

Valuable Techniques and Training in Craft

Specialized crafts training and the conservation of an 18th Century Jacobean Embroidered Needlepoint

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Background

The approach to and techniques used in the conservation treatment of an early 18th century Jacobean embroidered needlepoint was heavily informed by my training in textiles at Nova Scotia College of Art & Design (NSCAD). The knowledge I had gained from studying and creating textiles during my years of craft training were fundamental in the treatment of this needlepoint. Under the constant supervision of Ms. Rousseau as principal conservator, we considered and tested a number of the techniques I had worked with as an art student, such as dyeing, hand stitching, needlepoint, and embroidery.



Figure 1
Rabbit skin glue patch attached to upper left verso



Figure 2
Significant discoloration in upper right corner



Figure 3
Dispersed disintegration and discoloration

Condition Report

Materials The needlepoint was worked in wool thread and yarn, with silk thread and couched metal thread on a fine flax linen ground.

Damage Deterioration had occurred mainly in the top left corner where previous conservation attempts had taken place using rabbit skin glue and patch work (Figure 1). This is an inferior method as the glue is irreversible and brittle over time. Thus the thread in contact with the glue became stiff and brittle resulting in segments of loose patch falling away. The most significant discoloration was of dark brown and of unclear origin, covering the top right corner of the object (Figure 2). Large proportion of deterioration had occurred in portions of the piece where needlepoint and petite point in silk thread had worn away (see Treatment in Progress).

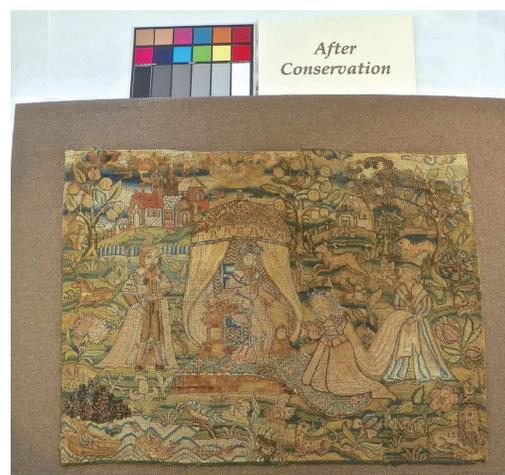
Cause of Damage The object was attached by the edges to a rough cut panel board with approximately 30 corroded iron nails (Rousseau, 2015). The embroidered panel was hand sewn to a heavy dark green woven mat fabric similar to burlap (Rousseau, 2015). Both were carefully removed prior to treatment of the object. Discoloration and deterioration was dispersed throughout due to light exposure, age, oxidation issues and improper care and storage (Figure 3).



Before Treatment
Conservation of a Jacobean English Embroidered needlework that pictured a royal visitation scene set in a fantastical pastoral landscape with symbolic flora and fauna.



Treatment in Progress
Post - cleaning



Conservation Complete

Methods of Treatment

Hepa Filter Vacuum We began by vacuuming both sides of the object with a Hepa filter vacuum.

Stain removal The brown stains were addressed using a mild bleach solution composed of sodium perborate and sodium chloride gel and a rinse with isopropyl alcohol and distilled water applied with a sponge brush. This was all under the suggestions of Ms. Elise Rousseau of Conservation de Rigueur, where this treatment took place. (figure 4)

Color Match and Dye After careful consideration of approach, we decided to hand dye fine weave linen patches to fill holes and blend tears. These were color matched to the missing areas (figure 6). The dark neutrals we chose matched the faded colors of the piece and became perfectly blended as stabilization patches even when they showed through to the front.

Stabilization We used a basic couching stitch and laid couching stitch to redefine shapes in the embroidery where the thread had partially torn away. We then used back stitch, darning stitch and invisible couching stitch to stabilize the frayed and broken areas, holes and tears, and for mounting at the end of the project. (Figure 5, 6).



Figure 5
Detail of decorative element secured



Figure 6
Reverse view of color matched patches

Conclusions

Every conservation project presents unique problems and therefore requires specialized treatments. Background knowledge from arts and craft education, and more importantly supervision from those with experience, provide a strong basis for conservation work and were key elements in understanding and applying materials and techniques in this treatment. This allowed us to achieve the desired visual and structural effects necessary to preserve the Jacobean needlepoint.

References

Rousseau, Elise (2015). Jacobean English Embroidered Needlepoint - Conservation Treatment Summary Art conservation de Rigueur, San Francisco, CA.