

EXAMINATION REPORT

National Gallery of Art
Conservation Department

Lorenzo Lotto

St. Catherine

Oil on panel, dated 1522

228

Kress Collection

Dimensions: H: 58.1 (22 1/16") x W: 51.1 cm (20 1/16") x T: 0.5 cm

Summary description: Vertical rectangle. Half-length frontal portrait of female saint holding palm leaf and wheel. Background is dark red brocade drapery.

Frame: Antique wooden carved frame which is both painted and gilded. Inner and outer molding are gilded. Central flat section contains a raised gilded floral design against a flat blue field. Minor loss occurs in the raised ornament.

Photos: Panchromatic, overall.

UV (1981).

IR (1981).

X-radiograph (1981).

Distinguishing marks:

On front, at lower right, signed in black paint "Laurentius Lotus/1522".
reverse, on cradle: in blue ink "10735 F" "734, F, B, G L".

Former treatment:

Kress collection Condition and Restoration Report (no date): "Cradled, cleaned and restored with dry colors and damar, French varnish isolator, damar varnish coating, by S. Pichetto, about 1934. 1955 - M. Modestini revived color under white stains with AYAB, and applied coat of 27 H varnish."

"Condition Good. Has a few white stains. Varnish is beginning to crack and yellow."

NGA conservation files: "Nov. 1943 - wiped; Jan. 1944 - Retouched stains on face, hands and red robe; Feb. 1944 - Corrected discoloration and refinished surface; June 1948 - unframed, x-rayed, inpainted. Made templates of painting and frame; Jan. 1951 - Removed pencil scratches from upper lip." "June, 1979 - long scratches reported in face; touched in with wax and damar"; "Oct. 12, 1981 - new scratches noted."

228 Lorenzo Lotto St. Catherine - EXAMINATION REPORT - CONTINUED:

SUPPORT

Construction:

The support consists of two members of what appears to be a diffuse porous hardwood, possibly poplar, with vertical grain. The members are 0.5 cm thick and are joined vertically at w. 41 cm from the bottom left corner. The absence of butterflies or dowels suggests that the panel members were joined solely with an adhesive.

The presence of shallow exposed unfilled worm tunnels throughout the reverse indicates that the panel has been planed down. A number of similarly exposed worm tunnels along the right and left edges suggests that the edges of the painting may have been cut down slightly.

In an effort to arrest warping, a thick layer of wax has been applied to the reverse of the support. The panel has been reinforced by a mahogany (estimated) cradle whose horizontal members no longer move. Remnants of brown tape are visible along the edges of the panel.

Condition:

The panel is currently in plane, although a slight depression along the right side, corresponding to the join, is visible in raking light.

GROUND/PAINT

Construction:

The ground was applied as a smooth white layer of medium thickness. It is estimated to be gypsum, most commonly used for panel paintings in this geographic location. The oil-type paint was applied over it as a series of thin transparent glazes, especially in the shadows of the reds and greens, with no impasto evident. The face was executed using white lead and therefore appears white in the x-radiograph. Its mottled appearance as visible in the radiograph is unusual and does not relate to its smooth appearance when viewed in normal light. The curtain behind the figure contains a bright red underpaint which has been overlaid with a dark pigment to produce the final subdued drapery tones.

The x-radiograph revealed that at the upper right the curtain behind the figure was originally pulled aside to reveal a distant mountainous landscape. There is a small dark shape visible in the radiograph but not on the surface of the painting, located to the left of the figure's ear.

228 Lorenzo Lotto St. Catherine - EXAMINATION REPORT - CONTINUED:

It may be a leaf of flower; however this form is too indistinct to be positively identified as a design change.

Condition:

The paint layer contains a fine rectangular small-aperture crackle pattern associated with the grain of the panel. Numerous small whitened repaints are evident throughout the flesh tones and reds, and these are extremely disfiguring. The shadows in some areas of the face and throat have been strengthened with thin restorer's glazes.

The background contains numerous small feathered retouches and two three-cm repaints covering loss. These larger repaints occur in the background, to the left of the figure's ear and to the right of her proper left cheek. The small losses and repaints in the background are clearly apparent in both the radiograph and during ultraviolet light examination. There is a diagonal loss along an eight-cm line (at h. 8 cm, w. 12 cm from the bottom left corner), and there are also many small chipped filled and repainted losses along the join line.

The paint layer in the area of the signature is damaged and has been retouched. The crackle pattern around the signature is repaint intended to mask the lack of crackle in this area and is clearly apparent when viewed under magnification. Those areas of the signature which were tested were much more soluble than the surrounding paint beneath the varnish layer. This high solubility together with the absence of crackle pattern typical of the rest of the painting clearly indicates that the signature is a later addition.

The paint layer contains several scratches. The largest is a vertical line seven cm long in the green drapery above the figure's shoulder (h. 31 cm, w. 12 cm from the bottom left corner). There is also a 2-cm scratch in the red robe at the bottom left (h. 10 cm, w. 12 cm from the bottom left corner).

SURFACE COATING

Construction:

The picture is covered with one or more extremely thickly applied layers of a glossy natural resin (estimated) varnish which is soluble in acetone. It does not appear to be toned.

Condition:

The surface coating is extremely yellowed and has begun to crack,

228 Lorenzo Lotto St. Catherine - EXAMINATION REPORT - CONTINUED:

lessening its effectiveness as a protective coating. It contains many scratches in the face and throat of the figure. These have been retouched but are clearly apparent in a raking light. The yellowed appearance of the varnish and the scratches which it has incurred make the varnish layer extremely disfiguring.

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