

The conservation treatment of the *Ghent Altarpiece* by the Van Eyck brothers (1432)

Elaborate press kits on the conservation treatment, the rediscovery of the original Lamb and a statement on its appearance are available at the KIK-IRPA's press page, as well as an overview of available images: <http://www.kikirpa.be/EN/136/371/Press.htm> or www.kikirpa.be > Press

Images for publication (Lukas – Art in Flanders): bart.desitter@viaa.be

Information on the conservation treatment or interviews with the restorers:

simon.laevers@kikirpa.be | 02 739 68 08 | 0494 32 07 80

The first two phases of the conservation treatment of the *Ghent Altarpiece* by the Van Eyck brothers took place between October 2012 and December 2019. They were carried out at the request of the churchwardens of St Bavo's Cathedral by the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) at the Museum of Fine Arts Ghent (MSK). Two exhibition rooms were redesigned as a conservation studio with a glass wall that allowed visitors to view the treatment in progress. **80% of the treatment was financed by the Flemish government** (Flanders Heritage Agency and Department of Culture, Youth and Media, 40% each) **and the remaining 20% by the Baillet Latour Fund.**

Phase 1: October 2012 – October 2016 (completed)



Before treatment

After treatment

The eight panels of the closed altarpiece were treated first. During conservation it was discovered that around 70% of the panels and frames were overpainted. **The overpaint was removed to reveal the original paint work of Van Eyck that had been hidden for over four centuries.** The conservation treatment was unanimously praised, both in Belgium and internationally.

Phase 2: November 2016 – end of 2019 (completed)



Before treatment



After treatment

In October 2016 the panels of the closed altarpiece returned to St Bavo's cathedral and the second phase of the treatment started at the MSK: that of **the lower register of the open altarpiece**, with the central panel of the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*. The left panel with the copy of the *Just Judges* already underwent conservation in 2010.

First the yellowed and cloudy **varnish layers were removed and some test windows were made** to gain insight in the location and magnitude of old overpaint on these panels. **Additional research** indicated that overpaint covered large parts of the underlying, well-conserved paint layer and that it could be removed. **After recommendation** of the international expert committee that supports the treatment and of the Flanders Topstukkenraad (Masterpiece Council) the Flemish government provided **supplementary financing** for intensive restoration of the panels of phase 2. All overpaint was removed, which covered around 50% of the original painting on the central panel. The original polychromy on the frames was restored as well. **The result of this phase of the restoration received unanimous praise : the Adoration of the Mystic Lamb is overwhelmingly beautiful!**

During the Van Eyck year 2020, the restored panels will be on view from 24 January onwards in the exhibition *The Return of the Lamb* at St Bavo's cathedral. The restored panels of the closed altarpiece will be part of the exhibition *Van Eyck: An Optical Revolution* at the MSK, opening on 1 February. From 8 October onwards, the complete altarpiece will be on view in the new visitor centre at St Bavo's.

Phase 3: After 2020 (planned)



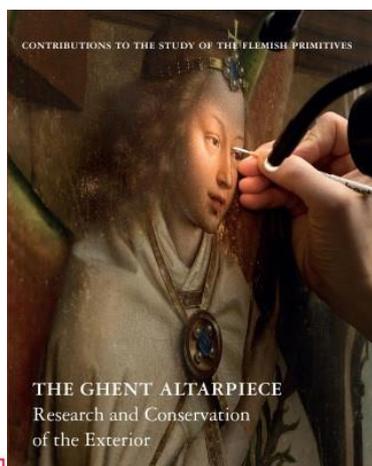
The intensive treatment of the **upper register of the open altarpiece** is planned after the Van Eyck year 2020. The churchwardens of St Bavo's will launch a European tender and submit a new subsidy dossier to the Flemish government.

Images: clostertovaneyck.kikirpa.be and © Sint-Baafskathedraal Gent, Lukasweb.be-Art in Flanders vzw, foto KIK-IRPA

The Ghent Altarpiece in 100 Billion Pixels

The ultra-high resolution photos and the scientific images are available in open access on the website clostertovaneyck.kikirpa.be. You can zoom into the intricate, breathtaking details of this masterpiece. The images of phase 2 of the conservation treatment will be added in June 2020. This website is financed by The Getty Foundation and the Gieskes-Strijbis Fund and received the e-Gov Award 2018 for User-friendliness.

The Ghent Altarpiece. Research and Conservation of the Exterior



The scientific results of phase 1 of the conservation treatment will be published in February 2020 in the book *The Ghent Altarpiece. Research and Conservation of the Exterior*, edited by the Centre for the Study of the Flemish Primitives of the KIK-IRPA.

Bart Fransen and Cyriel Stroo (eds.)

Hardback, c. 450 p.

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Project	Conservation of the Ghent Altarpiece by the Van Eyck brothers
Commissioner	Church administration of St Bavo's cathedral, Ghent
Project manager	Architectenbureau Bressers bvba
Contractor	Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA), Brussels
Cost of phases 1 and 2	1 410 592,54 €
Additional cost phase 1	149 113 € (treatment of the frames) 479 650 € (uncovering of the original paint layer)
Additional cost phase 2	150 159,34 € (uncovering of the original paint layer)
Public subsidy	Flander Heritage Agency Department of Culture, Youth and Media
Sponsor	Baillet Latour Fund
Sponsor additional research	Gieskes-Strijbis Fund, the Netherlands
Location	Museum of Fine Arts Ghent (MSK)
Conservation studio	City of Ghent, sponsored by ArcelorMittal, Meyvaert Glas and the Baillet Latour Fund
Subcontractors	Jean-Albert Glatigny, Collection Care Mobull, Eeckman Art & Insurance, Meyvaert Glas
Scientific research	KIK-IRPA, Ghent University, University of Antwerp
Touristic-educational program	Province of East-Flanders
Substitute panels (photos)	KIK-IRPA

Location partners:



Conservation and research partners:



Partners touristic-educational program:

