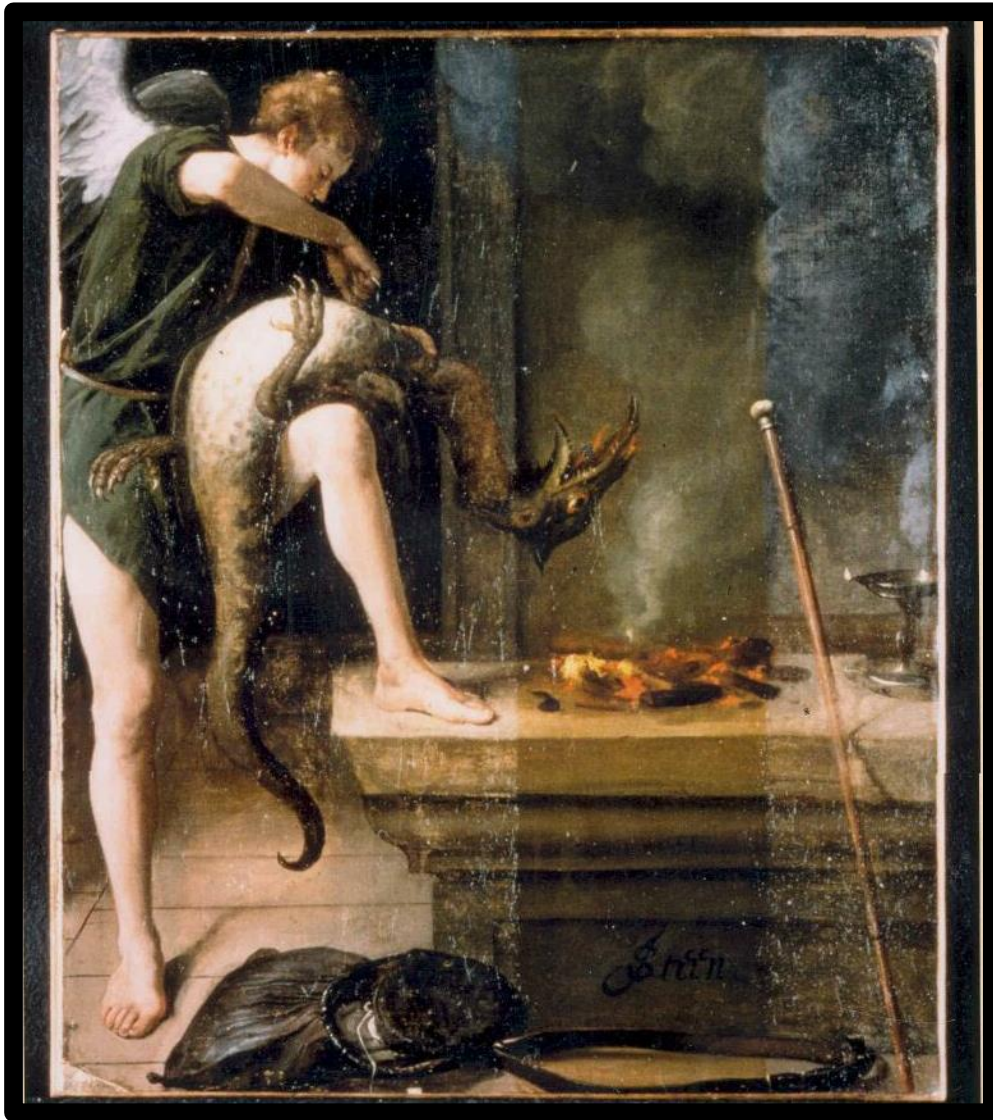


MUSEUM BREDIUS



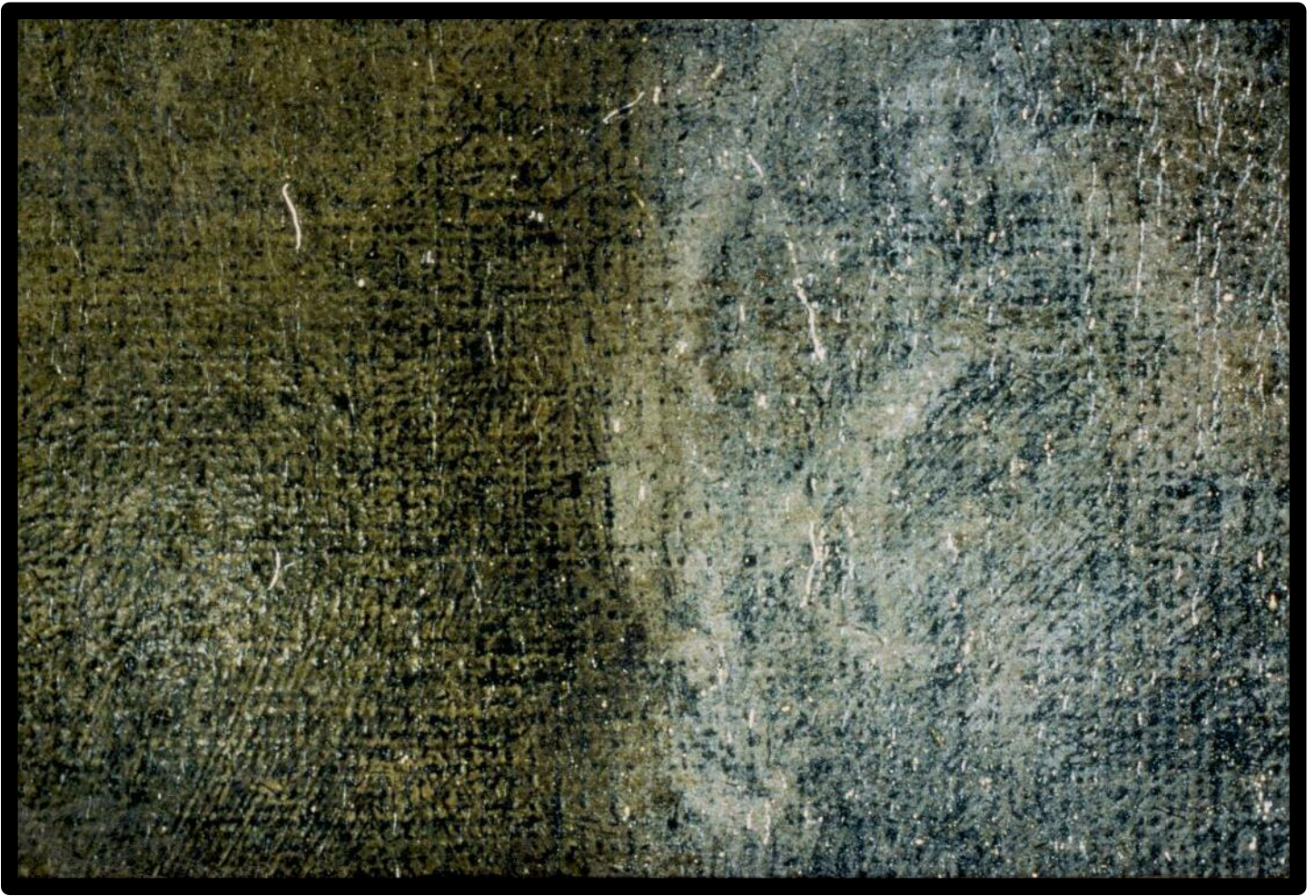
The reconstruction was put forward in the 1960s. Two wingtips and a scabbard had come to light when the left section was restored, showing that the two works had started as one. It was clear that the figure in the green tunic represents the angel Rafael, overpowering the evil spirit with incense. In 1993, Hague art historian Albert Blankert suggested a way to restore the two paintings to form a single work, and agreement was reached to carry this out at Hague Gemeentemuseum's restoration studio.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



Both the paintings were discoloured, although one more than the other. The old varnish had to be removed to bring the colours on either side into alignment. Considerable brown-green overpainting had been applied to the right half, along the side of the table for example, possibly intended to correct Jan Steen's rather free and vivacious style of painting.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



The paint of the grey smoke appeared particularly worn, leaving black dots of ground exposed. The macro photo shows the worn pattern visible under the thick layer of brown varnish.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



Jan Steen is an artist who starts by painting the background in a global colour before inserting the details of the foreground. Whenever he changes shapes, like the corner of the tabletop from straight to diagonal, this eventually becomes visible.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



This macro photo of the edge of the tabletop shows how someone who found Steen's manner of painting too casual has covered it with a uniform layer of brown paint. The granular pattern demonstrates how much coarser the paint powder or pigment was then than now.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



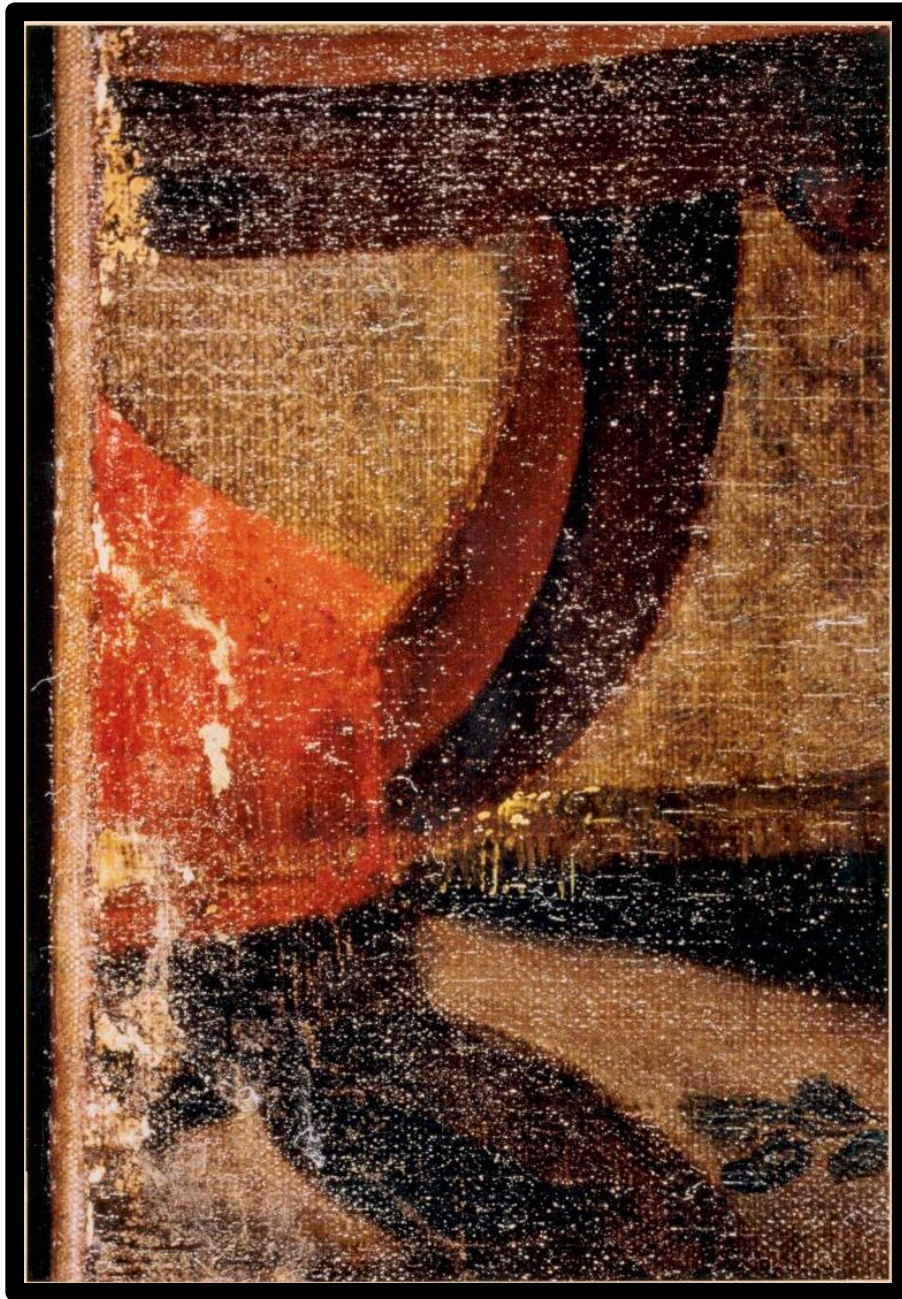
It is always difficult to predict the condition of the paint under an old layer of varnish before a painting is cleaned. On the top left section of the 'Tobias and Sarah' half, the composition seems to have survived in reasonably good condition, despite the craquelure, which is a common effect in old paintings.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



Only after cleaning is the extent of the damage along the left margin evident: there are lacunae and scorch marks are now exposed, possibly the result of a fire. The light and dark yellow patches are old gaps that previous restorers have filled and painted over at various times in the past.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



Old damage to the red chair has also been exposed. Clearly visible is the way the composition was divided straight down the middle. Seventeenth-century artists rarely paint half a chair and Steen, who frequently used this piece of furniture in his interior paintings, always showed the whole chair.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



After the old varnish layer was removed, the two separate halves had to be reunited to form a single piece. That was done by adding a new canvas to the back of the original as a lining. The two halves had been relined separately before, so these old linings had to be peeled off before the paintings could be attached to the new canvas. Here the two sections are laid out on the lining table with the inserts for the missing corner and centre strip under synthetic foil ready for low pressure to be applied through suction.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



Shiny foil reveals the texture of the surface of the two halves of the painting. Once the old and new canvases are pressed together the lining table is heated to melt the adhesive, a mixture of wax and resin, and to ensure that after cooling the adhesive binds securely.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



The two halves are now attached to the new lining canvas so they once again form a single piece. Before proceeding, any irregularities between the old and new surfaces need to be smoothed out. To monitor this the painting is lit with strong raking light from the side.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



For it to work as a painting, the canvas needs to be attached to a stretcher, also new of course, since the dimensions of the painting are now entirely different. To ensure that the whole composition appears on top of the stretcher, entirely visible without the edge being obscured by the frame's rabbet, the size of the stretcher has to be carefully calculated.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



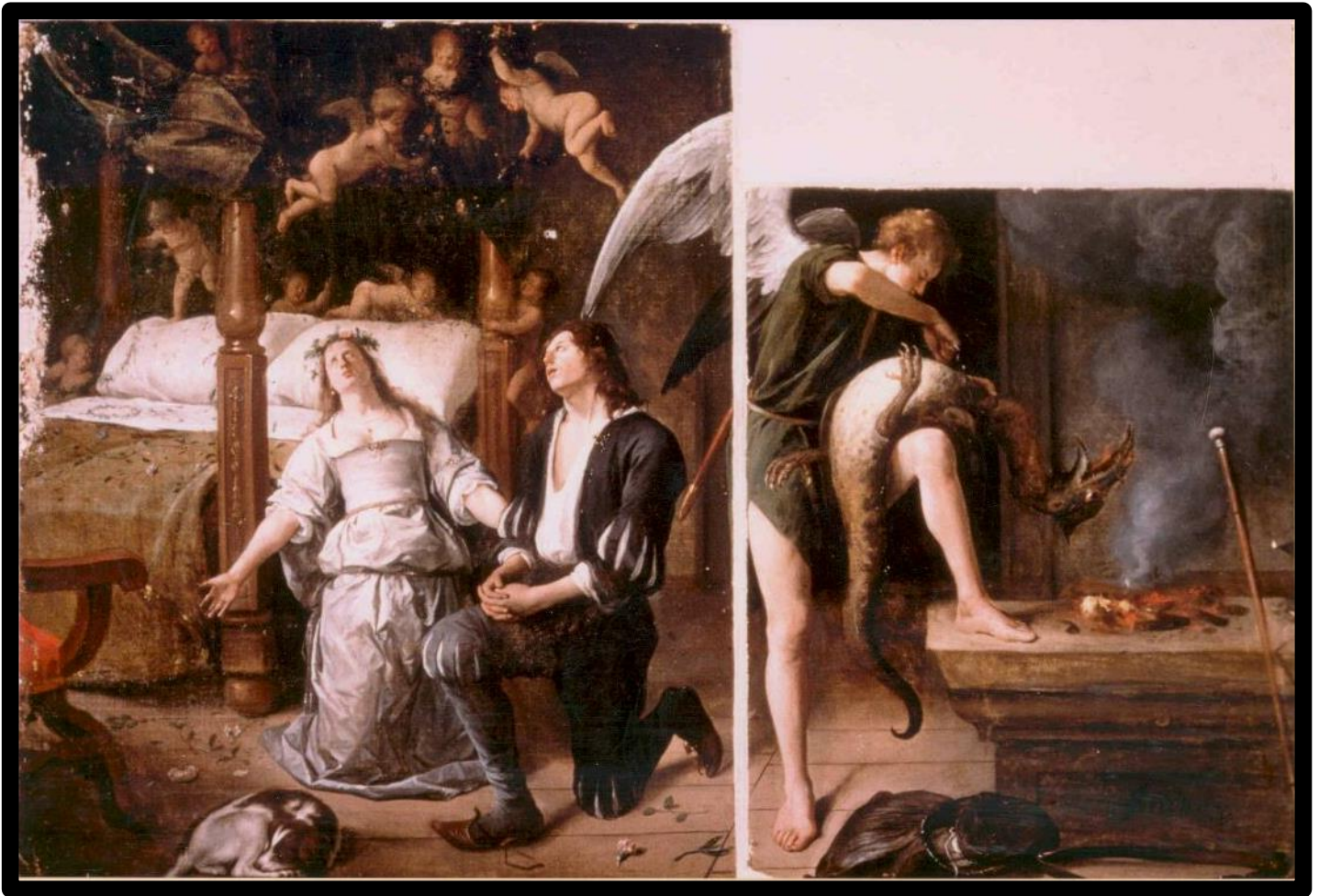
The sides also have to be folded with utmost precision to avoid the composition appearing crooked, which would become obvious in the frame. The unpainted margins are evenly aligned on all sides, to the millimetre.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



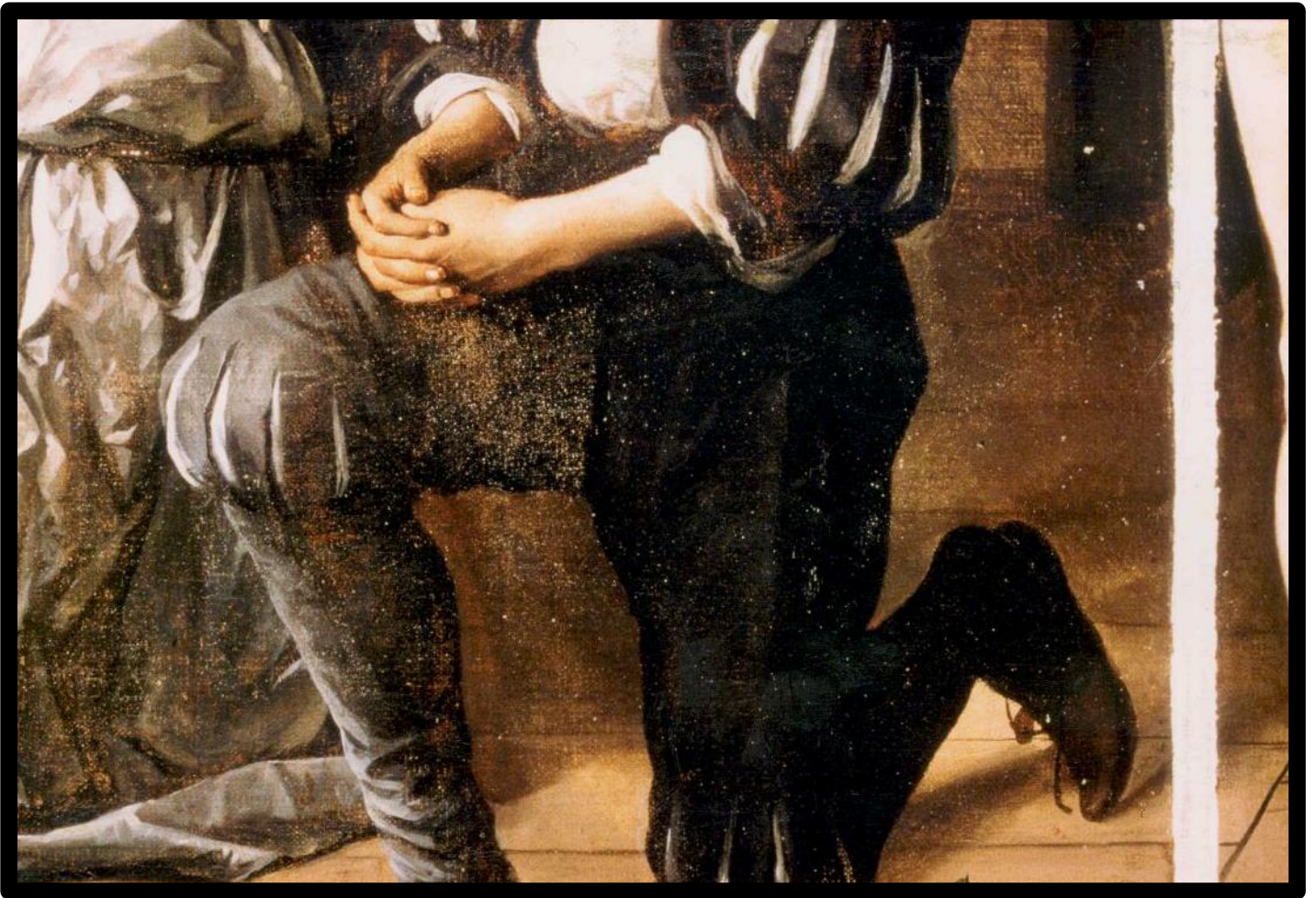
Once the stiff canvas is securely folded onto the new stretcher it is fixed in place with sharp tacks. To prevent the structure warping during this process, it is carefully held in place and watched on all sides.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



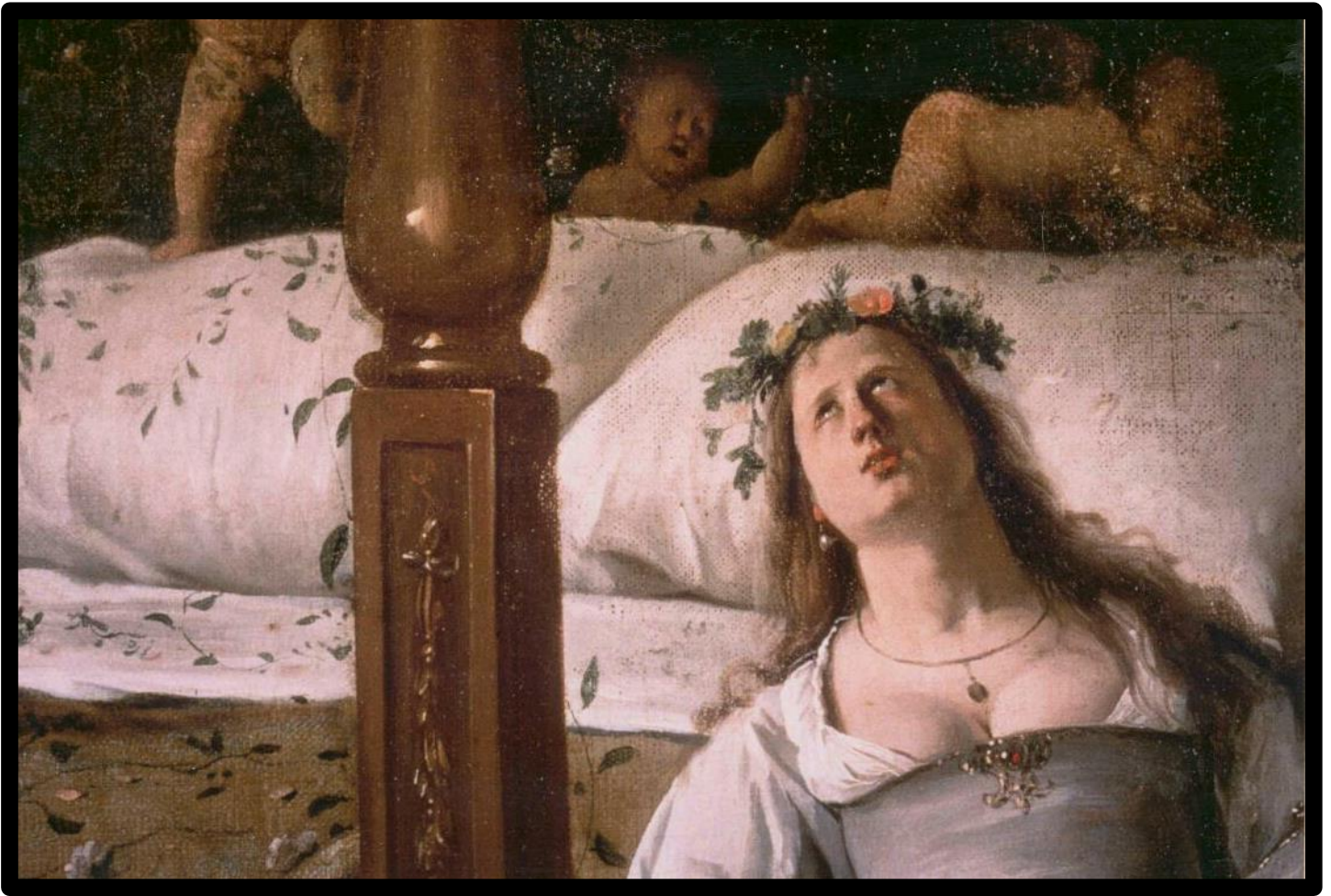
The lining and stretching are complete. The painting can now be varnished in preparation for retouching. It is essential to take a photo at this stage so that restorers will in future be able to tell what is Jan Steen's work and which details and larger elements were added later.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



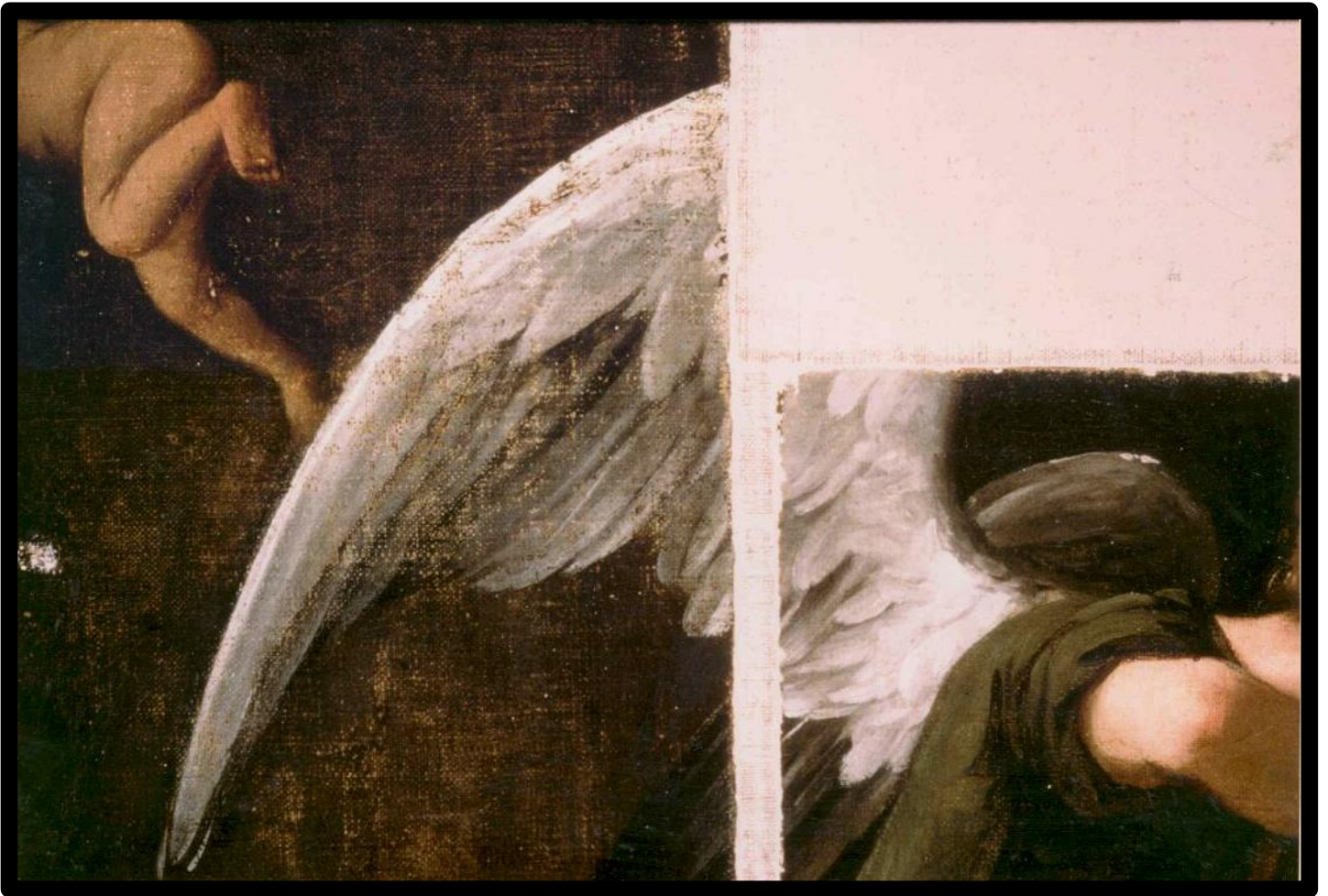
Tobias's legs during the retouching phase. Slowly but surely, the old worn surface layer is rebuilt with suitable new paints. Here the flaws in the structure, texture and readability of the untreated leg are obvious compared to the other leg, right, which appears as the artist intended.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



The pillow to the left of the post has been retouched; to the right, not yet. Gradually, the texture and the rendering of materials are returning. Retouching takes a lot of time: it is the least spectacular process in the entire operation, but in the end, it is clear how much has been achieved.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



Another example: to the right of the join, the wing has been retouched; to the left, not yet. The damage on the left was the result of the wingtip having been covered for many years by a layer of paint and only being brought to light in the 1950s.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



In a matter of months, the ruin is transformed into an intelligible, entertaining painting. A start is made here on the least problematic retouches, after which the restored areas can show how best to deal with the more difficult areas.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



Before the larger lacunae can be filled, the matter is discussed in detail with those immediately concerned, as well as others involved and various experts. The first form and colour suggestions are tried out on paper, and here options are discussed with restoration expert Prof. van de Wetering and Rijksdienst restorer Ariëlle Veerman.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



The trimmed wingtip had to be repaired: restorers needed to insert a convincing addition yet without attempting to imitate Jan Steen. The open wings of a large mounted gull from the Museon collection provided a serviceable model.

MUSEUM BREDIUS



It is important to remember that, despite all our efforts, what we have here is the remains of a central section: the original work was probably much larger, possibly by several decimetres, especially to the left and above. The kneeling couple may therefore have started at the centre of the composition. The restored section is all that has survived of a large, monumental composition, on which we may all give our imagination free rein.