

Service tender for the conservation-restoration of seven paintings located within the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception at the Church of the Jesuits in Valletta

Reference number: **PA5.0103/35**

Clarification Nos 1

Date: 9th May 2022

Question Nos 1:

I would like the following points to be further clarified please;

In the State of Conservation report provided, there is no mention of the state of the decorative frames of the following;

The Birth of Our Lady JCV/P147

The Annunciation JCV/P/149

The Visitation of Our Lady to St Elizabeth JCV/P/150

The Presentation of Our Lord JCV/P/151

The Assumption of Our Lady JCV/P 152

If there are any decorative frames, could you please forward us their state of conservation, or if there are no decorative frames present, does it mean that new ones have to be worked new and what finish?

Reply to Question Nos 1:

As indicated in the Annex State of Conservation report, the paintings were exhibited within wall recesses of the Oratory, where the wall decoration around each artwork serves as a decorative frame (note Figure 76 and Figure 77). Yet narrow, gilt wooden strips were nailed to the paintings' perimeter to cover the existent gap present between the painting and the wall recess. These gilt wooden strips - which can be clearly noted in photographs of other paintings - have a simple motif. Several parts of these wooden strips were found broken, detached from the paintings or missing. The surviving parts - including the broken ones - were collected and should be made available to the conservators working on these artworks. As stated in the Method Statement (in Section 4.2 - Specific Activities), it has been clearly stated that these wooden gilt strips (or frames) will have to be treated and missing parts must be reconstructed. Of course, the reconstructions should follow the original moulding design and have similar polychromy. The polychromy must be carried out using stable materials and the end result closely resembles the original). The Method Statement even states that these wooden strips should be isolated from the painting with soft textile and installed in alternative ways in order to prevent

damaging the original paint layer of the artworks. The following is quoted from the Method Statement provided in the Tender Document:

"Following the conservation-restoration treatments, all the artefacts are to be installed into their original position. All paintings have gilt wooden frames that also need to be treated and the missing parts have to be reconstructed. The latter gilt wooden strips shall not be adhered to the painting. Instead, the wooden strips shall be only adhered to the wall using long stainless steel screws that can be removed with ease. The fixed wooden strips should secure the paintings in their original location. It is recommended to line the reverse side of the wooden strips with soft cotton textile in order to limit the wood from abrading the artworks' paint layer."

Question Nos 2:

Also; In the Organisation and Methodology section in page 7 you ask the tenderer to Propose and Justify scientific analysis, which is a very generic request. Since we presume that a conservator has carried out the sent paintings condition report, and this person has inspected thoroughly the paintings state of conservation and their conservation necessities, I'm gently asking you to specify if the scientific analysis are definitely required (as the paintings seem to be in a relatively stable and fair state of conservation) and how many for each painting?

Reply to Question Nos 2:

Conservation and restoration treatments should always be backed by scientific investigations. Professional conservators-restorers are expected to collaborate with heritage scientists in order to better understand: the manufacturing technique of an artwork; past treatments; and its current state of conservation. The State of Conservation report for the Oratory paintings is based on thorough (yet preliminary) on-site investigations by a warranted conservator-restorer. Still, it is expected that the conservator-restorer who will be intervening on these paintings will have to re-examine and document each artwork in various light sources and with a near-infrared camera. Other non-destructive scientific analysis (carried out by a cultural scientist) helps the conservator-restorer in making informed decisions and to better define the most adequate treatment methodology for each artwork. The following paragraph, quoted from the Method Statement in the Tender Document, explains the necessity of scientific investigations:

"Scientific analysis – such as stratigraphy of the paint layers; identification of the paintings' constituent materials; identification of non-original materials; and the analysis of degradation processes – are encouraged and could be requested by the project representative. Such analysis is intended to better understand the artwork and its alterations, as well in order to better plan the treatment methodology."

It is very important to note that the conservator-restorer who will work on these paintings should be a professional who, based on the information provided in the State of Conservation report, shall be capable of determining the scientific analysis - including the necessary number of tests - required for each artwork. A heritage scientist could be sought for advice on this matter if necessary. It is important to focus primarily on non-destructive analysis that could include, for instance, the use of a portable XRF for the identification of pigments.

Such scientific analysis is necessary, regardless of the artworks' state of conservation. The State of Conservation report clearly demonstrates that the majority of the artworks are not in a fair and stable condition. It is possible to note, for instance, that the paint layer of many paintings detached and

deformed from the canvas support due to past water infiltration. In fact, as shown in the report, some paintings were faced with Japanese paper during past treatments as paint was at risk of flaking off.

Question Nos 3:

On page 22 of the tender document it is mentioned that the paintings are to be re-installed in their original location. Can you please clarify if the contracting authority will take care of installing a fixed scaffolding for the mounting of the paintings?

Reply to Question 3:

Kindly note that the Contract is responsible to provide the necessary equipment for the paintings to be reinstalled into their original location.