

THE CONSERVATION CENTER

INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS – NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

14 East 78th Street

New York, NY 10075

TEL: (212) 992-5866 · FAX: (212) 992-5851

Kress Number: K-1264

Artist: Jacopo Amigoni

Title: *Portrait of a Man*

School/Period: Italian, c. 1720-30

Support/Medium: Oil (estimated) on canvas

Dimensions: 71 x 95 cm (27 7/8 x 37 1/2 in)

Owner: High Museum of Art, 58.29

Date of Treatment: October 2022-May 2023

Conservator: Laura Richter Le

Supervisors: Dianne Dwyer Modestini and Matthew Hayes



Frame: The gilded wood frame is not original, showing four joins where it has been cut down, two on the left and two on the right.

Photographic documentation:

Nikon D850 camera with 60mm lens, ISO100, f8

Before treatment: digital photography in normal light and UV light, recto
digital photography in normal light, verso

During treatment: digital photography in normal light

After treatment: digital photography in normal light

Analytical techniques performed:

X-radiography with Carestream HPX-1 digital system

Infrared reflectography (Apollo Camera Opus Instruments: InGaAs Camera with 0.9-1.7 μm range)

X-Ray Fluorescence (Bruker Tracer III-V+ (Rhodium source, silicon detector, titanium filter)

Cross-section microscopy (Leica DM400 B microscope and GRYPHAX camera & software)

SEM-EDS (Hitachi TM3000 Table scanning electron microscope and Bruker Nano XFlash MIN SVE and Quatex 70 software)

Abstract

The Portrait of a Man is owned by the High Museum of Art as part of the Kress Collection. It is a half-length portrait of an unknown sitter, dressed in a billowing red cloak, with a delicate lace collar and large white wig. Originally attributed to Pietro Longhi, the painting is now accepted to be an early work of Jacopo Amigoni, a peripatetic Venetian artist working in the early seventeenth century.

The painting was sent to the Conservation Center in 2022 for treatment and analysis. The varnish had yellowed, affecting the overall tone of the work and emphasizing the craquelure pattern, especially in the sitter's face. Several areas of past inpainting had discolored, poorly matching the surrounding design. The fills along the edges stood out from the weave structure of the original canvas. Finally, there was abrasion that had especially impacted the readability of passages that were already thin and pastel-like, such as the hair and pink highlights.

Art Historical Background

A peripatetic European artist, Jacopo Amigoni (1688-1752) worked within some of the most significant artistic centers in Europe at the time. A native of either Venice or Naples, he studied under Bellucci in Düsseldorf, and spent a good part of his early career in Germany, becoming a favored artist in the Bavarian court of Munich. In 1729, he moved to England, achieving success in the competitive environment of London; he remained there, apart from spending a few months visiting Paris, until 1739. Amigoni returned to his hometown of Venice until finally, in 1747, he migrated to Spain, spending the remainder of his career as court painter to the Bourbons in Madrid.

While remaining rooted in the Italian Baroque tradition, both rococo and classicizing elements predominate at various points across his oeuvre. Towards the start of his career, in the 1710-20s, Amigoni was among the “Frenchified” Venetian painters, with a light palette and elegant brushwork.¹ As his style progressed, beginning in the 1730s and continuing until his death, Amigoni became known for a more calm, classicizing style—in contrast to contemporaries such as Ricci or Tiepolo. In general, his palette was cooler and his brushwork more controlled than in his early career.²

Claiming to dislike painting portraits, Amigoni marketed himself as a painter of large-scale historical, allegorical, and religious scenes. However, he consistently received portrait commissions from members of royal courts and the aristocracy across Europe, which proved very profitable. Additionally, Amigoni painted self-portraits and portraits of fellow artists and friends. He might have at first dissociated himself from the genre to better compete for larger, more prestigious positions, especially as an itinerant artist encountering new environments and new competition across his career.

In documents in the Kress archives, the *Portrait of a Man* is dated to c.1720-30 without any justification. Its style, however, appears to fit well into this stage in his career, in which Amigoni was working primarily in Bavaria for the Elector Max Emmanuel. Although, at the time, Amigoni made frequent trips to Venice, technical analysis showed that the ground is calcium carbonate, which was generally used in the North (as opposed to calcium sulfate in Italy). As a result, this work was likely painted while in Bavaria.

¹ Leslie Griffin Hennessey, “Jacopo Amigoni (c. 1685-1752): An Artistic Biography with a Catalogue of His Venetian Paintings,” (PhD dissertation, University of Kansas, 1983), 77.

² Leslie Griffin Hennessey, “Jacopo Amigoni (c. 1685-1752): An Artistic Biography with a Catalogue of His Venetian Paintings,” 116.

As a helpful comparative work, while under the Elector's employment, Amigoni painted a portrait of Joseph Effner, the young architect employed to design the Neue Schloss Schleißheim, a brilliant palace for which Amigoni painted numerous frescoes. Amigoni paints the architect as an elite courtier, in an elaborate costume reminiscent of the popular court style, and comparable in several ways to the High Museum portrait. Effner is clothed in a similarly ostentatious red cloak, although this one is warmer in tone and more carefully modeled. Below, he is shown in a relaxed, open shirt and a silver justaucorps. He wears a long wig, powdered white, in the latest fashion, another point of similarity with the High portrait.³ Interestingly, although the figure we now see in the High portrait is wearing a comparable costume, x-radiography revealed that he was originally clothed in a more closely fitted shirt or jacket (Image 6). Whether the change was instigated by the sitter or the artist is unknown, but we can assume that the costume below is another costume fashionable in Bavaria at the time. Cross sections revealed a luminous orange-yellow color with traces of a purple color below (perhaps a cloak draped over the lower arms). This might have looked something like Joseph Vivien's *Self-Portrait* of c. 1715, also painted in Bavaria.

In terms of style, the painting reveals a number of influences and/or correlations. The quick, visible brushstrokes and flamboyant use of color are comparable to other works of the late Baroque, such as those Luca Giordano or Francesco Solimena, both of whom worked in Naples around the start of Amigoni's career. Like Giordano, especially at this time in his career, Amigoni was known for his speed, versatility across artistic media (fresco, canvas, printmaking, etc.), and his ability to reproduce models from other artists. Amigoni's portrait shows few traces of an underdrawing, possibly suggesting his ease at working extemporaneously (image 4). There is evidence of revisions to his design while working, however. The sitter's left hand was rotated and his fingers adjusted (a detail seen in the x-radiograph, image 7).

The dark background in both the High Museum portrait and the portrait of Joseph Effner is common at this point in Amigoni's career. Art historians have connected this feature both to the Neapolitan tradition and to trends within contemporary Venice, with Piazzetta and others employing tenebrist backdrops. This style not only appears within Amigoni's oeuvre during the 1720s but is also found among the works of other court painters working for Max Emmanuel, including Joseph Vivien and Georges Desmarées, supporting the suggested date for the High Museum portrait.

The softly modeled face of the sitter achieves a similar effect to that of pastel portraits that were popular at the time. Similarly, in the cloak, the red glazes blur the edges and soften the form, and the pink highlights of his cloak are also pastel-colored and French in spirit. There are several possible sources of inspiration for this softer style. While working in Bavaria, Amigoni was surrounded by French artists in Max Emmanuel's court. Joseph Vivien, for example, who was first painter to the Elector, had achieved his reputation through pastel portraits, joining the Academy in Paris as a "peintre en pastel" and eventually becoming a counsellor within the institution. Towards the end of his career in Bavaria, he worked increasingly in oils, but retained the soft modelling and light tones of his works in pastel. The light, "chalky" appearance of the figure's face in Amigoni's work might have been inspired by such paintings, and the style might

³ Peter O. Krückmann, *Von Venus Beschützt: Jacopo Amigonis Fresken Im Neuen Schloss Schleißheim* (Munich: Bayerische Verwaltung, 2011), 31.

have appealed to patrons in Bavaria, hoping to imitate styles seen in court. As another potential influence for the young artist, Rosalba Carriera, a Venetian portrait artist who had achieved fame across Europe and whose pastels were celebrated, met Amigoni on at least one occasion during the 1720s.⁴ Amigoni was making regular trips back to Venice during this period of his career, and since Venetian style was admired by the Elector back in Bavaria, likely sought to remain immersed in the artistic sensibilities of his hometown.

In the following century, while working in London, this pastel-like quality to his depiction of flesh was criticized by local artists and critics, where capturing the life and unique features of the sitter was prioritized. Horace Walpole wrote, “Amigoni’s women are mere chalk, as if he had only painted from ladies who paint themselves.”⁵ George Vertue, a highly respected engraver and critic, agreed that Amigoni was ill-suited to portraiture, but nonetheless recognized the charm of his elegant and colorful style: “Signor Amiconi a large picture of the Queen and the Duke standing by her. several attributes of honour, and sciences, the whole freely and lively - but neither like nor correct - but of fine glowing colours, so his other portrait pictures.”⁶ During this period and throughout the rest of his career, Amigoni’s figural depictions took on more weight and become more restrained, perhaps in response to critics, inspiration from his environment, or a personal change in taste.

While working in Bavaria, Amigoni was never an official court painter on a salary but remained a freelance artist. As a result, he had the freedom to negotiate prices and seek out clients around Bavaria. Nonetheless, he was granted “court protection,” meaning that he was directly subordinate to state authorities and freed from municipal guild obligations.⁷ This also meant that he was free to seek out and accept private commissions. While the sitter might have been someone within the Elector’s court, it could also portray another patron in Bavaria at the time.

Provenance and Treatment History

Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi (1878-1955), Rome-Florence
Sold to Samuel H. Kress (1863-1955) on 13 March 1941 as Pietro Longhi
Gift to the High Museum in 1961, no. 58.29

Two treatments have been document as part of the Kress collection, prior to its gift to the High Museum. In 1942, the painting was cleaned, relined, and retouched with dry color and damar

⁴ Leslie Griffin Hennessey, “Jacopo Amigoni (c. 1685-1752): An Artistic Biography with a Catalogue of His Venetian Paintings,” 133.

⁵ Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England: With Some Account of the Principal Artists; and Incidental Notes on Other Arts* (Twickenham: Printed by Thomas Farmer at Strawberry-Hill, 1762-80), 112-114.

⁶ Hennessey, “Jacopo Amigoni (c. 1685-1752): An Artistic Biography with a Catalogue of His Venetian Paintings,” 41.

⁷ Hennessey, “Jacopo Amigoni (c. 1685-1752): An Artistic Biography with a Catalogue of His Venetian Paintings,” 21.

medium. In 1958, Mario Modestini applied a coat of Rembrandt varnish and sprayed a wax in carbon tetrachloride.⁸

Literature

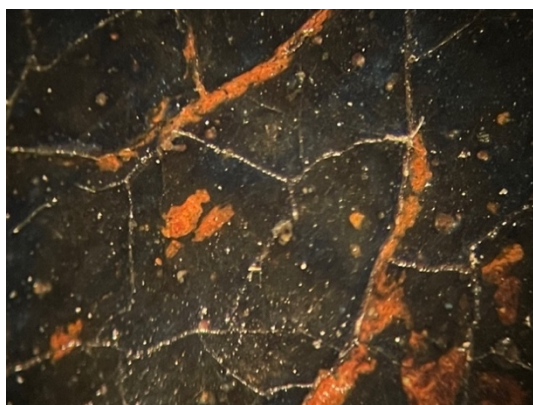
- Hennessey, Leslie Griffin. "Jacopo Amigoni (c. 1685-1752): An Artistic Biography with a Catalogue of His Venetian Paintings." PhD dissertation, University of Kansas, 1983.
- Holler, Wolfgang. *Jacopo Amigonis Frühwerk in Süddeutschland*. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1986.
- "Jacopo Amigoni: Portrait of a Man." Kress Digital Archives, accessed October 19, 2022. kress.nga.gov/Detail/objects/2762. Accessed 19 Oct. 2022.
- Krückmann, Peter O. *Von Venus Beschützt: Jacopo Amigonis Fresken Im Neuen Schloss Schleißheim*. Munich: Bayerische Verw, 2011.
- Scarpa Sonino, Annalisa. *Jacopo Amigoni*. Soncino: Edizioni dei Soncino, 1994.

I. Technique

The painting was executed on a single piece of plain-weave canvas, most noticeable in the thinly-painted background. It is a relatively rough canvas.

The ground layer is uniformly applied and is a warm red color, visible under magnification through the craquelure and in points of abrasion. As evidenced by SEM-EDS analysis of a cross-section, this appears to be composed of calcium carbonate and toned with red, brown, and yellow earth pigments, likely combined with oil as was traditional to the period (see Appendix B, cross section 4). The ground is thinly applied and fills much of the canvas weave. In infrared reflectography, there is very little evidence of an underdrawing (Image 4); this does not exclude the possibility that Amigoni employed more extensive underdrawing that is not detectable with this equipment. Intriguingly, the x-radiograph shows several revisions to the design (Image 6). The original garment, imaged in the layer below the cloak and presumably some sort of shirt or jacket, was more closely fitted, following the form of the sitter's body and faintly outlining his right arm. Cross-sections revealed an orange layer below the white and red layers of the cloak, as well as fragments of a purple layer at the base of his jacket, both likely from the original costume. This orange color can also be faintly seen through cracks and points of abrasion in the cloak (see macro image below). Another revision revealed by x-radiography is found in the sitter's left hand, which was rotated and repositioned (Image 7).

⁸ "K1264 - Condition and restoration record, circa 1950s-1960s," DOC08106, National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, 46A3. National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, 46A3. <https://kress.nga.gov/Detail/archival/DOC08106>.



Macro image of the orange layer, as seen through cracks (20x magnification).



Detail of the red cloak, with the off white, thicker underlayers visible below glazes of red lake.

The background is covered with a thin layer of dark oil paint containing a mixture of black and red pigments (as seen in cross section 4). The figure is crisply and fluidly applied. The face is relatively thin, with visible brushstrokes in the highlights. The lacey white cloth ornamenting his neck and wrist displays thin, elegant brushwork. His red cloak contains a first, white layer with confident brushwork and light impasto. This is covered with red glazes, likely several red lakes, ranging from a deep, translucent red, to lighter pink, to reddish orange in tone. These are thinly and flamboyantly applied.

II. Condition before Treatment

The original support has been glue lined onto a more finely woven canvas, visible from the verso, of 34 threads per inch vertically and 29 threads per inch horizontally. The stretcher is modern; it has one vertical and one horizontal cross member. All keys are present. The tacking edges are secured with small round nails at around 2-inch intervals and are covered with brown paper tape. The support is structurally sound. The canvas has good tension and is well-secured to the stretcher. The original and lining canvases are well-adhered to each other, and there are no deformations. Other than some minimal adhesive stains on the lining canvas, this does not show significant discoloration.

The ground layer is securely adhered to the canvas and paint layers above.

Overall, the paint layer is well-preserved. There are fills along the top and side edges of the painting at varying widths of up to 0.5 inches, with imprints of a fine weave textile, poorly matched to the original canvas texture. The paint is abraded, especially in the hair, where it is thinly painted over the dark background. There are several scratches to the paint layer, now covered with poorly matched retouching, especially noticeable in the lace collar and velvet cloak (see images below). Other points of retouching include the textured fills around the edges. The lower blue portion of the cloak has a line of abrasion from the lower frame rebate. Below this line, there is a large section of overpaint covering the abraded, original patches. The retouching is

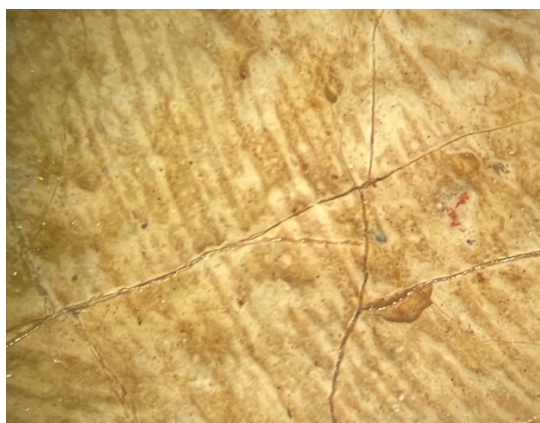
discolored to a warmer, green-blue. There is a fine network of ageing craquelure across the surface.



Details of past retouching, now discolored

Conservation records indicate that surface coatings added in past treatments include shellac, damar, and wax. The varnish layer fluoresced bluish in UV, suggesting the additional presence of a synthetic resin (see image 3).

Overall, the surface coating appears to be relatively uniform. Some patchiness in the degree of gloss across the surface could be due to remaining previous varnish, unevenly removed, or to the current varnish sinking. A scratch has removed the varnish layer and appears dark in the UV image, approximately 5 inches in length and passing through the figure's proper left hand (image 3). The varnish has yellowed and darkened, most noticeable in high key passages. Additionally, remnants of old varnish remains in hollows of the paint across the surface, with brown specks that are most distracting in the flesh tones.



Macro image from the figure's face, showing discolored varnish localized in cracks and depressions of the brushwork.

III. Treatment

- 1) Cleaned dust and dirt from the recto and verso with sponges.
- 2) Removed discolored varnish with ethanol, 1:1 ethanol:isooctane mixture, as weaker solutions were ineffective at removing the thick varnish layer. The painted surface appeared dry and matte upon removal of the varnish. An acetone:benzyl alcohol gel was employed for areas of tenacious overpaint (1 g Carbopol, 2.5 g Ethomeen C-25, 25 mL benzyl alcohol, 100 mL acetone, and 4 mL H₂O)—specifically, discolored portions of the figure's face, including overpaint that covered the top edge of his lips, as well as green-blue overpaint at the bottom edge of the painting.
- 3) Filled losses with a mixture of burnt sienna, chromium oxide, bologna chalk, rabbit skin glue, and a drop of Rhoplex N580, matching the texture of the original canvas.
- 4) Applied a thin, isolating brush varnish of 12% mastic in turpentine to saturate and protect the paint film. This first layers of varnish sunk into the dark, toned ground, leaving a patchy surface gloss.
- 5) Retouched fills and discrete losses to the paint film with dry pigments in AYAB, Maimeri colors, and watercolors. Another thin layer of 12% mastic in turpentine was added during this stage to better saturate passages that had become matte.
- 6) A final varnish layer of 18% mastic in turpentine was sprayed over the surface.

APPENDICES

A. Photographic Documentation:



Image 1: Before Treatment, Recto



Image 2: Before Treatment, Verso



Image 3: Before Treatment, Ultraviolet (UV) illumination

The varnish layer fluoresces bluish in UV, suggesting a synthetic varnish. A few scratches that occurred after the application of this varnish are visible as dark lines. These damages impacted the gloss of the surface, but disappeared when the varnish was removed during treatment.

**Image 4: Infrared (IR) Reflectogram**

Examination under infrared illumination showed few signs of an underdrawing but did reveal pentimenti at the edges of shapes in his costume. For example, there is a small line visible between the cloak and white cloth around his neck. Also, there appears to be a small line where the edge of his jacket fell in his earlier costume. Both are indicated with arrows above. The distinct dark lines in the infrared image, seen especially in the red cloak, match the dark lines of paint above the red glaze. This likely is a paint containing carbon black.



Image 5: False Color Infrared Image

The false color IRR shows the sketchy quality of the dark shadows across the figure's cloak even more clearly. It also reveals a dark shadow below the sitter's proper left hand (indicated by the high concentration of paint containing a carbon black). This has likely become less distinct from the surrounding fabric as the blue color darkened over time. Finally, the brown background appears hastily and freely rendered, as seen in the diagonal strokes applied against the lighter ground.

**Image 6: X-radiograph**

The X-radiograph shows distinct, quick brushstrokes forming the folds and form of the cloak, suggesting an underlayer of lead white below the red glazes and shadows. Additionally, the denser white shape down the center of his figure indicates that he was originally portrayed wearing a jacket, which was then subsequently covered with the cloak. The hand also shows signs of revision, as the position of the fingers and angle of the hand was adjusted (see detail below).



Image 7: Detail of hand, x-radiograph laid over natural light photograph

The x-ray image shows multiple positions of the hand. When placed over the visible light color photograph of the painting, the past position of the hand appears tilted downwards with the middle and ring fingers extended.

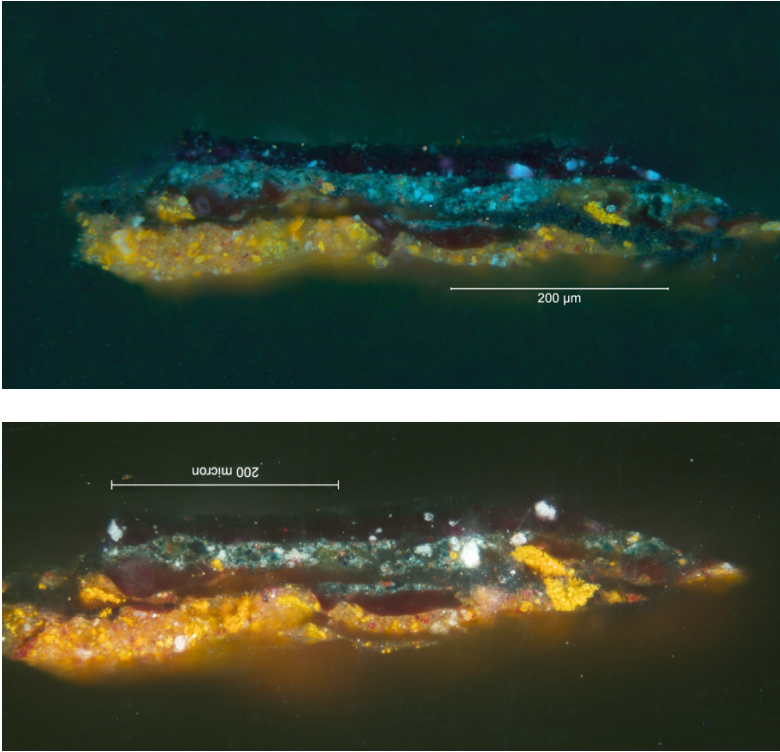


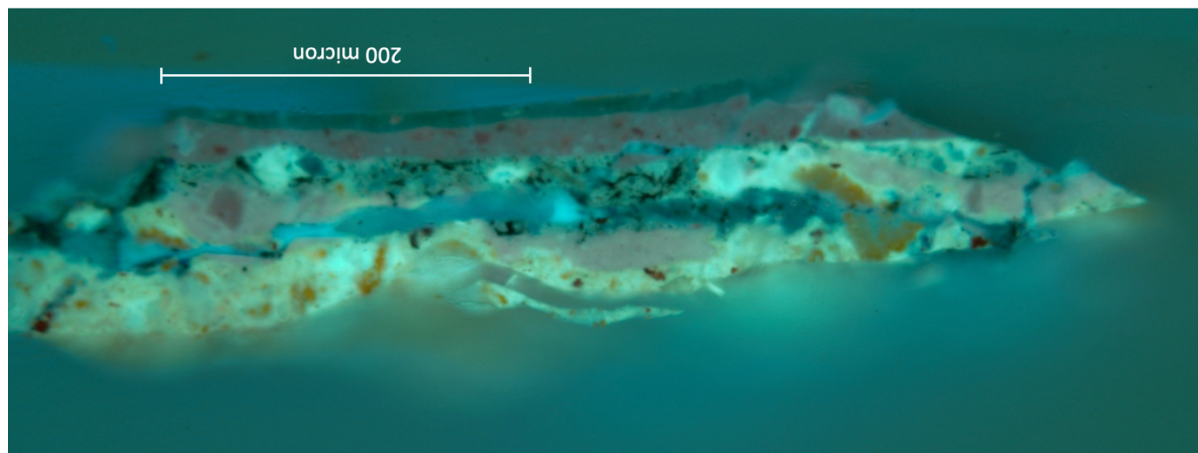
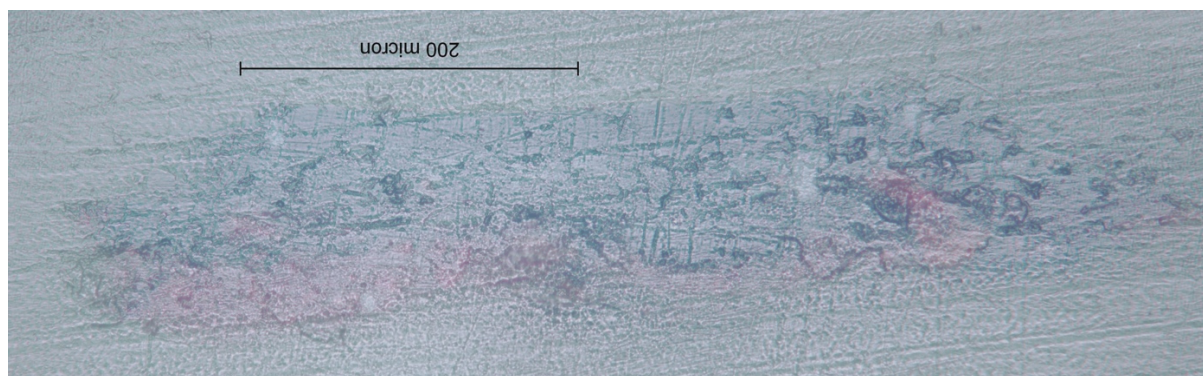
Image 8: After Treatment, Recto

B. Cross Sections

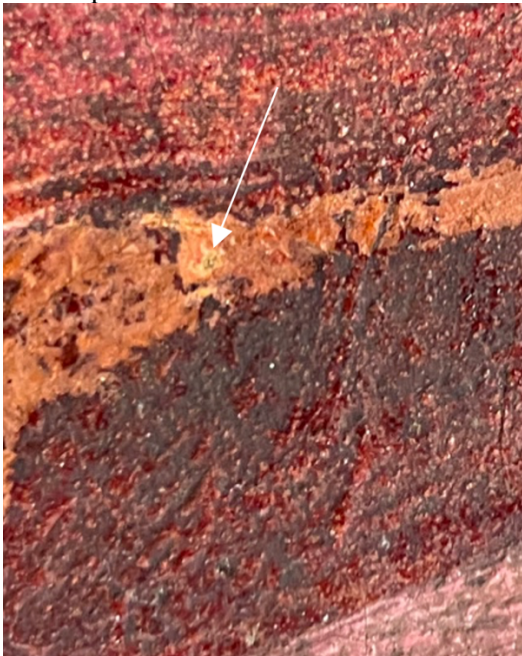


Image 9: Cross Section Location Map

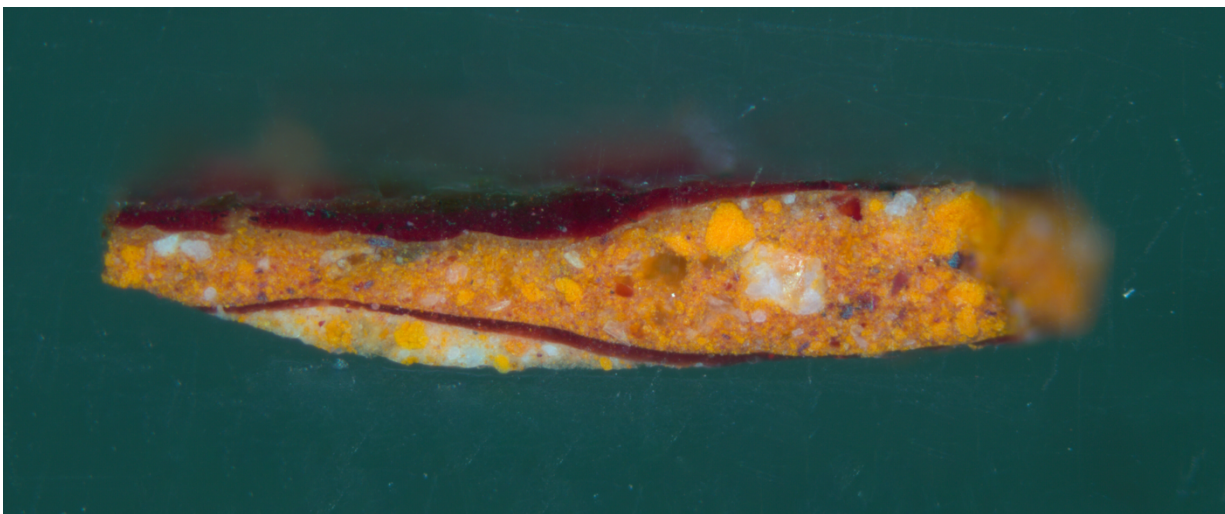
Cross section #1	
Description of Area: Dark Blue: Taken from the edge of a loss in the dark blue passage towards the proper right side of the bottom of the cloak. 	AB- stain/other: n/a
Normal Light – micrograph taken at 200x magnification 	

UV Light – micrograph taken at 200x magnification**Brightfield (BF) – micrograph taken at 200x magnification****SEM-EDS****Stratigraphy and Notes**

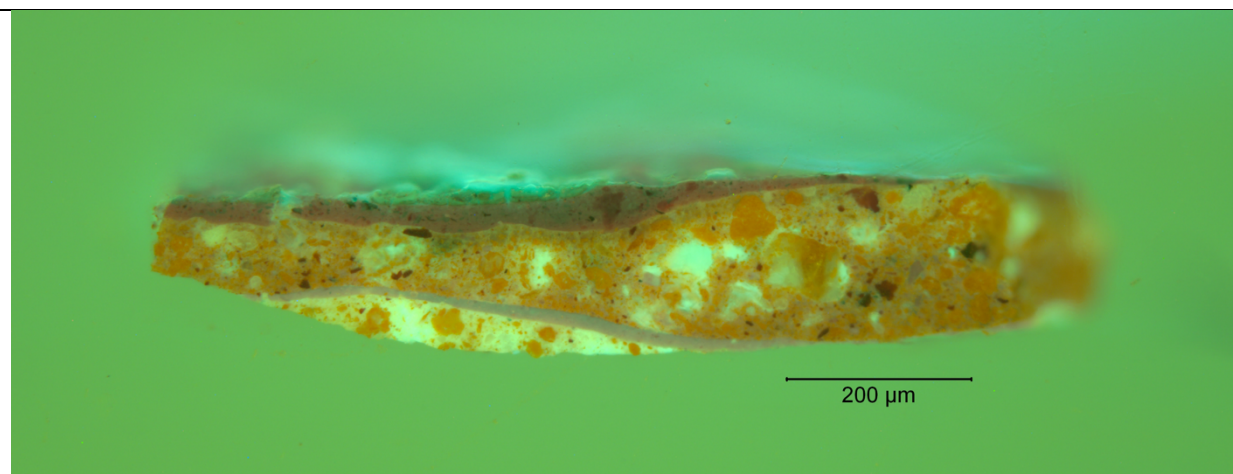
1. Lowest layer does not appear to be the ground (as seen in CS4) but is likely an earlier paint layer. The bright orange/gold color comes from very large particles, mixed with white and small red particles.
2. Next, there is a reddish-purple layer that appears as fragmented islands.
3. The light blue layer is presumably the lighter blue passages of the cloak.
4. This is followed by two darker layers (more easily differentiated in the UV image. One is more a warm, purple tone, like the islands in the second layer. The topmost layer is likely the varnish.

Cross section #2	
Description of Area: Dark Red: Taken from an island within the loss towards the bottom center of the red portion of the cloak. 	AB- stain/other:

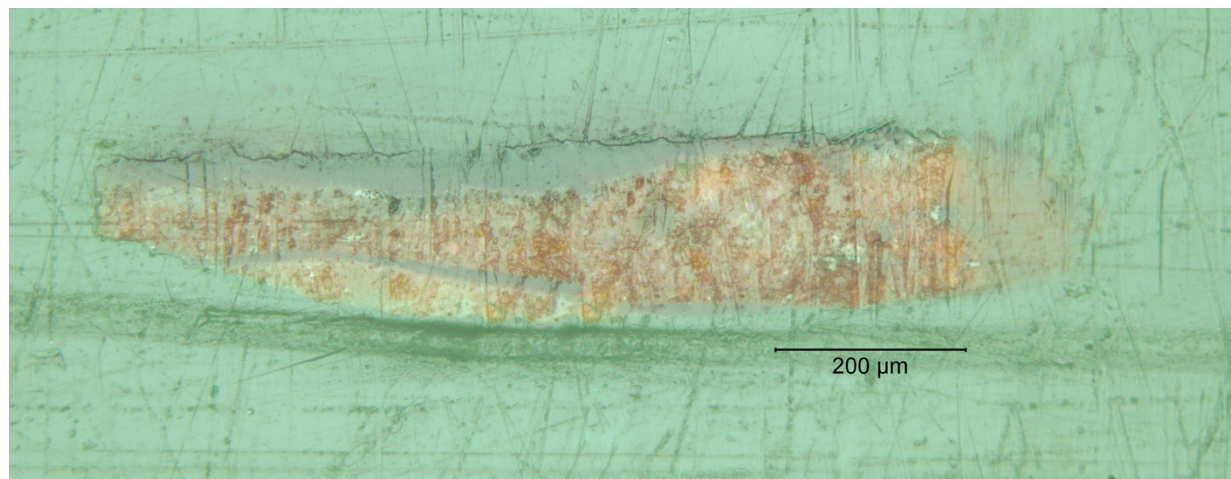
Normal Light – micrograph taken at 200x magnification



UV Light – micrograph taken at 200x magnification



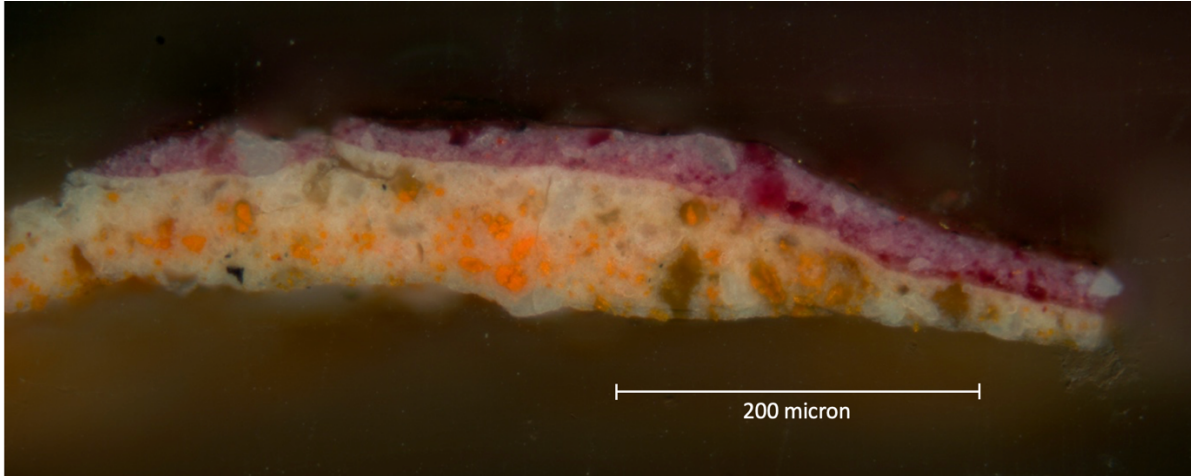
Brightfield (BF) – micrograph taken at 200x magnification

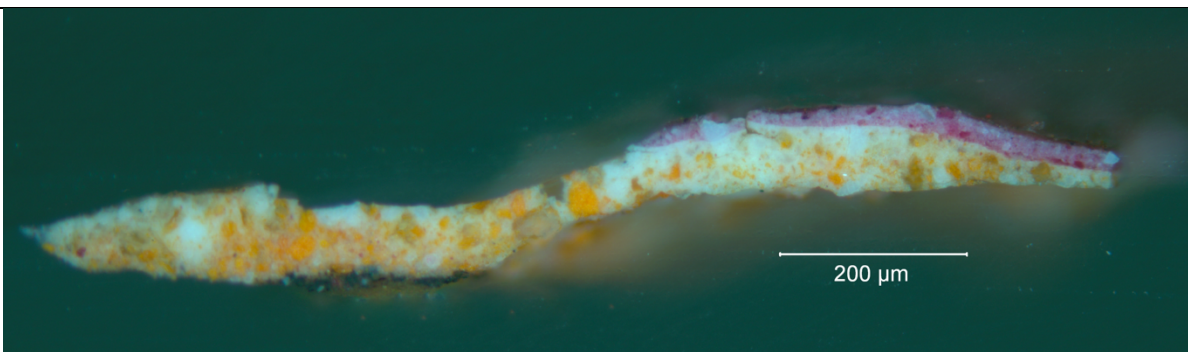


SEM-EDS

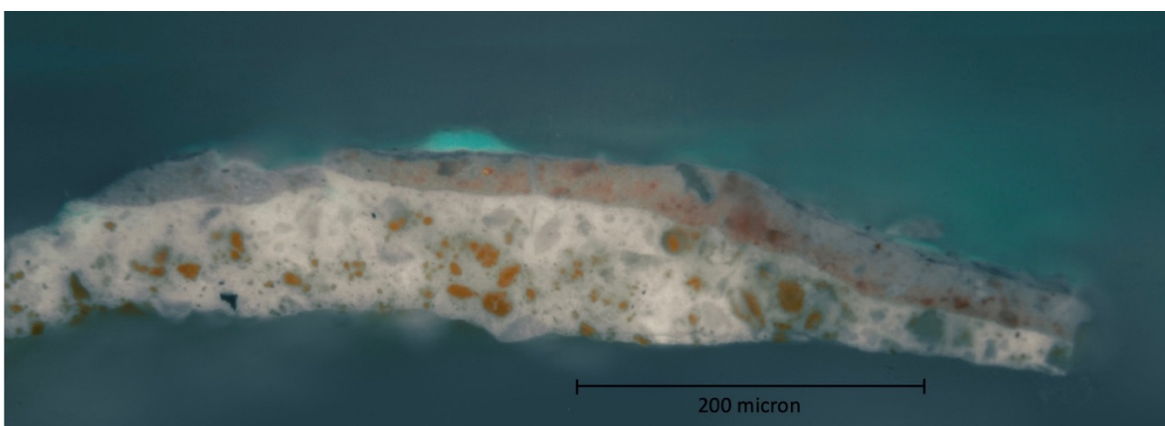
Stratigraphy and Notes

1. The lowest layer is not the ground (see CS4) but a whitish underlayer found across the cloak. It is composed primarily of white particles with a few large orange particles that appear the same as the pigment found in two layers above.
2. Next, there is a thin layer of very fine red pigment. In normal light, it appears similar to the uppermost red layer. However, under UV exposure, it is paler and more homogenous.
3. The thickest layer is a bright orange color with large particles, as seen in CS1.
4. The surface paint layer is primarily finely ground red particles, with scattered larger red particles as well as small amounts of blue particles.
5. There is a translucent brown varnish layer on top that fluoresces in UV.

Cross section #3	
Description of Area: Light Red: Taken from the edge of a loss within the pink highlight on the proper right side of the cloak. 	AB- stain/other:
Normal Light – micrograph taken at 200x magnification  200 micron Normal Light – micrograph taken at 200x magnification	



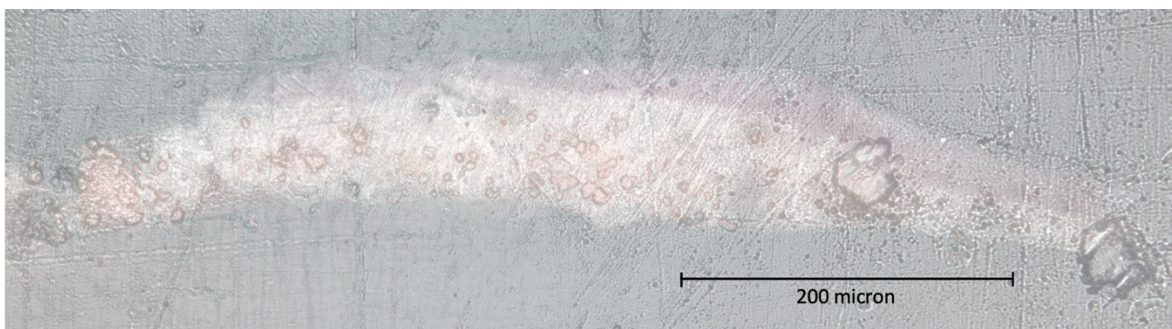
UV Light – micrograph taken at 200x magnification

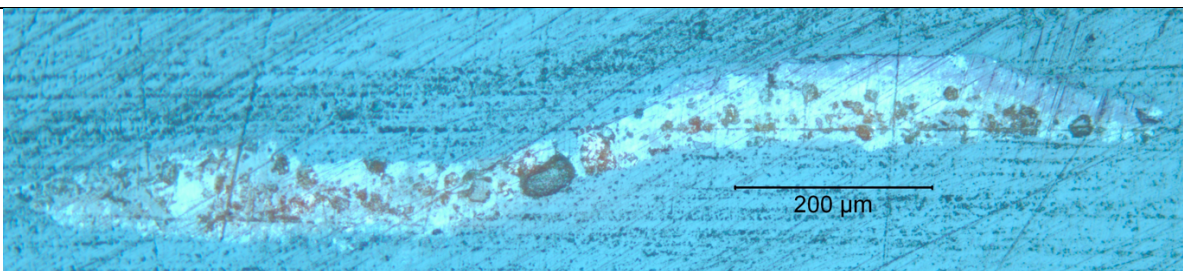


UV Light – micrograph taken at 200x magnification

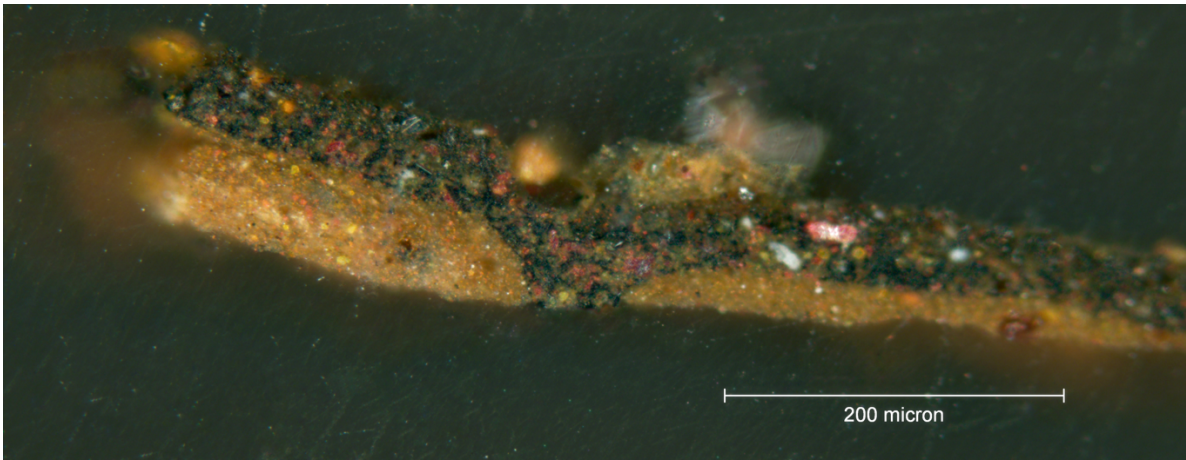
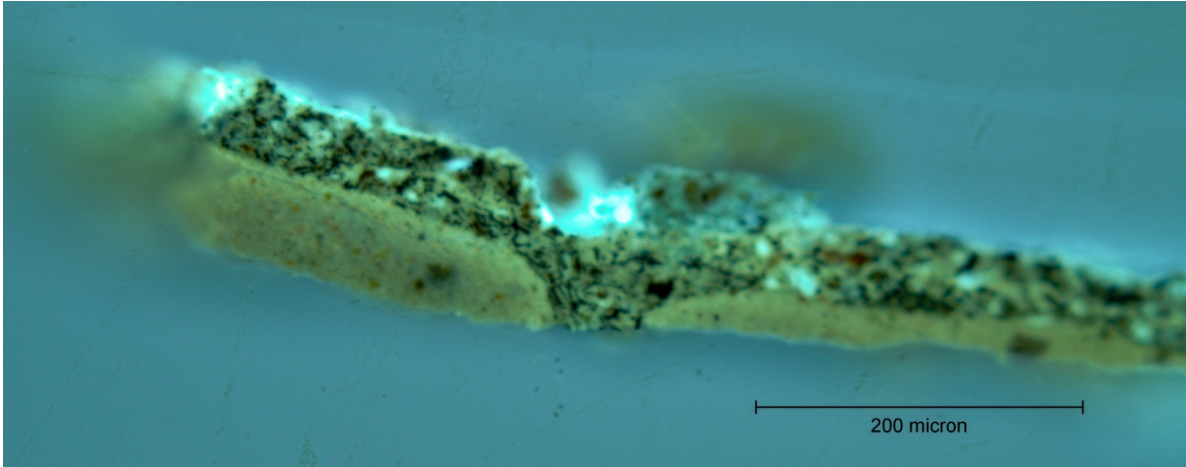


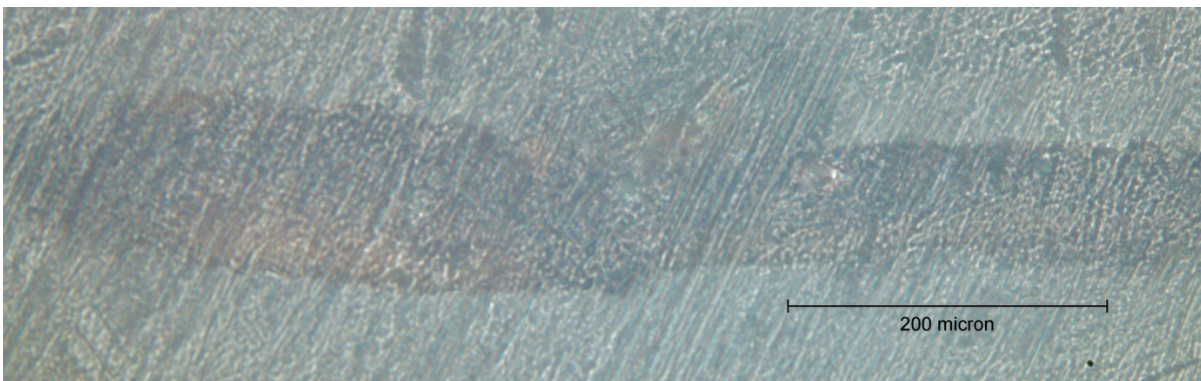
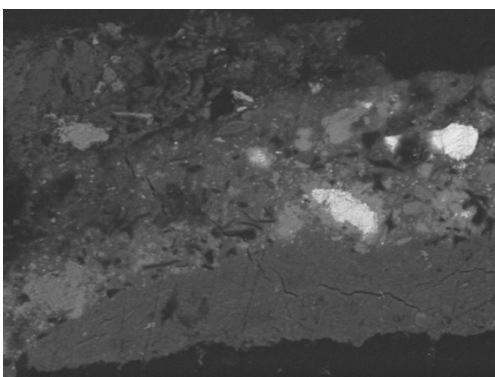
Brightfield (BF) – micrograph taken at 200x magnification



**SEM-EDS****Stratigraphy and Notes**

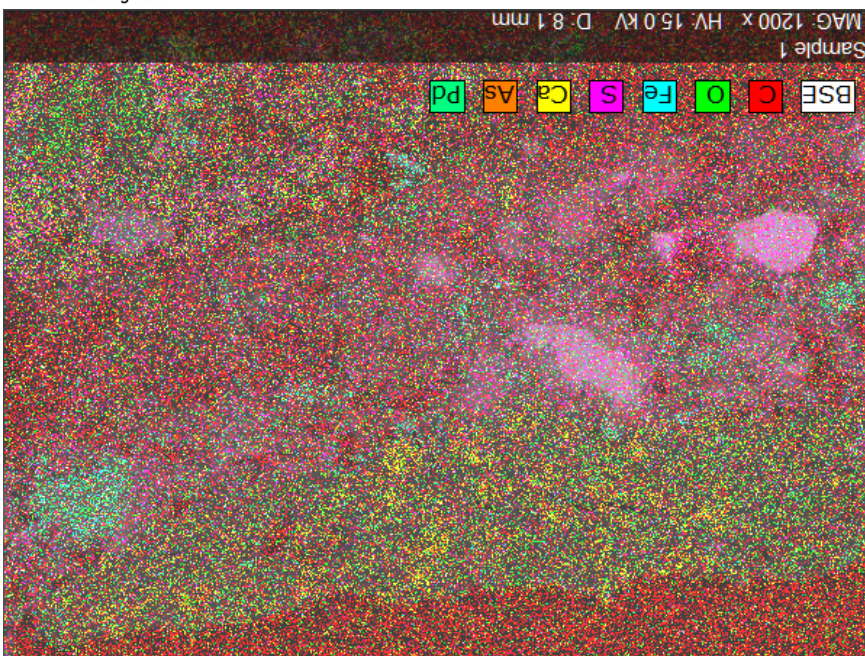
1. The lowest layer is only visible on the left at 100x magnification. It is a blue pigment, potentially the same as in CS1. Found below the white underlayer, this was likely part of an earlier design.
2. The white layer above is relatively thickly applied and appears the same in composition to the lowest layer in CS2: a white pigment, with large orange particles scattered throughout.
3. The surface layer is pink, which appears to be a mixture of finely ground white and light red particles.

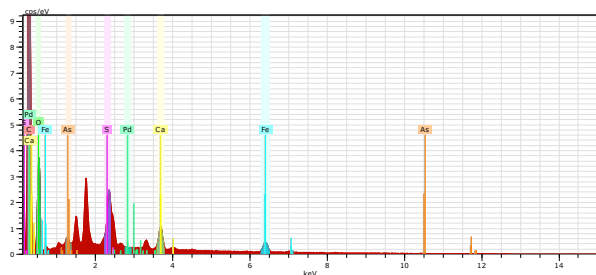
Cross section #4	
Description of Area: Brown from the background	AB- stain/other:
	
Normal Light – micrograph taken at 200x magnification	
	
UV Light – micrograph taken at 200x magnification	
	

Brightfield (BF) – micrograph taken at 200x magnification**SEM-EDS**

K1264_CS4 2023/05/15 15:28 AL x1.2k 50 um

Ground and Background





- 1) The ground layer is composed primarily of calcium, carbon, and oxygen, indicating that it is calcium carbonate based.
- 2) The particles above include several that are lead-heavy and several that are iron based. Aluminum, silicon, sulfur, and calcium are also present in significant quantities.

Stratigraphy and Notes

1. The lower layer appears to be the ground layer, which is overall a light reddish-brown color. All the particles are finely ground and varied in color, including red, yellow, white, black, and brown.
2. The upper layer, the background of the painting, is primarily composed of black and red particles, with small orange and yellow particles dispersed throughout.

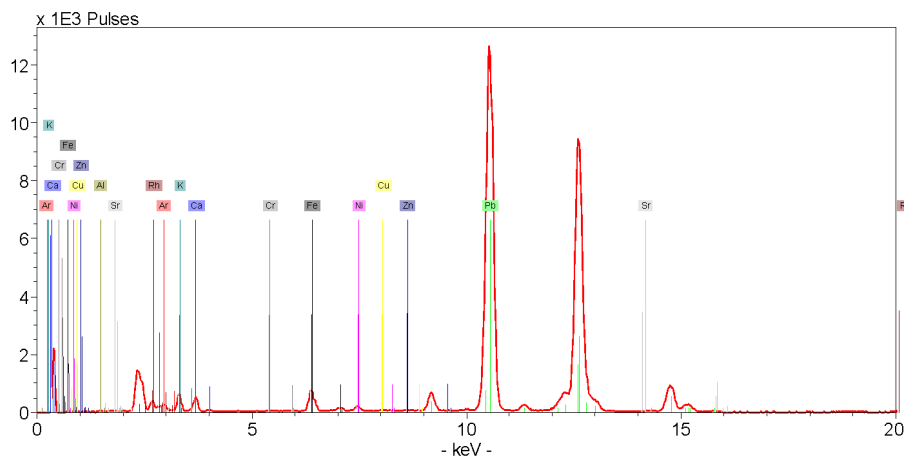
C. X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF)

Settings: 40kV, 10uA, 20s

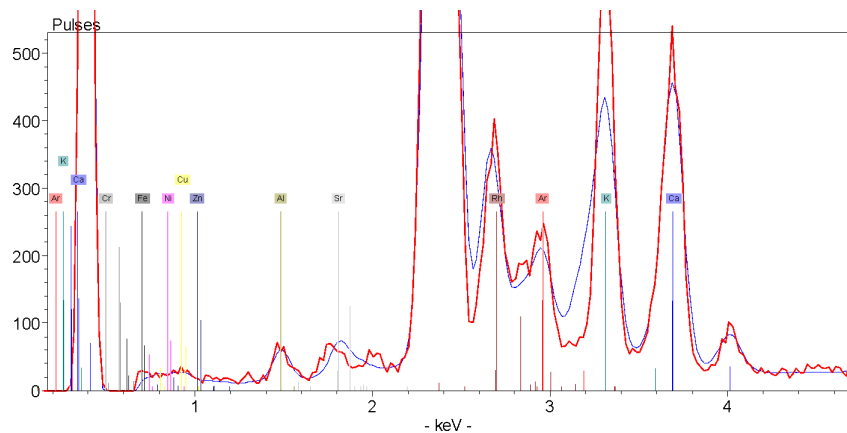
Point 1: Red

Location: 25.1cm from left, 36.1cm from bottom

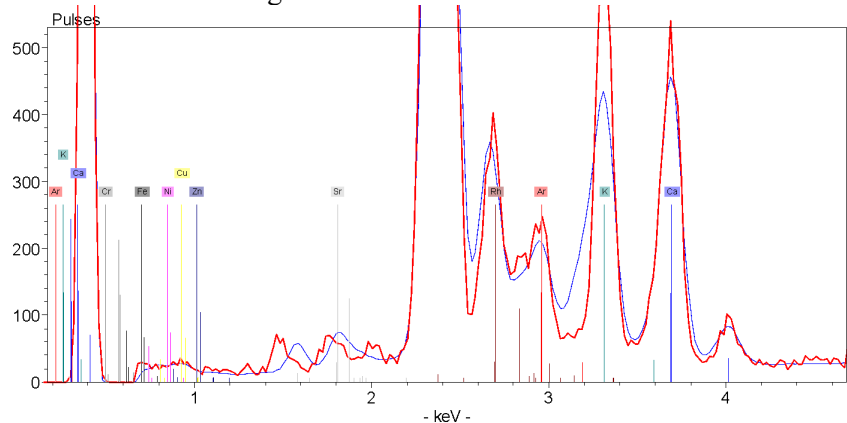
Overall:



Best fit curve including aluminum:



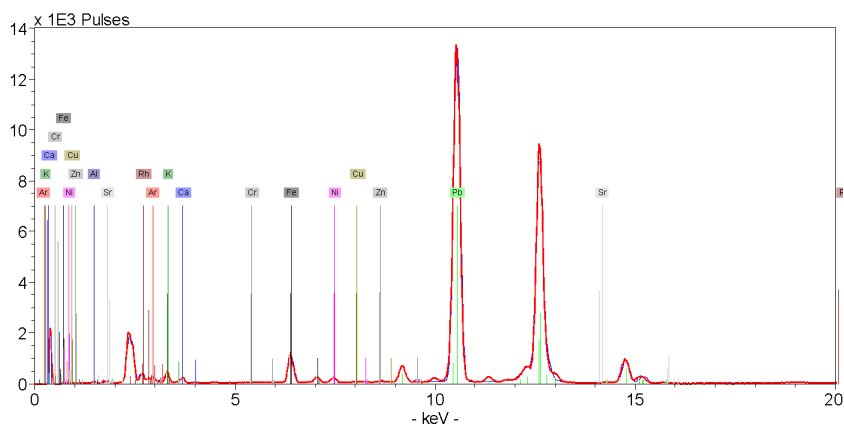
Best fit curve excluding aluminum:



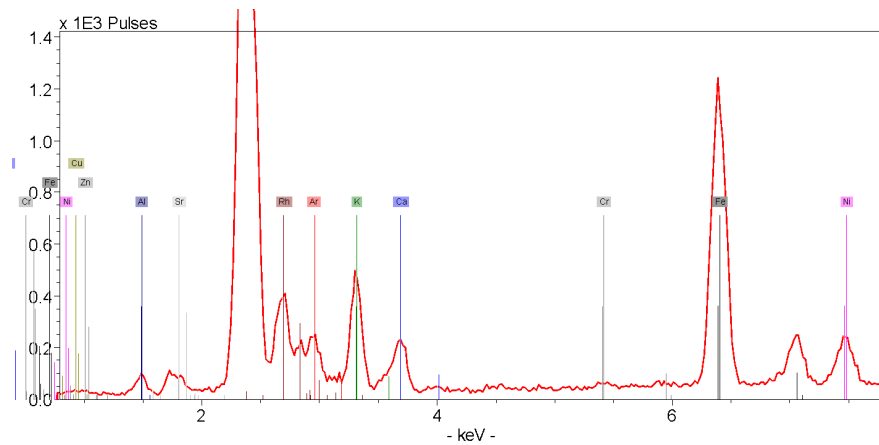
Point 2: Blue

Location: 30.8cm from right, 42.0cm from bottom

Overall:



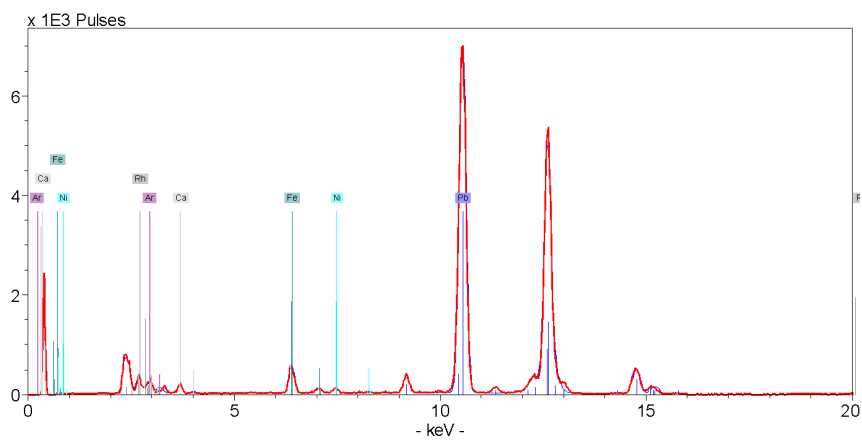
Detail, lower keV:



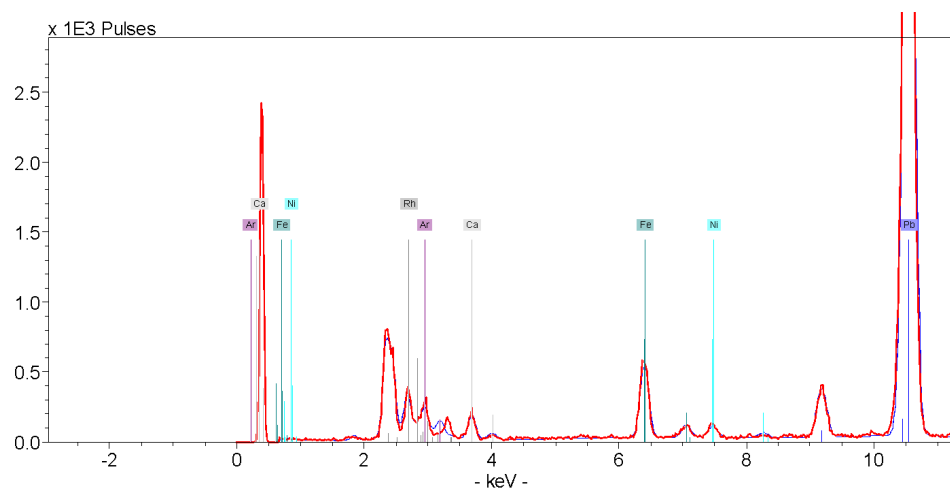
Point 3: Yellow

Location: 35.4cm from right, 43.6cm from bottom

Overall:



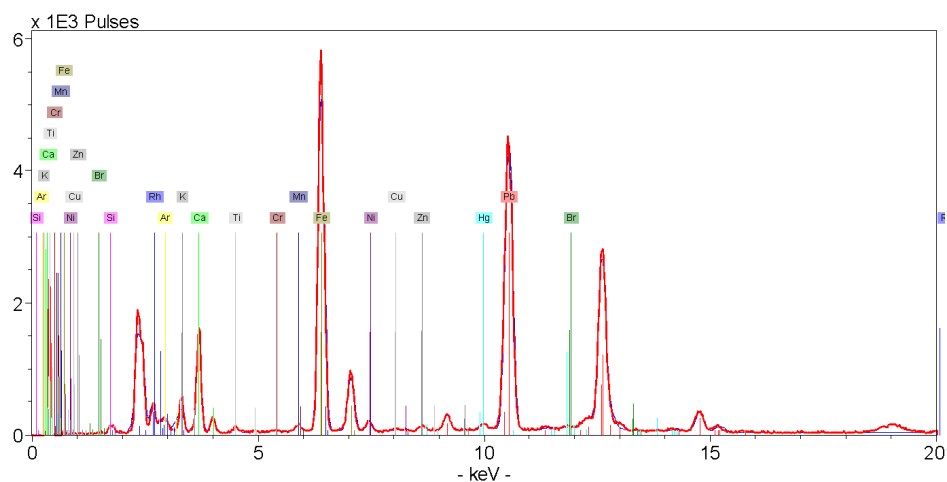
Detail, lower keV:



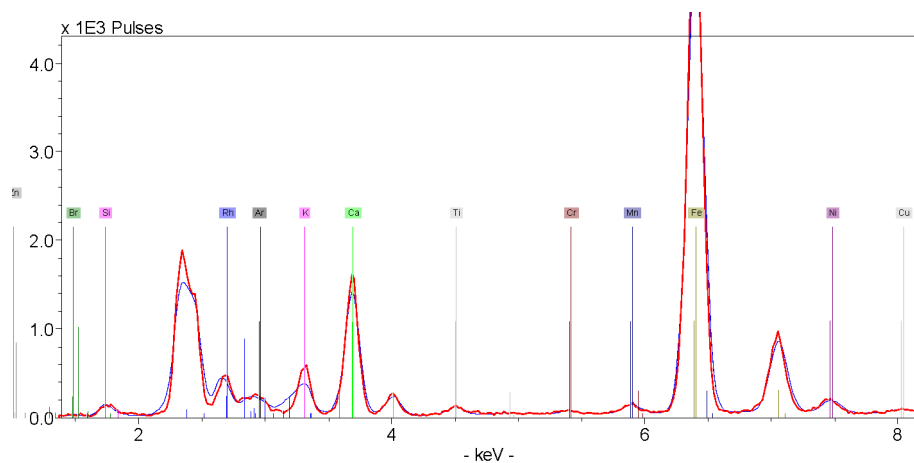
Point 4: Brown

Location: 11.2cm from right, 34.5cm from top

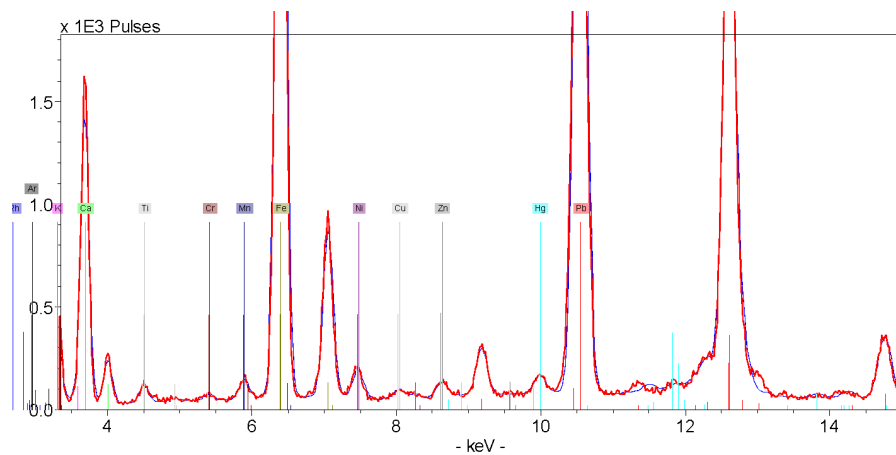
Overall:



Detail, lower keV:



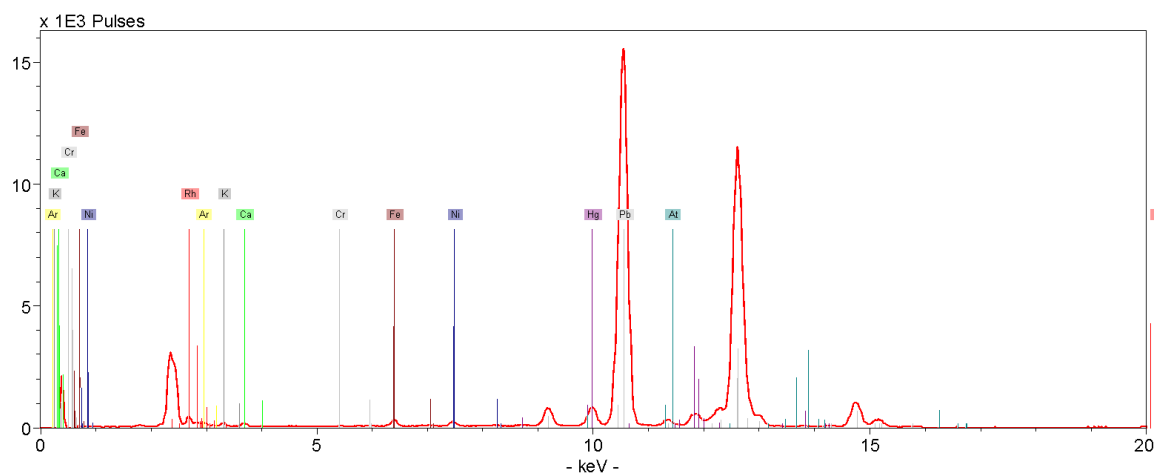
Detail, higher keV:



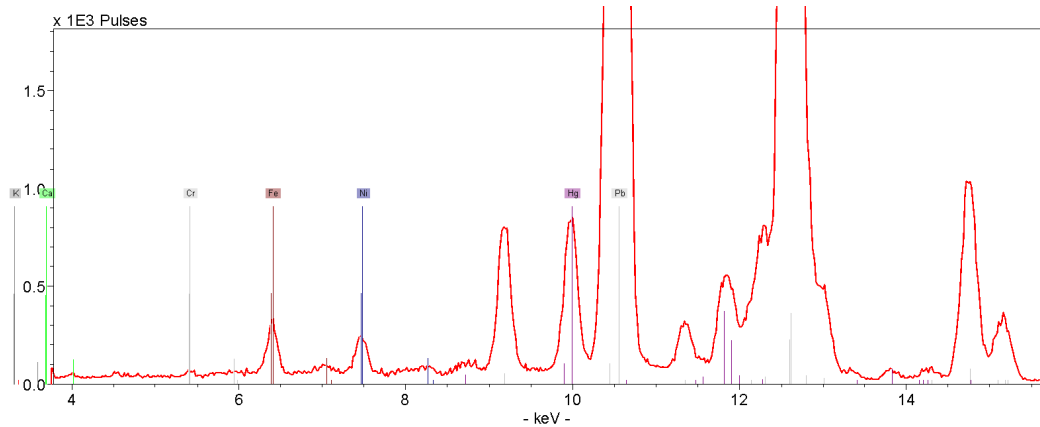
Point 5: Flesh Tone

Location: 22.9cm from top, 35.5cm from left

Overall:



Detail, higher keV:



Detail, lower keV:

