

Tate AXA Art Modern Paints project (TAAMPP)

Newsletter 1: October 2006

Welcome to the first Newsletter of TAAMPP!

This is the first of 6 newsletters that will be sent from Tate every 6 months to update you on the activities and advances we have made as part of this important research project into some of the conservation issues of acrylic paintings. We are focussing on assessing the short- and long-term effects of cleaning these types of paintings, which is frequently undertaken by conservators before display or loan for exhibition.

The project officially started on 1st April 2006, and is scheduled to run for 3 years. The funding from the AXA Art Group will cover the salary of the Tate AXA Art Research Fellow, the necessary support costs for the research, and the cleaning of 5 acrylic paintings from Tate's collection of 20th century art. The first of these has just been announced (see below), and each subsequent Newsletter should include details on the next painting.

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Introducing the Tate team:

Bronwyn Ormsby (AXA Art Research Fellow at Tate) will be carrying out the vast majority of the scientific research into the effects of cleaning acrylic paints. She already has 3 years experience working in this area, having completed an earlier phase of the project at the start of this year.

Patricia Smithen (Conservator of 20th Century Paintings) is one of Tate's conservators specialising in the field of modern paintings. She will be the conservator cleaning the 5 paintings, and will work closely with Bronwyn on this part of the project in attempt to apply the scientific findings more directly to case studies.

Tom Learner (Senior Conservation Scientist) has been co-ordinating this project with other related projects in which Tate is currently involved, especially our collaboration on 'Modern Paints' with the Getty Conservation Institute and National Gallery of Art (in the US), and - more recently - the University of Torino in Italy.

Nicky White (Tate Development) is the dedicated sponsorship manager for the project, and will be working closely with Frances Fogel (Marketing Co-ordinator for AXA Art UK, and Communication and Liaison Co-ordinator for TAAMPP) to develop a direct and efficient Tate - AXA Art link.

TAAMPP website:

Tate recently launched its website for the project. It can be viewed by visiting:
http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/conservation_modernpaints.htm

The website contains information on the conservation issues of cleaning acrylic emulsion paints, what our research has discovered so far, and what the specific aims of TAAMPP are. It also contains links to other related projects at Tate and AXA Art websites.

We intend to keep the website regularly updated, so that details of upcoming events where the project will be presented and/or discussed will be posted, as well as information on the other acrylic paintings in the Tate Collection that will be cleaned as part of the project. This will include any details of whether the works can be viewed once cleaned: in most cases this will be at one of Tate's four galleries (Tate Modern, Tate Britain, Tate Liverpool and Tate St. Ives), but some may also be earmarked for loan to an international exhibition.

Dissemination and events:

Press launches. A UK event took place in the paintings conservation studio of Tate Britain on 28th March, and press launch was also made in New York.

Modern Paints Uncovered. In May of 2006, a major international conference was hosted at Tate Modern, and was attended by over 250 conservation professionals from over 35 countries. AXA Art was represented by marketing personnel from Benelux, Germany, Spain and the UK. To take advantage of this event, a poster that outlined TAAMPP was presented at the symposium.

Presentations so far:

- Bronwyn Ormsby, Tom Learner and Amanda Cropper (Head of Corporate Development at Tate) spoke to all AXA Art sponsorship managers at TEFAF in Maastricht, March 2006
- Bronwyn Ormsby spoke at Modern Paints Uncovered symposium, Tate Modern May 2006
- Bronwyn Ormsby spoke at a roundtable discussion organised by AXA Art Switzerland during Art Basel in June 2006
- Tom Learner spoke at a reception organised by AXA Art US, at the American Institute for Conservation (AIC) conference in Providence, R.I, June 2006
- Bronwyn Ormsby spoke at a roundtable discussion organised by AXA Art Spain at Reina Sofia, Madrid in October 2006
- Bronwyn Ormsby spoke at a roundtable discussion organised by AXA Art France at Christie's, Paris in October 2006

Upcoming Presentations:

- 16 January 2007: Presentation to the Decorative and Fine Art Society in The Hague

Please contact Frances Fogel of AXA Art UK (frances.fogel@axa-art.co.uk) for further details

The first painting to be cleaned:

Untitled 2/72 by Jeremy Moon (1972)

The painting was completed in March of 1972 after some adjustment to the final design. An inspection of the edges revealed a mauve colour underlying the bright pink stripes and several coats of slightly different yellows were used to achieve the perfect finish. As well as adjusting the colours, Moon also adjusted the width of the bands as he composed this work on the canvas. While at first glance, the painting appears to be perfectly flat and even, a raking light playing across the surface reveals evidence of brush strokes. The edges of the bands were taped to achieve a crisp finish, and a characteristic lip of paint is just visible. Acrylic emulsion paint provided Moon with the ideal medium for achieving this smooth, matte finish across a large area.

The work was purchased by Tate in 1976 and had an accumulation of dirt and other disfiguring accretions. In addition to a layer of atmospheric dust, there are black finger marks, scuff marks at the corners, and some black accretions across the centre of the painting. There are also a few long vertical drip marks which have deposited white material on the surface.

As part of TAAMPP, this painting was selected as the first candidate for cleaning. Bronwyn Ormsby and Patricia Smithen will be testing different cleaning methods for this work and monitoring the changes to the surface, before and after treatment. A new display of works by Jeremy Moon, including *Untitled 2/72*, is planned for Tate Britain in February 2007.