



Civico Museo Parisi Valle  
Maccagno con Pino e Veddasca – Lago Maggiore (Varese)  
**The Treasure of Imperial Maccagno**

## 2. The Restoration of *Immaculate Conception*

The painting was in a very poor condition. Without a frame, it had been taped to a wooden panel. The entire lower part was folded over the back of the panel, which made it impossible to recognise the complete development of the subject and the extraordinary dragon at the feet of the Madonna. Abandoned for decades in a temporary shelter, the canvas presented numerous problems: a general loss of flatness, widespread damp stains, multiple cracks in the support, and an evident alteration of the original colours because the paint film was abraded, with colour and preparation gaps spread over the entire surface. The restoration provided an interesting opportunity to study a work that had never before been the subject of close analysis. The discovery of the writing on the back, with the date and indication of the commissioner, immediately led to the decision to keep the painting on the original canvas. The materials and methods adopted were agreed on a case-by-case basis with the conservation authorities and evaluated to ensure that they were as transparent and reversible as possible, while respecting the material and aesthetic characteristics of the painting. In order to carry out the restoration, the work had to be transferred to a restoration workshop in Milan. Here, after photographic documentation of the state of the painting, dirt deposits and double-sided adhesive and glue residues were removed by means of acetone compresses. This was followed by the smoothing of the edge deformations through controlled humidification and subsequent application of heat and pressure, and the pre-consolidation of the colour with Aquazol in ethanol, in order to be able to safely remove the patches on the back. After preliminary tests, the paint film was cleaned with a pH-controlled solution. In addition, the paint film was consolidated by brush application of Plexisol on both the front and back, re-hardening the resin through heat to promote the adhesion of the layers.

The elegant lower outline of the painting was no longer legible. It was identified during restoration. On the basis of this trace, the template for the new frame was made, which was specially built for the *Immaculate Conception* in Maccagno. The fabric gaps were filled with linen inserts of a



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texture and density similar to the original, while the cracks were repaired by splicing the ends of the ruptured threads together head-to-head with sturgeon's glue. On the back of the cracks, polyester tissue thread bridges were applied. Once the painting was tensioned on the new frame, it was possible to repair both the preparation and colour gaps. These were filled in with Bologna plaster and sturgeon's glue, first by levelling, then connecting the surface to the surrounding areas. The fillings were finally painted with a tempera colour identified after a series of tests. To finish the operations, a protective varnish was applied all over the painting. The intervention was concluded with the conservative restoration, but we hope that in the future it will also involve the aesthetic aspect with the retouching of the numerous gaps, in order to enable a complete interpretation of this important work, which has never been presented to the public.

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(extract from the restoration report)

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