

# CONSERVATION OF MURAL PAINTINGS IN SECULAR BUILDINGS IN SLOVENIA

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The paper presents an overview of the most relevant and interesting examples of mural painting in secular buildings in Slovenia and a selection of recently conserved-restored mural paintings in secular buildings with an emphasis on applied materials, techniques and conceptions. Some specific issues concerning the conservation and renovation of secular buildings in Slovenia in relation to the preserved paintings are stressed, and the common problems faced by conservators-restorers are discussed.

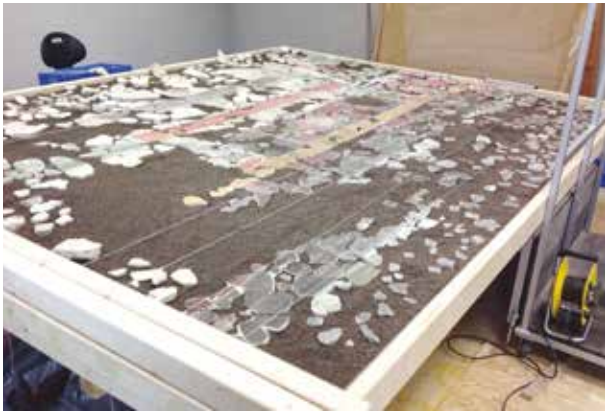
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Slovenia is rich in mural paintings in secular buildings. In general, these paintings go back to the Roman times, late Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, as well as the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

ROMAN WALL PAINTINGS -  
THE EARLIEST SECULAR PAINTINGS

The walls of many secular houses in the Roman towns of Emona (Ljubljana), Celeia (Celje), Poetovio (Ptuj),

Nevidunum (Drnovo) and Carnium (Kranj), as well as rural and maritime villas were decorated with paintings in fresco or a combination of fresco and secco techniques on layers of typical Roman lime-sand plaster. Presently, only the reconstruction of a simple painting on a fragment of a Roman wall on the archaeological site of Emonska hiša (Emonan House) in Ljubljana is on display in situ. It is also planned to build an exhibition pavilion on the archaeological site of Glavni trg (Main Square) in Celje with in-situ



1. Sandbox for manual assembling of pieces of classical mural painting from Celje in the Restoration centre, Ljubljana, photo by Blaž Šeme, 2015

Smėlio dėžė, kurioje surinkti antikinės sienų tapybos fragmentai iš Celės

presentation of the preserved original floor mosaics and wall paintings.<sup>1</sup> Other, often more lavishly ornamentally decorated remnants of paintings are mainly stored in museums and most of them have not been conserved-restored yet. Some fragments of paintings need an urgent conservation-restoration intervention, since they have been demounted and stored in poor conditions. This also applies to some of the largest preserved fragments of Roman paintings from Ljubljana, which are currently held in the conservation-restoration atelier of the Department of Restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana. Another challenge in the conservation of Roman paintings is the reassembling of hundreds of small pieces collected during excavations (e.g. from

1 Nande Korpnik, 'Presentation of Architectural Organization of Glavni trg 17 and 17a in Celje with the Outline of the Architectural Design of the Exhibition Pavilion of Archaeology', in: *Zaščita in vzdrževanje mozaikov in situ / Protection and Maintenance of Mosaics In Situ*: 2nd International symposium on mosaics (Ljubljana, 21–23 October 2015), Book of Abstracts, Ljubljana: Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, 2015, p. 25. In-situ presentation of remnants of wall paintings in the archaeological park Simonov zaliv in Izola is also planned in the near future (information received from conservator-restorer Martina Lesar Kikelj, MA).

the sites of Turška mačka in Celje and Knedlov vrt in Kranj).<sup>2</sup> Experts of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia have managed to reassemble a great many fragments from Celje with the help of a special computer program (developed in collaboration with the Research Institute Jožef Stefan in Ljubljana) and a sandbox for manual reassembling of pieces [ill. 1].<sup>3</sup> Besides, a number of graphical reconstructions of painted rooms in secular Roman houses were made according to several better-preserved fragments of paintings.<sup>4</sup>

#### GOTHIC AND RENAISSANCE WALL PAINTINGS

In addition to the fragments of classical mural paintings, the earliest preserved paintings are late medieval (mostly the fifteenth and early sixteenth century) and Renaissance painted surfaces in castles, manors, urban houses and the façade of a rural house (Podvrh nad Javorjami).<sup>5</sup> Basically, the painting technique is

- 2 Pika Škerlj, Blaž Šeme, Sabina Kramar, 'Antique Fragments of the Wall Paintings from Knedlov vrt in Kranj and Issues of Conservation-Restoration of Archaeological Wall Paintings', in: *10. Međunarodna konferencija studija konzervacije-restauracije (Dubrovnik 2013)*, [online], 2010, [cited 2015-11-15], <http://www.konferencija-restauracija.com/images/stories/Pre-davanje/2013/SKERLJ.pdf>.
- 3 Erik Dovgan, Blaž Mahnič, Gregor Čepin, Tea Tušar, Bogdan Filipič, Gregor Berginc, Daniel Vladušič, Jelka Kuret, Petra Benedik, Asparuh Mihailov, 'e-Pedius: crowdsourcing support for the reassembly of wall-painting fragments', in: *The e-Pedius Application*, [online], 2013, [cited 2015-11-15], <http://e-pedius.si/?lang=en>.
- 4 The author of graphical reconstructions is painter and conservator-restorer Veljko Toman (published in: Ljudmila Plesničar-Gec, *Emonske freske (Emona's Frescoes)*, Ljubljana: Mestni muzej, 1973).
- 5 Janez Höfler, *Srednjeveške freske v Sloveniji. Gorenjska (Medieval Frescoes in Slovenia. Upper Carniola)*, Ljubljana: Družina, 1996; *Ibid.*, *Srednjeveške freske v Sloveniji. Primorska (Medieval Frescoes in Slovenia. Littoral Region)*, Ljubljana: Družina, 1997; *Ibid.*, *Srednjeveške freske v Sloveniji. Okolica Ljubljane z Notranjsko, Dolenjsko in Belo Krajino (Medieval Frescoes in Slovenia. The Surroundings of Ljubljana with Inner Carniola, Lower Carniola and White Carniola)*, Ljubljana: Družina, 2001; *Ibid.*, *Srednjeveške freske v Sloveniji. Štajerska s Prekmurjem*



2. Painted medieval chapel of Turjak castle,  
photo by Blaž Šeme, 2007

Turjako pilies viduramžių koplyčios sienų tapyba

the same as in the Roman times. In most cases, these paintings are made on lime plaster in true fresco with additions in the secco technique; in some cases, the lime technique is also used. Unfortunately, due to multiple renovations, reconstructions, wars and long-term neglect (e.g. ruined or destroyed paintings in the castles of Lendava, Vurberk, Stara Loka, Gračarjev turn, Klevevž etc.) not many paintings from that period have survived. Chapels are often the most richly decorated spaces in castles and manor houses.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, these paintings, e.g., in the castles of Kamnik (Mali grad), Turjak, Sevnica (Lutrovska klet) and

Negova, are artworks on sacral themes [ill. 2]. Some other sacral and secular mural paintings in the chapels of Princely Mansion in Celje, Mokronog castle and Švarcenštajn castle near Velenje were removed and transferred to local museums. However, some interesting remnants of Renaissance mural paintings are still preserved on the walls of Rajhenburg (Brestanica), Otočec and Fužine castles.

The majority of preserved paintings from the medieval and Renaissance periods in Slovenia are in a relatively good condition thanks to conservation-restoration treatments in the last century or during the recent years, and are mostly adequately protected. Some picturesque painted façades of old towns, e.g., in Škofja Loka (former Town Hall), Radovljica (Šivec House), Koper (Almerigogna Palace and a house on Kidričeva 33) are from that period as well. The task of

(*Medieval Frescoes in Slovenia. Styria with Over the River Mura Region*), Ljubljana: Družina, 2004.

6 Matjaž Ambrožič, "Grajske kapele in patronatni vpliv fevdalne gosposke na cerkveno življenje" (Castle Chapels and the Patronage Influence of Feudal Lords on Religious Life), in: *Kronika* 3, 2012, p. 557.



3. Painted façade of a house on Kidrič street in Koper,  
photo by Blaž Šeme, 2007

Namo Kidričo gatvéje Koperje tapytas fasadas

preserving these paintings on façades is very difficult because of direct exposure to harmful atmospheric factors [ill. 3]. The important segment of medieval and Renaissance mural painting in Slovenia is mainly well conserved-restored paintings of urban houses and palaces, e.g., in Celje (Glavni trg 8), Kranj (Pavšlar's House), Škofja Loka (Homan's House), Koper (Cankarjeva 2, Tovarniška 2, Kreljeva 6), Laško (parish house), and Krško (Mencinger's House).

#### EXAMPLE OF CONSERVATION-RESTORATION: MENCINGER'S HOUSE IN KRŠKO

As part of the total renovation of the house of Slovene writer Janez Mencinger,<sup>7</sup> situated in the old town of Krško, the stratigraphic analysis of the walls showed

that several living quarters were fully decorated. Wholly preserved decorative paintings, probably made in the late nineteenth century, were made with stencils. Rich ornaments on the walls with decorative lines and a rosette in the middle of the ceiling fully cover the walls in the rooms like wallpaper. While uncovering these paintings in one of the rooms, the restorers came across another, even earlier wall painting. A line of male and female portraits was hidden under two layers of thick plaster. Chief conservator of the project Alenka Železnik from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Ljubljana Regional Office, dated the portraits back to the second half of the sixteenth century, referring to the clothing typical of the period of Protestantism. At that time, Protestantism was widespread in Slovenia and the city of Krško was a strong Protestant centre, so the portraits may have depicted some nobles who lived at that time. Among the portraits, two coats of arms were painted on a base; there is hope that in the future it will be possible to identify the members of the noble family portrayed on that base. The uncovered Renaissance paintings represent a unique find of utmost importance in the Slovene region. Portraits were painted very delicately and, despite a very limited range of colours, the hairstyles and clothing details are well visible [ill. 4].

While restoring these paintings, a team of restorers were faced with alteration of pigments, which had started to fade. It is not really clear what caused the fading of the pigments, but it is assumed that an improper method or agent for surface cleaning was used, or a method was improperly executed. It is important that the use of different chemicals for treating wall paintings requires advanced knowledge

<sup>7</sup> The house is named after writer, lawyer and politician Janez Mencinger (1838–1912), who lived there from 1887 onwards.



4. Series of Renaissance portraits discovered during the renovation of Mencinger's house, photo by Tjaša Pristov, 2013

Renesanso portretai, aptikti renovuojant Mencingerio namą

and relevant experience of a restorer. It is important to devote enough time for preliminary research and carry out all the necessary experiments needed for a successful and appropriate execution of conservation-restoration works. Luckily, the restorers managed to stop the deterioration of the pigments. On the basis of object investigations<sup>8</sup> a proper neutral colour reintegration and minimal retouching of the original was chosen. The same conservation principle was applied on the fresco uncovered on the façade of the same house. Art historians describe the poorly preserved painting of St. Mary as an image of the iconographic type of St. Mary Help of Christians, which was first painted by Giovanni Pietro de Pomis (ca. 1565 or 1569/70–1633) for the high altar of Mariahilferkirche in Graz, Austria. By comparing similar paintings with the same motif, the depiction discovered on Mencinger's House is a very high-quality baroque painting from the turn of the

8 Object investigation is based on a study in which information regarding the original form, material and state of conservation of an object is obtained.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While the fresco was in a very poor condition, completely destroyed in the lower part, it was decided that it had to be demounted from the façade, fixed on a new portable support and displayed in a secure environment, away from any harmful weather conditions that could cause further deterioration. However, a new approach was chosen for the creation and reintegration of a copy of the original fresco on the façade. Instead of making a new copy by classical painting technique on plaster, reconstruction was made by digital technology on a vapour-permeable foil Transfer, a medium that is capable of producing a large number of replicas. A slightly more advanced approach is already established abroad, while in Slovenia it was the first example of the kind. All the necessary data for the reintegration of the missing parts of the original portrait were collected by historical research and individual studies of analogues. The original painting was precisely photographed. The photos were taken in the digital RAW format, processed with Adobe Camera Raw computer tool, and colour calibrated



5. Uncovered original mural of *St. Mary Help of Christians* discovered on the façade of Mencinger's house, photo by Tjaša Pristov, 2012

Originali Švč. Mergelės Marijos – Krikščionių Pagalbos sienų tapybos kompozicija, aptikta ant Mencingerio namo fasado

6. Reconstructed mural of *St. Mary Help of Christians* applied as wallpaper on the renovated façade, photo by Tjaša Pristov, 2013

Rekonstruota Švč. Mergelės Marijos – Krikščionių Pagalbos sienų tapybos kompozicija, perkelta kaip pasikartojantis piešinys ant renovuoto fasado



with the Colour Checker Passport computer program. Based on the original photos and collected analogues, the full drawing of the image was made with the computer program Calera Painter. For a reintegration test, a section of the processed image was printed and applied on a new surface of a smaller dimension, where special attention was paid to the precise colour tone and its intensity. Due to the use of multiple media in designing the reconstruction, various deviations in colour could occur. It was necessary to ensure the best possible matching of the colours on print with the colours on the original. After adjusting the colours and finishing the individual details of the image, the reconstruction was ready for print. The image was printed on a vapour permeable, highly elastic film, which was applied to a new plaster. Finally, the surface was coated with varnish, which gave the image its final look (a slightly matt appearance) and additional surface protection. Since the reconstruction was performed, regular inspections have been carried out and no deteriorations have been detected (until now). The reconstruction was highly esteemed from the viewpoint of appearance and technological implementation. The viewers who are not familiar with the used technology actually are not aware that the image is applied like wallpaper and not painted. The demounted original painting was reintegrated on a new support and is now displayed in a memorial room beside the uncovered Renaissance portraits. Initially, these two rooms were meant for the offices of the Faculty of Energy, but due to the discovery of Renaissance portraits the intended use of the space was changed. Leading design engineers, representatives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia and representatives of the Municipality of Krško acclaimed the value and the quality of these discoveries. The offices were converted into museum rooms where the life and work of Slovene writer Janez Mencinger is presented. The rooms are opened to the public and serve as a foundation for further research into the city's history [ills. 5 and 6].

## BAROQUE PAINTINGS IN SECULAR BUILDINGS

Baroque mural paintings in secular buildings, found mostly in castles and manor houses, are more numerous than Gothic and Renaissance ones. Some interesting examples of relatively well preserved baroque illusionistic ceiling and wall paintings in castles and manors go back to the late seventeenth and eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> The earliest are the ceiling paintings of the so-called Celje Ceiling in the former Palace of Counts Thurn-Valsassina in Celje (early seventeenth century). The paintings in Celje are painted on canvas, which, according to other preserved paintings, is a unique case for early baroque ceiling painting in Slovenia. Examples of painted wallpapers have also survived (e. g. eighteenth century wallpapers in Jابلje castle). Otherwise, Baroque paintings are usually painted on lime plaster in fresco or secco techniques or their combination. Plaster is often put on reed netting, especially on the ceilings of castles and manors. Regrettably, the majority of the earliest Baroque paintings from the end of the seventeenth century did not survive. These are paintings conventionally attributed to the painter Almanach<sup>10</sup> or his circle (Auersperg Palace and the refectory of the Franciscan monastery in Ljubljana and Soteska, Bokalce, Iški Turn castles), or unknown painters (e.g. Luknja and Pobrežje castles). However, more recent theses suggest that some of the

9 Marjana Lipoglavšek, *Baročno stropno slikarstvo na Slovenskem (Baroque Ceiling Painting in Slovenia)*, Ljubljana: Vi-harnik, Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, 1996; Eadem, "Iluzionistično slikarstvo 17. stoletja na Slovenskem" (17th Century Illusionistic Painting in Slovenia), in: *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino (Nova vrsta)* 18, 1982, pp. 73–91; Barbara Murovec, "Likovni viri za baročno stropno slikarstvo v Sloveniji" (Visual Sources of Baroque Ceiling Painting in Slovenia)", in: *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino (Nova vrsta)* 39, 2003, pp. 92–145.

10 The painter, solely known by the pseudonym Almanach (also Almanak, Allmenak, Allmenack, Almenaco Belga etc.), was of Flemish origin, presumably from Antwerp. He worked in Carniola (the central part of present-day Slovenia) in the second half of the 17th century. Among the works attributed to him are drawings, canvases, ceiling and wall paintings.



7. Richly decorated ceiling with stucco and painting in Grm castle, Novo mesto, photo by Blaž Šeme, 2008

Gausiai dekoruotos lubos su stiuko puošyba ir tapyba Grmo pilyje Novo Meste

paintings were not mural paintings at all but painted canvases, and many mural paintings that were previously attributed to Almanach might have actually been the works of Johann Georg Remp (1648–1716), ‘a leading fresco painter of the late seventeenth – early eighteenth century in Carniola.’<sup>11</sup> The only largely preserved paintings presumably attributed to Almanach are found in the garden pavilion (Hudičev turn) of Soteska castle, which is currently under conservation-restoration. Many other baroque mural paintings of

manors and castles by various artists have already been conserved-restored, e.g. in Smlednik (Valburga), Dornava, Slovenska Bistrica, Brežice, Zemono, Bled (castle chapel), Škofja Loka (chapel of Puštal castle), Ljubljana (library of the Seminary Palace, chapel of Kodeljevo castle), Jablje castle, and Betnava manor. This applies also to some secular buildings with rich decorations made in a combination of painting and stucco works. Examples of such decorations can be found in the castles of Novo mesto (castle Grm), Maribor, Štatenberg, Begunje, Goričane and Ljubljana (staircase and chapel of the Gruber Palace) [ill. 7]. In addition to Almanach and J.G. Remp, other baroque painters and authors of paintings from some previously mentioned locations are worth mentioning:

<sup>11</sup> Matej Klemenčič, Barbara Murovec, ‘Almanach, Painting in the Second Half of the 17th Century in Carniola and the State of Art Historical Research’, in: *Almanach and Painting in the Second Half of the 17th Century in Carniola*, Ljubljana, 2006, ed. Barbara Murovec, Matej Klemenčič, Mateja Breščak, pp. 15–17.





8. Baroque paintings in the Hall of Knights in Brežice castle after conservation-restoration of the ceiling, photo by Blaž Šeme, 2014

Brežicių pilies Riterių salės barokinė tapyba po lubų konservavimo ir restauravimo

Giulio Quaglio (1668–1751), Franz Carl Remp (1675–1718), Franz Ignaz Flurer (1688–1742), Franc Jelovšek (1700–1764), Anton Cebej (1722–1774) and Eustachius Gabriel (1724–1772).

Despite many more or less successful conservation-restoration projects in the past decades, a great number of other baroque manor houses and castles with mural paintings were destroyed or are still totally neglected, such as, e.g., the castle of Podčetrtek. In many cases new conservation-restoration of paintings and more adequate monitoring and maintenance plans would be necessary. However, some excellent examples of conservation-restoration of baroque paintings in the castles of Brežice (Viteška dvorana), Sevnica (Lutrovska klet) and Vipava (Lanthieri

manor) were also among the largest and most complex conservation-restoration projects of mural paintings of the last decade in Slovenia [ill. 8]. The projects were supervised by experts from the Restoration Centre of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia. It is also very useful for the students of conservation-restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design who had the opportunity to work on sites during the conservation-restoration practice, e.g. on baroque mural paintings in manor houses in Smlednik, Vipava, Gracarjev turn and Tuštanj [ill. 9]. It should be noted that especially in the north-western part of Slovenia there are many baroque paintings in peasant houses, which was part of the tradition of decorating the façades of towns and villages in the



9. Baroque paintings of the Hall of Knights in Smlednik (Valburga) manor during conservation-restoration, photo by Blaž Šeme, 2007

Smledniko (Valburgos) dvaro Riterių salės barokinė tapyba konservavimo ir restauravimo proceso metu

wider Alpine region of Central Europe. E.g., in the small region of Poljanska dolina (Poljane Valley) only, 75 mural paintings are preserved, most of them from the baroque period, on the façades of 35 houses in 18 villages.<sup>12</sup> In most cases the paintings are on the exterior of the houses and therefore highly vulnerable. Many of them were demounted, especially after the earthquakes in the last decades. Increasingly more decorations with mural paintings in the baroque style appeared in urban buildings, as is also confirmed by new discoveries.

<sup>12</sup> Bernarda Jesenko Filipič, “Freske na profanih objektih v osrednjem delu Poljanske doline” (Frescoes on Secular Buildings in the Central Part of the Poljanska Valley’), in: *Glasnik (Slovensko etnološko društvo)*, 1/2, 2013, p. 147.

#### EXAMPLES OF CONSERVATION-RESTORATION: BAROQUE HOUSES IN LJUBLJANA

The house at Novi trg 4 in Ljubljana pertains to a baroque noble palace from the mid-eighteenth century. The interior of the palace was once richly decorated with murals. The renovation of two rooms in the palace started with the stratigraphic analysis of the walls and ceilings. The results showed the presence of several decorative paintings. In total, seven ceiling paintings were discovered, each from a different period. Three of them were thoroughly documented, because later they were lost in the process of uncovering the fourth layer. The painting on the fourth layer was quite well preserved and consistent with the entire presentation of

the baroque palace. The mural was restored using the principle of mimetic reintegration. Two more painted layers under this painting were left intact.<sup>13</sup> In the case of several painted layers, dilemmas of their presentation occur, because one or more painted layers are destroyed. Since the method of demounting wall paintings is not developed to an extent that it could insure the detachment of one painted layer from another, the decision ‘which one’ will be sacrificed has to be made. It has been done, but the technology is very complicated. Decisions are normally taken on the basis of object investigations, the entire visual identity of the building, the function of the space and available resources.

During one of the most recent stratigraphic researches in the house at Mestni trg 10 built in the style of early Baroque, a bourgeois palace with an arcaded courtyard, a baroque staircase and a rococo façade situated in the old town of Ljubljana, more than sixty decorative wall patterns were discovered. Some of them were in extremely poor condition, preserved only in fragments. Better preserved patterns (approximately forty samples) were uncovered only partially to the extent of their repetition, so that a drawing of the pattern could be made in scale 1:1 and prepared for further graphic processing. Vector drawings were made and graphic reconstructions were designed for selected individual samples with the aim to present to individual owners of private apartments an overview how the wall paintings would look when restored. With this approach the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia seeks to encourage the owners to consider the possibility of presenting discovered paintings. Since the renovation of the building is ongoing, the ultimate fate of the murals is still unknown. These examples reveal how richly noble houses were decorated in the past [ills. 10 and 11].

13 Tjaša Pristov, “Palača Novi trg 4” (Palace Novi trg 4), in: *Varstvo spomenikov*, Poročila 48, Zavod za varstvo kulturne dediščine Slovenije, (*Journal for the Protection of Monuments*, Reports 48, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia), Ljubljana, 2013, pp. 126–127.



10. Central part of the ceiling in the palace at Novi trg 4 during the uncovering and documenting of several painted layers, photo by Tjaša Pristov, 2011

Centrinė lubų dalis Novi trg g. 4 esančiuose rūmuose, atidengiant ir dokumentuojant kelis tapybos sluoksnius



11. Central rosette on the ceiling in the palace at Novi trg 4 after completion of conservation-restoration works, photo by Tjaša Pristov, 2011

Centrinė lubų rozetė Novi trg g. 4 esančiuose rūmuose, baigus konservavimo ir restauravimo darbus



12. Entrance hall of the Meksika building at Njegoševa 6 with paintings by Rihard Jakopič, photo by Blaž Šeme, 2007

Meksikos pastato vestibulius Njegoševa g. 6 su Rihardo Jakopičo tapyba

Various discovered original layers of paintings showing a rich history of the buildings and the custom of decorating interior spaces with different wall paintings could be exposed in the cases when projects are co-funded by the Municipality, the Ministry of Culture or European funds. Generally, these spaces are intentionally designed for the use as offices or museum premises. But when it comes to the necessity to restore newly discovered historically and culturally valuable elements in private spaces, where additional funding is not possible, the presentation of discovered painting usually does not occur. In these cases, thorough documentation and, if possible, preservation of original painting under various superimposed and overlying layers is needed. In the worst-case scenario, during architectural, static or installation renovations, paintings are destroyed. Private investors have

not much interest in restoring discovered murals. An ongoing problem is a lack of interest in restoring discovered murals on the part of the investors, because it considerably increases the size of the initial investment and presents a certain amount of limitations of usage and further maintenance. Additional artistic and historical value, unfortunately, is not enough for the investors when deciding about the presentation of newly discovered paintings.

#### WALL PAINTINGS OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH AND THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the second half of the nineteenth and in the twentieth century a great number of mural paintings were created in public (theatres, opera houses, museums,

galleries, governmental and educational etc.) and private buildings. Typical of the late nineteenth century are mural paintings in the Opera House of Ljubljana.<sup>14</sup> Mural decorations in castles, manors and palaces also appeared, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, e.g., in Ormož castle, Kodeljevo castle (chapel) in Ljubljana, Kamnik castle (chapel in Mali grad), Škofja Loka castle (chapel), Besenghi degli Ughi palace in Izola and many other noble houses in the coastal and other areas of Slovenia. A great number of mostly church painters received commissions for mural paintings in secular buildings, e.g. Janez Wolf (1825–1884), Matija Koželj (1842–1917), Janez Šubic (1850–1889) and Jurij Šubic (1855–1890). Unfortunately, many painters of that and later periods had no adequate knowledge of making a technically good and durable fresco painting.

Mural painting of the first half of the twentieth century in Slovenia has not yet been well researched. Beside several painters who definitely worked in secular buildings, e.g. Matej Sternen (1870–1949), Ivan Vavpotič (1877–1943), Helena Vurnik (1882–1962) and France Kralj (1895–1965), an interesting and probably the only mural painting by the best-known Slovenian impressionist painter Rihard Jakopič (1869–1943) should be mentioned. The painting, which is located on the Meksika building on Njegoševa cesta in Ljubljana, is rather large. The challenge to properly preserve and conserve-restore this painting is huge because of the inadequate technique of execution; besides, being on the exterior of the building, it is exposed to air pollution and other harmful atmospheric factors [ill. 12].

As a general rule (with exceptions, of course), the more recent and decorative the painting is, the lower the awareness of the need for its preservation and maintenance becomes. Therefore, a particularly

14 For more on the conservation-restoration work on the paintings in the Opera House, see the paper by Tjaša Pristov (*Conservation-Restoration Works on Wall Paintings in SNG Opera and Ballet House, Ljubljana*) in this publication.



13. Art nouveau painting in Villa Poljanska 97 after restoration interventions, photo by Tjaša Pristov, 2014

*Art nouveau* tapyba Poljanska g. 97 esančioje viloje po restauracijos

difficult task for the conservators of the regional offices of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage often is to convince custodians and owners, especially of private buildings, to preserve a more recent original mural painting.

#### EXAMPLE OF CONSERVATION-RESTORATION: AN URBAN VILLA WITH AN ART NOUVEAU PAINTING IN LJUBLJANA

A distinct example is a partly represented art nouveau painting discovered in Vila Poljanska 97, in Ljubljana [ill. 13]. Despite the lack of resources and due to functional modifications required by the modern standards of renovation of public spaces (buildings), it was possible to preserve the paintings in one room and part of the corridor. All the corridors and the staircase were originally decorated with a decorative painting in the art nouveau style. Uncovered wall paintings are characterized by stylized wreaths with vegetable ornaments and individual flowers between thin lines geometrically arranged along the walls of

the focal point, with additional decorative bands at the top and the bottom of the wall. Individual preserved components revealed a fully decorated room on the first floor, which is also adorned with elegant, curvy shapes. Six equally stylized female figures fill the areas around the door openings. Although the figures were made with stencils, they create a sense of eroticism and sensuality. Women figures are painted in an easy and relaxed poise, and their dresses and thick orange hair blend into a pattern. In their hands they hold a floral wreath, a motif that is repeated in the centre of the ceiling. In the lower part of the walls, the painting ends with a playful ornamental belt from symmetricaly arranged circles and individual lines. All the discovered paintings were in an extremely poor condition, mainly due to previous construction and installation interventions. By restoration interventions the original parts of the paintings were mimetically integrated, while the missing and badly deteriorated parts were reconstructed. The project was successful because the investor, the Municipality of Ljubljana, showed the right amount of interest and understanding of the increased value of the villa due to the uncovered paintings. Such cases represent an exception rather

than a rule in our practice. A great many discovered murals are not treated according to the conservation standards. Art nouveau murals, discovered while renovating a public house in Brežice, were preserved only in documentation, while the original was never presented due to opposing opinions. The lack of interest and concern was the main reason why the discovered art nouveau paintings in Vila Veselova 11 in Ljubljana were destroyed. The investors who are able to recognize the artistic and historical value of murals can normally increase their value in commercial terms as well.

EXAMPLE OF CONSERVATION-RESTORATION:  
PAINTED ADVERTISEMENTS ON THE FAÇADE  
OF AN OLD GUEST HOUSE IN LJUBLJANA

In the case of renovation of the façade on Kolodvorska 8, a 150-year-old guesthouse in Ljubljana, the owners were thrilled when advertising signs with decorative paintings were discovered. Some of the discovered signs were captured in an old photograph of the house from 1935. The signs were in a very bad condition. In the past, two of the uncovered signs advertised the sale of beer and vine. Sadly, due to the lack of finances and data for proper reconstruction, these two paintings were not exposed. They were thoroughly documented. This decision resulted from the fact that even more interesting paintings were uncovered on both sides of the front door. A sign 'Restaurant, Old Carpenter Hostelry' with a carpenter painted in his workshop was uncovered on the right side of the door. The sign was repeated on the left side of the door, where the central field was decorated with a scene of still life. Both signs were painted in oil, and the paint layer was full of craquelures. Some parts of the paintings were seriously damaged because of later electric installation and previous renovations of the façade. Recent layers were removed mechanically and chemically until the paintings were fully cleaned. All lacunas were filled



14. Paintings on the façade of Kolodvorska 8 – Old Carpenters Restaurant – after completed restoration interventions, photo by Tjaša Pristov, 2012  
Pastato Kolodvorska g. 8 – Senojo dailidžiu restorano – fasado tapyba po restauracijos



15. Monumental murals by Slavko Pengov in Villa Bled (Tito's former residence), photo by Blaž Šeme, 2013

Monumentali Slavko Pengovo sienų tapyba Bledo viloje (buvusi Tito rezidencija)

with lime mortar and the missing parts of colour were locally retouched. Having finished the façade renovation and painting restoration, the owners mentioned the new findings in their accommodation offers. The visitors and guests, especially those from abroad, appreciate the atmosphere of this old inn [ill. 14].

#### WALL PAINTINGS OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the first two decades after World War II some monumental murals in the style of Socialist Realism were painted in public and residential buildings in Slovenia. The most significant are the works by Riko Debenjak (1908–1987) in Rio and Ljudska restavracija restaurants in Ljubljana, and by Slavko Pengov (1908–1966) in the former residence of the

Yugoslav president Tito in Bled, Municipal Assembly in Nova Gorica, the Parliament, the Parliament House in Ljubljana and the former Faculty of Mining on Aškerčeva cesta in Ljubljana. Other authors – Maksim Sedej (1909–1974), Nikolaj Omersa (1911–1981), Marij Pregelj (1913–1967), Stane Kregar (1905–1973), Zoran Didek (1910–1975), Evgen Sajovic (1913–1986), Čoro Škodlar (1902–1996), Rajko Slapernik (1896–1975), Dore Klemenčič (1911–1988) and Miha Maleš (1903–1987) – created mural paintings in secular buildings in different locations all over Slovenia, but to a much lesser extent.<sup>15</sup> These paintings have not been well documented and studied yet, and many of them are

<sup>15</sup> Donovan Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš: monumentalne stenske poslikave socialističnega realizma" (Slovene Engineers of Human Souls: The Monumental Murals of Socialist Realism), in: *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, 44, 2008, p. 118.

already destroyed, sometimes deliberately removed or covered, often 'with the purpose to erase, forget, or at least suppress a certain period of history'.<sup>16</sup> While Debenjak's paintings in both restaurants do not exist anymore, the monumental works by Pengov are still preserved [ill. 15]. In terms of preservation of paintings, a positive example is the conservation-restoration of Pengov's mural painting in the Parliament House in Ljubljana in 2010. A somewhat younger author of mural paintings in Slovenia is Ive Šubic (1922–1989), and his daughter Maja Šubic (b. 1965) continues the tradition of painting in secular buildings, especially in the Škofja Loka area.

## CONCLUSION

From the Roman times to the present days Slovenia boasts a rich tradition of mural painting in secular buildings. Through the centuries figural and simple decorative paintings were painted on the walls of rural and urban houses, noble villas, manors, castles and public buildings. Often, especially in earlier periods, painters and wall painting workshops would arrive from abroad, particularly from Italy and northern countries, and would introduce new ideas, materials and techniques of painting. The majority of murals are painted on lime plaster in true fresco, lime or secco techniques. Sometimes, other techniques such as painting on wallpapers and canvases (particularly in the early baroque period) were also applied. Unfortunately, a great deal of knowledge of making a technically good and durable fresco was lost in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century. For that reason many paintings from later periods are more vulnerable than medieval and baroque murals. A number of mural paintings of secular buildings are preserved only in fragments; some of them were demounted from their original walls (during excavations in the case of

paintings from classical antiquity) and are stored or displayed in other locations. An unknown number of paintings are still hidden under the layers of plaster, limewash and overpaint. The state of preservation and endangerment of the paintings that are still visible on the walls of secular buildings is very different and depends on many factors. Future archaeological and conservation-restoration discoveries in combination with classical and technical art historical studies, as well as broader interdisciplinary research will surely improve the actual knowledge about the extent of mural painting production through the centuries, the history of secular buildings and their mural paintings, artists' workshops and their connections, painting materials and techniques, the condition and endangerment of buildings and paintings, etc. For that purpose it would be necessary to build a common database of interdisciplinary data on mural paintings with a possibility of free access for researchers and conservators.

Some examples of conservation-restoration of newly discovered mural paintings in mostly private urban houses that are presented in the paper could point out some basic conservation-restoration methods, approaches and dilemmas. In the beginning, before any conservation-restoration treatment, thorough documentation of the condition of the building and painting is usually made. It is especially important in private decorated rooms in the cases when the risk of destroying a painting is high and demounting with transfer is not possible. Regrettably, there is not much interest for restoring discovered murals among private investors, because restoration considerably increases the size of the initial investment and presents a certain amount of limitations of usage and further maintenance. Additional artistic and historical value, unfortunately, is not enough to encourage the investors to expose the newly discovered paintings. In these cases it is necessary to preserve the painting under various superimposed and overlying layers. In the worst-case scenario, due to architectural, static

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



or installation renovation paintings are destroyed. A thorough stratigraphic analysis of paint layers and plasters is also important and helps to recognize all the relevant painted layers correctly and, in the case of multiple layers of painted decorations, to decide which layer should be preserved. Graphical reconstructions of the missing parts and graphical simulations of the entire decorated interiors that can be made after the analysis can sometimes help to convince the owner to preserve the decoration. When using new materials during the cleaning, consolidation and reintegration procedures, conservators-restorers normally follow the basic conservation principles of compatibility, reversibility and sustainability of materials and minimum intervention.<sup>17</sup> In the case of colour integration, the basic principle is minimal and neutral retouching and discerning additions from the original parts. Due to the owners' aesthetic expectations, mimetic reintegrations are also often applied in such cases. When no other solution to preserve the painting is possible, a decision to demount and replace it with a copy can be made.

In the early beginnings of organized protection of cultural monuments,<sup>18</sup> the conservation of mural paintings in secular buildings was not a priority, since much more attention was obviously paid to sacral medieval monuments. However, in the last decades many larger and more important murals of secular buildings were conserved-restored under the auspices

of the present-day Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia. In general, the majority of conservation-restoration interventions on wall paintings are performed when projects are co-funded by the Municipality, the Ministry of Culture or European funds. Generally, these buildings are offices, museums or other public premises. But when it comes to the conservation-restoration of a private building where additional funding is not possible, the presentation of discovered paintings usually does not occur. Therefore, the greatest problems that the conservators-restorers of the regional offices of the Institute are facing daily are the lack of money and resources, time limitations for executing certain works, and the lack of interest in exposing or maintaining wall paintings, especially if they are decorative wall paintings from the late nineteenth or the twentieth century.

The future responsibility of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia is to adequately evaluate decorative paintings from later periods as an important piece of the mosaic of recent history. In order to increase public interest, it would be necessary to inform the public about the findings and examples of good practice more frequently. As one of the important measures, the Institute began a systematic collecting of stencil patterns, uncovered decorative paintings and samples made with paint rollers. The aim is to create the foundation for a database that will allow constant upgrading in the hope that the samples not only will remain a documentary material, but also will continue to adorn both public and residential premises. Although the collection and processing of the data is still in the initial stage, it presents a possibility of maintaining a variety of patterns on a larger scale and a better overview of the situation.

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17 However, in practice these principles are hardly applied in their entirety. Especially younger conservator-restorers in Slovenia nowadays have a relatively good knowledge of a wider range of conservation-restoration materials, methods and basic conservation-restoration principles. Still, different reasons, especially stressful time limits and a lack of experience can sometimes lead a conservator-restorer to make a wrong decision (e.g. the use of inadequate cleaning methods).

18 Organised protection of monuments began with the appointment of honorary conservators in the Central Committee for the Study and Maintenance of Structural Monuments of Vienna for the most part in the present-day Slovenia from 1850 onwards, and especially with the establishment of the Office for Kranjska (Carniola) in 1913.

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## PASAULIETINIŲ PASTATŲ SIENŲ TAPYBOS KONSERVAVIMAS SLOVĖNIJOJE

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### SANTRAUKA

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: konservavimas, restauravimas, išsaugojimas, sienų tapyba, pasaulietiniai pastatai, Slovėnija.

Slovėnijoje yra gausu sienų tapybos pasaulietiniuose pastatuose pavyzdžių. Jau antikinės Romos laikais daugelio (senovinių Emonos, Celeia, Poetovio, Neviodunum, Carnium ir kt.) miestų namų ir kaimo vilų sienas puošė tapyba. Žinoma, jos išliko tik fragmentai. Be daugybės antikinės sienų tapybos fragmentų, aptiktų per archeologinius kasinėjimus, ankstyviausi išlikę pavyzdžiai yra pilių, dvarų ir miesto namų vėlyvųjų viduramžių ir renesansinė sienų tapyba. Kai kurie vaizdingi senovinių miestų, tokių kaip Škofja Loka ir Radovljica, tapyti namų fasadai taip pat yra to paties laikotarpio. Dar daugiau Slovėnijoje yra baroko ir vėlesnių laikotarpių pasaulietinių pastatų sienų tapybos, nuo nesudėtingo liaudies meno pavyzdžių kaimo namų fasaduose iki įmantresnės tapybos miesto ir aristokratų rezidencijose. Pilyse ir dvaruose esama nemažai įdomių renesansinės ir baroko iliuzionistinės lubų tapybos pavyzdžių. XIX–XX a. buvo sukurta daugybė pasaulietinės sienų

tapybos visuomeniniuose (teatruose, operos teatruose, muziejuose, galerijose, vyriausybinuose bei švietimo ir kt.) ir privačiuose pastatuose. Per pirmus du dešimtmečius po Antrojo pasaulinio karo visuomeniniuose ir gyvenamuosiuose pastatuose taip pat buvo sukurta socialistinio realizmo stiliaus monumentalių sienų tapybos kūrinių.

1913 m. Slovėnijoje buvo organizuota kultūros paveldo apsauga. Pradėta nuo sakralinių pastatų (vienuolynų, bažnyčių, koplyčių ir šventyklų) viduramžių bei vėlesnių laikotarpių sienų tapybos paveldo apsaugos ir konservavimo bei restauravimo. Tik pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais, prižiūrint Slovėnijos kultūros paveldo apsaugos institutui, buvo konservuota ir restauruota daugiau sienų tapybos kūrinių pasaulietiniuose pastatuose. Daugeliu atvejų konservavimo ir restauravimo projektams vadovavo instituto Restauracijos centro specialistai. Tarp keleto didžiausių projektų galima paminėti Liublianoje neseniai atliktą Operos teatro, Parlamento rūmų ir Nacionalinės galerijos sienų tapybos konservavimą ir restauravimą. Vis dėlto daugeliui sienų tapybos kūrinių trūksta tinkamos priežiūros. Privačiuose miesto ir kaimo namuose yra daug sienų tapybos pavyzdžių, kurie yra pavojingos būklės dėl nepakankamos priežiūros, netinkamos renovacijos ar paprasčiausiai pastatų savininkų pagarbos paveldui trūkumo. Be to, daugelis privačių ar valstybinių dvarų ir pilių su savo meno paveldu vis dar tebėra apleisti ir nyksta.