

Restoration Process of Ship's Masthead

Here is an example of a French ship masthead treated with repeated coats of whitewash. Years of weathering, wear and poor storage conditions had created internal rot damage, which caused separation and warping of the wood. These types of sculptural works were often created in sections and assembled, through a process of lamination, and in this case, an entire section of the face and neck had come apart at the seams (Fig 1). This was due to checking of the wood along weakened lamination lines. Fortunately this major piece had not been lost. Further examination revealed that a large internal dowel had once held the right side of the head in place. This section was missing entirely (Fig 2).

The first step of the restoration process was to lightly remove the rotting, splintered wood on the surface and consolidate the brittle underlying layer. This was done with a consolidant, which, once dry, would give new strength to the wood and allow for proper adhesion of the separated face section later.

The next step was to affix a block of wood to the internal dowel, matching the original in grain and texture. This piece needed to be carved in symmetry to the other side. In order to match up both sides, a photo was taken of the intact left side and reversed, to use as a model to carve the right side, so that the hair and ear would match on both sides. One way to insure the carving is symmetrical is to continuously paint the object to be carved the same color as the original. This allows for an easier alignment of light and shadow, thus a more exact carving. As wood is removed, the under layers are painted white repeatedly until the final form emerges.

Once the hair and ear section was finished, the face and neck sections were reattached. However, large gaps still remained along the check lines, which ran through the eye and down the chest. The cracks and missing eye and brow section were filled with a resin-based putty that adheres to wood. A lighter weight, easily sandable, putty was then applied just slightly higher than the original surface (Fig 3). This layer was worked both when wet then dry to

reproduce the grain of the wood and the weathering marks. The final step was the in-painting to match the original and the surface distressing to insure flawless continuity (Figs 4&5).



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.

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