

Nordic Collaboration Project: Communication, Investigation and Conservation of the Kumla altar (c. 1439), Swedish History Museum

Lena Porsmo Stoveland*, Lise Sæter, Tor Erik Skaaland, Oda Grønnesby and Noëlle L.W. Streeton

Conservation Studies, Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History, University of Oslo, Norway.

*Corresponding author: lena.porsmo@gmail.com

During the spring of 2015, a late-medieval double winged altarpiece from the church of Kumla, belonging to the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm, was the focal point of a Nordic Collaboration project on academic and professional growth in conservation education. The project had two key aims: To deepen Nordic cross-sector cooperation and to develop good, innovative practices for public engagement in the field of conservation education. The execution and success of the project was made possible by students and staff from Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, the University of Oslo and The University of Gothenburg as well as The Swedish History museum in Stockholm. The altar's preservation state and its need for remedial conservation offered an excellent opportunity for students of both painting and furniture conservation to gain practical experience while working in small groups and under supervision for two weeks at a time. This presentation outlines some of the outcomes of the project based on the experience of former participating students from the University of Oslo.

Communication is becoming an increasingly important part in conservation, not only to make people aware of the profession, but to legitimise and state the importance of cultural heritage preservation in an increasingly demanding political environment. Several platforms were used to raise public awareness about the conservation of the Kumla altar, including an interview in Swedish radio, newspaper articles, and daily blog entries as the project progressed (see <http://kumlaaltar.tumblr.com/>). Most of the examinations and treatments of the altarpiece was executed in the museum gallery, where a temporary studio was created on open display. This enabled the students to engage visitors in conversations, answering questions, and to demonstrate conservation *in situ*. Explaining the working methods and the

rationale behind the different treatments helped to increase the visitor's curiosity and interest. As the altarpiece was disassembled during the practical work, a small demonstration model was made to visualise its construction after assembly.

The blog functioned as a channel for discussing practical and ethical challenges as well as the importance of documentation and analytical investigation. The blog thus contributed to making decision-making processes and challenges more transparent and available for present and future readers, as well as training students in articulating their work to non-professionals. Nevertheless, further experience of using the blog format as a tool for communication is desirable to make it work better in relation to two-way communication. A web-page dedicated to the collaborative study of the altar is currently under construction and supervised by the projects coordinator from Metropolia University. The project partners have contributed to the content of the page, where treatments, investigation techniques and results of analytical research will be gathered in one place.

As a whole, the Kumla project provided valuable experience for the participating students, as both oral and written communication is essential skills for emerging conservators. The success of this collaborative project might be seen as a model for other educational programmes as well as encouraging further development of innovative practices for public engagement.