

## Cleaning of Acrylic Painted Surfaces

July 12 – 15, 2016

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art  
Sarasota, Florida

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**SESSION TITLE:** Acrylic Paint Basics

**INSTRUCTOR:** Tom Learner

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### ABSTRACT

Acrylic paints have been available since the 1940s, initially in solution form and, shortly after, as water-borne emulsions. The emulsion form has been widely used by artists ever since. This session will introduce all participants to some of the main concepts and features of acrylic paints, including an overview of their history and use, some basic chemistry, what this means in terms of their behaviour, how they will/may alter with age, and how this might affect their subsequent conservation. The session will also give an overview of some broad trends that these paints display in their response to wet cleaning systems, in preparation for the more in-depth studies to be discussed over the next few days. The main classes of cleaning systems to be explored will also be introduced.

### OBJECTIVES


- To outline the main aims of this particular workshop: "Research into Practice".
- To explore and understand the basic chemistry and properties of acrylic paints, and how they might vary with brand, age, pigment type etc.
- To discuss the main conservation issues of cleaning of acrylic painted surfaces
- To introduce some key concepts in research exploring the effects of wet cleaning systems on acrylic paint films and works of art.
- To introduce the main classes of cleaning systems that will be explored during the workshop.

### CONTENT OUTLINE

The session will provide participants with the salient information on acrylic emulsion paints that will be needed to properly digest the discussion on cleaning systems that will follow in the rest of the workshop. A brief description of the history and uses of acrylic paints will be given, including known dates of introduction, and will be compared to other major classes of modern, synthetic paints. An overview of basic chemistry and physical properties of acrylics will be guided by highlighting features that differentiate them from other paint types. Particular attention will be placed on the role and behaviour of the surfactant, one of several additives added to acrylic emulsion paints during the manufacturing process, and now known to have a significant effect on the appearance and aging of acrylics, as well as their response to cleaning systems. The section introduces the various issues of cleaning and will outline some fundamental concepts, in terms of likely physical/chemical changes experienced by the paints with cleaning.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Crook, J., and T. Learner. (2000). *The Impact of Modern Paints*. London: Tate Publishing

 Learner, T. and B. Ormsby. (2009). "Cleaning acrylic emulsion paints: putting research into context." *Proceedings of SFICC colloquium: Conservation-restauration des oeuvres contemporaines*: 193-199.

Learner, T., P. Smithen, J. Krueger and M. Schilling (eds). (2007). *Modern Paints Uncovered*, Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles.



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## Session Outline cont'd.

Ormsby, B., and T. Learner. (2006). "The effects of surface cleaning on acrylic emulsion paintings – a Preliminary Investigation". *Surface Cleaning – Material and Methods*: 135-149.

Phenix, A., and T. Learner. (2009). *Cleaning acrylic painted surfaces: Research into practice*. Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles.

 = Essential reading material

 = Available online



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