



Abstracts

# Dialogues with Artists

12<sup>th</sup> AICCM Paintings SIG Symposium

Adelaide

21- 22 October 2010





# Dialogues with Artists

Abstracts of papers presented at the  
12<sup>th</sup> AICCM Paintings Group Symposium

Adelaide, Australia  
21-22 October 2010

An initiative of the Paintings Special Interest Group  
of the Australian Institute for the Conservation of  
Cultural Material Inc., in association with the ARC-funded  
*Twentieth Century in Paint* project.

## **Dialogues with Artists**

Copyright © The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material Inc.  
2010

Edited by Helen Weidenhofer

Published by The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material, Inc.  
AICCM  
GPO Box 1638  
Canberra ACT 2601

**Disclaimer:** These abstracts have not been refereed. The opinions expressed are those of the respective author/s and not necessarily those of the AICCM. Responsibility for the content and opinions expressed, and the methods and materials used, rests solely with the author/s. Please contact the respective author/s directly if you wish to further explore any issues.

No part of this publication may be reprinted in any form or by any means without prior permission of the publisher.

## Contents

Sponsors	4
Introduction	5
Program	6
The Twentieth Century in Paint Assoc Prof Robyn Sloggett	9
House Paints 1900-1960: History and Use Dr Harriet A L Standeven	10
The role of zinc oxide in deterioration of modern oil based paintings Gillian Osmond, J Drennan and M Monteiro	11
When Art met Science Melina Glasson, Prof Carl Schiesser, Prof Robyn Sloggett, Dr Nicole Tse and Dr Stephen Best	12
Early experiments in the use of the Australian Synchrotron for the study of paintings David Thorrowgood	13
Hidden worlds: An Infrared Survey of the Art Gallery of Western Australia's Collection Dr M E Kubik	14
Insights into Artists' Materials and Techniques in the Australian War Memorial Collection Alana Treasure and David Keany	16
'Less slick and not so clever' - Interpreting the works of E. Phillips Fox in dialogue with his correspondence Catherine Nunn	17
Sidney Nolan and house-paint (1941-1953) Paula Dredge	18
Seeing through veils: The Restoration of John Brack's <i>Collins St, 5pm</i> and <i>The Bar</i> Michael Varcoe-Cocks	19
The Sydney Moderns and Australian Colour Field Paintings Stewart Laidler and Simon Ives	20
What evidence? Using anecdotal evidence to investigate early twentieth century oil paintings in Southeast Asia Dr Nicole Tse	22
Towards understanding Chinese painting practice in the 1980's: treatment of Gu Wenda and Guo Zhonglian's <i>Night Ambush</i> , c.1985 Anne Carter	24
Conservation of public art: keeping artworks alive and reinforcing community's engagement Sabine Cotte	25
Data Capture, Integration and Analysis Services for An Online Network of 20th Century Paint Conservators Suleiman Odat and Jane Hunter	26

## Dialogues with Artists

### Sponsors

The AICCM Paintings Special Interest Group gratefully acknowledges the support of the following Symposium sponsors:

- Anne and Gordon Samstag Museum of Art,  
University of South Australia

[www.unisa.edu.au/samstag](http://www.unisa.edu.au/samstag)

- Arts SA

[www.arts.sa.gov.au](http://www.arts.sa.gov.au)

- Carrick Hill

[www.carrickhill.sa.gov.au](http://www.carrickhill.sa.gov.au)

- Artlab Australia

[www.artlabaustralia.com.au](http://www.artlabaustralia.com.au)

- Colour Square

[www.coloursquare.com.au](http://www.coloursquare.com.au)

## Introduction

The AICCM Paintings Special Interest Group and the Twentieth Century in Paint Project are pleased to host the 12<sup>th</sup> AICCM Paintings Group Symposium on the theme of *Dialogues with Artists*.

The Symposium theme is inclusive of all manner of dialogues – actual face to face interviews where conservators investigate and discuss an artist’s use of materials and their working practices, the importance of longevity in their work and the aging characteristics of the works they produce, to the type of dialogue which takes place when a researcher becomes intimately and expertly knowledgeable about an artist’s methods and materials, and the scientific properties of their paintings and artworks.

Abstracts of the wide-ranging papers delivered over the two days of the Symposium are presented below. Many reflect the research to date of the Australian Research Council Linkage Project ‘The Twentieth Century in Paint’, a collaboration between the University of Melbourne, University of Queensland and industry partners Queensland Art Gallery, Art Gallery of New South Wales, National Gallery of Victoria, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Artlab Australia, The Getty Conservation Institute, Tate Britain, National Art Gallery Malaysia, SEAMEO-SPAFA, University of the Philippines Diliman and Silpakorn University.

Symposium delegates will visit Carrick Hill, former home of early twentieth century contemporary art collectors Ursula and Bill Hayward, and The Cedars, home and studio of artists Sir Hans Heysen and Nora Heysen.

The panel discussion on the theme of ‘Conversations with artists’, involving art historian and theologian Bishop Dr Ian George AO, South Australian artists Simone Kennedy and Christian Lock, and conservators Dr Harriet Standeven and John Hook, will explore further aspects of *Dialogues with Artists*.

## Dialogues with Artists

### Program

#### Wednesday 20 October

Artlab Australia  
70 Kintore Avenue, Adelaide

1.00pm ARC 20th Century in Paint Project meeting - ARC Project participants

4.15pm Bus departs Artlab for Carrick Hill

Carrick Hill  
46 Carrick Hill Drive, Springfield

4.30pm Carrick Hill – tour of historic house and garden, viewing of the art collection and exhibition 'Lost Gardens of Adelaide', and petanque challenge

The Edinburgh Hotel  
1 High Street, Mitcham

7.00pm Informal dinner



**Thursday 21 October**

Bradley Forum  
Hawke Centre Level 5  
University of SA, City West campus  
55 North Terrace (cnr Fenn Place), Adelaide

- 8.45am REGISTRATION
- 9.15am Welcome to Country by Aunty Josie, Kaurna Elder  
Welcome and Opening by Erica Green, Director, Anne and Gordon Samstag Museum of Art
- 9.30am Andrew Durham *Introduction to Dialogues with Artists*
- 9.35am **Keynote Address** Assoc Prof Robyn Sloggett *The Twentieth Century in Paint*
- 10.15am **Keynote Address** Dr Harriet Standeven *House Paints 1900-1960: History and Use*
- 11.00am MORNING TEA  
Session Chair: Dr Nicole Tse
- 11.30am Gillian Osmond *The Role of Zinc Oxide in Deterioration of Modern Oil Based Paintings*
- 12.00pm Melina Glasson *When Art met Science*
- 12.20pm David Thurrowgood *Early experiments in the use of the Australian Synchrotron for the study of paintings*
- 12.50pm LUNCH  
Session Chair: Helen Weidenhofer
- 1.50pm Dr Maria Kubik *Hidden worlds: An Infrared Survey of the Art Gallery of Western Australia's Collection*
- 2.20pm Alana Treasure & David Keany *Insights into Artists' Materials and Techniques in the Australian War Memorial Collection*

The Cedars, Hahndorf

- 3.00pm Bus leaves Uni SA for The Cedars
- 3.30pm AFTERNOON TEA at The Cedars
- 4.00pm Tour of The Cedars, home and studio of Sir Hans Heysen and Nora Heysen
- 5.00pm Return travel to Adelaide

Concubine  
132 Gouger Street, Adelaide

- 7.00pm Symposium Dinner in the Shanghai Room

## Dialogues with Artists

### Friday 22 October

Bradley Forum  
Hawke Centre Level 5  
University of SA, City West campus  
55 North Terrace (cnr Fenn Place), Adelaide

Session Chair: Sarah Feijen

9.00am Catherine Nunn *'Less Slick and Not so Clever' - Interpreting the Works of E. Phillips Fox in Dialogue with his Correspondence*

9.30am Paula Dredge *Sidney Nolan and house-paint (1941-53)*

10.00am Michael Varcoe-Cocks *Seeing Through Veils: The Restoration of John Brack's 'Collins Street 5pm' and 'The Bar'*

10.30am MORNING TEA

Session Chair: Andrew Durham

11.00am Stewart Laidler & Simon Ives *The Sydney Moderns and Australian Colour Field Paintings*

11.30am Bishop Dr Ian George AO *Conversations with artists*

Followed by a panel discussion with Simone Kennedy, Christian Lock, John Hook and Harriet Standeven, led by Andrew Durham

12.30pm LUNCH

Session Chair: Paula Dredge

1.30pm Dr Nicole Tse *What evidence? Using anecdotal evidence to investigate early twentieth century oil paintings in South East Asia*

2.00pm Anne Carter *Towards understanding Chinese painting practice in the 1980's: treatment of Gu Wenda and Guo Zhonglian's 'Night Ambush', c.1985*

2.30pm Sabine Cotte *Conservation of public art: keeping artworks alive and reinforcing community's engagement*

3.30pm AFTERNOON TEA

Session Chair: Helen Weidenhofer

4.00pm Suleiman Odat & Jane Hunter *Data Capture, Integration and Analysis Services for An Online Network of 20th Century Paint Conservators*

4.30pm Closing Discussion

## The Twentieth Century in Paint

Assoc Prof Robyn Sloggett<sup>1</sup>

The twentieth century witnessed extraordinary shifts in technologies and philosophies of art production. These shifts were geographic as well as intellectual and aesthetic. A commensurate shift has occurred with the study and management of art within institutions, including commercial galleries, art museums and universities. For conservators aligning knowledge about artists, their materials and their philosophy with mechanisms and structures for the preservation and access of such material involves active negotiation with artists, archivists, librarians, arts centre managers and curators, to name a few. The challenge is relentless and exponential. Recognizing the scope of the challenge and understanding possible solutions is critical in ensuring that conservators are in a position to contribute to an understanding of the twentieth century in paint.

---

<sup>1</sup> Director and Grimwade Chief Conservator, Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, The University of Melbourne  
October 2010

### House Paints 1900-1960: History and Use

Dr Harriet A L Standeven<sup>1</sup>

The versatility of household paints has ensured their use in a broad range of applications, including the protection and decoration of historic buildings, the coating of toys and furniture, and in the creation of artworks. Historically, house paints were based on naturally occurring oils, gums, resins, and proteins, but in the early decades of the twentieth century, the introduction of synthetic resins revolutionized the industry. Good quality ready-mixed products became available and were used by artists worldwide.

This paper traces the development of the household paint industry - primarily in the UK and USA - over the first half of the twentieth century. It includes a discussion of paints based on traditional oils and resins, nitrocellulose, phenol-formaldehyde, and oil-modified alkyds. Emulsion paints based on the vinyl resins, styrene-butadiene, polyvinyl acetate, and acrylic are also discussed, and examples of when each type has been used by artists is given.

---

<sup>1</sup> Conservator of Modern and Contemporary Paintings, London  
[www.harrietstandeven.com](http://www.harrietstandeven.com)

## The role of zinc oxide in deterioration of modern oil based paintings

Gillian Osmond<sup>1,2</sup>, J Drennan<sup>1</sup> and M Monteiro<sup>1</sup>

Zinc oxide is one of the most significant white pigments used in paint formulations throughout the twentieth century. Valued for its whiteness, colour stability and antifungal characteristics, its good suspension properties in oil based paint media also facilitated the expansion of ready-mixed house paint production. Used on its own and more commonly to confer desirable properties to first lead and more recently titanium white paints, and also as a frequent component in coloured paints, zinc oxide is widely found in twentieth century paintings produced using both artists' and oil based house paints.

However, zinc oxide is also known to be highly reactive in oil-based paint media. Metal soaps, metal salts of fatty acids, are commonly formed as part of the normal ageing of oil paint. In the case of zinc oxide, the zinc carboxylates which form contribute to the characteristic hardness of zinc paints. Yet zinc soap formation has also been linked to serious deterioration phenomena in paintings from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Industrial paint research has long battled this reactivity to manage impacts on the storage properties of house paints or rapid onset of defects in exterior applications. Technological developments have changed the favoured production process of the oxide and available grades. Changes in paint formulation, including the oil component and use of additives have also occurred with attendant implications for long term properties of the paint.

The current study aims to enhance understanding of how and why zinc soaps form and become mobile in paintings and in what circumstances the presence of zinc oxide is likely to contribute to film defects or structural instability. Cast films of control and commercially prepared artists' paints incorporating zinc oxide and naturally aged for up to 30 years are used to compare the oxide in different oils and in combination with other pigments and additives. Techniques include optical microscopy of surfaces and samples in cross section, FTIR of the bulk film and extractable inclusions, SEM BSE imaging and EDX analysis, and TEM of thin sections. Particular reference will be made to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century developments specific to the Australian house paint industry and local pigment production, and therefore likely to be of significance for Australian painting collections.

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute for Bioengineering and Nanotechnology, University of Queensland

<sup>2</sup> Queensland Art Gallery, Centre for Contemporary Art Conservation

[gillian.osmond@qag.qld.gov.au](mailto:gillian.osmond@qag.qld.gov.au)

October 2010

### When Art met Science

Melina Glasson<sup>1</sup>, Prof Carl Schiesser<sup>2</sup>, Prof Robyn Sloggett<sup>3</sup>, Dr Nicole Tse<sup>4</sup>  
and Dr Stephen Best<sup>5</sup>

The boom in chemical understanding and industrial processes during the twentieth century gave rise to an almost incomprehensible array of new products on the common market. Nowhere is this more evident than in the paint industry. For the artist, the advent of synthetic paints gave more choice in the final outcome of their artworks than ever before. Thus with so many paints available, it was only a matter of time before artists were using everything and anything in their creations, often with little regard for how the painting would behave over time. Yet, for the conservators that must preserve these artworks for future generations, the questions of how these modern materials behave and age over time is of vital importance. Poly Vinyl Acetate, PVAc, based paints hit the market during the 1960s and have been used by various artists ever since. Unfortunately, although PVAc is a commonly used chemical in many applications, there is a severe lack of knowledge on how this polymer works within the context of paint. As such, in collaboration with the ARC linkage grant 'Twentieth Century in Paint' it is hoped to define the mechanism of the deterioration of PVAc paints. Theoretical studies based on commercially available PVAc binders with selected pigments will be verified using novel experimental techniques. A proposed outline of this work will be presented.



---

<sup>1</sup> PhD candidate, ARC Centre of Excellence for Free Radical Chemistry and Biotechnology, Bio21 Molecular Science and Biotechnology Institute, 30 Flemington Rd, The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010

<sup>2</sup> Director of ARC Centre of Excellence for Free Radical Chemistry and Biotechnology, Bio21 Molecular Science and Biotechnology Institute, 30 Flemington Rd, The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010

<sup>3</sup> Director of The Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010

<sup>4</sup> APDI, The Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010

<sup>5</sup> Senior Lecturer, School of Chemistry, The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010.

## Early experiments in the use of the Australian Synchrotron for the study of paintings

David Thurrowgood<sup>1</sup>

The NGV has long applied traditional technical observation techniques to canvas and paint based artworks, including x-ray, infrared and ultraviolet light imaging. While extremely useful, these techniques have well recognized limitations. In recent years the possibility of elemental mapping using synchrotron radiation has emerged as very possibly the first significant advance in analytical imaging techniques for paintings in several decades. Unlike many previous techniques used by galleries, the synchrotron provides clear information about the chemical makeup of a whole surface. This information can tell conservators a great deal about individual areas of paintings, and also allow imaging of entire works that is viewed as elemental maps. This presentation will discuss some of the early challenges and results of the NGV/CSIRO/Daryl Howard collaboration toward developing synchrotron elemental mapping as a practical new method of understanding paintings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Senior Conservator, Metals and Conservation Science, National Gallery of Victoria  
October 2010

### Hidden worlds: An Infrared Survey of the Art Gallery of Western Australia's Collection

Dr M E Kubik<sup>1</sup>

To date, over 800 paintings at the Art Gallery of Western Australia have been scanned using an InGaAs camera, revealing varied information about artist materials and their state of preservation: hidden inscriptions, nudes, grids and retouchings have come to light using a portable system which can rapidly scan across exhibition walls and storage racks. This paper presents findings, grouping information according to artist, period and materials, and shows that sketching is not limited to more traditional oil paintings, but also to contemporary art where prudence and cost of materials should be less of an issue.

Infrared Reflectography (IRR) is an established technique in conservation examination, and recent advances in technology now permit rapid analysis of artwork (Van Asperen de Boer 1968, Eastaugh 1995, Consolandi and Bertani 2006). This paper presents an InGaAs camera system developed and applied in-situ to the Art Gallery of Western Australia's collection both on display and in storage. The working parameters of the InGaAs camera may be easily modified using different filters and lenses, and by control of exposure and collection rates using the software interface.

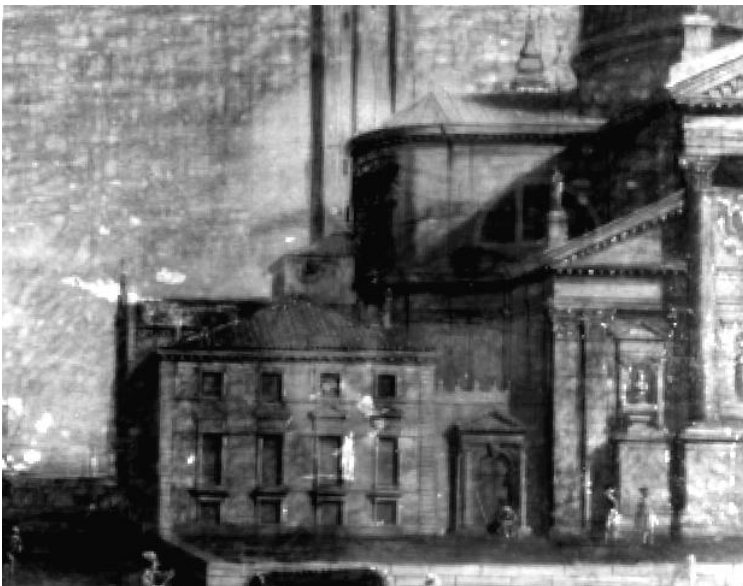


Figure 1: Using InGaAs technology, the ghostly image of a woman appears through the Church of St Maria Maggiore (After Canaletto), Art Gallery of Western Australia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Art Gallery of Western Australia, PO Box 8363, Perth BC WA 6849, maria.kubik@artgallery.wa.gov.au



IRR relies on radiation interacting differently with materials in a painting's structure, revealing information such as what the picture is made of and how these materials are combined and applied. Interpreting the resulting images provides art historical information on artists' working techniques, including hidden artwork and possible forgeries. This project presents additional benefits, such as IRR mapping of restoration efforts, particularly retouchings and damages to supports.

Unusual reworkings in Indigenous art and contemporary Australian artists are also presented.

### References:

Van Asperen de Boer, J. 1968 'Infrared Reflectography: A Method for the examination of paintings', *Applied Optics*, Vol 7/9, 1711-1714

Eastaugh, N. 1995 'Examination of paintings by Infra-red and other techniques', *IEEE Colloquium on NDT in Archaeology and Art*, May 1995, London, UK

Consolandi, L. and Bertani, D. 2006 'A prototype for high resolution infrared reflectography of paintings', *Infrared Physics & Technology* 49 (2007) 239–242

### Insights into Artists' Materials and Techniques in the Australian War Memorial Collection

Alana Treasure and David Keany<sup>1</sup>

The Australian War Memorial commissioned artist scheme began in the twentieth century. Over the years artists have been chosen as traditional practitioners or for their modern, contemporary approach. Non-commissioned art now held in the collection also displays idiosyncrasies in the artist's use of media.

In their depiction of conflict and images associated with Australia's military history, Herbert McClintock, Max Ragless, Sidney Nolan, and more recently Christopher Langton, Rick Amor, Peter Churcher and Jon Cattapan, have all used contemporary or innovative artists materials and techniques in their paintings.

Many of these paintings have given rise to strange characteristics either immediately or upon ageing, some with associated conservation issues. In this paper we demonstrate how various modes of communication through artist interviews, study of the painting's technique or condition both through visual observation and instrumental analysis, has given insight into some of the more 'interesting' artists from the War Memorial's art collection.

---

<sup>1</sup> Painting Conservation, Collection Services, Australian War Memorial, Canberra  
alana.treasure@awm.gov.au

'Less slick and not so clever' - Interpreting the works of E. Phillips Fox in dialogue with his correspondence

Catherine Nunn<sup>1</sup>

Technical research into an artist's methods is informed by close examination of works by the artist coupled with archival research. Archives can be in the form of materials left in the artist's studio, contemporary documentation or correspondence. This information can help us to understand the materials used in a painting, ultimately enabling appropriate treatment decisions to be made.

The correspondence of Emanuel Phillips Fox (1865-1915) with fellow artists describes his methods of canvas preparation, and the surface effects he hoped to achieve in his paintings, thereby elucidating our understanding of his working methods. However, this information also alerts us to the fact that there is the potential that the appearance of Fox's works may now be changed from the artist's intentions in both subtle and dramatic ways. Fox's use of non-traditional materials and techniques, including high impasto and most significantly his use of coarse, absorbent canvases have in many cases resulted in extreme physical vulnerability of his works. Both time and ill-conceived restoration treatments have transformed the appearance of many of his paintings.

This paper will examine Fox's use of materials that have precipitated deterioration phenomena in his paintings. Physical changes wrought by both time and restoration treatments will be described, respectively. This information will help to enable a more nuanced reading of Fox's artistic legacy and highlight the considered approach required for the conservation treatments of his paintings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, The University of Melbourne, VIC 3010  
cnunn@unimelb.edu.au  
October 2010

### Sidney Nolan and house-paint (1941-1953)

Paula Dredge<sup>1</sup>

The Australian artist Sidney Nolan (1917-1992) is well known for his use of non-artist grade materials in his artworks. In particular his paintings are associated with Ripolin® paint, an enamel house-paint, originally made in Holland. A recent gift to the Art Gallery of New South Wales of the contents of Sidney Nolan's Wahroonga studio, in use from 1951 to 1953, provide a unique insight into the extent of Nolan's experimentation with commercial materials, well beyond that previously recognised. While the studio contents include a large component of Ripolin® products, giving this study a rich resource for analytical standards, it is the breadth of the other material including various types of solvents, mediums, driers, pigments, waxes, varnishes, supports, finished paint products, colour charts and receipts for goods which are beginning to give a much more comprehensive picture of Nolan's working practice prior to his move to the UK in 1953. Initial results of a three year research project are presented, investigating Sidney Nolan's working practice prior to 1953 using this archive of material which is to be studied alongside paintings from the collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Some initial findings regarding Ripolin® and DULUX® paints are already challenging the ways in which Nolan's paintings have been catalogued to date.

This research forms part of the project *The Twentieth Century in Paint*, and is funded by the Australian Research Council, the University of Melbourne and the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Postgraduate Award (Industry), Art Gallery of New South Wales & Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, University of Melbourne

## Seeing through veils: The Restoration of John Brack's *Collins St, 5pm* and *The Bar*

Michael Varcoe-Cocks<sup>1</sup>

This paper will explore the complexities encountered in locating fact and artistic intent in the restoration of two paintings by John Brack.

The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) purchased John Brack's *Collins St, 5pm* (1955) from its first exhibition while a companion work *The Bar* (1954) remained privately owned until the two were united in the NGV collection over half a decade later.

The differing treatment and varnishing histories of both works resulted in such disparate aesthetic renderings that a program of restoration was deemed necessary to re-associate the two surfaces.

With John Brack now deceased, his 1950's aesthetic priority is best determined through written documentation (specifically his studio diaries), engaging associated voices (his widow and fellow artist Helen Brack and other related scholars) and the material evidence found at the paint surface.

With possible research completed the relevant parties gathered in front of the paintings to collectively question the aesthetic requirements of a varnish desired by Brack in the early 1950's. Test panels of a replica varnish - based on undisclosed constituents of a 1950's proprietary matte varnish - were later prepared for appraisal.

Despite all premeditated measures, establishing harmony in parallel treatments was found to be technically challenging due to the use of artist-prepared mediums, retouching varnishes, Brack's early adoption of ketone resins and his personal restoration of one of the two paintings. It also became clear that presumed fact was not necessarily reality.

The difficulties encountered during this experience highlighted the potential ambivalence of terminology, memory and the written word. It reiterated the importance of a shared dialogue along with the accompanying implications. The project also uncovered specific issues in the treatment of works by John Brack that pose ongoing questions for further research.

---

<sup>1</sup> Conservator of Paintings 1850-1950, National Gallery of Victoria

### The Sydney Moderns and Australian Colour Field Paintings

Stewart Laidler and Simon Ives<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of 2010 curators and conservators from the AGNSW embarked on a collaborative research project to be carried out over a two year period. The project involves Senior Curator of Australian Art Deborah Edwards, Assistant Curator Denise Mimmocchi, and the AGNSW paintings conservators Stewart Laidler and Simon Ives.

The aim is to investigate the colour philosophies and materials of two significant periods of colour painting in Australian art: the so called Sydney Moderns (such as Grace Cossington Smith, Roy De Maistre, and later Ralph Balson and Grace Crowley), and the Colour Field painters of the 1960s and 1970s. In terms of the latter there is a great deal to be learnt from the many active artists of this group, and hence we have embarked on an extensive program of artists interviews and on gathering material on their work.

The project will involve an in depth analysis of a large group of paintings initially based on AGNSW collection works but subsequently extending to those in other public and private collections. One of the concrete outcomes of this research will be the creation of Australia's central archive on the Sydney Moderns, and a bank of recorded interviews with Colour Field painters, a study of techniques as well as an identification of the materials they used, and a body of information relating to their philosophies of colour and practice.

The period under research spans the era of the introduction and uptake of synthetic media by artists. It starts with the first Australian abstract painting by Roy de Maistre, influenced by European formal artistic developments, and representing an important and innovative formal leap, but carried out using the traditional materials of oil painting (De Maistres Colour Keyboard of 1919 is being closely analysed for this project). By the time of the Field show of 1968, Australian artists are also looking to the United States and the full range of synthetic media have been introduced and embraced by fine artists. This historic transition in artistic materials in part facilitates and drives the formal developments pursued by the painters, as they explore new expressive potential of the new media.

Nearly half a century on however, these works are becoming 'old' for the first time, and a gamut of age related visual changes have altered the way they appear, and affected their visual performance. What are the artists' attitudes to these

---

<sup>1</sup> Art Gallery of New South Wales

changes? Sydney Ball's recent retrospective of his colour field work, for example, threw up a number of concrete examples which needed to be addressed. A number of early works by Michael Johnson in the AGNSW collection are also presenting themselves as conservation problems demanding radical interventions in order to enable the works to perform in the way the artist intended. These treatments necessitate addressing fundamental questions about what constitutes the vital essence of the artwork.

How we address these challenges, involves in part a dialogue with the artists about their ongoing consideration of the condition of their work; how they would like the work to appear and be displayed.

The interviews, therefore, in addition to covering a historical and conceptual overview of the artists' oeuvre, will also concern themselves centrally to recording the views of the artists in relation to the ageing of their works, and getting their opinions on the ongoing maintenance and display of their work in regards to their current condition, and potential for future change over time.

This presentation will concern itself with the analysis of the Roy de Maistres' Colour Keyboard by XRF and optical microscopy, and also with two current Sydney based artists, both centrally involved with the Field show and among the most important of the colour field painters in Australia, Sydney Ball and Michael Johnson. The presentation will cover the interviews with the artists, and the collaborative treatments carried out with the artists on their work.

### What evidence? Using anecdotal evidence to investigate early twentieth century oil paintings in Southeast Asia

Dr Nicole Tse<sup>1</sup>

Research models in conservation are continuously evolving, being the very nature of our discipline. Early in the twentieth century scientific models have set the benchmarks for our practice, and now inclusive frameworks comprising of scientific and humanitarian approaches have a voice in the way conservators work. In collating and processing anecdotal data employed in conservation research evidence however, there are questions relating to how the data was obtained and evaluated, and what judgements and cultural platforms directed the decision making processes.

The aim of this paper is to evaluate anecdotal evidence in an interdisciplinary study across five countries. Research undertaken from 2003 to 2006 investigated western artists materials used in painting practice in the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Focusing on the technical, archival, documentary, anecdotal and scientific examination, the research addressed a number of questions about the production and behaviour of Southeast Asian paintings that used Western derived art materials and techniques. In addition, the study involved multi-partnered cross-cultural research, and issues of language and levels of meaning associated with technical terminology to anecdotal statements were wide ranging. With few written resources in the specific area of study, the acquisition of anecdotal evidence was even more integral to the study, which aimed to establish workable protocols across five countries that were also consistent with University interview procedures.

The processes of defining the materiality of the twentieth century oil paintings in the above countries, therefore was not straight forward in the context of colonial and post colonial dialogues and the disciplinary structures for assessment. In view of the wide-ranging demographic backgrounds, annual workshops, field work and consultation were pivotal to developing a unified approach. Anecdotal evidence was also captured in a shared capacity to ensure the meaning was not lost. Of importance was to question how and why certain outcomes were achieved and whether any unintended effects were recorded. Further standard qualitative interpretive techniques from coding to recursive abstraction were employed. Finally the anecdotal data is presented in view of the other disciplines informing the research.

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Research Council Post Doctorate Fellow (Industry), Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, University of Melbourne



This research forms part of the project *The Twentieth Century in Paint*, and is funded by the Australian Research Council, the University of Melbourne and the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

## Dialogues with Artists

Towards understanding Chinese painting practice in the 1980s:  
treatment of Gu Wenda and Guo Zhonglian's *Night Ambush*,  
c.1985

Anne Carter<sup>1</sup>

Recognised as a major figure in Revolutionary Realism, Gu Wenda formally trained in the art department of the military's North China United University in the 1940s, and later at the Central Academy of Fine Arts from 1954 to 1956. In the mid 1980s, he painted *Night Ambush* with his wife, Guo Zhonglian.

The Queensland Art Gallery owns three of only six remaining oil paintings by Gu Wenda: his persecution during the Cultural Revolution meant that many of his paintings and sketchbooks were destroyed. *Night Ambush* underwent extensive restoration treatment in 2009 to repair flaking paint which occurred as a drying phenomenon. This treatment, although extensive, was considered a priority due to the rarity of Gu's work. Although technical analysis of the painting provided some clues to its conservation issues, interviews with the artist's widow and collaborator, Guo Zhonglian provided technical answers. The treatment of the painting is described, as is research undertaken on other paintings from this era (including research by Gillian Osmond). All of which provides insights into the period of immense change for Chinese artists during the 1980s and early 1990s, and insights into why their rarity makes these paintings so valuable.

---

<sup>1</sup> Acting Senior Paintings Conservator, Queensland Art Gallery

## Conservation of public art: keeping artworks alive and reinforcing community's engagement

Sabine Cotte<sup>1</sup>

Public art is a particular category of collections: immersed within the community, much loved by a part of it, yet more often than not ignored by the majority, and sometimes even degraded and vandalised by some people. Personal relationships that we may be creating with this work play a large role in our perception of a public work of art.

Does the community notice public artworks only when they are threatened or when they are shocking enough to create controversy? Is conservation of a public work of art a simple maintenance routine or can it be turned into a 'rediscovery' of the artwork and a new chapter of its ongoing life and its relationships with the community? The conservation of two mural paintings by Melbourne artist Mirka Mora, located in public places, was a close collaboration between artist and conservator. The paper attempts to illustrate the complexity of reconciling not only the artist's and the conservator's views, but also to satisfy the various stakeholders in caring for the artwork. It also suggests some lines of reflection to reinforce community's engagement with the public collections and strengthen the relationship between living artists and public collections.

---

<sup>1</sup> Painting Conservation, 2 McCabe Place, North Melbourne Vic 3051

# Data Capture, Integration and Analysis Services for An Online Network of 20th Century Paint Conservators

Suleiman Odat and Jane Hunter<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

One of the key aims of the ARC-funded Linkage Project 'Twentieth Century Paint', is to develop a Web interface to an integrated knowledge base - that is designed to provide decision support to the teams of conservators, curators and materials scientists who are investigating the optimum conservation treatments for culturally and historically significant twentieth century Australian and Asian-Pacific artworks. Such a knowledge-base will overcome one of the major challenges facing art conservators in Australia and South-East Asia - the difficulty they face in accessing, sharing and integrating relevant data and information on art materials, paints, paint deterioration mechanisms, paint characterisation data, conservation techniques, artistic practises, and related publications.

The aim of this project is to develop and apply the latest information integration, data management and Web 2.0 technologies to collaboratively build a distributed online knowledge base that will:

- Provide a repository for art historical information not currently available about artists working across our region.
- Enable paint characterization data to be captured directly from the microscopes (SEMs, TEMs), FTIR spectrometers and synchrotrons - and stored, described and compared in order to understand the nano-structural behaviour of the paint.
- Provide information and recommendations to assist with the preservation of important paintings in national collections across Australia and Southeast Asia.
- Inform decisions relating to the exhibition, display, travel and conservation of these paintings.
- Enable access to a vast array of information relating to artists, their art and art materials including information as diverse as oral histories and scientific spectra.

---

<sup>1</sup> The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. s.odat@uq.edu.au; j.hunter@uq.edu.au

- Deliver an innovative investigative framework for art historical and cultural material investigations that links FTIR, Raman, Infra-red, mass spectrometry databases (eg IRUG), with X-ray diffraction and Synchrotron data, paint chemistry databases (eg Paint and Ink Formulations Database) and publications on paint conservation techniques.

### Outcomes to Date

An authenticated web-based system has been developed that links the Asia-Pacific and Australian researchers to an underlying distributed national imagery database, a network of conservation and materials science experts, and associated image processing and analytical services. Figure 1 illustrates the overall architecture of the Web portal. High resolution images, FTIR spectra and associated metadata for each sample (such as paint samples, containers, receipts, artists' interviews, reports, and etc) are uploaded to the Jackrabbit repository using via a secure web interface. The Java Imaging Management Interface (Jimi) is used for reading, writing, viewing and manipulating images in multiple-graphics file formats efficiently. A MySQL database is also used to store Wiki information, user names, encrypted passwords, and access control policies. Figure 1 shows a high level architectural view of the system. Figure 2 shows a screen shot of the web interface to the paint characterisation database, including an SEM microscopy image of zinc white crystals. In this presentation we will also describe the unique ontology that we have developed to streamline the integration of the cross-disciplinary and highly heterogeneous databases shown in Figure 1.

## Dialogues with Artists

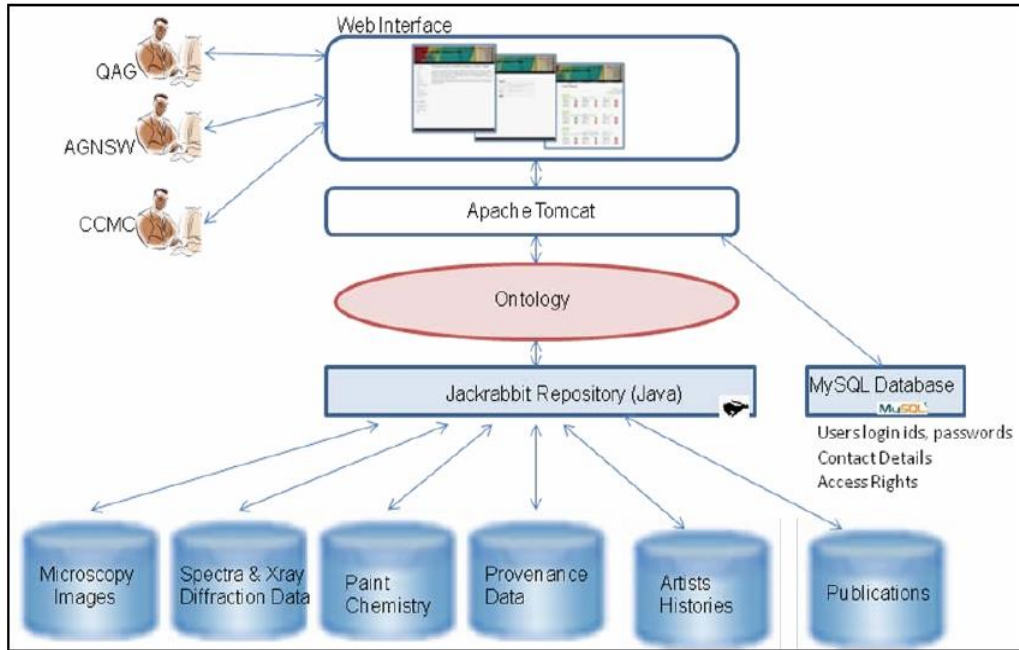


Figure 1: High-level Architectural View of the Twentieth Century Paint Knowledge Base.

Item Details		34	1999																										
Brand:	Gamblin		1881																										
Name:	opaque yellow blue verdicts 016	Local:loc:																											
Code:		016:	breakfast all refined																										
Pigments:	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Princ order Prim</td><td>DET</td><td>ADD</td></tr> <tr><td>concentrated</td><td>DET</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>cadmium sulphide</td><td>DET</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Pr17</td><td>DET</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>nickel substituted</td><td>DET</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>iron oxide PR42</td><td>DET</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>red iron oxide</td><td>DET</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Pr11</td><td>DET</td><td></td></tr> </table>	Princ order Prim	DET	ADD	concentrated	DET		cadmium sulphide	DET		Pr17	DET		nickel substituted	DET		iron oxide PR42	DET		red iron oxide	DET		Pr11	DET		<table border="1"> <tr><td>ADD</td><td>ADD</td></tr> </table>	ADD	ADD	
Princ order Prim	DET	ADD																											
concentrated	DET																												
cadmium sulphide	DET																												
Pr17	DET																												
nickel substituted	DET																												
iron oxide PR42	DET																												
red iron oxide	DET																												
Pr11	DET																												
ADD	ADD																												
Physical Observations:	<table border="1"> <tr><td>slight gritty texture</td><td>DET</td></tr> <tr><td>glossy</td><td>DET</td></tr> <tr><td>close boxes, then after</td><td>DET</td></tr> <tr><td>surface cracking</td><td>DET</td></tr> <tr><td>softened coating features</td><td>DET</td></tr> <tr><td>add</td><td></td></tr> </table>	slight gritty texture	DET	glossy	DET	close boxes, then after	DET	surface cracking	DET	softened coating features	DET	add																	
slight gritty texture	DET																												
glossy	DET																												
close boxes, then after	DET																												
surface cracking	DET																												
softened coating features	DET																												
add																													
Surface Macro:		Change Comment	Add File																										
FTIR Surface ATR:		Change Comment	Add File																										
FTIR Sample Transmission:		Change Comment	Add File																										
Cross section:		Change Comment	Add File																										
SEM:																													

Figure 2: Screenshot of the project web site and online paint characterisation database.

## Reference

The Twentieth Century in Paint web site:

<http://www.20thcpaint.org/>

NOTES

## **Dialogues with Artists**

NOTES



NOTES

## **Dialogues with Artists**

NOTES