CONSERVATION-RESTORATION OF A SOCIALIST-REALIST WALL PAINTING

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A socialist-realist wall painting titled “Youth Are Getting Involved in the Production” by Maksim Sedej and Dana Pajnič has undergone conservation-restoration treatment by the first and second year Master’s students.

The wall painting was painted in the secco technique in 1949 and is located in the Secondary School for Hairstyling in Ljubljana (image 1). Due to its location in the school cafeteria, the wall painting was vandalized with graffiti, scratches, chewing gum and wet paper projectiles. Because of its nearly floor-length size and a lack of display protection in the past, surface abrasion and consequent paint loss occurred where the chairs were scraping its surface (image 3). A few years ago, a plexiglass display protection was inappropriately mounted and consequently removed, which left traces of an indelible silicon strip used for its installation on the surface, as well as drilled holes from screw attachments. In the decades since its last restoration, layers of dust and soot built up on its surface, making the colours appear less vivid.

Conservation-restoration intervention began with tests for the removal of surface impurities (image 4). Water applied with natural sponge rendered satisfactory results. Tests with ammonium carbonate and Art Peel yielded diverging but inadequate results: the first proved to be no more effective than water only, the latter was too aggressive on the paint surface. Out of the tested solvents, the most appropriate was a mixture of ethanol and butyl acetate (image 2), with which the cleaning of the whole surface was completed, after the preliminary cleaning with water. The remains of the silicon strip were removed mechanically, with scalpels (image 5). During the conservation-restoration work, overpainted areas from previous restorations were discovered (image 6), as well as unsuitable surface repairs with putty made of brittle synthetic material, all of which were removed (image 7). The repair of gaps, scratches and holes was carried out with a mortar made of lime putty and calcite sand and the retouching of paint loss areas was executed in the secco technique (image 8). In addition, an inscription with the title, author and date of creation of the wall painting will be added to the site, to raise awareness of the work of art adorning the school walls (image 9).

Students who carried out the conservation-restoration work: Čila Berden, Petra Bohinc, Maja Cingerle, Anja Novak, Helena Pucelj Kranjc, Zala Rebernak, Barbara Škander.