Technical meeting
PATINA / Aging or retouching?
Problem and advantage of artificial patina in historic interiors.

14 – 16 November 2018 (Wednesday – Friday)
Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation Berlin-Brandenburg
Potsdam, Germany

On 14th, 15th and 16th November 2018, the technical meeting of the Network of European Royal Residences on "Patina: Aging or retouching. Problem and advantage of artificial patina in historic interiors" was held at the Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation Berlin-Brandenburg (Germany).

The aim of technical meeting was to exchange about all the issues linked to patina. What is patina? What is the aim of patina? Can patina be imitated? Are there historic methods of artificial patina? Why should we use artificial patina? Do we have risks applying artificial patina?

This technical meeting has been organized between presentations of participants and on-place presentations on specific cases, specific materials as fabrics, wooden floors, sculptures, etc. in historic interiors and restoration workshops of the Palaces of Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation Berlin-Brandenburg.

In addition to the Power Point Presentations of the participants, the following minutes present the main ideas for reflection, the main discussed and debated problems during the three days of the meeting.

WHAT IS PATINA / HOW TO DEFINE IT? /

Official definition: Patina "is a film on an object, consisting in particles of natural decomposition, the sedimentation of particles of the air and their chemical interaction."
Patina is a result of time. Consequently, Patina can become a symbol of age, a symbol of dignity. It shows the visibility of time, the history of an object, the patina should not be mixed up with dirt. (Samuel Wittwer)

Patina is a problematic for interiors of the residences, but also for exteriors. Architects are concerned about the question of patina due to the importance to maintain the building itself in a good state (walls, roofs, timber frame, etc).

Nevertheless, the definition of patina is more complex:

- Patina can be considered as a problem or as something positive (opposition between Patina as unaesthetic problem [example: the "praying youth" bronze in Sanssouci] vs patina as fashion [vintage style]) Patina "aspect" can be unwanted or desired. (For example: Trellis Cabinet in the New Palace in Potsdam where artists from the Paris Martin family wanted intentionally to create a patina aspect).
- Patina can create a "mistake" and be considered as the "official" aspect of an object by the public (traditional example of the copper roof. Due to the oxidation, these roofs became green and are, in the people mind, in natural color).

⇨ It can be quite difficult to name exactly the situation of an object, masterpiece, etc. Is it really patina, or dirt, or damage? The distinction can be vague. Consequently, it is important to define exactly the problem.

WHAT TO DO? WHAT OPTIONS DO WE HAVE? /

Three options can be taken to ageing interiors: (Sebastian Edwards)
- Replace
- Repair
- Do nothing (or do very little)

For each option, professionals are facing to a lot of further options, problems, choices, etc. Concerning patina, only the first seems to be problematic, while repairing or leaving are not necessarily attacking the authentic surface/patina.

An example for the problems to be faced in the first case: if an institution decides to replace some furniture, several choices are available for a royal residence. An institution can:
- Buy a new one
- Make copies
- Find historic equivalence (through inventory)

But for each of these options, there are a lot of questions and problems turning up. Here below, some of these issues developed during the meeting:

- High costs (for authentic furniture or for copies). Even some objects digitally printed can be very expensive.

- Current nature and function of the residence: It is a problem of the residence still used by Royal Families (example of Patrimonio Nacional). It is impossible in this case to have copies, reproduction. The Royal Families will not use copies and curators and restorers are used to restore continuously.

- Debate on authenticity. Is making copies a lie for the public? If we respect the atmosphere of a room, can we work with copies? And: if we use artificial patina to reduce the "bling" of a new copy, will "the lie" become even bigger or is it the only way to repair the atmosphere and to harmonize an interior? Can we talk to our visitors about "Fake"? Or "reproduction"?

Through the different presentations, we observed that in each residence, in each room, experts mix the different options. <u>There is not just one choice.</u> Here below, some examples:

⇨ The choice of one of these approaches is on a case-by-case basis. The decision is be taken room by room, object by object.

Nevertheless, another important problem for the curators is the visibility of the actions. Do we disguise the replacement or repair through an artificial patina? Or do we leave the replacement or repair visible and wait for natural aging process?

With a reparation, a replacement, the institutions create a problem of visual aspect. Visitors can see a difference between original/old objects (or parts of objects) and new ones, between original furniture and its repair, etc. We can find many examples, for all types of objects.

Concrete example: Due to the oxidation, old copper roofs became green. Many buildings around the world can hardly be imagined with a roof in a different color, the bright green of copper rust became an important part of the visual memory of the building; In case of the necessary replacement, these roofs are greyish and we have to wait 15-20 years for oxidation. For not to disappoint expectations and to stay in the line of visual tradition, the idea will be to use an artificial patina (turning the copper green by applying chemicals). Or: do we have to wait a natural patina?

ARTIFICIAL PATINA: USES AND PROBLEMATICS /

- The "artificial patina" can be used in order to "erase" the differences between original and new object.
- What is "artificial patina"? This differs from material to material. It can consist in an imitation of real patina, f.e. by applying paint, wax, lacquer, dirt etc. Or it can be evoked by chemical processes. Or an aged status can be achieved by using other materials than on comparable historic items. The effect of artificial patina can be more or less "strong". Consequently, a reflection, debate, has to be done between curators, restorers, before to act: what technics, what materials do we use? What will be the "level" of the patina? What result do we want to have? Etc.
- Importance of the scientific research before acting. Now decision making is supported by researches. Example of the Conservation and Restoration Project for Historic Textile Decoration in the King's Bedroom and Dutch Cabinet (2009-2013) at the Museum of King Jan III in Wilanow with pigment analysis, elemental composition analysis, microbiological analysis, microscope analysis,etc.
- All technics used to create an imitation of aging should be reversible.
- Problem of the patina of an "artificial patina". It is not always possible to know how an artificial patina can evolve. The result can turn out very different to the original surface and create a bigger difference than without patina.

- The used materials used could also create some problem. With time, we discover that former technics, former materials can create problems or a new degradation. In the Museum of King Jan III in Wilanow, they discover that the restoration of the velvet in the 50 does accelerate the existing damages.

⇨ It is important to keep in mind that:

- Patinating can become a new esthetic or structural problem, can be a risk
- The risks of an artificial patina are only known, if the technic is an old one and there is lots of experience.
- We have to remember that each action has a consequence for the next generation of curators. It can be preferable to have patience, avoid taking risk. Each action has to be reversible.
- In spite of the degrations and problems caused by old restorations or former artificial patina, it is important to remember that it is also a testimony of history, of changing technics. Technics are evolving every day. Currently, a new technique has been developed in the Palace of Fontainebleau with the use of "Capeline de soie" which allows to protect the original silk. But in this case, the very transparent "capeline" was printed first with the historic ground color and pattern, so that this protection skin returns an imagination of the former color and structure. In some decades, this technic could be "old-fashion" and be a testimony of our current time.

PUBLIC /

It is very important to give explanation to the general audience but what to say? What explain? Do we explain everything? Or do we have to give only some main information? What is "Honesty"? What is our "Responsibility" vis-à-vis of the general audience?

Visitors need to understand social context, historical context, art historic context. It is important to explain why we restore or why we decide to do nothing. Often, visitors do not understand why we decide to do nothing and to leave things untouched (f.e. textiles turned shabby). They would like that everything be beautiful, shiny. Consequently, if we choose to leave the patina, dust, we should explain it, explain our choice. It would be also important to the general audience to know, if the objects they see are copies.

Nevertheless, for several reasons, it is not so obvious to explain everything to the general audience:

- If we inform the public that something is "fake" or done by help of artificial patina, it could be disappointing for the public. It is possible to remove the "magic", "enchantment" of the rooms, of the place. It is necessary to be careful.
- It is important to ask ourselves why people come. Do people come to see original objects? Or to feel a specific atmosphere? What is the real interest of the public? General Visitors are not experts and generally just want an experience, feel a particular atmosphere. Consequently, it is not mandatory a problem to inform that the objects are "fake".

- It is difficult to explain all these choices, all the constraints, all the explanations to the general public which are not expert. It is already complicate to explain the distribution and the history of each room in a Palace like Versailles, with the succession of inhabitants, events, periods, etc. It becomes more complicate if we also begin to talk about restoration, replacement, copies, natural and artificial patina, etc. There is a difference between audience point of view and professionnals/experts point of view. Visitors do not see all these problems, all the consequences of these choices.

Alternative solutions can be found as:

- Present the original objects for temporary time, giving some explanation. (Example at the Imperial Palace of Compiègne with the presentation of furniture coming from depository, with damages. This exhibition has been very successful and was an opportunity to show to the public our jobs. (Elisabeth Caude)
- Explain the difficulty of all these choices to the public and, in the same time, publish scientific text with all the information, history, etc. Example of the "Etats des Lieux" from Beatrix Saule which explain in details the history of the rooms, the difficulties of each object, room, etc.
- Possibility also to use the "virtual reality" and the new technologies to show the room in their original state, their original appearance.

About the experiences in the palaces and workshops /

- Henriette Graf (curator, SPSG) showed us the problem of a piece of wooden furniture bought some 20 years ago on the art market as replacement piece. There had severe parts of veneer been replaced and treated with artificial patina (a wood stain), which in only ten years had turned much darker than the rest of the surface of the piece, which is now completely out of visual balance.

- Susanne Evers (curator, SPSG) showed us, how throughout the time light is destroying the structure of silk on top of fading colours. She showed some room examples with completely renewed fabrics in different techniques to go then on with other rooms, where the textile wall coverings and coverings of furniture are from different times. She showed that in these cases it does not matter whether the walls are historic and seat coverings new, or the wall coverings are of later date than the upholstery: there is almost always an aesthetic gap, which absorbs attention and can irritate the visitors eye. She then showed a solution from Fontainebleau (Salon Jaune de Joséphine), which had also been discussed within the SPSG before: the totally faded embroidered silk was first undergoing structural conservation. Then it was covered with a very transparent, light "capeline", which is used normally to fix and preserve old fabrics, too, with the difference, that this material was now first printed in the historic colours and patterns.

- In the workshop of painting and frame restoration, Bärbel Jackisch (head of painting restoration, SPSG) showed carefully carved additions on gilt frames. After gilding, it was necessary to reduce the "bling" effect of new gold by rubbing and painting over; but on another example, which had been restored some decades ago, exactly this technique of

using different gold bronzes to paint on additions needs again a restauration, because the gold bronze turned black.

- In the New Palace Nadja Kuschel and Ute Rönnecke (restorers of textiles, SPSG) showed how they could restore a 1768 silk wall covering by developing a special technique to glue the silk on a strong supporting fabric. As a result, any visitor recognized the age of the silk due to its parts of different intensive colours and fissures. For curtains and upholstery, they had reconstructed the original fabric (colour and pattern) and even the gold trimmings, so that they give a "bling" effect. According to the restorers, the audience likes to have both – the old and the new – next to each other. But they know, that the new silk may react completely different, as in other parts of the palace there are silk reweaving from the beginning of the 20th century, which have lost all colours (early synthetic colours) while the 18th century rests still give an idea of the original colour.

- In the trellis cabinet of the New Palaces, restorer Christiane Thiel (external SPSG) showed us a varnish developed by the Martin brothers in Paris and used here ca 1768, which was first clear when it was applied. It turned yellow within 6 to 12 months. This yellowing effect is a historic example of artificial patina. In the case of this room, half of it had been removed in the 1980ies by mistake, but the recipe was analysed, the varnish recreated and again applied, so that no one can tell the difference nowadays.

- Katrin Lange (director of the department of restoration, SPSG and former head restorer of sculptures) explained a problem of patina outside the palaces, where several hundred of sand stone sculptures are exposed to humidity and sun. Each piece of stone has its own colour and chemical ingredients (f.e. iron) and reacts different, why later additions very often are much brighter. But painting them (to imitate patina) would mean to add another material with an own kind of reaction to elements and time. This is why in the 18th century the stone was not visible but painted, a procedure, which is not only enormously costly and has to be repeated every 10 to 20 years, but which also applies more and more layers of paint, so that the sculpture lost their details. The opinion about the result and the solution was different.

- After lunch we visited the 2nd floor of the New Palaces, which had not been used after the revolution of 1918 and WW II for anything, but became a storage area in the 1960ies only. In 2018 the storage moved to a new building so that this area now shows a somehow perfect preserved and good aged surface of the late 19th century, when Emperor Wilhelm II had installed guest rooms there. Everyone agreed that this should be kept as it is.

- Thomas Kühn (restorer, SPSG) showed us in the Marble Palace the problem of restored or reconstructed wooden floors with rich inlayed patterns, some parts of wood in different natural colour, some parts with stained wood. Floors are used and so any artificial patina is smoothened quickly; the abrasion of floors helps to bring back patina quite quickly.

- Benjamin Glasberger (restorer, SPSG) demonstrated different aging techniques on metal (copper, zinc, silver) and how he makes series of long term tests to study the reaction of these chemical processes.

- The little Palace on the Island of the Peacocks (built 1794/95 as a folly for king Friedrich Wilhelm II.) had been cleared of all furniture just some weeks before, because the building structure has to undergo severe construction work (hopefully not interfering with the interiors). There had been almost no restorations for 200 years. Wiebke Müller and Ute Joksch (restorers, SPSG) explained the actual difficulty to decide, what parts to touch

(conservation) and what parts they are still thinking about. It showed us like a summary of the days the very thin border between dirt, abrasion and patina. Sebastian Edwards (HRP) made this remark: Do not change so much. Leave it as it is.

A short Conclusion /

There is not a right way for patina. There are a lot of problematics (which can be contradictory) to consider and analyze before to take a decision, case by case.
The important question is more: "What is the best we can do"?