
VERILOR

Conservation of gold-imitating varnishes applied to decorative bronzes from the 19th century. Definition of associated cultural values and identification of ancient restorations

OBJECTIVES

Imitation of gilding by applying a gold varnish on decorative bronzes was a common practice in the 19th century. In order to evaluate their cultural values and consider their preservation, the project objectives are :

- Reconstructing the technological and artistic evolution of gold varnishes during the 19th century : types of production and varnishing processes including materials and mixtures, gestures, tools and precise recipes for the production and application of varnishes (mixtures, heating, chronology, duration of operations, etc.)
- Analyze the impact of socio-professional organization and the economic and cultural context on this production
- Develop a simple and inexpensive method of discriminating synthetic varnishes dating from the 20th century from original 19th century varnishes.

PROGRAM

- Historical research on the technological and artistic evolution of varnishing as well as the socio-professional and socio-economic context associated with the varnishing practice : related objects will be located and written sources, mostly archives dating from the 19th century, will be studied (statistical documents, directories, workshop archives, inventory lists after death or bankruptcy of craftsmen...)
- Experimental approach for the identification of synthetic restorative coatings applied to brass.

RESULTS

The main deliverables of the project will be :

- UV reference images which can be consulted by professionals in conservation-restoration to identify synthetic varnishes and waxes on ancient (varnished) copper alloys
- A contribution to databases archiving analytical reference spectra (FTIR)
- A chronology of gold varnish types which were used throughout the 19th century
- A summary of trends observed in terms of socio-professional and socio-economic developments
- A methodology for identifying synthetic protection systems on brass for conservators-restorers (decision tree).



Fig. : Paire de lampes à huile, anonyme, fer, tôle peinte, laiton et bronze, 1820-1850, AA.47.B.10.a et b, coll. Musée Historique Lausanne

FUNDING

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DURATION

18 months
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