

CONDITION REPORT AND TREATMENT PROPOSAL

Artist: Unknown

Title: Painting of Agate Bowl

Inv. Nr. GG_5838

Date of work: 17th century (estimated)

Dimensions: 81.5 cm x 145 cm

Conservators: Laura Richter Le, supervised by Michael Odlozil, Eva Goetz, and Ina Slama

Date of examination: June 19, 2023

Reason for conservation: Stabilization



Technique and Condition Description:

Support

The sub-support is a six-member wooden stretcher with one vertical crossbar, one horizontal crossbar, and 10 keys. The top center key has cracked, but otherwise the stretcher appears in stable condition.

The painting was executed on a single piece of plain weave canvas. It is relatively fine, at around 12 warps and 12 wefts per cm. The original support has been glue lined with a thick 2/2 twill canvas with an open weave structure, around 8 warps and 10 wefts per cm. The tacking edge is secured with small round nails at around 4 cm intervals and is covered with brown paper tape. The canvas has good tension, and the original and lining canvases appear well-adhered to one another.

The edges of both the original and lining canvas have been damaged by insects, causing losses in all four corners of up to 9 cm (in the top, right corner).

Ground and Paint Layers

There appears to be a thin orange-red ground. The paint layer is thinly applied and is estimated to be oil based. The paint appears abraded, especially in the dark tones of the bowl.

There are extensive passages of overpaint and retouching across the surface, covering most of the outer edge of the painting, and including repainted/added elements such as the shadow below the lowest bowl. The overpaint generally appears cooler than the original and has darkened in portions. Especially over the background, it has been quickly applied with large strokes, at points overlapping with the edge of the bowl and the paper tape.

There are several cracks and losses to the paint layer now covered with fills and poorly matched retouching. These generally appear stable. A crack passing diagonally through the lower, left quadrant of the upper bowl is slightly lifting and exhibits several micro-losses to the paint layer.

Due to the insect damage, there are small borrowing holes, adjacent cracks, and small losses along the edge of the painting. These are concentrated around the corners and are found at most 4.5 cm from the edge. Around these areas of damage, the paint layer generally appears to have remained stable and in plane.

In the upper bowl, there is localized bulging down the top center (around 16 cm), as well as a dent (around 8 cm) in the top left quadrant. These also appear stable.

An old, yellowed varnish layer is found over the original paint layer, but does not extend over the more recent campaign of retouching. An additional varnish layer has been applied over the surface, including over the front facing portion of paper tape.

There is a line of matte points of abrasion to the varnish (no more than 0.5 cm each), extending the length of the painting in a line 15 cm from the left edge. These are most visible in the UV photograph. Another large scratch to the varnish passes through the lower, right of the upper bowl and is 25 cm in length.

Treatment Proposal:

- 1) Documentation.
- 2) Superficial dusting of recto and verso.
- 3) Remove the paper tape with swabs moistened with water, using solvents as needed to lift the varnish from the surface of the tape.
- 4) Consolidate unstable areas along the edge.
- 5) Surface clean.
- 6) Remove painting from stretcher.
- 7) Assess damages to lining canvas, reinforcing fragile losses with appropriate materials and methods.
- 8) Expand and reinforce the tacking margins by adding strips of fabric to the recto using an appropriate adhesive.
- 9) Re-attach painting to stretcher.
- 10) Fill losses to the corners and turnover edge with a fill material. Locally retouch and varnish these areas.
- 11) After treatment photography.

Approved by:

Elke Oberthaler

TREATMENT REPORT

Artist: Unknown

Title: Painting of Agate Bowl

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Date of work: 17th century (estimated)

Dimensions: 81.5 cm x 145 cm

Conservators: Laura Richter Le, supervised by Michael Odlozil, Eva Goetz, and Ina Slama

Date of treatment: June 19-July 27, 2023

Reason for conservation: Stabilization



Treatment:

The paper tape was removed from with cotton swabs moistened with water and mechanical action (image 1). Ethanol was used to lift varnish from the surface of the tape. Fragile areas along the tacking margins and damaged areas of the painted surface were consolidated with methylcellulose

2.5%. A facing of Japanese tissue was applied with methylcellulose 2.5% to the edge of the painting recto, covering around 4 cm where the insect damage was concentrated (image 3).

The painting was removed from the stretcher. The lining canvas was very stable and, other than the four corners and tacking margin, remained intact. The tacking edge, as well as areas of the verso that had been covered by stretcher bars, had accumulated insect droppings and shells that were cleaned with a vacuum and brush (image 2). X-radiography of a small section of the upper and lower edge of the painting (image 5) revealed that there were small losses to the original canvas, but it remained primarily intact. However, the glue between the lining and original canvas proved to be a thick, hard layer, removed only slowly through mechanical action (as seen in a test on a damaged portion of the top edge, image 6). Additionally, since the insects passed through the open-weave structure of the lining canvas, it remained remarkably stable. As a result, it was determined that removing the lining canvas might leave the original canvas in a more fragile state when returned to storage.

A strip lining of a thin linen fabric was added to reinforce the tacking margins, stretching onto around 3 cm of the verso painting surface, and adhered to the lining canvas (images 7 and 8). BEVA film was applied to both the painting recto and the linen strips, activated using a heated iron spatula.

The surface distortion in the upper bowl was lessened with moistened cloth (layers of hollytex, cotton fabric, and felt), and left under weight overnight. This decreased the region of distortion but did not remove it entirely, likely due to a mass of lining glue between the original and lining canvas concentrated in this area (image 9).

The remaining paper tape was removed from the stretcher. The sharp corners of the stretcher were smoothed and rounded. The painting was re-stretched using new metal tacks pushed through a protective layer of Promatico.

The surface was lightly cleaned with water, which lifted some small points of past inpainting covering accretions (the largest of which was 2 cm, image 13).

Canvas fills were added to the large losses in the four corners, adhered with 2.5% methyl cellulose. The losses were filled with a chalk-based fill material (Zecchi Stucco), with linen fibers added for bulk in the deepest losses (for example, image 11).

The losses were inpainted with gouache (Schmincke) followed by watercolor (Schmincke). Areas of past overpaint that were most discolored, as well as small accretions, were lightly toned with watercolor. The largest accretion was shaved down before inpainting (image 13). Abrasions were dotted in with mastic in turpentine (est. 8%), (images 14 and 15). All areas of retouching were also locally varnished with mastic in turpentine (est. 8%).

A backing board was attached to the verso.

Images:



Image 1: Left: Top of proper left tacking edge; a) before removal of paper tape and b) after removal.



Image 2: Insect droppings and shells on a) the tacking edge between the paper tape and canvas and b) the verso.



Image 3: Facing added to the painting edge to protect areas of insect damage.



Image 4: Verso after removal of the stretcher.

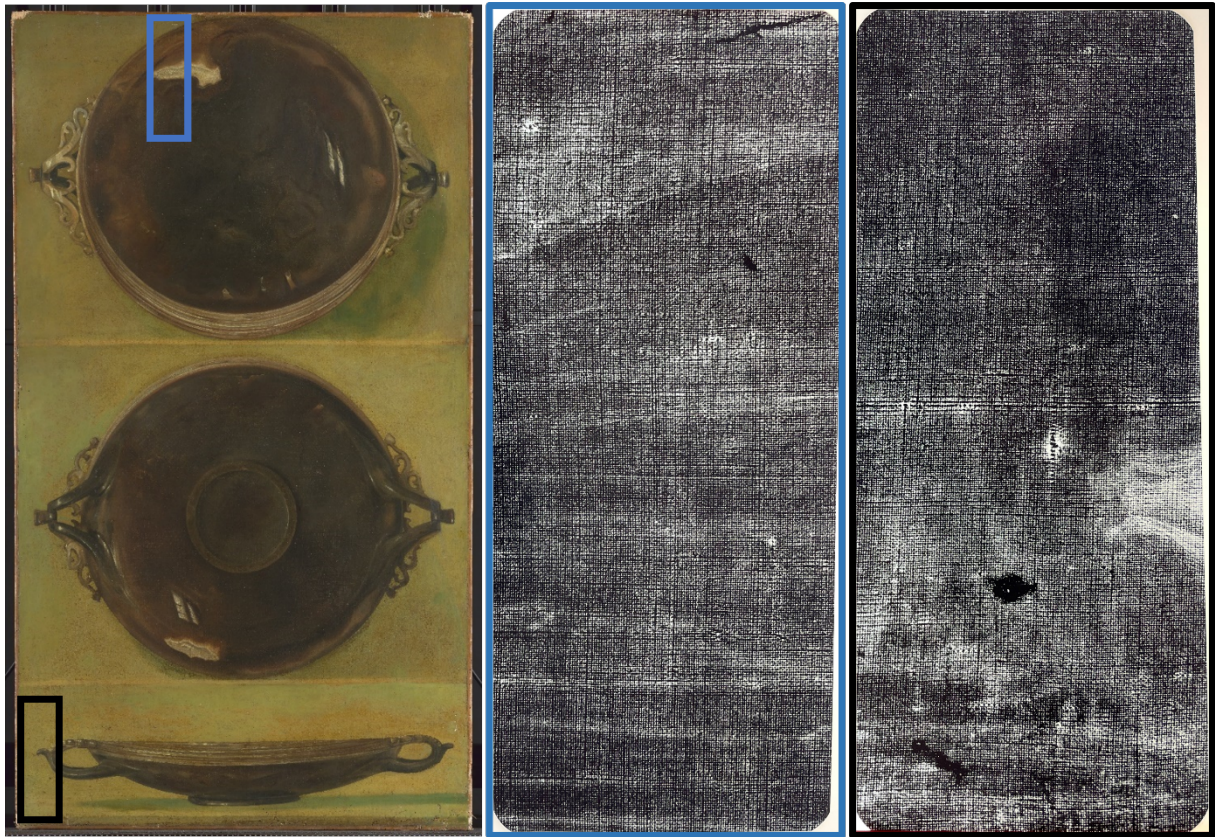


Image 5: X-radiography, showing the weave and condition of the original canvas.



Image 6: Testing removal of lining canvas on a damaged portion of the upper tacking margin. Some of the glue was removed mechanically to the left, revealing the original canvas.



Image 7: Verso with strip lining adhered and before reattaching to the stretcher.



Image 8: Verso following strip lining.



Image 9: Planar distortion, a) before and b) after moistening and placing under weight.



Image 10: Recto with chalk fills.

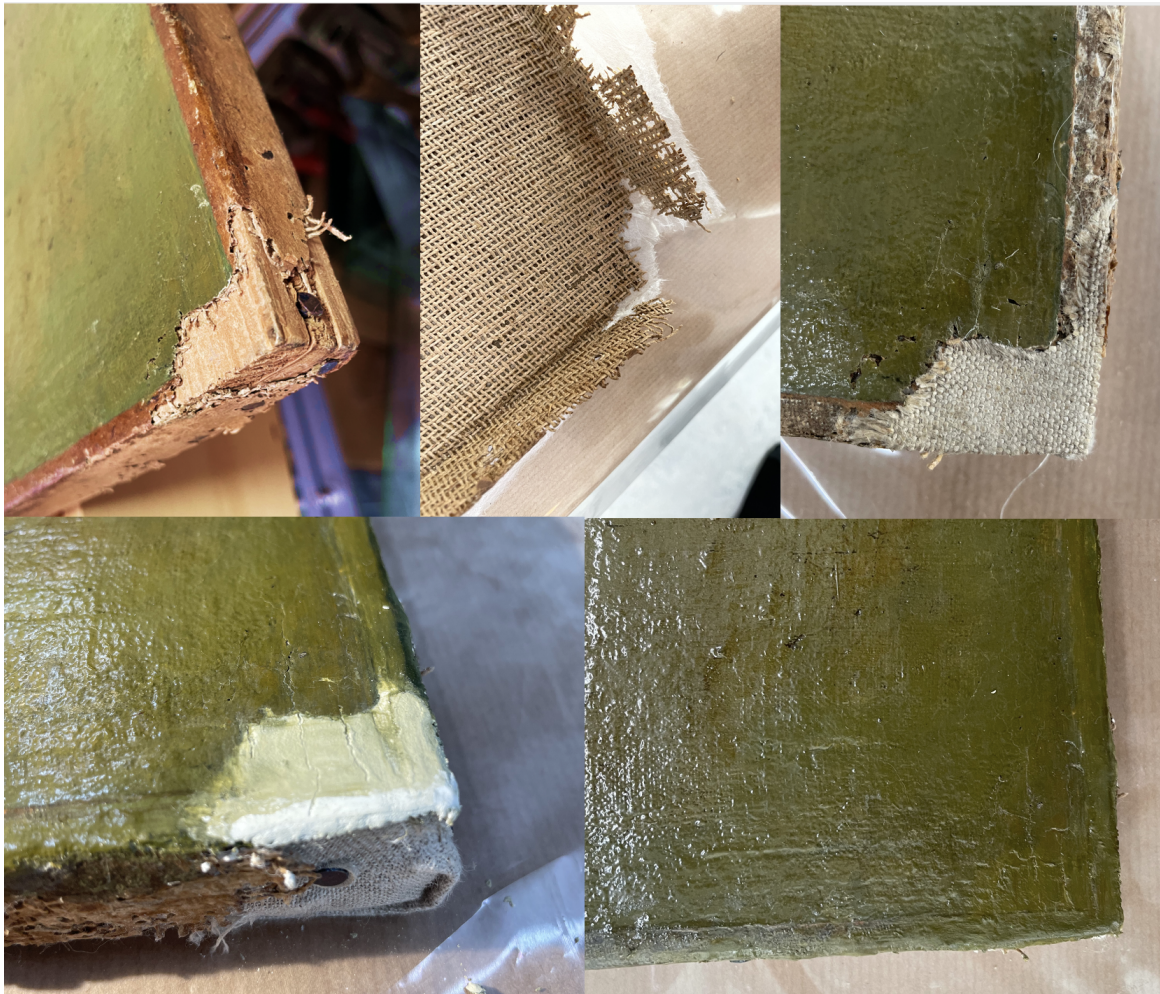


Image 11: Top left corner, a) before treatment, b) reverse after removing paper tape and stretcher, c) canvas fill in loss, d) chalk-based fill, e) after treatment.



Image 12: Bottom right corner, a) before treatment, b) during treatment, with chalk-based fills, and c) after treatment.



Image 13: Abrasion within the central bowl, a) before treatment and b) after treatment.



Image 14: Left edge of central bowl, a) before treatment, showing a line of abraded points, and b) after abrasion was dotted with varnish.



Image 15: Line of abrasion, a) before treatment and b) after dotting with varnish.