label: "46"

title: Historic Canvases Deciphered

subtitle: Five Case Studies

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abstract: Textiles with a woven pattern were used as painters’ canvases by Spanish and Italian artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In this poster, textiles that has have been hidden for centuries between paint and lining canvas come to life in handwoven reconstructions. The research and reconstruction of canvases contributes to understanding of technical painting art history and brings attention to an understudied aspect of textile production during the period that an artwork was created. Canvas reconstruction enables new research and may provide insight about why old masters used these supports, as well as how and when these textiles were made.

short\_title: Historic Canvases Deciphered

# <A-head> Introduction

Textiles with a woven pattern were used as painters’ canvases by Spanish and Italian artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But art historians and painting conservators have focused on the painted layers rather than the underlying fabric.

In this poster, textiles that have been hidden for centuries between paint and lining canvas come to life in handwoven reconstructions of the support canvas of five paintings by El Greco ([**fig. 46.1**](fig-46-1)), Titian ([**fig. 46.2**](fig-46-2)), Caravaggio ([**fig. 46.3**](fig-46-3)), and Velázquez ([**figs. 46.4**](fig-46-4)**, [46.5](fig-46-5)**). The support canvas used by the great masters is shown in each of the figures.

# <A-head> Material and Methods

Close examinations enabled Lab O to analyze the weave structure of the patterned textile canvas. Using software developed for computer-aided handlooms, Lab O then developed a weave draft for the reproduction of these linen textiles.

A weave draft of the El Greco canvas had already been published ({{de los Rios y Rojas and Socorro 1977}}). Four high-resolution X-ray images, provided by the museums that hold the paintings, were deciphered to find the pattern of these textiles.

After consulting the first published book on weaving ({{Ziegler 1677}}) and a modern facsimile, translation, and study ({{Hilts, Ziegler, and Lumscher 1990}}), a weave draft was generated for each textile using software developed to interface with computer-aided handlooms.

All reconstructions were then woven in linen on a dobby loom.

# <A-head> The Project Goal

Lab O, a laboratory for handwoven canvas located in Odemira, Portugal, was founded to deepen the technical and practical knowledge of historic canvases and to promote their analysis, authentication, and conservation. The work at Lab O connects craft, entrepreneurship, technology, science, and art history.

The research and reconstruction of canvases contributes to the understanding of technical painting art history and brings attention to an understudied aspect of textile production during the period that an artwork was created. Canvas reconstruction enables new research and may provide insight about why old masters used these supports, as well as how and when these textiles were made.