



INTERNATIONAL
FINE
ART
CONSERVATION
STUDIOS

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PRELIMINARY CONDITION ASSESSMENT AND BUDGET COSTS

The Barbican Mural by Robert Lenkiewicz (1941-2002)
'Methaphysical ideas current in England during the period 1580-1620'

*The Waterfront Partnership and The Lenkiewicz Foundation,
Plymouth*

1st May 2015



The Barbican Mural by Robert Lenkiewicz, 1972

*Location: at the rear of 5 Southside street, facing the Parade, Plymouth PL1 2JL
(artist's former residence and studio)*

Orientation: Northwest

Gross Dimensions: 40 ft high (3,000 sq ft)

INTRODUCTION

General observations of the mural were made during our recent survey on 14th April 2015.

The aim was to assess the current condition of the painting and provide an outline of possible options and costs for its preservation, prior to redevelopment of the building.

Current proposals implicate the loss of significant parts of the mural, through the opening of old doors and windows in the exterior painted wall. If parts of the wall are to be transposed elsewhere, certain practical aspects need to be carefully investigated in order to establish whether it is possible to separate the stone/brick structure from the external rendering, without harming the painted surface. This is known as Stacco method (removing part of the thickness of the wall with the painting on it).

The mural is now 43 years old and has fallen into serious disrepair. Flaking and loss has reached a level at which the stability and security of the painted surface is compromised, and consequently, stabilisation (consolidation and reattachment) is necessary, irrespective of any decision for conservation of the entire scheme. This is true, even if the general consensus amongst stakeholders is to cover the mural behind cladding or other type of covering.

If the mural is to survive in its present location, then a programme of conservation treatment and regular maintenance would need to be developed and implemented to enable its long-term preservation.

Exterior murals are intrinsically vulnerable to harsh outdoor environments by virtue of their location. It would be impossible to restore the mural to its original brightness and intensity without compromising historic and artistic value. Lenkiewicz took responsibility for the maintenance of the mural while he was still alive, repairing and repainting it on a regular basis. However, repainting the artwork after his death would lead to loss of cultural and artistic meaning. An alternative option to restoration would



be to stabilise the paint layers, clean the surface, discretely retouch the scheme, and protect it using an ultraviolet-light absorbing solvent or water-based varnish.

Access to an inventory of the artist's materials, wall preparation, painting and finishing processes would greatly help inform conservation methods of treatment.

CONDITION

Primary Support

The mural comprises a cement and sand rendering structure that carries a white preparatory layer, on which the illustrative paintwork is executed. The coarse structural base is rough and porous, but there is evidence of a sealant or isolation layer applied over the rendering in the samples collected from site.

There is serious interface delamination and loss across the surface, visible as the breaking of large curled pieces. The paint is extremely vulnerable and brittle. In the lower section, however the character of the paint structure has remained intact as was easily accessible from ground level for repainting.

Paint Layers

It seems that the paint layers themselves comprise a commercial house-hold paint of Dulux brand. The paint layers are generally in very poor condition. The colours have generally faded and there are multiple areas of delamination and loss of paint material, which seem to be the result of various different environmental factors:

- i. Extremes of temperature and humidity, freeze-thaw cycles and capillary rise leading to salt effluorescence, cracking and lifting of paint layers;*
- ii. Exposure to ultraviolet rays accelerating the deterioration of paint binder and causing hazing, yellowing and fading of pigments;*
- iii. Rain fall leading to salt effluorescence, cracking and lifting of paint layers, drips and stains;*
- iv. Exposure to local moist sea environment, leading to moss and lichen growth and salt deposits.*

Luckily, the mural appears to have escaped disfigurement from graffiti and other types of vandalism, a modern-day malaise affecting many urban murals.



Varnish/Surface Coatings

The paintings appear unvarnished. The surface is generally matte, with a patchy and dry texture. In addition to grime, debris and pollution, there is also a considerable accumulation of mildew and moss across the surface, as the painting has been exposed to a moist environment.

Non-Original Elements

The whole wall structure is currently overlaid with large softwood battens around the outer edges, and vertically, at regular intervals, over the entire wall. The battens were screw fixed to the wall with large steel screws. Apparently, the wall was fitted with these struts, on instruction by the artist, to enable the re-creation of the scheme.

FEASIBILITY STUDY AND COSTS

In order to establish the viability of removing a section of wall, and to highlight any potential complications that may arise during the stabilisation of the paint layers, a small single unit should be chosen for the execution of a trial process. The area of direct concern should be of minor artistic importance but represent the widest range of potential issues as identified above. A complete conservation trial to include retouching can also be undertaken, if required.

Methodology

The treatment would be carried out in situ, from a scaffold tower if executed at high level, and comprise the following:

- 1. Remove wooden battens*
- 2. Consolidate loose flaking paint layers and stabilise render substrate*
- 3. Clean and remove surface dirt*
- 4. Apply isolating varnish*
- 5. Face surface with a layer of Japanese paper and cotton fabric*
- 6. Attach wooden support structure to section of wall*



7. *Excavate wall behind render layer*
8. *Cut through wall and remove to a chosen location*
9. *Remove temporary protection and assess condition of paint layers*

Materials list

Adhesives for Consolidation

*Paint layers: Lascaux Consolidation Medium 4176
Lascaux 498HV
Acrilmat
Calcium Hydroxide nanoparticles
Primal WS24
Plextol B500*

Application: With brushes through Japanese paper.

Reagents for Surface Cleaning

*Tri-ammonium Citrate (TAC)
Ammonia
Triton™ 80 N
White Spirit
De-ionised water*

Application: With cotton swabs or small brushes.

Coatings for re-varnishing incorporating UV absorber Ciba 777 UVA

*Paraloid B72
Golden's MSA (contains UV absorber)
Avalure 315*

Application: With hogs hair varnish brushes

Paints for Retouching

Base toning: Commercial prepared artist's colours (acrylic)



Surface layers: *Dry pigments in Paraloid B72*
 Gamblin Conservation Colours (Aldehyde – Laropal A81 resin)

Application: *With fine artist's hogs hair brushes*

Schedule

The time on site required to conduct the feasibility trial is expected to be in the region of 1 week.

A further 2–3 days would be necessary, to compile a report (including photographic documentation and any graphic illustrations, as relevant).

Budget costs

| <i>ITEM</i> | <i>COST (£)</i> |
|---|------------------------|
| <i>Phase 1: Feasibility trial</i> <i>(2 conservator for 1 week)</i> | <i>3,650.00</i> |
| <i>Additional</i> | |
| • <i>Travel and subsistency expenses (for 1 week)</i> | <i>1,150.00</i> |
| • <i>Accommodation expenses</i> | |
| <i>Sub-total</i> | <i>4,800.00</i> |
| <i>Compilation of Treatment Document</i> | <i>600.00</i> |
| • <i>Provision of records detailing the trial carried out</i> | |
| <i>TOTAL</i> <i>(VAT to be added to all costs)</i> | <i>5,400.00</i> |

**Scaffold requirements to be discussed; supplied by others*

ILLUSTRATIONS



The Barbican Mural by Robert Lenkiewicz, after completion in 1972. © The Lenkiewicz Foundation.



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*The Barbican Mural
by R. Lenkiewicz, 1972
Parade, Plymouth*



The Barbican Mural by Robert Lenkiewicz in 2014. © The Lenkiewicz Foundation.



Lower right section of mural depicting Lenkiewicz's children. This section was repainted by the artist himself on several occasions and displays fewer instances of peeling paint.



Central lower section of mural showing self-portrait of the artist (on the left).



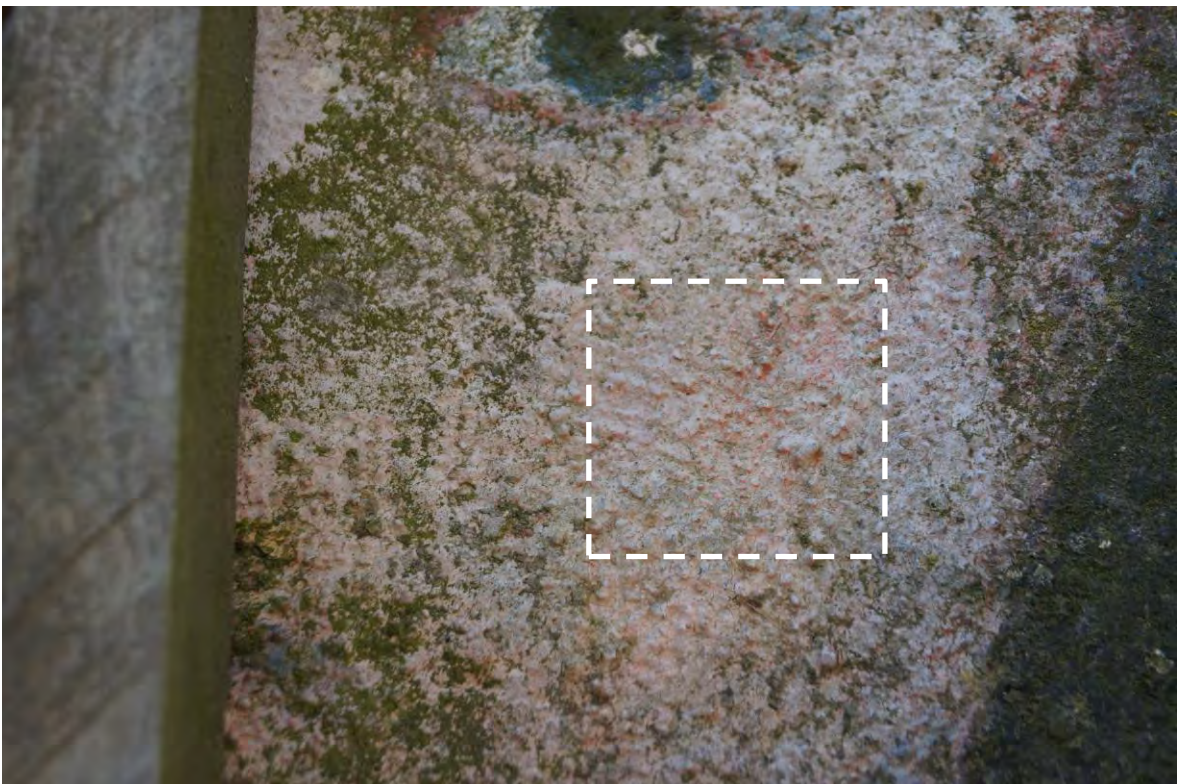
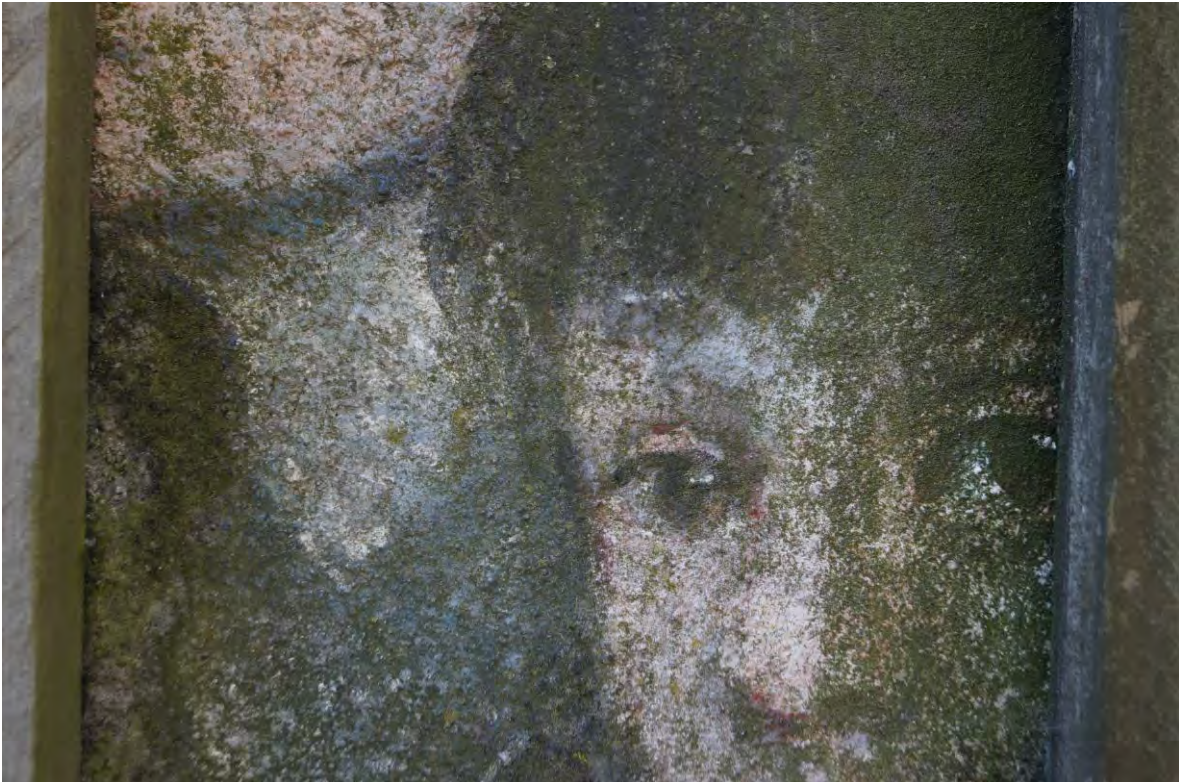
Artist signature and date (Lenkiewicz, 1972), painted in red, in the lower right corner.



Detail showing breakdown of the paint binder – first stage of paint degradation eventually leading to cracking and loss of adhesion.



Images showing instances of extreme weathering to paint layers. Amongst them, fading, mildew and dirt build-up, extensive paint flaking and paint loss.



Images showing lichen and moss growth across the paint surface. A cleaning test was conducted to ascertain the solubility of dirt and biological growth (below).