

At Marcantonio Ghislina's workshop: restoration in support of knowledge

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Keywords: Cremona, 1700, cultural heritage

The recent restoration of Marcantonio Ghislina's cycle of seven paintings on canvas [1], created for the dome of the church of the former hospital in Casalmaggiore near Cremona, provided a key opportunity to conduct an extensive diagnostic campaign, utilizing both multispectral imaging and colorimetric techniques, as well as non-invasive and micro-invasive analytical techniques. This produced essential data for understanding the artist's painting technique and made it possible to clarify the procedures adopted by the master and his workshop for the realization of large-format works (the canvases in question measure approximately two m by four m each). Despite their technical uniformity, the works reveal stylistic characteristics that suggest they were executed by more than one hand: the cycle was conceived entirely by M.Ghislina and largely executed by him directly, but the execution of some canvases and portions of others was delegated to assistants.

Multispectral imaging (Visible, Infrared, Infrared-False Colors and UV) was applied to the entire cycle of paintings; the painting “*Ester sviene davanti ad Assuero*” was taken as a model for the application of the subsequent diagnostic phase: measurements with portable X-ray fluorescence (p-XRF) and colorimetry (CIE *L*a*b) instruments, and micro-sampling for the study of the pictorial stratigraphy; on these, measurements were carried out using micro-Raman spectroscopy and scanning electron microscopy coupled with energy dispersive spectroscopy (SEM/EDS).

The results of diagnostic tests reveal a meticulous painting technique based on uniform preparation, progressive application of colour, and systematic use of glazes. The type of composition, the use of different types of pigments, and the rational and well-structured working method, characterized by careful control of materials and in-depth knowledge of the interactions between preparation, pigment, and binder, reveal a technical language consistent with the practices of an efficient and organized workshop.

References

[1] G. Bocchi & F. Piazza, *Marcantonio Ghislina 1676-1756, Un pittore di frontiera nel Settecento lombardo* **2025**, ISBN 979-12-243-1182-9.