

REBECCA GREGG CONSERVATION LTD
CONDITION REPORT

Benjamin West RA
The Holy Family
Oil on board



Before treatment



After Treatment

Condition

The painting was in a relatively poor condition when first examined.

The painting was originally painted on a panel, however; the mechanical damage visible had resulted in the support and paint in those areas becoming raised and deformed.

The paint layers were in a stable condition, there were distinct losses along the edges of the damage. The damages formed a double cross with an additional spur running vertically up into Our Lady's face. There was evidence of further losses, especially along the lower edge, however there did not appear recent and the adhesion between the paint and ground layers and the support appeared stable.

There has been some historic flaking of the paint layers in the Christ's white drapery, Our Lady's hand and in the lower sections of the painting which had resulted in minor losses to the paint and ground layers.

There was significant abrasion across the entire background of the composition.

There was a network of ductile cracking across the entire composition; this appeared to be the result of drying craquelure due to differential drying times of the paint layers. This was usually most commonly seen with the use of bitumen in the paint layers, a technique which was in use at the time in thwarted attempts to recreate an 'Old Master glow'.

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There had been significant abrasion to the lighter areas of the composition in particular to the figure of Christ Child whose face has suffered abrasion and a heavily applied campaign of over-painting.

There were significant amounts of discoloured over-paint along the sites of the tears, and in the most visually disturbing of the drying cracks. Our Lady's face has also been over-painted.

The over-paint present was discoloured and in most places heavily applied. There did appear to be at least two campaigns of restoration present, there was a relatively large area below Our Lady's elbow, along the lower edge and covering more of the ductile cracking which appears relatively recent, it is above the existing varnish layer and there had been an attempt to visually re-integrate the existing restoration work.

There was a significantly dark and discoloured varnish layer present which fluoresces strongly in ultra violet examination. The painting appeared to have been partially cleaned at some point in its history, and the yellowed varnish removed in part from the lighter areas of the composition. This unsympathetic cleaning had resulted in abraded losses to the face of Christ, and significant damage had been caused to the faces of Our Lady and St Joseph.

There was a significant layer of surface dirt present.

Treatment

The surface dirt was removed and tests carried out to assess the extent of the over-paint present and how the painting support was constructed.

The multiple layers of discoloured varnish layers were removed with solvent mixtures as were the dark and heavily applied layers of over-paint from the previous restoration campaigns. This was carried out in stages as it was important to establish the condition of the original paint layers and whether there would be any difficulties with the solubility of these layers in solvent.

In fact the original paint layers were found to be vulnerable to solvent and it appeared that these layers had suffered significantly from unsympathetic cleaning during previous restoration campaigns.

The removal of varnish and later layers of over-paint revealed significant damage and abrasion across the entire painting and especially to the faces.

These raised edges of the areas of mechanical damage were incredibly difficult to flatten as the paint around the damage had become raised and deformed.

Once completed an isolating varnish layer of Larapal A81 in a diluent of Shellsol A was applied, the losses filled with an inert silica filling material, textured to replicate the original surface and retouched with dry pigments in a Larapal medium. Care was taken to reintegrate the areas of abrasion and the more visually disturbing of the drying craquelure without covering any of the original paint layers.

Finally a semi-matt protective varnish layer of Regalrez 1094 in a diluent of white spirit was applied.

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Before Treatment



During Varnish Removal



Before Retouching



After Treatment

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