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CONSERVATION TREATMENT REPORT

Altar Ceiling Painting
St. Mary's Catholic Church
95 Hasell Street
Charleston, South Carolina 29401

Submitted by:
Catherine Rogers

February 5, 2023

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1. PRE-TREATMENT CONDITION OF PAINTING

The most recent altar ceiling painting was painted in 2002 by Martha and Richard Snyder and is signed in pen on the lower left side of the ceiling painting. The work was most likely an interpretation of the subject matter that was previously visible, which was the Holy Spirit Dove surrounded by sky and clouds. This composition is visible in an old black and white photograph of the altar area from the early 20th century in the church archives.

The present paint layer is acrylic paint and is not varnished. The substrate is a layer of plaster which was applied over the original work and was done after some water penetration damaged the painted ceiling. The dove located in the center of the painting is a separate craft quality canvas material which was painted on and attached with some form of stick on glue. This dove faces a Southern direction, opposite of what was depicted in the early photograph of the altar area. There is a slight grime layer on the surface of the altar ceiling painting along with scattered black drips of an unknown substance. Numerous areas of lifting and flaking paint are visible throughout the design of the ceiling painting and are a result of possible moisture penetration from above the painting and/or a high humidity environment in the church. Otherwise, the paint layer was generally well adhered to the plaster substrate and appears stable and securely attached.

2. CONSERVATION TREATMENT PRACTICES

Cleaning Tests and Interpretation

Cleaning tests using a mixture of organic solvents, a paint stripper and by mechanical action with a scalpel proved that any removal of the upper paint layer using these methods would be tedious and probably not successful. Several campaigns of overpaint on the original surface of the painting are noted with various shades of light to medium to dark blue present. An architectural type design was revealed under the overpaint along the border with the use of a gold/metal leaf present. The lowest layer of blue ceiling paint appears to be very dark in color similar to the Prussian Blue used in the Crucifixion painting below. It is the conservator's opinion that this dark blue color was the original layer of paint used in the original execution of the ceiling painting.

Removal of Flaking Paint and Filling of Plaster Losses

The numerous areas of scattered flaking paint on the surface of the altar ceiling were removed mechanically by scraping and sanding. Areas of paint loss were filled with a reversible vinyl fill

material and any excess was cleaned using a damp sponge. All areas of present lifting and flaking in the paint layer were addressed but ongoing monitoring of the altar ceiling painting is recommended in case further lifting and flaking become an issue.

Application of Ground Layer

The altar ceiling painting and the areas of fills were coated with a layer of white primer. The center area was covered first with primer with the clouds being covered at a later stage so that a similar positioning of the clouds were maintained in case the former ceiling painting followed the original placement of the clouds.

Application of Paint Layer

The ceiling design was compiled predominately from a study of the paint analysis and from the earlier church photograph of the altar area. A design drawing using colored pencils was made to guide the conservator and to help the SMC staff understand the direction of our work. The first layers of the altar ceiling painting were painted using the “Grisaille” technique which means the design was executed in shades of gray and was monotone. Layers of color were laid over the underpainting as the design of the altar ceiling painting evolved. Golden acrylic paints and Benjamin Moore latex paints were used for the execution of the work. The ceiling painting was left unvarnished so that the surface of the painting would not reflect any substrate distortion and/or glare from any lighting sources in the church.

Conservation Team:

Catherine Rogers of Rogers Art Conservation, LLC, for testing and interpretation.

Craig Crawford of Crawford Conservation, Inc., for testing, interpretation, and execution of design drawing and painting of altar ceiling work.

Maho Yoshikawa, Private Practice, Chicago, IL, for design support.

Project Date: September 19, 2022 - January 10, 2023

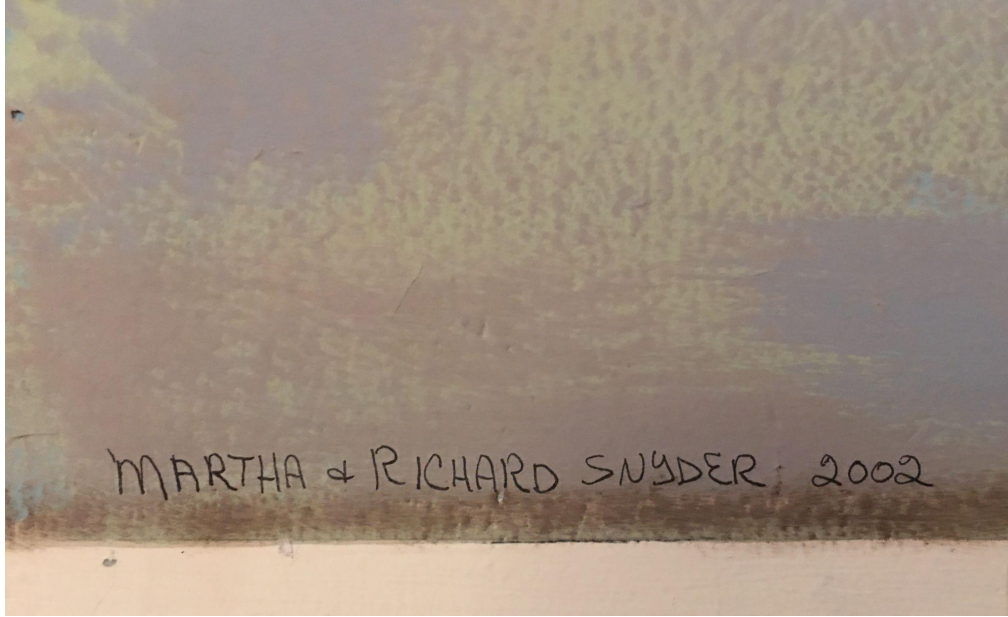
3. CONSERVATION DOCUMENTATION



Before Treatment



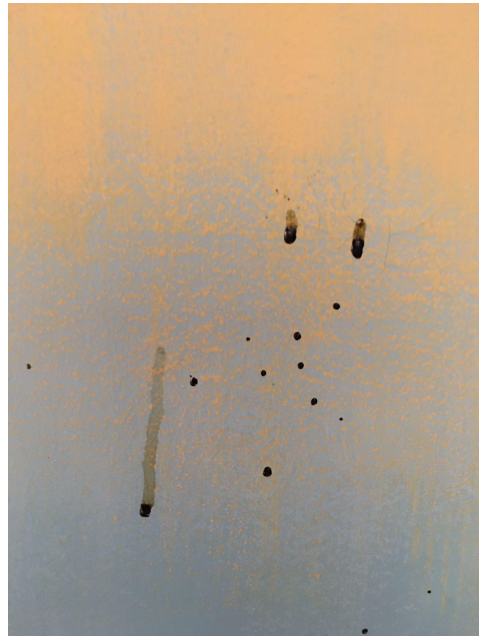
Before Treatment



Before Treatment, Detail of Signatures of Painters



Detail of Lifting and Flaking Paint



Detail of Drips on Ceiling Painting



Details of Overpaint Removal & Architectural Design Exposed



Detail of Gold/Metallic Leaf used in Ceiling Painting



Detail of Overpaint Removal with Light, Medium and Dark Blue Colors Exposed



Sketch of Ceiling Painting Design



Ceiling Painting in Progress



Painting Execution for Altar Ceiling



Painting Execution for Altar Ceiling



After Treatment, Detail of Clouds



After Treatment, Detail of Clouds



Ceiling Painting in Progress



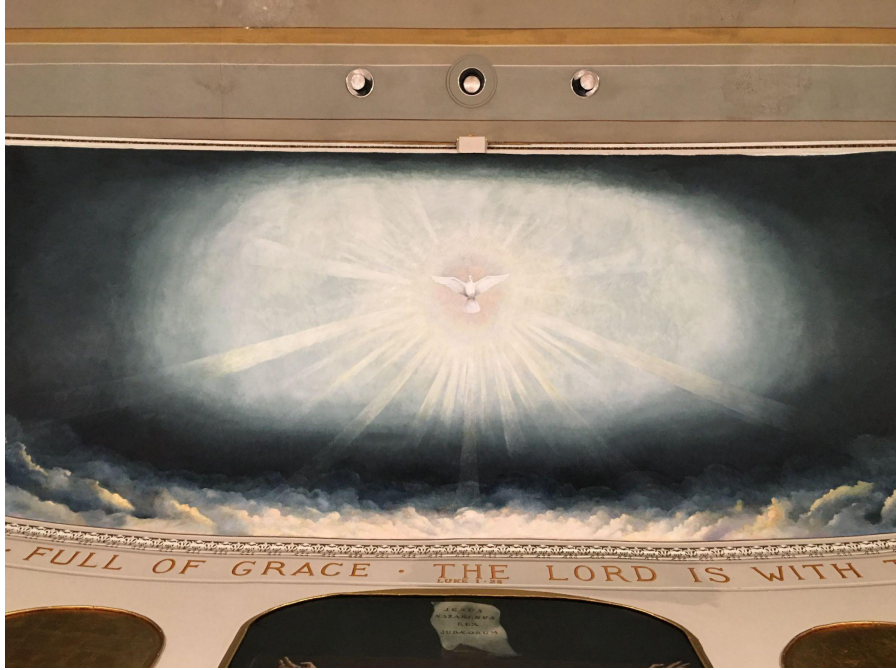
Ceiling Painting in Progress



Previous Dove Painting painted on Canvas attached with adhesive



Craig Crawford working on initial Dove design.



After Treatment, Detail of Ceiling Painting



After Treatment, Detail of Dove



After Treatment