

# THE MAKING OF ART EXPERTISE

## CHANGING PRACTICES OF ART HISTORY & CONSERVATION, 1850 – 1950

### ABSTRACTS – WEDNESDAY 8 MAY

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#### **Rome 1930-1939. Art History, Science and Conservation from the Conference on the Scientific Analysis of Artworks to the Founding of the *Istituto Centrale del Restauro*** *Marco Cardinali, University of Genoa*

The pioneering experiences with the scientific analysis of the works of art, that took place in the Twenties, brought the international Institutions (Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle and Office International des Musées) to promote the first Conference focused on the new methods and approaches (Rome, October 13-17, 1930). The participation of the Italian scholars would show the conflict, mainly due to theoretical fundamentals, between the prevailing mistrust of technical research in art history (i.e. Adolfo Venturi, Roberto Longhi) and few art historians, working in museums and supporting the scientific contribution to a deeper knowledge of the artwork (i.e. Sergio Ortolani, Umberto Gnoli). The some isolated position of the Italian perspective would turn to a specific and groundbreaking solution through the thinking and doing of Cesare Brandi, founder of the Istituto Centrale del Restauro. The philosophical framework and the operating outcome of his Theory of conservation would represent a crucial step beyond the limit of Benedetto Croce's aesthetics and his strong influence on Italian art history.

#### **Art Criticism from a Laboratory? Bold Beliefs and Contested Claims** *Geert Vanpaemel, KU Leuven*

When in March 1914, Velazquez' *Rokeby Venus* in the National Gallery was vandalized by an angry suffragette, the Scottish chemist Arthur Pillans Laurie rushed to London to take samples of the damaged canvas in order to identify the pigments used by the Spanish painter. At the time, Laurie was recognized as the foremost expert on the analysis of historical painting methods and materials, but the opportunities to make original investigations were rare. Museum directors would seldom allow scientists to touch their precious artefacts, let alone take samples. During the interwar period Laurie would continue to advocate the inclusion of laboratory research in art historical research. However, notwithstanding his much appreciated (and widely mediatized) work for insurance companies and police departments in the authentication of artefacts and the discovery of frauds, his arguments were received rather coldly by art historians, art connoisseurs and even art dealers. This was not only a result of Laurie's somewhat idiosyncratic character. Along with Laurie, other contemporary scientists shared a similar fate. To explain this lack of appreciation, historians have generally pointed to the overly positivist attitude of the scientists, which did not align easily with the more holistic investigation methods of art historians. We believe on the contrary that it was exactly the lack of a positivist approach in the scientific investigation of art, which caused scientists to make unwarranted claims and which excluded the possibility of a collaboration between scientists and art scholars.

#### **Seeing through the Old Masters. Radiography as Art Expertise** *Uta Kornmeier, Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, Berlin*

From the beginning of the twentieth century, art historians and restorers had a new and fascinating tool for examining artworks and particularly paintings at their disposal: x-radiography. The mere acquisition of an x-ray image is, however, only the first step in the analysis, the much more difficult part is the interpretation of the image. For that a new kind of expert entered the scene in the late 1920s, the radiologist. My talk will explore the emergence and establishment of this new art expertise by focusing on the 1930s court case against Otto Wacker, a German art dealer accused of selling fake van Gogh paintings. Here, for the first time, a radiologist was asked to give evidence in court by explaining x-ray images of art which boosted the acceptance of x-ray examination in the art world.

## **'We Cannot Splash Light onto the Palette': The 1893 Munich Congress and the Public Demand for Research of Painting Materials**

*Kathrin Kinseher, Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Munich*

During his speech at the Munich congress on painting techniques in 1893 Franz von Lenbach contrasted light – the medium of photography – with paint, which was, in his eyes, a technically poor material for imitating nature. One focus of the Munich congress and the related exhibition of painting techniques was oriented to the stability of pigments and paints as the fundamental materials of painters. Both events had been organized by the German Society for the Promotion of Rational Painting Methods that sought a state-funded authority for the investigation and regulation of the numerous inventions in the field of painting materials. The establishment of such an institutionalised authority was accomplished in 1903, when the Society's research institute, previously funded by private and governmental grants, was adopted by the Technical University of Munich. On the long path to this achievement, the 1893 Munich congress and exhibition were important in manifold ways. The contribution will analyze the significance of both events with regard to the collaborations they fostered and the disagreements they made visible. Finally, we will see that both events set new trends in research on painting techniques and materials.

## **The Influence of Scientists on Picture Conservation and Artists' Materials in London, 1885-1935**

*Jacob Simon, The National Portrait Gallery, London*

Scientists were increasingly at the forefront of efforts by museums to understand and conserve their collections and to improve environmental conditions. They were also central to the campaign for improved materials for artists. In London two successive professors of chemistry at the Royal Academy, were prominent. Arthur Church supervised the restoration of wall paintings in the Houses of Parliament in the 1890s and provided advice to museums. Arthur Laurie took up the concerns of leading painters about the integrity of artists' materials and established Madderton&Co, his own colour manufacturing business, in 1890. He campaigned unsuccessfully for a committee-based approach to picture conservation in the 1920s and set up his own research laboratory thereafter. The role of scientists in museums became important after the First World War with the foundation of the British Museum laboratory and in the 1930s laboratories at the National Gallery and the Courtauld Institute.

## **Conservation and Science in The National Gallery London in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century**

*Mariana Pinto, Utrecht University*

The mid-nineteenth century in The National Gallery has been considered as one of the key moments of the early history of preventive conservation in museums. Between 1846 and 1853 preventive measures with the aim to reduce further deterioration of paintings became an institutional concern which entailed several debates in the Gallery. While this period has been extensively investigated by scholars, the second half of the nineteenth century has not been studied yet comprehensively. Some scholars have referred to the second half of the century as the "dark ages" of preventive conservation, although more recent literature has analysed the topic under new perspectives. This presentation will focus on the NG during the second half of the nineteenth century and discuss the role of chemists and restorers in preventive measures.

## **Varnishing Munch. Revisiting Munch's Painted Surfaces at the National Museum of Art, Norway**

*Thierry Ford, The National Museum of Art, Oslo*

The National Museum of Art, Norway, houses one of the most important single collections by the expressionist painter Edvard Munch (1863-1944). It comprises 57 paintings from Munch's earlier period and is arguably the best-known part of the museum's paintings collection. However, it is also the most controversial in terms of restoration history. The art works were acquired over a period of 30 years, either bought directly from the artist, or through generous donations. Parallel to this, the museum has a long history of employing restorers and conservators since its foundation in 1837. As early as 1909 the Museum was embroiled in a restoration controversy concerning the varnishing of the Munch paintings. A series of public debates challenged the Museum's varnishing practice, especially regarding unvarnished works, questioning how Munch had intended

his painted surfaces to appear. Current research involving the systematic scientific examination of the surfaces combined with archival references, helps to piece together past attitudes and changing restoration practices. It focuses on a specific group of paintings for which there is sparse early documentation due to secrecy in response to criticism.

### **From Broad Street to Beaumont Street at the Crossroads of a New Century: Conservation and Collections Care at the 'Old' and 'New' Ashmolean Museums**

*Morwenna Blewett, Worcester College and Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford*

The Ashmolean Museum moved from its original purpose-built site occupied since 1683 to another purpose built space on Beaumont Street in 1894. This paper will examine the status of conservation activities prior to this move. It will also investigate the nature and extent of conservation practice and preventive measures that were put in place once the Museum had made its move across town. Its collections and remit was to undergo the most radical change since its inception over 200 years before. The place of conservation was central to the motivation to move and also to the new functions adopted by the Museum as it approached the immediate dawn of the nineteenth century in its new space.

### **200 Years of Conservation History of the Paintings Collection of the Rijksmuseum: An Overview**

*Esther van Duijn, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*

This presentation will give a concise overview of the conservation history of the paintings collection of the Rijksmuseum, focussing on the period 1850-1950. The story will be told from the perspective of various paintings by Rembrandt, since they have always been documented most thoroughly. The overview will include the rise and early dissemination of wax-resin lining, the Dutch adoption of the regeneration method and the closely connected reluctance to remove old varnish layers. The restorers that will play a prominent part are: Nicolaas and Willem Anthonij Hopman, Willem Frederik Cornelis Greebe and Pieter Nicolaas Bakker, and Christiaan Hendrik Jenner and Henricus Hubertus Mertens. However, they cannot be seen separate from their time, so the role of their supervisors, mostly the museum's director, will also be addressed.

#### **Keynote lecture I**

### **Conservation, Connoisseurship, and Conflict: The Politics and Materiality of Expertise**

*Noémie Étienne, University of Bern*

Art historical knowledge, institutional agendas, economics, and politics intersect with art conservation practices. Such entanglements are most often visible when conflicts arise, inviting the different actors to explicitly formulate positions that otherwise would remain tacit. Taking into account different historical cases, this talk aims to unpack the way expertise is produced during conservation treatment. First and foremost, I will discuss how the boundaries of different disciplines such as connoisseurship, sales, and restoration were negotiated in a particular context: the opening of the Louvre museum in Paris in 1793. Indeed, the inauguration of one of the first European museums created conflicts, and generated discussions about claims of expertise and authority among all the involved actors. As I will show, artists and connoisseurs advocated at this particular moment to distinguish themselves from restorers and art dealers and claimed their own positions in the new institution.

#### **ABSTRACTS – THURSDAY 9 MAY**

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### **200 Years of Conservation History of the Paintings Collection of the Rijksmuseum: Some Words on Sources and Methodology**

*Esther van Duijn, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*

Between 2015 and 2018 Esther van Duijn carried out a fulltime research project studying the conservation history of the paintings' collection of the Rijksmuseum. This presentation discusses the sources and methodology that she used. The case-study of Rembrandt's Portraits of Marten Soolmans and Oopjen Coppit (1634) was especially

significant, showing the importance of conservation history as an integrated part of interdisciplinary research preceding and accompanying the treatment of paintings.

### **Restoration Recipes in the Nineteenth Century: A Role for the Amateur in Caring for Paintings?**

*Maartje Stols-Witlox, University of Amsterdam*

During the (long) nineteenth century, 'how-to' books and manuals for amateurs or collectors included recipes to restore paintings – as had occurred in previous centuries, thereby instructing non-professional audiences on the executing of cleaning, varnish removal, removal of dents from canvas or even on more invasive treatments. This paper looks at the nature of such recipes and the role they may have played at a time when enormous changes were occurring in the nature of professional conservation and preservation practices. It investigates the professional backgrounds of the authors of restoration recipes and the authors' motives for writing, analyzing the contents and scope of recipe books produced during the period. In addition, it looks at the ways in which scientific developments and new curatorial ideas echoed in and possibly influenced and changed the nature of restoration recipes for amateur audiences. Are signs present that authors distinguished between treatments that could safely be carried out by the amateur and those that were better left to professionals? If so, how was this division or roles and on what grounds was it suggested?

### **Reconstructing Nineteenth-Century Wax-Resin Linings**

*Emilie Froment, University of Amsterdam*

In the Netherlands, since the mid-nineteenth century, paintings are traditionally lined with an adhesive composed of a mixture of beeswax and natural resin. Until the 1970s, wax-resin linings were implemented to paintings on a wide scale. This occurred nonetheless the various drawbacks of the technique including colour change in paintings. During my PhD I investigated the impact of wax-resin linings on the colour of ground layers in seventeenth century Netherlandish paintings. The research is based on the study of physical phenomena observed on ground reconstructions produced according to historically accurate reconstruction techniques. The lining method used followed the same approach. The lecture presents the methodology used for the research. It focuses on the making process of the ground reconstructions and discusses possibilities and limitations in using historically accurate reconstruction for researching colour change in Netherlandish seventeenth century paintings after wax-resin linings.

### **The Forgotten St. Gall Conference of 1898 and its Failed Impact on Paper Conservation as an Academic Discipline**

*Birgit Reissland, The Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency*

In 1898, Pater Ehrle, head of the Vatican Library, invited curators of leading European manuscript collections to attend the International Conference on the Preservation and Repair of Historic Manuscripts in St. Gall. This was a first attempt to coordinate the conservation of severely damaged manuscripts on an European level, with a strong emphasis on international cooperation and an interdisciplinary approach. The event testified to the high level of scholarly expertise regarding conservation concerns. During the World Wars the international approach froze and the St. Gall conference faded into oblivion. After WW-II, Europe faced an immense amount of war-damaged paper heritage that was entrusted to craftsmen for repair. This shift away from scholars towards craftsmanship shaped the field of paper conservation for decennia. It was not until the end of the twentieth century that paper conservation reached an academic level. Questions fervently discussed in the field today unwittingly match those discussed in St. Gall – a hundred years ago.

### **The History of Textile Conservation in the Rijksmuseum**

*Suzan Meijer, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*

This presentation will be about the history of caring for the Rijksmuseum's textile and costume collection and the early beginnings of the textile conservation studio. Most of this will be based on physical and visual evidence

of treatments as well as on information from the museum's annual reports, since there was no actual conservation documentation carried out before 1985.

## **ABSTRACTS – FRIDAY 10 MAY**

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### **Conservation in the Making: Teaching and Training at the Fogg Museum**

*Francesca Bewer, Harvard Art Museums*

Guided by the key vision of itself as a 'laboratory for art', from early on the Fogg Museum embraced a culture of experimentation in its role as locus of both teaching and research. This paper will provide some context for the integration of art and science in the setting of this university museum, and examine in more detail some of the trials in teaching and training that were undertaken – and gauge the impact that the somewhat unique formation had on art historians and on the professionalization of conservation.

### **Conservation and Conservators in Italy: An Historical Review**

*Marco Ciatti, Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence*

For many centuries in Italy the conservation work was executed by the artists next to the artistic production. Between the XVI and XVIII c. in the various artistic regional schools a lot of experiences and theories were accumulated. An important change was achieved by G. B. Cavalcaselle, one of the founders of the modern art history, who underlined the new historic interest in the conservation and looked for restorers as technicians and no more as artists. In 1939 the new I.C.R. planned by G.C. Argan and directed by C. Brandi fixed the new standards for the restorers' education. With some changes, this model is still today the starting point for the best Italian schools of conservation.

### **How and Why Are We to Teach Art History? Debating the Sites and Aims of Academic German Art History at the End of the Nineteenth Century**

*Anne van Dam, Utrecht University*

How and why are we to teach art history? This was a central concern in a prolonged debate in 1891 between art historical professor Herman Grimm, museum director Wilhelm Bode and lecturer August Schmarsow. It all started with Wilhelm Bode's review of the book *Rembrandt als Erzieher von einem Deutschen*, in which Bode spared some choice words about the lacking education of future museum employees at German universities and in Berlin in particular. What followed was an extensive and heated debate in which Grimm, Bode and later Schmarsow positioned their views on subjects such as the goal of art historical education, the *wissenschaftlichkeit* of the discipline and the use of images and original artworks in the *Bildung* of young art historians. This paper examines their different viewpoints and explores how these varying ideas about art history relate to its development as a rigorous, scholarly discipline both within and outside of the university.

### **Heading for a Dead End: Walter Gräff, Alexander Eibner and Max Doerner**

*Andreas Burmester, Doerner Institut, Munich*

It is only since the mid-1950s that the Doerner Institut as we know it today developed its profile: Cutting edge art technological research, early preventive conservation attempts, ground-breaking restorations, and broad dissemination activities. Nowadays, the institute is embedded into a European network of similar institutions. Until 1945, not only the isolated political situation of Nazi Germany prevented any international co-operations. As recent research demonstrated, the basic concept for the institution, founded in Munich in 1937, had serious birth defects. Latest in 1941, the visionary impact by the art historian Walter Gräff – who established art technology as a science in Germany from around 1910 –, by the chemist Alexander Eibner – who developed a deep interdisciplinary understanding of painting materials –, and by the painter Max Doerner – who influenced the practical education in painting and restoration of many generations of artists world-wide – got lost. Until 1945, a new generation took over, leading the institute and its activities towards a dead end.

**Ways, Aims, Visions, Disillusionments - Education in the Field of Art and Conservation in Germany 1850–1950**  
*Michael von der Goltz, Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaft und Kunst, Hildesheim*

In nineteenth-century Germany the educational landscape in the field of art history, restoration and conservation was highly heterogeneous. The impact of new scientific developments on the training of professionals in this field is therefore difficult to measure. This paper will first present different existing educational programs and policies in the German context and discuss what their declared aims were. After a short look at the professional situations of conservators and art historians and a discussion of the hierarchical structures that were in place in their institutions, I will have a closer look at the possible external influences and discuss if and how new developments in science and technology might have impacted this professional field. Finally, we will turn to public and professional criticism on hiatuses in the training of professionals and to the remedies that were suggested. But were these realised?

**Keynote lecture II**

**Invention as a Necessity: The Salvage of Italian Frescoes during World War Two**

*Cathleen Hoeniger, Queen's University, Kingston*

Treasured cycles of early frescoes were among the casualties of the Second World War in Italy. This paper will focus on the struggle to salvage the fragile remains from the ruins, analysing key moments when heritage directors and painting restorers adopted innovative approaches. Under the pressure of extreme circumstances, new scientific materials and methods were tried out. Expertise came from scientists at restoration centres established in the 1920s and 30s, most notably the Istituto Centrale del Restauro in Rome. But the use of novel methods was balanced by several leading specialists who continued to favour more traditional, artisanal approaches. Overall, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which science informed restoration treatments. The evidence is clouded by the overtly literary language chosen by Cesare Brandi, the principal restoration spokesperson in Italy, to describe the achievements of wall-painting conservation during the war years.

**Mending, Sticking and Repairing: The Role of Expertise at the Intersection of Conservation and Archaeology in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth Centuries**

*Caitlin O'Grady, University College London*

Nineteenth and twentieth century preservation practice developed in response to a recognized need during excavation and export of artefacts to Europe, the UK and USA. Developing at the intersection of multiple disciplines, archaeologists and scientists worked to co-opt preservation expertise into their knowledge domains through the social construction of knowledge. Terminology used to describe preservation actions in the published and unpublished literature – including mending, sticking and repairing – deliberately demarcated the boundaries of knowledge, expertise and skill used to distinguish experts from technicians. This paper investigates the social construction of preservation through critical assessment of archaeological field manuals and scientific handbooks and the language used to provide insight into the role external disciplines played in codifying the identity of early preservation technicians. This process resulted in a hierarchical system of expertise that continues to have ramifications for contemporary conservation practice in a variety of institutions.

**The Disciplinary Formation of Art History Through the Lens of its First International Conferences**

*Maria Teresa Costa, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin*

This paper aims to reconstruct the transnational debate on the disciplinary formation of art history and the emergence of new methodologies (as *Kunstwissenschaft*) through the analysis of its first international conferences (the actual CIHA) between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. To deal with art historiography means in fact not only to study its objects and methodologies, but also to consider a field of knowledge and series of practices shared by a community of researchers and to elaborate a network of scientific exchanges, both on a national and on an international level. The focus on the first international conferences in art history, which are essential instruments of cultural transfer, should help both to reconstitute a transnational perspective, and to overcome art historical narratives which reinforce only the celebrated names of art historians or artistic schools, expanding their horizon towards an international art historical *koine*.

## **From Concierge to First Class Technical Assistant: The Climb of the Restorer J.C. Traas and his Work on the Van Gogh Collection**

*Ella Hendriks, University of Amsterdam*

The most important restorer for the Van Gogh family collection of paintings, now in the Van Gogh Museum, was Jan Cornelis Traas (1898-1984). As Traas appears to have kept no records of his work, did not publish, and no personal archive is known, the paintings themselves are the primary source for revealing his restoration methods. Archived internship reports, job applications and other correspondence spread across various institutions enabled us to unravel the circumstances in which Traas built his early career, slowly working his way up to achieve recognition in a field that some claimed was 'monopolized' by the well-known de Wild family of restorers in the Hague. Combining technical with archival findings reveals how Traas's approach was shaped by his formative background and training and seems to have transcended his work on old-master paintings in the Mauritshuis to affect the way he treated these 'modern' pictures by Van Gogh.

## **The Enlightened Interdisciplinarity of the Conservation and Research Campaign of the Ghent Altarpiece in 1950-1951**

*Hélène Dubois, Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA), Brussels*

The Brothers Van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece underwent an ambitious conservation campaign in 1950-51, under the enlightened direction of the chemist Paul Coremans. Most of the treatment itself was carried out by one restorer, Albert Philippot, and was paired with ground-breaking laboratory research and with the contributions of an international panel of museum curators. The network established through the project determined the evolution of craft-based intuitive restorations towards a scientifically well-structured profession whereby decisions are based on objectified and fully documented observations. Since the 1930's Coremans and his colleagues had built up a wide expertise in the technical examination of paintings by developing analytical and photographic techniques. This paper details how his' sharp intellect and his communication skills played a key role in the achievement a constructive work environment in which all equally reaped the benefits of sharing information leading to a myriad of discoveries.