



Conservation and restoration of a modernist mosaic from Lluís Bru or Mario Maragliano: a new type of chromatic reintegration?

Núria Avecilla Palau - avecillapn@diba.cat Oficina de Patrimoni Cultural (OPC), Diputació de Barcelona
(in collaboration with Florencia Florido – florencia.f@zoho.com)

Introduction

In 2015, the OPC's conservation department performed an on-site intervention of a modernist mosaic located at the Casa-Museu Lluís Domènech i Montaner, in the sea-side town of Canet de Mar. In origin, the mosaic decorated a mirrored entryway-furniture piece but, some time in the past, it was transferred to a new support made of painted wood. The condition assessment primarily documented damage of the mosaic's internal iron structure, which had expanded along the upper corners due to corrosion mechanisms triggered by internal and external causes. Consequently, this force fractured the overlying mortar of the tesserae, which in turn were detached from the expansion area and eventually got lost.



Details before and after the intervention

Objectives

Following the diagnosis, the initial proposal included the replacement of the internal iron structure. However, this option was ruled out given the constraints of such effort-and-time-consuming process, which would indeed put the mosaic at risk. Finally, it was determined that the most immediate and effective solution should consist of a minimal approach with an eye to treating the corrosion and visually simulating the missing glass and ceramic tesserae with no 3D reintegration.

Treatment methodology

- General cleaning of the mosaic.
- Cleaning and inhibition of the exposed iron structure corrosion.
- Consolidation and repair of tesserae blistering.
- Filling of the setting-bed lacunae.
- Protective coating of the exposed original setting-bed mortar.
- Chromatic reintegration of the tesserae over the original imprints.

Conclusions

This intervention proved satisfactory regarding the proposed objectives and the overall criteria of reversibility and retreatability, given the fact that the protection coating applied to the mortar acts as a buffer and favours both the eventual removal of the pictorial layer and further treatments.

Notwithstanding that, there were physical limitations during the chromatic reintegration phase that relate to the fact that work had to be performed with the mosaic in horizontal position and under different lighting conditions than the exhibition's. Moreover, in view of the optical reintegration solution applied, the museum was recommended to point the light beams in a frontal manner so as to prevent shadow casting. Artwise, a close-up visual examination of detached tesserae showed that the blue pieces were made of double-sided enamelled white ceramic, which is the same technique that was used by Lluís Brú and Mario Maragliano at Barcelona's modernist Sant Pau i Santa Creu Hospital, which provides clues to the mosaic's currently unknown authorship.

