

Thomas Baines

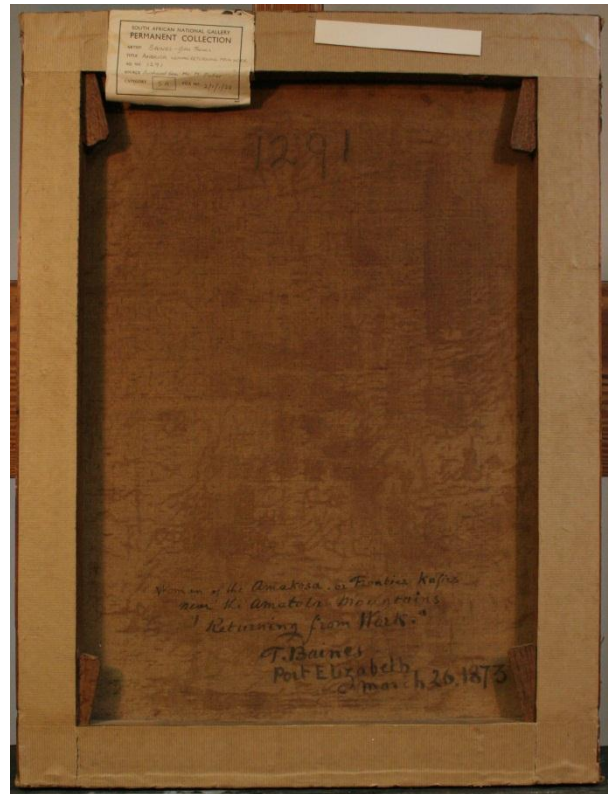
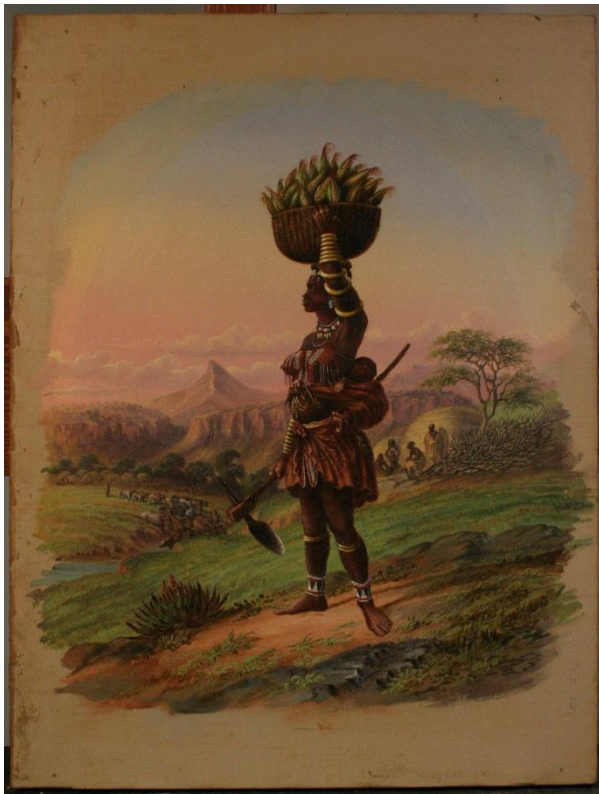
AmaXhosa Woman returning from Work (1873)

Oil on Canvas (61 x 46 cm)

SANG Acc 1291

TECHNICAL REPORT

This late painting by Thomas Baines, planned and painted to be framed with an oval rebate, remains unlined on its original canvas, and is therefore a wonderful example of the fine yet lively impasted brushwork the artist employed to describe details of foliage and costume.

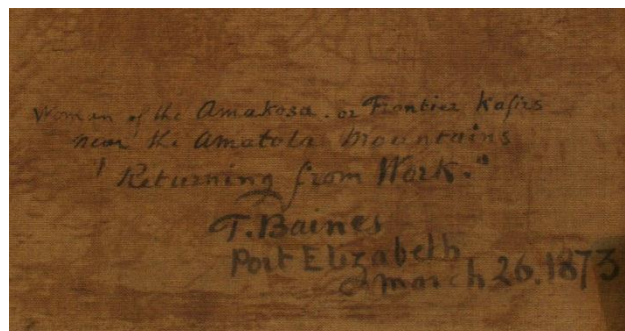


Baines AmaXhosa Woman returning from Work (1873)

Canvas Support

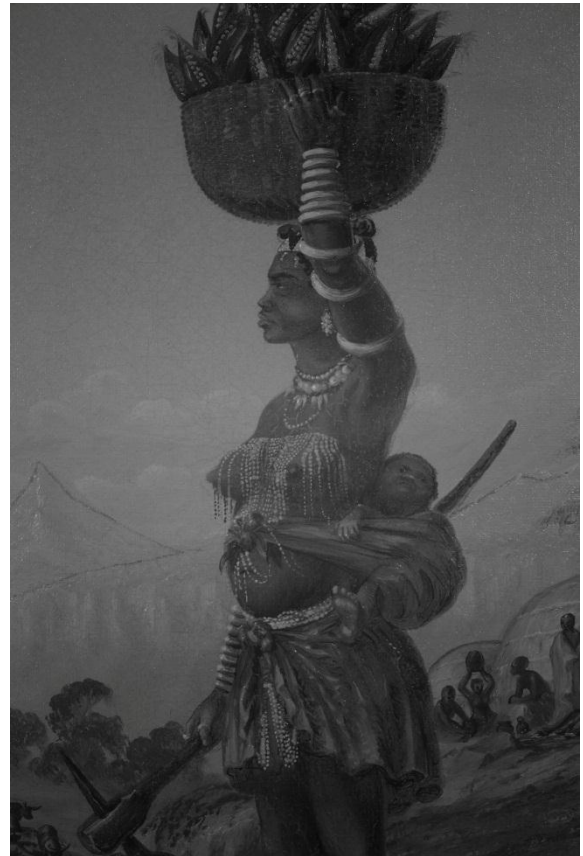
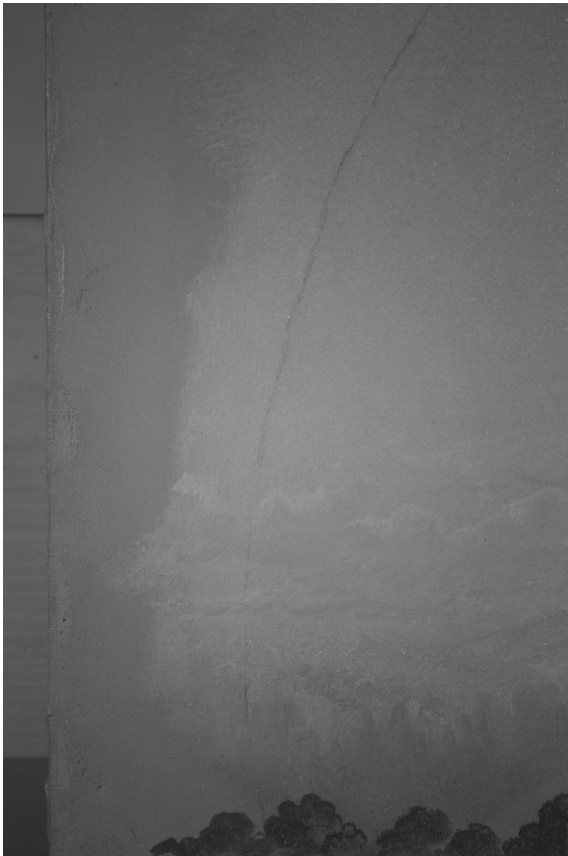
The support is a finely woven linen canvas which remains unlined and is inscribed at the reverse:

*Woman of the Amakosa. or Frontier Kafirs
Near the Amatola Mountains
"Returning from Work."
T. Baines
Port Elizabeth
March 26. 1873*

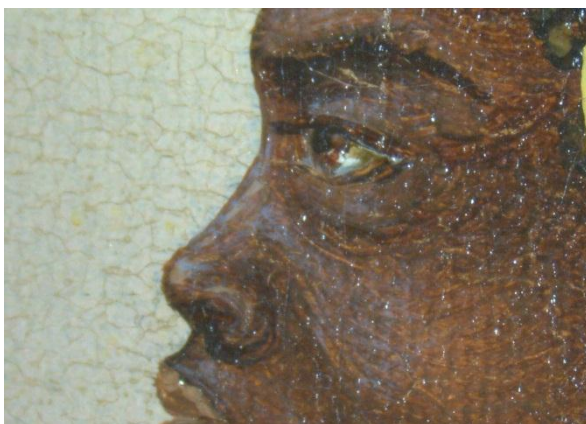


Ground Layer and Underdrawing

A biscuit coloured oil ground has been applied by the artist. The ground remains visible in the rebate as the painting was planned to be framed as an oval. This planning is evident in the underdrawing which denotes a clear oval as the format for the picture. The underdrawing is applied in a fine charcoal and can be seen to an extent with the naked eye, however it is much more apparent when viewed in infrared light, for example denoting the oval, the mountains in the background, and the figure.



Details in infrared showing underdrawing



Details showing underdrawing at profile and headdress visible in normal light

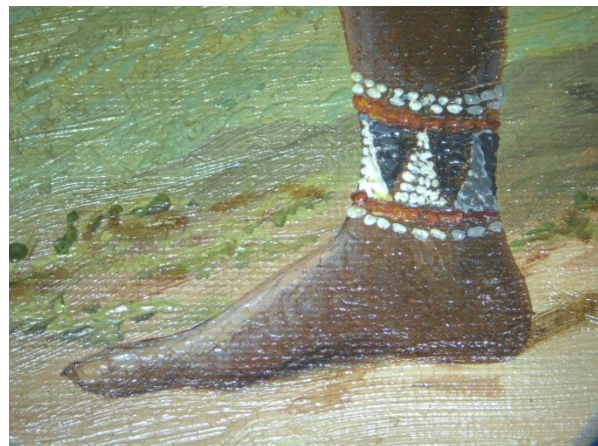
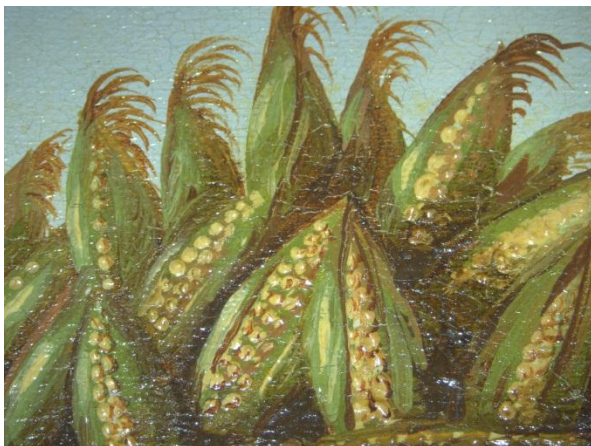
Paint Layers

The traditional technique used for the build-up of the paint layers can be clearly seen behind the oval rebate, where initial blocks of colour are elaborated with details of foliage, shadows or highlights.



Detail showing working method of artist outside the planned oval to be covered by the rebate of the frame

The paint layers have been applied with deft precision and extreme confidence. The small delicate blobs of impasto used to denote the beadwork and the corn are beautifully preserved, as are the delicate scumbles used to modify the flesh tones. The foliage of the tree has been achieved with a rapid but precise blotting of the brush, while the aloe in the foreground has been built up slowly with glazes and highlights.



Details showing impasto and glazing in the corn and impasto of beadwork with delicate scumbles to modify the flesh paint



Detail showing buildup of aloe with glazes and highlights, and blotting technique used for leaves of tree

The careful planning by the artist evident in the underdrawing is also evident in the paint layers. Here clear reserves can be seen where the background was painted up to the area left open for the main figure, which was then painted in the final stages once the background paint had dried. This is evident in a raking light, for example at the legs where the green background paint extends only partially below the contour of the figure.



Detail in raking light showing reserves planned for figure

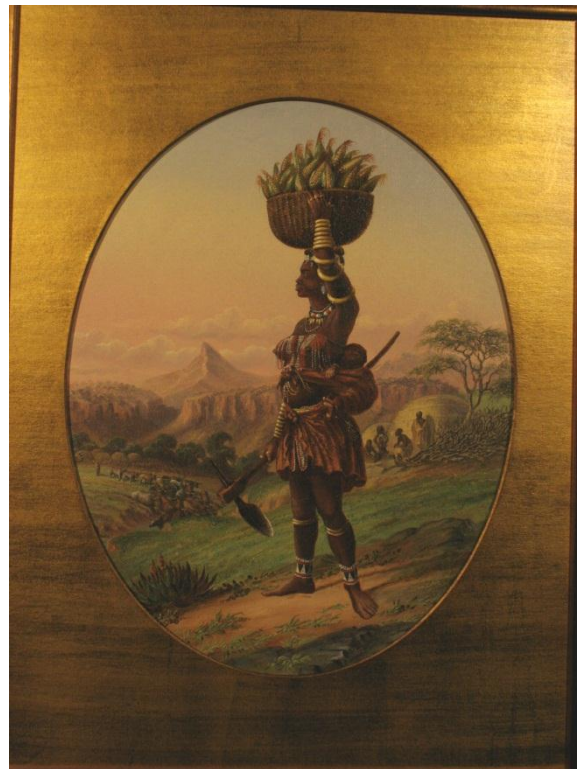
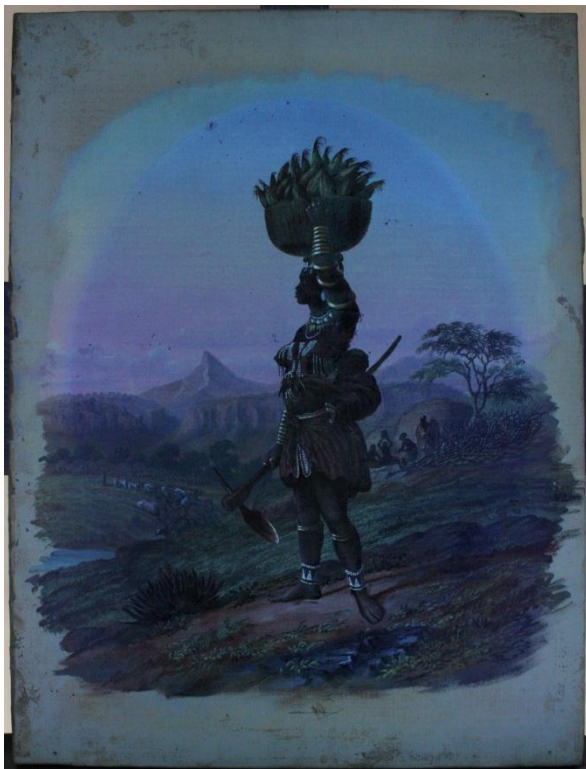


Microscopic detail showing brushstrokes of background paint below paint of figure

The oval rebate which covers the areas of paint extending beyond the planned oval has served to protect those areas from developing craquelure, a process inevitable due to the expansion and contraction of the canvas with changes in relative humidity. It has also resulted in the yellowing of the oil medium, a process which occurs in the dark, so that the exposed and unexposed areas are clearly evident due to their difference in colour. This is further seen in the ultraviolet image which shows a greater fluorescence of the varnish layer where it has been exposed to light, as opposed to where it remains behind the rebate.



Details showing difference in ageing (development of craquelure and discolouration of oil medium) due to paint being behind the oval rebate



Ultraviolet image showing increased fluorescence of the varnish in exposed area, and the painting framed with the oval rebate

Bronwyn Leone
June 2016