

Microfading works on paper

Bruce Ford

Microfading is an accelerated light-fading test method in which a sub-millimetre spot of very intense visible light is focused on an object and the resultant (visually undetectable) colour change is tracked in real time using reflectance spectroscopy. The method is rapid, essentially non-destructive and most importantly specific to the object tested, because for a colourant the rate and nature of photochemical reactions depend markedly on its particular circumstances, including prior exposure and its physical and chemical environment. In some cases the reflectance spectra may also be used to help identify colourants.

Lightfastness testing of hundreds of objects, including a great variety of works on paper, for the National Museum of Australia and for other Australian and overseas collecting institutions using the method has proved to be a highly cost effective means of more confidently identifying and directing resources towards protecting the most vulnerable items, while improving public access, allowing more flexible lighting arrangements and saving on exhibition costs for collections as a whole.

Author biography

Bruce Ford is a chemist and conservation scientist with Art & Archival Pty Ltd and works on rock art conservation and site management in addition to museum-based science and conservation policy issues. He is a consultant to the National Museum of Australia where he has established a micro-fading capability to support a revised lighting scheme designed to better direct resources in the area. He has recently worked for the Tate Gallery, Guggenheim Museum and 9/11 Museum as well as most national collecting institutions. He has a BSc Hons (Chemistry) from the University of Canterbury, Post Graduate Diploma (Conservation) from the University of Canberra and an MA (Museums and Collections) from the Australian National University.

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