

# CONSERVATION OF CONTEMPORARY MURAL PAINTINGS ADAPTATION OF *STRAPPO* TECHNIQUE ON AEROSOL ART

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## INTRODUCTION

Aerosol art is one of the most powerful and used expressions nowadays, but, in terms of conservation, is also one of the most complicated to work with. Contemporary art expressions present problems related with materials which have not been created for the artistic purpose. In addition, sometimes, contemporary art expressions refuse preservation because damage and loss is part of its purpose - which makes harder the art restorer's main task. In aerosol art, renovation and loss is part of its aesthetics, but public and environment could change that, willing to preserve artworks that either have become part of the community or highlight a particular moment for the society. According to that, this research was focused on a complete documentation review of the contemporary practices related with aerosol art. Following with the experimentation of materials, in order to improve the results in the adaptation of *strappo* to this contemporary mural technique.

## STAGE I

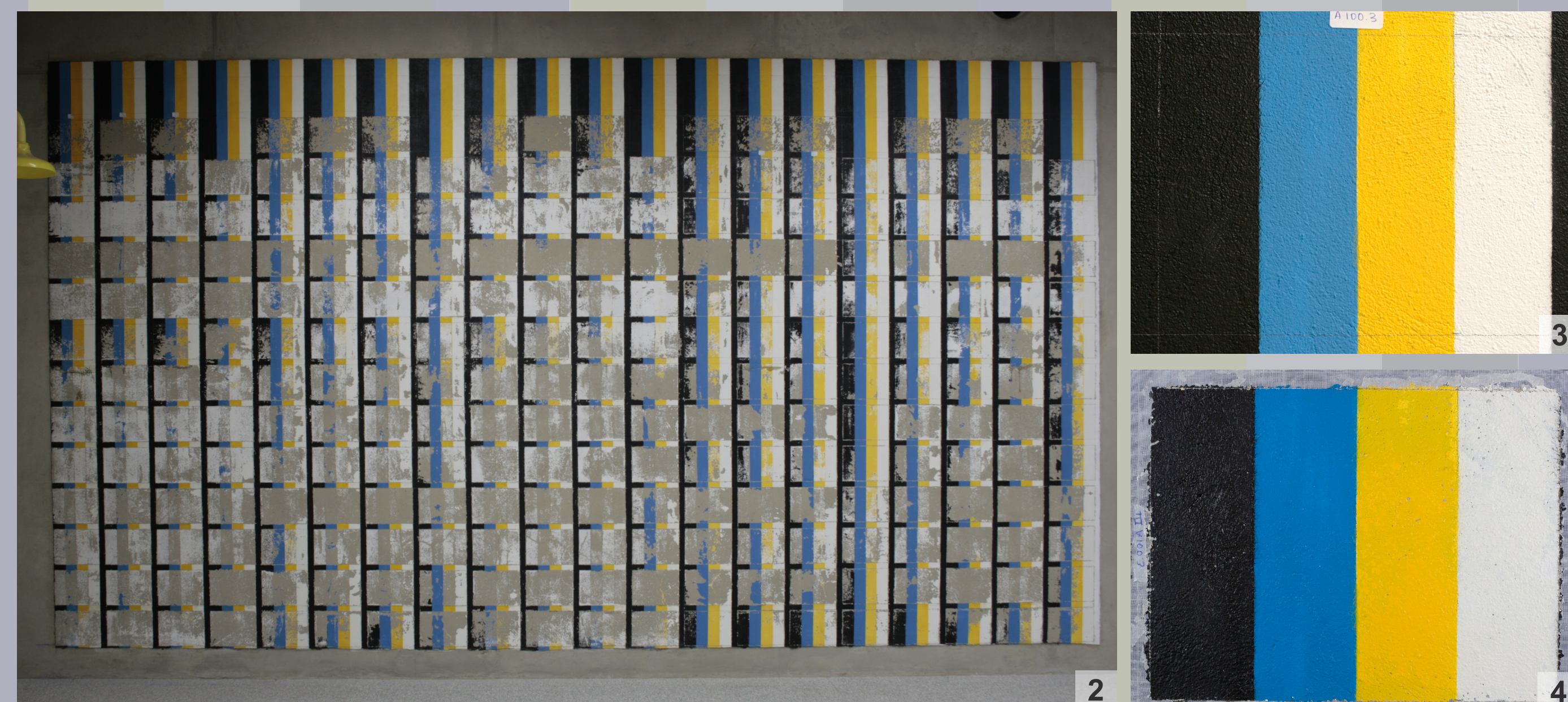
Aerosol art is a contemporary form of mural art mainly located outdoors. This began with the first graffiti writers in New York in the '70, and arose as validated form in urban environment with the street art and graffiti mural art. Although graffiti and street art play a controversial role in the cities, because both can be illegal or legal, some people are aware of those expressions and recognise them as a part of the aesthetics of the environment. Basically, this idea of recognition has produced that particular artworks – created either illegally or without explicit permission – have become valuable.

Moreover, the values that public give to unsanctioned public art produce a change in the ephemeral concept. Graffiti murals and street artworks created to last at some point, can be a renowned symbol for communities, which want to preserve that idea as long as possible. On the other hand, it is not just the ephemeral concept that makes difficult the conservation of those practices. There are also: the lack of knowledge about the techniques used and the environment itself, being complicated to do a control and management of the piece in situ. This was the main reason to research about ex situ possibilities to preserve artworks in the urban environment, finding the Italian *strappo* as a valid solution for particular cases.

## OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research is to conserve aerosol artworks related with graffiti and street art practices in the urban environment. For that, it will be necessary:

- Identify the importance of aerosol art practices in contemporary art
- Delve into the original concepts and the evolution of graffiti and street art
- Present possibilities on conservation of those practices
- Develop a modus operandi for emergency situations
- Adapt the traditional *strappo* technique to enamel paintings
- Analyse the materials used in the *strappo*, and understand the improvements they offer
- Evaluate the physical and chemical alterations produced on the surface – of enamel paintings – during *strappo* processes
- Establish new course of action for future researches



## STAGE II

The second stage involved the main research for this thesis. For which, it was created a facsimile mural painting following the process developed by aerosol artists in urban environment. This facsimile was used to test the different glues and resins that had been applied as facings in previous detachment interventions, combining surface active agents and textile layers. Finally, 265 *strappo* tests were done, but just the 30% of them showed satisfactory results. Those tests were selected to follow the next steps: back-treatment and facing removal.

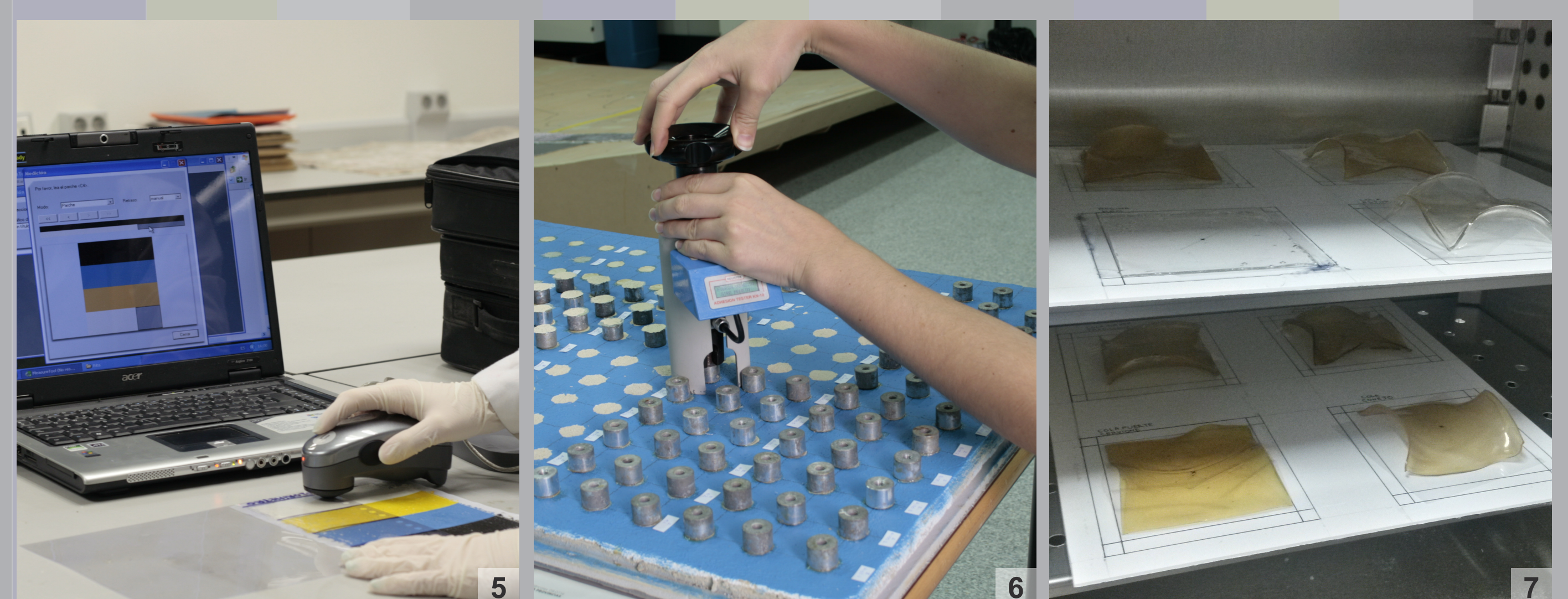
The back-treatment consisted in a dry-soft cleaning, followed by the reinforcement of the back of the painting with the application of a synthetic fabric (nylon thin fabric) and acrylic resin (Plextol B500®). As far as the front cleaning was concerned, this process was made depending on the adhesives used in each test. Animal glue *strappo* detachments would be treated with hot and humidity, in order to remove the facing from the front; but those facings made with resins needed solvents and more complicated process, which finally showed bad results in comparison with the animal glue facings.

## STAGE III

The third and last stage is regarding all the physical and chemical analysis done to contrast the information with the *strappo* tests. In order to understand the results and identify the problems incurred on the surface, the following analysis have been done:

- Organoleptic check
- Contraction measurement
- Colour analysis
- Brightness analysis
- Adhesion test
- UV Fluorescence for residue identification
- FTIR for absorption measurement
- SEM/EDX

This part of the research is being carried out at the moment. The results achieved will be help to complete the practice research on materials and processes for the conservation of aerosol art.



Images: 1. Mural graffiti in Valencia / 2. Facsimile in IRP Laboratory / 3. Test before detachment / 4. Test after the whole *strappo* process / 4. Colour analysis with spectrometre / 5. Adhesion tests / 6. Contraction measurement test during desiccation

## PROVISIONAL RESULTS

Firstly, all the results achieved so far support the main objective of the conservation of aerosol art. The research done in the first stage proved that despite of those artworks might not be created to last, public can change that concept.

Regarding the results obtained in the second stage, it is identifiable that the major part of the animal glue tested show good results during the *strappo*, in comparison with synthetic resins. Furthermore, the application of surfactants as etanol or isopropanol helps to produce a better and safe detachment of the paint layer, as well it does the combination of muslin and fabric for the facing.

Meanwhile, physical and chemical analysis are showing at the moment that minor damage is produced on the painting surface. Also, the diverse materials used during the *strappo* processes are compatible with the painting technique.

This research will be completed next year with the contrast of the results from questionnaires done to graffiti writers and street artists, and the finalisation of the physical and chemical analysis.