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A collaborative approach to the conservation of Victorian Watercolours at the Art Gallery of NSW

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ABSTRACT

Within the holdings of the Art Gallery of NSW lies a marvellous collection of watercolour paintings from the Victorian era (1837-1901). Many of these works were amongst the first items acquired by the gallery in last quarter of the nineteenth century and thus form the foundations of the AGNSW collection. This period of art saw an astounding rise in the popularity and status of watercolour painting and is often described as the time during which the medium was 'at its peak'. The preparation of over 90 of these watercolours and their splendid frames for an exhibition entitled *Victorian Watercolours*, provided a unique opportunity for conservation staff to examine the materials and techniques of this era and gain insight into how these incredibly masterful works were created.

Ranging from small sketches and studies to large, grandiose and extraordinarily detailed pieces a collaborative approach to the conservation of these works was required incorporating paper and frames conservation through to mount cutting and frame reproduction. Working closely with the Curatorial department, the individual details of each work were researched, discussed and resolved in a holistic way, offering rare learning opportunities and skills development to all those involved. The project also facilitated partnerships with other gallery stakeholders including the Conservation Benefactors and Women's Art Group, whose invaluable support provided further resourcing towards the conservation treatment. This paper details all aspects of the project and the importance of collaboration when dealing with significant and complex bodies of work such as this.

BIOGRAPHIES

Analiese Treacy holds a Joint Honours Degree in Art History & Italian from University College Dublin, Ireland and a Masters Degree in Fine Art Conservation (Paper) from the University of Northumbria in Newcastle, England. Analiese has worked at a number of institutions both in Europe and Australia and currently works as a Paper Conservator at the AGNSW.

Dr Malgorzata Sawicki, Head, Frames Conservation, AGNSW, received PhD in App.Sci. (Materials Conservation), for research on non-traditional gilding techniques; recipient of the AICCM awards: *Conservator of the Year (1999)*, *Certificate of Appreciation for Outstanding Research (2009)*; founder/first Convenor, GOCSIG (1996–2001); Coordinator, ICOM-CC Wood, Furniture, and Lacquer WG (2008–2014).

Tom Langlands, BVA Hons Sydney College of the Arts 2000, is a practicing artist, conservation technical assistant and mat cutter at the AGNSW since 2009. Most recently Tom has completed a 4 year traineeship in reproduction frame making.

Barbara Dabrowa completed her Master's Degree at the University of Nicolaus Copernicus, Torun, Poland, majoring in the Conservation of Gilded Objects, 1985. Since 1995 she has been working as a Senior Frames Conservator, at the Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, Australia. She is a Convenor of GOCSIG and ICOM CC member.

Emma Rouse is a Frames Conservator at the Art Gallery of NSW. She has a Master of Cultural Materials Conservation from the University of Melbourne (2014). Emma has also worked as a conservator at the National Gallery of Singapore and at the National Gallery of Victoria.