

23.01.2020, Press release: The appearance of Jan Van Eyck's original Lamb on the *Ghent Altarpiece*, by the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA, Brussels) and the Churchwardens of St Bavo's Cathedral (Ghent)

Several recent posts on social media and press articles, criticizing the appearance of the original Lamb painted by the brothers Van Eyck, seem to reflect a misunderstanding of the results of the recent restoration campaign.

The brothers Van Eyck have chosen to represent the Lamb of God with human-like staring eyes, more human features and an intense gaze. They have chosen to do so, although they were perfectly capable of reproducing the natural appearance of a lamb. This kind of representation of the Lamb of God with human eyes was common in the middle ages, as can be seen for instance in the mosaics in the Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.

The original Lamb was overpainted in the middle of the sixteenth century, changing its human appearance to a more naturalistic and passive expression. The discovery of the original Lamb carries huge art historical significance, and has ignited fresh debate among theologians and art historians concerning its meaning and the possible reasons for the change of appearance in the overpaint.

The Van Eyck brothers' original Lamb was in good condition with minimal paint loss. The images circulating on social media show the original Lamb freed from overpaint, before minimal inpainting of small paint losses.

The restoration of the Adoration of the Lamb was carried out by The Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA, Brussels) and was supported by an international commission of twenty experts, as well as many world renowned researchers in museums and universities. In the course of this treatment, former restorations were removed, including extensive sixteenth century overpaint, covering about half the surface of the original and obscuring the nuances and fine details of the original. The removal of the overpaint was preceded and guided by thorough examination using the latest state of the art technology. The choice for removing the overpaint was carefully weighed out, and it was fully supported by all involved. The results of the restoration have been praised by the experts, the public and the council of St Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent, which is housing the Altarpiece.

Consult the KIK-IRPA's press page for more information on the restoration:

<http://www.kikirpa.be/EN/136/371/Press.htm>

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