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Abstract

Title:

The evidence in texture: Is RTI a useful tool for conservators?

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Abstract:

Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) is an imaging technique that combines multiple photographs of an object to create a computational model of the object's surface. RTI is able to highlight subtle differences in texture on the surface of an object that cannot be seen with the naked eye, microscopy or traditional photography. A better understanding of the surface of an object can reveal important information about an object and its condition. The use of RTI is not uncommon in the cultural heritage sector. It is typically used to answer research questions posed by a curator or archaeologist regarding an object's fabrication, evidence of previous use and inscriptions. However, the information gained from RTI when used in this way often has limited use for conservators. This paper asks: can RTI be of use to conservators and in what situations (if any) RTI is most useful? After several years of using this technique to image objects in the conservation setting, the authors have collected numerous case studies demonstrating the usefulness of the technique. Examples include identifying areas of previous restoration on an antique commode, deciphering inscriptions on the badly eroded surface of a coin, detecting a preliminary sketch on the verso of a painting, documenting the deterioration caused by iron gall ink and spotting alterations made to a composite photograph. The results indicate that TI can be a useful tool for a conservator to better understand previous interventions to an object's surface, information which can be vital in conservation decision making.

Brief Biography of the Author(s):

Nicholas Flood is Objects Conservator at the Australian National Maritime Museum. He has previously worked at International Conservation Services, the Australian War Memorial and

Artlab Australia. He holds qualifications in Cultural Materials Conservation, Chemistry and Philosophy and has contributed research in the characterisation of collection material, conservation photography and conservation advocacy.

Matteo Volonté brings his enthusiasm, skills and expertise to his current role as Senior Paintings Conservator at International Conservation Services. He holds a Diploma of Fine Arts and a Master of Painting Conservation from Accademia di Belle Arti, Aldo Galli in Como, Italy.

Oliver Hull is Senior Furniture Conservator at International Conservation Services. Oliver completed an apprenticeship in furniture making, design and restoration and holds a Diploma of Furniture Conservation and certificates from City & Guilds of London in both Specialised Craft (antique furniture restoration) and Advanced Craft in Furniture.

Agata Rostek-Robak is Conservation Manager at the Australian National Maritime Museum. She has over 25 years work experience, mainly in various Senior Conservator roles at the State Library of NSW. Agata obtained conservation qualifications from the University of Canberra in 1992 and is currently studying towards a Master of Business Administration.

Jeff Fox is Objects Conservator at Australian National Maritime Museum. Prior to this he worked as the Archaeological Conservator at the Saruq al-Hadid Archaeological Research Project in Dubai U.A.E. Jeff graduated from the Master of Cultural Materials Conservation course at University of Melbourne in 2013 where he specialised in objects conservation.

Lucilla Ronai is Paper Conservator at the Australian National Maritime Museum. She has previously worked at the Library of Trinity College Dublin and the State Library of Queensland. Lucilla completed the Master of Cultural Materials Conservation at the University of Melbourne, specialising in paper conservation.

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