

# A Roman Technique of Open-Weave Canvas Lining

Emma Kimmel, The Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU

## INTRODUCTION

The treatment of a 16<sup>th</sup>-century, Venetian painting from the Arkansas Arts Center revealed a lining canvas with a very open weave.

- The painting was purchased in 1930 from an Italian dealer for the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.
- Kress paintings were often lined after acquisition with tight, basket-weave canvases (a plain weave alternating 2 warps with 2 wefts).
- This lining canvas has an open, plain weave, and there are no notes in the Kress Foundation file that discuss the addition of a lining.
- If this lining was not done by the Kress Foundation, where did it come from?



Attr. Francesco Bassano, *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, c. 1580, oil on canvas, H. 37 5/16" x W. 52 1/4"  
Arkansas Arts Center (Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation), K-105  
(Clean State, Emma Kimmel)



Reverse with overall lining visible.  
(Before Treatment, Emma Kimmel)

## THE LINING

This lining has several characteristics that point to an Italian method of canvas lining:

- It is composed of bast fiber threads with irregular widths.
- It is a plain weave with 16x16 threads per inch.
- It is adhered with a thin layer of glue-paste adhesive.
- The original canvas has a fine weave, with approx. 30x30 threads per inch.



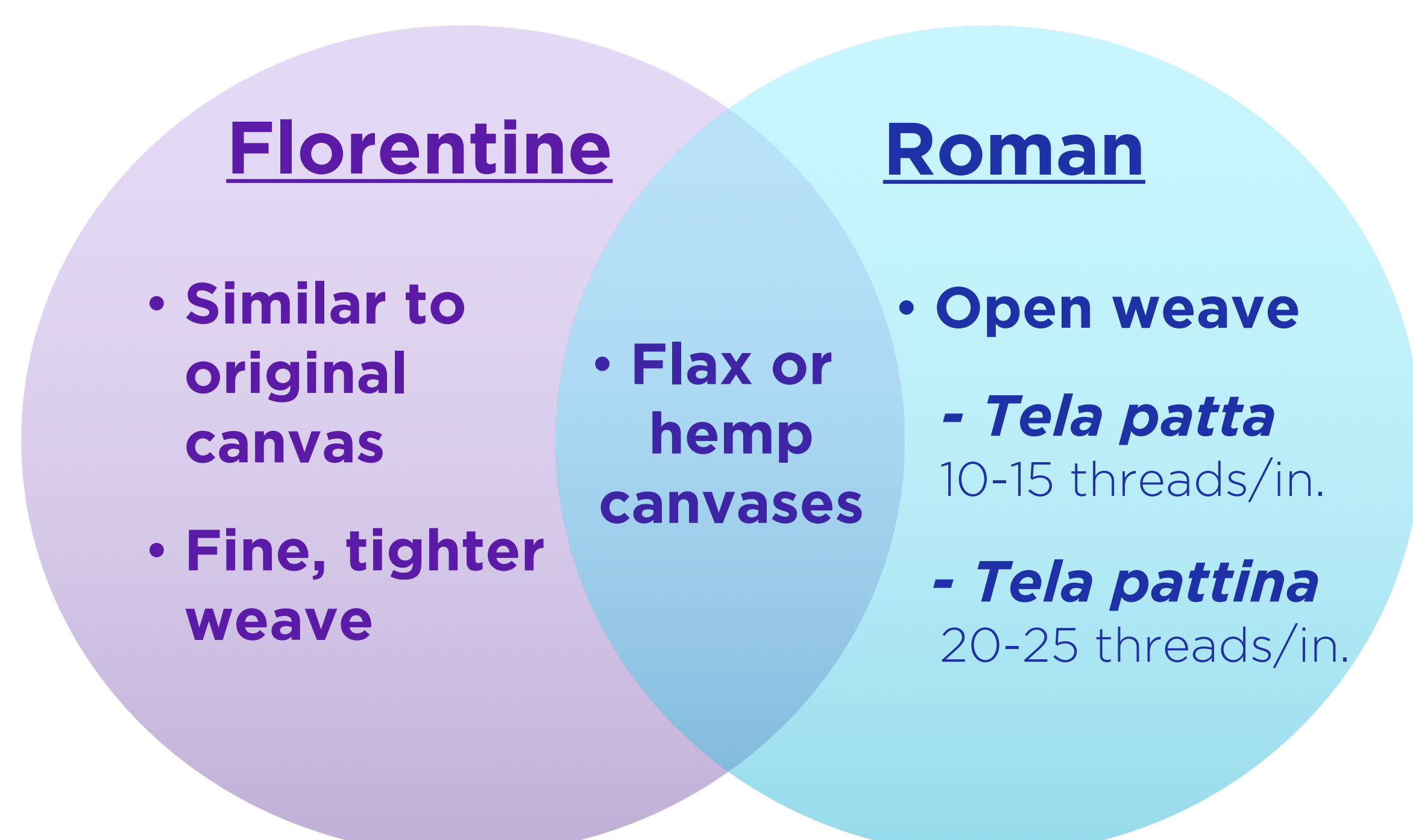
Detail of the lining canvas with a swatch of linen from our studio for comparison. (Emma Kimmel)

The lining was likely applied in Italy before the painting was sold to the Kress Foundation in 1930.

## FLORENTINE VS. ROMAN LINING CANVASES

In Italy there are two traditional glue-paste lining methods: Florentine and Roman. A characteristic difference between them is the lining canvas chosen.

- The Florentine method uses a tighter weave similar to the original canvas.
- The Roman technique uses an open weave. There are two main types:
  - *Tela patta* canvases are typically 10-15 threads per inch.
  - *Tela pattina* canvases are denser at 20-25 threads per inch.



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## BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE TRADITIONAL ROMAN LINING PROCESS

1. The painting is prepared for lining by cleaning the reverse of the canvas, mending tears, applying canvas inserts, and applying an overall facing.
2. Diluted *colletta* (glue) is applied to the back of the original canvas to consolidate preparatory layers before the lining procedure.
3. The lining canvas is soaked for at least 12 hours and then left to dry before being stretched onto a wood or metal working frame.
4. A thin layer of *colla di pasta* (glue paste) is spread onto the back of the painting. The lining canvas is placed on the back of the painting and massaged from the reverse, pushing from the center outwards to remove excess glue. This process is repeated from the front of the painting until only a thin layer of glue remains.
5. After drying for several hours, the painting is then ironed from the front through waxed paper until the surface is completely dry.

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lower overall weight after lining</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Heat, moisture, and pressure of the lining process</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thin glue layer</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not suitable for highly damaged or sensitive works</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Greater flexibility</li></ul>	

## CONCLUSIONS

- *The Adoration of the Shepherds* was lined with a Roman *tela patta* canvas, suitable for a larger painting of this size.
- Traditional Italian glue-paste linings are not appropriate for many paintings, but almost 90 years later this lining remains unobtrusive and flexible.
- Further experimentation using open-weave canvases with alternative adhesives could make the lining process less invasive while still providing a light, flexible support.



## REFERENCES

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