

Resurrection of a Masterpiece

■ The cleaning of the “Rest on the Flight into Egypt” by “Antonius Laetus”, called Correggio, has been concluded

Francesco Munari – a prominent dignitary in Correggio at the turn of the 15th century – commissioned the work for his family chapel in the Church of San Francesco dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. Painted in 1520, the small altarpiece by Correggio – measuring just over a square meter – entered the Tribune of the Uffizi, the designated site for great masterpieces within the Medici collections, on the request of Ferdinando II in 1649.

The painting underwent a cleaning in 1935 for the *Exposition de l'Art Italien* at the *Petit Palais* in Paris and, subsequently up to the present, interventions of ordinary maintenance; these consisted in applications of natural resins and glue sizes to “refresh” or consolidate the painterly surface. The layering of these materials over time provoked traction in the strata of color that tended to rise in correspondence with the *craquelure* causing fragmentary losses. Over time, the piling up of these filmy materials turned to a darkened amber-colored coating that transformed the painting into a flat and uniform image.

Thanks to the donation of Howard Freedman and Rita Montlack for the Friends of the Uffizi Galleries, in June 2018 the work was brought to our restoration laboratory where it underwent a delicate cleaning. The



Cleaning tests on the painting (photo 1 by Angelo Latronico).



The painting *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* by Antonio Allegri, called Correggio, after the restoration sponsored by the Friends of the Uffizi Galleries (photo by Angelo Latronico).

methods of application adopted under the direction of Francesca de Luca freed the painting from the ageing materials of previous restorations up to but not including the oldest strata of varnish applied in direct contact with the painterly surface (photo 1).

As the restoration progressed, the luminous presence of a distinctive pictorial hand emerged like a breath of life: vibrating, constructed and composed directly on the canvas, forged with chromatic variations visible under a microscope at a distance of two-milli-

meters (photo 2). For this reason, in collaboration with Sabrina Cassi, we limited our pictorial restoration to veils of color integration in the background landscape with no intervention on the figures. Our intent was to safeguard the imperceptible chromatic mutations of the single brushstrokes characteristic of the creative process in Correggio's painting as now can be seen in the figures that once again pulsate with the breath of life in all of their carnal humanity. The work now restores the poetic language of a great master in



Microscopic image of a detail of the root of the palm tree (photo 2).

an intent narrative of the biblical tale and its theological concept so well known in the cultural environment animating the early decades of the Italian Cinquecento. ■

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