



CONSERVATION
- RESTORATION
WORKS ON WALL
PAINTINGS IN THE
HVAR THEATRE



PROJECT OF RESTORATION OF THE HVAR ARSENAL AND THEATRE FOR THE TOWN OF HVAR

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The works on the structural rehabilitation of the Hvar Arsenal lasted from 2005, which was not all that long ago, to 2009.

The building, which also contains the historic theatre and the Fontic, is owned and used by the Town of Hvar, which was an equal partner and co-investor with the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, and as such it successfully completed the project of structural rehabilitation of the entire building.

With a view to the fact that this is a first-class cultural monument which, due to its particular nature and importance, continually intrigues not only the population of Hvar but also the entire Croatian public, all the interventions that have been carried out, and those that are currently under way, had to be executed in a fully professional and high-quality manner, and highly-qualified expert personnel had to be engaged to work on this complex restoration project.

The work on structural rehabilitation was extremely delicate and very specific, and it called for the application of state-of-the-art materials and methods for their use, so that both the planner and the contractor who worked on this special building had

an opportunity to display all their knowledge and prove their capability and expertise. In the course of the works, restorers had to protect and safeguard the ceiling and wall paintings in the historic theatre for the entire duration of the interventions, which were often rather hard on the fragile structures of those valuable paintings.

For this reason, an indispensable part of the team of experts consisted of restorers from the Split Conservation Department of the Croatian Conservation Institute. The successful completion of rehabilitation works created the preconditions for further restoration interventions in the theatre, compilation of documentation on its interior decoration, and adaptation of all the spaces to their final purposes.

One of the first steps in this final phase of works consisted of conservation and restoration interventions on the ceiling and wall paintings and on the remains of frescoes on the western wall of the Hvar theatre.

The team of experts of the Split Conservation Department of the Croatian Conservation Institute has completed its task in line with the requirements of their profession, and the result of their efforts has been displayed for all to see.

This publication contains some information, but each of us will feel the full impact of what has been achieved if we enter the Hvar theatre and step into its magic.



THE HVAR THEATRE

Radoslav Bužančić, Ph.D.
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It is often pointed out that the Renaissance theatre in Hvar is the oldest municipal theatre in Europe, but at the same time it is forgotten that it is also the third-oldest of Europe's post-mediaeval theatres – counting from Palladio, who built the first and most famous one in 1580 in Vicenza, called "Teatro Olimpico". That theatre was completed in 1585 by Scamozzi, the renowned continuator of Palladio's work. The "Teatro all'Antica" in Sabbioneta is the second-oldest theatre, erected soon after Palladio's, between 1588 and 1590. It was constructed by the same architect, Palladio's collaborator, Vincenzo Scamozzi. At the turn of the 17th century, the Hvar theatre was created, the third Renaissance theatre built above the Hvar Arsenal. Seven years were to pass after the completion of the Hvar theatre before the next late-Renaissance theatre was erected in Parma – the "Teatro Farnese", built in 1618 by Giovanni Battista Aleotti. Although the construction of the Hvar theatre was completed in 1611-1612, as the inscription above its lintel states, the idea of its creation, and its execution, must have begun much earlier, at the time of the very lively reconstruction of the town, which had been damaged by the Turks during the Cyprian War. The need for such a municipal theatre was prompted by the humanistic atmosphere on the island, the appearance of Renaissance plays by authors from the Hvar literary circle, from Lucić and Hektorović to Pelegrinović and Benetović, and by strong links between Hvar and the other municipalities on the Adriatic, Split and Dubrovnik.

In contrast to the other theatres mentioned above, the Hvar theatre has not maintained its original interior, due to subsequent reconstructions, but its external Renaissance appearance has been preserved almost entirely. Although no document on the theatre's construction is available, and neither is there any information on the theatre builders, a conclusion can be derived indirectly about who the protagonists of this significant municipal endeavour were. The town duke, Petar Semitecolo, who governed the town at the time of the Hvar theatre's completion, often receives full merit for its construction, although it is clear that certain construction works relating to the theatre's erection must have been executed long before Semitecolo took charge of the municipality. At the turn of the 17th century, excellent master builders from the renowned Bokanić family of Pučišće were active in the town of Hvar. The most famous among them, Trifun Bokanić, won recognition for his large-scale interventions on the main town square in Hvar. Some documents connect him to the construction of the altar in the Chapel of Our Lady in Hvar Cathedral in 1605, while others mention the master and his mannerist style in connection with the building of the Hvar town loggia, which was completed between 1603 and 1605, during the rule of Duke Giulio Contarini. The latest research links Trifun Bokanić to the reconstruction of Hvar's Dominican church of St. Mark and its belfry: its terrace received some characteristic ornaments consisting of rosettes and angel heads, which were often executed by his workshop. The belfry of the Franciscan church by Andrijić, erected in the early 16th c., received, during a reconstruction in the second half of the 16th c., some Bokanićian elements, such as a balustrade with balusters shaped like double pears



with a string of pearls, and a profiled handrail with indentation.

In addition, Bokanić's manner has been recognized in the buildings of the Arsenal and Fontic, erected opposite the town loggia in the port of Hvar. The new building of the Arsenal was constructed in the 16th century, on the site of a large earlier Arsenal that was destroyed during the attack of the fleet of the Turkish viceroy of Algeria, Uluz-Ali, in 1571. The reconstruction lasted until the early 17th century, and, according to a report by the Croatian Duke Stjepan Tiepolo, the work was completed in 1607. However, the Arsenal was subsequently modified. The inscription on its eastern door gives the year 1611, and the Fontic, which stands to its north, was completed soon afterwards – the year 1612 is chiselled into the wall on its terrace, above the entrance to the theatre. The chiselled year marks the end of the construction of the Renaissance theatre situated on the upper floor. The completion of the Arsenal, and the construction of the Fontic and the theatre, are linked to Proveditor Semitecolo and the period between 1610 and 1613, but the execution of the arches on the ground floor is mentioned as early as 1609, in a report by Proveditor General Marcantonio Veniero. The arches of the Arsenal did not merely support the structure, and the upper floor could not have remained the same after their completion. The thickness of the walls of the upper floor had to be doubled to ensure the stability of the arches, by pressing on their springers like gothic turrets. The arches were made to enhance the bearing capacity of the floor above them, which suggests that the idea that the Fontic terrace would serve as the theatre entrance was present even before Semitecolo's intervention. Venier mentions that at the time of his report two more arches were being built, and that they would complete the first half of the construction work. Clearly, this must have been a very significant endeavour for the town, even before Semitecolo's work, because expensive arches that served as a preparation for what was coming later on would not have been executed merely for storing *baškoti* (round bread rolls), which was the function of the Arsenal's upper floor at the time of Duke Contarini. The workshop of the Bokanićes of Pučišće also took part in the Arsenal's alteration and reconstruction: on the one hand, their activities in this locality were documented and recognized in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and, on the other hand, some rare stylistic elements reflect shapes that the Bokanićes frequently employed. The shape of the Arsenal's great arch, with indentation, is an arch-shaped version of the lintel over the southern gate of the town of Trogir, with an identical distribution of profiling. The ornament on the Arsenal's cornice, although much larger, appears as a frequent decoration on wreaths surrounding the shields of coats-of-arms which bear the signature of Bokanić's chisel. The Fontic's northern façade, turned towards the town square, displays a rhythmical sequence of doors with arched openings and stone benches standing between them on elongated consoles. These consoles are somewhat more robust than those executed by Trifun in the Trogir loggia, but in both cases the benches are elements of the urban equipment of the town squares, and in the Trogir loggia they serve more as benches to rest on in a shady part of the portico than as benches to sit on before a judge. The Fontic door was made in a manner that was often used by the Bokanić workshop, with an alternate rhythm of blocks and finely chiselled protrusions. Furthermore, Bokanić's work on the Hvar Arsenal can be observed on the characteristically shaped balustrade of the Fontic terrace. The present-day balustrade is not the original one: it was moved from



Dubrovnik during the reconstruction carried out by Cvito Fisković. The Fontić's balustrade has remained captured in several sketches, and the most important of these is the proposal for the edifice's illumination with the original distribution of balusters, divided into fields separated by *kapitans* with stone pyramids above them. It has already been mentioned that Bokanić frequently used the motif of the conic elongated pyramid turret.

There is no information on the appearance of the interior of the Renaissance theatre, nor on the carpenter who crafted it, but it is known that the theatre was divided into two parts: the stage and the audience. The original stage was larger than that of today, and it encompassed a part of the pit, reaching to the first two boxes. The stage and the proscenium were made of wood, as were the seats, which were distributed over a floor paved with one-foot-square ceramic tiles. In the early 19th century, when it was managed by the Theatrical Society, the theatre was altered in the neoclassical style. The renovation of 1801-1803, under the management of Petar Crescenci, yielded a more modern appearance, with a new spatial organization, with two rows of boxes surrounding the pit and a new stage for the actors. Subsequent modifications in the middle of the 19th c. widened the audience, added new boxes and reduced the stage. The biggest changes were made during the reconstruction at the turn of the 20th c., when the theatre was given its present-day appearance. It was decorated with new ornaments, and the renovated ceiling over the pit was plastered and painted by Ante Bubić, in the neobaroque style. The allegory of Music depicted as a woman playing the organ, the gilt on the profiling and *cartapesta* decorations, painted ornaments and the new stage design, painted by master Nikola Marchi, gave the theatre its present-day appearance. This modernization was unjustly blamed for the loss of the Renaissance authenticity, and the resulting depreciation

of the value of this unique architectural enterprise from the era of awakening of the post-mediaeval performing arts. Quite the opposite is true: those who criticized the modernization were typical representatives of an era in which purification was deemed to be the correct method with respect to monument valorization. Such perception was discarded a long time ago, and this is precisely what makes the Hvar theatre unique, not only in terms of its age, but also in terms of the stratigraphy it contains, which puts it among the most significant sources of information on the development of the European performing arts in general. The 400th anniversary of the Hvar theatre, which is marked this year, is an important jubilee which the Hvar theatre will celebrate having been renovated, after a thorough restoration which took more than a decade.



CONSERVATION - RESTORATION WORKS ON WALL PAINTINGS

**Zoraida Demori Staničić, M.Sc.,
Head of the Section for Branch Departments**

The presentation of conservation and restoration work done on the wall paintings of the Hvar theatre is an opportunity to pay tribute to several years of work by a team of experts from the Split Department of the Croatian Conservation Institute. There are just few monuments of such importance as this theatre, which is nestled in the building of the Hvar Arsenal, an exceptionally significant edifice on the eastern Adriatic coast. This land-mark arched building dominates the port of Hvar, and opens to the sea for which it was intended, and from which it drew its livelihood.

The long and complex conservation and restoration work on the Arsenal, funded by the Ministry of Culture and the Town of Hvar, had to encompass the theatre as an integral part of the Arsenal. The theatre is located in the eastern section of the first floor. It was erected by the duke and proveditor, Petar Semitecolo, in 1612, the second year of peace after the tempestuous decades of popular uprising, as stated by the solemn inscription over the entrance: ANNO PACIS SECVNDO MDCLXII. The historical data, found in the local archives and transmitted by Hvar resident Grga Novak, testify that the population of Hvar maintained and repaired their municipal theatre through the centuries – for the first time in 1676, and then again and again till 1803. In that year, the newly founded Hvar Theatrical Society, with Petar Crescini, arranged for the interior to be refurbished, and that appearance of the interior has been preserved to a large extent up to this day. The theatre was refurbished on several other occasions, in 1819, 1828, 1845 and 1888-1900, while in 1988, thanks to the care of the Centre for Protection of the Cultural Heritage of the Island of Hvar, the conservation and restoration work on the wall paintings on the stage was carried out by the Conservation Institute of Croatia. On that occasion, during the rehabilitation of the 1900 wall painting of the Duke's Palace by Nikola Marchi, lower layers of paint were discovered. They belonged to the 1819 painting of an idealized imaginative landscape by Petar Galasso. The strapping technique was used to take the Marchi painting off the wall and move it to the collection of the Hvar Heritage Museum, where it was displayed.

The work on the static rehabilitation of the structure of the Arsenal and Fontic







buildings, which lasted for several years, included conservation and restoration interventions on the ceiling paintings and wall paintings on the theatre stage. In 2006, restorers from the Split Section for Wall Paintings, Mosaics and Stucco of the Croatian Conservation Institute were invited by Ita Pavičić, M.Arch., of the Town of Hvar, to establish the condition of the ceiling and stage paintings and propose protective measures. It immediately became clear that these would not be merely routine works. The research that was carried out, and the study that was developed, explained the characteristics of the paintings and the complexity of the intervention. The study included various kinds of exploration, including laboratory testing, which helped establish the main conservation and restoration principles and guidelines concerning the methods, materials and techniques that were to be used.

The initial condition, and the patient implementation of procedures relating to the static rehabilitation of the building, resulted in the necessity of carrying out some complex conservation and restoration work on the wall paintings, ranging from urgent interventions – intended to stop the cracking and detaching of segments of the painted ceiling – to comprehensive works that respected up-to-date standards of the restoration profession. The work encompassed a range of specific procedures, materials and techniques: elimination of moisture and damaging salts from the wall painting on the stage, rehabilitation of plaster with the application of edging, injection, impregnation, consolidation of the coat of paint, its cleaning and protection. The structure of the surface on which the ceiling paintings were executed is different from that of the wall painting on the stage, and it contains different technical elements, including stucco. There is also an inserted painting on paper, with a motif of a girl playing an organ. This allegorical representation of music was painted by the local drawing teacher, Ante Bubić. The ceiling, which covers 70 square metres, hangs from the bearing beam structure on wooden lattices, and for this reason the damage in the statics also affected the painted plaster, and in some places the plaster had fallen off. The urgent intervention aimed at preventing the collapse of the ceiling, due to the rehabilitation of the bearing beam structure, also included its preventive conservation. A protective coat was laid over the entire painted surface, and the rear side also needed to be reinforced.

The exhibition that is before us has been developed, in cooperation with the Town of Hvar, with the intention of presenting the overall conservation and restoration work on the wall paintings of the theatre and to emphasize specific procedures that were applied during the work. The work was carried out by restorers from the Section for Wall Paintings, Mosaics and Stucco of the Split Department of the Croatian Conservation Institute: Tonči Borovac, M.Sc., Head of Section, Antonija Buljan, M.A., project leader, and their assistants Ivana Jerković, graduate conservator-restorer, Josipa Milišić, graduate conservator-restorer, Maja Kiršić, graduate conservator-restorer, Vinka Marinković, graduate conservator-restorer, Ivana Hodak, graduate conservator-restorer and Ivka Lipanović, graduate conservator-restorer. Branko Matulić, Ph.D., assistant professor, Zoran Alajbeg, photographer, and the Split company Geodata have also participated in the implementation of the project.

The invitation from the Town of Hvar to participate in this complex task reflected the awareness shared by the entire population of Hvar of the artistic heritage of their town. I would say that it is the same awareness that has prompted the inhabitants of Hvar for centuries to look after their municipal theatre.



THE FIRST PHASE OF CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION WORKS ON WALL AND CEILING PAINTINGS IN THE THEATRE

**Branko Matulić, Ph. D.,
Advisory conservator-restorer**

In the 16th century, the Hvar theatre – the first public municipal theatre in Europe – was incorporated into the 14th-c. Arsenal. Undoubtedly, it is one of the most significant achievements of Croatian cultural history. The stratified nature of the theatre entity, with numerous modifications executed in the course of time, called for a very serious approach to each and every segment of protective intervention, and especially to the treatment of very fragile parts of the wall paintings on the stage and the decorative paintings on the ceiling, made in the 19th century.

The treatment of the paintings, of several years' duration, began in 2006 with the development of the master plan, which set out the principles and basic conservation and restoration postulates with clear directions for the application of various methods and execution techniques for this demanding and very complex restoration task.

An analysis of the current condition of the paintings, with due consideration given to the rather complex situation pertaining to the rehabilitation of the statics of the entire Arsenal, resulted in an elaborate organizational and executive work plan, covering the full range from urgent interventions to gradual implementation of protective treatment, which had to take into account not only the logic of its own profession, but also the logic of the entire Arsenal construction site. The entire project was developed and executed by the team of the Section for Conservation and Restoration of Wall Paintings, Mosaics and Stucco of the Split Department of the Croatian Conservation Institute.

The wall painting on the eastern wall of the theatre, on the stage, served as a permanent



stage decoration, covering 15 square metres. Due to the moisture in the wall structure under the plaster which carried the painting, especially in the area of the walled-in northern window, salt had migrated from the wall and plaster towards the visible surface of the painting. As a consequence, the adhesive power of the lime contained in the plaster had weakened, and the plaster had fallen off in some places, while in others the plaster, as also the painted layer, had become crumbly and loose and detached from the base. The samples that were taken and analysed in a laboratory confirmed that the technique applied had been the *secco* technique over dry plaster. The plaster was entirely revitalized, and all the damaged segments were rehabilitated by edging, injecting and impregnation treatment. Thereafter, the painted layer was also consolidated, after it had been cleaned, which was a precondition for a temporary protective reinforcement layer that was placed over the face of the painting.

The protective techniques applied on the ceiling painting were very similar, and in some segments even identical, but – obviously – the different base structure was taken into consideration. In contrast to the wall painting, the ceiling painting covers around 70 square metres, and it hangs on the bearing wooden beam construction, the distance between the beams being bridged by a mesh of wooden lattices (*stucchette*) which served as a base for the layer of plaster. The damage to the statics of the ceiling structure was directly reflected in the ceiling painting, in that some segments of the ceiling plaster had fallen off, some segments had detached and slid, and there were numerous vein-like and capillary cracks in the plaster structure. The cause-and-effect link resulted in the painted layer being in part destroyed, and in part damaged to a greater or lesser degree with visible pulverisation zones, especially in those segments that had been exposed in the past to subsequent interventions on the painted layer. The preventive consolidation of all damaged sections consisted of either fitting protective edging, or anchoring them with wooden wedges. The plaster and the painted layer were impregnated and thus preconsolidated, and after that the surfaces of the



ceiling paintings were cleaned with a combination of mechanical and chemical methods. The figurative motif of the cardboard painted in watercolours, which was incorporated in the decorative wall frame, received a special treatment.

After the completion of the protective cleaning of the painted layers, a preventive consolidating protective coating was applied, which restored the original intensity of the pigments and the visibility of the decorative motifs of the paintings. This was followed by the development of graphic documentation, which served as a basis for recording and elaborating all subsequent restoration-documentation entries.

In the final part of the first phase of this complex conservation and restoration endeavour, a protective reinforcement layer was placed over all the painted surfaces to protect them and safeguard them from possible subsequent damage caused by the parallel protective interventions aimed at rehabilitation of the bearing beam structure. Once the face of the painting was protected, conservation and restoration treatment procedures were also applied to the back of the ceiling painting. When the layer of dust and dirt was removed, traces of paint were revealed on the reinforcing wooden lattices: we assume that these belonged to some older painted elements of the theatrical stage design, and they were reused as ordinary wooden construction material during reconstructions of the theatre interior. Both the wooden structure and the back of the plaster were impregnated and treated with biocide protection substance.

THE SECOND PHASE OF CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION WORKS ON WALL PAINTINGS IN THE THEATRE

**Tonči Borovac, M.Sc.,
Advisory conservator-restorer**

The second phase of restoration works on the ceiling paintings of the Hvar theatre encompassed a whole range of complex tasks, with the primary goal of restoring the vital value of the materials used (in the wooden bearing structure, plaster and painted coat). The most important task, and the most demanding, was the execution of all necessary interventions on the plaster and paintings of the ceiling. The plaster, laid over a mesh of wooden lattices, called for the highest level of restoration knowledge, skill and care, in terms of both the treatment of the existing original surfaces and the incorporating of reconstructive elements, which had to be integrated into the original artistic composition.

There was an aggravating circumstance in the necessity of adjusting to the additional damage that occurred immediately prior to the execution of the second phase of works in June 2010. This damage consisted of a section of the ceiling becoming detached from the original base, made of a mesh of lattices. The estimate was that an additional 3.5 m² were lost, which further complicated the planned restoration treatment.

The team of restorers consisted mostly of graduates undergoing specialist training at the Department for Conservation and Restoration of Wall Paintings and Mosaics of the Split Academy of Arts, who are nowadays employed by the HRZ. Once the team was assembled, the first works could be initiated. The high level of expertise and good coordination among the team members were the main preconditions for the high quality of work execution. A gradual approach, patience and thoroughness were the main features of the methodological and strategic guidelines that were set as the fundamental aim.

The most important elements of the intervention strategy were:

1. protection of the original appearance of the painted ceiling sections to the greatest extent possible;
2. restoration of the original features of the plaster and pigments in the *intonaco* layer (which had been lost);
3. restoration of homogeneity, firmness and stability to the entire suspension system;

4. a well-designed intervention aimed at stabilization of the system must ensure, in the long run, minimal risk of repeated separation from the base, detachment of the plaster and absorption of possible smaller static disturbances;
5. the materials used for the intervention must be suitable and adjusted to the requested parameters.
6. the natural texture and surface dynamics of the treated surfaces should not be lost, and a sterile appearance to the polished surface should be avoided;
7. the appropriate final protection of the painted coat as a guarantee of protected freshness and stability.

During the restoration works, many dilemmas and problems were solved as the works progressed. Technical issues, such as the selection of the necessary consolidating substances, appropriate reconstructive plasters for interventions in the structure of the ceiling, plasters for reconstruction of the side stucco profiles, acceptable pigments for the reconstructive retouch, harmonization of the original level of shine of the original painted coat and the retouch etc., were resolved by the team during the restoration interventions.

The most difficult task was restoring the consistency and firmness of the entire surface of the ceiling, disturbed by the fact that several large segments had fallen off, and that the base plaster had become detached from the wooden structure. The system of integral anchoring with wooden anchors improved the bearing capacity of the wooden suspension system to the greatest possible extent, and it satisfied the conditions necessary for further work. The marks left by those interventions had to be repaired, which included the evening-out of differences in texture and pigmentation of the repair plaster, and preparation of an ideal surface for retouching.

The retouching of decorative plant ornaments and the background tone of the ceiling restored the original composition, playfulness of various compositional elements, freshness of the entire artistic representation and persuasiveness of the implemented reconstructive elements. The accents created by the new gilt, made by the technique of applying artificial gold dust over the edges of stucco ornaments of simple shapes, following the example of the original remains, emphasize the three-dimensional nature of the frame of the painted ceiling.

The wall painting on the theatre's stage required special treatment due to the chronic problem of the painted coat's becoming detached from the base, and to numerous air pockets filled with pulverized remains of plaster that had changed its composition from carbon compounds to sulphate compounds (gypsum), thus threatening to spread further into healthy areas. This problem calls for isolation and neutralization, whereby the damaging processes are stopped and the affected segments of the plaster rehabilitated. In addition, injection is used to consolidate and strengthen the rear side, detached from the base.

A large lacuna in the lower left angle of the wall painting was isolated with impregnation substance and liquid plaster, in order to even out its absorption capacity so that it could better absorb elements of the local tone or possible retouch. Of the remaining part of the surface, small areas were retouched, where the painting pigment was missing, and small oscillations





in the *intonaco* texture were fixed.

The final protective layer placed over the fresco protects it from UV rays and strengthens the painted layer, while preventing possible loosening and flaking.

The continuous three-month restoration campaign succeeded in achieving all its projected goals, by adhering to the planned strategy and time line. The final appearance of the painted ceiling and fresco on the stage of the theatre reflects the desirable level of quality and consistency that is well deserved by this kind of cultural monument.

The cooperation and manifest interest of members of the Hvar Town Council deserves a special mention, because they were willing to support the restoration team in every way and provided priceless moral and logistic support. Their daily presence and assistance served as strong psychological support and motivation.

Our gratitude goes to everybody for their assistance and support.

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ZAVOD



GRAD HVAR

CONSERVATION-RESTORATION WORKS ON WALL PAINTINGS OF THE HVAR THEATRE