

Safeguarding Paintings Mission
-End of mission report-
Biladi Mission March 2nd –23rd 2021



St. John the Baptist Painting
Sursock Palace
before and after damage

Funded by

“Prince Claus Fund for
Culture and Develop-
ment”
and “Cultural Emergen-



GERDA HENKEL STIFTUNG



Collaboration

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Partners



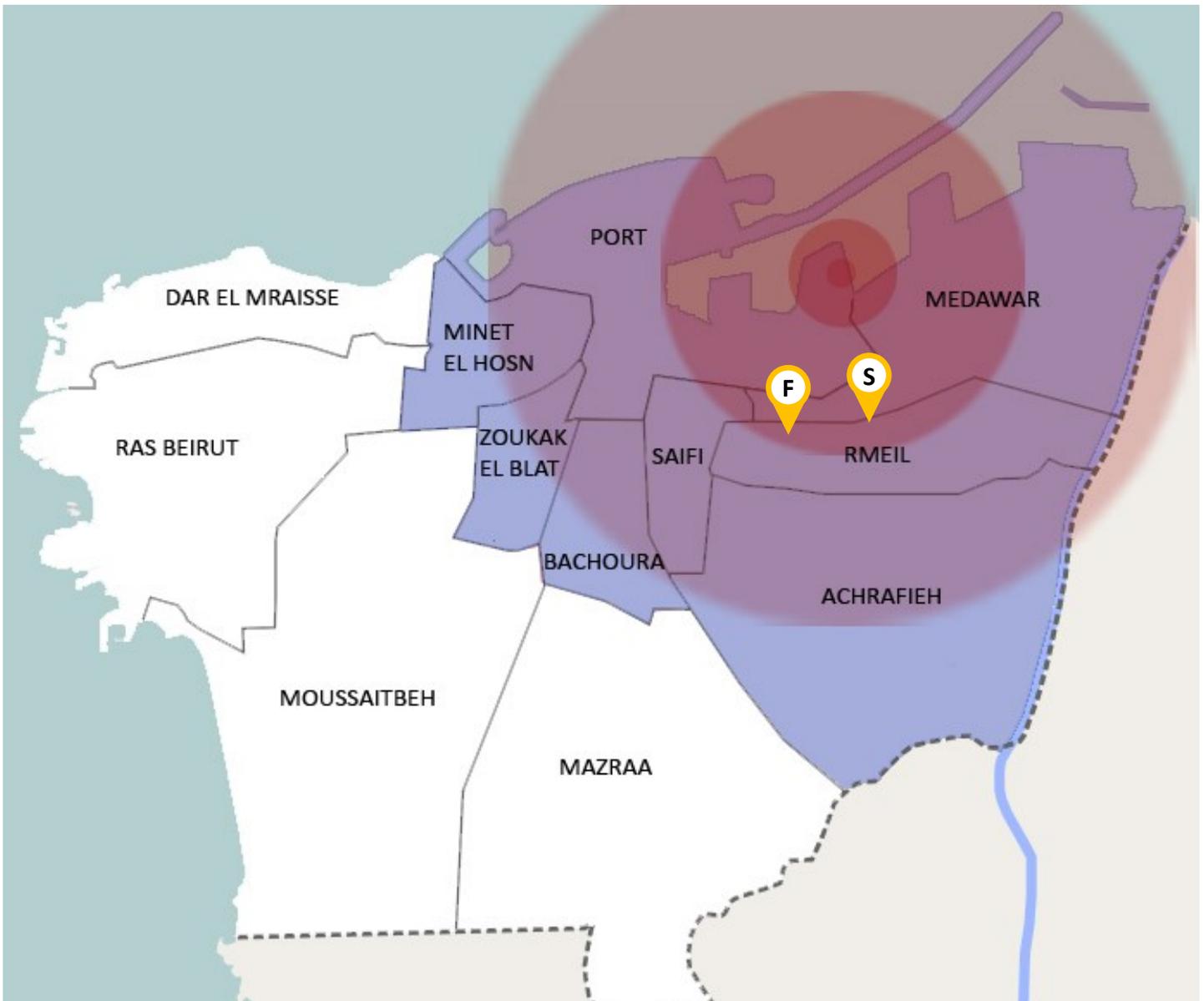
II. Acronyms and abbreviations

CPP:	Cultural Property Protection
LU :	Lebanese University
PPE:	Personal Protective Equipment

III. Introduction

The Beirut Port Blast on the 4th of August 2020, hit the neighborhoods of Medawar, Quarantina, Al-Badawi, Mar Mikhael, Rmeil, Gemayzeh, Mar Nicola, and extended to Burj Hammoud, Ashrafieh, Al Bashoura, and Zoqaq El Blat.

The stricken area is a major component of the capital's identity and its social and urban characteristics and its cultural heritage. The area houses most of the city's art collections which were severely damaged by the blast.



Map of the 12 districts of Beirut

Districts most affected by the blast are highlighted

Yellow Dots pinpoint the affected buildings housing the painting collections

IV. Necessity

The paintings in the devastated houses were damaged from the extent of the Blast. The Blast dust covered everything. Most of the glass covering paintings was shattered, exposing a big number of paintings and caused rips in some of the canvas, many others lost their frames which broke from the shock or from becoming unhinged and falling.

The painting collections in general consists of 17th-century landscapes and portraits, by Lebanese and foreign painters, and these collections are one of the founding bricks of the Lebanese cultural identity and are an important witness of Beirut's history.

Therefore, it was urgent to interfere and protect the painting collections in the stricken area and safeguard them in the best conditions possible until restoration works can take place.



Villa Feghali
Main hall



Sursock Palace
Main hall

V. Research

Biladi did research that led to a primary assessment covering most of the hit area. It revealed that The Sursock Palace holds one of the oldest and biggest collections of paintings, and they are damaged. Note that Sursock palace was severely damaged by the Blast because it sits on a hill facing the Beirut Port.

Villa Feghali, which is situated 100 meters from Sursock palace was also damaged and it holds important paintings that require intervention.

VI. Preparations

Starting from research and assessment, Biladi proceeded with building a capable team to handle such a challenging mission.

First; Biladi contacted the Archaeology Department at the Lebanese University which proposed nine students for volunteering in the mission. The students were aptly qualified and trained on the basics of handling fragile objects, as well as using the right storing methods.

Second; Biladi brought in an expert in painting restoration, Mr. Gaby Maamari, and an architect, Dr. Rana Dubeissi. They both were in charge of the preservation and storage of all the paintings as well as following up on a daily basis with the volunteers and the logistical department in Biladi.

Third; Biladi provided the needed material and equipment for the work.

Forth; Biladi supported the team by implementing the necessary COVID-19 PPE. Each member of the team was provided with an overall, latex gloves, KN95 masks and eyes protection. The working stations were set as far apart as the work tasks would allow to limit contact between the volunteers to the bare minimum.

VII- Training

The Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative offered an intense crash-training for the whole team (volunteers and experts), in addition to the respective owners of Sursock Palace (Mrs. Mary Cochrane-Sursock + Ariana Sursock) and Villa Feghali (Mrs. Joelle-Olga Feghali).

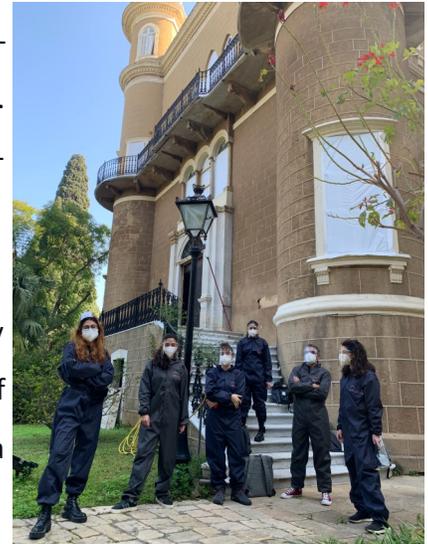
The training schedule consisted of the following:

Day 1: Object Handling and Safety Considerations

Day 2: Wrapping & Packing of Paintings for Storage

Day 3: Preparing of Storage Space

The Smithsonian team also provided the participants with technical sheets (handouts) summarizing the training and included guidelines needed for a smoother and structured operation. Also, a full recording of the training as well as links to recommended books about paintings materials.



LU volunteers
Sursock Palace

Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative
Smithsonian American Art Museum Lunder Conservation Center
Beirut Recovery Workshop

Day 1: Object Handling and Safety Considerations
December 16, 2020
Amber Kerr, Chief of Conservation
Gwen Manthey, Paintings Conservator

Objective: Introduction to Workshop Leaders and training background. Review of considerations for personal safety and how to approach a new or in-process recovery site, with considerations for approach to the management, problem-solving, and successful recovery of each collection.

Your guide to plan ahead:

- Who are your team members and what are their roles?
- Do you have tools to document the condition of each artwork before it is wrapped and stored?
- Do you have your supplies organized? See Side Bar.

Safety Considerations: Make sure you wear closed-toe shoes, long pants, and long-sleeved shirts. Dress for the weather. As relayed by Blue Shield Lebanon, there is a fine layer of gray particulates and dust over nearly everything. It is probable there has also been mold growth and pest activity. It is advised to wear *personal protective gear* while salvaging and preparing artworks for storage. This includes: gloves (more notes in side bar), protective eyewear, and a dust mask. Salvaging and preparing artworks for storage will disrupt this dust layer and you will be at active risk for inhaling the dust, mold, and other bacteria and contaminants, as well as getting it into your eyes. As you continue to recover artworks throughout your project, you are increasing your risk exposure. **Remember, if you are put at risk, the objects will also be at risk.**

Your safety plan:

- Do you have PPE? See Side Bar.
- Do you have a space to work, with lighting, tables, ventilation, and electricity?
- Do you have a place to rest and relieve yourself during the workday?
- Did you bring food and water for yourself, and do you have a space to eat?

What Supplies To Bring:
notebook, pencil, camera, color checker, measuring tape, utility knives, scissors, multitools, wire cutters, packing tape, Tyvek, poly sheeting/drop cloths, 2" x 4" x 12" blocks (Ethafoam, wood, etc.), quart and gallon bags, permanent markers, string tags, sticky notes, chalk, cardboard/Coroplast, absorbent materials (blotter, paper towels, towele, fabric diapers, cotton wool), dust brushes, first aid kit, wet wipes

Pack your personal essentials and food separately.

What Kind of Gloves? Disposable nitrile is best, as impurities in latex and vinyl gloves can cause sensitivity issues as well as damage metallic artworks. But, use what gloves you have available, and either dispose of them after they become damaged or at the end of the day or wash them if you can. If gloves are not available, clean your hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after handling artworks.

Artwork Survey and Condition Evaluation: It is important to know what damage has occurred to the artwork, to prevent being at risk for causing damage. Do you have a pre-existing list of artworks in the collection, and any prior condition documentation?

Your documentation plan:

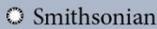
- Document what the artwork is, on paper and in photographs.
- Create Object ID numbers to each object, and label each work as you can, as well as their saved fragments. *Tip: Use sticky notes to record the object ID, and include in each image of the object and its fragments.*
- Condition-map what damages are present in the artwork – tears, holes, missing paint, stains or other structural damages. Even quick drawings can suffice.
- Who is responsible for safeguarding the written survey?

Other considerations: Who is notified about the condition survey? Are copies provided to the owner/ house manager? Can the insurance company be provided the survey to provide an estimate on future treatment or loss to the owners? How are you going to insure the confidentiality of the information of this collection?

Resources (embedded links):

- Museum Conservation Institute – Caring for your Paintings
- American Institute for Conservation: Health & Safety in Collection Care Wiki
- National Park Service – Conserve-O-Gram, 2/6: Preparing Salvage Caches for Emergency Use
- National Park Service – Conserve-O-Gram, 2/11: Health and Safety Risks of Asbestos
- National Park Service – Conserve-O-Gram, 2/12: Safe Techniques for Archival Surveying and Assessment
- National Park Service – Conserve-O-Gram, 21/01: Health and Safety Hazards Arising from Floods
- National Park Service – Conserve-O-Gram, 21/2: An Emergency Cart for Salvaging Water-Damaged Objects
- Smithsonian Institution Safety Manual
- Northeast Document Conservation Center 1.4 Considerations for Prioritizing

Handouts from the Smithsonian training



Critical Thinking Exercise

SCRI/SAAM
Beirut Recovery Workshop



The following slides are meant to serve as a thought exercises to build upon your critical thinking skills about how to safely plan and carry out salvage activities.

The following images were either provided by Joanne Farchak Bajjalj or pulled from major press articles. We apologize for any disturbance they might cause.

How to Properly Put on and Take off a Disposable Respirator

WASH YOUR HANDS THOROUGHLY BEFORE PUTTING ON OR REMOVING THE RESPIRATOR.
If you have used a respirator before but you can't see the nose strips, make sure you have replaced the nose strips.
Do not use the filter for food, jewelry, glasses, clothing, or anything that could prevent proper placement or cause leakage; your face will be exposed.
Follow the instructions for wear and use on the respirator.

Putting On The Respirator

- Hold the respirator by the top edge of the headbands or the top edge of the head straps.
- Place the respirator over your nose and mouth, ensuring the headbands or head straps are behind your head.
- Adjust the headbands or head straps to fit snugly around your head.
- Adjust the nose strip to fit snugly against your nose.

Checking Your Seal

- Perform a positive pressure seal check by exhaling sharply into the respirator. If you feel air leaking around the edges, adjust the headbands or head straps and the nose strip.
- Perform a negative pressure seal check by inhaling sharply through the respirator. If you feel air leaking around the edges, adjust the headbands or head straps and the nose strip.

Removing Your Respirator

- Do not touch the front of the respirator.
- Remove the respirator by the top edge of the headbands or the top edge of the head straps.
- Dispose of the respirator in a sealed plastic bag.

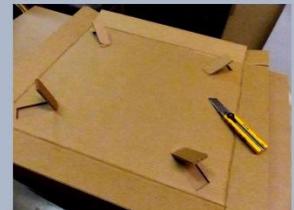
How to Remove Gloves

To protect yourself, use the following steps to take off gloves

- Grasp the outside of one glove at the wrist. Do not touch your bare skin.
- Roll the glove away from your body, pulling it inside out.
- Hold the glove you just removed in your gloved hand.
- Roll off the second glove by pulling your fingers inside the glove at the top of your wrist.
- Turn the second glove inside out while pulling it away from your body, leaving the first glove inside the second.
- Dispose of the gloves safely. Do not reuse the gloves.



PACCIN Soft Tab
<https://www.paccin.org/content.php?336-Tabbing>



VII– Mission Schedule

After the training, Biladi and the Team had a clear idea of the intervention principles. Also, a clear list of the material and equipment needed for the operation was established according to the primary assessment and the paintings inventory provided by the owners.

The Mission was accordingly scheduled over a period of 4 working days in order to prepare the wooden shelves, and during which the needed material would be procured and prepared.

An overall 9 days of work were put into the mission, out of which 7 working days were at the Sursock Palace, and 2 working days at the Villa Feghali, to safeguard 130 and 18 paintings respectively.

Altogether, the mission, put aside the training, was supposed to last for **13 working days**

IX- Difficulties & Complications

The mission faced many difficulties concerning the implementing the schedule:

First; the total COVID-19 lockdown hindered the commencement of the mission from the 25th of January till the 2nd of March.

Second; due to the economic contraction in Lebanon and the limited imports, the material needed for safeguarding the paintings became very rare, if available. Which challenged the team to come up with other ingenious techniques for safeguarding the paintings using available material that were approved by the Smithsonian personnel.

Third, after the mission commenced, the team found out that the number of paintings was three times what the owners had provided earlier. The owners were not aware of the volume of the valuable collections in their storage. This required extra material, more staff, and longer working days. (Instead of 7 days at Sursock to store 130 paintings, 16 days were needed to store 425 paintings)

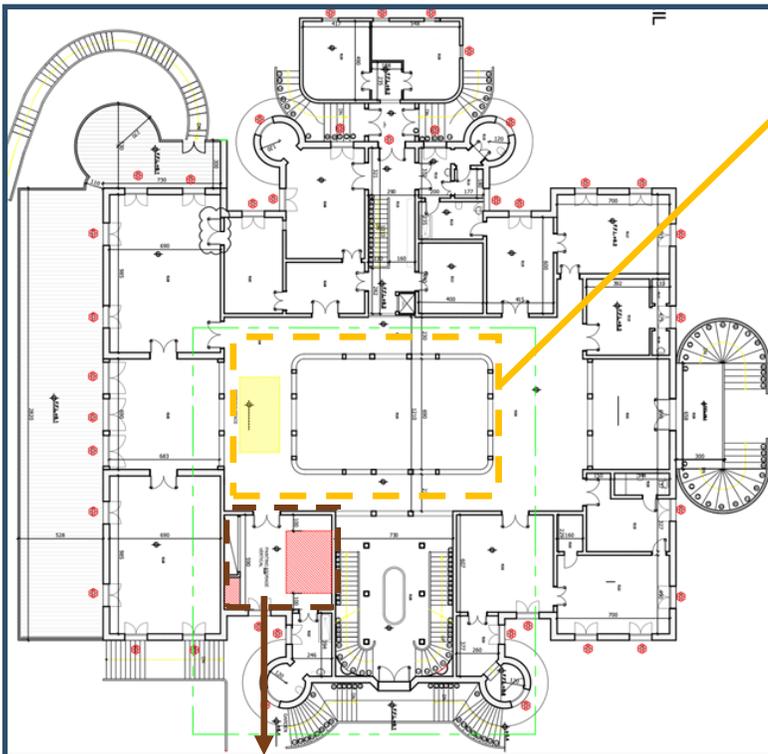
Fourth; at Sursock Palace there were six large paintings on the second floor that were too big and heavy to carry or move to the storage. Yet it was urgent to safeguard them because, in addition to being family heritage, they were museum-quality originals. And the second floor has a fragile roof and pieces of its plaster were falling so it was jeopardizing these paintings, and soon there will supposedly be construction work on the floor. The team decided to minimize the risk and keep the big painting in place on the walls, cover them with silk paper and cotton cloth, and ultimately enclose them with wooden boxes.

Fifth; the team was working in people's houses handling private collections. The traumatized owners were present daily as the team was working on safeguarding the paintings. For them, each painting has a memory and it caused a wave of emotions seeing it brought down, wrapped and put in storage. This was a big challenge, and the team became involved and revealed a high sense of responsibility.

X- Choosing & Preparing the Storage Room

The Sursock Palace consists of two stories and sits on a hill facing the port of Beirut. It was severely damaged from the 4th of August port blast. The second floor and the roof were almost blown out.

The expert and the architect along with the owners chose a room on the first floor that is safe and its structurally sound to become the storage space for the paintings. It only has one big window which was blown out like all fenestrations of the house as well as its door. Both were fixed and closed down with the material needed to ensure a good environment for the storage. Biladi insulated the window, and added a dehumidifier to the room. The room's ceiling and walls are still in good shape.



Storage room

Horizontal storage unit

Vertical storage unit

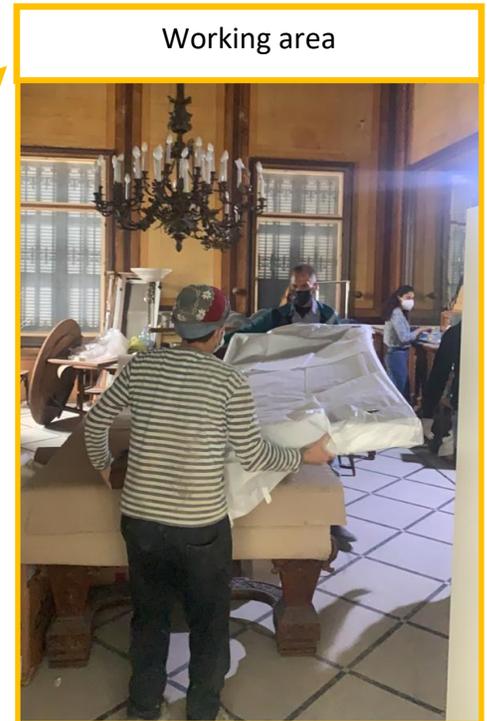
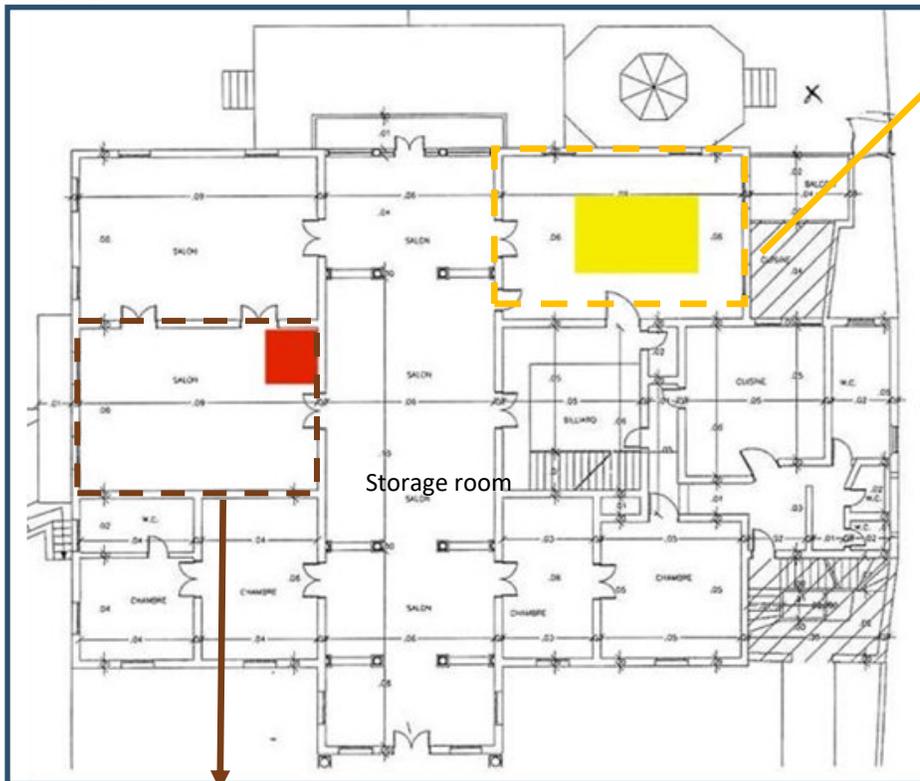


Dehumidifier used



X- Choosing &Preparing the Storage Room

The Villa Feghali consists of two stories and is about 100 meters from Sursock Palace on the same street. It also sits on the hill facing the port of Beirut. It was severely damaged from the 4th of August port blast. The Northern corner of the house collapsed. The Feghali family have already started reconstruction work in their house and they have moved all their furniture to the southern salon which was safe from the blast. The southern salon had mild temperature and humidity and it is a closed and safe area. Other parts of the house are under construction. We chose a corner of the salon to place the racks for the paintings. No humidifier needed.



Working area

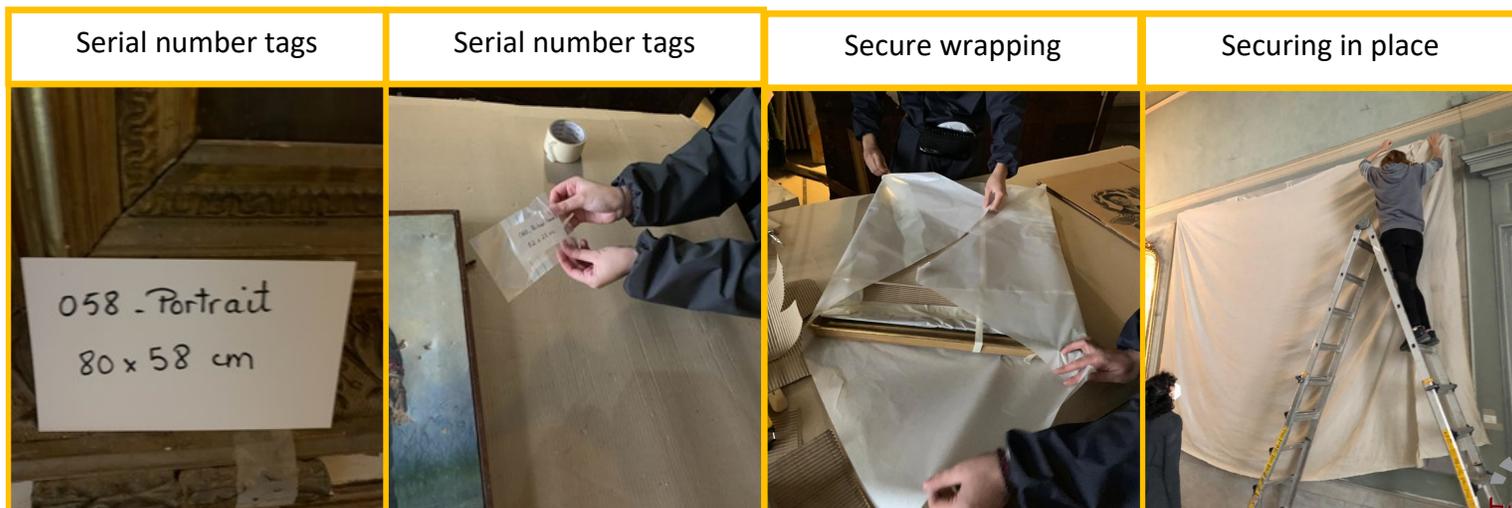


XI– Techniques and methods followed

After the training sessions with The Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, and after studying the available material in the Lebanese market, the team put up the following work methodology which was followed at both Sursock Palace and Villa Feghali;

The paintings were collected from different rooms of the house and placed on the first floor close to our two working stations:

- 1- Each painting was given an identification number noted on a card with its dimensions and tagged once over the encasing and another one on the inside of it. (upon the owner’s request, at Sursock Palace, each painting was photographed in high definition with the tag next to it)
- 2- If the painting is in good condition it went to station one in charge of immediate wrapping, if it is fragile, it goes to station two, in charge of securing and holding it in place before wrapping
- 3- Paintings in good condition were wrapped with silk paper, then pure cotton fabric, taped with masking tape, with its tag in a sealable bag taped on it in a visible place, and moved to storage
- 4– Fragile paintings were wrapped in accordance with their situation, extra silk paper, cotton ribbon to hold them together, cardboard for extra protection, and moved to storage to lay flat
- 5– At the storage room, each shelf was given a reference letter (A, B, C, etc..), so that when a painting reaches it, a team member would note each painting location with the respective specific number .
- 6- At Sursock palace, on the second floor, six large paintings were kept in place due to their large size and heavy weight. They were covered with silk paper, cotton fabric, and wooden boxes in-situ.
- 7- An Inventory including all paintings with their location in the storage room is given to the owner for future reference



XII– Achievements

The mission commenced on the 2nd of March 2021 and was completed within 18 working days on the 23rd of March. 16 days at Sursock Palace, and 2 days at Villa Feghali. During that time the Team managed to safeguard 425 paintings at Sursock palace and 19 at Villa Feghali.

Both owners received an inventory stating the number, name, and description of each painting, which allows them to pick it up in a second when needed.

The paintings are now in a stable safe environment awaiting to be restored

XIII– Impact on Owners & Volunteers

When we first visited Sursock and Feghali, both owners were traumatized and confused about what to do with their damaged items in their houses. Paintings, ceramics, furniture, chandeliers, sculptures, etc... knowing that these are 150 year old continuously inhabited houses by the same families, and each generation has left its touch through different artifacts...

Helping them collect the paintings, wrap each one carefully and set it in the storage palace gave them hope that damage is not a one-way path, the damage is reversible and their normal life can be restored. The impact on the owners was a very rewarding outcome from this mission.

For the volunteers and the team who completed this mission, it was a professional and emotional experience. It was a mechanism that helped them on their way to healing from the Blast trauma and its consequences. They are also satisfied with the outcomes of the mission.



Team members and expert working on the Sursock collection.



XIV– Lessons learned

During this mission, the team managed to create simple techniques using available material to meet the values and standards stated at the initial training. And since the mission was in private houses in the presence of the owners, the owners learned the techniques and they are implementing a parallel system themselves to safeguard and store other items in their houses, such as sculpture and furniture etc ...

XV- Limited Responsibility

The mission aims at safeguarding and securing the paintings at Sursock palace and Villa Feghali in stable conditioned storages and helping the owners to acquire the knowledge needed to keep the paintings stored in proper conditions. The mission doesn't ensure the safety of the paintings after it is completed, the paintings' safety falls under the responsibility of the owners.

An end-of-mission report, documenting in pictures the changes that were operated during the mission will be signed by the mutual partners on the mission.

XVI- Mission Completion Ceremony

Biladi held a Mission Completion Ceremony to which all the team involved in the mission were invited. Appreciation certificates were given to the Volunteers who spent 18 working days from March 2nd till the 23rd working together on the mission. The team showed remarkable commitment and diligence which ensured the success of the mission.





SECURING PAINTINGS AFTER THE BEIRUT BLAST

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

Is given to
Mr/Miss Volunteer

His volunteering and dedication spark a strong hope that lights our way
to rebuilding our beloved city, BEIRUT.

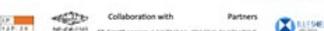
PROF. PETER STONE
President of Blue Shield International

MRS. JOANNE FARCHAKH BAJALY
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