The plasters we are concerned with here, almost all painted, were found in practically every room of what we have nicknamed “House X”. This is a multi-roomed, two-storied Minoan building located at the sea-side site of Kommos in south central Crete, the excavation of which straddled the last years of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st, directed by J.W. Shaw with the assistance of the present author. Like other finds, the plasters are now stored in the official storeroom for the Kommos excavations, one we often refer to in Greek as the “Kommos Apothiki.” A picture of its façade and main entrance is illustrated here in Fig. 1. The building, consisting of four large rooms, has also served as the excavation’s headquarters since its construction in 2007 to replace some rented rooms in an old house in the village of Pitsidia, in the Messara, by then too dilapidated to use any longer.¹ A digital version of the text and pictures presented here are also to be found at the University of Toronto Library’s Website.

¹ The new apothiki’s construction was, thankfully by us, underwritten by INSTAP (Institute for Aegean Prehistory).
Of the plasters from the house in question, the more substantially preserved ones are being published in a book entitled *House X at Kommos: a Minoan Mansion near the Sea* (Shaw and Shaw eds. Forthcoming). Though some of the larger pieces will also be illustrated and commented on here, this file is meant to deal more with the smaller or more damaged pieces of plasters, which were not included in the above book. This venue makes them known to others who might not always have easy access to where they are stored. Another aim of this paper is to include a description of how we have handled matters of long-term storage, and the preservation of the concerned materials—information that may prove of benefit to others concerned with such issues in other excavations.

Like a great number of other finds from Kommos, the plasters from House X are all stored in the Main Storage Room of the Apothiki, where one can also finds plasters already published, like those from Monumental Building T (Shaw and Shaw eds. 2006) and from the many houses on the Hilltop and Hillside areas of the site (Shaw and Shaw eds. 1995). House X was built north of T along the north side of a broad west-east paved road that led west to the sea—features that mark its elite status. It may not be an accident that this is also the only Minoan house at Kommos to have yielded representational frescoes, though—it is true—there may be frescoes in other, unexcavated, Minoan houses that were once built along the road. Indeed, some possible remains are visible at the west end and north side of the road, but largely hidden under structures of the Greek Sanctuary later partially built in that location. While the themes of the frescoes in House X are
essentially floral, the painted decoration of palatial Building T consists of simulations of fancy variegated stones characteristic of elite Minoan architecture.

Given that our main goal is to present our practices of storage and conservation, we turn to Figs. 2 and 3, where we see a number of wooden boxes resting on Dexion shelves, such shelves having been built against the walls throughout the room. The three slimmer wooden boxes contain all the frescoes found in House X. (The larger box sitting on the floor below them contains one of two large stone anchors found at the site, reminding us of its strongly mercantile, seafaring engagements). More boxes containing plasters from House X can just be made out at the right edge of the illustration of Fig. 2, also set on Dexion shelves. In total, 5 wooden boxes hold plasters that belong to House X. In all cases, laminated paper labels attached to the front of each box provide reference to the particular architectural space/s the stored plasters came from.

Of interest is that all three of the boxes in Fig. 2 contain plasters found in a single space of House X, namely from Space X1. Its location can be seen in a simplified plan.
provided here (fig. 21) of House X, rendered by Giuliana Bianco, our excavation’s architect. Space X1 is long and narrow and it seems to have acted as a kind of closet for the larger and well built X4 directly south of it, the two spaces being connected by a wide and, likely, door-less entrance. We suspect that the plasters evidently dumped in X1 once adorned the walls of X4, though this is but a guess. The dumping in closet X1 occurred in LM IB, while the construction of House X, and presumably of the making of its frescoes, appear to go back to Early LM IA.

Conservation, packaging, and storage are always crucial matters in the case of fragile materials such as plasters. Some of the methods we adopted for those from House X were introduced by two of our conservators: Cathy Hall, presently employed by the Institute of Aegean Prehistory in Eastern Crete (INSTAPEC), and, especially, Elise Alloin of the École National du Patrimoine—Institut Français de Restauration d’Oeuvres d’Art., who first used them for plasters from monumental Building T. Alloin introduced us to the system of “mounting” the more substantial and important plasters in what will, henceforth, will be referred to as “display panels,” like one the reader can see in Fig. 4 here.

Materials used for the display and packaging of plasters will now be introduced, with the help of samples of them that can be seen in a photograph, in Fig. 5. Starting at the left top corner of the display, one can see a small plastic box, its inclusion implying that plastics are safe as containers, as are the plastic zipped bags, like one shown at the
right end of the middle row of the display. Basically, there is a danger in packaging plasters in paper containers, or using paper tags to label their contexts, since silverfish feed voraciously on paper. Polyethylene foam has been used as a safe substitute for paper. It is manufactured in various thicknesses, examples occurring in our display at bottom left, including also the thin strip set vertically along the display’s right edge. Concerning the three pieces of Polyethylene foam at the bottom left part of the display, a use for the leftmost, thick, rectangular piece can be seen in Fig. 3, where four such pieces set against the sides of the box (as others were set in the other wooden boxes) served a double purpose: to provide supports on which to set a display panel, as can be seen in Fig. 4, and to create empty space under the panel to allow for the storage of other pieces of plasters there. We shall, henceforth, refer to the latter as “loose plasters” to differentiate them from those mounted in display panels. Figs. 6 and 7 illustrate “loose plasters” placed at the bottom Box 1, below the panel with the Lily Fresco.
Returning to the wrapping materials seen in Fig. 5, we still have to point out the sample of acid-free tissue (at the center of the display), one of the uses of which has been to cut a piece the size of a display panel to cover the latter and protect the painted plasters from accidental scratching. To further protect the mounted plasters, a sheet of foam (1 cm thick, in this case) was finally put atop the tissue sheet, before the lid was used to close the box.

The mounting of plaster fragments within a “display panel” calls for some more comments here, though a full description of the process was already given in Kommos Vol. V (Shaw and Shaw eds. 2006, p. 231). The panel was made of two layers of foam, each 1 cm thick, that were glued together. Cavities of appropriate size and shape to receive plaster pieces were then carved out of the top layer only, allowing for the fragments to sit atop the uncut bottom layer. The latter was, in turn, glued onto a sheet of Coroplast™—a much firmer layer of corrugated plastic \(^2\) that allowed the assemblage to be treated as a tray that can be lifted in and out of the wooden box safely, the process further facilitated by two metal rings that were attached at sheet’s two narrow ends. A

\(^2\) As indicated in [www.coroplast.com/genprop.com](http://www.coroplast.com/genprop.com), the material involved is polypropylene twin-wall profile sheet w/copolymer resin.
further, and quaint detail introduced by conservator Alloin was to also carve out a small rectangular area at the bottom right corner of the foam panel in which to store smaller pieces of painted plaster related to, but not joining with those embedded in the panel. The cut out piece of foam was then used as a lid to cover the cutout area. An example of this contraption is best discernible here in Fig. 11 at the top central part of the panel.

Continuing with the description of the stored plasters, the panel we see in Fig. 8 (Box 2) shows a red area with traces of broad green leaves painted on it, which must belong to the Lily Fresco, the pieces found in X1. The solidly red background here is enlivened by a series of wavy multicolor bands that abstractly evoke part of the landscape. Under the panel
just described are loose plasters illustrated in Figs. 9 and 10.

Moving to panel 3 (Box 3), we offer two illustrations (Figs. 11 and 12) of what remains of a representation which has been difficult to interpret. Reeds or stems come to mind as an explanation for the long, stick-like forms that are sepia-colored, shown against a yellowish background. What might be a leaf or two appear here and there overlapping the “stems”. Worth noting is that the yellow background is marked by a hue different from that of the yellow background of the Lily Fresco (fig. 4), leaving it vague as to whether the two compositions were directly connected, or, more likely, shown on different walls in one room. Once again Box 3 contains “loose plasters” under the panel, and these are shown in Figs. 13 and 14.

With the fourth panel (Fig. 15: Panel 4, Box 4) we turn to plasters that were found in a number of rooms in House X other than Space X1. The two pieces of plasters mounted on the left part of the panel come from Space X8. Their odd linear designs make no sense thematically, and have led this writer to wonder if no representational subject was intended and we may have young artists practicing the rendering of elegant brushstrokes, some support for this idea being that these lines appear to have been immediately covered by a slip of plaster painted a solid red color?

Returning to the panel, the two pieces at top center come from X11. One may represent a rocky landscape; the other is painted with a series of bands, alternating between blue and white, and with separating lines or thin bands between them in black. The larger piece to the right of these, in the upper right corner of the display panel, is certainly part of a spiral frieze, a reconstruction of which can be seen in the official publication of House X. This fragment was found in Space X14a. The designs on the
fragments from Space X6, appearing in the right lower part of the panel are part of plaster molding, facets of which were painted orange-red.

Lastly and as far as panels, there is none used in the case of Box 5, which contains plaster fragments deriving exclusively from Space X2, all apparently depicting floral motifs against variegated backgrounds, mostly painted red (Figs. 18 and 19). Box 5 also contains “loose plasters”, illustrated in Fig. 20.

There follow some comments on the packaging of the loose plasters, which has not yet been dealt in any detail. The packaging of such plasters can be seen in Figs. 6-7, 9-10, 13-14, 16-17, and 20. It was noted above that plastic is deemed a safe material to
use in connection with the storage of plasters, hence the collections of small pieces of plasters that have been grouped by context and stored in plastic bags of various sizes. Each of these bags also contains a Tyvek tag (a sample illustrated in Fig. 5, second in top row), which is also deemed a safe material to use in connection with plasters, as it does not contain either paper or cloth and is thus resistant to destructive agents like silverfish.3

Another aspect of the packaging is that in the case of collections of small pieces of plaster, it was necessary to provide a hard surface as a backing. Wide use was made of what is commercially known as Coroplast or Corex, a material already referred to above in connection with the display panels. Such materials can easily be cut in square or

Fig. 15  Panel with Plasters from various rooms, Box 4.. Left, X8; Middle upper, X11; Upper right, X14; Middle and lower right, X6.

rectangular pieces. Between it and the plastic bag in which loose plasters were placed, the system pretty much guarantees that the small pieces of plasters will stay in place, especially if the plastic bags containing them are not handled or are handled carefully, allowing for the pieces to show their painted face. A substitute for Corex as a backing, examples of which can be seen among the samples in Fig. 5, are thinner pieces of Polyethylene Foam, (top right in Fig. 5) or bubble wrap (bottom row right).

Naturally, the “loose fragments” are not of much use in conveying an idea about the subject matter, but it is worth storing them in the boxes with the panels, not least for others to compare colors and other details. For instance, the difference in tones of yellow has already been mentioned above and there are differences in the quality of the artwork that convey at least the impression of a number of artists at work throughout the house. Chunks of thick plaster, painted a solid pale blue, as in Box 3, are difficult to explain thematically, as the color does not appear in any of the larger mounted fragments.

Landscape paintings, found in X2, seem to form a coherent group, united by a red background and bluish/greenish elements that are clearly parts of plants. Their overlapping forms make for a more naturalistic depiction of nature, especially when we
compare them with the Stems Fresco, where there is hardly any overlapping. The rather rough surface of part of the last painting (here Fig. 12) add to the peculiar characteristics. The unexplained linear designs in red on a rough background (two pieces from Space X8 seen on left side of Panel 4, fig. 15) add to the apparent oddities, suggesting the possibility offered by the writer in the official publication of House X, that training of young apprentices may have been going on while the main painters worked on the formal decoration of the house.

Fig. 18  Landscape fragments from Box 5, Space X2

Fig. 19  Landscape fragments from Space X2, Box 6
Fig. 20  Stored plaster fragments

Fig 21  House X ground plan