

G.CANNICCI'S VISITATION ALTARPIECE, COPY AFTER MARIOTTO ALBERTINELLI: THE VALUE OF TECHNICAL INVESTIGATION

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“THE REAL THING?” The Value of Authenticity and Replication for Investigation and Conservation

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Abstract
Gaetano Cannicci (San Gimignano 1811 - Firenze 1878), “G. Cannicci” (as the painter signed), remains one of the unsolved mysteries of a 19th century copyist: few works are associated with his hand and his technique is unknown. Copying Mariotto Albertinelli’s (1474-1515) *Visitation* altarpiece, this Italian painter used the same iconography and similar dimensions (Figures 1, 2), but a different form of support and materials.
The aim of this poster is to explore Cannicci’s workshop technique, which is important for future comparative investigations and for conservation purposes.
To study the textile support, paint layers and varnish of G. Cannicci’s altarpiece, a range of complementary methods were employed, including: optical microscopy (OM), scanning electron microscopy coupled with energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (SEM-EDX), micro chemical analyses (MA), Raman spectroscopy (RS), Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) and gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS).

ICONOGRAPHY AND STYLE SPIRIT

The monumental copy by G. Cannicci is evidence of the growing popularity of Italian Renaissance painting in the nineteenth century. Some copies were made for Grand Tourists, but others to answer religious commissions, like many paintings by Cannicci (Fig. 1).

Cannicci’s copy keeps the original religious meaning of the subject: this childhood episode in the life of Jesus is mentioned by the apostle S. Lucas in the *New Testament* (Lc 1, 39-56): “At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in... Judea [Ain-Karim]... Mary stayed with Elizabeth [who was pregnant with S. John Baptist]... for about three months...” [1].

If exposed in an active Christian temple (church, convent or monastery) this painting keeps one of *The Nara Document on Authenticity* parameters: the devotional “function” [2].

As mentioned in a letter from the king D. Manuel I to the Santa Casa da Misericórdia (SCM) of Lisbon (Holy House of Mercy), in 1516, *the Visit of Virgin Mary to S. Elisabeth* is the patron of Portugal’s SCM [3].

G. Cannicci *Visitation*, painted in 1850, follows Mariotto’s Florentine *Visitation* style from 1503 (Figures 1-3).

Cannicci used Leonardo’s (1452 – 1519) *sfumato* technique in the modelling of the sacred figures, with attention being given to the holy cousins faces, hands and drapery. The *Visitation*’s architecture (with *grotesche*) and the warm pallet recalls the spirit of Fra Bartolomeo (1472-1517) and Pietro Perugino (c. 1446/1450-1523) paintings, and its landscape send us to Flemish masters.



1 – G. Cannicci *Visitation* altarpiece, 232 x 144 cm. Painting during conservation at ACV, Portugal.



2 – Mariotto Albertinelli *Visitation* altarpiece, 232 x 146 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

G. CANNICCI'S PAINTING TECHNIQUE

For this study six micro samples were taken: one from the support for OM (Figures 4, 5) and five from the paint layers (Figures 6-10) for GC-MS, SEM-EDX, RS and FTIR complementary analyses.

The textile support was identified as linen, by OM [4, 6] (Figures 4, 5). Albertinelli had executed his *Visitation* on panel.

The preparatory layers contain a linseed oil binder, identified by GC-MS [4] (Fig. 12). The materials present are: a first brownish ground layer, made with **brown iron (Fe) based pigment(s)** [5], chalk – CaCO_3 –, and white lead – $2\text{PbCO}_3 \cdot \text{Pb(OH)}_2$ – identified by MA and SEM-EDX [4] (Fig. 13), a second whitish *imprimatura* layer, 50-115 μm thickness, also made with the same materials although with brown iron based pigment(s) in less quantity than in the first layer.

The paint layers are composed with different mixtures of pigments in linseed oil (distinct from the *tempera* binder used by Albertinelli on his *Visitation*), brushed over the bright *imprimatura*, to achieve the desired colors: blue (Fig. 6) made with **cobalt blue** – $\text{CoO} \cdot \text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ –, and white lead, yellow (Fig. 7) made with **iron hydroxide yellow** (goethite), vermilion – HgS –, white lead and brown iron (Fe) based pigment(s), red (Fig. 8) made with **vermilion**, **iron oxide red** (haematite) – Fe_2O_3 –, an unidentified red colorant, chalk and white lead, green (Fig. 9) made with **chrome green** – $\text{Fe}_4[\text{Fe(CN)}_6]_3 + \text{PbCrO}_4$ –, made with Prussian blue and chrome yellow as mentioned in the literature [6], white lead and zinc white – ZnO –, commercially available as an oil paint circa 1850 [6], identified by RS [4] (Fig. 14), greenish blue (Fig. 10) made with **Prussian blue** – $\text{Fe}_4[\text{Fe(CN)}_6]_3$, white lead, zinc white, brown iron based pigment(s) and chalk.

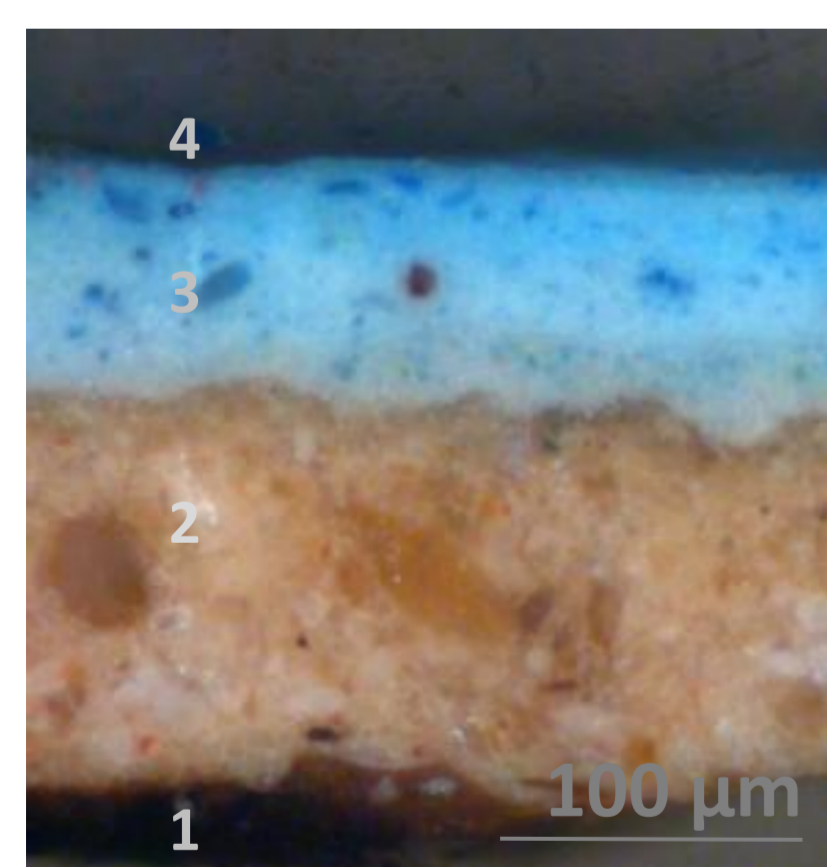
The varnish, 5-25 μm thickness, clearly observed by OM with ultra violet light (UV), (Fig. 11), was identified as rosin (colophony), “a pine resin left after the distillation of crude turpentine” [7] and linseed oil.



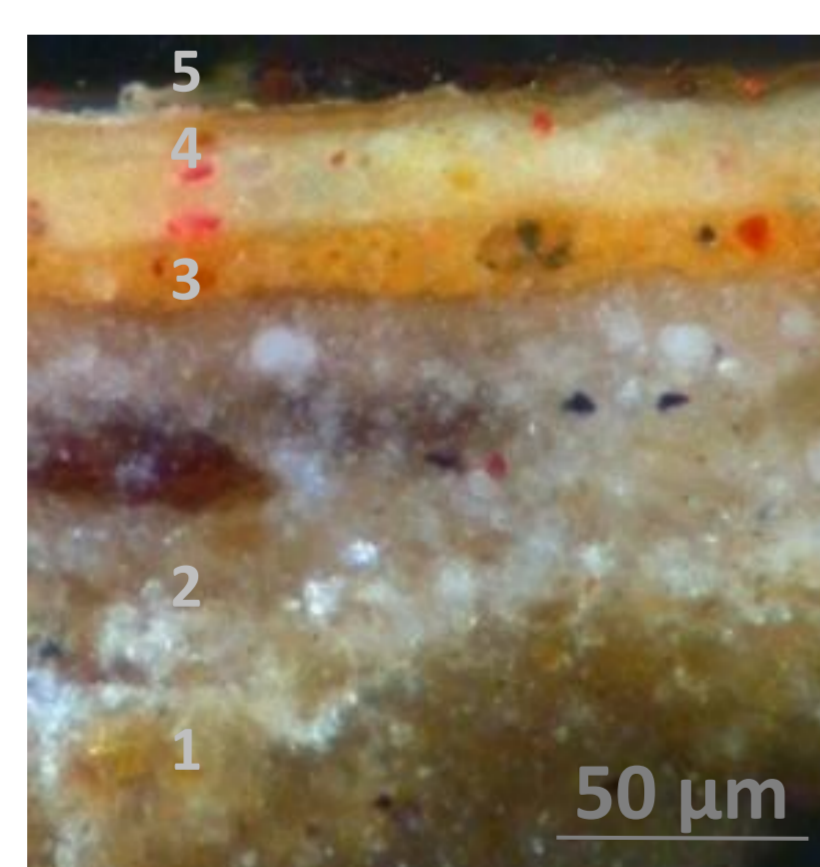
3 – The painter’s signature and date on the back of the canvas: “G. Cannicci. Paint. [painted in] 1850” (translation).

CONSERVATION TREATMENT

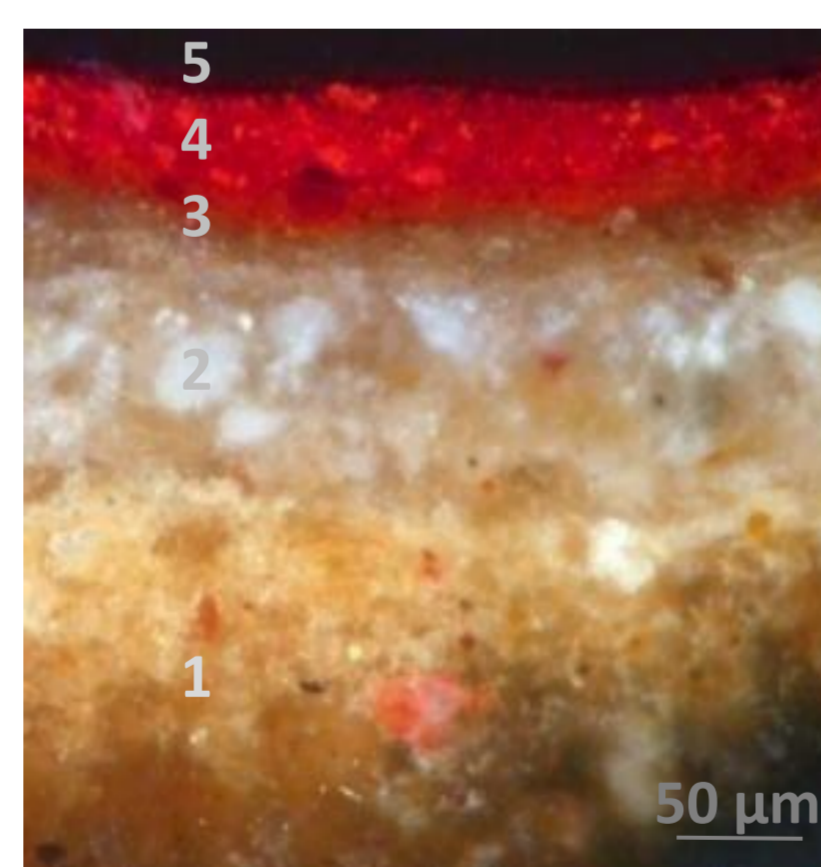
The painting’s conservation was undertaken with reversible, compatible and stable materials: dust was removed from the back of the canvas using erasers (neutral pH), paint layers were consolidated with a protein-based adhesive of a similar nature to the one used in a previous treatment, identified by FTIR [4] (Fig. 15), and the fatty varnish mentioned above was thinned with a two-part mixture of solvents (Fig. 16) adequate to its solubility [9, 10].



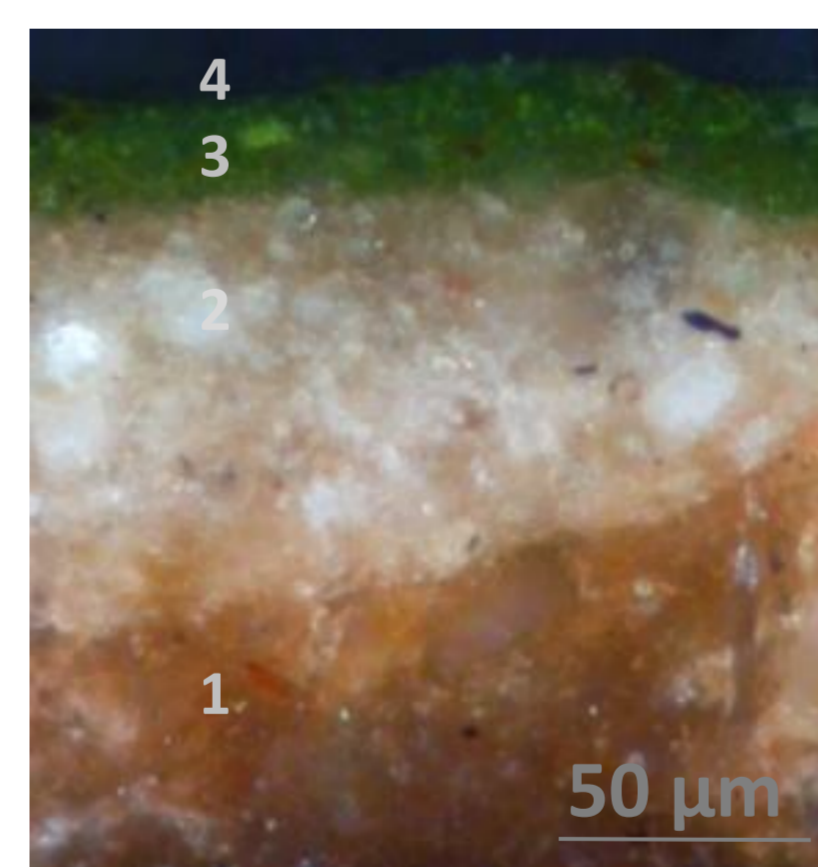
4 – Textile fiber’s longitudinal cuts.



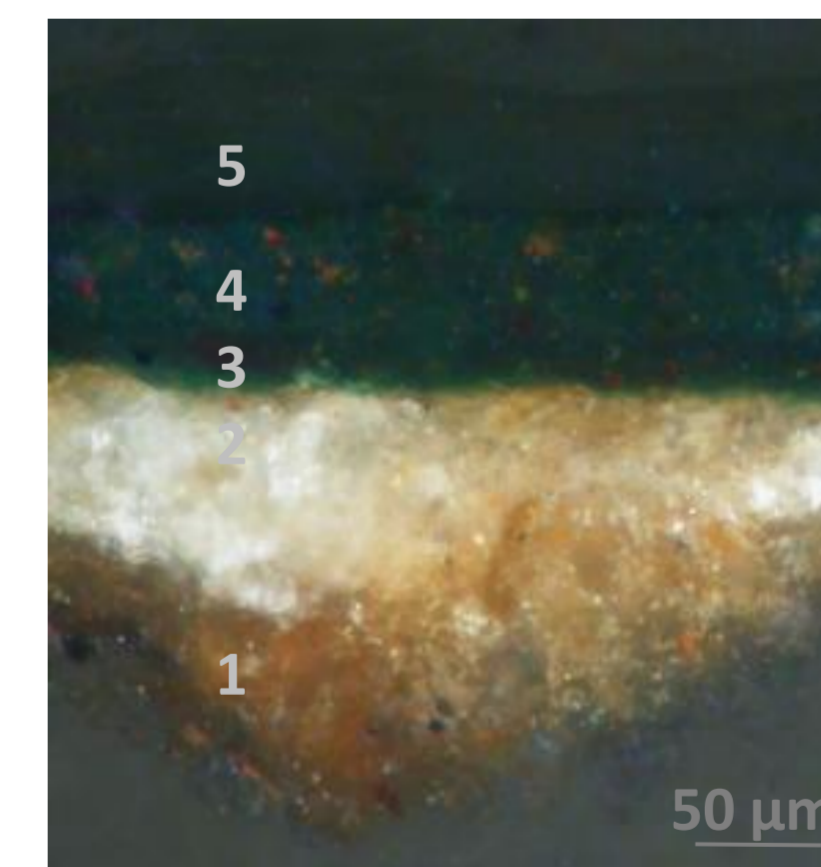
5 – Textile fiber’s transversal cuts.



6 – The blue sky.



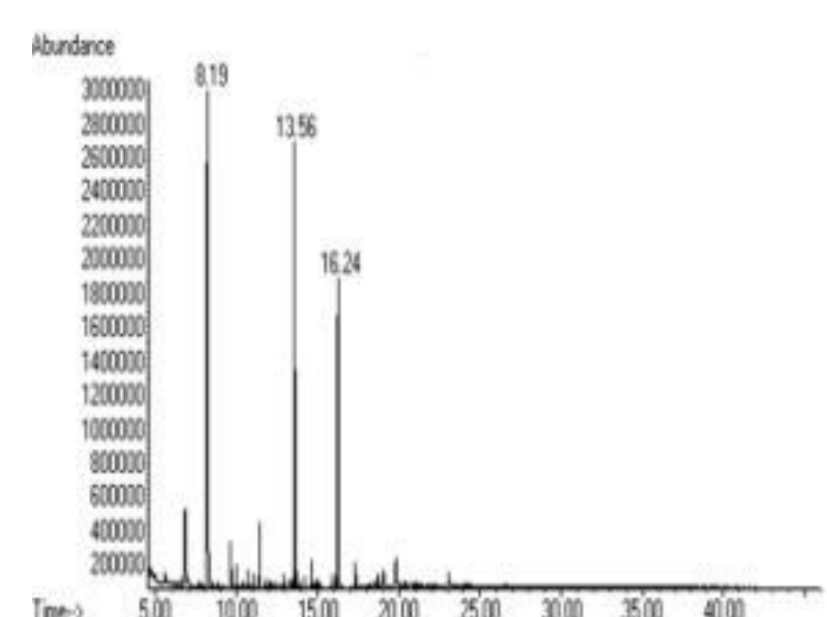
7 – The S. Elizabeth yellow mantle.



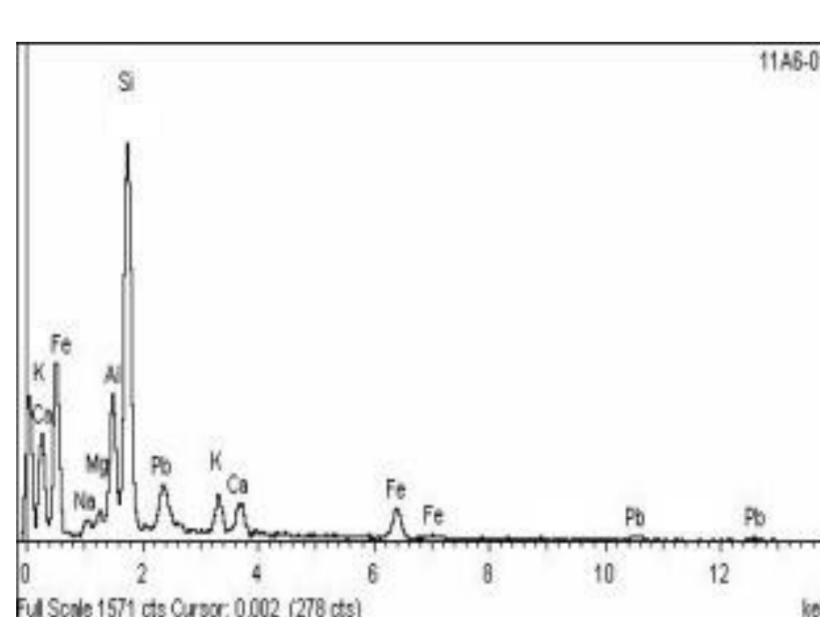
8 – The Virgin red tunic.



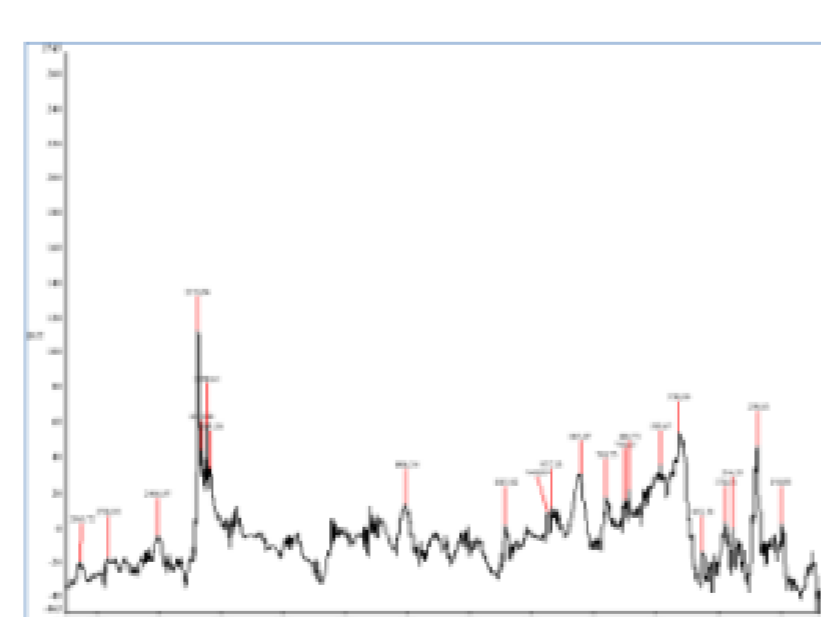
9 – The S. Elizabeth green Tunic.



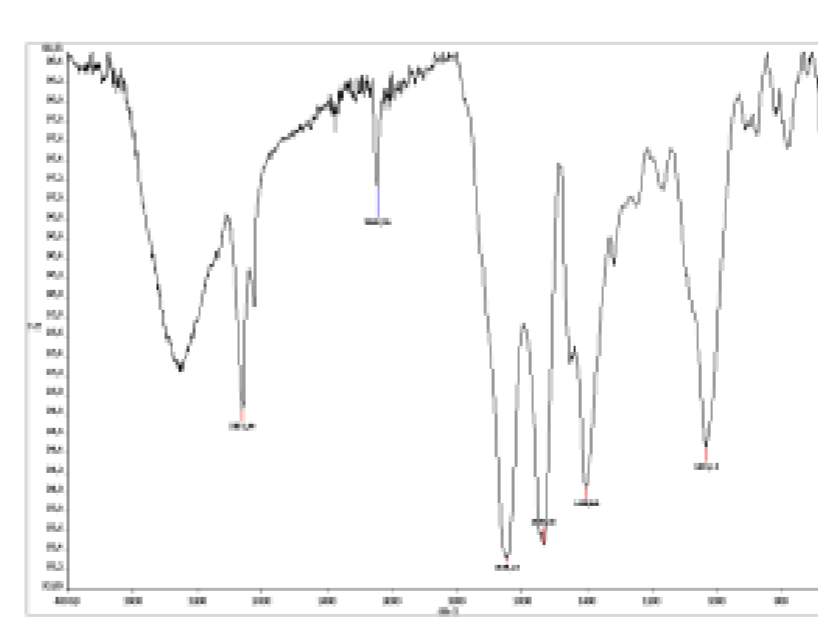
12 – GC-MS, ground layer binder.



13 – SEM-EDX, 1st preparatory layer.



14 – RS, green paint layer (Fig. 9).



15 – FTIR, varnish layer (Fig. 11).



16 – The *Visitation* during cleaning.

Acknowledgements

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Further reading

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Author

Filipa Raposo Cordeiro is currently working towards her PhD at the University of Lisbon with a grant from FCT. She specialized in Conservation and Restoration of Easel Paintings at: OPD, Florence, CCI, Ottawa and V&A, London. She has 18 years conservation experience, working for Museums, Palaces, Church and Private owners, in Portugal, Italy, U.K., Canada, China and Spain. She has made public presentations in London at the British Museum, in Glasgow at the University and in Lisbon, at MNA, FLUL and LNEC. She has published a book and international peer reviewed articles.



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