

Cartoons of the Sacrament of Last Rites by Johann Friedrich Overbeck

STATE OF PRESERVATION

All the cartoons are in very precarious conditions. The paper, in fact, appears to be torn and peeling from the support.

Unfortunately, water damaged a large portion of the paper surface, washing away the colors, revealing crystals of glue and provoking detachment of paper from the canvas. The edges are also damaged, scraped off and affected by insects. The wooden support is deformed, thus causing dangerous tension on the canvas. Among all these panels, this conservation process will focus only on the Last Rights due to the collection's poor condition and need of immediate restoration.

James the Apostle gives the *Last Right* to a Christian man who is dying.

Peaceful group of the Elect led by the angels to Glory.

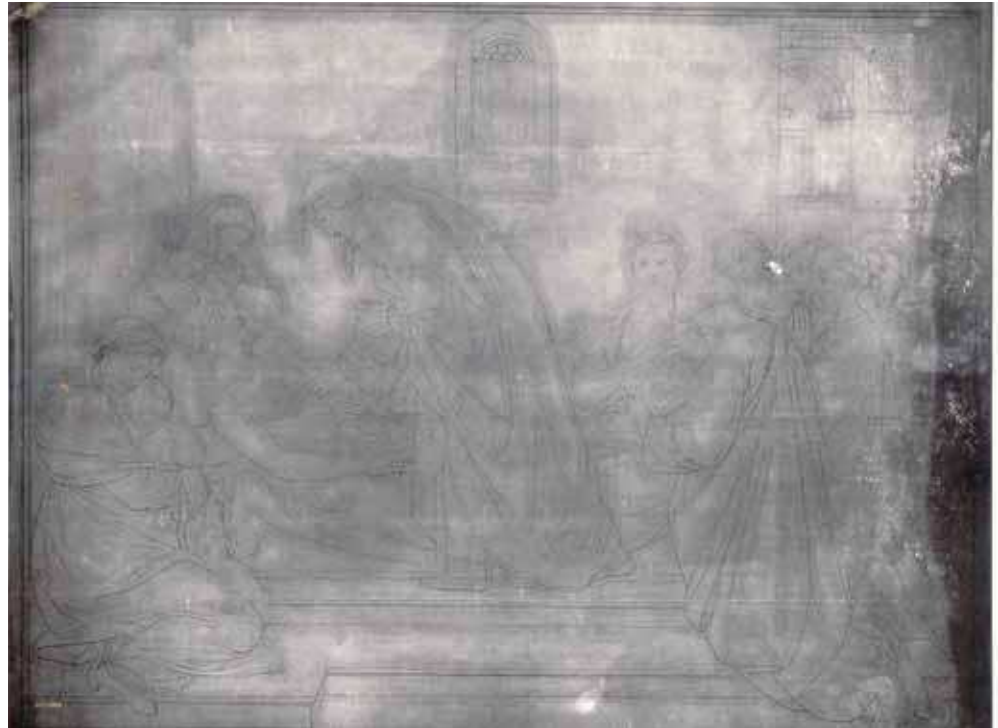
At the sound of the trumpet, four angels call the dead to the Final Judgment.

The condemned people are pushed into hell by the demons. Jesus the Judge surrounded by angels.

RESTORATION PROCESS INCLUDES

- Dust suction and micro dust suction of each panel
- Detaching the cartoons from the wooden support
- Removal of the canvas
- Removal of the crystallized glue
- Cleaning of the water stains
- Fixing of the tears
- Reintegration of the missing parts with Japanese paper
- Reinforcement of the edges
- Placing of new light supports (honeycomb)
- Pencil veiling
- Placing of a small frame to protect the edges
- Photographic documentation

Total Cost € 70.060,00



► Johann Friedrich Overbeck was born in Lübeck, Germany. His father, Christian Adolph Overbeck, was doctor of law, poet, mystic pietist and burgomaster of Lübeck. Within a stone's throw of the family mansion in the Königstrasse stood the school, where his uncle, doctor of theology and a voluminous writer, was the master; there, Overbeck became a classic scholar and received instruction in art.

The young artist left Lübeck in March 1806, and enrolled at the academy of Vienna, then under the direction of Heinrich Füger. Füger had trained under the French Neoclassic painter Jacques-Louis David. While Overbeck clearly accrued some of the polished technical aspects of the Neoclassic painters, he was alienated by lack of religious spirituality in the themes chosen by his masters. In Overbeck's view, the nature of earlier European art had been corrupted throughout contemporary Europe, starting centuries before the French

Revolution, and the process of discarding its Christian orientation was growing. He sought to express Christian art before the corrupting influence of the late Renaissance, casting aside his contemporary influences, and taking as a guide early Italian Renaissance painters, up to and including Raphael. After four years, the differences between his group and others in the academy had grown so irreconcilable, that Overbeck and his followers were expelled. Accordingly he left for Rome, carrying his half-finished canvas "Christ's Entry into Jerusalem," as the charter of his creed "I will abide by the Bible; I elect it as my standing-point." Overbeck entered Rome in 1810, which became the center of his labor for 59 years. Housed in the old Franciscan convent of San Isidoro, Overbeck was joined by a company of like-minded artists including Peter von Cornelius, Friedrich Wilhelm Schadow and Philipp Veit. They became known among friends and enemies by the descriptive

Artist: Johann Friedrich Overbeck
Dimensions: 3 m x 90 cm
Date: 1849 - 1855
Material: pencil on paper
Inventory no: 42505.1, 2, 3, 4, 5

epithets: the Nazarenes, the German-Roman artists, the church-romantic painters, the German patriotic and religious painters. Their precept was hard and honest work and holy living; they eschewed the antique as pagan, the Renaissance as false, and built up a revival on simple nature and on the serious art of Perugino, Pinturicchio, Francia and the young Raphael. The characteristics of the style thus educated were nobility of idea, precision and even hardness of outline, scholastic composition. They employed the addition of light, shade and color, not for allurements, but chiefly for perspicuity and completion of motive.

Overbeck was the mentor of the movement as this writing of a fellow-labourer attests: "No one who saw him or heard him speak could question his purity of motive, his deep insight and abounding knowledge: he is a treasury of art and poetry, and a saintly man." But the struggle was hard and poverty its reward. Helpful friends, however, came in Niebuhr, Bunsen and Frederick Schlegel. In 1813 Overbeck joined the Roman Catholic Church, and thereby believed that his art received Christian baptism.

Timely commissions followed. The Prussian consul, Jakob Salomon Bartholdy (1779-1825, uncle of Felix Mendelssohn), had a house on the brow of the Pincian, called Palazzo Zuccari or Casa Bartholdy. He engaged the quartet of Overbeck, Cornelius, Veit and Schadow to fresco a room 7 m square (now in the Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin) with episodes from the story of Joseph and his Brethren. The subjects which fell to the lot of Overbeck were the *Seven Years of Famine* and *Joseph sold by his Brethren*. These tentative wall-pictures, finished in 1818, produced so favorable an impression among the Italians that in the same year Prince Massimo commissioned Overbeck, Cornelius, Veit and Schnorr to cover the walls and ceilings of his garden pavilion, near St. John Lateran,

with frescoes illustrative of Tasso, Dante and Ariosto. Overbeck was assigned, in a room 5 m square, the illustration of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.

Overbeck belongs to a mix of schools, yet this eclectic background didn't hamper his creativity. Fifty years of the artist's laborious life were given to oil and easel paintings. He ranks among thinkers, and his pen was hardly less busy than his pencil. He was a minor poet, an essayist and a voluminous letter-writer. Yet his art was the issue of his life: his constant thoughts, cherished in solitude and chastened by prayer, he transposed into pictorial forms, and thus were evolved countless and much-prized drawings and cartoons, of which the most considerable are the Gospels, forty cartoons (1852); *Via Crucis*, fourteen water-color drawings (1857); and the *Seven Sacraments*, seven cartoons for tapestry which were sadly never completed (1847-1859). Overbeck's compositions, with few exceptions, are engraved. His life-work he sums up in the words "Art to me is as the harp of David, whereupon I would desire that psalms should at all times be sounded to the praise of the Lord." He died in Rome in 1869. He was interred in the church of San Bernardo alle Terme.

The magnificent series of the *Seven Sacraments* is complete and preserved in the Storage Room of the Painting Collection of the Vatican Museums. The subject was inspired by Raphael and Poussin. The pencil-work of these cartoons is delicate and displays the ability of the Master. The number of drawings is consistent: 5-6 cartoons for each Sacrament (one panel was destined to a central position and the others were meant to be located at the sides). All drawings were completed in pencil on paper and subsequently they have been transferred on canvas and a wooden support in order to avoid excessive fragility.