

Surgical Microscope Helps Preserve Art Treasures**Baroque Masterpiece is Restored in the Public Eye**

Copenhagen, Denmark. Visitors to the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen have had the rare experience of witnessing the restoration of an impressive painting from the baroque era face to face. The 2.79 by 4.67 meter oil masterpiece, "The Tribute Money – Peter Finding the Silver Coin in the Mouth of the Fish," also known as "The Ferry-Boat to Antwerp," created by Flemish master Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678) around 1623 in Antwerp, is now being scientifically examined, restored, and conserved.

Looking over the restorers' shoulders for ten months

According to the planned timetable, from September 2007 until the end of June 2008, the open workshop in the middle of the museum gallery will reveal exciting insights into the masterpiece and the most intimate details of conservation and restoration techniques. "As the national gallery, it is our mission to explain to the public how we maintain and examine our cultural heritage," Keeper of Conservation Jørgen Wadum explains.

Leica M651 is there in real time

The project is supported in part by Leica Microsystems with a Leica M651 surgical microscope, which is equipped with a 150mm lens for long-range observation. The floor stand is extremely maneuverable to permit flexible work on the painting. With the help of microscopic analyses, it is possible to locate for example saponifications (chemical changes to the paint pigments) on the surface of the painting. By means of wireless projection on a 5" plasma screen, visitors can follow the current work at the microscope in real time.

Restoring the splendor of the original colors

The painting consists of eight canvases of varying size and quality. Originally begun on a much smaller scale, the painting was expanded only as the creative process went on. The present appearance is impaired by darkly discolored varnish, numerous places where the paint has faded, and discolored retouching from earlier restoration efforts.

The first important step in the current restoration consists of removing layers of varnish and retouchings from the almost 14 square meter sur-

face of the painting. Then, the paint layer will be examined carefully and restored as necessary. At the same time, experts will attempt to determine which phenomena result in quality sacrifices. Painting techniques and paint layers will be analyzed intensively to determine their structure, pigment compositions, and binders in order to place the work in the context of Jordaens' artistic and technical development.

Seeking answers

The project team meticulously gathers all information that offers insight into the genesis and the nature of this 400-year-old painting. Cross sectional, x-ray, and infrared analyses are used, among other techniques. An x-ray image has already revealed the first surprise: a woman's face, which is presently hidden under an overpainted cloud in the sky.

The project not only endeavors to restore the masterpiece to its original, colorful splendor. Experts are looking for answers to many questions, such as: What were the function and meaning of this painting, which depicts at the same time a scene from everyday contemporary life and a historical scene with a Biblical theme? How did Jordaens' workshop operate? Did Jordaens paint the entire work himself? > AS

One of the most impressive paintings in the Statens Museum for Kunst, the national gallery in Copenhagen, undergoes restoration in the public eye: Jacob Jordaens' "The Tribute Money – Peter Finding the Silver Coin in the Mouth of the Fish," also known as "The Ferry-Boat to Antwerp," oil on canvas, 279.5 by 467cm. Experts examine the surface of the painting for tiny damage spots and changes to the paint pigments with the help of the Leica M651 surgical microscope.



Photos: Kristin Henze



The project team of the Statens Museum for Kunst: Jørgen Wadum, Keeper of Conservation and Project Leader; Eva de la Fuente Pedersen, Senior Research Curator; Pauline Lehmann Banke, Conservator; Troels Filtenborg, Conservator; and Johanneke Verhave, Conservator.