ABSTRACTS OF THE PRESENTATIONS GIVEN DURING THE SESSIONS OF THE ICOM-CC WOOD, FURNITURE, & LACQUER WORKING GROUP

FURNITURE AND THEIR UPHOLSTERY

The 18th Century Furnishing of Two Sacristies at the Saint Barefooted Carmelites’ Church in Krakow at the 44 Copernicus Street. The Case Study of a Set of Furniture and Paintings that Complement Architecture.

Discovery of the Painting Decoration Associated with the Netherlands Ceramic Decorations.

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Abstract

The convent of the Saint Barefooted Carmelitess in the Wesola District of Krakow, was established in 1716-25 together with a church (1719-33) funded by Jan Szembek, The Great Royal Chancellor, and his wife, Ewa from the Leszczynski family. During the time of partitioned Poland this convent was a shelter for Carmelites from around Poland, who moved here bringing with them parts of furnishings from their houses.

Next to the Church presbytery is the (so called) external sacristy, where the priest prepares for mass. The second sacristy is accessible from the convent interior. It is a storage place for the altars table-cloths, chasubles, albs, so called Chalice linen, and liturgical accessories. In the wall dividing sacristies is a big draw for serving garnish for chasubles and table-cloths as well as a wooden drum, which can incorporate a Chalice and a chandelier. The furnishing of both sacristies was funded by Krystyna Jagniatkowska from the Szembek Family.
The external sacristy has an L-shape with unequal arms. The interior was furnished prior to 1747 and consists of a marble portal and a lavatory, tables, a wainscot and paintings. Wooden and painted furnishing of the sacristy was designed for its architectural interior.

The wall tables supported by turn legs include four or two draws, or the chest closets that can be closed by the table-tops lifted on hinges. These tables support a wainscot with octagonal paintings without frames, which are attached to the edge of the octagonal openings. All elements of the tables and the wainscot, such as legs, table-tops, pilasters, cornices and panels have painted decorations imitating various materials, mainly wood and marble. During the conservation process the face sites of the draws, as well as capitals and bases of pilasters revealed miniatures that were painted blue on a warm white background, which is reminiscent of Netherlands’ ceramic decoration.

Directly above the wainscot hang seven oil paintings on canvas in the lunette shapes that are fitted to the shield walls, including three paintings, which are also fitted to door and window openings. Paintings in the wainscot and half circle paintings on the walls depict scenes from the life of Saint Teresa the Great painted according to graphics by Arnold von Westerhout from 1716.

The second sacristy is based on the rectangular plan and is covered with an arched vault adorned with lunettes.

Basic furnishing which was made for this interior, consisted of four pieces of furniture and is dated from the year 1725 (date discovered during conservation treatment). Cupboards were designed precisely to accommodate particular accessories: the deepness and wideness of drawers for chasubles; upper parts of cupboards for liturgical utensils, or a wardrobe accessible through the door at the side of the cupboard. Furniture is decorated with polychromy imitating marble veneer, and each draw or cupboard has writing on white cartouches describing their function.

This furnishing is enriched with furniture that was transferred from other houses or moved particularly to the sacristy. The most interesting is a wardrobe for Chalice Linen, of unknown origin. The two-door wardrobe includes 37 draws as well as dividers and recesses. Sites and surroundings of the door panels are decorated with veined designs, while interiors of the door panels, reverse sites of doors and front panels of all drawers are decorated with miniatures that were cut out from prints and then in-painted, and are composed with ribbons with designation describing their contents.

Both interiors and their furnishings have been maintaining the same functions since designed two and a half centuries ago.

Upholstery in the Occupied Royal Palaces of England: 
Care and Conservation

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Abstract

The Occupied Royal Palaces of England, in particular, Buckingham Palace, St James’s Palace and Windsor Castle, present great challenges for furniture conservators, especially upholstery conservators. Due to the unbroken succession of British Monarchs since the late 17th century, these great houses have been in continuous use as official residences and Palaces of State. There has never been a significant period of inactivity or what one might call ‘benign neglect’ to preserve the original interiors. Each generation has maintained the palaces in a condition ‘Fit for a King’ and very often altered the interior decoration to promote the modern taste or their own particular style. This continuous maintenance and refurbishment, typically on a thirty to forty year cycle, has resulted in very little original or certainly untouched upholstery remaining intact.

In the last twenty years, use of the Royal Palaces has increased to possibly its highest level ever as the role of the British Monarchy has developed to engage more directly the populace through investitures, receptions, concerts and more recently, enhanced visitor access. This increased activity is putting significant strain on an ageing and progressively more fragile furniture collection. All furniture in the Occupied Royal Palace interiors has to work and is used as it was originally intended, as indeed are the Palaces themselves. The benefit of this situation is that an extremely important collection of historic furniture is maintained very much in context, giving it relevance and enhancing its interpretation.

Due to the unique environment, known provenance and original aesthetic qualities of much of the upholstered furniture manufactured specifically for the Royal Palaces, there is a strong argument for presenting the collection in a form as close to the original intention as possible. To that end, when refurbishing room settings, historical top covering fabrics are researched and replicated and original upholstery profiles are investigated and often discovered under what is over-stuffed mid to late nineteenth century re-upholstery. There have been some notable discoveries and successes in re-creating original upholstery schemes by this method.

The main development of recent years in the care of the upholstered furniture collection and perhaps the most valuable information to share with fellow conservators, is the system that has been devised to enable seating furniture previously upholstered ‘on-the-frame’ to be re-upholstered using the original stuffing pads on a sacrificial frame, fitting so closely to the gilded or polished wood elements of a design as to make it indistinguishable from the original ‘tight’ fitted upholstery in ‘half-over-the-frame’ designs. This system requires no invasive fixings, in fact, no fixings at all to be made into the original upholstery rails or furniture frame in general. A piece of furniture treated in this way closely represents its original design qualities, is useable, and can be re-upholstered any number of times without further damage to components of the original object. These are all very important issues in this unique environment, however, this system could also be very useful to others who care for upholstered furniture, in both the commercial and institutional sectors, particularly if they wish to retain the original components, aesthetic qualities and function of a piece of furniture.

The following paper will discuss the strategies, working methods and materials that have been developed to take account of the extraordinary demands of this unusual working environment.
Losses Compensation in Gilded Wood Conservation: Tendency in Aging Behaviour of Surfaces Gilded Using Selected Synthetic Polymers

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Abstract
Gilded wood is often associated with upholstered furniture forming its elaborate surroundings. Compensation of losses in conservation of gilded wooden objects, using non-traditional gilding techniques has been a subject of studies aiming to select stable synthetic polymers and reversible methods to successfully replicate original matte water-gilded surfaces. The experiments have involved methodical testing of several stable materials used successfully in other conservation fields. The best performance was achieved using acrylic dispersion Plextol®B500, polyvinyl acetate resin AYAF, and acrylic resin B-72, which were further investigated with regards to their concentration in the solutions and methods of activation of dried films, and finally in practice, in the treatment of several gilded frames. The final phase for testing sought to determine tendency in aging behaviour of the surfaces gilded using synthetic materials as well as to establish whether the appearance of these surfaces will distinctively change in comparison with traditional gilding over time. Tests aimed at analysing optical properties of resulted gilded surfaces and their transformation under stress caused by extreme humidity and temperature fluctuations.

Two plain wood, flat-moulding frames of external dimensions 500 x 500 mm were constructed and gilded. One side of each frame was gilded using traditional matte water-gilding, while three other sides were gilded using subsequently Plextol®B500, B72, and AYAF resin. One of the frames was placed in the Plexiglass chamber and was exposed to extreme humidity fluctuations formed with silica gel, which was changed from wet (silica gel covered with water) to dry (silica gel desiccated to approximately 2.7% RH), and again to wet setting, every second or third day. The test was conducted for 12 months achieving RH fluctuations in range of 84.9 %, from the lowest of 14.2% to the highest of 100.0%. During the whole year, in two-to-three day cycles, the tested frame was exposed to sudden dramatic changes in RH from above 90% to below 20% (or opposite) occurring during a period of one day. It was then left for one or two more days to adjust to the conditions prior to the next change - in opposite direction - occurring.

The second frame was exposed to direct sunlight through the window causing stress in the materials due to extreme fluctuation of RH and temperature by day-night cycles. This test was carried out for two years, with the temperature fluctuations in range of 22.4°C and humidity changes in range of 67.63%. The lowest recorded temperature was 17.1 °C while the highest was 39.4 °C, with a common jump by almost 20 °C a day during sunny days. The lowest noted values of RH was 6.98% and the highest 74.61%, with a common drop in RH by more than 40% a day on sunny days.

In both cases conditions were monitored 24h/7d with the temperature and relative humidity ACR SmartReader Data Logger.

In the case of the first frame, results showed that the appearance of the gilded surfaces changed little when inspected with the naked eye. The physical degradation of the polymers, which could be detected with microscopic examination, did not cause distinctive deformation of the gilded surfaces. Gilding created with
Plextol®B500 remained the most similar to the traditional matte-water gilding, and there was little distinction in the appearance of both surfaces apparent also after the test.

Visual examination with the naked eye of the second frame showed distinctive craquelure formation in the surface gilded with B-72, while gildings created with both Plextol®B500 and AYAF were showing little changes.

The paper will present and discuss the results in this last stage of the conducted experiments.

1 The outcomes of my research have been published in the Preprints of the ICOM-CC 13TH Triennial Meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 2002, and presented as posters at the ICOM-CC 14th Triennial Meeting, The Hague, 2005, and at the IIC Congress, Munich, 2006.
Sky Furniture: Satellites

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Abstract

Preservation of museum artifacts is based on the understanding of materials used in their construction. Faced with the unknown, conservators apply a variety of analytical tests to establish the composition of materials. Unearthing an archaeological furniture or examining a space objects returning from orbit will pose the same questions - what are the materials used in their construction, how do we analyze them, and how do we preserve them?

Satellites, like furniture, are utilitarian objects, and like furniture facilitate use of their surroundings – in case of the latter – the outerspace. Other functions of satellites include space communication, navigation, and warning about atmospheric events. The authors developed a protocol for examination and analytical testing of early space objects represented in the collection of the National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, to define the best museum care. Vanguard I, (1958) Explorer VII (1959) and GRAB (1960) were selected as case study. Design criteria used in building the early satellites were focused on performance in space. However, storing these satellites under terrestrial conditions, without modifying these design compositions, posses interesting challenges related to corrosion and polymer degradation. Little information is available about the materials that were used particularly in the construction of the reconnaissance satellites such as GRAB. Yet, these three back-up satellites exhibit similar deterioration of materials - powdery deposits and hair-like cracks in cements used on solar panels, cracking and chipping of solar cells.

The objective of this research and analysis was three-fold: first; to establish what materials were used in the solar cell panel construction; second to understand the degradation mechanisms, and; third develop methods to retard or prevent the degradation process. The analytical methodology that the authors applied employed Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) and FTIR in conjunction with Attenuated Total Reflectance (FTIR-ATR) Mass spectroscopy and stereo-microscope surface analysis. The analysis was carried out at the Applied Physics Laboratory, Johns Hopkins University, Laurel, MD, USA.

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An Early Warning Dosimeter for Organic Materials in Museums, Historic Buildings and Archives.

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Abstract

Within museums, historic buildings and archives, there has for a long time been a need for an acceptable technology for early warning of environmental risk to collections made from organic materials. A generic early warning dosimeter for organic objects (EWO-dosimeter) has been developed by the Norwegian Institute for Air Research (NILU), within the EU funded project MASTER (EVK-CT-2002-00093). The basic technical idea behind the EWO-dosimeter is that the degradation of organic materials in museums and archives by environmental stress factors can be simulated with a dosimeter made of a synthetic organic polymer film that will react and give an early warning before harm to the object will be observed.

The result from the MASTER project shows that: the EWO-dosimeter responds to a wide range of environmental parameters a generic, integrating device [1]. It has an accelerated response due to its manufacture from a sensitive polymer material and it is designed to give an early warning response on a 3-month time scale that can represent the average long-term exposure conditions of collections, and is short enough to be of practical use. In addition, a portable measurement instrument for analysing the dosimeter and reporting the environmental conditions in the museum has been designed.

During the research and development phase of the EWO-dosimeter the early warning concept was discussed with a European end-user group during two workshops and their requirements were presented to the project partners. One important requirement was that the dosimeter should be easy to analyse at the site of exposure, preferably with some sort of visual indications. Based on this requirement, NILU has developed a prototype of a portable measurements instrument (a dosimeter reader) [2]. A major advantage of this dosimeter reader is that the dose effect can be read on site directly at the location after exposure, and can be interpreted by comparison with acceptable exposure levels for different kinds of institutions, from archives to open structures. Threshold levels developed by the Centre of Sustainable Heritage, University College London (UCL), a partner in the MASTER project, are based on best available effect measure for the environmental parameters on organic objects, dyes and existing standards. A refined preventive conservation strategy has been developed by ULC in order to integrate the EWO-dosimeters with existing conservation strategies and relate it to environmental guidelines.

References
Wax Tablets in Polish Collections - the State of Preservation and Restoration Issues

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Abstract

Over millennia, wax tablets formed very popular writing materials. The beginning of wax tablets (tabula cerae) dates back to early antiquity. Their origin was Mesopotamia, where the earliest recorded use was from the third millennium B.C. until the middle of the second millennium, (i.e. 14th c.) B.C. They were used for creating government documents concerning administration, judiciary and accounting. They were also used in private life, in education, and for correspondence. The tradition of using wax tablets in Poland was widespread in medieval times, and rare uses can be found as recently as the 19th century.

For the last few years, research was carried out in the Paper and Leather Conservation Department at the University of the Nicolas Copernicus in Torun, regarding wax tablet collections in Poland. In 2005, there were 256 tablets catalogued, including 34 polyptychs (not all complete). In comparison to the registration from 1998 the collections were extended by 6 tablets: 5 of which were found in the archaeological excavations in Elblag, and 1 in the library collection in Gdansk. These collections are unique in Europe and consist of tablets that are preserved in archives, museums, and libraries in Torun, Gdansk, Szczecin, Jawor, Krakow, and Wroclaw (the department in Legnica), Elblag and Kornik. Texts that are retained on these tablets date back as far as the second half of the 14th century, and up to the first half of the 16th century. The oldest text is dated back to 1354, while the youngest is dated to 1530. From the Polish tablets the following wood has been identified: maple, beech, box, lime-tree, oak, sycamore, as well as wood from fruit-trees, such as; cherry, apple, and pear. The fields that are carved in the wood are filled with wax of varied colours including black, green, and natural wax tones. Frameworks of the polyptychs are mostly decorated with foliage and zoomorphic ornaments. The tablets from Torun were made by carvers from Lübeck or other Hanseatic cities prior to 1300. An entirely different style of decoration, using a deep relief method, is present in the Cracovian Notebook from 1497.

The paper will present causes of deterioration and report on the stages of degradation of the Polish collections, regarding differentiation in wooden support and wax fields. Destructive factors of mechanical, biological, physical and chemical nature will be discussed. The paper will stress the relation between the stage of degradation of wax fields and movement of the wooden background.

Aspects related to conservation and restoration of the wax tablets will be presented using a case sample of the polyptych consisting of 16 wax tablets with a judiciary text of the Teutonic Knights Commander’s Headquarter from Gdańsk, dated from 1368 to 1416, in the collection of the library of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Gdańsk. The dimensions of the single wooden supports made of pear wood are 34.0 x 18.0 x 0.7 cm. The thickness of the codex is approximately 11 cm. Treatment was carried out between 1995 and 1997.

The poor condition of the polyptych demanded immediate conservation intervention. Major degradation was caused by insect infestation, and the presence of furniture beetles (Anobium punctatum) was detected. The powdered wood and decomposing fragments of wax fields with text made research and exhibition of the...
polyptych impossible. This damage resulted in the permanent loss of text. Conservation and restoration treatment focused on fumigation and structural strengthening of wood by impregnation and infilling of many losses. Separated fragments of wax fields were reintegrated with wooden backgrounds and surrounded with wax supports to prevent further degradation. All tablets were conserved and then reassembled in a polyptych according to its original design. Damaged parchment glued to the ridge was also conserved, achieved through regluing and introducing an isolation layer of new parchment. Losses to the parchment fragments and the bolt on the front cover were reconstructed. Works initiated at the Paper and Leather Conservation Department resulted in a significant improvement in the storage conditions of the wax tablets in Poland, as well as commencing their conservation and restoration treatments.

References:
Restoration of the Figural Window Bench now encased in the Henry R. Luce Centre for the Study of American Art in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum in New York

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Abstract

The primary focus of this paper is on the restoration of the wood frame of an American figural window bench (c.1815-20) in the Henry R. Luce Centre for the Study of American Art. The bench displays a pair of outward-facing eagles on each end, topped by a torus moulding bearing elaborate stencilled motifs. Structural repairs included: replacing a missing portion of carving on a paw foot, which was accomplished by moulding and casting a duplicate carving found elsewhere; as well as restoring carvings on damaged areas on the head, body, and feathers of both eagles by first installing armatures, and then building up and shaping two types of filling material around them to duplicate the existing carving. Surface problems necessitated: restoring the original graining by in-painting the missing figure over the raw maple base wood, and matching the deeply-coloured transparent glaze coat over it; revealing and matching layers of original verte antique paint colours; replacing gilding where required; and reconstructing one of the gilded stencil motif from motifs found elsewhere, then integrating it into the existing fragments of the motif needing it.

The secondary focus of this paper is on the structural and surface problems on objects from the early-eighteenth century through the mid-1930s that differed from the problems on the window bench:

An early-eighteenth-century English Queen Anne balloon-seat chair of solid and veneered woods required restoration of the powder-post beetle-eaten splat, and insertion of wood, which, because of the impossibility of matching real wood, we replaced with graining. Joinery of the splat to the crest rail terminated that restoration.

A late-eighteenth-century set of six English satinwood-grained and decorated chairs exhibited powder-post beetle damage below the grained surfaces. Building up this type of repair after cleaning out the beetle tunneling and frass shows the manner in which we handled beetle damage before any in-painting could be carried out.

A set of four early nineteenth century English Regency grained and ornamented chairs displayed another problem: removal of a degraded, darkened finish coat that had become brittle. Mixtures of chipping, scraping, and abrading, eliminated the coats from all four chairs, after which we replaced the needed graining, re-gilded the chairs where necessary, and reconstructed the vignette ornamentations from clues that were still extant.

And lastly, the problem on a mid-1930s French Art Deco pair of armchairs by Jules Leleu was how to duplicate the appearance of the nitrocellulose spray-painted surface with hand-painting to restore the damage on the edges of the chair frames. These chairs, numbered 18057 and 19386 respectively, came to us with the original fabric covering and foundation still in place.
Conservation of the Neo-Gothic Furniture at Malbork Castle Museum

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Abstract
The paper presents the conservation and renovation of the furniture at Malbork Castle – the medieval Teutonic Order headquarters - restored at the turn of the 20th century. The splendour of the interior decorations from the times of the castle conservator Conrad Steinbrecht activity (1882-1922) has been gradually revived during the recent conservation and restoration being conducted at the Castle site. The designs of the furnishings that were made during this period were based on the Gothic originals, which were researched by Steinbrecht and his co-workers during their exploration escapades. Accepting a concept of a transition of the Castle interiors into a museum of the Teutonic Order abode, they searched for monuments which stylistically and historically could form a basis for reconstruction of furnishing for the restored Castle. An important stage of these works was employment of a few technicians, who were cataloguing the heritage furniture, carpentry work etc., that were found in Germany. The Neo-Gothic furnishings were made by sculptures, woodcarvers and carpenters employed by the Castle as well as craftsmen from outside of Malbork appointed by the Castle Reconstruction Board. As many researchers were fascinated by the history of the Castle and its material relics, it was also an opportunity to renew the artistic technique and craftsmanship. This way, the unique museum of monastery interiors was arranged as fully reconstructed and richly furnished and decorated, the only institution of that kind in Prussia.

Following the damage to the Castle architecture during the military operations of the Soviet army in January 1945, the huge devastation affected also its furnishings. First, securing works on the Castle’s site was carried out after its takeover by the Polish administration, when the Conservational Board for Preservation and Reconstruction of the Malbork Castle was set up in 1959. There was little understanding of the aesthetic, historic and strictly museum value of the interior decorations’ elements during the first stage of restoration. Not until the last decade of the 20th century was the German conservators’ legacy was fully recognized and re-valued, a fact which resulted in including the Malbork Castle site on the UNESCO World Heritage List in December 1997, and consequently gradual reconstruction of the interiors as well as their furnishings.

The former splendour of the interiors was successfully revived in the Capitular at the High Castle, in which in the years 1992-2002 was carried out conservation of the stained-glass windows, wall paintings, ceilings, architectonic details and door woodwork, as well as oak stalls with the corner wardrobes made in the years 1901-1907. From a number of Neo-Gothic furniture that are being restored, it is worth mentioning the set of tables from the Convent Refectory, which were based on the original tables from the monastery in Lüneburg.

Beside these projects, single pieces of furniture that have often been in very poor condition have also been restored, such as three wardrobes in the (so called) Giebelschrank style, or a set of furniture from the rooms of the Order officials at the High Castle.

It is worth emphasizing the scope of complex research, inventory and strictly conservation and renovation work involving furniture. These reconstructions were possible due to the comprehensive photographic documentation from the Annual Reports on the Castle Restoration (Marienburg Baujahr) or from the German archival sources, as well as comparative studies of well-preserved original Gothic furniture, which were reproduced for the museum during the time of the Konrad Steinbrecht activity. The objectives of many
conservators involved in the conservation and restoration of these works was to find prototypes which could be matched with retained Neo-Gothic furniture.

To a lesser extent, one can encounter the legacy from the times of so-called “romantic conservation” of the castle that was conducted mainly within the limits of the Middle Castle in the years 1817-1856. The works that were carried out at that time with the participation of the famous architect, Carl Friedrich Schinkel, were criticized by his successors on the grounds of showing too great a liberty in rebuilding the castle. With a critical approach to the effects of the former activity at the castle, we are aware of their historic significance in developing the ideas and conservation methods – two different attitudes co-existing in one historical monument.

The authors of the paper wish to present to the broad international audience of specialists the outcomes of the carried out conservation treatments, among others, that concerning tables from the Convent Refectory, and by doing so, to popularize the respect for the cultural heritage that is just little more than a century old. Furthermore, it is significant to emphasise the museum character of the 19th – 20th century arrangement of the Castle complex. The castle interiors along with their furnishings, which are successively restored, commemorate the efforts of the old German scientists and architects.

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FURNISHING

Technology of Reproduction Frames made at the Conservation Laboratory at the Czartoryski’s Museum of the National Museum in Kraków

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Abstract

A number of historical frame reproduction projects have been undertaken at our department, basing their designs on the original frames from the collection at the Czartoryski’s Museum of the National Museum in Kraków, frames in the collections of other museums, or related literature.

The importance of an appropriate frame for a painting, concerning its profile and colour, is well known, particularly by all those engaged in organising permanent and temporary exhibitions.

In Polish collections, which are usually associated with a turbulent history, only a small number of objects have been retained in their original frames. With the frequent movement of objects, including from hiding or looting, it was easier to handle paintings without frames. Canvases have often changed their dimensions due to being cut out of their frames.

A frame needs to enhance the artistic value of the painting, but it cannot compete with it, or distract the viewer from the painting. Indeed, in the selection of an appropriate design of frame it is possible to mix varied historical periods, but it requires special skill and aesthetic comprehension. Contemporary reproduction frames, which are associated with a particular historical period by exposing a singular characteristic detail in decoration, are completely satisfied. The most important aspect is the final integrity of the painting and its esthetical presentation.

It is important to find a balance in artificial aging, patination, and distressing, because with passing time an original patina will form itself.

Artistic skill and conservation knowledge, as well as a high level of craftsmanship assist in the design and making of a reproduction frame. In making a copy of an old frame, a conservator replicates a complicated old technology, identifies old materials used in the original designs and recognises its quality over mechanical, factory-made mouldings widely accessible in speciality shops. The paper will illustrate this with a rich collection of cases and photographic documentation.

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