

Una Tecnica di Foderatura Romana: A Roman Practice of Open-Weave Canvas Lining

Emma Kimmel, NYU Institute of Fine Arts

Last semester I began the treatment of a 16th-century, Venetian painting acquired by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation in 1930 from an Italian dealer. Most paintings from the Kress Foundation were treated soon after their purchase. This often included standard structural treatments – the addition of linings to canvas paintings, and cradles to panels. This one, however, did not receive the typical treatment.

Upon my initial examination, I noticed something unusual. From the reverse, I could see that the painting was lined with a very open weave canvas. Here is a close up image, and to the left is a swatch of linen from our studio for comparison. This lining is atypical of the Kress Foundation that favored the use of tightly woven canvases. So I wondered: where did this lining come from?

In fact, it is a traditional Roman lining technique done before the painting was sold. In Italy there are two traditional glue-paste lining methods: Florentine and Roman. The lining procedures are similar, but a characteristic difference is the lining canvas chosen. While both are linen or linen-hemp blends, the Florentine technique calls for a lining meant to mimic the original canvas – typically a tighter weave. The Roman technique, however, uses an open weave. There are two main types: a “tela patta” or “tela pattina.” From a quick Google search, both are readily available for purchase from several Italian vendors. *Tela patta* is quite open, around 10-15 threads per inch in warp and weft. *Tela pattina* is denser at 20-25 threads per inch. Generally, the larger the painting, the less

dense the canvas chosen in order to minimize the overall weight after lining. The lining on the Kress painting is about 15x15 threads per inch, meaning it has a *tela patta* canvas – suitable for a larger work such as this one.

The Roman method has several advantages, primarily: a lower overall weight after lining, less glue applied, and greater flexibility. It would not be suitable, however, for paintings with significant tears or damages requiring more rigid supports. Although glue-paste linings are not appropriate for many paintings due to the heat, moisture, and pressure of the process, the nearly 90-year-old lining on the Kress painting remains unobtrusive and quite flexible. There has been limited experimentation using Roman canvases with alternative adhesives, which could make the lining process less invasive while still providing a light, flexible support. Thank you!