Reading Color:

Promoting Artworks' Legible History Through Conservation and Restoration Treatments

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Imagine: a vast canvas alive with fields of vibrant plum, tangerine orange, and velvety black, transformed by harsh light into a square of dull greys and blacks. Imagine a delicate fresco depicting figure after buxom figure bedecked in clothes of petal pink, sea foam green, and sky blue, smothered beneath layer after layer of muddy brown varnish and years of candle soot. Imagine a statue, lifelike with its pale glowing skin, royal purple robe, and sunny golden hair, stripped of its colorful vivacity until the marble beneath lies naked, white and empty. These artistic travesties do not have to be imagined. They have been occurring for hundreds of years, due to the ravages of time and rough handling. While these tragedies cannot be reversed, art conservators are becoming more and more skilled in both conserving the present state of an art object *and* presenting a vision of what the work may have looked like in the past.

In this essay, I will build on Salvador Munos Viñas' rejection of "legibility" as a motivation for conservation. While I will agree that the desire to return an object to a particular "meaningful" state should never be the foundation of a conservation treatment, I would go further and say that promoting visibility of various legible stages of an art object is both possible and necessary. I will show that conservators are now able to distinguish a variety of different stages in an artwork's history by examining two conservation projects, both of which prove the capability of modern technology to accurately determine and present multiple iterations of a work. I will also argue, through a third conservation treatment, that conservators *and those in the art world* have an obligation to the viewing public to present art objects' myriad transition states in as much accuracy as possible, because the appearance of a work, particularly its color, carries meaning about the object's history. While color and appearance may be fleeting, the world of conservation is progressing to such an extent that the legible history of an object, as seen through its appearance, need no longer be forever lost.

In his book, "Contemporary Theory of Conservation," Salvador Munoz Viñas states that classical conservation is the pursuit of the objective truth of an artwork, and that conservators' goal is to reinforce the structural and aesthetic integrity of that object in order to maintain its true nature. Some conservators have taken this idea and tried to refine it, saying that truth is not the ultimate end of conservation: promoting legibility is.

"Legibility is the ability of an object to be correctly comprehended or "read" by the observer…it holds that objects have a worthwhile meaning…which damage hinders or hides. Correct as this may appear to be, it is not so… when conservators decide to render an object 'legible', they are actually making a choice; they are deciding which legibility should prevail over the many possible ones." [1]

To explain this point, Viñas posits this example: if a conservator were to be tasked with conserving a rusted suit of armor from the Middle Ages, she would have a decision to make. Should she maintain the crust of oxidized iron in order to show that the armor has not been used for a very long time—or was perhaps even buried? Or should she clean it as thoroughly as possible, removing the "damage" done to the armor in order to give viewers a glimpse of what it used to look like? According to Viñas, there are many layers of meaning wrapped up in an art object. "Objects," he says, "can be compared to palimpsests, in which texts (information, messages, and meanings) are written in succession, each one hiding or modifying the previous ones. It is the conservator who chooses which meaning (which legibility) should prevail, often at the expense of permanently excluding other possibilities." [2]

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[1] Salvador Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 100.
[2] Ibid., 101.

In essence, Viñas is saying that the brief of art conservators is to maintain the structural and aesthetic integrity of an artwork for future generations while honoring its history—a philosophically difficult task which can mean considering an artwork's damage as much a part of its history as the artwork itself—a mindset espoused by 17th century proto-art conservator, John Ruskin[3]. According to this philosophy, deeming a particular state of a work as more authentic than another can negate the historical legibility of other states of a work. While I agree with this assertion, as previously stated, I maintain that as conservation technology continues to advance, it is the prerogative of the contemporary conservator to use the tools available to them identify as many intermediate states of a work as possible in order to give visibility to a variety of readings of a work, even as they have to make conservation choices that will promote a single reading of a work. As will be seen in two upcoming two examples, modern technology and conservation practices have advanced to such an extent that the problem of conservators "permanently excluding" potential readings of a work through conservation treatments is decreasing.

The recent conservation/restoration of the Harvard Murals using light is an excellent example of how technology can help promote multiple readings of an artwork. Mark Rothko's Harvard Murals (fig. 1), painted in 1962, were commissioned by Harvard University and hung in a sunny office dining room near Harvard Yard. [4] The work was comprised of five murals, three of which lay side by side on one wall, the other two flanking a door on the opposite wall. For efficiency's sake I will be focusing on the three grouped murals.

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[3] Ibid., 3-5.
[4] Louis Menand, "Watching them Turn Off the Rothkos," The New Yorker, April 1, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/watching-them-turn-off-the-rothkos

In the 1960s, these murals were striking. The panel on the far left boasted a lopsided electric orange square, thick, bold, and searing to the eye. The square floated atop a pinkish-plum field; Rothko's blues and reds danced, seeming almost to vibrate beneath the bright square halo. The center panel, wider than the other two, was a deep, velvety black. Two monolithic maroon stripes stretched from base to top of the canvas, each end nearly touching a sketchy maroon border ringing the panel. The far right canvas, also maroon, contained a similar monolithic stripe, this time lying on a field of bluish-brown. As New York Times writer Hilarie M. wrote, "Rothko created a sense of depth and interior space that the viewer could enter psychologically."[5]

In the late 1970s, however, these paintings looked wildly different (fig. 2). After nearly two decades of exposure to harsh sunlight, the vibrant but light sensitive Lithol red pigment, mixed with ultramarine blue and animal glue to create the deep plum and maroons throughout the work, had drastically faded as a result of light exposure. When conservators began to look at what could be done to recover these paintings, they realized that the immense difficulty in conserving them lay in the topography of the paintings themselves. The surfaces of the murals were so heterogeneous, with various thicknesses of animal glue and egg tempera paint laying side-by-side, that glazing the work would have irrevocably marred the delicate juxtaposition of matte and glossy textures. Conservators decided to take an unconventional approach to conservation- an approach which could even be considered a type of restoration. [6]

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[5] Hilarie M. Sheets, "A Return for Rothko's Harvard Murals," The New York Times, October 23, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/26/arts/artsspecial/a-return-for-rothkos-harvard-murals-.html?_r=0

[6] Jens Stenger, Narayan Khandekar, Annie Wilker, Katya Kallsen, Daniel P. Kirby, Katherine Eremin. "The making of Mark Rothko's Harvard Murals" *Studies in Conservation* 61:6, (2016): 331-347.

While conservation, preservation, and restoration are often used as interchangeable terms, there are very important differences between the three. The American Institute of Conservation (AIC) defines art conservation as: "The profession devoted to the preservation of cultural property for the future. Conservation activities include examination, documentation, treatment, and preventive care, supported by research and education." [7] The broad term, "treatment", describes the attempt of a conservator to act on an object in a way that preserves the current status of the art, protects it from future damages, and mends any broken element that compromises the work's structural or aesthetic integrity. Whatever the treatment, it should, above all, be reversible.[8] Conservation could involve using soluble adhesives to repair a torn map, cleaning mold off of a book cover, or removing aging varnish that causes a painting to appear yellow.

While conservation focuses on keeping a work stable in its present state, restoration is an attempt to noticeably alter a work so that it looks more like what it did when it was first created. Traditional restoration techniques often involve the permanent addition of modern materials onto an art object. Replacing a large swath of missing mosaic tiles, re-finishing a wooden bedframe, and sewing new fabric onto a historical garment are all examples of restoration.

A team of conservators decided to treat the violently faded murals using a non-invasive "restoration" process which uses light as a compensatory measure to show the viewing public what the painting used to look like. The concept was drawn from conservator Raymond Lafontaine, who first proposed the possibility of using blue and white light to negate the

[7] "Our Code of Ethics," American Institute for Conservation, accessed December 10, 2019, https://www.culturalheritage.org/about-conservation/code-of-ethics.

[8] Ibid.

aesthetic effects of yellowed varnish. [9] The team's first step in conserving the Harvard Murals was to determine the original color of the paintings. Using faded color images of the murals from the 1960s as their starting point, the group utilized a chemical fading model to make a digital mock-up of what the original pigments could have looked like. They also digitally compared the values of black-and-white photographs of the murals to those of vintage photographs of the time. Lastly, they double-checked both methods using unfaded segments of a sixth mural, confirming their research.

The conservation team then took a digital photo of the current state of the paintings; they compared the current color with the target (original) color and created a compensation image. This image would then be projected onto the paintings using a set of digital projectors. Much like Lafontaine's blue and white light, this projection adds the colors that are lacking in the paintings in order to restore them to their original, colorful glory. The light used is free of the damaging ultraviolet radiation that caused the fading of the red Lithol, and since the projections can be turned off, the treatment is completely reversible, in accordance with conservation ethics.

The conservation/restoration of the Harvard Murals shows just how far the field of conservation has come in its ability to detect and present anew the past stages of an artwork—in this case, its color. There are now countless tools at conservators' disposal; from digital photography, to computer models, to scanning techniques, to light projectors, all of which can be employed to determine a work's original appearance. By using a reversible restoration technique,

[9] R.H. Lafontaine, 1986. "Seeing Through a Yellow Varnish: A Compensating Illumination System." *Studies in Conservation*, 31(3): 97–102.

conservators were careful to not promote a certain reading of Rothko's pieces. Museumgoers can see both the electric colors of the original work, as well as the damaging effects of light and time.

Next, I want to highlight another conservation treatment which, though controversial, shows the capability of modern technology to aid in promoting visibility of multiple legible stages of an artwork. Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel between 1508 and 1512. He painted directly into wet plaster, a technique called *buon fresco* that is known for both its difficulty (the plaster dries as one paints) and its durability (once the plaster dries, the paint tends to hold fast). This technique resulted in colors that were, as art historian, Gianluigi Colalucci puts it, "luminous and fresh, as translucent and precious as those of a watercolor."[10] Between the years of its creation and the most recent conservation, which was completed in the 1990s, the ceiling fresco was cleaned in a variety of different ways: earliest conservators used bread, water, and Greek wine to revive the color and clarity of the original fresco. In the mid-1700s, a father-son conservation team sought to brighten the dirtied colors and get rid of pesky salt deposits using animal glues as varnish. Still others retouched the work itself, overpainting the fresco with oils. [11] Throughout this time, soot from candles placed in the chapel accumulated in layer after smoky layer on the surface of the fresco and between the layers of glue. The result of this excess material was a darkened, grimy version of Michelangelo's original work (fig. 3). As is evident, these conservation treatments noticeably modified the original artwork and did not follow the best practices currently recommended by modern conservators.

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[10] Gianluigi Colalucci "The Frescoes of Michelangelo on the Vault of the Sistine Chapel: Original Technique and Conservation." *The Conservation of Wall Paintings* (1991): 67.

[11] Gianluigi Colalucci, "Michelangelo's Colours Rediscovered," in *The Sistine Chapel, the Art, the History, and the Restoration*, London: Muller. Blond and White, 1986), 260-265.

In 1980, it became exceedingly evident to conservators that the Sistine chapel ceiling was far from stable. In addition to darkening the colors on the ceiling, the glue that had been added to the frescoes caused intense flaking of the ceiling's surface and also gave rise to colonies of fungus. This was the status of the Sistine Chapel that had been known to the world for centuries: the darkened, shadowy, almost Romantic version of Michelangelo that was unlike any other work of his time. And this is what conservators devoted themselves to repairing. [12]

Art historians' perception of Michelangelo's use of color has been greatly influenced by the pre-restoration chiaroscuro observed in the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Some art historians, such as Toti Scialoja, the former director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Rome, have attempted to understand the unusually dark additions (animal glue and soot) as intentional experiments by the artist, designed to add depth to the work. [13] Historians like Scialoja have therefore viewed Michelangelo as a moody, experimental genius, straying from the fresco technique *en vogue* in favor of a more unique and mysterious style.[14] Were this true, the 1980 conservation of the Sistine Chapel would have been a drastically irresponsible and heavy-handed treatment of a centuries-old monument. However, there are three reasons why this cannot be the case. First, comparing the conserved Sistine Chapel to other works of its time, we can see that the fresco matches up well with what we'd expect of it. Second, a piece of the original fresco (free of any conservation) was discovered wedged in a crack in the ceiling. The fragment didn't contain any

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[12] Gianluigi Colalucci. "The Frescoes of Michelangelo on the Vault of the Sistine Chapel: Original Technique and Conservation." *The Conservation of Wall Paintings* (1991): 67.

[13] Gianluigi Colalucci. "The Technique of the Sistine Ceiling Frescoes." *The Sistine Chapel: A Glorious Restoration* (1994): 26.; Douglas C. McGill, "Sistine Chapel Restoration Stirs Up Controversy", Sun Sentinel, November 9, 1986, https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-1986-11-09-8603080786-story.html

[14] Henry Tanner, "Restoration Reveals Michelangelo's Gifts", The New York Times, May 31, 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/31/arts/restoration-reveals-michangelo-s-gifts.html

glue or soot and matched up perfectly with the conserved fresco. Lastly, the fact that the pigments used in the fresco have been proven to not react with the plaster shows that Michelangelo probably did not intended to paint a lot of chiaroscuro *a secco.* These three facts disprove the idea put forth by critics of the 1980 conservation that a great deal of important *a secco* coloring was removed during the conservation. The dark, dusky version of the ceiling that was accepted for years was clearly a result of faulty, uninformed conservation projects over the centuries.

As shown, the heavy-handed conservation techniques of the past covered the original fresco in layers of darkness, resulting in a drastically different version of the Sistine Chapel Michelangelo's original. However, the fact remains that the heavily varnished ceiling, known and loved for years, is a legible, "readable" stage in the history of the Sistine Chapel's existence. As Viñas would argue, the aesthetic "damage" to the frescoes caused by years of soot and layers of glue is just as meaning-laden as the bright and clear fresco. The conservators of the chapel were conscious of this. They knew that removing the historical patina would be a controversial procedure but decided to perform the treatment to both increase the fresco's stability and remove excess material not intended by Michelangelo. In addition to gradually removing the animal glues, filling in major cracks, and stabilizing the chapel with dehumidifiers, the conservators were insistent on taking countless photographs of the fresco in order to document the appearance of the damaged fresco. The AIC code of ethics condones this practice, saying that conservators must "produce and maintain accurate, complete, and permanent records of examination, sampling, scientific investigation, and treatment. When appropriate, the records should be both

written and pictorial."[15] According to Carlo Pietrangeli, the general director of the Papal Museums, conservators took "fifteen thousand black and white photographs, ektachromes, and color slides," throughout the three-year conservation process. In addition, a Japanese television crew captured footage of each stage of the conservation process.[16] Though photography has existed since before the establishment of conservation as a profession, this technology, when paired with others, is an extremely important advancement in promoting legibility. Just as the conservation of the Harvard Murals utilized photography in revitalizing the Rothkos, conservators and museum workers can make use of these photos to create interactive displays, guidebooks, perhaps even tinted glasses to show viewers of the Sistine Chapel how it has changed throughout the centuries.

As an aside, is also notable that the conservators decided to retain the loincloths that artist Daniele da Volterra was commissioned to paint onto the nude figures in the *Last Judgment* fresco in the Sistine Chapel. The conservators knew that Michelangelo never intended for the naked figures to be clothed, just as they knew that the animal glues and soot were not Michelangelo's artistic intention. However, because the loincloths were painted so close to the time of the artwork's completion, and because the covered nudity may have saved the chapel ceiling from possible censorship-driven destruction by the Council of Trent, the conservators decided that the addition was an important part of the chapel tells a story about the work's history.[17] The conservators made the controversial choice to keep some elements (the loincloths)

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[15] "Our Code of Ethics," American Institute for Conservation, accessed December 10, 2019, https://www.culturalheritage.org/about-conservation/code-of-ethics.

[16]Carlo Pietrangeli, "Introduction: An Account of the Restoration." *The Sistine Chapel: A Glorious Restoration* (1994): 7.

[17]Stephen R. Wilson, "Restorer Opposes Removing Loincloths from 'Last Judgment'", Associated Press, March 23, 1990, https://apnews.com/d0fb0b0f774116d3d8bd4911b060bd93.

and eliminate other elements (the soot and glue), all in favor of letting audiences glimpse different meaningful stages of the work's lifespan. I find these choices to be wise and commendable, but I maintain that conservators should work hard to put forth the information they gather about *all* of the different stages of the work. I hope that future conservators will have the capability to scan *Last Judgment* in order to show the public what lies beneath the modest breeches, in addition to presenting the fresco as it currently stands.

Through the examination of the *Harvard Murals* and the Sistine Chapel Ceiling, I have established that understanding artworks' history through its ever-changing appearance—specifically its color—is increasingly possible through the use of technology. I want to examine a final conservation treatment to show that in some cases, conservators have a moral prerogative to promote the visibility of artworks' historic past.

The predominant visual characteristic of sculptures in the classical style is their whiteness, an idea which conservators of the early 20th century incorporated into their treatment of classical sculpture. In 1939, conservators attempted a cleaning of the Elgin Marbles, a set of friezes taken from the Parthenon (fig. 4). Mary Beard writes that these marbles, taken from the Acropolis to the British Museum, held layer upon layer of multicolored historical patina. The marbles were cleaned using extremely harsh techniques in order to make sure the marbles would look "pure, white, and *classical."* [18] Upon seeing the works, an artist of the time praised the cleaning, saying that the marbles seemed to have returned to their "original whiteness," even though subtle remains of a paint job could be detected upon examination. [19] This insistence on the preeminence of whiteness was first espoused perhaps most influentially by Johann

[18] Mary Beard. *The Parthenon* (Great Britain: Profile Books Ltd, 2002), 168-169.

[19] William St. Clair, Lord Elgin and the Marbles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 282.

Winckelmann, who promoted the idea that whiteness represented the epitome of classical beauty, and pigmentation on an artwork denoted uncivilized barbarianism. [20] This reading of classical sculpture as uniformly white, while certainly an indisputable part of its history, is extremely one-sided and problematic, as I will later discuss.

As scientists and conservators have come to realize, the stubborn belief that ancient statues were pure white is far from true. As technology has advanced, scientists and researchers have been able to non-invasively examine ancient sculptures and have discovered with certainty that most if not all classical sculptures were originally colored with pigments. They have done this by examining trace elements on sculptures with a stereomicroscope and examining sculptures under a UV light. Pigments stand out from the surrounding marble under a UV light, making it easier to see where the paint existed. Scientists have also been able to identify the chemical species found in these statues by using an infrared spectroscopic analysis. This technology measures the wavelengths reflected by the trace pigments and matches those wavelengths to previously-measured wavelengths in a database.[21] Not only are scientists and conservators now able to say with confidence that many statues were painted, they are also able to identify exactly which pigments were used in the creation of the artworks.

Far from being merely an afterthought, color was an extremely important and meaning-laden element of these sculptures. As author Mark Bradley argues in his research on color and meaning in the ancient world, the discovery of bright pigments on statues such as Augustus of Prima Porta shows that there was a legibility to artworks that is now lost. Beyond the fact that

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[20] Margaret Talbot, "The Myth of Whiteness in Classical Sculpture," The New Yorker, October 22, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/29/the-myth-of-whiteness-in-classical-sculpture

[21] "Augustus of Prima Porta," The Digital Sculpture Project, October 1, 2011, http://www.digitalsculpture.org/augustus/liverani.html

audiences are now unable to understand that these white marbles used to be vastly different in visual appearance, they are also missing out on another layer of legibility. Without the paint, modern-day audiences are no longer privy to the visual symbolism that would have been evident to audiences of ancient Rome.

Bradley discusses the meanings of the lost colors on Augustus of Prima Porta in his article, "The Importance of Colour on Marble Sculpture." Augustus' hair, golden-brown, would have been instantly recognizable to contemporary viewers as resembling the hair of the god Helios, representing "light, knowledge, truth, purity, the Golden Age." [22] The fringes of Augustus' tunic, painted with Egyptian blue, would have resembled the deep purple dye of the murex, a color reserved only for the highest strata in the Roman empire. And the bold cloak draped across his left forearm would have been painted with a lac dye, a vibrant scarlet pigment made from the wild madder. The bright red would have indicated Augustus' political and military prowess.[23] All of these various painted hues would have contributed to a very legible image of Caesar Augustus as a divine warrior, descended from the gods and sent to bring peace to the earth.

Although the loss of symbolic color is significant, a more sinister result of pigmentation loss has permeated Western Culture. Winckelmann's ideology has led different iterations of supremacist groups to appropriate the art of ancient Greece and Rome as propagandistic iconography for their own causes. In a BBC interview, Professor Rolf Michael Schneider of the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, said:

[22] Mark Bradley, "The Importance of Colour on Ancient Marble Sculpture," Art History, 32 (2009), 449
[23] Ibid., 450

"Without the classical tradition, the Nazi visual ideology would have been rather different. The perfect Aryan body, the white color [of the marble], the beautiful, ideal white male: to put it very bluntly, it became a kind of image of the Herrenrasse or 'master race." [24]

Art critic Ben Davis describes a more recent example of the use of classical imagery in the name of white supremacy. Identity Evropa, a "crypto-fascist, white supremacist organization," utilized images of Michelangelo's *David,* Young Hercules, and, Winckelmann's poster child, Apollo Belvedere in their recruiting posters (fig. 5). These posters sported taglines such as, "Our future belongs to us," and "Let's become great again." [25] The propagandistic use of these white marble statues betrays the pervasiveness of Winckelmann's belief that colored sculpture belonged to barbarians only. It shows that the Western viewing public does not fully understand that these statues were *not* white, and therefore cannot represent the cradle of white supremacy or the idealization of white beauty. In the sociopolitical climate of the 21st century, where prejudice against people of color runs rampant, this harmful misunderstanding must be righted.

In the now-famous "Gods in Color" exhibition, archeologist Vinzenz Brinkmann attempted to correct the assumption of pan-whiteness. He used what he had learned about polychromy through ultraviolet analysis to reconstruct the sculptures as they perhaps might have looked, using bright and beautiful paints. He and his team made plaster casts of the original statues, including Augustus of Prima Porta, and painted them according to the chemical

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[24] Alastair Sooke, "The Discobolus: Greeks, Nazis, and the Body Beautiful," BBC, March 24, 2015 http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20150324-hitlers-idea-of-the-perfect-body

[25] Ben Davis, "The New White Nationalism's Sloppy Use of Art History, Decoded," ArtnetNews, March 7, 2017, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/identity-evropa-posters-art-symbolism-881747

[25] Fiona Rose-Greenland. "Color Perception in Sociology: Materiality and Authenticity at the Gods in Color Show." *Sociological Theory* 34, no. 2 (June 2016): 81–105.

information they had discovered. [26] Two exceptionally beautiful items in the exhibition collection are the reconstructions of Erechtheus, the son of the goddess Athena, the other Eumolpos, the son of Poseidon (fig 6). For centuries, these figures have existed as dark, metallic statues of muscular, ruggedly bearded men. However, Brinkmann used his research to reconstruct what they might have looked like. The Digitorial® for the "Gods in Color" exhibition reads:

"In the two Riace Warriors the illusion of sun-tanned skin was achieved by the application of numerous layers of a greatly thinned asphalt varnish to which a little red pigment had been added… Their extremely lifelike appearance is produced by their elaborately crafted stone eyes, their copper nipples and lips, and their teeth plated with silver foil." [27]

These statues are magnificent. Their lifelike bronzed bodies, though never originally white, can now be unambiguously read as bodies of color. They combat the pervasive assumption that statuary whiteness (and by extension, whiteness of skin) was elevated and highly valued in the ancient world.

Critics of the exhibition, such as art historian Fabio Barry, have been appalled at the hyper-saturation of the plaster copies' pigmentation. Barry laughed at the Augusts of Prima Porta copy, calling it "a cross-dresser trying to hail a taxi." [28] (fig. 7) This reaction is understandable; the highly saturated colors are shocking, and quite possibly not what the original hues looked like. However, the educated guesses made by conservators and archeologists, like Brinkmann,

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[27] "Gods in Color." Gods in Color, 2017. https://buntegoetter.liebieghaus.de/en.
[28] "Augustus of Prima Porta," The Washington Post, May 4, 2008, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/02/AR2008050203090.html

have been backed by technology and research. The idea Brinkmann wants to convey through his exhibition is that the marble statues that are bone-white today did indeed have pigmentation in the past and should be presented to the public with this fact in mind.

If we view the white marbles through the lens of a conservator, we encounter the fact that the current state of the statues is very different from their past colorful state. Modern day conservators, Viñas would argue, should conserve the objects as they stand, honoring their whiteness, which represents their historical passage through time. While I agree heartily that conserving classical statues should never involve restoration of the objects' pigmentation, I believe that there should be more exhibits like "Gods in Color" that incorporate the knowledge of pigmentation gained by conservators into their presentation of the artworks. In the Louvre, and other museums around the world, tombstones giving information about marble sculpture after marble sculpture neglect to mention that the present whiteness of each classical statue is far from the reality of its intended and historical existence.[29] This gap between the reality of ancient classical sculpture and the way they are presented today must be filled if audiences are to be able to shake off the pervasive privileging of whiteness. As seen in the example of the "Gods in Color" exhibit, conservation (maintaining the status quo of the object and helping stabilize it) can and should go hand-in-hand with a completely non-invasive quasi-restoration of a particular state of the objects' existence. In light of Winckelmann's ideas about whiteness as the peak of beauty, conservators and curators have a responsibility to join forces to pursue the truth of an object's past so that audiences everywhere have a chance to glimpse very important lost readings of each work, in addition to their modern-day appearance.

[29] Margaret Talbot, "The Myth of Whiteness in Classical Sculpture," The New Yorker, October 22, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/29/the-myth-of-whiteness-in-classical-sculpture

The desire to promote the visibility of all legible stages of an artwork through modern-day technology is noble, but economic and ethical problems will inevitably arise as the fields of conservation and restoration expand to include this philosophy. For example, many smaller museums don't have an in-house conservator able to do research on already-acquisitioned objects. Museums that do have a conservator often have a long waiting list of objects needing repair; these conservators may have little time to spend on conjecture about what a work could have looked like in the past, much less finding a creative way to represent that to the public. There is also cost to be considered with restorative machinery, like the projectors used in the restoration of the Harvard Murals. Whose responsibility is it to repair the broken machines? Also, does funding exist for the manpower behind these additional conservation and restoration treatments? Ethically, there will also arise the question of how to classify works like those in Brinkmann's "Gods in Color" exhibition. Are they facsimiles? Are they equally as valuable as the originals? Do they also need to be conserved as painstakingly as the centuries-old statues? These questions will be difficult to grapple with, but l believe the importance of promoting the legibility of many stages of artworks' colorful history is worth the cost, the questioning, and the effort.

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Fig. 1: Mark Rothko, *The Harvard Murals* (1962), multimedia on canvas, digitally restored.

Fig. 2: Mark Rothko, *The Harvard Murals: Panel 5* (1962), multimedia on canvas.

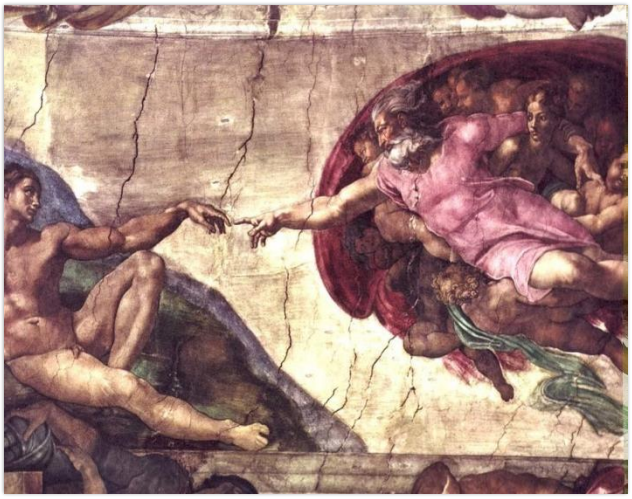

Fig. 3: Michelangelo, *The Sistine Chapel Ceiling*, fresco, 1508-1512.

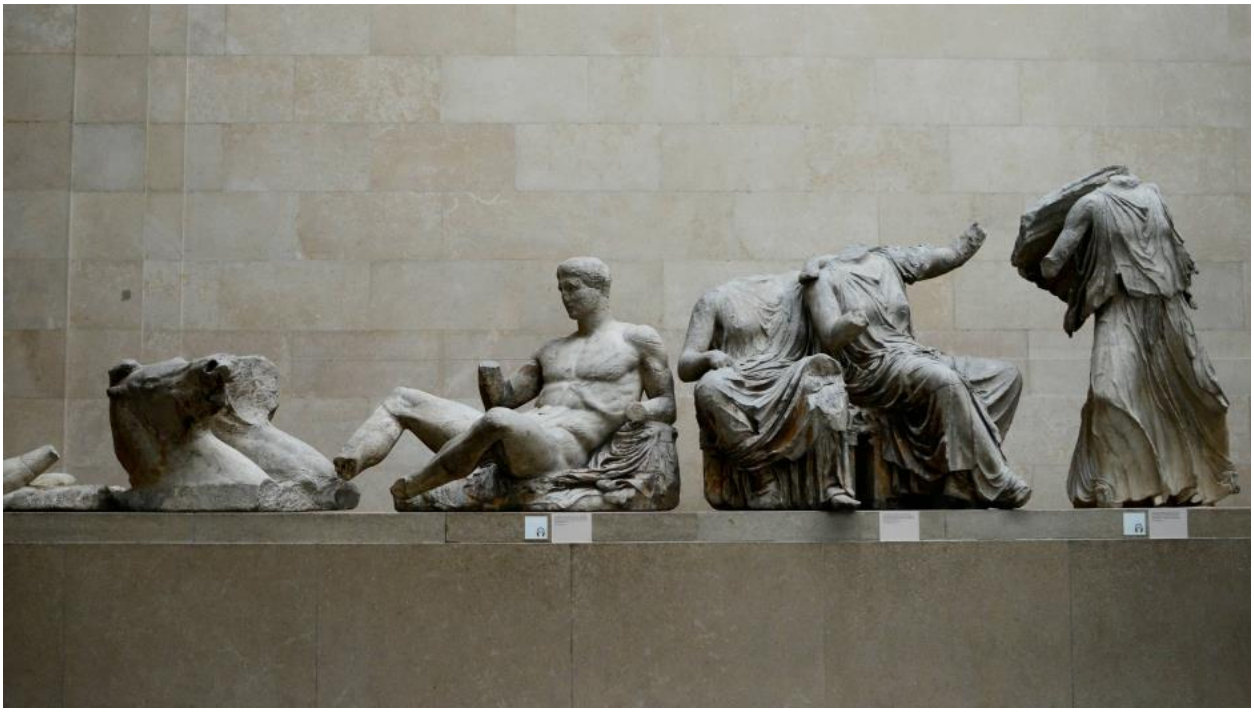

Fig. 4 Phidias, *Elgin Marbles*, marble frieze, 447–438 BC

Fig. 5: Identity Evropa propaganda poster

Fig. 6: Vinzenz Brinkmann, plaster and paint reconstruction of Augustus of Prima Porta

Fig. 7 Vinzenz Brinkmann, plaster and paint reconstruction of bronze sculptures of Erechtheus and Eumolpos