



Unique 14th Century frescoes restored for public view after 10 years

The iconographic decorations in St Michael's chapel in the Royal Monastery of St Mary of Pedralbes represent the earliest frescoes in Italian Trecento (14th Century) style in Spain, an exceptional testament to Catalan art influenced by the Italian masters of renaissance. Closed to the public for over 10 years, the chapel recently re-opened to visitors following extensive restoration work on the 75m² of murals.

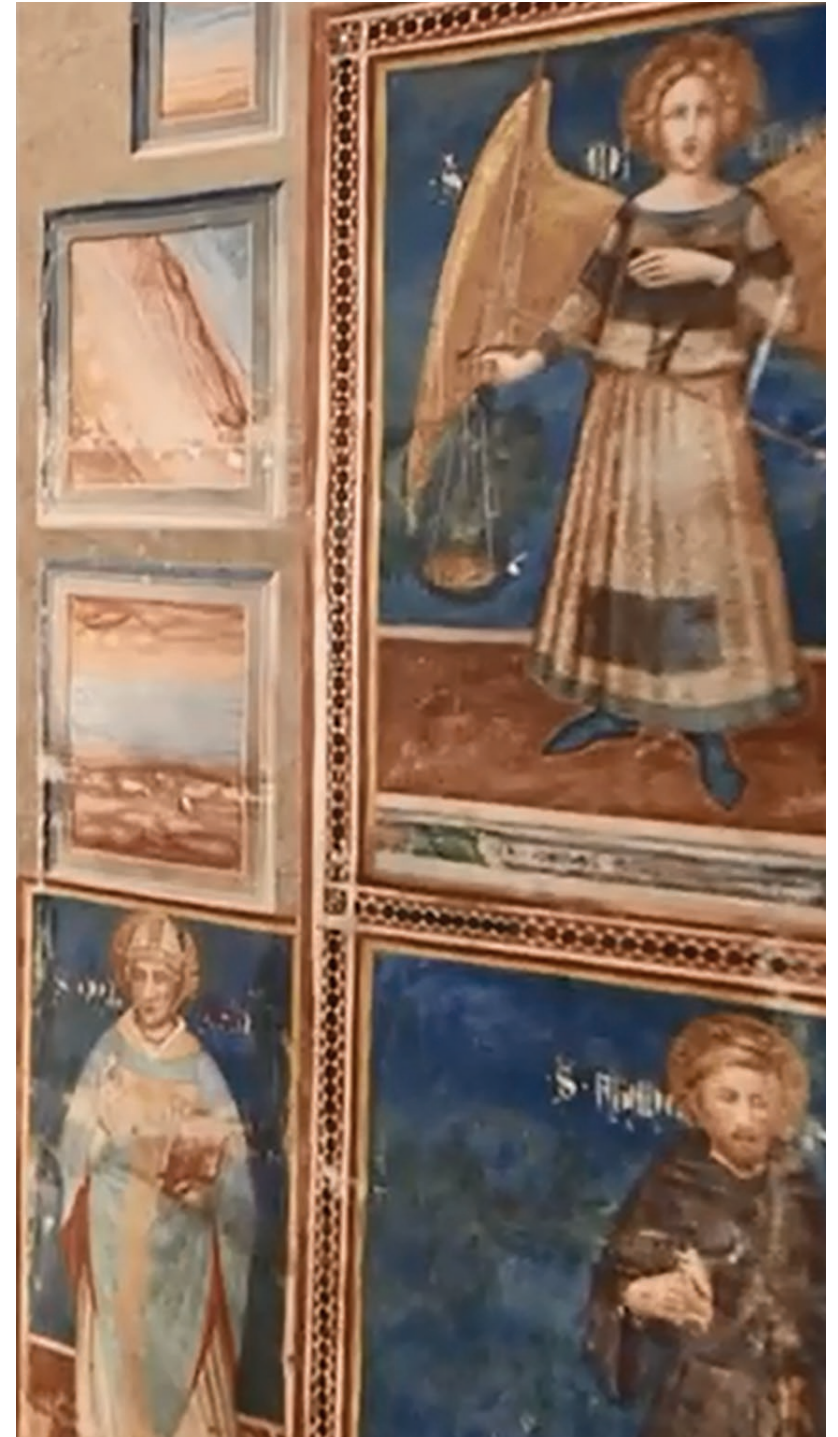
Industry sector: Sign & Display, Decoration

Business name: Royal Monastery of Pedralbes

Headquarters: Barcelona, Spain

Testimonial from: Anna Castellano-Tresserra, head of conservation at the Royal Monastery of Pedralbes,
Lidia Fonts, head of conservation and restoration, Museum of History of Barcelona

HP solution: HP Latex Printing Technologies



Challenge

“The chapel frescoes are artistically and historically valuable so the environment is sensor-controlled to protect them from physicochemical and biological damage. Opening to the public was critical, also to incentivize continued funding, but we wanted to offer visitors an experience that reflected the completely restored chapel without altering the delicate chapel environment.”

Anna Castellano-Tresserra, head of conservation at the Royal Monastery of St Mary of Pedralbes



Respecting the delicate environment of the murals

The restoration of the 75m² of murals in St Michael's chapel, portraying The Passion of the Christ, The Seven Joys of the Virgin Mary, and portraits of various Saints, presented an exceptional challenge for the Royal Monastery of St Mary of Pedralbes in charge of the work, in collaboration with the Department of Conservation and Restoration of the Museum of History of Barcelona. Indoor climate control in the chapel was critical to preventing environmental alterations affecting the murals and remedying them.

“Catalan artist Ferrer Bassa was commissioned to create the frescoes in 1346, and are of unique value as the earliest example of Italian Trecento influence in Catalan art. They were only rediscovered in the late 19th Century when furniture covering the frescoes was removed,” explains Castellano-Tresserra.

Budget resources were focused on fundamental research and analysis and on restoration of the mural conservation work. The lower sections depicting the marble panels were only partially restored. This was an extensive project that involved analyzing the materials present, as well as the removal of erroneous restorative work, then a fixing process to stabilize the wall, a cleaning process and finally pictorial retouching.

“We set ourselves the target of reaching a stage in the chapel restoration where, although incomplete, visitors would have a complete view of the iconographic murals. We wanted to create an immersive visitor experience so we needed to recreate the unrestored bottom marble sections without harming the conservation of the frescoes in the delicate chapel environment,” says Castellano-Tresserra.

Solution

“The faithful textile replicas of the decorated walls, mounted on wooden board, created a complete contextualized view of the iconography for visitors. HP Latex Ink certifications and the textile certification documented the sustainability and the minimal environmental impact of the printed solution. No other printing technology could satisfy our stringent criteria.”

Lidia Font, head of conservation and restoration, Museum of History of Barcelona



Certified HP Latex Printing Technologies respect the delicate environment

The introduction of any material that could alter the delicate chapel environment would have been a grave concern due to the potential impact on the conservation of the frescoes. “We had heard about the environmental credentials of HP Latex Printing Technologies from other projects so investigated the technology as a possible solution,” states Lidia Font, head of conservation and restoration, Museum of History of Barcelona.

“The certifications for HP Latex Inks and the certification for the textile substrate chosen, gave us the documented technical data we required to implement the printed replicas of the marble panels. Conservation is our overriding priority and the technical specifications of the inks and materials used respected our criteria,” adds Font.

The certifications for HP Latex Printing Technologies and the certification for the DirectTex® Poplin plus substrate used gave the conservation team complete confidence in the solution proposed. The 2 x 1.2m strips of printed textile were applied to wooden panels and mounted on stands that were placed in front of the unrestored decorative marble panels to offer a more complete viewing experience of the frescoes.

“The only alternative would have been to leave the decorations in their original unrestored state but that would have been unattractive and distracted attention from the iconography. The restored murals were enhanced by this solution,” adds Font.

Result

“We managed to open the chapel to the public as planned thanks to the decorations printed using HP Latex Inks. The frescoes in St Michael's chapel have gained the visibility they deserve, and this will help us to attract the funds necessary for the continued restoration of this important work of art.”

Lidia Font, head of conservation and restoration, Museum of History of Barcelona



Attractive HP Latex printed decorations enhance the visitor experience

“The printed decorations achieved exactly the goal we had set out; they enhanced the visitor experience by recreating the complete view of the paintings (giornate). The colors are spot on and the panels are really attractive. For a moment we were concerned that they were too attractive and might distract attention from the original frescoes! But once the printed marble panels were installed they simply complement the restoration work and help us enjoy the exceptional work of art,” says Font, adding, “When we move forward to the next phase, we will be able to simply create new panels, or add or remove existing ones, as the restoration work progresses, minimizing the impact on visitor access.”

Castellano-Tresserra highlights the growing role of technology in the fields of restoration and conservation while underlining the importance of confidence in relationships. “Technology is playing a greater role in every area of restoration. HP Latex allowed us to create an affordable solution but it is not all about the technology; it is also about trust and confidence. HP's reputation as a company added to our confidence and trust.

“As conservationists of cultural patrimony we can measure the sustainability and environmental impact of our activities on a daily basis. We are confident that we will be able to complete the restoration and conserve the exceptional frescoes in St Michael's chapel, dating back to the 14th Century, and they will be enjoyed for generations to come,” concludes Castellano-Tresserra.