

MICHAEL KUHLENTHAL: FAÇADE DECORATING TECHNIQUES

The idea for the project 'Façade Decorating Techniques' germinated at the Austrian Conference for the Conservation and Preservation of Cultural Heritage in September 1997. Among those invited were also representatives from Bavaria, Slovenia and the Czech Republic. Discussions had revealed that there was still a good deal to clarify in the preparation phase of various restoration measures that were to be carried out in 1998. Therefore, it was agreed to discuss and clear up these questions, which after all were of general conservational interest within the framework of a Raphael Project.

Indeed, quite different façade decorating techniques were involved. The facades of the burgraviate of Cesky Krumlov are decorated with wall paintings which had, however, been restored at some later date. The materials employed in this previous restoration were the source of special problems; a situation very often encountered when working with exterior wall paintings.

On the other hand, the Baroque façade of the former monastery church of Kostanjevica is, and this is an absolute rarity, a free-standing façade placed at a distance in front of the monastery church in order to ensure the unity of the monastery façade. This façade is decorated with rich architectonic plastering with glossy stucco finish which originally gave it the appearance of marble. This glossy stucco finish was not discovered until the preliminary examination, because it had been overpainted several times. The restoration and partial reconstruction of this glossy stucco finish confronted the Slovenian restorers and colleagues with very special problems they had never dealt with before.

The Grotto Pavilion of the Castle in Neuburg am Inn demonstrates, like all grotto architecture, a complicated mixture of techniques: coloured, painted smooth plaster, figures of dyed stucco, mosaics of pebbles and mussels, etc. The restoration of such mixed techniques demands especially comprehensive preparation, and new problems are always cropping up once work is in progress.

The façade of the 'Glasscherbenvilla' (broken glass villa) in Passau presented similar problems. With its whole façade decorated with unusual materials such as gravel, broken glass, scoria and fragments of china from the nearby porcelain factory, it is too, quite unique for its time.

The stucco-decorated theatrical façade of the choir of the church of Stift Griffen converges into a niche housing a statue of the Virgin Mary standing on a world globe. The decoration around the windows of the monastery buildings is partly stucco and, what is unusual, of terra cotta mouldings. Terracotta restoration on exterior facades was, therefore, new for Carinthia.

The great variety of façade techniques guaranteed that the collaboration was a learning process for all the participants. Being able to apply what was learned from the problems encountered in the restorations in Neuburg and Passau to the grotto hall in Castle Cesky Krumlov let the Czech colleagues profit directly from the experience gained here. The Carinthian colleagues were particularly interested in current documentation methods, so they hired a restorer specialised in documentation for

further examination of the Stift Griffen façade. On the other hand, a Bavarian stucco specialist was sent to assist the Slovenian colleagues in tackling the problems of the restoration and reconstruction of the glossy stucco in Kostanjevica. A one-week course was run and the needed samples were made. The stucco marble appearance of this façade was a sensation for all the participants. Apart from direct assistance and suggestion, the main goal of this collaboration was to discuss problems, exchange ideas about various concepts and finally assert a high common standard.

At the beginning of the project, the individual objects, the results of the preliminary examinations and the restoration difficulties were presented together at the first meeting on 12/13 March 1998 in Munich. Thus, the same information was available to all the participants and the type and manner of collaboration could be agreed upon. The restoration concepts, planned methods and restoration measures were discussed at two other meetings on 28/29 May 1998, in Neuburg, Passau and Cesky Krumlov, and on 25/26 June 1998, in Stift Griffen and Kostanjevica. Due to the tremendous work load of the participants, further communications was conducted by telephone or fax. The finished restorations were presented at the final meeting on 22/23 October 1999 at Stift Griffen and in Kostanjevica, followed by a discussion of the final report which was then agreed upon.

The project included most of the façade decoration techniques commonly used in Europe, e.g. types of plaster, stucco, wallpainting, graffito, terracotta, mixed techniques, etc. in view of the fact that all the usual material compositions and art technologies were dealt with, the found and applied solutions to these conservation problems are valid for all of Europe. The documentation of the monuments are testimony that the restorations were carried out by interdisciplinary collaboration of art historians, restorers, scientists, architects and craftsmen, who exchanged their experiences in meetings as well as via fax and telephone.

The long winter this year prevented resumption of the restoration work on the exterior until quite late. Nonetheless, the work on the facades of the burggraviate of Castle Krumlov, the Grotto Pavilion in Neuburg and Stift Griffen was completed. However, the difficulties presented by the restoration of the Passau 'Glasscherbenvilla' and the free-standing façade in Kostanjevica made it impossible to finish the whole facades in time so that a total photograph of the restored facades could not be included into the present documentation. There is no full photograph of the restored facades, because the scaffolding was still in place. Instead, photographs of finished parts which are representative for the restored facades taken from the scaffolding have been included.

The final meeting in October 1999 demonstrated that all the participants evaluated the project positively. The contacts made here will not end with the termination of the project but will continue in the future and thereby ensure the important sustainability.