

Louvre masterpiece by Veronese 'mutilated' by botched nose jobs

Paris museum accused of trying to cover up 'vulgar' alterations to Italian Renaissance painter's Supper at Emmaus

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The Observer, Sunday 13 June 2010

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1) the original painting with the nose turning down. 2) Previous 'repaints' are removed. 3) After the first restoration the nose and mouth have changed shape. 4) The second attempt tries to repair previous errors Photograph: Louvre

The Louvre Museum in Paris is facing accusations that restorers have carried out two botched nose jobs on a woman pictured in one of its 16th-century masterpieces.

Art experts on both sides of the Channel say that a principal character in *Supper at Emmaus*, a 1550s painting by the Renaissance master Veronese, has been scarred by "vulgar cosmetic" surgery.

After the first operation, the patient emerged with "a mutilated nose tip that hovers disconnectedly over an anatomical void", according to critics. Subsequent corrective surgery has left her with an unnaturally wide nostril and swollen lips, they say.

Michel Favre-Félix, president of the Association for the Respect and Integrity of Artistic Heritage (Aripha) in Paris, said: "Veronese had pictured a noble family mother, as an echo to the Virgin Mary, and it has been turned into a caricature of a 21st-century adolescent, with bloated cheeks and a ridiculous pout."

He accused the restorers of unnecessarily retouching Veronese's original and of "falsifying the whole physiognomy and expression".

More seriously, their "re-retouching", as he put it, was a covert repainting without leaving any record of their actions in the museum's files.

Describing the attempt to correct the first restoration as a "tacit admission" of "gross errors", Favre-Félix said that the museum has refused to acknowledge the second restoration, despite photographic evidence showing how the painting has changed.

His concerns were echoed by Michael Daley, director of restoration watchdog ArtWatch UK, who said: "It's an astonishing own goal by the Louvre because this time, after criticisms of their first repaint had appeared in the French press, the Louvre covertly repainted it again, but without leaving any record of their action in their own files."



A detail from the restored Supper at Emmaus

Photograph: Louvre

He criticised "picture surgeons" who act like cosmetic surgeons, "prettifying" unique images, and condemned restorers who are doing more harm than good. Before-and-after photographs of the Veronese offer "incriminating" evidence, Daley said, proving that the changes were "unwarranted and indefensible".

He said: "In the pre-cleaning state [picture 1], the tip of the nose was seen to turn down convincingly into the groove that runs from the upper lip, and both of the curved ridges which define the boundaries of that groove were articulated by shading, consistent with the right-to-left fall of light on the face."

Pointing to a photograph of the face after the Louvre had cleaned it and removed what was considered "repaints" by earlier restorers, leaving what survives of Veronese's work [picture 2], he said: "We can see exactly what they added with their own brushes and paint. The distinctive downward set of the visible nostril had survived the 'cleaning', albeit in somewhat injured form."

But a photograph after the first restoration [picture 3] shows that this surviving original depiction of the nostril has been painted out, said Daley: "The former softly turned, downward pointing nostril has been obliterated and replaced by an impossibly sharp-edged upper aperture that ends abruptly.

"This new not-nostril is horizontal, not downwards sloping, and it connects to a now fuzzed and mutilated nose tip that hovers disconnectedly over an anatomical void. "

The mouth also underwent radical reworking, he observed: "The head had been given a blander, puffed-out balloon-like quality. There was no evidence or authority for these changes in the photograph of the cleaned-but-not-yet-restored state."

Daley said that a photograph following the second, "phantom" restoration [picture 4] shows an attempt to undo some of the most egregious errors, yet others have been introduced: "The tip of the nose has been turned down once again, but it has also been sharpened."

It also has a "grotesquely large nostril", he observed, and the lips have become "swollen and formless".

Favre-Félix said: "It is another alien 21st-century version, dishonouring Veronese's painting."

Mark Zucker, professor of art history at Louisiana State University and a specialist in Italian Renaissance art, said: "Shocking is a good word to describe what the restorers have wrought."

Although restorers concede the errors of their predecessors, the rate of restorations is

accelerating, critics say. Their criticisms, to be published this month in *ArtWatch UK Journal*, come ahead of a meeting on 18 June by a Louvre committee, apparently to decide whether to restore another masterpiece, Leonardo Da Vinci's *Virgin and Child with St Anne*.

Daley warned: "Were such a restoration to go ahead, a long-resisted restoration of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* would surely follow. There has already been massive lobbying among art world grandees wishing to be associated with the cleaning of the most famous – and, in their terms, 'dirty' – picture."

A Louvre spokeswoman described the "second restoration" as simply being spruced up ("bichonnée"). "That's why you cannot find it in the painting's dossier," she said.

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