

## Krk, Church of St. Francis of Assisi / Conservation of the Sacra conversazione Altarpiece

The painting from the high altar in the church of St. Francis of Assisi in the city of Krk, portraying Franciscan saints gathered around the Virgin and Child in "sacred conversation" (*sacra conversazione*), is one of the largest Renaissance paintings on wood in Croatia (280 x 190 x 1.8 cm). Historical and art analyses indicate it was created by the workshop of Bernardino Licinio, a painter from Bergamo, active in Venice in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Within his opus, the Krk painting from 1531 is one of three preserved large altarpieces painted on wood. The first was created in 1530 for the San Vito church in Ferrara, and the second is the famous *Sacra conversazione* from 1535, painted for the Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari church in Venice.

In the inscription at the bottom of the painting MDXXXI / SVPTIB. P.F.P. CRASSOVICH. DE. VEGLA, we can read the date *Sacra conversazione* was painted and the name of the commissioner, friar Petar Krašović from the Krk monastery, a respectable member of the Conventual Franciscan Community.

In the past, several interventions were carried out on the painting to repair and conceal the damage. Even the format of the painting was reduced on two occasions by cutting off the edges. If we add four centuries of exposure to unsuitable microclimatic conditions to the above-mentioned interventions, it is clear that the painting was in very bad condition before conservation. The painted layer was peeling off, it was difficult to see what was painted because large areas were covered with overpaint, yellow varnish and other impurities, and there were cracks that indicated the stability of the wooden support was compromised.

During 2008, the altarpiece was dismantled and transported, which was a challenging process due to the large dimensions and weight of the painting. The position of the altarpiece, high on the altar, and the inability to access the back of the painting because of the wall also presented a technical problem. At the same time, extensive conservation and restoration research began that included infrared and

ultraviolet spectrum imaging and laboratory analysis. Due to the dimensions and the position of the painting, it was the first time that computer radiography was performed *in situ*. Damage to the support system and weakened joints of the wooden support were observed on X-ray images, as well as parts of the original painted layer that had been painted over, and the inscription about the restoration in the bottom part of the painting.

After the painting was transported to the workshop of the Rijeka Department for Conservation of the Croatian Conservation Institute, it was disinfected with gas to prevent further spread of xylophagous insects. Unstable parts of the painted layer were stabilized by injecting a binder and fixing it to the carrier using a thermal iron.

The cleaning was quite demanding due to a large number of interventions and layers of overpaint on the original painted layer. Recent layers of overpaint were removed and the older ones were preserved. During carpentry repairs, plank joints were strengthened and cracks were mended.

Cross supports were attached to the back of the painting with a screw system that allows the movement of wood and removes the risk of new cracks appearing. Retouching was carried out with gouache paint and finished with wood stains after varnish was applied, achieving a visual unity of the painted layer and completing the conservation and restoration process.

The painting will be returned to its original place on the high altar after the reconstruction of the church of St. Francis, and after the church has established appropriate microclimate conditions to preserve the artwork.

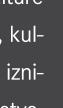
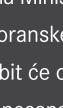
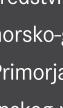
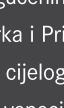
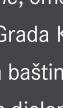
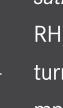
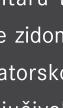
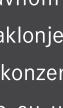
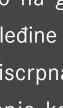
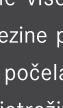
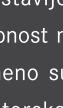
Since conservation and restoration, funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, the City of Krk and the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, of the altarpiece of the *Sacra conversazione* has finally been completed, cultural heritage of the entire Croatian Littoral will be enriched by the extraordinary artwork belonging to Renaissance paintings from Venice.

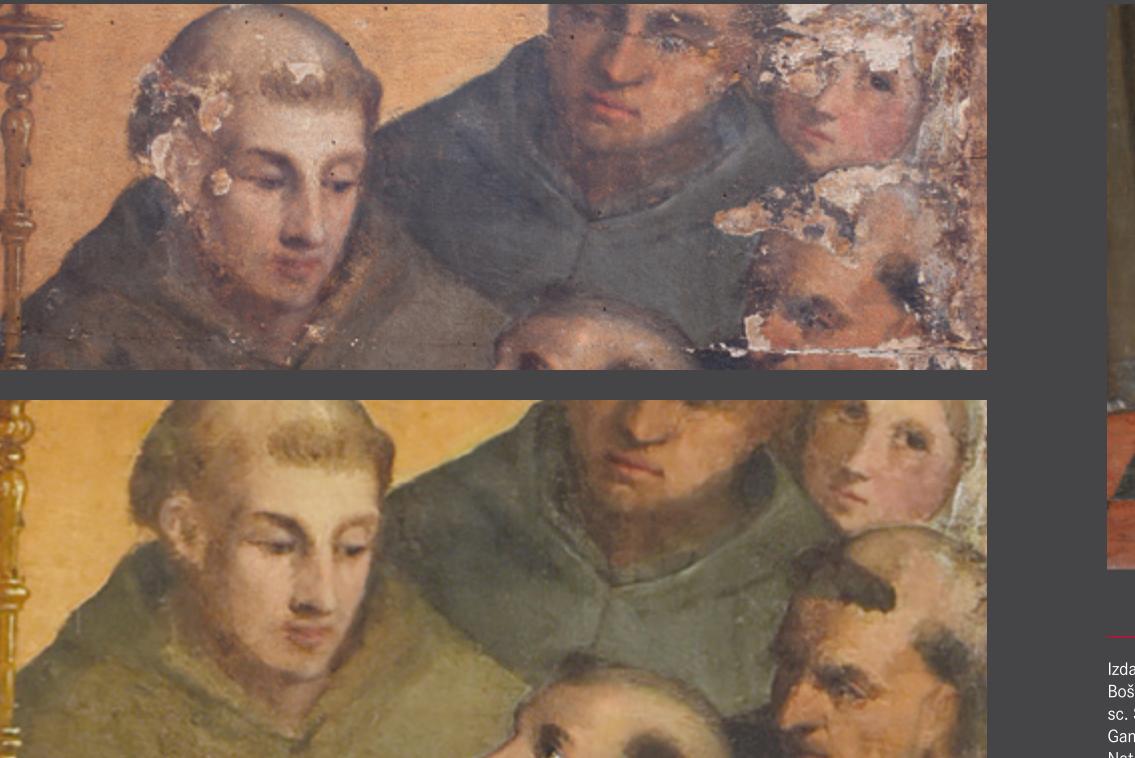
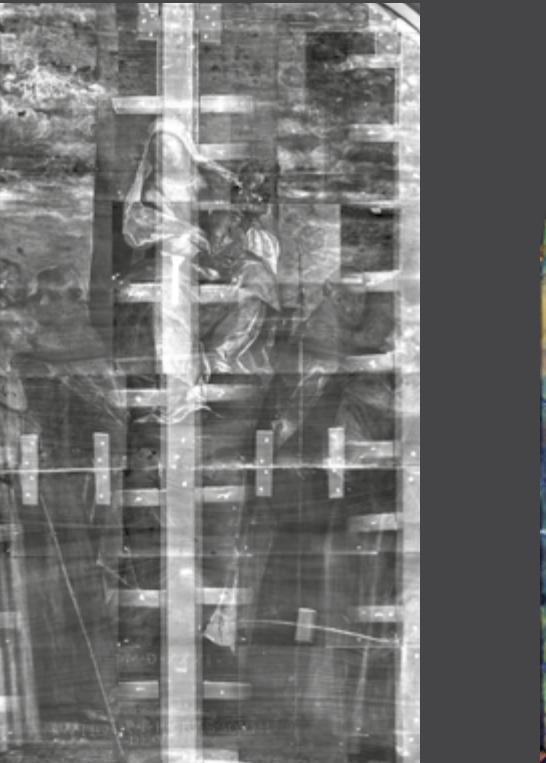


## KRK, CRKVA SV. FRANJE ASIŠKOG / Konzervatorsko-restauratorski radovi na oltarnoj pali Sacra conversazione



## KRK, CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI / Conservation of the Sacra conversazione Altarpiece





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