

Ducal Hall in the Apostolic Palace



**ONGOING RESTORATION REPORT
FEBRUARY 2024**

Restoration Procedures

Restoration of the paintings of the vault, lunettes, frieze, and Bernini curtains

Aula Secunda

Since February 2023, following the results of the analysis of the Scientific Research Laboratory and the various cleaning tests, the cleaning of the paintings of the Vault of the Aula Secunda and the marble coats of arms started.

The surface of the Aula Secunda Vault is mostly painted on plaster with a base of lime and pozzolan, on which the white background was painted with lime. Only a few portions were painted on Roman stucco plaster, such as the entire Vault of the Aula Tertia. Moreover, the analysis revealed the use of valuable ancient pigments (lacquer, cinnabar, minium) and several detected previous restoration interventions. It was, therefore, necessary to carry out a calibrated and very targeted cleaning, depending on the problems, to remove the blackened layer on the pictorial surface.

From April until early August 2023, restorers performed depth consolidations of the Bernini drapery and carried out additional cleaning tessellations to better study the older painted layers. By comparing the tessellations with the eighteenth-century engraving showing the original design of the curtain with the arms of Alexander VII, it was found that the painting matched the ancient design.

The restorers made a rendering to understand how the drapery, currently chromatically linked to the walls from the 1900s, was instead anciently connected to the paintings of the Aula Secunda and Aula Tertia Vaults.









Current state of the Bernini curtain





Details of the eighteenth-century engraving and the corresponding cleaning areas



Details of the eighteenth-century engraving and the corresponding cleaning areas



Rendering of the Bernini curtain

In December 2023, the cleaning of the vault of the Aula Secunda was completed, and the cleaning of the frieze below, composed of panels with beautiful landscape paintings to which allegorical female figures alternate. Unfortunately, this appears to be the most complex area of the entire hall, as the state of conservation of the paintings is severely compromised and requires more effort to solve the various problems. As it is a transitional area between the sixteenth-century decoration, the original vaulting and frieze, and the nineteenth/twentieth-century integrations of the walls, it has numerous remakes designed to reintegrate damaged and now lost parts. Therefore, the aesthetic restoration will mainly focus on linking and connecting different parts to recompose the figurative unity of the ensemble, which is currently compromised.

Many parts of the original decoration had been obliterated by gray-colored layers, as in the sloping surfaces at the base of the window openings, whose 17th-century faux-marble squares, painted after the enlargement at the bottom of the openings, had been completely obscured.



The discovery of the seventeenth-century decoration under the gray tint in the window wells



Cleaning of the 16th-century decoration of a window compartment



The cleaning of a landscape

Still within the window wells, the sixteenth-century parts recover their bright and vivid colors in harmony with the decoration of the vault. The very high pictorial quality of the landscape paintings is revived by the cleaning, although the paintings in this area of the walls are very damaged, from cracks and nail holes inflicted at different times.



Cleaning the landscape with nocturnal scene



Detail of the elephant in diffuse and grazing light

Currently, the operations to consolidate the entire frieze and clean the scenes have been completed and the gaps are being filled in, and this will be followed by the pictorial reintegration.



Gap plastering

In the cleaning carried out on the allegorical figures, the restorer had to try to connect the sixteenth-century parts with the darker-colored nineteenth/twentieth-century remake parts, which affect all the heads, redone for the changes in the capitals. With the pictorial reintegration, the restorer will have to recreate a pictorial continuity between the parts of different shades.



One of the female allegorical figures after cleaning

At the same time, cleaning tests are continuing on the various surfaces of the Bernini drapery, where restorers have been using lasers for some tests on the stucco of the putti, which have provided excellent results.



Cleaning using a laser



Laser cleaning tests on one of putti in stucco



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