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Field Reports

Title

Sala delle Asse, Castello Sforzesco, February 21st 2026 Milan, Italy

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Authors

Mcavoy, Scott Patrick

Cocciardi, Caroline

Rissolo, Dominique

et al.

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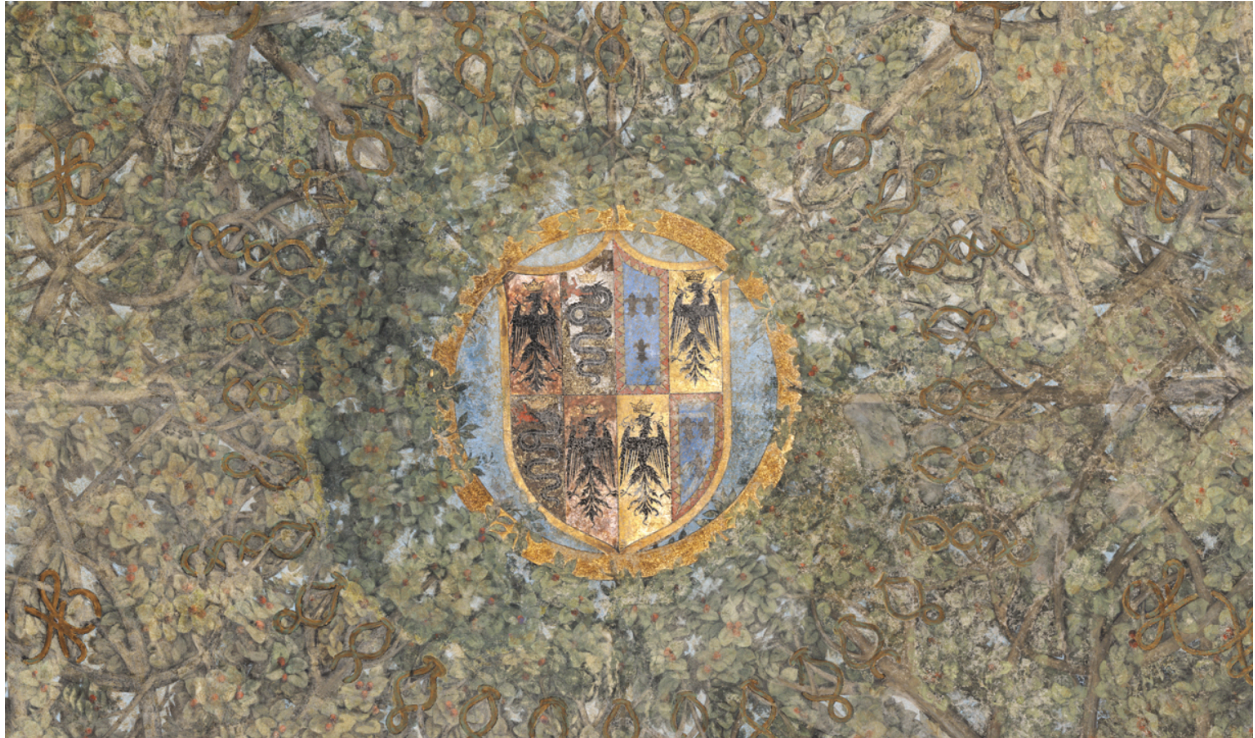
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Field Report:

Sala delle Asse, Castello Sforzesco

February 21st 2026

Milan, Italy



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Field report prepared February 22nd 2026

Scott McAvoy*, smcavoy@ucsd.edu

Caroline Cocciardi, monalisaknot@hotmail.com

Cultural Heritage Engineering Initiative (CHEI) and ALERTCalifornia
at the University of California San Diego

CHEI projects are directed by Professor Falko Kuester & Dr. Dominique Rissolo

Expedition Overview:

In February 2026, during the period of carnevale, and during the winter olympics in Milan, special tours were offered enabling small groups to observe the restoration effort being performed on 15th century secco paintings and charcoal drawings (both attributed to Leonardo Da Vinci) within the Sala delle Asse in Castello Sforzesco. The work, started in 1498, features 16 mulberry trees forming a canopy of interwoven branches and leaves painted on a vaulted ceiling. Throughout the canopy is a single unbroken golden cord, looping in a variety of knots. By 1893 the paintings had been covered by layers of whitewash, and the room had been used by Austrian and French militaries occupying the castle.

Two restoration efforts caused further damage, first 1898 -1902 with a very aggressive removal of the whitewash layers, followed by a heavy and vibrant overpainting, and in 1954 an additional layer of darker colors sponged meant to soften the overly vibrant overpainting. The tour guide provided an estimate that only 20% of the painting was original.

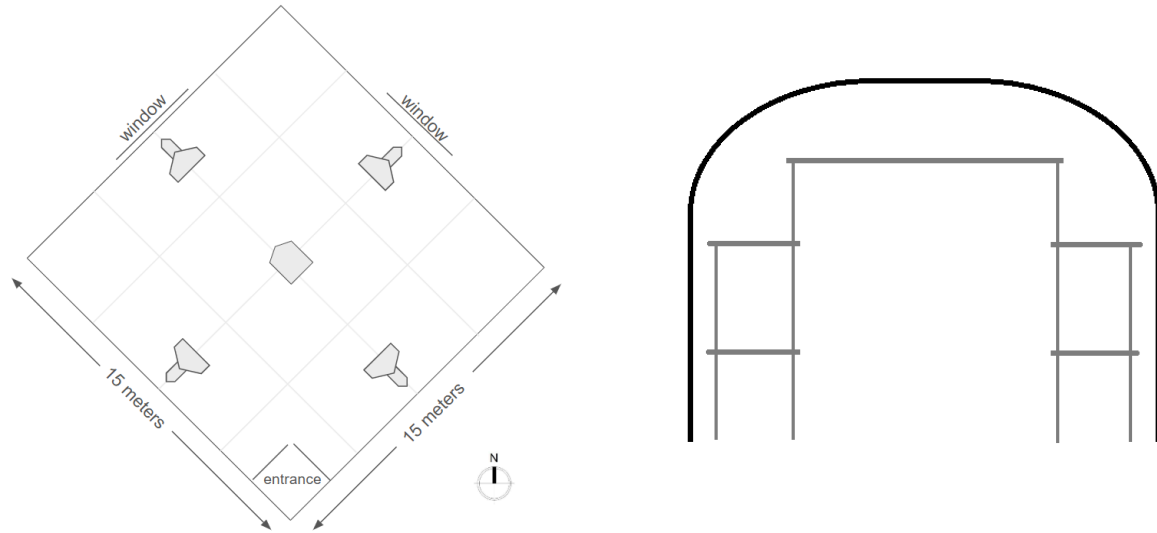
In the mid 2000s the paint began to flake, and investigations pointed to the presence of salts, which had leached from the stone onto the surface of the paintings. The restoration effort we observed involved the application of damp Japanese paper to the surface of the painting, which dissolved these salts and enabled their removal. The effect was immediately noticeable, as the salts had left a white crust over the pigment. Restored areas were much more vibrant. In addition to the conservation effort, it was also decided to remove the 1954 sponge layer, and reveal the earlier vibrant overpainting from the turn of the 20th century.

The hall had been closed to the public for some time as major restoration work was being done. This tour provided a unique opportunity to observe the knots, which were of interest to our collaborator Caroline Cocciardi of the organization Leonardo's Knots. Unfortunately no photography was allowed within the Sala.



The square castle has its main entrance facing southeast. The Sala is on the ground floor of the castle, in the “torre dei falconieri” which is in the northern corner of the castle.

The floorplan, according to the tour guide, is 15 meters by 15 meters, and I estimate the ceiling height to be about 8 meters, judging by the scaffolding placed there by the restoration architects. We will need to research previous restoration work to confirm.



Key notes:

- The tour group was allowed on to the 2nd level of the scaffolding, not the third directly under the ceiling. From this vantage point the knots closest to the center could not be observed. The knots visible from the edges were almost entirely overpainted, there were just a handful of original segments on the knots, featuring gold and with diagonal lines separating the twisted strands. Almost all original segments were less than 5cm in length, and no crossings seemed to be original. Most of the original knotwork was visible on the northwest side, with some on the northeast. Perhaps this is correlated to their protection from direct sunlight.
- The restoration is set to finish in spring of 2027, but will likely not open up to the public again until 2028.

Contacts:

Seres - restoration company performing salt removal

<https://www.seres.it/en/>

Ad Artem - tour group

www.adartem.it

Next steps:

Research hyperspectral investigations of the Sala
Obtain the books:

Leonardo Da Vinci. La sala delle Asse del Castello Sforzesco / The Sala delle Asse of the Sforza Castle. Silvana Editoriale 2017.

La Sala delle Asse del Castello Sforzesco. All'ombra del Moro, a cura di C. Salsi, A. Alberti, Silvana Editoriale, Cinisello Balsamo 2019

Make a formal request to the scientific office to request survey documentation.