Conservation of detached anti-nazi and anti-facist mixed-media installation

Object and its brief history

The object of the conservation is the installation of historical value, which originated just before World War II. It is the inscription made with pencil onto a corner of two painted walls – „7 sierpnia 1939 / szubiencja / na Hitlera / i Mussoliniego“ (August the 7th 1939 / gollows / for Hitler / and Mussolini”) with nail placed above one part of the inscription with rope hanging from it. The object was preserved in the state requiring action to stop the process of its deterioration.

Installation was found in 2012 in Kraków, Domini-kańska Street 1 flat no. 3, during conservation works connected with another object in this XIX century tenement (Figure 1). It had to be removed immediately to be preserved. Before the detachment process a solution of PVA was used as a consolidant. The removal of the object from the wall facing was made with PVAc solution.

Preparations and detachment in stacco technique (Figure 2) was proceeded by Oskar Hanusek, Joanna Kunert and Katarzyna Świerad, (at the time students of Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow, Poland). Installation is currently in possession of the Academy.

Preliminaries and aim of the conservation

The aim of the conservation was to preserve the object, apply it on a movable support and prepare for an exposition as a museum object. An important problem to solve was designing of a moveable support system which would allow to present this corner object, as original placing parts at an 90° or due to exposition requirements – parallelly. Moreover, the object had to be prepared to be stored and transported laying flat.

Process of the conservation

The intervention was executed by four students of the Academy: authors of the poster and Daniel Bednarczyk.

Firstly, the reverse of the object was treated – the excess of mortar was removed mechanically and losses were filled in to obtain even surface (mortar based on the 12% PVA solution with chalk and grinded plaster). Later the same mixture was used to fasten the lining of cotton gauze. Then the intervention layer made of extruded polystyrene cutted into small, rectangular pieces was attached to the reverse of the object with thermoplastic glue (Figure 3a).

At the same time work on the preparation of new support took place. Using aluminium strips, two frames were put together. The new support was built of aluminium core and glass fabric linings, hardened with epoxy resin (Figure 3b). Figure 4 shows the construction which was employed to enable parallel and perpendicular arrangement. The object was then attached to the new support with epoxy raisin with silica filler.

After facing removal the edges were filled with polystyrene pieces, and then covered with a layer of mortar. Surface of fillings was overlaid with mixture of the PVA solution and chalk to imitate original texture of the layer with brush (Figure 5). In the next step they will be covered with limewash and gently retouched.

Conclusions and prospective work

The object is still undergoing conservation treatment. The final task now is to find a way to secure both nail and rope and then preparation of the method of fixing all these elements together in one stable but removable structure that allow for convenient exposition, transport and storage respecting the original idea of the anonymus who made this spontaneous gesture in the summer of 1939.