

CMOP

Cleaning Modern Oil Paints

Partnership

- **University of Amsterdam - Faculty of Humanities (Project Leader) - NETHERLANDS**
- Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands - NETHERLANDS
- Tate - UK
- Courtauld Institute of Art - Department of Conservation & Technology - NETHERLANDS
- University of Pisa - Department of Chemistry and Industrial Chemistry – ITALY

Project Summary

Within the primary context of safeguarding tangible heritage for current and future generations, 20th- and 21st-century oil paintings are presenting a range of challenging problems that are distinctly different from those noted in paintings from previous centuries. Problems are often but not exclusively associated with unvarnished, unprotected surfaces.

Phenomena increasingly observed include the formation of vulnerable surface ‘skins’ of medium on paint surfaces, efflorescence, unpredictable water and solvent sensitivity, and alarming incidences of dripping paints, several years after the paintings have been completed. The current lack of understanding of the nature of change in modern manufactured artists’ oil paints means that established empirical approaches to conservation treatments such as surface cleaning are not applicable to a great number of works. In particular, commonly used systems that rely upon water as a major component cannot be safely applied to clean modern oil paintings.

Thus far, few alternative methods of treatment have proven effective and as a consequence the presentation of modern oil paintings may be compromised. This project aims to make a significant impact on our understanding of the reasons behind these alarming problems by exploring several aspects of paint formulations (oil [lipid] fraction, pigment-medium interactions, additives), and case study works of art. Those explorations will guide the development of surface cleaning systems that are more appropriate for use on the increasing numbers of unvarnished oil paintings in international and private collections.

New cleaning systems will be trialled on works of art in several internationally significant public collections. This information will be disseminated via web platforms, seminars, conferences and a documentary for the general public. The cleaning systems will be introduced via existing continuous professional development courses and workshops/seminars aimed at practising conservators and conservation students, thereby offering practical solutions to current and future conservators facing these difficult challenges.