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THE BABY AND THE BATHWATER
LECTURE FINDING AID & TRANSCRIPT

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Video Description

From 2010 Press Release: In the process of conservation of old, damaged, altered or dirty works of art, the conservator takes on the role of sleuth to determine what qualities about the work are original and what are not. To do this, one must also try to determine what the original intent of the artist was. This question is not always straightforward, as time can leave deep and sometimes indelible

impressions. How do time and other factors affect easel paintings, and how is this different from murals and other types of artwork? How does a conservator determine what was originally there or what was the original intent? How does the conservator then try to bring the painting back? This talk will examine these issues, along with more technical conservation questions, with illustrations of numerous conservation projects undertaken by Elizabeth Mehlin, painting conservator.

Elizabeth Mehlin is the owner and chief conservator of Mehlin Conservation, a private painting and mural conservation studio founded in 2007 in Ipswich, MA. She has over fifteen years experience in painting and mural conservation, and has worked in conservation labs and on projects in Seattle WA, Anchorage AK, Washington, DC, Montreal, Quebec, and Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

Elizabeth Mehlin has a Master's Degree in Conservation of Paintings from Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. She has a BA in Art History from Williams College, Williamstown, MA. She is a Professional Associate of the American Institute for Conservation and a member of AIC's Collections Emergency Response Team. She also performs museum and collections evaluations for Heritage Preservation, a Federal agency in Washington DC for their Risk Evaluation and Planning Program and Conservation Assessment Program.

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Subject List

David Rose

David Sears (1936-2013)

Lisa Mehlin

Painting conservation

Martha Oaks

Portuguese Hill

Gabrielle deVeaux Clements

Water damage

Varnish	Joshua Reynolds
Keith Ferris	Smithsonian Institution, Air and Space Museum
Solvents	Constantin Brumidi
Ken Callahan	Everett, Washington train station
Evan Cummings	Carhenge, Alliance Nebraska
Joliet Quebec	Ozias Leduc

United States Capitol, Senate Committee on Appropriations room

Women Artists from the Cape Ann Museum Collection: A Survey Exhibit (2009-10)

Transcript

Courtney Richardson 0:00
I am Courtney Richardson. I'm the Director of Education and Public Programs here at the museum. We have a very special lecture tonight, “The Baby and the Bathwater: Conservation Concerns,” by Lisa Mehlin. Lisa is the owner and chief conservator of Mehlin Conservation, a private painting and mural conservation studio founded in 2007, in Ipswich, Mass. She has over 15 years’ experience in painting and mural conservation and has worked in conservation labs and on projects in Seattle, Washington; Anchorage, Alaska; Washington, DC; Montreal, Quebec, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Big list, Lizzy. About a year ago, we contacted Lisa to help us with the minor little project. While in the many stages of planning our 2009 fall exhibition, “Women Artists from the Cape Ann Museum collection,” we came across a mural done by Gabrielle deVeaux Clemens, for the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The mural had been down in storage since it had been donated to the museum as part of Walker Hancock's estate. It was in extremely poor condition, rolled and folded around a really large two by four. But our curator and collections committee agreed that it was worth restoring. We approached Lisa to see if she would consider taking on this little project. And she said yes. Little did she know not only was she to restore the piece of art and history that we had in our storage, but she actually became part of the women artists from the Cape Ann Museum collection exhibition. The mural was displayed prominently in the gallery, and Lisa came in twice a week and sometimes on the weekends to work on it. She graciously hosted our docents at her studio and enthusiastically spoke with visitors, sometimes large school groups, sometimes foreign exchange students (who knows), about her work on the mural and the process that was unfolding before everyone’s eyes. When the exhibition closed, Lisa took the mural to her studio and it's been there ever since. So, hopefully we'll get an update tonight.
Please join me in welcoming Lisa Mehlin.

Lisa Mehlin 2:17
Thank you very much for that nice introduction and I won't introduce myself again since that's already been done. Thank you to everybody for coming
out tonight on this Celtics evening. I understand that we have some other priorities as well, so I'll try to keep this somewhat brief.

All right, I just briefly want to explain the phrase “baby and the bathwater.” I think most people are familiar with it, but they may not know its origins. This print here is from 1512. It's actually the first text reference to this expression; it’s from Germany. And in Europe during the 16th century baths were actually considered to be unhealthy, and so people didn't take them very often. And when somebody did go to the trouble to heat up a big bathwater tub, then they generally, the entire family would wash starting from oldest to youngest. And so, by the time the baby got around to the bathwater, you easily could throw the baby out, because you wouldn't be able to find it. So that's the origin of that idea. And tonight, what I'm going to be talking about is a similar concept with conservation of paintings and murals where what you're trying to find is the essence of what was original. We don't use the term restoration in the field anymore, because what we're actually after with the process of working with these paintings is to try to conserve what's left of what was there originally and not restore something back to some ideal of what we think it was. There have been very prominent examples for restoration efforts in the past. And now the effort is much more aimed towards preserving what you can see and not going any further than you need to you. There's certainly some amount of in-painting and things like that. But in general, the idea is to try to as best one can resurrect what was originally there.
This is an engraving by William Hogarth from 1761, Time Smoking a Painting. From early times people realized that paintings underwent significant changes through time. And that time generally darkened paintings, made them yellow, made them harder to see. I love this image. I just think it's wonderful. And I think that early on, people weren't really, they didn't quite understand the chemistry of what happened. They just realized that things got darker and harder to see. But people started to sort of almost look toward paintings that had that sort of Old Master glow as something to aspire to. And some painters actually painted their pictures with the intention of having them yellow and darkened. So, you have to kind of be aware of that as well, that some artists took that into consideration when they were choosing their colors.

So, what I'm going to talk about tonight is what happens to paintings due to time, accident, neglect and every other kind of thing under the sun that you can imagine. The next couple of slides are going to be somewhat disturbing for those of you who love art, and bear with me, they're all projects I've worked on, so they're not in the condition that you'll see them in tonight. Paintings can be, all kinds of things can happen. A lot of times what I see is paintings are stacked one on top of another and one will punch through the other. This is one of the worst examples of a torn painting I've ever seen. This painting was in a fire. On the upper right corner, I did a little test to see if I could resurrect the original colors. They’re there but it was really pretty obscured. This painting I had absolutely no idea what had happened to it. I

couldn't tell if it was dirty, if it had overpaint; I couldn't tell what was going on. There were just so many questions. I'll return to this one a little later on. Water damage. I'm going to go into a little more specific example of a water damaged mural that I worked on. Oh, actually, sorry, I'm gonna get into that in a minute. This is an example of lead white, which was used quite often in murals in Italy, in the early, in medieval times. So, this was actually an illuminated manuscript page, but it's the same idea. Lead white reacts with the oxygen in the air and becomes lead sulfide, which is black. And so, the white turns black when it's exposed to the air, especially polluted air. This can be reversed. So, there are actually conservators working on murals in Italy and trying to resurrect some of these paintings. You can actually see the original colors.

Mehlin 6:40
Here's a situation that comes up on occasion where certain artists, in particular Joshua Reynolds, is famous for his use of carmine and matter lake pigments in his paints and what those are, they're actually not pigments they're dyes. So, if you think of a tie dye, you're applying the dye to a fabric. So, the dye doesn't have really any color in and of itself until you put it onto something else. Dyes are also used in paintings and just like your tie dye that you run through the wash, they fade. And so, Joshua Reynolds paintings have a tendency to look very blanched and sort of, they look like dead people. And in fact, a contemporary of Reynolds spoke of his portraits and said, "the portraits (quote), the portraits perish sooner than the men they represented." And so, they were sort of already dying during his lifespan. And here you can see a pretty graphic example of that - the reds have totally faded out of this painting. And this is an example of a matter lake is the type of dye that was used, and he used them to glaze the features in particular, to give the sort of runny look to the face, and also, in this case, whole background as well.

So, I'm going to talk about dirt and varnish. These are things that accumulate on the surface of the painting. You may recognize this scene as the beginning of Bear Skin Neck. This is done by Liz Cook. Some of those buildings are still there. And the left third of the painting has been cleaned. The right section has both dirty varnish and surface grime on it. Typically, oil paintings do have a varnish layer and the varnish layer, if it's a natural resin varnish, like a damar or a cobalt resin varnish, will yellow. So, as it ages, it will get more and more yellow.

For those chemistry buffs in the audience, what we use to figure out about taking varnishes off is slightly different from surface dirt. With surface grime, we generally use water based cleaning agents like a type of soap - surfactants, and that will take off the grime and nicotine, that sort of thing. For varnish, you have to use solvent based systems and what you see here is a chart called the Tea's Chart that conservators use. It looks very confusing and it is. But essentially, if you look at the triangle, on the on the edges of it, there are essentially three different representations of ways that molecules hold together. There's polar forces, hydrogen bonding forces and dispersion forces, which are three ways that molecules react to one another. And the little regions that you see in the center there, represent various types of solvents and combinations of solvents. And the circles represent solubility parameters for certain types of varnishes. So, what we do is mix our solvents to try to find, based on what the varnish is, what

the, the best way to remove the varnish would be without affecting the oil paint layer. And that takes a lot of time to figure out and that's one of the reasons it takes - it's a good idea for a conservator to either be an apprentice for a while or to go to a graduate program in order to learn this system.

Here's another example of a dirt and varnish cleaning half done. I did actually notice in the process of doing this study, there was a change in the flag at the top, you can see. That flag was actually redone with a different name. You see that once in a while, but until the varnish was taken off, nobody knew that there'd been an alteration in the in the portrait.

Here's the painting that was in the fire. I've taken off the top layer of soot, there's actually still another layer of other embedded grime on the right-hand side that gives you some idea of how bad things can get on occasion.
This is an Aldro Hibbard for those of you who are Cape Ann art fans and half cleaned again.

Another thing we encounter quite often is water damage, frequently along the bottom edge of paintings. If you see them looking like this, most likely it's been sitting in water and the stretcher will absorb the water and it will buckle and the paint will sort of flake off like this.

Mehlin 10:59
This is a mural at the Air and Space Museum. It was by Keith Ferris, it's a 30 foot by 60-foot mural. There's a bathroom located on the other side of this wall and there was a leak over a long holiday weekend behind this mural. And the plumbers, rather than going in through the bathroom side, decided to go through the mural, just to make matters worse. So, you do sometimes find that the cure is worse than the problem. So, you can see there's holes cut and because it sat like this for three days, there was mold and everything else behind the mural.

It is on canvas and it's adhered to the wall. And it's actually in the jet aviation area if you ever are there. And there's big jet engines in front of this and, as you can see, computer terminals as well. So, it was a kind of a challenge to get back there and work on this. There we've pinned up the mural just to try to get access to the wall so that we can clean all the mess up behind there. And, as you can see, the plumbers just tore it to shreds. It was actually not that bad until they tried to fix [...]. So, what we did is basically fixed, prepped the wall, got all the mold and everything off the back and old adhesive which was of no use anymore. And then we reapplied a new layer of adhesive. This was actually water based adhesive, which helped to soften the canvas slightly in order to let it set back down, so it wouldn't all be kinked up. This is terrible slide, but it does show all that junk and gunk that was all over the back. On the left, there is the part that we haven't adhered yet and on the right, is the part of that has been adhered. And here's the mural. You can see how monstrous it is. The damage ran all the way along the bottom. And we were sort of lying behind those big jet fuselages there. So, there's a before and after – gives you some idea of the extent of the work. It was really quite some project.

Here's a situation where there's actually a deliberate alteration done to the painting. I was given this project by an art dealer who said, Well, I see that there's a flagpole on top of this building. But I want to know if it's, you know, British or not, because if it's not British, I, you know, I don't want it or something. So, I did some exploration into this piece. And I discovered that indeed, there is a British flag that had been obscured - somebody didn't want it on there. And in the process, I realized that first of all, most of the foamy ocean wasn't really that foamy after all. So, somebody had, you know, embellished that. And the boat that looked like, you know, was surviving this vicious storm was, in point of fact fishing, and I discovered fishing nets hanging when I took off the overpaint on this.

This is a terrible slide and I apologize, but it's an interesting case. This is Admiral Edward Monckton from Ottawa. It's an 18th century painting and I want to draw your attention to the lower right corner here. There's actually graffiti of a square-rigged ship down there. So, the graffiti is probably 18th century graffiti. So, it's really quite something when we were taking off the overpaint, that showed up and I just thought that was unbelievable.

Here's a case where someone brought me this painting and said, Well, this dog looks kind of funny. I don't know why. And I looked at it does really look funny. Look at the eyes and something was wrong with them. So, I did a little cleaning and there was old [...] on that eye. So, I think some child stabbed paying eyes. And so there it is, after I repaired it, and there's the eyes.

Mehlin 14:49
I'm running through these. I'm going to try to just make it quick. There's a lot of images here. So, this is a case where someone brought me this painting and I had no idea what was wrong with it. I just saw these strange little white squiggles all over it. And I came to realize that, after cleaning a little edge of it, if you look at the left-hand image there, I've taken off this white material which was actually overpaint. And I came to realize that paint, overpaint was covering old damages. And whoever had done the restoration work had used material that had gone opaque with time. So, all the overpaint was basically just chalked into blanche. And so, I had to take that all off. And it makes me, reminds me of a point which is that conservation materials are always changing. Things that were used 30 years ago are not used very often now. And so, what we try to do now is always do things in a reversible way so that it will be easier to take off down the road, in the event that something we're using now, like this, blanches or changes. And on the left, is the original with the way I got it and on the right, is after I retouched it up with better materials.

I'm going to talk a little bit about what kind of analysis we use for examining paintings to determine a little bit about what's original and what isn't. This is a four by five, black and white image. Believe it or not, we still use black and white quite a bit because it's a wonderful way to give information about a painting. Although it's quite hard to see here, it is quite dark, but we do use four by five format, black and white. This is a transmitted image of the same painting.

And you actually wouldn't have realized from the black and white that there's a lot of damage and losses in the paint, holes, and so forth.

This is an ultraviolet image of a painting and you can see there's a dot above the man's head that's an old damage that's been in-painted, and in-painting over paint generally shows up as black because it doesn't fluoresce the way the natural resin varnish does. So, you can learn a lot about painting by a UV image. Sometimes, however, if the overpaint and so on, the touching up, has been done a long time ago and the varnish is aged, then it doesn't always show.

This is a Charles Wilson Peale painting of his daughter Angelica. On the left-hand image, it kind of looks okay. But when you look at in the breaking light, which is another way to look at paintings, you can see that it's a big mess, and it's like a lunar landscape. On the left here, I've taken half the varnish off, and on the right, you can see the fluorescent layer of varnish and then there's no fluorescence on the right-hand side.

We use x-ray analysis as well to tell information about changes in the original design of the painting. We also use infrared, which I didn't have a good image of, but infrared shows you more of the under-drawing. An x-ray shows you sort of all the way through, the way it does with the human being. It goes all the way through the back - you get an image of the stretcher and everything else, unless somebody's used a lead white back, which works like a lead jacket that you put on to not, so x-rays don't always work if you have certain types of grounds. But in general, this gives you a lot of information about the history of the painting and the changes in the design. Here you can see in this, this is the Joshua Reynolds painting from before. There was a change in the hair, that you can see on the left there.

A lot of what we do involves solvents. And we do have to be careful to take good care of our lungs and our health. And so, I just wanted to put that image in here to mention that. We also, this is actually some images from graduate school that I took where we were learning how to grind our own paints. And the image on the left is from a research project I did on different types of adhesives. So, it involves, and even now I find that I end up doing a lot of R and D on my own and try to figure out what will work best. And I, the literature is always changing. Here's another example of, this is the paint mixing workshop the woman on the right is having a little too much fun, I think.

All right, now I'm going to talk about, well, what do you do in cases where there's an artwork that's huge, or it's folky, or was never really meant to be taken seriously as a work of art. I just love this. I don't know why. This is from in Wyoming, a big fireworks mural.

Mehlin 19:33
This is an image painted on a drum and it had problems in the very center of the drum, mainly because that's where all the vibration happens. And doing, looking more closely at the paint, I realized that there was actually, if you look at that little loss there, there's actually another painting underneath. So not only was this painted on something that's vibrating all the time,

but it also had a second layer of paint, which is probably part of the reason why the layer on top was not doing very well.

Here's a reverse painting on glass. And I see this a lot where the edges of the painting where it's gotten more exposure to humidity just start to curl and fail. And that's close it with that. When I took it all apart, I actually had to redo the edges completely. And reverse paintings are a monster unto themselves. And we won't get into too much detail about that. That's afterwards.

Now I'm going to talk about when paintings are actually a bigger scale operation than, it requires you to sort of use different resources and different approaches. This is in the Senate Appropriations Committee room in the Capitol. These are murals by Constantine Brumidi, who was considered to be the Michelangelo of the Capitol. I think the only real similarity is that they're both Italian but anyway, there's some test patches, you can see in that center area, where we're trying to see what had happened over the years. The Capitol, being like every other government building, more or less, changed their paint scheme and carpet by whim. And so, there were about six layers of different paint that they put in here when some of the colors in the original mural didn't go with the carpet or didn't go with their idea of what was fashionable. And as you can see, you know, we had to work on scaffolding from pretty high up, it was somewhat narrow, we weren't really able to use solvents except on weekends and when people weren't, when the Senate wasn't in session. So, if they had some big issues they were resolving, then we had to wait or work very late at night or so on. And working on scaffolding all day has its own issues. This is, we're working on the lunettes that you see on the upper left there. And, you know, basically, it just required taking a lot of breaks and being really careful not to overtire yourself too. Does anybody have a guess as to which is before and which is after?

Mehlin 22:07
The top one is before, I mean sorry, the top, the top one is after. The lower one, even though it looks brighter, those were 1970s paint schemes. And when we actually took them off, although the painting looks dingier on the top, it's actually a much more interesting and colorful piece. And this required painstaking work. It was several months of work for the lunettes and several months for, we were working also on the big main panels were down on the main floor of the same room. This used to be the Naval Affairs room. And so, these are all scenes of marine, women in various different sort of marine themes. Now, this, the backgrounds of these murals were repainted green because they didn't think that the color blue was really fashionable, and so we ended up having to, in the process of taking off the overpaint, it was discovered that the walls were crumbling behind these murals. And so, what you see here is actually structure that's been put up to re-infuse the walls with adhesive to, basically to shore it up. And again, painstaking, we had to work mostly with scalpels take all this off with scalpels, because we couldn't use a lot of solvents and they didn't work anyway, because the paint was house paint or something.

Mehlin 23:28
So, it's a labor of love sometimes. And we also uncovered little damages that had to be addressed. And typically, that happens in the process of fixing something you find that there's problems you didn't even know were there when you couldn't see everything. This is after.

This is a train station in Everett, Washington, and they actually built this train station that has sort of an unusual shape to fit some murals that were given to the town of Everett. They're Ken Callahan murals from WPA. And you can see there why the building is such a funny shape. These were actually in, they were in a lumber mill in Everett. And so, they're part of the history of that area. And so, but again, it was a very large-scale operation and required scaffolding and required actually special equipment too, including these big tables that we built. We actually had to rent a huge warehouse space to house these pieces while we're working on them. And the roller thing you see, on the right there, was a way to get access to the center of the piece when the big, big pieces, when they were lying flat - that way somebody could actually work on the painting, because actually accessing the center can be very tricky.

I threw this in just because it was an unusual situation. This was an Inuit sculpture from Northwest Territories, and it was made of alabaster, very powdery alabaster. You can see on the left image, the nose of the bear has broken off, and actually the foot has too, and in re-adhering these, we realized that it was just an absolute mess. It was powdering off everywhere. And the idea of shipping it back to the Northwest Territories was hair-raising. So, we ended up having to build a big structure so that it could then fit in a crate and it wouldn't rattle around. So that was that was kind of an interesting project. And some of what we do involves shipping and storage and trying to make sure that further damage doesn't occur.

This is a World War One poster, it's actually a painting done for a poster for Canada, but by Evan Cummings, who's a well-known painter of this type of painting. This is a huge, huge piece and it's so big that it wouldn't fit on the hot table. We actually had to put a new backing on it because the fabric was just rotting. And as you see half of the image, half of the painting is on the suction hot table, which is how we line paintings. And but not all of it. And so, we had to actually build a structure to support the rest of it. And here you see half of it is being lined. And that's done with pressure and heat. So, the right-hand half there is being lined right now and the left-hand part is not. And then what we would do is flip it around once it was done, and it's all done with, it's all under suction, but only one half is under heat. This is not advisable, by the way. But when you're dealing with really big pieces, you can't always do it all at once. So, this is a worst-case scenario, but it does sometimes happen. And that's the lining cooling down.

All right back to our strange China trade painting. This came in the other day, they're all, about a month and a half ago and I thought, you know, I have no idea what's going on with this. And somebody had scrubbed an area on the right there. If you look in the upper left image on the right side, there's something going on, but I thought it would have been completely scrubbed down to nothing. And I actually came to realize that it was scrubbed down to just the right level and that there was actually a fully intact painting underneath, which was a shocker to me. The

squares that you see there I use this sort of like a Band-Aid when the paint is so fragile that it doesn't, it won't survive moving around and handling. So, I make these little patches out of facing tissue, of Japanese tissue, just to hold the paint until I can deal with it. This painting hadn't been lined, as it turns out, so I did actually do a heat lining of this painting too, because the paint was just flaking off everywhere. And there you have a before and after.

Mehlin Speaker 27:40
This is a big project that I worked on in Joliet, Quebec; it was part of a big project for Heritage Quebec, where they raised money for preservation of this cathedral, which is considered to be one of the more important cathedrals in the environs of Quebec. And the main thing to know about this is where we were working was inside the church, but it was up in the clerestory level, right up in there. And the original steeple of this church had been so overbuilt, that in a storm it got knocked off and it smashed down into the top of the roof. So, what we encountered in looking at the paintings was that a lot of them had become buckled and torn and ripped, and had been basically tacked in place with nails. So, there were 35 paintings in there by Ozias Leduc, who's a famous Quebec artist. And these were the Stations of the Cross and many other murals as well mixed in. But you can see on the right there with the close up of the hand, the paintings were torn, all kinds of things went on. The team that we worked with there is on the left. The project took about six months.

We were working as you can see up the scaffolding up in the upper left image. We're working 75 feet above the ground. So, if you dropped something, it took about a second and a half to hear it hit down below. And we also were not able to use solvents here because there were a bunch of teams working at once in here. So, there were close quarters, it was very hard to access the pieces, and we couldn't use any solvent. So, what we ended up doing was peeling these pieces off, the worst ones that were the most deformed, peeling them off onto a big tube, half at a time top half and the bottom half, and re-adhere them with a rye starch paste, which is a traditional material that's actually used in Europe quite often. We use it in this case, to re-adhere the pieces without having to use solvents of any type. And here you see on the right-hand image, lower right, that we tacked the pieces back once we had glued them, we tacked them in the nail holes of where someone else had already nailed them in and used that to our advantage. So once in a while you can use damages to your advantage as well. And as you can see, this is us applying the glue, you know, the lighting was terrible the air was terrible, it's hot. We're applying the wheat starch paste with big scrapers. And on the lower right, you can see sometimes how bad the damage was. And that same image is above that that's after. And after the two left hand images are also after images.

Mehlin 30:20
All right, so now I'm going to move on to something completely different: "Carhenge." What do you do when somebody creates an artwork that's sort of destined to fail in terms of falling apart? If nobody has had the chance to see this, I highly recommend it. It's in Alliance, Nebraska. And some crazy guy made Stonehenge out of cars, but I really don't understand it. It's kind of neat, though. And not only are there cars but there's, other people that have built

sort of, you know, tribute sculptures there on the right. And I just think it's fabulous. Would I want to fix it? No.
This is also the only place I've ever seen a vending machine for bait. How did they even stock that?

Mehlin 31:08
All right, back to the Gabrielle deVeaux Clements mural. This is it in the installation of the exhibit upstairs. And you can see it has, you know, damages from being folded and so forth. And up close, you know, there's some stains that were on the piece that seem to be wood stain, when I could tell they didn't come off with anything, scratches and so forth.

These are not particularly good images, but the lower, the left image shows some patches that I did on the on the edges where it had gotten really frayed. And I reinforced those edges so that it could be re-stretched again. And I also did flattening of some of the worst creases which you can see on the right-hand image. And this is what it looks like right now in the studio - it's got fills and I'm toning in the losses and should be done pretty soon.
So that's it. Thanks very much. Anybody have questions?

Unknown Speaker 32:12
So, when you're fixing, say, the paint is very fragile and it's missing or whatever, do you actually paint in or do it all with solvents and varnishes? Do you actually redo paint?

Mehlin 32:25
I do redo paint that's missing. And it really depends on what the situation is, for example, with the big murals, it's, you are more likely to just tone in big areas of color that are missing. Whereas if it's a small easel painting and somebody wants it to be absolutely perfect, then then I do in-paint that, but I use materials that are reversible and actually with a UV light, you can see it immediately so you know what had been going on with it right away.

Unknown speaker 32:56
Is that terrifying? [...]

Mehlin 33:03
It's terrifying when you deal with, that's a very good question. For me Dutch paintings are the most terrifying because they're built up in glaze layers, like ten glaze layers. So, to redo that, you have to build it up in ten. But you have to do the right ten or it looks wrong. And there's actually something called metamerism that happens where if you use the wrong pigment, or a different combination of pigments, you don't get the same color, in certain light. So, you have to make sure that you in-paint in proper light, which is actually I use, I use daylight and I use tungsten light, because that's got the sort of broadest color spectrum but if you were to in-paint say with overhead, fluorescent lights and then take the painting outside it will look awful. Any other questions. Yes.

Unknown speaker 33:50
How do you feel about varnishing oil paintings? I mean, you think they should be or should not be and what kind of varnish should you use?

Mehlin 34:01
Are you an artist? Are you asking me as an artist?

Unknown speaker 34:03
I am.

Mehlin 34:04
I would advise, I think varnishing is a good idea because it protects the painting. There's a lot of very good modern varnishes that don't yellow and age. I can give you more specifics about what I use. But in general, varnishing doesn't really do harm to paintings. There are certain schools of painting, like Impressionists did not varnish things. And so, if I get a painting that's not varnished, I generally don't varnish it. Because I don't want it to change the, you know, there's a very satiny look to an unvarnished painting. And you can mimic that with a very thin spray coat of something so you're not actually putting a thick layer on it and so won't look so sheeny or shiny. But your question is actually a complicated one. I would say go ahead and varnish and damar is always a fine varnish. I still use it, it does yellow, you can put UV inhibitors in it so that it won't yellow. But those actually, the way they work is they're sort of, they will absorb the UV and break down. So eventually your varnish will yellow anyway, even if you do use those. So, I generally use synthetic non-yellowing varnishes. I specifically use one called Paraloid B-72, which is, it's a methyl methacrylate copolymer. It's like a, like a super glue, sort of, but it's a combo of two types of versions of superglue that don't get very hard over time. So, the reason you have a copolymer is that one stays sort of more soluble and the other one gives you the strength, and that actually also works as an adhesive. I use that very often as an adhesive, like to glue the bear back together we used the same thing. Paraloid B-72. You can order it from online conservation supply places. I mix all my varnishes myself, I should mention that. I would not recommend buying Windsor and Newton damar or anything because they mix it in turpentine. And turpentine is a big no-no because it ages, it ages and yellows so much more so than if you mix it in mineral spirits.

Unknown speaker 36:16
If you were going to remove the varnish, what do you use?

Mehlin 36:20
Well, I use a variety of things, depending on how old the varnish is and what it is, and I can't really even say what I would recommend, unless it's a brand-new varnish layer. Otherwise, it's really tricky. You have to try a bunch of different things. Yes.

Unknown Speaker 36:38

I had a couple questions. On this painting you're showing here, the patches, are they to hold down flaking paint? (Mehlin: yes) And then, when you line the painting, then it adheres the paint to the canvas, correct?

Mehlin 36:53
Yeah. It's like putting a backing on something. Right. So, people say well, how's that gonna help the paint layer and what it does is it heats up and, if you're talking about a heat lining, there are also cold linings, and they don't all infuse through the paint. But if you have a painting that has a problem with the paint layer itself, you put a backing on it, assuming that the fabric is, you know, the support fabric is failing, which is the case here. I generally don't line unless I have no other recourse, but yes, these patches basically I put on only in the worst-case situations, and I use actually Japanese tissue and rabbit skin glue, strangely enough, for these, almost always. And then I can set the paint down slightly, but then I actually line it like this, I line it with the patches still on. And because the lining adhesive that I'm using is solvent based and my rabbit skin glue is water based, I can just remove it right away when I'm done. That's another thing we do is play with solvent based and water based systems so that you can actually make kind of like a sandwich of stuff and be able to undo some of it but not all of it.

Thank you very much for coming out.