach the crown, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024).





Figure 5. Craquelure present along the seam lines of the different pieces of canvas support that make up the entire painting, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024).

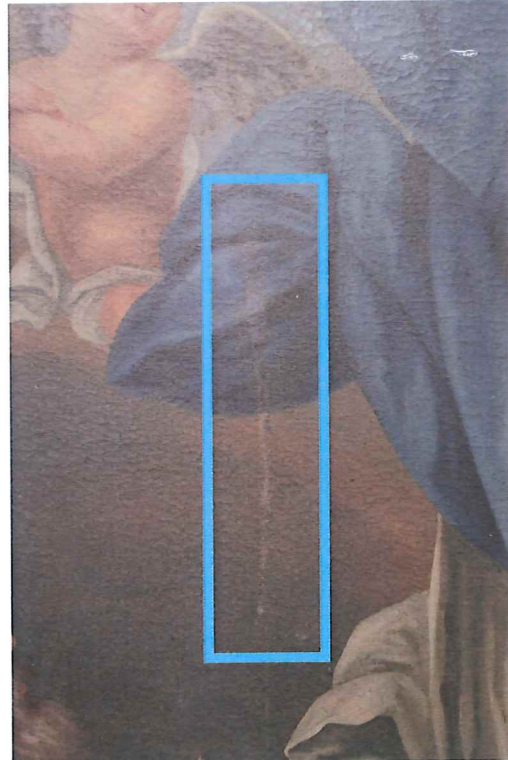


Figure 6. An elongated overpainted, discoloured patch, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024).

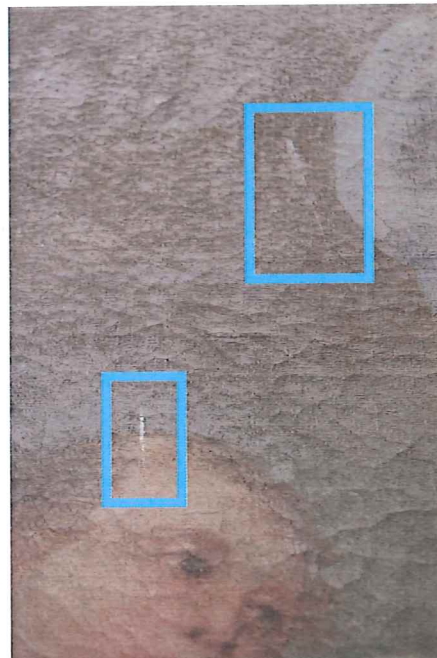


Figure 7. Detail showing wax drips over the painted surface, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024).

#### 4. Proposed Conservation and Restoration Treatments

This section will include the different treatments, processes, and methodologies thought to be required at this point based on visual inspection, knowledge from previous projects, and research of published literature. Prior and throughout the stages of the project, all steps and methodologies will be photographically documented with visible light, and some cases also with ultraviolet light. All the treatments, and methodologies will be documented in a final conservation report for future reference.

Archpriest Fr Christopher Ellul and other members of the *Assoċjazzjoni Patrimonju Tarxien* are invited to visit Restawr Arti Studio whenever required and think fit, in order to view and follow the progress of works.

The painting will be taken down from the walls accordingly. Emergency facing will be applied to those areas of flaking paint, packed properly and safely inside the church, and transported to Restawr Arti Studio in Naxxar in an enclosed transport van. Eventually, once the works are finalised, the painting and frame will be repacked properly and safely, and returned back to the church in an enclosed transport van.

The first step is to photographically document the painting from front and back using visible, raking, and ultraviolet light. A thorough inspection will be carried out at close distance in order to evaluate and design a precise methodology for the treatments required.

The focus will move to the lengthy and important treatments addressing the structural support. A temporary facing using Japanese paper will be applied to the pictorial layer to protect it from the handling that is required in the coming stages. The painting will be dismantled from the stretcher frame. The tacking margins and deformations in the canvas support will be flattened carefully through a process of humidification and pressure. This will allow the paint layer to relax and go back to its original position.

A synthetic consolidant will be applied by brush from the backside of the painting. The type of consolidant and its dilution will be determined depending on the requirements of the canvas. A synthetic consolidant is preferred over a natural adhesive due to a higher melting point, and therefore will not disintegrate in the high temperatures of Summer, and also does not attract unwanted pests. Additionally, they are reversible with mild solvents.



The consolidant will then be re- activated to reach and re- adhere all the different layers of the painting by the use of heat and a low pressure vacuum table. This system will ascertain homogeneous and controlled heat throughout the painting, and also controlled pressure to aid in better adhesion and consolidation.

The tear will be repaired from the back of the painting by using fine threads that will be adhered systematically as to re- strengthen the area around the tear. Whereas, all the punctures and holes created by nails and the pins of the crown will be inlayed with a natural canvas of the same composition, thread, and weave. A fine polyester will be used to patch the areas of the tear and inlays. These will provide further strength around the treated areas. At this moment the Japanese paper facing can be removed.

Depending on the strength of the canvas after consolidation, the conservator/s will decide if a re- lining is required. If the canvas is able to support the weight of the painting, strips will be applied only to the edges and tacking margins of the painting in order to give more strength to the edges while providing a longer edge from where the conservator can pull during the re stretching process. Otherwise, a re- lining will be needed. In any chosen treatment, the adhesive will be compatible with the consolidant used previously. This will eliminate undesirable reactions due to their different physical properties that might reduce the bonding strength between the original canvas and the new lining canvas or strip lining canvas. The type of new canvas chosen will be of a similar composition, thread and weave in order to have similar properties as the original. The painting will be re- stretched and tensioned to the original stretcher frame.

The next stage will be to determine the best possible cleaning methodology or methodologies to remove the oxidised varnish, and altered restoration colours without affecting or touching the original paint layers. Various cleaning tests will be carried out to determine the mixture of solvents in liquid or gel state, and the methodology of cleaning. Dirt, grime, and gypsum infills from the previous restoration will be softened and removed by fine scalpel blades. This process will be carried out to expose Buhagiar's original colours once again.

Lacunae and losses in the paint layer, and preparation layer will be infilled with fine quality *gesso di Bologna* and rabbit glue, and eventually levelled to match the rest of the painting's surface. Prior to re- integration, a low molecular weight retouching varnish will be applied to separate the original colours from the retouching restoration colours while saturating the original colours. Then, the pictorial re- integration of losses of the pictorial

layer will be carried out using stable varnish based colours purposely designed for restoration. This phase will unify the appearance of the painting. As a final step, the surface will be given a synthetic coating with a satin finish. A synthetic varnish will be chosen over a natural varnish since it is proven to be more stable to high temperatures and humidity levels, does not discolour by time, and also has an ultraviolet filter incorporated, hence it protects the oil colours from the negative effects sunlight may have on the original materials.

## 5. Conclusion

From the observations carried out on site, Restawr Arti suggests that the altar painting of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady at Tarxien Parish Church is preserved by following a conservation and restoration programme. All treatments carried out will be based on a methodological, and ethical approach in order to preserve the historical materials. Conservation treatments, and procedures must be carried out using established conservation products and tools.

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05/06/2024

**Quotation #**

018/24

Tarxien Parish Church

Phone no.

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Conservation and Restoration – Our Lady of Consolation,  
oil on canvas, Francesco Zahra, 1770

## DESCRIPTION OF TREATMENTS

## PRICE (EURO)

Preliminary and final conservation report	180.00
Structural intervention including consolidation, strip lining or relining	600.00
Cleaning and removal of oxidised varnish, dirt, and candle wax	1025.00
Gypsum infills	150.00
Pictorial re- integration and final protective varnish (UV filtered)	390.00

Subtotal exc. VAT 2345.00

VAT 18% 422.10

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**Total (Euro) 2767.10**

This quotation is valid for 6 months from date of issue.

The Virgin of Consolation with Saints,  
Francesco Zahra,  
oil on Canvas, 1770

Annunciation of Our Lady Parish Church, Tarxien, Malta

## Restoration Method Statement



Semira Gayle Bugeja (M.Sc., B.A. (Hons) (Melit.))

November 2024

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## 1. Introduction

The following report carried out by Restawr Arti provides a description of the required conservation and restoration treatments for the altar painting of The Virgin of Consolation by the Maltese artist Francesco Zahra in 1770, at the Tarxien Parish Church. All knowledge gathered regarding the present condition of the work of art under study is based on a visual inspection. The proposed required conservation - restoration treatments are based both on professional experience, and published research, and may require slight changes in the process or methodology once the conservator/s carries out a close and thorough visual inspection.

The aim will be to present a conservative methodology for the conservation of the painting, and hence preserving the original materials and colours. All conservation materials, and procedures stated will be compatible, and respectful to the original materials in discussion.

## 2. The Painting- General Information

Dimensions - 156cm x 233cm

The work of art in discussion is a 1770 oil on canvas painting representing The Virgin of Consolation in *sacra conversazione* with St. Augustine, St. Monica, St. Catherine, and St. Agatha (Figure 1.). The painting, is the work of Francesco Zahra (1710 - 1773), one of the most sought after artists in Malta at that time. The figure of the Virgin Saint sits on clouds, holding Her baby Jesus on the right side of the composition as She looks down to St. Monica and St. Augustine. She is also handing over the cincture to St. Monica. St. Augustine looks up to the Virgin and Child as he holds the burning heart.

The Child, in *contrapposto* looks gracefully at St. Catherine as He holds the cincture at His right hand. St. Catherine kneels in the foreground with the broken wheel in front of her and St. Agatha holding the 2 breasts on a plate.



Figure 1. The altar painting of The Virgin of Consolation with St. Augustine, St. Monica, St. Catherine, and St. Agatha, at Tarxien Parish Church, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024)

### 3. Condition Assessment

A visual inspection to understand the present state of conservation was carried out at a distance since the painting is placed on the altar, and the back side could not be inspected at this stage. Hence, a better understanding of the manufacturing technique, original materials, deterioration phenomena and damages may be identified once an inspection is carried out at a close distance, from front and back.

Initiating from the canvas support, the painting seems to be well stretched to the stretcher frame, however the bottom right edge is slightly deformed, possibly due to some loose tacks at the top which then result in sagging (Figure 2.). Exactly at the top right corner is a



tiny tear in the canvas support, the preparatory layer, and paint layer. This is visible as a dark brown spot.

Several punctures in all the different layers of the painting are present along the edges due to the gilded border frames that are attached to the painting with nails. Punctures are also present above the head of the Virgin Saint due to the attached crown, which may also be creating unwanted stress on the original support. Since this crown is a late addition, and evident that it is a source of deterioration and damage, it was decided, together with Archpriest Fr Christopher Ellul and the members of *Assoċjazzjoni Patrimonju Tarxien*, that this crown will not be re- attached after the conservation and restoration process.

It was noted that the paint layer is cracking due to the natural movement of the canvas support during different macro climates along the years. This phenomenon, also known as craquelure is distributed allover the painting (Figure 3.).

Several wax drippings are present over the painted surface (Figure 3.).

Overall, the painting has a dull appearance due to the discoloured varnish, dirt and grime that is present on the painted surface. This is reducing the three dimensionality and certain details of the figures and background.

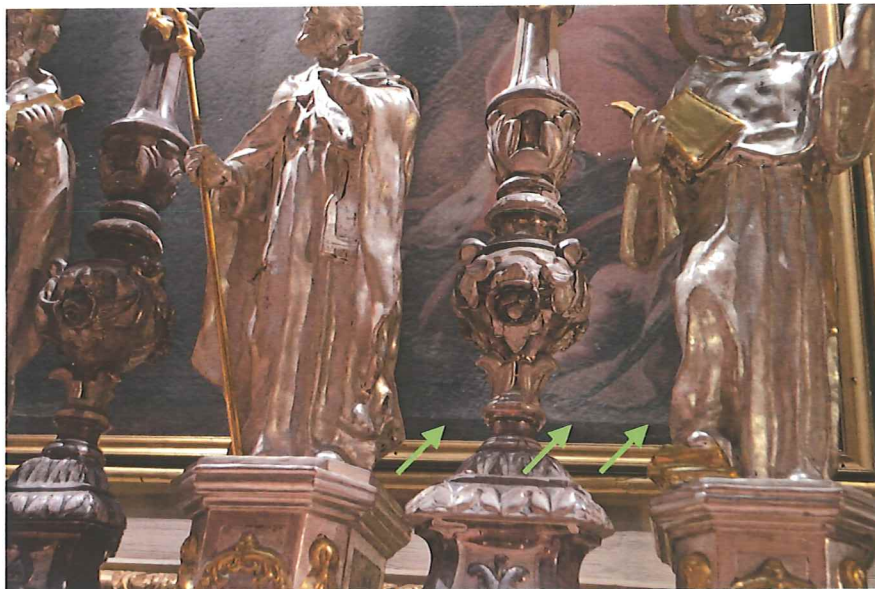


Figure 2. Detail showing the bottom right side of the painting that has deformed, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024).





Figure 3. Detail showing areas of craquelure, and wax drips marked in blue, (Image, Restawr Arti, 2024).

#### 4. Proposed Conservation and Restoration Treatments

This section will include the different treatments, processes, and methodologies thought to be required at this point based on visual inspection, knowledge from previous projects, and research of published literature. Prior and throughout the stages of the project, all steps and methodologies will be photographically documented with visible light, and some cases also with ultraviolet light. All the treatments, and methodologies will be documented in a final conservation report for future reference.

Archpriest Fr Christopher Ellul and other members of the *Assoċjazzjoni Patrimonju Tarxien* are invited to visit Restawr Arti Studio whenever required and think fit, in order to view and follow the progress of works.

The painting will be taken down from the walls accordingly, packed properly and safely inside the church, and transported to Restawr Arti Studio in Naxxar in an enclosed transport van. Eventually, once the works are finalised, the painting and frame will be repacked properly and safely, and returned back to the church in an enclosed transport van.

The first step is to photographically document the painting from front and back using visible, raking, and ultraviolet light. A thorough inspection will be carried out at close distance in order to evaluate and design a precise methodology for the treatments required.

The focus will move to the lengthy and important treatments addressing the structural support. A temporary facing using Japanese paper will be applied to the pictorial layer to protect it from the handling that is required in the coming stages. The painting will be dismantled from the stretcher frame. The tacking margins and deformations in the canvas support will be flattened carefully through a process of humidification and pressure. This will allow the paint layer to relax and go back to its original position.

A synthetic consolidant will be applied by brush from the backside of the painting. The type of consolidant and its dilution will be determined depending on the requirements of the canvas. A synthetic consolidant is preferred over a natural adhesive due to a higher melting point, and therefore will not disintegrate in the high temperatures of Summer, and also does not attract unwanted pests. Additionally, they are reversible with mild solvents. The consolidant will then be re-activated to reach and re-adhere all the different layers of the painting by the use of heat and a low pressure vacuum table. This system will ascertain homogeneous and controlled heat throughout the painting, and also controlled pressure to aid in better adhesion and consolidation.

The tear will be repaired from the back of the painting by using fine threads that will be adhered systematically as to re-strengthen the area around the tear. Whereas, all the punctures and holes created by nails and the pins of the crown will be inlaid with a natural canvas of the same composition, thread, and weave. A fine polyester will be used



to patch the areas of the tear and inlays. These will provide further strength around the treated areas. At this moment the Japanese paper facing can be removed.

Depending on the strength of the canvas after consolidation, the conservator/s will decide if a re- lining is required. If the canvas is able to support the weight of the painting, strips will be applied only to the edges and tacking margins of the painting in order to give more strength to the edges while providing a longer edge from where the conservator can pull during the re stretching process. Otherwise, a re- lining will be needed. In any chosen treatment, the adhesive will be compatible with the consolidant used previously. This will eliminate undesirable reactions due to their different physical properties that might reduce the bonding strength between the original canvas and the new lining canvas or strip lining canvas. The type of new canvas chosen will be of a similar composition, thread and weave in order to have similar properties as the original. The painting will be re- stretched and tensioned to the original stretcher frame.

The next stage will be to determine the best possible cleaning methodology or methodologies to remove the oxidised varnish, and altered restoration colours without affecting or touching the original paint layers. Various cleaning tests will be carried out to determine the mixture of solvents in liquid or gel state, and the methodology of cleaning. Dirt, grime, and gypsum infills from the previous restoration will be softened and removed by fine scalpel blades. This process will be carried out to expose Zahra's original colours once again.

Lacunae and losses in the paint layer, and preparation layer will be infilled with fine quality *gesso di Bologna* and rabbit glue, and eventually levelled to match the rest of the painting's surface. Prior to re- integration, a low molecular weight retouching varnish will be applied to separate the original colours from the retouching restoration colours while saturating the original colours. Then, the pictorial re- integration of losses of the pictorial layer will be carried out using stable varnish based colours purposely designed for restoration. This phase will unify the appearance of the painting. As a final step, the surface will be given a synthetic coating with a satin finish. A synthetic varnish will be chosen over a natural varnish since it is proven to be more stable to high temperatures and humidity levels, does not discolour by time, and also has an ultraviolet filter incorporated, hence it protects the oil colours from the negative effects sunlight may have on the original materials.

## 5. Conclusion

From the observations carried out on site, Restawr Arti suggests that the altar painting of The Virgin of Consolation at Tarxien Parish Church is preserved by following a conservation and restoration programme. All treatments carried out will be based on a methodological, and ethical approach in order to preserve the historical materials. Conservation treatments, and procedures must be carried out using established conservation products and tools.

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