

Restoration Process

El chico de la gallina (Boy with Hen), 1913
by Manuel Benedito

Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection

Retrospective on the painter Manuel Benedito
(1875-1963)

San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts
Madrid, September-October 2013

Juan Alberto Soler Miret, conservator
Historical profile **Juan Ángel López**, curator



Introduction

In 2012 Baroness Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza purchased at auction one of the most interesting works by the artist Manuel Bedito:

El chico de la gallina, 1913, oil on canvas, 67 x 49 cm.



On long-term loan to Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, the work was requested from the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection for inclusion in the retrospective exhibition on Manuel Bedito (1875-1963) organised by the San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts (25th September-27th October 2013) to mark the 50th anniversary of the artist's death.





Manuel Benedito

El chico de la gallina

Oil on canvas, 67 x 49 cm, on arrival at
the TBM workshop

When the painting arrived at the conservation workshop of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, it was discovered that both the canvas and the frame, which was the original one used by the author, were in need of restoration to enhance the quality of the work.

The painting presented a thick layer of surface dirt composed of grease and smoke. Furthermore, the protective layer had oxidised and acquired a yellowish-brown colour, preventing a proper appreciation of the work.

The frame was also covered by a layer of dirt, with the result that the fine gold had lost its lustre and looked brown.

When the canvas was dismantled from the frame, abrasions and losses of colour to the pictorial layer were discovered along the top of the work, caused by friction from the frame.



INFORME DE ANÁLISIS DE LABORATORIO

OBRA	CHICO CON GALLINA
AUTOR	M. Benedito
EPOCA	-
SOLICITUD DE ANALISIS	JUAN ALBERTO SOLER

IMAGEN DE LA OBRA ESTUDIADA. LOCALIZACIÓN DE LAS MICROMUESTRAS

MUESTRA TOMADA CON HISOPO Y DISOLVENTE	
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TECNICAS DE ANALISIS EMPLEADAS:

GC-MS

FTIR

CONCLUSIONES:

Barniz de resina dammar

FECHA: 18 de enero de 2011

Andrés Sánchez Ledesma

Laboratorio de análisis Museo Thyssen Bornemisza

A sample of the protective layer was taken and analysed in the laboratory to determine the type of resin, which proved to be a natural-resin varnish called Damar.



The next step was to remove the layer of surface dirt, and once this had been done it was time to start eliminating the layer of oxidised varnish in order to recover the painting's original luminosity.



Detail of the removal of the layer of oxidised varnish



Detail of the stuccoed area along the top of the perimeter.

Having removed the oxidised varnish, the next step was to apply a stucco made of calcium carbonate and animal glue to the areas where losses to the pictorial layer had occurred.

After reintegrating the colour losses with Winsor & Newton water colour, the frame was cleaned to recover the original lustre.



Detail before cleaning



Detail after cleaning



The work in its original frame after their restoration

After treating both the painting and the frame, the canvas was remounted placing protective strips of felt along the inner edges of the frame to avoid new abrasions to the perimeter of the pictorial layer.

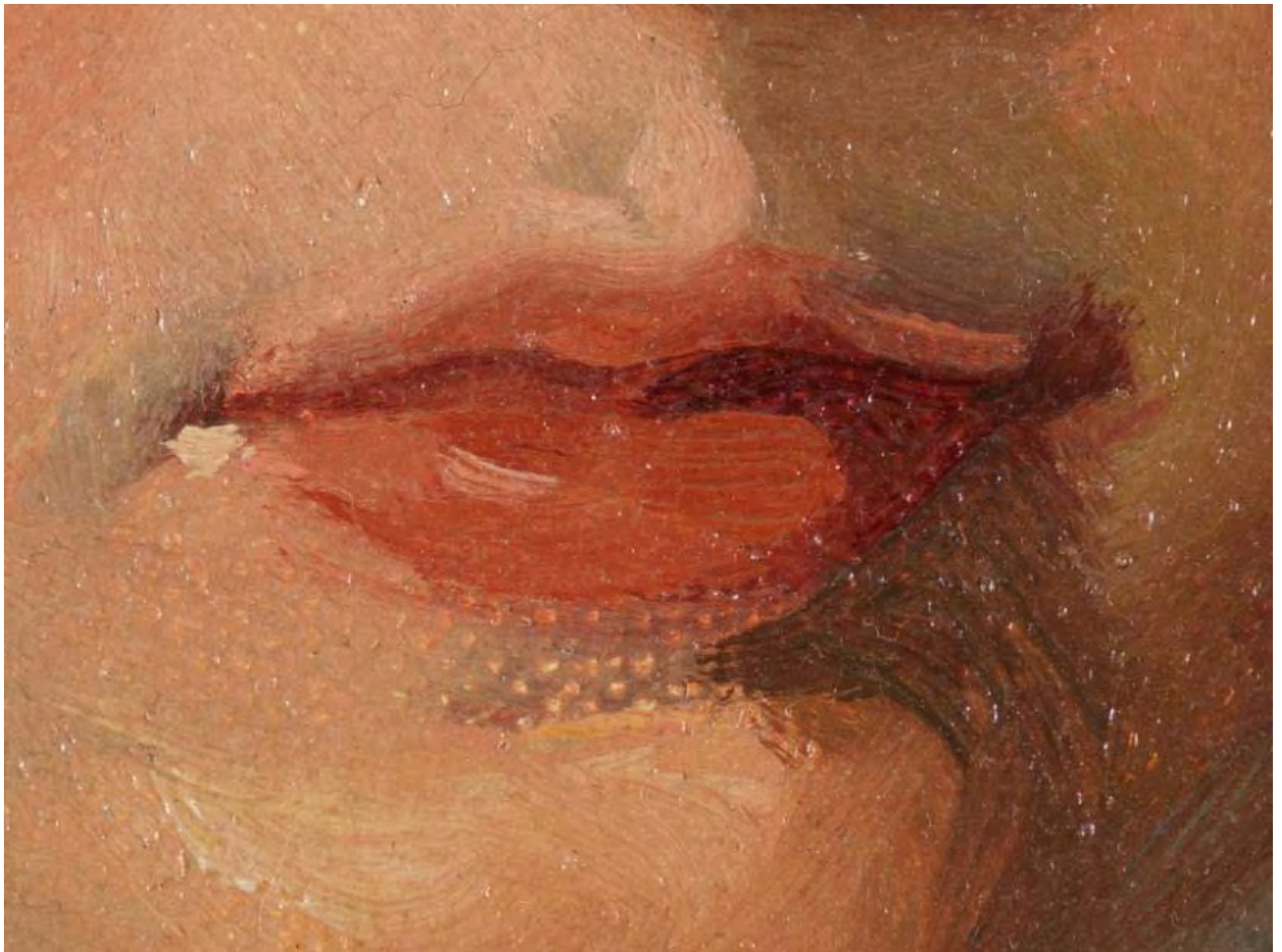
The back of the canvas was protected with neutral, acid-free foam board.



Detail of the face



Detail of the right eye



Detail of the lips



The hen's head

Comparative images of *El chico de la gallina* by Manuel Benedito, before and after restoration.



The work prior to treatment



The work after treatment



Final image

Manuel Benedito,
El chico de la gallina, 1913
oil on canvas, 67 x 49 cm
Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza
Collection

Description the work

A famous portrait artist in his day, Manuel Bedito is nowadays mainly remembered for his genre paintings. These capture the most personal aspects of the Valencian artist's work, almost always transcending the anecdotal thanks to the example of the grand masters of the past. *El chico de la gallina*, painted in 1913 at the height of the artist's powers, is a fine example.

The boy in the portrait is the son of "El Apreciado", the highly esteemed master of the hunt who dominates Bedito's painting *Return from the Big Game Hunt*, from 1913. The year before, Bedito, a great hunting enthusiast, had visited Navaloscorchos, an estate in the Córdoba countryside owned by his friend Luis Gómez de la Lama, to begin the composition. During the course of the execution of this work, he not only produced numerous sketches but several paintings as well, including this one.

Bedito was not content to simply depict the boy holding a hen, but used this anecdotal scene to engage in a magnificent study of light and texture—most notably of the bird's feathers—with no concession whatsoever to the narrative.

Furthermore, as evidenced by some of his other paintings from the same period, the Valencian artist was clearly inspired by masters of 17th-century Spanish painting. In particular, the boy's shirt and hat recall two works by Velázquez: *Saint John the Evangelist on the Island of Patmos*, c. 1619 (The National Gallery, London) and *Los borrachos* (The Drinkers), 1628-1629 (Prado Museum, Madrid). And as in the first Velázquez, the figure has a strong volumetric presence. But perhaps the most striking aspect of all is the intensity of his gaze, on a par with the finest portraits by the Sevillian painter.

Biographical details of the artist

Manuel Benedito was born in Valencia in 1875. From 1888 to 1894 he studied at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts, and in 1896 moved to Madrid to continue training under Sorolla. Between 1899 and 1904 he was a fellow at the Spanish Academy in Rome, during which time he took the opportunity to travel around Italy, France, Belgium and Holland.

In the following years the Valencian artist carried out numerous painting campaigns in Europe and Spain, capturing all kinds of popular figures in keeping with the aesthetics of the Generation of 1898. He also held his first individual exhibitions during this time, as well as winning countless prizes in national and international contests. In 1911 Benedito settled in Madrid and devoted himself primarily to painting portraits in an elegant, aesthetic style similar to that adopted by Sargent and Sorolla.

His official recognition came during the days of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. In 1924 he was admitted to the San Carlos Academy in Valencia and to the San Fernando Academy in Madrid, also replacing Sorolla, who had died the previous year, in the Colour and Composition Chair at the San Fernando School of Fine Arts. During this time he also held a number of successful individual exhibitions in Valencia, Madrid and Zaragoza.

After the Spanish Civil War, Benedito continued to produce portraits, hunting scenes, still lifes and genre paintings. He held several exhibitions in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia during this period, including a major retrospective organised by the General Directorate of Fine Arts in 1958. He was 88 years old when he died in Madrid in 1963.