

Preparing the canvas support

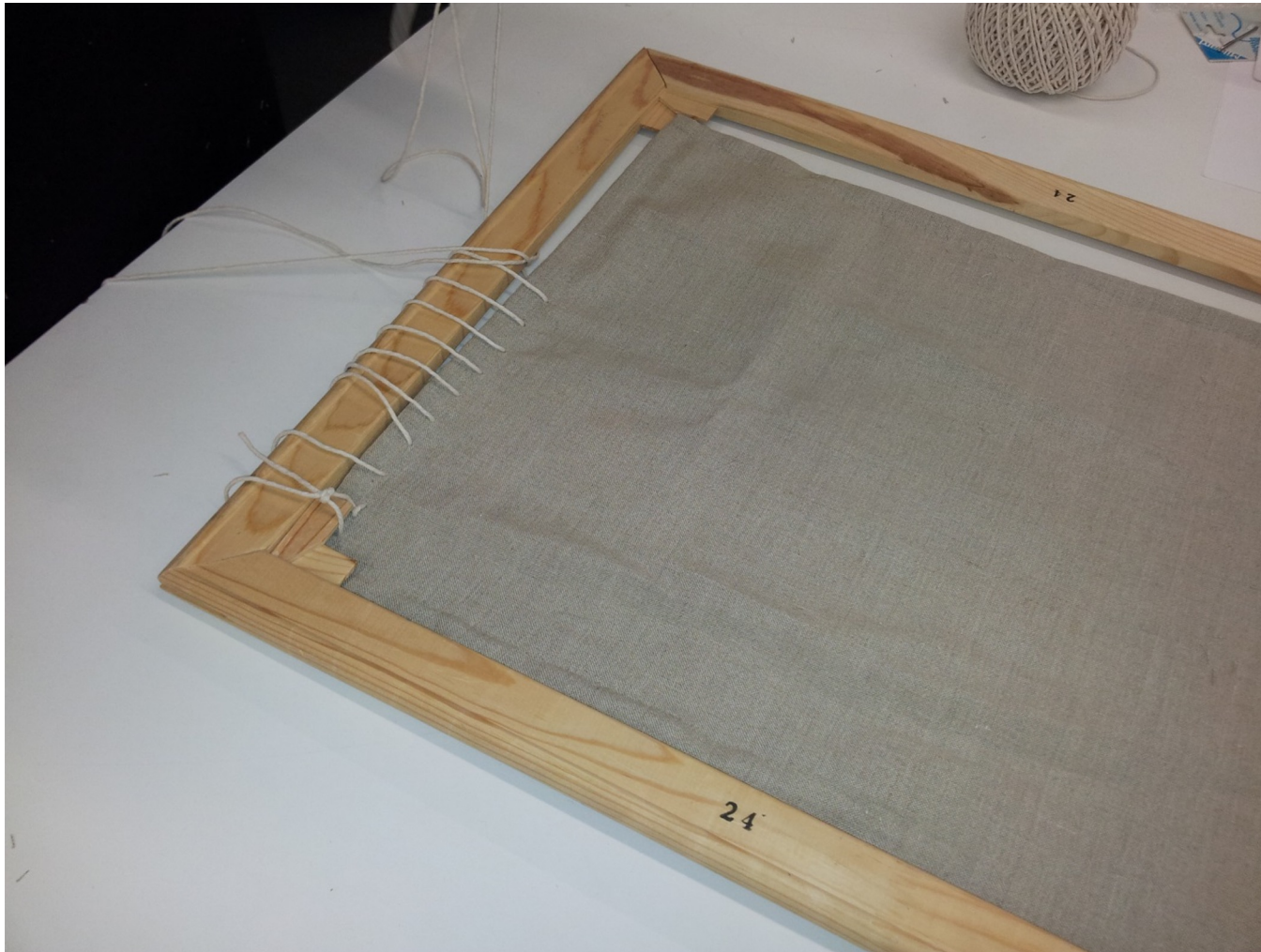
Dr. Erma Hermens

Materials: linen, animal skin glue (10%),
stretcher, string, needles.

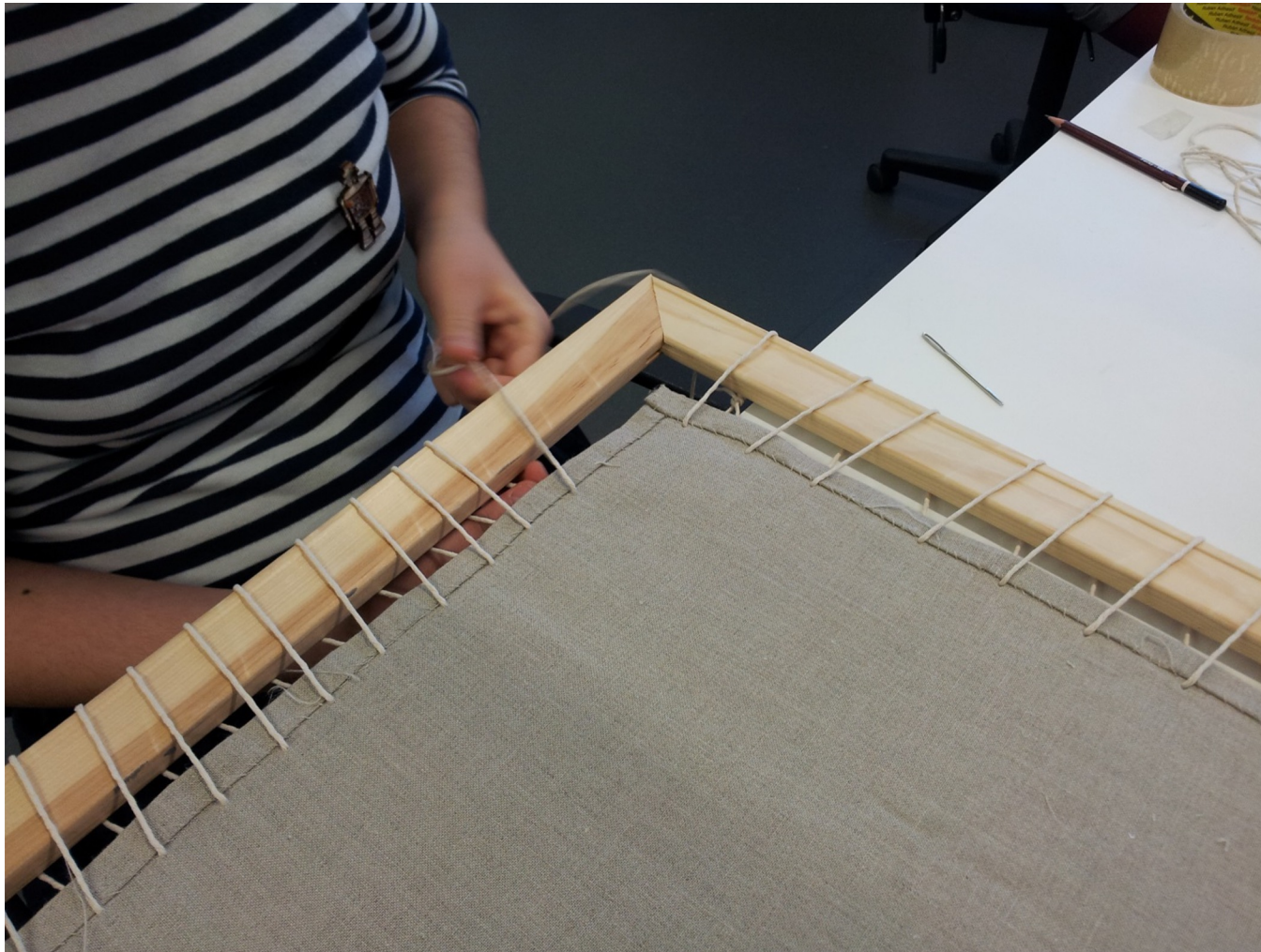
Sew a string in a double seam using threads taken from the side of the linen.
You fold over the edge of the canvas (c. 0.5 -1 cm) with the string in it, then fold over again and carefully stitch/sew it.
Use thread taken from the canvas's edge.



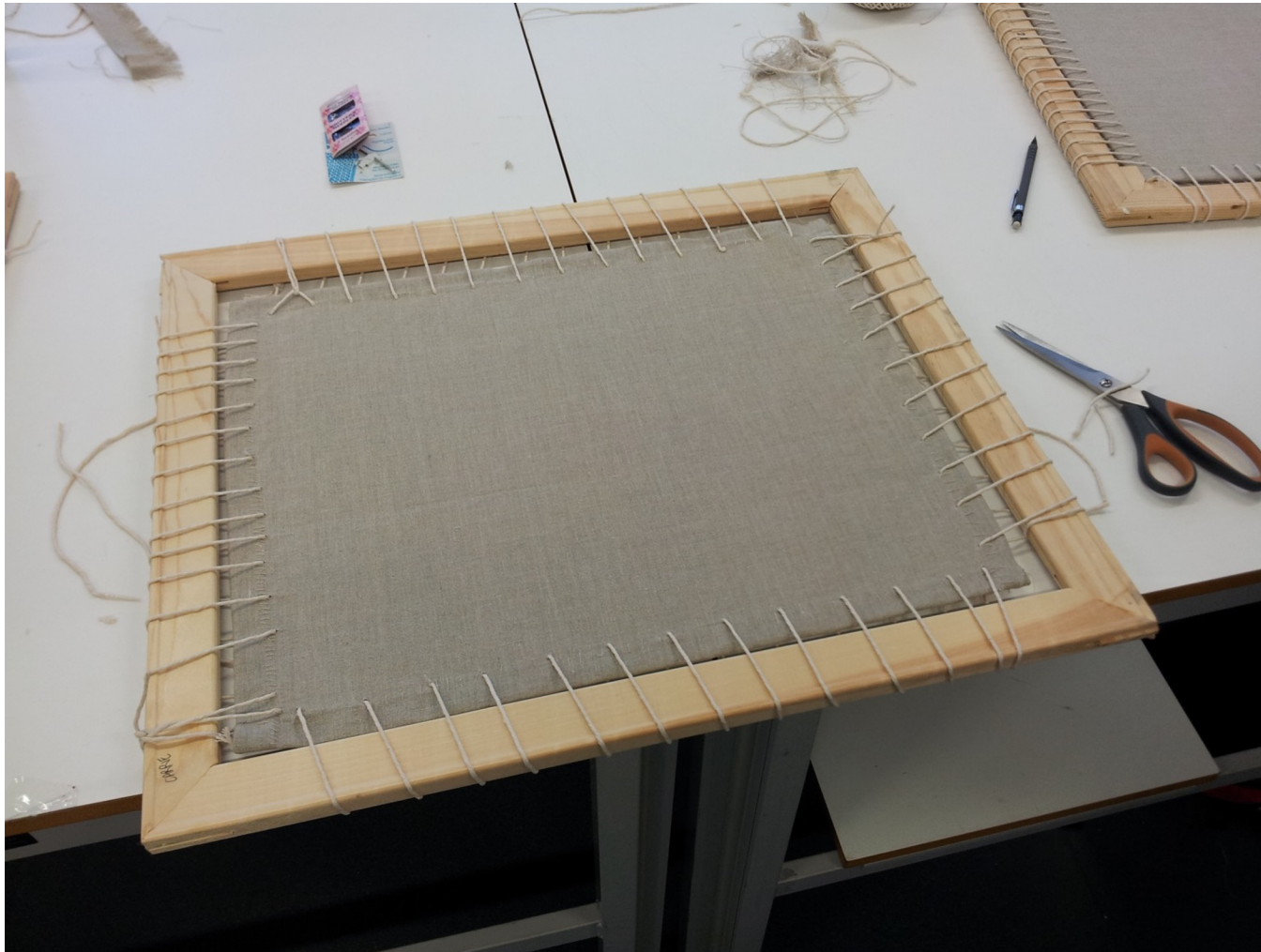
Once the seam is all done (make sure you use one length of string so measure it around the canvas before starting!), then you need to lace the canvas to the stretcher.
Use a big needle that can hold the same string you used in the seam, and make sure you go through the canvas just past the seam and then round the stretcher. Space it with c. 3 cm between.



Here you see the seam with the string in it from the back of the canvas.
The student is lacing the canvas on the stretcher.



Pull the string tight but not too tight as the canvas will shrink once you apply the animal skin glue. Just obtain a reasonably flat surface but do not expect it to be tight like a drum...
Once done make sure you put a good knot in the string used to lace the canvas on the stretcher.





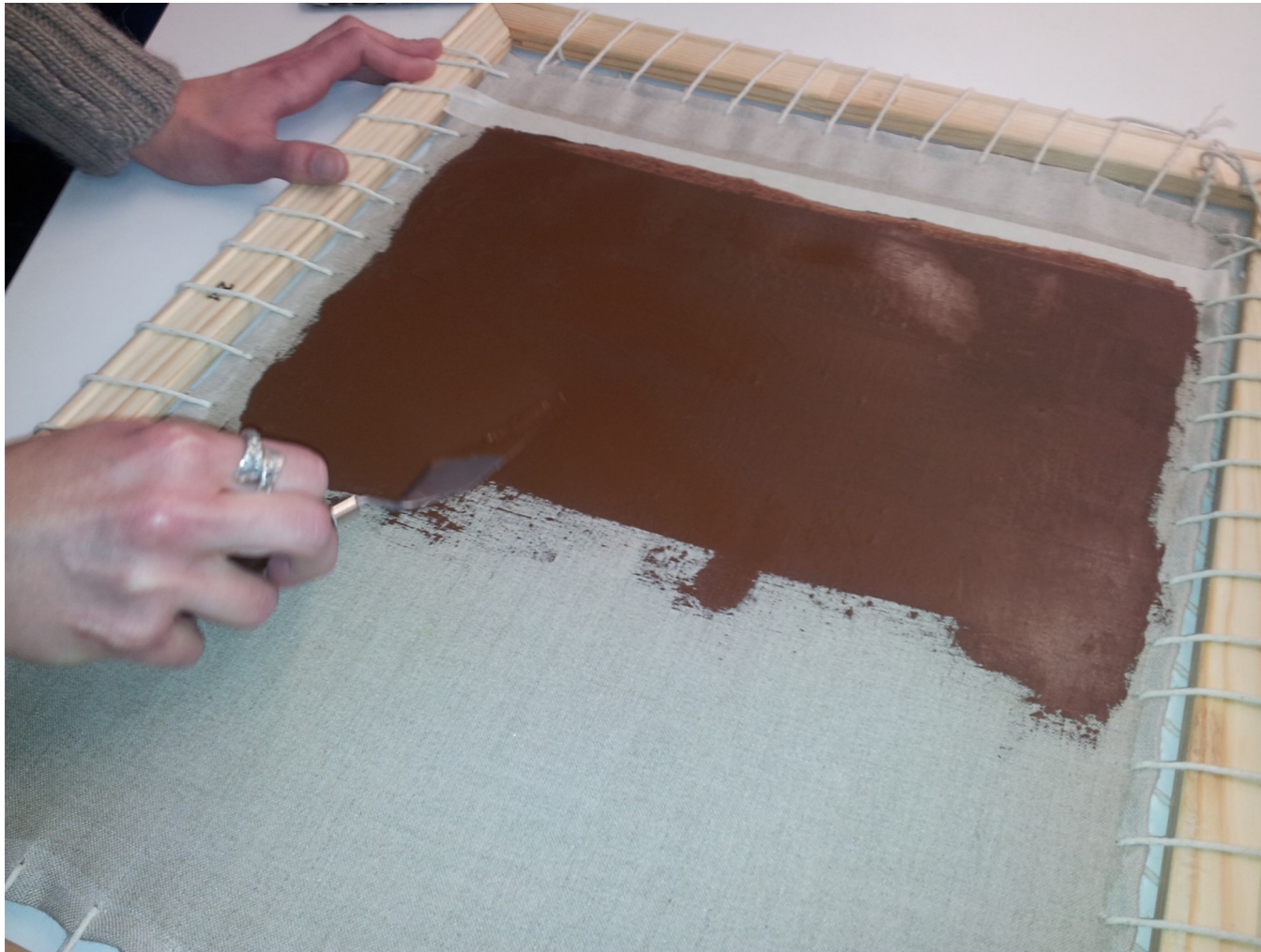
Now apply a warm animal skin glue (we use a 10% rabbit skin glue).
Apply this with a broad brush, wet but not soaking. Apply over the whole canvas.
The glue dries relatively quickly and will shrink the canvas . It will now be quite tight and will have the 'drum' effect.
Repeat this once more when the first layer of glue is dry,



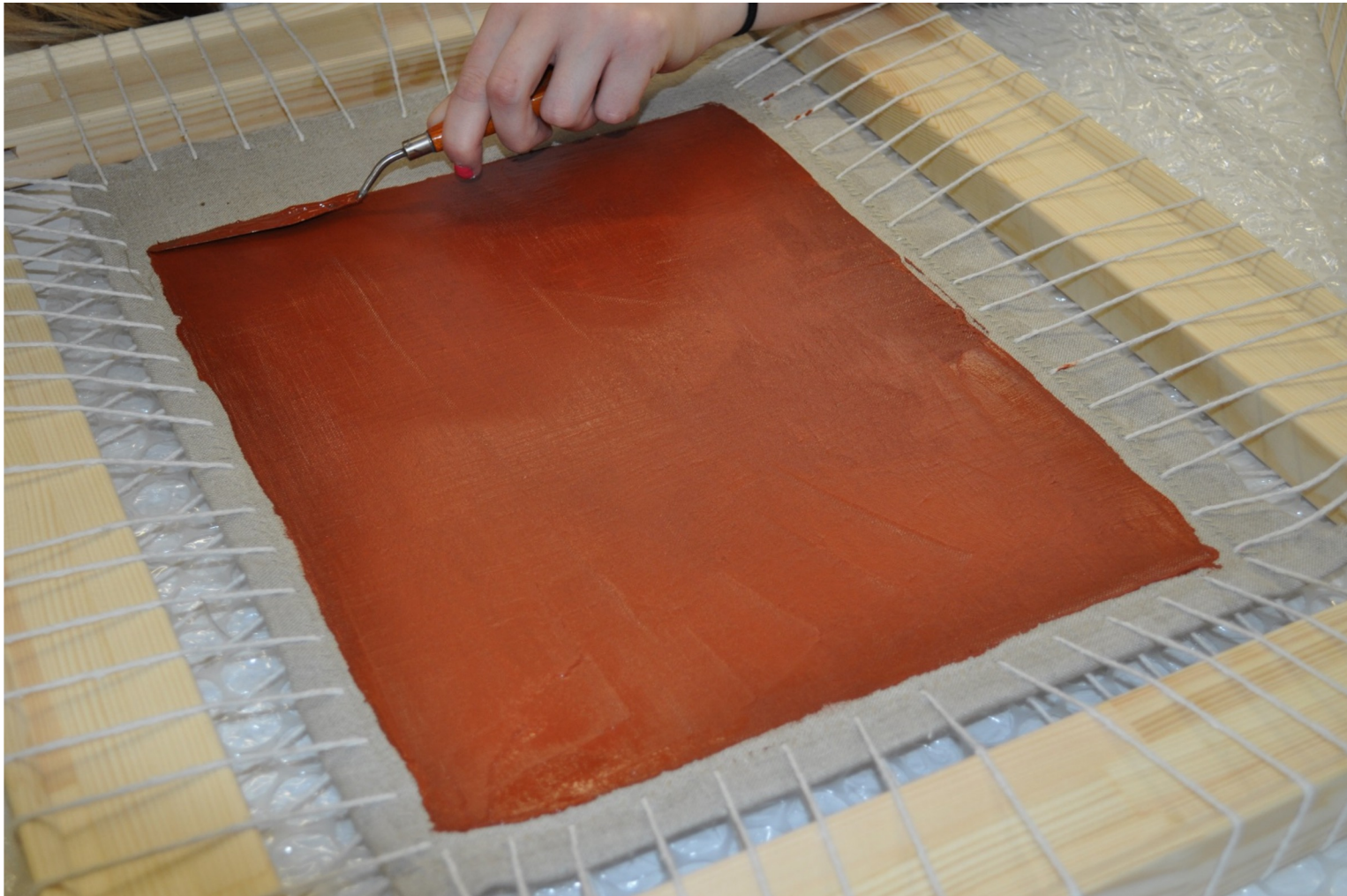
Once the glue is thoroughly dry (give it a couple of days), we applied a double ground layer, typically used in the late 16th and 17th centuries.

The first layer is a red earth pigment in oil (you can buy this in the tube: Burnt sienna oil paint, as this is still the same iron oxide pigment as was used at the time).

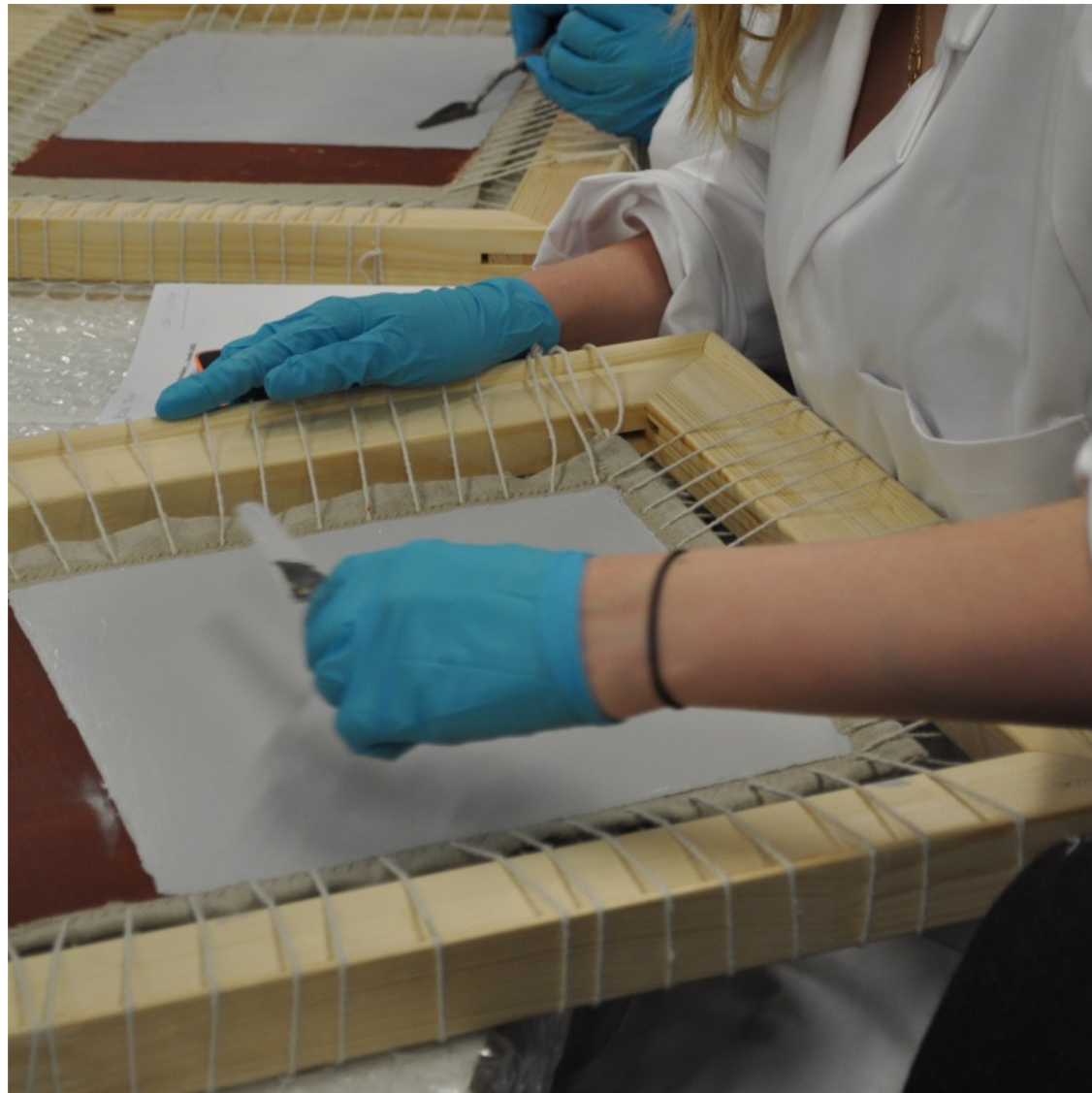
This layer will be applied with a palette knife, making sure that it fills the weave of the canvas well. One layer is sufficient. Make sure to smoothen it as much as you can with the knife. If this is hard, then use your hand to rub it in the weave, or a brush.



Leave a strip of canvas with the glue on visible so you can see the different effects these layers have.
Do the same with the subsequent grey layer: leave a strip of the red ground visible, just 2 cm will be enough.



The red earth layer needs to dry thoroughly which may take a week.
Now we apply the 2nd ground layer which is a mixture of lead white oil paint (buy ready made) with some umber and some ivory black added (with as dry pigment or as oil paints). This will provide a pale grey which is the tone we will use for the reconstruction. Again apply this layer with the knife.



After the grey ground has dried, we will transfer an image to it by using a tracing method.

We do a 'short cut' here, deviating from 16th C practice by using an enlarged photocopy of the detail we want to reconstruct.

We 'blacken the back with charcoal and then put the design on our painting and go over the outlines of (in this case) each flower. We then have the basic design.



We then 'fixate' the lines with an ochre paint, and put the first base layers, or dead paint as it was called, in: a solid base tone, following instructions from a 17th century treatise by the Dutch painter Willem Beurs. This will take place in the actual workshop. Until then, transfer of the design can be prepared beforehand.

