

Dossier: Napoli, Roma, Dresda: il dibattito sulle vernici tra la fine del XVIII e l'inizio del XIX secolo

Dossier: *Naples, Rome, Dresden: the debate on varnishes between the end of 17th and the beginning of 19th century*

The starting point for this paper is a late 18th century document entitled Lettera a Sua Eccellenza il Signor Cavaliere Hamilton Inviato Straordinario, e Ministro Plenipotenziario di Sua Maestà Britannica alla Corte delle Due Sicilie, Cavaliere dell'Insigne Ordine del Bagno di Filippo Hackert sull'Uso della Vernice nella Pittura, dated December 20, 1787, in Naples. The letter was printed in Naples and caused considerable discussion which took place mainly in the local art journals – with an echo that rumbled on for the next thirty years involving the cultural communities not only in Italy but also in Germany where art restoration was much discussed. So much so that the publisher Walther in Dresden produced an annotated German translation with five appendices, thirteen years after the letter was first printed in Naples. The letter and the discussion that arose after its publication can be interpreted in several ways, not only to understand the prevailing thinking about materials and procedures backed by critical analysis of treatises and other sources, but also to explain the visual taste of artists and art connoisseurs. The whole discussion is useful to help us understand the links between theoretical ideas about restoration and the quality of the work carried out at that time. The debate took place against a lively backdrop, animated by many protagonists – Hackert, Puccini, Anders, Tischbein, Goethe, Celestino, to name a few – and the subject touched on the concerns of a flourishing collectors' market interested in restoration as part of a wider scenario, dense with special interests and matters of taste. Throughout Europe, some of the first fruits of the Illuminist period were reaching maturity. Hence, separating and distinguishing science from the secrets of the painter's studio, as well as the various artistic professions and their different roles – restorer, art teacher, connoisseur, museum curator – led to a series of questions about techniques and working methods. Forty years on, when the discussion about pigments had still not subsided, the subject re-emerged again in Naples where it had originally started, through the testimony of an unexpected witness. However, the milieu had changed by then. And yet, the subject of restoration and pigments still led to fresh controversy. The whole question of disagreement between Michele Arditi and Andrea Celestino regarding the restoration of the ancient wall paintings in Pompeii and the Vesuvius area, became the occasion to re-examine, at a distance of time, the discussions on ancient artworks which had become a focal point from the late 18th century onwards.

I segni salvati. Lo stacco di un soffitto di Lucio Fontana all'isola d'Elba

Traces of the recent past. Detaching a ceiling by Lucio Fontana on the island of Elba

In the autumn of 2000, the Fondazione Lucio Fontana in Milan was approached by the owners of the Hotel del Golfo in the Procchio district on the island of Elba, for an opinion on the question of preserving a ceiling designed by Lucio Fontana in 1956 for the hotel's dining room. The owners wanted to enlarge the hotel and it was clear that restructuring work would have serious effects on Fontana's work which was already in a poor state of preservation. Therefore, after several attempts to persuade the owners not to go ahead with the enlargement project, the ceiling was detached from its site and became the property of the Italian State. After a detailed examination of the ceiling's construction in terms of its structure and surface finishing, a technical study was carried out on the feasibility of detaching it piece by piece and re-assembling it somewhere else. The next step was to carry out all the preliminary operations for protecting the surface of the ceiling, preparing the supports, cutting away and removing the ceiling panels, thinning the layer of material on the back of the panels, preparing a mounting layer on the mobile support, and repositioning the panels. At present, the 25 detached panels are stored in premises belonging to the Milan City Council while waiting for a decision about their future destination, hopefully definitive.

ABSTRACT

La Tomba del Cavaliere di Sarno: dal recupero al restauro

The Tomb of the Cavaliere of Sarno: recovery and restoration

In September 2002, a tomb containing painted panels with exceptionally rich images was discovered in an area known as Galitta del Capitano near the town of Sarno, southern Italy. Dated somewhere between the mid-4th century BC and the early 5th century, the tomb is decorated with scenes showing the homecoming of a warrior, depicted in triumph, dressed in blue and carrying the spoils of his defeated enemy. From the day it was discovered, it was clear that recovering this precious find would be an extremely difficult task. Not only was it large and fragile but also the structure itself was fractured, crumbling and water-soaked. With the help of various specialists, emergency work was carried out on site using a recovery technique that had not been used previously for objects of this type. The fact of being able to work on the excavation at the time of the find made it possible to examine the object closely to get a better understanding of the construction technique, and to take samples for diagnostic analysis, before any other actions were taken to dismantle it. Close examination of the way the stone surfaces had been finished showed that the blocks were only rough-hewn when they arrived at the necropolis from the quarry. They were then assembled and squared off on site before being lowered into the pit. Stonemasons then climbed down into the tomb and finished off the stone surfaces, smoothing them with abrasives. The interior of the tomb was prepared with lime-based plaster before being decorated. The technique used was painting on a damp layer of plaster (fresco) with no preparatory drawing as a guide, but marking out the coloured areas directly on the surface. From the mineralogical and petrographic point of view, worth noting is the abundance of Egyptian blue, a pigment which is generally considered rare in the field of funeral decorations in the region. The preparatory layer was probably made with quicklime that was only partially ready, in other words too quickly spent.

La caratterizzazione delle carte orientali

Paper from the Far East

The tradition of papermaking, from its origin in China during the first century BC, is an important part of the heritage for far-eastern countries in terms of history, science and production. This article examines the subject of papermaking in China and Japan – which preceded Europe by a thousand years – in order to arrange and clarify the information that has come down to us over time, sometimes incorrectly. European artists in the 19th and 20th centuries often used paper made in eastern countries as the support for various techniques in order to achieve particular effects; for this reason, studying collections of prints and drawings from that period can provide a good deal of information regarding the origin and composition of the paper in question. Cataloguing paper supports involves not only examining the surface features and the composition of the sheets, but also identifying the fibres used to make them. With the help of digital photography techniques, a database was created containing information on the types of paper and the fibres used in eastern countries, as a convenient tool for identifying paper samples. Previously unknown information was gathered about the use of a particular plant species, *Pteroceltis tatarinowii*, in Chinese paper. Certain types of Japanese paper are widely used for restoration work in Italy and elsewhere, thanks to their special chemical and physical properties. However, in many cases the exact composition of the paper is not available. Therefore it would seem important to bring in clear regulations on the subject in order to guarantee the quality of Japanese paper used in restoration work.