



BASILICA MINOR THE VISITATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY, SVATÝ KOPEČEK NEAR OLOMOUC

SADOVÉ NÁMĚSTÍ 1/1, OLOMOUC

DESCRIPTION OF WORK: ROYAL CANONRY
OF PREMONSTRATENSAINS, STRAHOV

CONTRACTOR: GEMA ART GROUP A.S.

IMPLEMENTATION: 05/2007 – 01/2010



The aim of the project was the preservation of the interior of one of the most visited pilgrimage sites in the Czech Republic – the Basilica of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary in Svatý Kopeček (Holy Hill) near Olomouc. All restoration work was carried out under the management of the company GEMA ART GROUP a. s.

The origins of the pilgrimage site go back to 1629 when the building of a chapel first started. The impetus came from an Olomouc burgher, Jan Andřýsek, who, according to legend, had a vision of the Virgin Mary on the site. The land belonged to the nearby monastery of Hradisko, where the Order of Premonstratensians was resident. The abbot of the monastery and the Bishop of Olomouc agreed to the building, but the chapel had a short lifespan as it was burnt down by the Swedish army during the Thirty Years War. The chapel was soon restored but was too small for its purpose as pilgrims coming to Svatý Kopeček constantly grew in number. At the suggestion of the then abbot of the Hradisko monastery, Bedřich Sedlák – Sedlecius – a proposal was made to further the renown of the place by building a new capacious church. The building took the whole decade (1669 till 1679). The author of the design was Giovanni Pietro Tencalla. In 1714 the Italian architect Domenico Martinelli added one story buildings to the sides of the church. Further alterations took place between 1721 and 1732, when the church was given a new interior, the work of the Italian sculptor and stucco master Baldassar Fontana. Frescos by Johann Christoph Handke were added in 1731.

The Basilica of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary underwent almost complete renovation in which the company GEMA ART GROUP a.s. took a significant part. The purpose of the work was to preserve the endangered parts of the ornamentation and in general recreate the original concept of the whole space. All interventions were subject to consultation with conservation experts.

Restoration work took place from May 2007 till January 2010 and the project raised considerable interest in the media.



Pendetives – after restoration



Decorative elements – before restorations



Decorative elements – work in progress



Painting in the Chapel – before restoration



Painting in the Chapel – after restoration



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RESTORATION OF THE STUCCOES AND THE SCULPTURAL PARTS

The stuccoes and the sculptural ornamentation in the main nave, the presbytery and the dome were in a reasonably good state. There was mostly localized minor damage such as cracks caused by masonry movement during the artillery attack by the Red Army in 1945 or by leaking rain water. The situation was much worse in the chapels, especially in the Chapel of the Guardian Angel, where the cracks caused by dampness were most extensive. Some parts of the stuccoes were also broken or disturbed.

The stucco decorations were first cleaned using distilled water, steam generator, brushes, vacuum cleaners and special sponges, thus removing the disintegrated layers of the paintings. A special water based chemical solution was used as a fixative. Missing parts of the stuccoes were replaced using a slaked lime based material. Coloured parts of the stuccoes were restored according to alterations made in the first half of the 18th century, using grey-green and darker grey shades originally found in the areas of the main nave, presbytery and the chapel. An ochre hue was chosen for the surrounding area of the frescoes in the lunettes.

Some sculptures also suffered localized damage. Pieces were broken off and due to the dampness in the chapels and the main nave the iron armatures holding parts of the sculptures together (such as the head, arms and legs) corroded away and the sculptures fell apart. It was necessary to take them to pieces, which were reconstructed, treated with an anti-corrosive agent and then glued back into the original form. Some later alterations were removed to restore the sculptures to their original appearance. The six sculptures of angels – cherubs, six putti on the cloud and the dove in the lantern of the dome were also restored back to their original form. The later-added silver paint was removed and replaced by the original ornamentation using pure gold.



Stucco sculpture – before restoration



Stucco sculpture – after restoration



Stucco sculpture – before restoration



Stucco sculpture – after restoration



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RESTORATION OF THE FRESCOES

Restoration of the frescoes pertained mainly to the areas of the main nave, the presbytery, the dome and the eight chapels. The experts encountered disturbance to frescoes due to grease and dirt deposits, minor to medium cracking and loss of plaster. The deposit layer distorted both the colours and the structure of the frescoes. During the restoration of the individual parts of the painting several techniques were used depending on varying colour content and size of the area and an overall harmony of the whole was always a consideration.

The surface of the frescoes was first mechanically cleaned using distilled water and a special India Rubber sponge suitable for dry cleaning of the frescoes. Disintegrated parts were consolidated using a water acrylic dispersion over Japanese tissue paper. In some parts of the paintings the application had to be repeated several times.

In some cases it was decided to remove more recent layers of over painting in order to preserve the original style of the interior. Defects were in-filled and re-touched using mineral pigments or oil paints.

A somewhat different approach was applied to the fresco restoration in the side chapels, which were more extensively damaged, for two main reasons: oil paint had been used during latter restorations and the roofs of the chapels suffered more damage than the roof over the main body of the church, which led to greater leakage of rain water and residual dampness inside the chapels which continued even after the roofs were repaired. The restorers first undertook a several weeks long dehumidification process using electric dehumidifiers. During the actual restoration of the frescoes in the chapels it became necessary to secure the worst affected parts right back to the foundation. The oil paint was consolidated using synthetic resins and a power spatula. All defects were in-filled in a similar way to the rest of the restored frescoes in the church.





Chapel of st. Joachim



Cleaning test paintings



Paintings after cleansing and puttying



Lunets after puttying



Paintings in the Chapels of st. Joachim after restoration