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The hidden stories of the baroque high altar in Gustaf Vasa church

A seminar about possibilities in technical art history

31th of January 2013 in Stockholm

Background

In conjunction with the construction of an additional railway-tunnel-system in Stockholm the 15 meter high baroque altar in Gustaf Vasa Church has been investigated for the first time ever. To enable the investigation a scaffolding has been raised that covers the whole altar. The undertaken investigation was intended to assess the risks for the altar as well as to conduct relevant prevention and monitoring during the tunnelling work. The investigation has identified how the altar was originally constructed and how the move from Uppsala Cathedral affected it.*

The high altar in Gustaf Vasa Church

The altar was built by Burchard Precht's workshop between 1728 and 1731. It is a fascinating object of art that shows a sophisticated interaction between advanced wood and stucco constructions to enable perspective and illusion. With still existing traces of original finishes on stucco and wood surfaces this high altar is unique in Sweden and the Nordic countries. Similarities in terms of construction, surface finishing and artistic intention of the altar in Gustav Vasa Church can be found in Germany and Austria. Burchard Precht came originally from Germany and became the foremost sculptor in Sweden during the 17th and early 18th century. He executed many important works of art for Swedish palaces and churches.

The aim of the seminar

The investigation that has been conducted during the City-Line-project between 2008 to 2012 has provided new knowledge about this fascinating altar and its context. We would like to share these new insights within the scope of a seminar in order to enable further knowledge sharing. The seminar also aims to highlight the potential of art technological studies related to altars from the baroque and rococo periods through the shared experience of the participants.

*The altar was placed in Uppsala Cathedral to the end of 19th century.



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Program

The seminar is a one day seminar and will take place at Holländargatan 16, Stockholm at Aldof Fredrik parish and in Gustaf Vasa Church at Odenplan. Speakers in the field of cultural heritage like art historians, conservation scientists and church authorities are invited. During the day there will be a site visit of the altar seen from the scaffolding. In the evening an organ concert will take place in front of the altar with baroque music from the time of Burchard Precht.

Seminar organizer

The seminar is organized by the company Disent AB and supported by the parish of Adolf Fredrik and Gustaf Vasa churches. The seminar is a part of Disent AB's give back policy of sharing knowledge in the field of cultural heritage.

Registration before 20th of December

The seminar do not charge any fee. A binding registration by e-mail to info@disent.se **before 20th December** is required. It will be possibly to participate in a lunch arranged by the "Husmor" of Adolf Fredrik's parish. The cost for this (about 90 SEK) have to be paid at site by the registration in the morning of the seminar day.



About the seminar organizer

Disent AB was founded in January 2010 and is a company acting in the field of cultural heritage. Our expertise is in technical art history, conservation planning and conservation science. We are specialized in architectural integrated art and historical surfaces. Our aim is to find sustainably and long term preservation solutions. A way to reach this is to applying interdisciplinary approaches and methods. Disent AB wants to encourage creation of dialogues and sharing of findings in the field of architectural integrated art in historic buildings.



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PROGRAM

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- 8:30 -9:00** Registration, information for site visit and poster presentation (Holländargatan 16)
- 9:00-9.30** **Welcome and Introduction**
Nils-Henrik Nilsson, kyrkoherde Adolf Fredrik Church
Anna Henningsson, Disent AB
- 9:30-10:30** **The construction of Burchard Precht`s altar in Gustaf Vasa church**
Alexander Eckert and Anna Henningsson, Disent AB
- 10:30-11:00** **COFFEE**
- 11:00-11:45** **The altar as expression of meaning. A study on how the expressive means function in relation to a viewer**
Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf, University of Stockholm
- 11:45-12:00** **LUNCH**
- 13:00-14:00** **Site visit of the altar from scaffolding in Gustaf Vasa church**
- 14:15-15:00** **‘versilbret und glasiert...’ – Coloured Glazes on Silver Leaf and the Imitation of Precious Materials in Germany, Austria and Switzerland (c. 1600-1800)**
Mark Richter, University of Glasgow.
- 15:00-15:15** **COFFEE**
- 15:15-16:00** **Pinxit et monochromata ex albo“ White Sculptures and Interior Decorations from the 17th to the 19th Century – Research, Technology of the Painting Layers and artistic Phenomena**
Melissa Speckhardt, University of Bamberg
- 16:00-17:00** **Summary and Discussion**
- 18:00-19:00** **Organ concert in Gustaf Vasa church with music from the time of Burchard Precht**
Åke Nordström, kyrkoherde and Olaf Andersson, organist Gustaf Vasa Church

PRESENTATION OF SPEAKERS

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Alexander Eckert is educated as organ and harmonium builder. He studied wood conservation at the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne and received his master degree in cultural heritage science at University Viadrina in Frankfurt Oder. Since 2008 he is involved as Disent's expert for wood construction in the examination of the of the altars and wooden objects in the City-line project. Beside this he is working with preservation of organs and wooden objects in the Baltic states and Germany. He has additional published various articles in the field of conservation of organs.

Anna Henningsson received her degree in conservation of wall paintings, stucco and stone from University of Applied Sciences in Cologne. She has subsequently studied art history at University of Stockholm. The last ten years she has worked in different projects regarding technical examination, documentation and conservation of building related art. Since 2008 she is responsible for the investigation, risk analyses and monitoring of the art in the churches related to the City-line project. She is one of the founders of Disent AB. Beside this she has published articles in the field of art documentation and painting technological studies.

Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf is professor of art history and works as a tutor for PhD students as well as own research at Stockholm's University. She is currently involved in an assignment establishing a new facility dedicated to research about art in different media and forms. A selection of publications are; *Ideal Landscape* (1990) and *The Sculptures of the Parthenon* (2000). In the autumn 2013 a new book will be published by Ashgate about four princely "galleries" (Galerie François Ier at Fontainebleau, the Galleria Farnese in Rome , Galerie des glaces in Versailles and Karl XI's Gallery in Stockholm).

Mark Richter received his masters degree in the conservation of paintings and polychrome sculpture in 1998 from the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne. He completed his PhD dissertation in 2012 on the topic "*Coloured glazes on silver leaf*" at the Courtauld Institute of Art (University of London). Since 2000 he has been involved in various research projects based in Munich as "*The Polychromy of Sculptures and Altarpieces of the Baroque and Rococo*" and the EU-Project CHARISMA – (Cultural Heritage Advanced Research Infrastructures, Synergy for a Multidisciplinary Approach to Conservation/Restoration funded by the European Union) at institutions as Doerner Institut, Munich Technical University . Currently he is working as a lecturer in Technical Art History at the University of Glasgow.

Melissa Speckhardt studied Restoration of wooden Objects (painted and gilded sculptures and altars) in Hildesheim at the University of Applied Science and Arts and additionally received her master degree in the field of Heritage Conservation in Bamberg, Germany. After finishing her studies in Bamberg she wrote her PhD dissertation on the topic "*White Interior Decorations from the 17th to the 19th Century*". For 12 years she has worked as a free lance art-conservator mainly on altars from the 18th century in Bavaria (baroque and rococo period) in wood and stucco."