

BRIEF CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PRESERVATION OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS ART

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Contemporary religious art is represented by all the paintings, sculptures, graphics, decorative art, which have religious theme and which can be used in certain circumstances as objects of worship or as purely decorative objects.

Difficulties arising from exposure or long-term storage of contemporary religious cultural heritage objects are the inherent result of instability due to the structure and properties of materials used in their preparation, aggravated by improper storage or handling conditions. The conservation of this heritage is primarily a problem of scientific research and then of technical implementation. The correlation of the studies from various fields, however, is a challenge, not only because of the great variety of materials or the existence of a multitude of methods to evaluate their characteristics, but also because of the possibility of interpreting the results or recommendations on choosing a conservation treatment considered - at some point - suitable.

The most representative works for contemporary religious art are icons.

Making icons requires the use of several techniques for preparing the support and for the painting itself, depending on the materials used and material support. Over time, alongside the traditional materials, new materials have appeared, of synthetic nature, some used since the end of the XIX century, others from the XX century.

Traditional materials used by artists are:

- for the support: dry fir or linden wood, cut into thin panels, with sleepers on the back and embossed on the front with linen cloth; other materials used for the support are canvas, glass, cardboard;
- for the ground: chalk powder and bone / skin glue or chalk powder with kaolin and leather glue;
- for the painting: natural pigments mixed with egg emulsion, tempera, gouache;
- for natural resin-based varnishes: dammar, olifa, shellac.

In contemporary religious art new materials have been introduced, materials based on synthetic polymers, which are found in all steps of creating the artwork:

- for supports: chipboard, MDF (Medium-density fiberboard), plywood;
- for primers: acrylic or vinyl resins;
- pigments in acrylic or vinyl medium;
- varnishes based on acrylic, vinyl or alkyd resins.

Acrylic, vinyl and alkyd polymeric resins have been insufficiently studied in terms of stability over time due to environmental factors and chemical compatibility with the materials used. Degradation processes can be generated by the action of: ozone, radiation from the UV - Vis spectrum, temperature, RH, polluting gases, VOC emissions. The complexity of the chemical mechanisms initiated in the materials is enhanced by the interaction between synthetic materials that are found in the whole: support, primer, pictorial layer, protective layer. The chemical instability of materials, analyzed in terms of the contribution of each factor in the general mechanism of aging is an issue that requires further debate. This is the result of the concomitant action of several factors or of newly formed degradation products, through reactions specific to the chemical degradation processes that develop in polymeric materials.

Given the fact that these materials are also used in restoration - conservation interventions, it is necessary both an evaluation of the degradation processes and a monitoring of the structural changes that occurred as an effect of the aging of the materials. In this regard, special attention is paid to the development of modern methods and techniques for stopping degradation, based on studies and research on the compatibility of interventions and materials. The goal of preserving a collection or certain objects of contemporary religious art in the long run therefore implies, first of all, rigorous scientific research.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PhD engineer **Maria GEBA** has graduated from the Faculty of Industrial Chemistry, Department of Technology of Organic Substances. After a 5-year internship at an antibiotic company, Mrs. Geba joined the Center for Research and Conservation - Restoration of Cultural Heritage within the "Moldova" National Museum Complex Iași, as an investigative chemist. With more than 40 years of experience working with cultural heritage items, she is now a senior scientific researcher, grade I, and the head of the restoration center.

