

U P P E R E A S T S I D E



Photographs by Marilyn K. Yee/The New York Times

Lisa Rosen is removing a century's worth of grime from mosaics at St. Ignatius Loyola Church.

After a Cleaning, a Glimpse of Glory

Like an old-fashioned doctor, Lisa Rosen makes house calls. Her patients are often too large or too fragile to move, or they require the kind of attention that comes only with home care. Although they look much better after she takes care of them, it's hard for them to express their thanks.

Ms. Rosen, 43, is an art restorer who works mostly on paintings, here and in Italy, where she helped restore ceilings at the Vatican. But for the past two months, she has been caring for another kind of patient: a set of rare mosaics depicting the Stations of the Cross in the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, on Park Avenue at 84th Street. The cleaning of the mosaics, part of a continuing refurbishment of the church, was completed last week, in time for Holy Week next month, during which the Stations are the centerpiece of the Good Friday liturgy.

Although soot and grime caused by candles, incense and radiators have all but obscured their beauty, the 14 lustrous works, which were designed and manufactured a century ago in Venice, are by any reckoning a stunning piece of art, a tour de force in thousands of colors.

"Few Catholic churches in the city have extensive wall mosaics, and none that I know of, except St. Ignatius, has anything that comprises the majority of interior wall space," said the Rev. Paul Tabor, an art historian who was associated with the church for many years. "In addition, their vivid col-



ors, sophisticated narrative and immense visual beauty, along with the fact they were made by Salviati & Company of Venice, a famous Italian glass and mosaic manufacturer, make them quite unique."

St. Ignatius, which has been designated a city landmark and whose notable worshippers included Jacqueline Onassis, is one of the city's last unaltered neo-Baroque churches. Dedicated in 1898, it is distin-

guished by the richness of its decoration; the décor includes an abundance of marble, stained-glass Tiffany windows and a gilt-coffered, barrel-vault ceiling, in addition to three sets of mosaics.

The first set, in the baptistery, depicts scenes from the life of John the Baptist. In the apse are scenes from the life of the 16th-century saint who is the church's patron. The 14 Stations of the Cross, the largest mosaic cycle and the focus of Ms. Rosen's efforts, line the nave.

The other day, as she was completing the laborious task of removing a century's worth of grime with toothbrushes dipped in a soap solution, Ms. Rosen marveled at the skill of the mosaics' creators. "The great variety of colors, the spacing between the tesserae, and the evenness of the mosaic surface as a whole suggest that they were made by master craftsmen," she said.

The cleaning has revealed many hidden details. Figures recur from Station to Station wearing the same clothing yet with subtly changing expressions, and the sky darkens slightly from one panel to the next as the story of Christ's crucifixion unfolds.

A stream of onlookers filled the church as Ms. Rosen worked. "Some of the parishioners were afraid that after cleaning, the mosaics would seem garish," she said. "But now they are coming up to me and saying that the colors are really subtle and elegant." BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO