

When Plaster Needs a Plaster Cast

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Object

Plaster doll Pille, 64 cm tall, with eyes that close and lips that are slightly open and with a rather natural child's body. Belongs to a private collection. The owner got Pille as her fourth birthday present from her parents in 1943.

Condition of the object before conservation



Fig. 3 - 4 Both legs and its right arm had broken and the foot of the right leg and the little finger of the right hand were missing. The legs showed former repairs, probably in about 1950, as far as the owner remembered. The pieces of the right leg had been stuck together with something resembling EPO glue. The glued fragments had then been covered with a thick layer of putty and painted. The wig made of natural hair was dirty, matted and cut short unevenly. In the forelock and nape some strands were missing. The cotton fabric of the wig's lining was torn in the front. The paint layer had crackled on the face and neck.

Conservation/restoration

Preparations for mending the legs and feet



Fig. 5 - 9 The paint and the thick layer of putty on the legs were removed mechanically, i.e. scratching with a scalpel. The cleaned surfaces were polished until smooth.

Joining the limbs



Fig. 10 - 15 To mend the limbs PVA- glue, gypsum and Japanese paper were used. Little grooves were made with a scalpel across the folding line and they were filled with strips of Japanese paper and covered with gypsum. The paper covered with glue was malleable and became stiff when it dried. So the joints are strongly connected. The added gypsum mass joined well with the limbs and the cohesion at the joints was good. The details were polished, primed white and painted in flesh colour. Finishing touches were made with varnish.

Materials used

Japanese paper, PVA-glue, gypsum mass (1:1 distilled water: PVA-glue + gypsum powder), chalk mass (chalk + pastel crayons + resin Acronal), hair extensions (natural hair, Tradehouse, Estonia), acrylic paints (the Netherlands, Russia), covering varnish (Extra-fine picture varnish, anti-UV, Lefrac & Bourgeois).



Fig. 1 Doll Pille with its 4-year-old owner in 1943.



Fig. 2 Conserved doll Pille with its owner in 2016.

Modelling a new foot and finger



Fig. 16 – 20 The missing foot was modelled on a base shape of Japanese paper, following the lines of the left foot. In order to restore the little finger a hole was made into gypsum and a wooden stick was inserted. Around it the missing finger was modelled after the fingers of the left hand

Repairs of the eye-construction



Fig. 21 – 22 The 'sleeping' (closed) eyes' mechanism was repaired. A stopper to fix the closing at the right moment was inserted. Formerly the eyes had closed too far back inside the head that damaged the eyelashes.

Face make-up



Fig. 23 – 24 The covering paint had retained its colouring and was all right. Cracks in the paint were filled with a mass of chalk and acrylic resin (Acronal). The mass was toned with pastel crayons to the shade that matched the original colouring. This made the cracks less visible.

Work on the wig



Fig. 25 – 29 The wig was removed and washed, the tear in its lining was mended and the cap was fixed on the top. The missing strands were replaced with new ones and hair extensions from natural hair were used to restore the hairdo as close to the original as possible.

Joining the details and dressing the doll



Fig. 30 – 32 The head and the limbs were joined with the help of a piece of elastic. The doll was given new underwear and shoes (sewn by the conservator). The owner bought the dress and knee-high socks in a shop of children's wear.

