

TATE



Press Release

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Tate announces AXA Art Insurance research grant for ground-breaking conservation project

Acrylic paints and primers have been widely used by artists since the early 1960s. They account for approximately 50% of paint sales over the last 30 years and they are the most common priming medium for modern canvases. It is estimated that acrylic materials are present in 30% of the Tate's collection of modern and contemporary paintings. The Tate AXA Art Modern Paints Project aims to find ways in which modern paint artworks can be conserved in the future, in many cases before the signs of ageing become apparent. To date, appropriate conservation techniques have been limited and this research will lead the way in redressing this conservation concern.

Dr Tom Learner, Senior Conservation Scientist at Tate, said: "This is the most in-depth modern paints conservation research being carried out internationally and there is a real need for it. Tate's research will be available for public and private collections around the world on how best to conserve modern paint artworks in the future."

New pigments and binders such as acrylic and polyester, and numerous additives, have been incorporated to improve performance and shelf-life of modern paints. Artists have also applied paint in many novel ways, using techniques other than a paintbrush and paints that were intended for other purposes such as house-paints and industrial coatings. However, as with any material used in the creation of artwork, acrylic emulsion paints display some specific concerns for their conservation.

This research aims to develop appropriate techniques to conserve modern paint artworks and to explore preventative measures that owners of these works can employ to prolong the life of the work.

In support of the project, David Hockney, said: "Oil paint has been used by artists for 600 years, so modern conservators have six centuries of experience to draw on and develop. Acrylics, on the other hand, are little more than half a century old. It is extremely important and very welcome that Tate's research into the future conservation of these relatively new materials is being done now to ensure these artworks will be kept in good condition for centuries to come."

The Tate AXA Art Modern Paints Project (2006-9) will build upon the success of the first phase of this revolutionary International research project (2002-5). Tom Learner added: "We are delighted that AXA Art Insurance has generously sponsored three more years of conservation research, recognising Tate's leading role in this project."

Dr Thomas Wessel of AXA Art's head quarters in Cologne said: "Modern art from the 1950s onwards, is currently the most highly sought-after and highest priced area of the market. Modern paint artworks feature in collections across the world. 50% of AXA Art's private and corporate clients worldwide have relevant modern works within their collections. This rises sharply when one considers AXA Art's insured works in public and institutional collections. This project is focused on determining the safest and most effective ways of cleaning acrylic paintings, irrespective of the 'status' of their owner.

“As the world’s leading art insurer, it is part of AXA Art’s global philosophy to research, set and maintain best practice in conservation solutions and preventative care for works of art.”

Tate’s primary partners for the research have been the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles and the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. Dissemination of the first phase of the research to the conservation profession will take place at Modern Paints Uncovered, an International symposium to be held at Tate Modern, from 16 to 19 May 2006. Tickets for this symposium sold out in under a month, highlighting the huge worldwide professional interest in this research.

A number of public events will take place during the week of the symposium. These include ‘Sir Peter Blake in discussion with Jon Snow’ on 19 May; ‘The Painted Surface’, a panel discussion between artists, curators and conservators on 19 May; and a Modern Paints MP3 download for visitors to hear short clips about 10 key works in the new Collection displays at Tate Modern, describing the paints used, how they were applied, and whether there are any conservation implications. It will be available in the gallery from 23 May or from www.tate.org.uk/learning.

In addition to workshops and presentations to increase understanding and awareness throughout the project, Tate and AXA Art will conclude the research with the publication of an owners’ guide.

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