

## THE RESTORATION OF A PAINTING BY UMBERTO BOCCIONI

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### Introduction

“Costruzione Spiralicca” an Umberto Boccioni oil painting on canvas, 95 x 95 cm, dates between 1913-1914 (Fig.1). The work showing a seated female figure is a negation of the traditional portrait genre. The composition focuses on the absence of face of the subject, whose form, disarranged in spiral patterns, occupies the centre of the painting.



Fig.1 The painting after the restoration.

The work, property of Civiche Raccolte d'Arte di Milano (Italy) since 1934, has with time presented conservation problems. It was restored three times, in 1960, 1966 and 1967. Restorations were invasive and, besides the relining with aqueous adhesives, painted surface was heavily retouched and even varnished. Recently there has been evidence of further deterioration.

### The restoration

The preliminary research was limited to non-invasive analyses: retro-illumination, infrared-reflectography, UV fluorescence.

The polarity of the varnish layers was determined with a solubility test. It was possible to differentiate two distinct varnish layers: an outer non-fluorescent layer, soluble at low polarity values (Fd ca.80); an inner fluorescent one, becoming soluble at increasing polarity. At a polarity Fd 57 paint loss occurred. Cleaning was confined only to the removal of the uppermost layer of varnish.

After removing the lining, we concentrated on the back to thin down the discontinuous layer of paste residues covering it. Having ruled out mechanical and physical means (Laser) due to the fragility of the crystallized canvas, we tried to dissolve or at least swell, the hydrophilic material with an aqueous medium. The strategy was to control the diffusion of water modifying its viscosity by means of gelling agents and to try to speed up the action by means of some water-soluble “active principles”. The most omogeneous results were obtained with a simple acidic gel.

After cleaning the canvas, the correct adhesion between canvas, ground and paint layers was restored, using non-aqueous consolidant. BEVA 371 solution was applied on the canvas and then reactivated on a heated low pressure table. Relining of the painting was not necessary for conservative reasons, as it was sufficient to mount it on the stretcher using strip lining, provided that continuous gradual tension is maintained.

### The new tensioning system

We chose to preserve the original stretcher, a precious document of the painting's history with its many labels, witnessing the rich history of the piece (Fig.2). The original stretcher was kept as a rigid reference structure, providing the painting with elastic tension from an independent system. Flowing Teflon profiles were added on the cut, and the canvas is kept in tension from the rear with spring-loaded mechanisms. A thin but resistant frame in stratified oak in the inner span of the stretcher was added, kept at a fixed distance with brass bolts. This frame houses the patented elastic tensioning system. Applied force is now evenly distributed on the strip lining canvas, having an inserted steel rod. The painting's natural movements are continuously under a gentle control, free to flow with the stretcher's profile. Tension can be finely regulated and a value of 2,5 N/cm has been chosen.

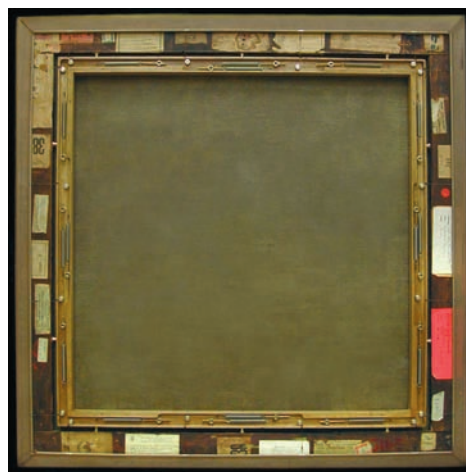


Fig.2 The back and the new tensioning system

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