
Articles You May Have Missed

There Is a Secret Villain Threatening the World's Masterpieces. It's Soap.

Art Net News, 05/24/2017

A team of researchers are working to find a solution to an unlikely scourge that is marring the surfaces of canvases around the world: soap.

Conservation scientists say that tiny formations of lead-based soaps are threatening to mar paintings by artists ranging from Rembrandt van Rijn to Georgia O'Keeffe. A team of experts has spent years researching why these microscopic white pockmarks appear—but they can't figure out how to stop them.

University of Delaware professor Cecil Dybowski has been researching these pesky soaps over the last four years with Silvia A. Centeno, a research scientist at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. The long-term goal of the project, funded by a joint \$590,000 grant from the National Science Foundation, "is to find out what factors affect the reaction itself and figure out procedures to ameliorate those problems," Dybowski says.

Through their work, Dybowski and his team have proven for the first time that water and humidity are major contributing factors in this soapy conservation nightmare. If enough metal soap forms on a painting's surface, it can lead to delamination, and the paint can flake off the canvas in layers, destroying the artwork. Soap also does not discriminate. The problem is so widespread that clever forgers even incorporate lead soaps to make a painting appear older.

One added challenge? Water is generally considered one of the safest cleaning products in the world of conservation—but that is not the case when it comes to lead soap. Instead, water may actually encourage the formation.

"Here's How Much Money Museum Employees Really Make," *Art Net News, 06/29/2017*

A new survey conducted by the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) provides hard data on the average salaries for curators, conservators, registrars, and other museum staff members—as well as which roles in this notoriously poorly paid field have seen the biggest salary bumps in recent years. The AAMD teamed up with

the consulting and analytics firm Stax, Inc., to survey 219 museums in the US, Canada, and Mexico about what they pay their employees.

The AAMD launched its first salary survey way back in 1918 and began collecting the data in a more formal way in 1991, but this marks the first time it has made its report free to the public.

Unsurprisingly, top administrative positions are the best compensated: The highest-paying museum gigs are director (\$293,988 average annual salary), deputy director (\$173,572 average salary), and chief operating officer (\$172,872). Chief curators (\$143,412) and chief conservators (\$118,271)—two roles that require either an advanced degree, lengthy training, or both—also fall towards the top of the salary hierarchy.

The lowest-paid positions are: security guard (\$33,974), education department assistant (\$37,801), and curatorial assistant (\$42,458). The second fastest-growing salaried position? Curator.

"Tomb Robbing, Perilous but Alluring, Makes Comeback in China," *New York Times, 07/15/2017*

Grave robbing has made a roaring comeback as the global demand for Chinese antiquities has surged.

With prices for some Chinese antiquities reaching into the tens of millions of dollars, a flood of amateur and professional thieves looking to get rich quick has hit China's countryside. While accurate figures are difficult to come by, the looting has resulted in the permanent destruction of numerous Chinese cultural heritage sites.

In 2016, China's State Administration of Cultural Heritage reported 103 tomb-raiding and cultural relic theft cases. During the post-Mao opening of China in the 1980s tomb-robbing became an epidemic. Farmers, whose families had for generations been charged with safeguarding local tombs, began moving off the land and into cities. Vast areas were turned over to make way for subway tunnels, apartment buildings and highway networks. Construction sites doubled as archaeological pits, and countless tombs and historical relics were unearthed in the process.

As the market for Chinese art and antiquities exploded, so too did the

number of forgeries. After reaching a peak in the early 2000s, officials say instances of tomb robbing at major heritage sites have decreased sharply in recent years. But the downside to having a civilization more than 5,000 years old is that cultural heritage sites are everywhere, making comprehensive protection all but impossible.

Despite all the looting and destruction, some say there has been one small silver lining. When it comes to unopened tombs, Chinese cultural officials typically take a more conservative stance, opting to protect rather than excavate. As a result, tombs that have already been opened by tomb raiders have become gold mines for archaeologists.

"The Vatican Discovers New Paintings by Raphael Hidden in Plain Sight—Right on Its Walls," *ArtNet News, 07/06/2017*

It's not every day that you find a new Raphael lying around, but such is life in the Vatican. Experts have discovered that Italian Renaissance paragon Raphael had a key role in painting the Room of Constantine in the papal apartments after a restoration yielded clear evidence of the master's hand.

It was previously thought that the magnificent reception room was painted by the artist's workshop after the Raphael sketched in general outlines, as the artist was thought to have died before its completion.

Not so, Vatican conservators now believe. Arnold Nesselrath, art historian and head of technical and scientific research at the Vatican Museums, stated, "We know from 16th-century sources that Raphael painted two figures in this room as tests in the oil technique before he died. According to the sources, these two oil painted figures are of a much higher quality than the ones around them."

"Violent Storms Invade the Louvre, Damaging Art by Poussin and Other Holdings," *ArtNet News, 07/17/2017*

Louvre Museum officials have revealed the details of the artworks damaged by the violent storms that shook Paris on July 8-9. Two works by Nicolas Poussin were among those damaged on Sunday July 9, as the French capital saw

two inches of rainfall in just an hour, with the tempest flooding several metro stations and infiltrating the Louvre.

In a press release published last Thursday, the French museum confirmed that water had invaded the mezzanine of the Denon wing, affecting the “Arts of Islam” and “From the Mediterranean Orient to Roman Times” rooms, both of which have been closed pending hygrometric stabilization.

Water also entered the first floor of the Sully wing, affecting the “Salle des Sept-Cheminées” and Henri IV staircase, and the second floor of the Cour Carrée, affecting some rooms housing French paintings.

Despite the immediate implementation of emergency measures by museum staff, water damage was observed on the varnish of two (Spring and Fall) of the “Four Seasons” paintings by Nicolas Poussin, and a large format work by Jean-François de Troy, *The Triumph of Mordecai* (1736).

The Poussin works were immediately removed as a precaution and the Jean-François de Troy unhooked from the wall. Three paintings by Georges de Latour and Eustache Le Suer on the second floor of the Sully wing have also been evacuated as a preventative measure.

“A de Kooning, a Theft and an Enduring Mystery,” *New York Times*, 09/09/2017

Willem de Kooning completed “Woman-Ochre” in 1955. It depicts a defiantly naked figure facing the viewer, arms akimbo. Three years after de Kooning finished the painting, a benefactor of the University of Arizona Museum of Art in Tucson bought it for the institution. And 27 years after that, in 1985, it was stolen — cut from its frame.

It was finally recovered last month, and investigators are focusing on several theories. And one of them is, in its own way, extraordinary: They are trying to determine if the heist was engineered by a retired New York City teacher who donned women’s clothing and took his son along as his accomplice, and then hung the masterwork in the bedroom of his own rural New Mexico home, where it remained.

In other words, they are examining whether he stole a painting

now valued at in excess of \$100 million simply so he could enjoy it.

The teacher, Jerome Alter, and his wife, Rita, both died at 81, he in 2012 and she earlier this summer. “My driving instinct is to say: ‘This couldn’t be my aunt and uncle who had it since the beginning,’” said Ron Roseman, Rita Alter’s nephew.

David Van Auker, an antiques and furniture dealer whom Mr. Roseman hired to appraise the contents of the Alters’ home, discovered the painting. Some determined Google searching turned up photographs of the stolen artwork and an Arizona Republic story from 2015 about the 30th anniversary of the theft.

Mr. Van Auker called the museum that evening, and a day later, a Friday, a team of excited staffers — including a curator, an archivist and the interim director — were in Silver City examining the painting. They took it back to Tucson the following Monday, and preliminary work was done to authenticate it. It was a very emotional homecoming at the museum, which had been hoping for nearly 32 years to get “Woman-Ochre” back.

“Restoration Reveals Hidden Figures in Div School Reformation painting,” *Yale News*, 10/05/2017

Martin Luther sits at a table surrounded by other leaders of the Reformation. A Bible is opened in front of him. A candle burns at the table’s center.

The scene is depicted in a 17th-century painting that for years has graced a hallway at Yale Divinity School. The painting by an unknown artist was removed last year for restoration and cleaning. Its paint was cracked and flaking in places.

Kathy Hebb, a conservator, examined the painting under a microscope in her studio in Guilford, Connecticut, and saw colors underneath cracks in the painting’s foreground. She found other examples of the same scene and discovered something was missing from Yale’s version — an omission that entirely altered the painting’s meaning.

Other versions of the image, such as an engraving housed at the British Museum, show figures of a cardinal, a bull, a pope, and a monk in front of the

table futilely attempting to blow out the candle, which represents the light of the Reformation.

A heavy layer of gray paint concealed the four Catholic figures in Yale’s version as well as the text. Hebb set to work uncovering the lost figures. She has painstakingly shaved away the insoluble over-paint using surgical scalpels under a microscope. Slowly but surely, the cardinal, bull, pope, and monk have emerged.

Hundreds of years under the paint protected the Catholic figures, which are brighter and in better condition than their Protestant counterparts.

The painting has returned to the Divinity School where it will be on view in the Sarah Smith Gallery as part of an exhibit marking the upcoming 500th anniversary of Oct. 31, 1517, the day Luther delivered his Ninety-five Theses to the Archbishop of Mainz, igniting the Reformation.

“Banksy’s Snorting Copper Back on the Beat after Restoration,” *BBC News*, 10/06/2017

Jet washed, painted over and attacked by thieves, Banksy’s Snorting Copper artwork in London’s Shoreditch had been thought lost forever. So just how has the £1m piece been brought back into public view - and is it still “a Banksy” at all after so much restoration work?

The mural, stencilled on an East End toilet block under the cover of darkness in 2005 and showing a policeman apparently sniffing cocaine, garnered instant intrigue and notoriety. Having been hidden from view for a decade, it is now back on the beat in its original location after a painstaking restoration process.

“We knew - or we thought we knew - the Banksy was there,” says property developer Jonathan Ellis, who along with David Kyte purchased the site and turned it into a mix of residential and commercial units.

The section of wall was lifted off the building site and taken to Fine Art Restoration Company in Carlisle, Cumbria. A team of six experts worked tirelessly, initially compiling images of the undamaged piece and working out what lay where. Restorers carefully stripped and scraped each brick to reveal the underlying artwork.

“Lots of energy was put into finding out which brick had which piece of the artwork so when we were using the solvents to strip back the many layers of white paint we knew what colour we were looking for underneath,” says Chris Bull, technical director.

With the work complete and the section of wall now attached to a steel frame, the piece has been valued at £1.25m. Determined, they say, not to sell it on for a quick buck, Ellis and Kyte put it on public display on the site where it was first painted - although this time it is inside the revamped building and protected behind glass with the added security of CCTV cameras and alarms.

“Getty Director Tapped to Lead National Trust board,” *KPCC*, 10/12/2017

Timothy Whalen, director of the Getty Conservation Institute, has been elected to serve for three years as the Chair of the National Trust’s Board of Trustees, the organization announced Thursday.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a non-profit that works to preserve many of America’s historic places. The group is launching a new program to preserve “places that represent the diversity of the American experience,” according to a press release.

Whalen has directed the Getty Conservation Institute since 1998, where he leads efforts to advance conservation in visual art. He has also worked with the National Trust since 1999, first serving as an advisor and later as a member of the organization’s Board of Trustees..

“Drawing by Farting: Phantom Raspberry Blower of Old Copenhagen Town is Uncovered,” *Copenhagen Post*, 10/11/2017

The famous 19th century French flatulist Joseph ‘Le Pétomane’ Pujol, thanks to his ability to inhale air and water through his rectum, could perform all manner of fart noises, from crowing roosters and cannon fire to a stirring rendition of ‘La Marseillaise’. Corseted women at the time were known to laugh so hard they passed out.

But even Le Pétomane would have struggled to match the feat of the visitors to National Gallery of Denmark

and the Black Diamond, whose collective hydrogen sulphide emissions – containing sulphur, the ingredient that makes a fart stink – have considerably darkened lead-white pigment on numerous graphic works held by the establishments.

In some cases, it can take only a decade to alter a piece of art forever. Researchers at SMK detected changes to 433 Danish and foreign works kept in storage, while the Black Diamond discovered damage to 200 in its care. A 30-month investigation by experts hired by the institutions, who installed various hydrogen sulphide measuring devices, concluded that while the storage facilities may have been partially responsible, the main culprit was an old air conditioning system that sucked up and then emitted unfiltered air from the exhibition halls.

The establishments are accordingly updating their air conditioning systems.

“Portrait of Mary, Queen of Scots Discovered Underneath 16th Century Painting,” *Art Daily.com*, 10/31/2017

An unfinished portrait of a woman believed to be Mary, Queen of Scots has been found hidden beneath another 16th-century portrait during a significant research project recently conducted at the National Galleries of Scotland and the Courtauld Institute of Art.

The ghostly image of a woman, which shows compelling similarities to other, near-contemporary depictions of the queen, was revealed by X-ray photography during an examination of a portrait of Sir John Maitland, 1st Lord Maitland of Thirlestane, which is attributed to Adrian Vanson.

The portrait was one of a number of works by the portrait painters Adrian Vanson and Adam de Colone, two Netherlandish artists who worked in Scotland at the end of the 16th century and beginning of the 17th century, to be examined by conservator Dr. Caroline Rae, the Courtauld Institute of Art’s Caroline Villers Research Fellow, who recently undertook a collaborative research project in conjunction with NGS.

Dr. Rae was able to trace the outline of a woman, whose appearance indicates she is likely to be Mary., based on distinct similarities to other depictions of the queen made during her lifetime, and in particular during her later years.

Despite the fascination with which Mary, Queen of Scots was regarded both during her lifetime and subsequently, there are relatively few authentic portraits of her, and in particular few images from her life in Scotland.

“This Thangka Restorer is the Force behind an Isolated Monastery Museum in Ladakh,” *Architectural Digest*, 11/02/2017

Matho Monastery in Ladakh is home to a rare collection of 600-year-old Thangka paintings and a potpourri of artefacts from the trans-Himalayan region.

Founded in 1401 by Lama Dugpa Dorje, the Matho Gompa (monastery) is the only one in Ladakh that belongs to the Sakya School of Tibetan Buddhism. Currently housed in a couple of small rooms in the gompa, these artefacts will soon be shifted into the grand four-storeyed Matho Monastery Museum, which has been under construction since January 2011.

One of the major driving forces behind the museum is a 35-year-old Thangka restorer from France, Nelly Rieuf, who has been living and working in the gompa for the last 6 years. This French art conservator, also a mother to a toddler and now pregnant with her second child, says that being a woman has been more an advantage than a disadvantage.

However, the challenges of living in a high-altitude village are catching up with her as she grows older. While she is looking forward to the completion of the museum project sometime this year or next, she is constantly harrowed by the living conditions in the village,

“At 3,800 metres above sea level, with non-drinkable water, lack of diversity in food and being isolated from the world, the living conditions can be quite harsh.” Her team comprises her husband, Tashi, a public relations manager who communicates with the monks and the villagers, and Gurmet, a young student from Secmol, an alternative school in Leh.

In addition to these, international interns and experts propose projects on different aspects of museum making. The monks and the villagers also assist the team. Nelly takes pride in a team of local village women who now assist her with Thangka restoration.