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CONSERVATION TREATMENT REPORT

Altar Painting - "Crucifixion" by John S. Cogdell, 1814
St. Mary's Catholic Church
95 Hasell Street
Charleston, South Carolina 29401

Submitted by:
Catherine Rogers

January 31, 2023

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1. PRE-TREATMENT CONDITION OF PAINTING

The entire canvas dimensions are approximately (H x W): 145" x 79-1/2". The canvas is a simple tabby weave of a heavy weight linen. Slubs and nubs are visible in the canvas with irregular threads that appear thicker. There are two vertical seams which are visible with the naked eye. The canvas widths of the three pieces that make up the painting are from left to right: 18", 41-1/4", 20". There is one tear in the canvas in the lower section of the painting that had been covered by the marble screen. It is located near the base of the cross. An older long, vertical tear that has been previously repaired and overpainted is located along the right edge of the frame in the background area with tacks being used to secure the canvas to the auxiliary support.

The canvas is stretched over a wooden auxiliary support which has diagonal braces in the corners and has been bolted to the wall making it difficult to easily remove. Gaps around the perimeter of the painting and its frame had been filled with wooden strips and plastered to fill in the gap. A dowel type framing has been glued and nailed to the painting on the upper, right and left edges and is 5/8" wide. The area adjacent to the outer side of the frame has been decorated with a gold painted border which is 1-1/2" wide. This framing becomes larger along the upper edge with wider areas of the painted gold decoration. A section of framing was missing along the lower section of the painting in the area which had been covered by the marble screen.

There are noticeable canvas distortions visible as canvas draws along the left edge of the painting. These are most likely due to a poor stretching of the canvas to its auxiliary support. Other canvas distortions are scattered throughout the design of the painting but are especially noted along the lower section which had been previously covered by the marble screen.

A dark red ground layer covers the canvas. The paint layer appeared to be consistent with oil paint medium and was applied in a thin to moderate thickness. The artist, John S. Cogdell, originally painted the painting in 1814. The painting was damaged during a fire in the church in 1838. The artist restored the painting after the church fire.

Extensive areas of paint loss were made visible during our conservation treatment and appear to be concentrated in a horizontal pattern indicating that the canvas was probably rolled in its removal after the fire. Changes made in Christ's proper right leg and a slight change of pigments used to execute the figure's hands indicate that these changes were most likely reworked by the artist after the fire damage. Another area of change was noted in the writing on the upper banner displayed in the painting. The smaller text which is now visible was painted over larger letters which would have been read as "INRI". It is unknown if Cogdell made the changes when he first painted this work or if it was changed after the fire damage. Also a small nail painted at the top of the banner was uncovered with the overpaint removal during the conservation process. Small

areas of retouchings are noted in the flesh area which also appear to be the restoration work of the artist. The artist most likely painted the background over with the Prussian Blue pigment. A later restoration of the painting resulted in the overpainting of the entire background of the painting that was accessible above the marble screen. This overpainting resulted in a muddy tan/gray application of paint over paint losses and over the Prussian Blue background that John Cogdell had used. The original paint layer was generally well adhered to the ground layer and remained stable and securely attached during the cleaning process.

A heavy layer of grime along with discolored varnish layers and areas of extensive previous restoration work mars the original surface of the painting. At least two different campaigns of overpaint on the original surface of the painting are noted. The surface coatings over the original paint surface typically followed a layering of grime, discolored varnish, overpaint, grime, discolored varnish, overpaint (older and more tenacious to remove than upper overpaint layer). The varnish layer is bloomed (more opaque and whitish coloring) in appearance due to moisture and the old restoration work appears darker in appearance than the original paint.

2. CONSERVATION TREATMENT PRACTICES

Removal of the Surface Grime, Old Varnish and Previous Overpaint

The grime and old varnish layers were removed with an organic solvent mixture of acetone and mineral spirits and aqueous cleaning solution (2% solution of Tri-ammonium citrate, buffered to pH 7.0). The tenacious oil overpaint was removed with a non-methylene chloride paint stripper and citric acid gel. In areas where the overpaint was difficult to remove, the stripper gel was covered with plastic wrap for an extended period of time to soften the overpaint. The overpaint was removed partially by mechanical action with the aid of a scalpel. Areas of gel cleaning were cleared using a mixture of acetone and mineral spirits.

Under the previously overpainted areas, paint losses were noted in numerous, scattered areas of the painting, especially in the lower section of the canvas which had been covered by the marble screen. The painting appeared unsigned but a section of text was uncovered during the overpaint removal on the right section of the wall of Jerusalem and appears to be an explanation of the history of the painting and fire by John Cogdell.

Application of Isolating Varnish

After the cleaning process, a varnish layer of Acryloid B-72 dissolved in hydrocarbon solvent (xylene) was applied by brush on the surface of the painting as an isolating layer.

Filling and Inpainting of Losses

Any loss of canvas in the old tears and paint layer losses were filled with a reversible vinyl fill material using a micro spatula, careful not to cover any of the original painting. In areas where the old fill was too high, the excess was removed mechanically with a scalpel. Any paint losses were toned with Winsor & Newton watercolors and inpainted with Gamblin Conservation Colors, pigments mixed with Aldehyde resin.

Treatment of Canvas Distortions

The two large tears and some smaller tears were treated with a heat set powder to act as an adhesive in securing the tear back together. The tear near the lower cross and the larger canvas distortions were relaxed with moisture and a local suction plate was used to reduce their distortions. Unfortunately this treatment provided success only temporarily as any reduction of canvas distortions was reversed with any increase of humidity levels in the church.

Application of Finishing Varnish

After the inpainting was completed, the painting was brush varnished with UVS matte varnish (Regalez 1094), a synthetic varnish that will not discolor or change in solubility over time.

Framing Treatment

Any missing framing was made to match the original and was glued and nailed in the missing areas. The old framing and the gold paint decoration adjacent to the framing was first cleaned using an aqueous cleaning solution (2% solution of Tri-ammonium citrate, buffered to pH 7.0). The new and old framing along with the adjacent gold border paint decoration was repainted with two applications of Liberon Gilt Varnish.

Stencil Border Treatment

A stencil border using pigmented and metallic paint was discovered on either side of the painting when the marble screen was removed. This stencil work is recorded in earlier black and white photographs of the church's altar area. The dust and grime layers were removed using a brush and vacuum and any areas of fragile paint were consolidated with Beva D-8 adhesive. The losses were filled with a reversible vinyl fill material using a spatula with excessive fill material removed with a damp sponge. The top of the stencils were marked with a curved border and paint which matched the wall color was used to outline this border edge. Areas of wall paint to the right and left of the stencil work were toned to better match the stencil background colors.

Conservation Team:

Catherine Rogers of Rogers Art Conservation, LLC

Craig Crawford of Crawford Conservation, Inc.

Maho Yoshikawa, Private Practice, Chicago, IL

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

3. CONSERVATION DOCUMENTATION



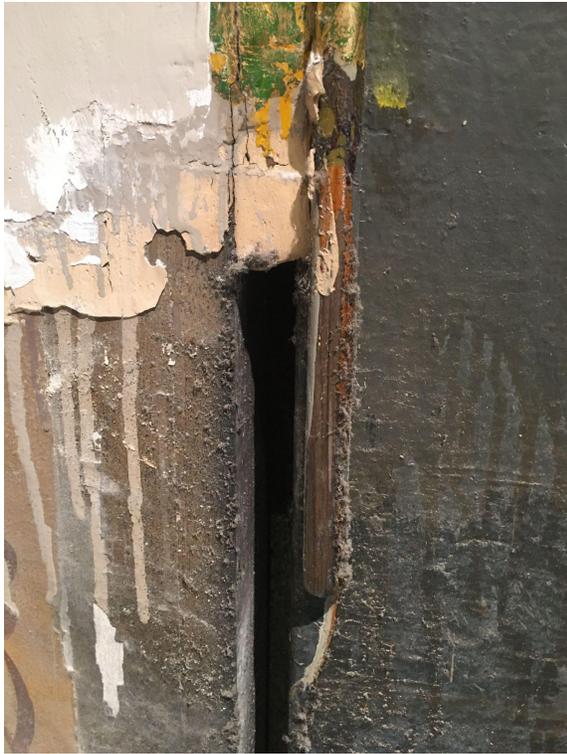
Before Treatment



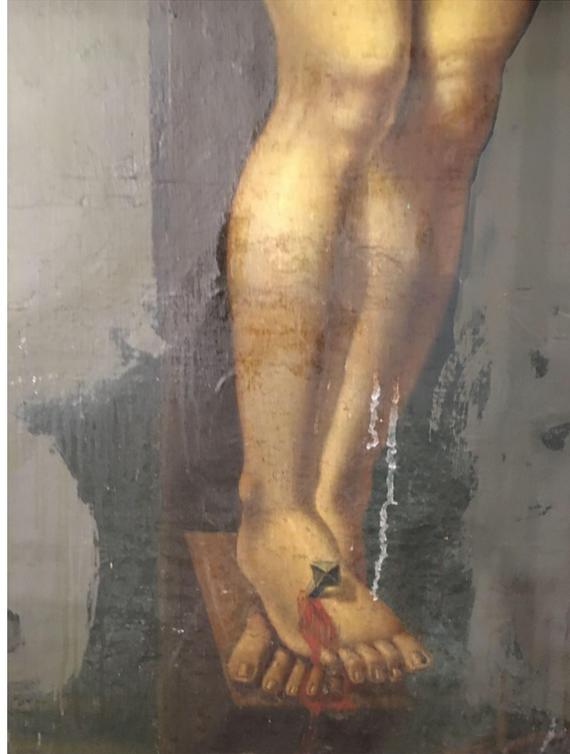
After Treatment



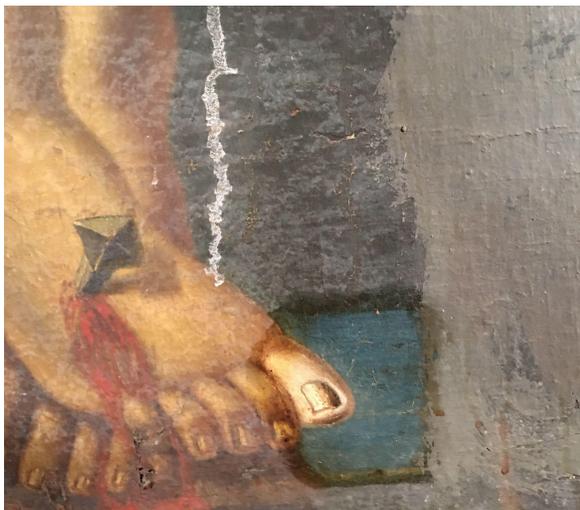
Before Treatment with Marble Screen removed.



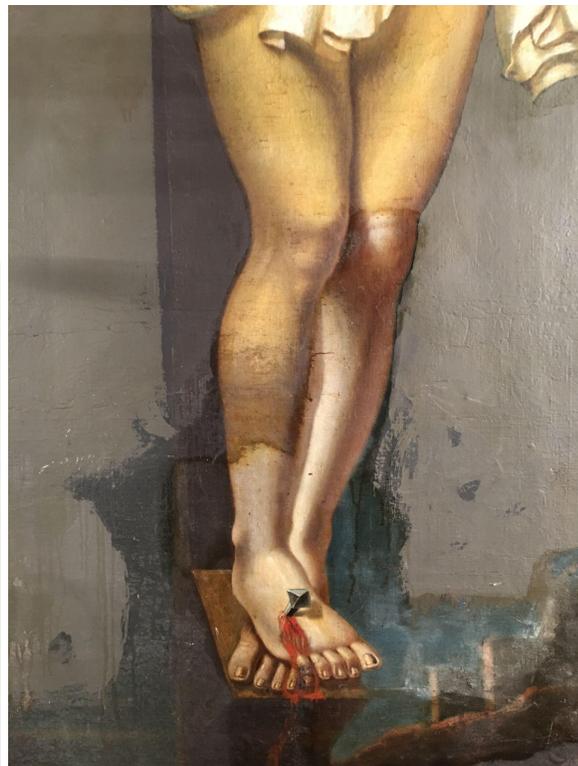
Gap between painting and plaster wall



Before Treatment, Detail



Detail of Cleaning Test



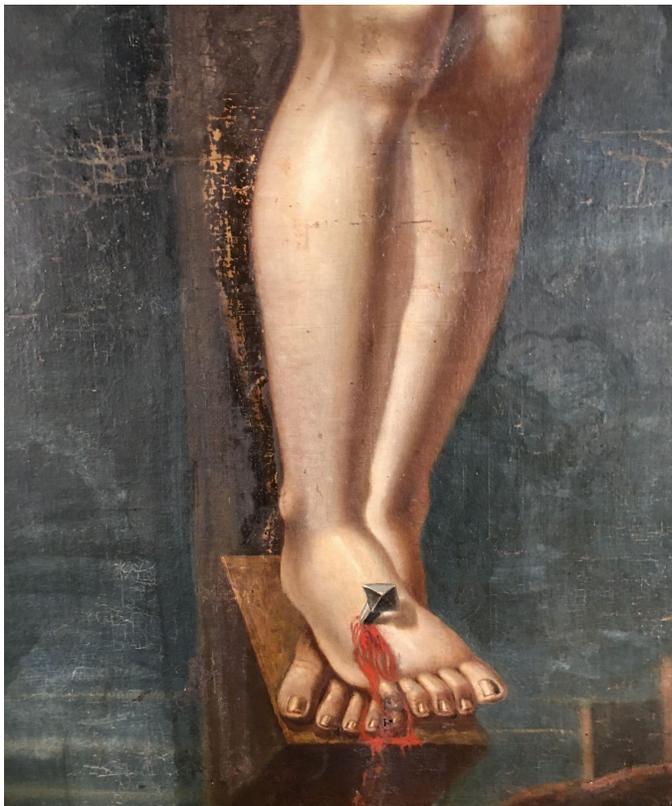
During varnish and overpaint removal



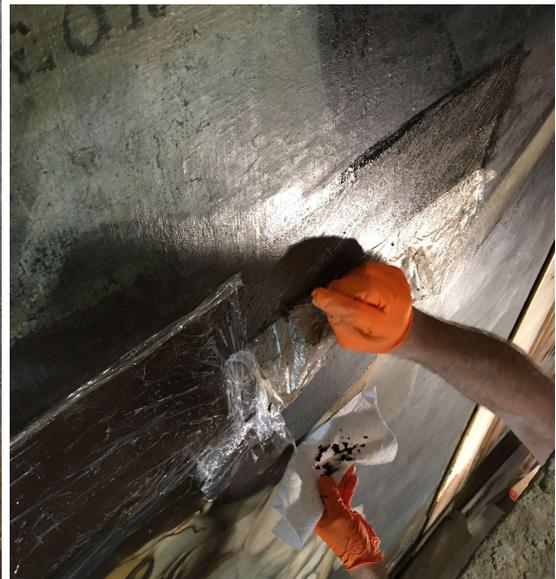
Grime and varnish removal



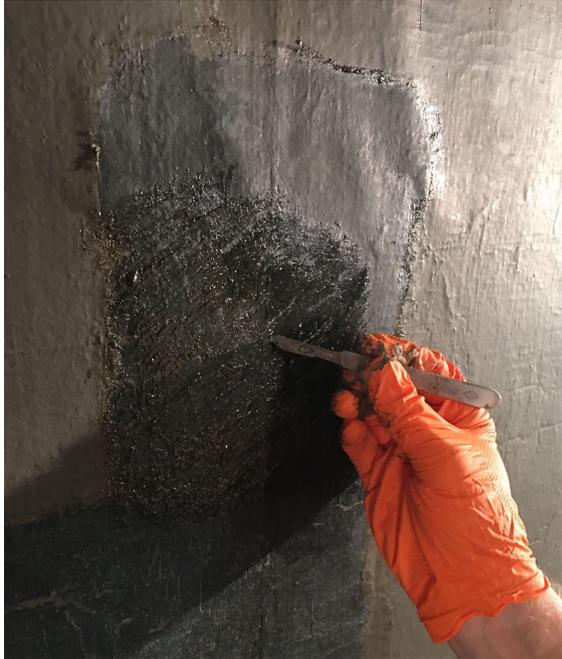
Detail of retouching which may be the artist's work



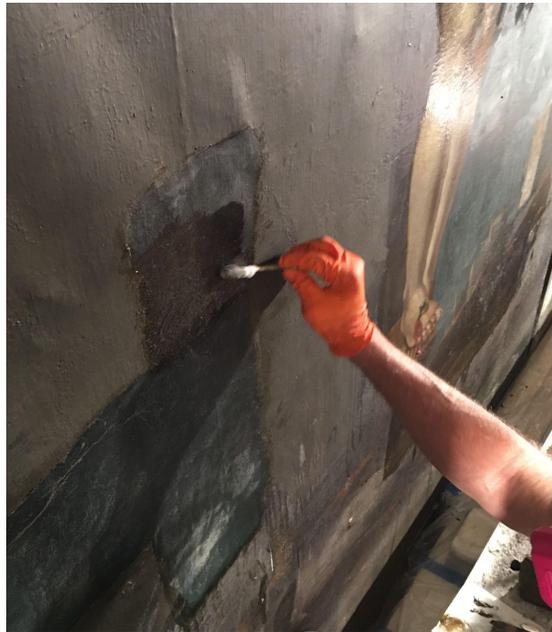
Detail of artist's change to position of proper right leg.



Cleaning process with paint stripper.



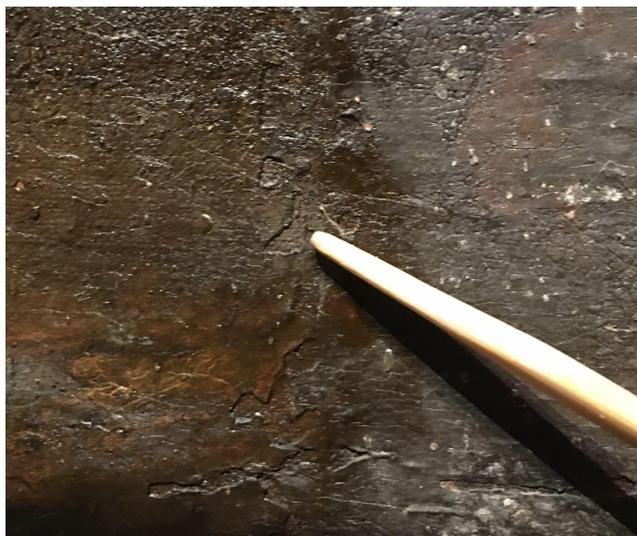
Scalpel used with overpaint removal.



Clearing the stripper and overpaint with solvents.



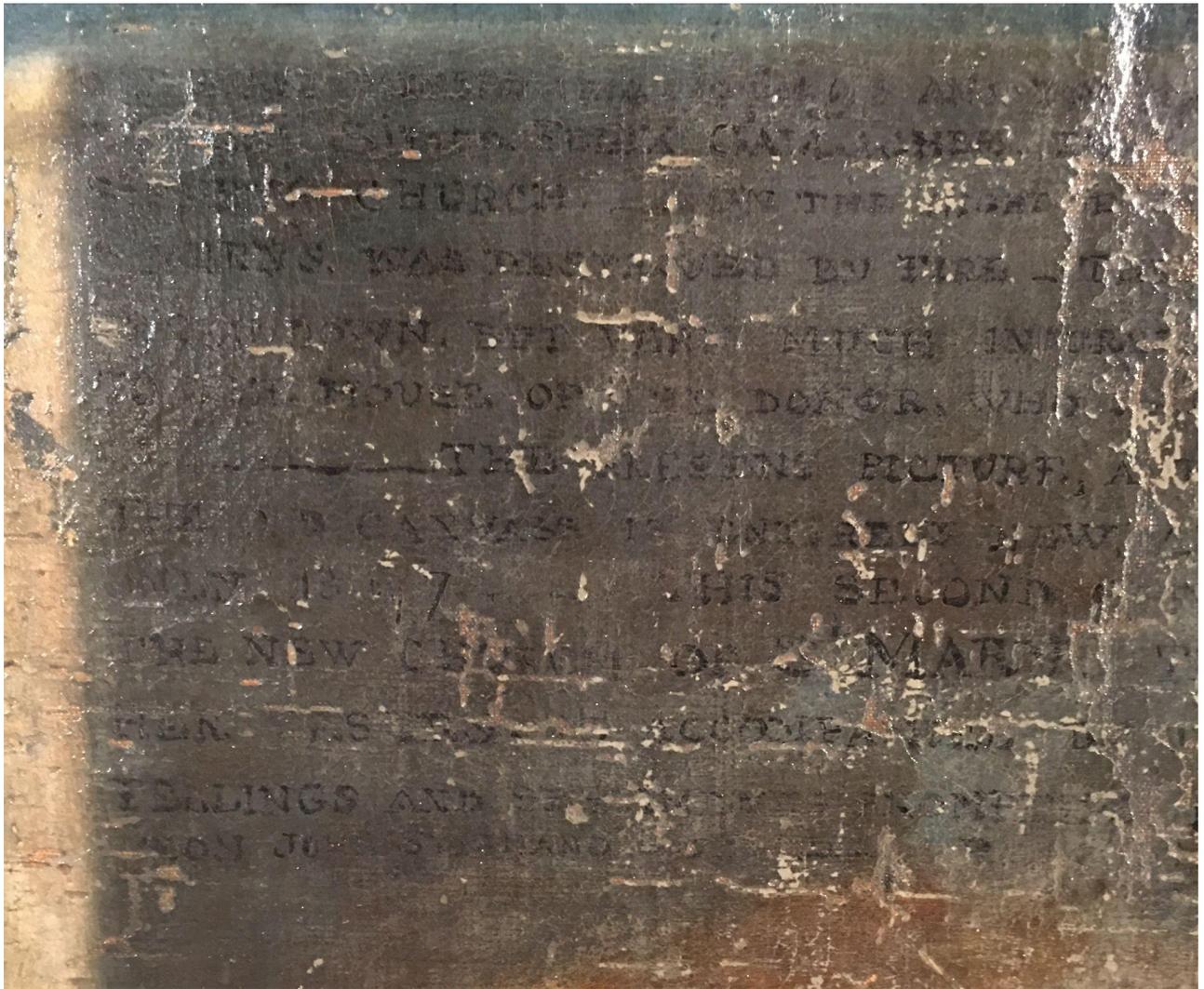
Cleaning swab in background area.



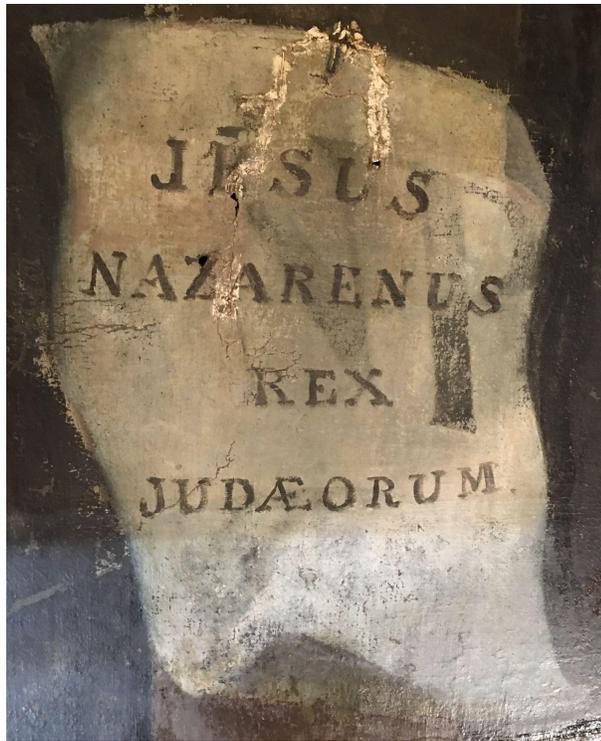
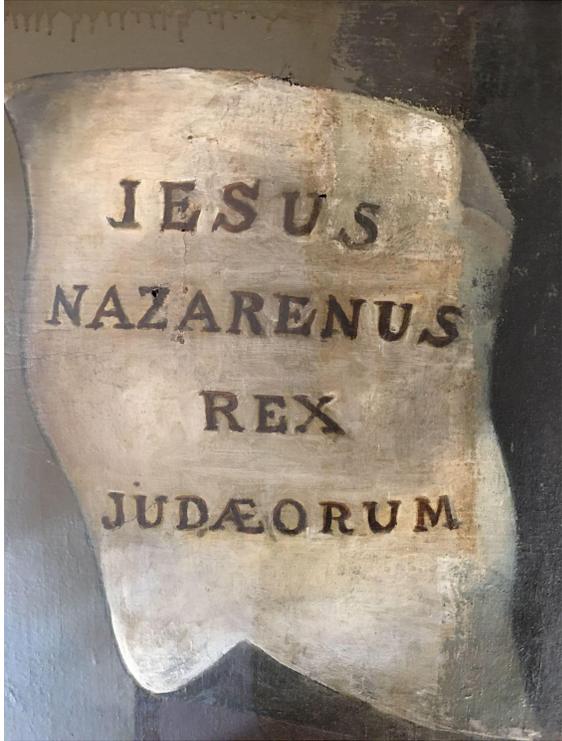
Area of missing ground and paint under overpaint.



During Grime, Varnish and Overpaint removal.



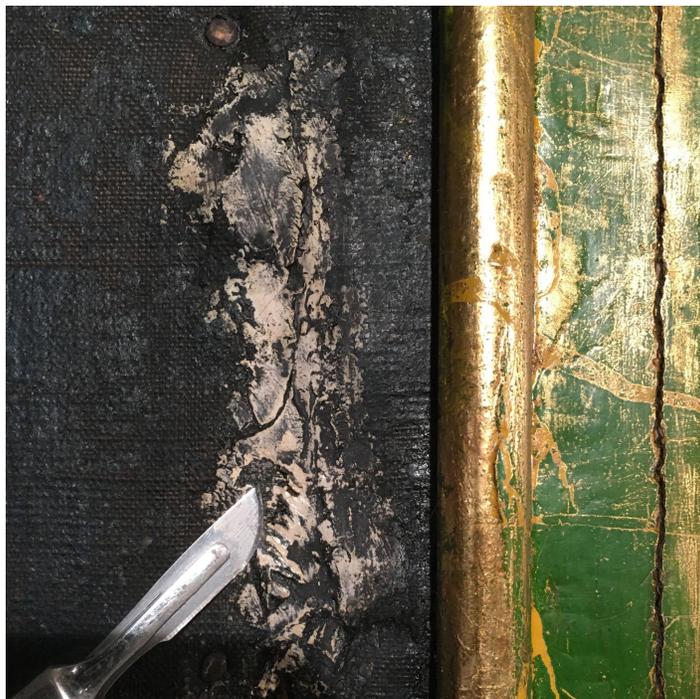
During Treatment, Detail of Text on Wall of Jerusalem



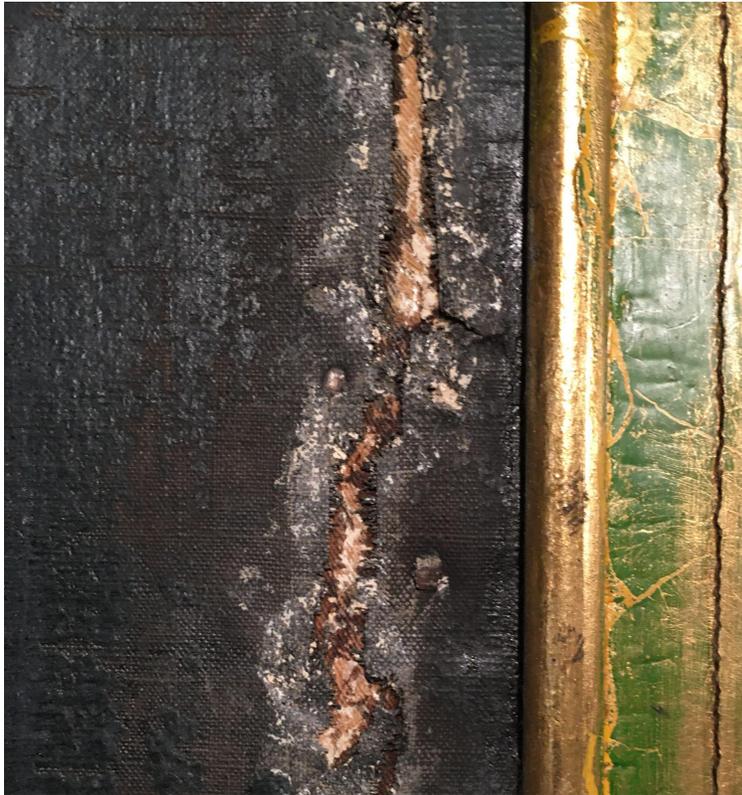
During Treatment, Details of Banner



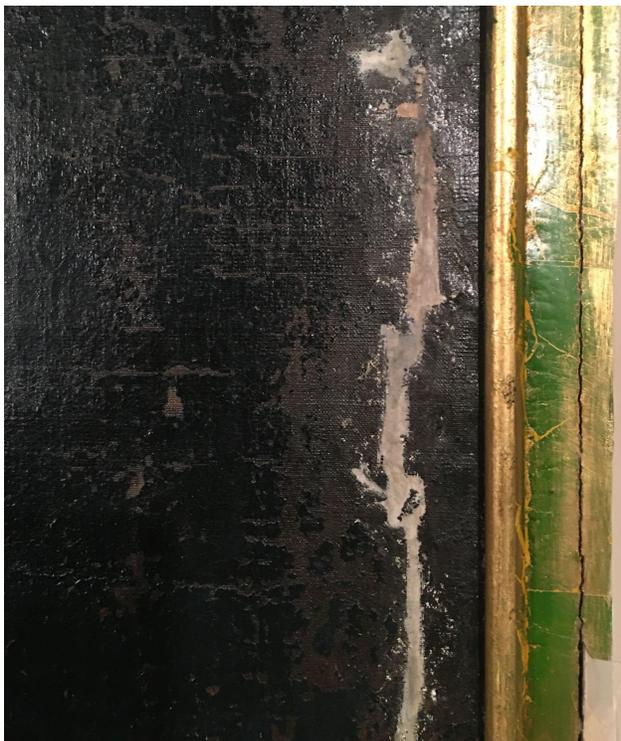
Detail of Old Tear



Detail of Fill material covering original paint.



Tacks visible in the area of the old tear after fill material removed.



Areas of old loss filled in tear areas.



Losses filled with polyvinyl fill material.



Fills toned with watercolors.



After Treatment Detail



After Treatment Detail



After Treatment