

The Conservator's Point of View

Condition of the panel and toolmarks

The relatively large and heavy walnut panel consists of four horizontal boards of different widths, which are glued together butt-jointed. All four side edges were provided with a milled 0.7 to 1 cm deep step. On this panel the step at the bottom was probably levelled with a narrow strip stepped in opposite directions before painting – presumably to create a better support surface for the heavy wooden panel (*fig. 1*).¹ Close to this step on the reverse side, three holes have been drilled on both sides, possibly for either the application of a groove bar during the painting process, for a temporary frame or for assembling the panel within wall panelling. Visible drops of the priming and of the paint layer on the side edges show that the format of the panel and its milled edges are original features (*figs. 2a, b, c*). A light brown matt and coarse-grained protective coating has been applied to the reverse of the panel. This coating is original. In raking light marks of planning and tool marks become apparent (*fig. 3*). In general, the panel is in good and stable condition, the joints are slightly open in some places. Between the second and third board, the joint which was re-glued in an earlier intervention has been connected with four dovetails. The glued joint at the bottom edge was also reinforced with eight nails at a later date (cf. *fig. 1*).

A bright chalk primer forms the basis of the oil-bound paint layer. A few fine underdrawing lines are only visible on the face and hands (*figs. 4a, b, c*). The application of the paint layer varies according to the forms and is relatively impasto in light areas worked with lead white, for example the dress, the embroidery or the brooch (*figs. 5a, b*). Some individual areas are painted wet in wet. In addition to the impasto areas, especially the background shows a smooth flatly applied paint layer with a

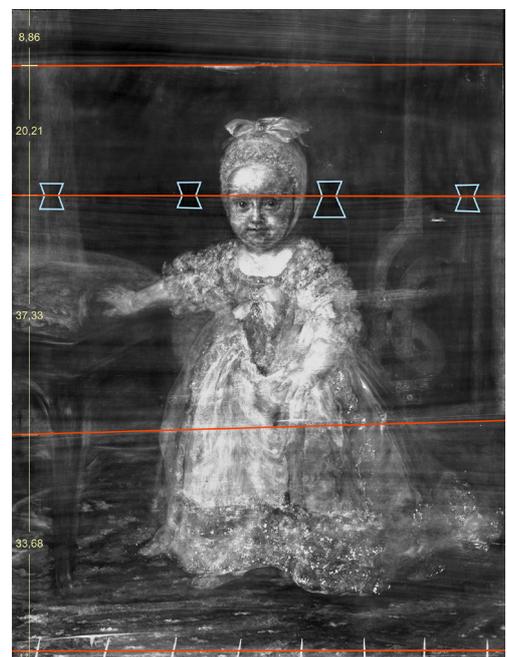


Fig. 1
X-radiograph; mapping of joints with tool marks, alterations and damages. The x-radiograph shows the distribution of paint layers containing lead white. It conveys information about the construction and the quality of the panel as well as the condition of the original paint layer.

fine-grained surface. By contrast to the meticulous rendering of face and white lace, the dress is painted in a free manner with less detail. Especially impressive is the rendering of the colourful carpet which shows variegated brush work with highly nuanced colouring (cf. *fig. 2a*).



Figs. 2a, b, c

Details during restoration; the original step is visible on the left edge. The yellowed varnish causes the green appearance of the blue colour of the carpet (left image). Left edge with drops of original priming and right edge showing original stepping (image in the middle). The step at the base was equalised with an additional bar before the priming was applied (right image).

The Need for Conservation and Restoration Intervention

The painting showed dirty, yellowed and blanching varnish coatings as well as darkened retouching (cf. *figs. 5a, b*). The original paint layer is noticeably well preserved, which is rare for paintings of this date. In the past rigid framing and worse climate conditions caused stress to the sensitive panel. This, together with mechanical damages and small paint losses, lead to a restoration process in 2023.

The measures included thinning the layers of yellowed varnish, removing old retouching, gluing recent cracks and integrating paint losses. This not only brought out the full intensity of the painting's brilliant colours, but also generally stabilised the wooden panel and achieved a cohesive appearance. In addition, the painting was enclosed in a climate-controlled display case integrated into the frame to protect it from climate fluctuations.

- 1 On the front the step is approx. 1.7 cm, on the reverse only 0.8 cm, the wood thickness is 1.8 cm. This could mean that the fourth board originally also had a milled step and that the painted surface would therefore have been 1.7 cm shorter at the bottom. All the boards could have been cut from one trunk and are curved differently depending on the board cut.



Fig. 3
Reverse with original coating in raking light.



Figs. 4a, b, c
Detail of the head in infrared-reflectography, during restoration, and in visible light after restoration.



Figs. 5a, b
Details during restoration; the paint layer of the dress is noticeably textured. The open brushstroke conveys the vivid fluffy quality of the dress and glossed highlights create a three-dimensional impression of the laces of the dress and of the brooch.