The transformation of Adriaen Thomasz. Key's Portrait of William of Orange

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Abstract: When the iconic portrait of William of Orange by Adriaen Thomasz Key was brought to the conservation studio of the Mauritshuis, examination of the radiograph showed that part of the painting was not original. Prior to the painting's arrival in the Mauritshuis, the left plank of the original oak support had been lost or removed, and replaced by another plank. Also, the whole painted surface, except for the face, was broadly overpainted. During the recent treatment, the conservators made the decision to remove most of the overpaint, and retouch the painting in an illusionistic way. Different options were considered for re-integrating the addition. This paper discusses the ethical and historical aspects that played an important role in the decisions to restore this painting.

Keywords: complete reintegration, historical context, ethical considerations, Mowilith 20

La transformación del retrato de William of Orange de Adriaen Thomasz Key

Resumen: Cuando el retrato icónico de William of Orange por Adriaen Thomasz Key fue llevado al estudio de conservación de Mauritshuis, el examen de la radiografía mostró que parte de la pintura no era original. Antes de que la pintura llegara a Mauritshuis, la tabla izquierda del soporte original de roble se había perdido o retirado y reemplazado por otra tabla. Además, toda la superficie pintada, excepto lo cara, se pintó ampliamente. Durante el tratamiento reciente, los conservadores tomaron la decisión de eliminar la mayor parte del exceso de repintura y retocar la pintura de manera ilusionista. Se consideraron diferentes opciones para la reintegración de la adición. Este artículo discute los aspectos éticos e históricos que jugaron un papel importante en las decisiones de restaurar esta pintura.

Palabras clave: reintegración completa, contexto histórico, consideraciones éticas, Mowilith 20

A transformação do retrato de William of Orange de Adriaen Thomasz Key

Resumo: Quando o retrato icónico de William of Orange por Adriaen Thomasz Key foi levado ao estúdio de conservação do Mauritshuis, o exame da radiografia mostrou que parte da pintura não era original. Antes da chegada da pintura ao Mauritshuis, a prancha esquerda do suporte original de carvalho havia sido perdida ou removida e substituída por outra prancha. Além disso, toda a superfície pintada, exceto a face, foi amplamente pintada. Durante o tratamento recente, os conservadores tomaram a decisão de remover a maior parte da repintura excessiva e retocar a pintura de maneira ilusionista. Diferentes opções foram consideradas para a reintegração da adição. Este artigo discute os aspetos éticos e históricos que desempenharam um papel importante nas decisões de restaurar esta pintura.

Palavras-chave: reintegração completa, contexto histórico, considerações éticas, Mowilith 20

Introduction

The portrait of William of Orange (1533-1584) by Adriaen Thomasz. Key in the collection of the Mauritshuis was brought to the Mauritshuis conservation studio for an aesthetic treatment in 2008 [Figure 1a]. The old retouching has darkened and had a very oxidized, discoloured and cracked varnish layer. The painting was disfigured by countless, discoloured retouching's. In preparation of the recent treatment, the painting was examined with non-destructive research methods: stereomicroscopy, handheld X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (HH-XRF, Tracer turbo Bruker, operated by Annelies van Loon and Anna van Millegen), and Macro X-radiographic fluorescence spectroscopy (MA-XRF Axil scanner, operated by Nouschka de Keyser, University of Antwerp), X-radiography, infrared imaging and photography, including ultraviolet-induced luminescence imaging. In addition, several cross-sections were collected (examined by Anna van Milligen and Annelies van Loon).

During the preliminary research, it became evident that the left plank of the small painting (48,1 x 34,1 cm) had been replaced during an earlier restoration treatment, before the painting entered the Mauritshuis collection. The oak support, originally comprised of two vertical planks, had probably sustained significant damage. The left plank had been lost or removed and a new plank had been attached to the left side. This addition, which is almost 25% of the total width of the painting, had been painted in a dark colour to match the background, and the sitter's shoulder was vaguely indicated. The original part of the painting, which includes the sitter's face and the rest of his upper body, was in relatively good condition; however, many damages had also been broadly retouched and overpainted to cover other damages, including a crack in the support which ran through the sitter's face.

This paper will explain the importance of this portrait of William of Orange, as it probably was the prototype for many may have had in. other versions/and copies made during the 16th and 17th century. Then the stages of the recent restoration treatment (2008 to 2018) are described, along with the ethical questions that were raised. One overarching question was: how to restore the harmony of this incomplete painting while respecting its age and character (Digney-Peer et al 2012: 608)?

Historical context: William of Orange and Adriaen Thomasz. Key

Prince William of Orange, on account of his statesmanship and political choices, is considered to be the Founding Father of the Netherlands. He was Stadholder of the Netherlands, and one of the most important aristocrats at the Spanish court, when Emperor Charles V (or King Charles I of Spain) ruler of the Netherlands stepped down to give way to his son Philip. Following Philip's reign, the Protestant population was severely persecuted in favour of Roman-Catholicism.

The Eighty Years War (1568-1648) included many battles between the Dutch cities and the Spanish soldiers. William of Orange became the leading aristocrat to fight for a freedom of religion. From 1577 to 1580, William settled in Antwerp with his wife and children. In Antwerp he turned to Adriaen Thomasz. Key (c. 1544, Antwerp – after 1589, Antwerp) to paint portraits of himself and his family. Adriaen Thomasz. Key mainly worked for rich merchants and the aristocracy (Jonckheere 2007: 19-22, 52). He had an extreme eye for detail and illusionism. No mention is made of the artist after 1589 (Jonckheere 2007: 22-23).
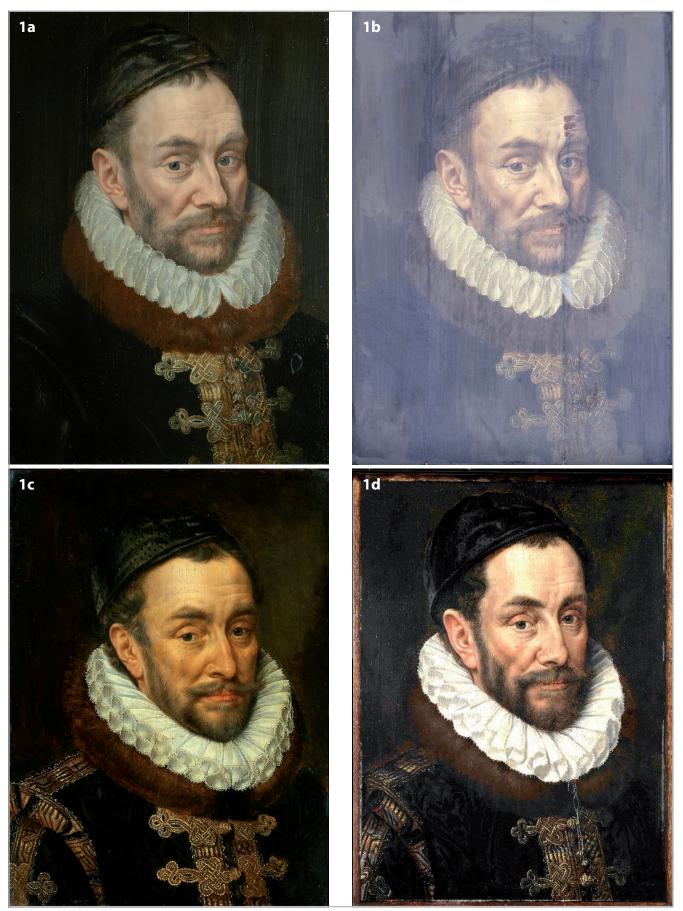
The Mauritshuis portrait of William of Orange

William was about 45 years old when Adriaen Thomasz. Key painted this portrait. Unfortunately, there are no documents relating to this portrait commission. The composition is comparable to the formal, stately portraits head and shoulder portraits from the end of the 16th century, and may indicate his self-chosen role as a diplomat. It shows him as a wise and thoughtful man, turned slightly to the left. He is dressed in a dark robe which is decorated with gold embroidery or braid, and a fur collar with a millstone collar. The plain cap on his head is a skullcap, generally worn in inside the house. Although the outfit appears dark and sober, it would have been extremely costly (Milligen, van 2008: 18, note 1).

There are several version of this portrait (described below), but Key's fast, confident working process suggests that the Mauritshuis version was painted form life: that is, with William of Orange present. During the recent technical examination, a minimal, sketchy underdrawing and thin undermodelling of the face were detected with infrared reflectography (Osiris Camera), and the paint layers have unusually loose and lively brushwork. The Mauritshuis portrait probably served as a prototype for a number of copies that were given to his supporters or like-minded leaders to show his political power and important role against Spain. Adriaen Thomasz. Key was one of the most significant artists in Antwerp. A document dated 1582 shows that his very successful studio regularly made series of copies of aristocratic portraits for collectors (Jonckheere 2007: 31, 60-63). Because of the loose and lively brushwork, the Mauritshuis portrait can probably be considered as the very prototype after which all other copies were made, both the head and shoulder type and half-length portraits (Lademacher 1999-2000, Vol. 1: 35; Jonckheere 2007: 100-101). Also the fact that it probably remained in the Stadtholder collection supports this idea (Sluyter 1993: 81).

Many copies of this portrait are known, not all of them painted in Thomasz. Key studio. Some copies are close in style and date – like the paintings in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (SK-A-3841_00) and in the Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum Madrid (Inv.n. º 208(1928.70)) [Figure 1c-d]. These two paintings have the same size as the portrait in the Mauritshuis, and all appear to derive from one model drawing (Milligen, van 2008: 25). Other copies depict William

Figure 1.- 1a Adriaen Thomasz. Key, Portrait of William of Orange, Before treatment. 1b Before treatment; Ultraviolet fluorescence. 1c Adriaen Thomasz. Key, Portrait of William of Orange, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. 1d Adriaen Thomasz. Key, William I, Prince of Orange, Known as William the Silent, Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

of Orange in slightly different clothing. The common feature in all these paintings is the application of gold embroidery or braid, and a fur and millstone collar. Most are about the same size, while others are slightly larger and appear more formal: like the copy by Daniel van de Queborn, ca. 1588, 110 x 84 cm, City Hall in Arnemuiden. (Milligen van 2008: 21). During the battle against the Spanish rule William continued to be considered a hero in and copies of varying quality that were painted (long) after William of Orange's death.

Conservation History

Files in the conservation department of the Mauritshuis contain restoration documentation of this painting as early as 1841. Since then, surface dirt removal was documented four times. In 1891 the varnish was hersteld (probably re-saturated) by the Berlin restorer Alois Hauser. In 1954 the painting underwent an unspecified treatment by Johannes Traas. Between 1963 and 1965, conservator Luitzen Kuiper notes that the original panel had been thinned and an additional plank was adhered to the reverse with its grain perpendicular to the original. He removed the auxiliary support the painting that had been adhered to the reverse, because it appeared to cause splits in the original panel and reinforced the split on the reverse [Figure 2a-b]. He also thinned a tinted varnish that had been applied by a previous conservator and applied an extra layer of dammar. The last treatment was carried out in 1995 when surface dirt was removed and an additional layer of varnish applied.

Restoration treatment of the Mauritshuis Portrait

At the turn of this century, the portrait of William of Orange was earmarked for restoration because it had a very thick, discoloured and cracked varnish layer and was disfigured by countless, discoloured retouching's. Using ultraviolet illumination, even more retouching's could be made visible along an old crack in the panel that extended vertically through the face, and left of the head [Figure 1b]. Examination with the stereomicroscope revealed retouching's along the crack through the face, and overpaint covering the entire background and a large part of the fur collar. Except for the area along the crack, the paint layers of the face were in good condition [Figure 2c-d]; however, the background was abraded and some areas of the fur collar had been completely lost. It was undesirable to leave the discoloured overpaint on top of the beautiful original paint layers, as they were rather crudely applied and covered original paint. Structurally the panel was stable.

The reverse showed that the panel had been thinned in a previous treatment, and that the crack had been filled to reinforce the join.

The x-radiograph of the painting shows that the narrow, left plank deviates from the main part of the painting in that it shows the presence of much heavy elements [Figure 3]. This
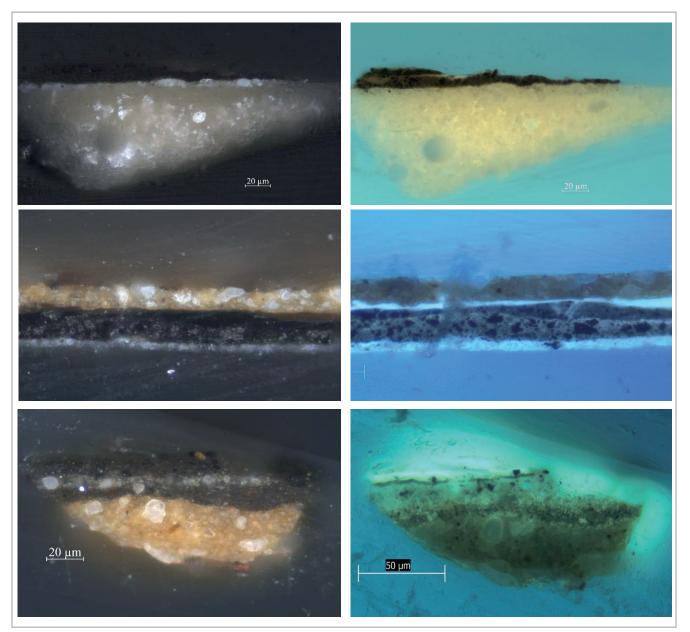

Figure 2.- Adriaen Thomasz. Key, Portrait of William of Orange, before treatment; location old splits and joins showing the filling material. 2b Reverse in Ultraviolet fluorescence, the filling appears dark. 2c Detail of the eyes showing the soft modeling of the face. The split in the panel is filled. The face is generally well preserved. The blue arrows indicate retouching that could not be removed. 2d Same detail as 3c in ultraviolet radiation

Figure 3.- Adriaen Thomasz. Key, Portrait of William of Orange, X-radiography (Image by R. Gerritsen)

Figure 4.- 4a Cross-section taken near the bottom edge to the right of the join with the added plank, showing the chalk ground layer (1), the imprimatura (2), a layer of black paint containing large black particles (3), a layer of black paint containing tiny black particles. 4b See 4a in ultraviolet radiation. 4c Cross-section taken near the bottom edge close to the join. The layer build-up is similar to 4a but chalk ground layer is missing. Instead, on the second black layer a fluorescent vanish layer (5) is visible. On top of that layer a beige layer (6) is visible. This beige layer is has the same composition as the ground layer in figure 4e. 4e Cross-section taken left of the join on the added panel. The beige ground layer (1), is followed by a dark grey layer with fine particles (2) and a second grey layer with coarse particles (3). On top of that a black layer is visible (4). The top layers consist of several varnish layers that are only visible with ultraviolet radiation (5). All cross-sections are taken by Anna van Milligen and Annelies van Loon. Images taken with a Leica microscope DM 2500M and a Zeiss Axiocam 512 by Carol Pottasch at 400x magnification in Dark field and UV.

difference indicated a structural treatment had occurred during a previous restoration campaign which involved replacement of the left plank. As it is not mentioned in the restoration documentation, we assume that this happened before 1841. During the most recent treatment several cross-sections were taken along the bottom edge to investigate the stratigraphy on either side of the join [Figure 4a-f]. The difference in the paint layer build-up is evident. The original shows an off-white ground layer, followed by a grey imprimatura and two very thin paint layers of black

paint. The first layer appears to contain relatively large charcoal particles (visual identification), while the second contains a very fine black pigments, maybe also charcoal. On the addition, the paint layers are much thicker and the build-up is different. Three layers that contained white, black and brown particles approximated the colour of the original background, but had a completely different stratigraphy and pigment composition. MA-XRF showed that the original part of the portrait has a chalk-glue ground (XRF:Ca), in keeping with the sixteenth century,

Figure 5.- 5a-c Left shows the painting during retouching with plain modulated colours. The tiny details for the embroidered decoration are more easily visible now

while the non-original addition on the left has a ground layer containing lead white and yellow earth (XRF: Pb, Fe). This difference explains why the addition appears bright white on the X-radiograph, while the original part of the panel is relatively dark. The composition of the ground and paint used on the left plank are idiosyncratic for the 16th century, and indicate it was definitely added later. The replacement of the additional plank on the left was of high quality: the oak was a good match, and alignment quite well with the original panel. Therefore, the decision was made to leave the non-original plank in place, but to thin the paint layers. Unfortunately, there are not enough year rings to perform dendrochronology of added plank.

After the technical examination and surface dirt removal, different mixtures of organic solvents were tested to remove the old dammar varnish layers and overpaint from the original part of the composition. With a relatively mild solvent mixture of ethanol and isooctane, it was impossible to remove only the varnish layers and to leave the overpaint intact. Both varnish and overpaint were removed together, which revealed the fine original paint layer. Along the bottom edge, some tiny remnants of the embroidered shoulder decoration were uncovered [figur5a-c]. These details indicated that the Mauritshuis painting originally also had gold embroidery on the shoulder similar to the embroidery on the portraits in the Rijksmuseum and the Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum. After most of the old overpaint and retouching's had been removed, it was clear that the face was in good condition, but the vulnerable brown and black paint of his costume had become abraded over time, revealing abraded areas and losses where the off-white ground layer is now visible. The overpaint on the addition extended to the right side of the join and the overpaint did not match

the original paint. The thickness of the overpaint on the unoriginal plank was also undesirable. The decision was made to also remove two layers of overpaint that were easily soluble.

Different options for retouching

The most intriguing question during the treatment was how to retouch this portrait, given the painting's historical importance and the artistic quality of the face. What should be done with the added plank? What approach to retouching and what "level of finish" is appropriate? And what to do with the added plank that shows only a vague suggestion of a contour for the shoulder. Three approaches were considered for retouching, ranging from reserved or minimal to complete reintegration (Muir 2011: 5-11).

First, a minimal approach would involve neutral toning with a modulated colour of the losses and abraded areas in the original part of the painting, and only slightly adjusting the present dark surface on the addition. Second, an approach to re-integrate the losses in the face, background and fur collar using imitative retouching – but only slightly adjusting the dark surface on the addition - would allow the viewer to enjoy the fine portrait as a whole, but clearly show which part of the painting is not original. The third approach would integrate the losses in the original part of the painting with imitative retouching, and reconstructing the sitter's "missing shoulder" to visually match the original. The most comprehensive approach would be to fully re-integrate the addition, including imitating the sitter's costume including the gilded embroidery on the shoulder. In this case, the copies mentioned above could be used as a visual source.

The conservator(s) decided to take the decisions step by step, and consider the different options at various stages during the conservation treatment.

First, a thin layer of Paraloid® B72 varnish (15% in Shellsol® A) was applied to isolate the original from the retouching's. Minute losses and irregularities, mostly along the join were filled and burnished with an agate stone, to achieve a comparable smooth surface to the painting. All of the paint losses and fills in the original part of the panel were then coloured with watercolour (chosen for its translucent character) to match the light colour of the ground layer so that all the losses had the same colour [figure 6a]. Then small losses in the mantle were toned with a darker paint, and a flesh tone was applied in the face the synthetic resin Mowilith® 20 and dry pigments [figure 6b]. These retouching's were done in a layered structure, imitating the original build-up similar to what could be seen through the microscope; i.e. a warm black and a cool black layer in the mantle. This particular resin can be used very thin as if it is watercolour, to create thin translucent retouching's. At the same time, with the right pigments, Mowilith® 20 can be used for thin, opaque retouching's. This layering of watercolour and Mowilith® 20 ensures reversibility.

After this first minimal stage, the painting had a slightly damaged, unbalanced appearance. The most impressive part, the face, is largely intact. Therefore we decided to continue to re-integrate all the losses on the original panel with imitative retouching in order to enjoy the quality of the original painting. The question was: what to do with the addition? Important factors were, that original paint on the original plank would not be covered, and that the retouching material should be easily reversible and visible from close-up. More difficult is the question: to which degree is it ethically appropriate to reconstruct a (rather large) lost part of an image?

The two paintings in the Rijksmuseum and in the Thyssen were very similar to the portrait in the Mauritshuis. As mentioned above, the tiny details of the gilded sleeve decoration that had survived along the bottom edge proved that the costume had originally resembled the two copies in the Rijksmuseum and Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum. Also, the embroidery on the shoulder are similar to each other. Despite the fact that all three paintings presumably came from Key's workshop, there were small visual differences in the decorations: the lines of the filded threads were very fine on the Thyssen portrait, comparably crude on the Rijksmuseum, and (based on the decoration in the front on the costume) more restraint on the Mauritshuis portrait. These examples helped us understand the original costume of the Mauritshuis painting (partially lost), and could be used as an example for retouching. Prior to the recent treatment, the shoulder decoration had not been included on the added plank, suggesting that either the previous restorer did not know the other paintings, or decided to not imitate the decoration.

At this stage of the restoration, the different retouching options for the shoulder– minimal, visible and imitative – were still possible. It was clear that the portrait had much to gain with a reconstruction of the missing shoulder. Photoshop reconstructions showed that the portrait would regain its monumentality [figure 6c]. Therefore the decision was made to proceed with imitative retouching in stages. The area for the sleeve and shoulder decoration was applied in a layer of gouache (Winsor & Newton) to match the base-tone of the gilded decoration. A thin layer of Paraloid® B72 was applied to saturate and isolate the gouache. The monochrome retouching added much presence to the figure [figure 6d-e]. However, a simple indication of the shoulder's form in this manner would draw the viewer's attention away from the rest of the composition, as much of the painting is very detailed. The colour of the gouache base tone was adjusted with Mowilith® 20. We began the imitative retouching by breaking up the large forms with the dark details, because it the obvious forms drew away attention from the face [figure 6f]. Step by step the details of the decoration were painted, imitating the embroidery found on his chest [figure 6g-h]. the Rijksmuseum and Thyssen provided a historically correct example of what our painting once must have looked like, which made a retouching similar to the original intention possible.

Ultimately, the decision was made to make a reconstruction of the decorated shoulder on the addition, using the copies of the portraits from the Rijksmuseum and Thyssen as a visual guide. These copies provided the most reliable example of what our painting once must have looked like, which allowed the conservator to come as close to the artist's original intention was possible.

After retouching the shoulder, the conservator decided to retouch the dress, collar and background of the addition to unify the composition. The very old, discoloured retouching's that could not be removed were adjusted in colour. Not only was the choice of black pigment to match the warm colour, but also the layer structure a crucial step, because of its effect on the final colour.

By taking the retouching step by step, it became clear that the condition of the painting and its damaged appearance affected the intention of the artist considerably, so that the delicate brush strokes could not be appreciated. By retouching the original and the added plank in an imitative way, the portrait became unified, and came closer to its original appearance. The Rijksmuseum and Thyssen portraits served as a reference point to limit the personal expression of the conservator.

Figure 6.- 6a Painting after retouching with watercolour to create a similar colour in all the losses. 6b Left shows the painting during retouching with plain modulated colours. 6c Painting before treatment with shoulder decoration from the Thyssen version in the left bottom corner. 6d Beige base-tone with gouache. 6e Gouache is coloured with brownish scumble. 6f Dark details applied to break up form. 6g Discreet amount of details to imitate embroidery. 6h Painting after treatment. 6i Ultraviolet image of painting after treatment. De dark areas show the applied retouchings

Conclusion

The portrait of William of Orange brings together three important factors. It is an image of an important statesman, by one of the best artists of his time and it is considered to be a prototype for other paintings of William of Orange. Unfortunately, the Mauritshuis painting was damaged before 1841, when the original left plank with the sitter's decorated shoulder went missing. While the addition approximated the original format of the painting, it did not adequately reconstruct the sitter's shoulder and costume. The composition therefore seemed out of balance and the portrait lost monumentality; the painting could not be enjoyed fully. The fact that the left panel had been left as an "artefact" of previous damage affected the viewer's perception of the painting.

In the recent (2008–18) treatment, different options for reconstruction the missing part of the painting were considered. Ultimately, the historical importance of the painting, as well as the high quality of the sitter's face, justified an imitative re-integration of the left plank. Even small details were reconstructed, including = the embroidered decoration on the shoulder. The Rijksmuseum and Thyssen paintings served as a reference paint determining the composition of the painting. By closely studying these two variants an objective and historically correct interpretation was possible.

A decision like this should be supported with information on the degree of restoration is available for the public, through publications, on the website or on a sign: the forthcoming exhibition 'When Art Becomes Science' (2021) at the Mauritshuis where this will be used as a case study. Following the exhibition, the museum might consider mentioning this addition in various forms, including digital information available on the website and/or multimedia tour.

The quotation of Mr. and Mrs. Mora and Paul Philippot in 1996 'A painting is a unique object that cannot be reproduced, but a damaged image makes it difficult for a viewer to experience the work of art in a meaningful way' (Albertson and Murry 2011: 82, 83), in this case rings true. By visually re-integrating the addition on the left side of this image, the treatment has allowed the viewer to fully appreciate the monumentality, historical importance and visual beauty of this important portrait of William of Orange.

Materials

Filling material: with a mixture of chalk, kaolin and MowiolR4-88, Poly (vinyl alcohol) from Sigma-Aldich Isolation varnish: Paraloid B72 10% in Shellsol A, Poly(methyl methacrylate) from Rohm and Haas

Retouching: Watercolour, Winsor & Newton, Gouache, Windsor and Newton; Synthetic resin: Mowilith 20, Polyvinyl Acetate from Kremer, mixed with 96% Ethanol to a workable mixture with the right gloss.

Final varnish: Laropal A81 16% w/w in Shellsol D40 and Shellsol A

Acknowledgments

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