

# MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS ST. PETE

## Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg Presents A Rare Opportunity to Witness the Conservation of a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Tabernacle in Real Time

*Live Conservation: Restoring a 17th Century Spanish Tabernacle* will be on view in the Miriam Acheson Gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg from March 16 through June 23, 2024.



**ST. PETERSBURG, FL (March 12, 2024)** — [The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg](#) (MFA), is thrilled to unveil a remarkable exhibition centered around the restoration of a gilded, painted, and carved tabernacle from Northern Spain, dating back to the mid-1600s. Despite enduring centuries of wear and tear, including losses due to woodworms, deterioration owing to environmental conditions, and damage from daily use, this remarkable acquisition retains much of its original surface. Yet, the once vibrant gilded and painted finishes have been dimmed by the passage of time and the accumulation of dust, candle soot, and other contaminants. Over the coming months, Luis Seixas—an alumnus of the conservation program at the prestigious Universidade Nova, Lisbon—will meticulously undertake the task of cleaning, consolidating, and restoring this precious artifact live within the Miriam Acheson Gallery. *Live Conservation: Restoring a 17th Century Spanish Tabernacle* will be on view from March 16 through June 23, 2024.

With a focus on preserving the tabernacle's authenticity, every effort will be made to return it as closely as possible to its original splendor—a fundamental objective of modern conservation practices. The conservation of art—preserving objects through professional, specialized treatment—is one of the Museum of Fine Art's most important goals. This immersive project offers a unique opportunity for visitors to engage directly with the conservation process, interact with a skilled conservator, and gain insight into the intricate techniques, materials, and methodologies employed. From observing delicate cleaning procedures to understanding the significance of preservation decisions, guests will have the chance to delve deep into the fascinating combination of art and science that is art conservation.

"I am absolutely thrilled to see the conservation of beautiful, evocative tabernacle move forward," remarked **Chief Curator Dr. Stanton Thomas**. "The project is especially gratifying because it brings together art and science, and engenders discussions about the crucial, but often overlooked links between those seemingly disparate fields. I am also fascinated with the work's unbelievably complex symbolism, and trying to unravel the combined meaning of the dozens of images of holy figures, prophets, and saints.

In addition to the captivating restoration process, the exhibition also explores the intricate historical context and layered symbolism embodied by the tabernacle. Resembling a miniature church, the object includes a small locking compartment at its lower center, traditionally used for storing Christian communion bread. Originally, this tabernacle might have been a component of a *reredos*, a large-scale altarpiece prevalent in Spanish Roman Catholic churches over the centuries.



With its gleaming golden surfaces reflecting the riches Spain plundered from the Americas, and its intricate architectural design evoking the grandeur of actual Baroque buildings or Classical temples this masterpiece offers a window into a bygone era of opulence and religious fervor. The meticulously crafted paintings and carvings adorning the tabernacle's surface, ranging from depictions of Old Testament Prophets Elijah and Moses to the moving scene of The Transfiguration of Christ, serve as

poignant reminders of the enduring significance of the Christian faith and the power of the Roman Catholic Kings and Queens of Spain..

By intertwining the live conservation process with a deep dive into both history and art history, this groundbreaking project offers a rare glimpse behind the curtain of museum operations. Moreover, this initiative underscores The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg's unwavering commitment to its mission of engaging, educating, and exciting the community by collecting, exhibiting, and preserving works of art for the enjoyment of all.

"This exhibition offers visitors a unique opportunity to witness the restoration work firsthand and to delve deeper into the cultural and religious significance inherent in this extraordinary object," stated **Chief Strategy Officer Darcy Schuller**. "By providing an exclusive behind-the-scenes look into the meticulous and crucial conservation process, we not only enhance understanding of the object but also reaffirm our dedication to preserving historically significant artworks for the enjoyment and education of future generations."



The conservation work is being conducted by **Luis Seixas** of LS Art Conservation, based in St. Petersburg, Florida. With over 30 years of experience and a steadfast commitment to the highest standards and ethics in cultural heritage conservation, Luis Seixas is a specialist conservator of objects and sculpture. He has worked extensively with private collections and institutions in the US, Europe, and China, including several UNESCO sites. Having obtained his degree in conservation and restoration from the Universidade Nova, Lisbon, with a specialization in polychrome sculpture, Luis Seixas has amassed a wealth of experience working with a diverse array of materials and objects such as bronzes, ferrous metals, silver, terracotta, ivory, and stone, as well as outdoor and indoor sculpture. In addition to his conservation expertise, Luis Seixas provides advisory services on preventive conservation for collections

and offers professional art installation services. He is a Professional Associate of the American Institute for Conservation, and abides by the code of ethics and best practices established by this organization.

***Live Conservation: Restoring a 17th Century Spanish Tabernacle*** will be on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg March 16 through June 23, 2024.

Live conservation will occur daily (Tuesday through Friday) from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm, with periodic breaks. Special Saturday sessions will occur on April 6, May 4, and June 1 from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm. Please visit [mfastpete.org](http://mfastpete.org) for conservation updates.

Press images available [here](#).

**Images:**

Unknown Artist, active Valladolid, Spain

*Tabernacle with Scenes of the Last Supper and the Transfiguration* (detail), c. 1650

Gilded and painted wood; plaster, linen, with metal hinges and lock

Measurements: c. 55" h. x 42.5"w. x 20.5"d.

Museum Purchase, Funds Provided by Mack and Susan Hicks

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**ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG**

The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg (MFA) has an encyclopedic collection of art from around the globe and across the centuries, with almost 5,000 years of civilization represented in thousands of objects extending from antiquity to the present. The collection includes works by Georgia O'Keefe, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Auguste Rodin, Kehinde Wiley, Jacob Lawrence, and many others, as well as ancient Greek and Roman, Asian, African, Art of the Americas and Native American art. The Museum's photographic collection is one of the largest and most well-respected in the Southeast. The museum's rotating exhibition galleries feature a diverse selection of temporary exhibitions from all over the world, as well as exhibitions curated from the museum's extensive collection. In addition to its robust exhibition program, the MFA engages the community through exciting public programs and events and serves students through youth programs and a partnership with the Pinellas County School System.

**MEDIA CONTACT**

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