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Conserving Active Matter: Materials Science

Funded by The
Andrew W.
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Foundation

DATE

March 28–29, 2019
9:00 am – 4:45 pm

LOCATION

**38 West 86th
Street, Lecture Hall**

CONTACT

This event is part of “Conserving Active Matter: A Cultures of Conservation Research Project,” a collaboration between Bard Graduate Center, the Humboldt University (Berlin), and the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam), generously supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This initiative aims to bring new developments in materials science and new ways of thinking about matter to create new ways of thinking about the future of conservation. The project is articulated through semester-themed explorations along four axes: Indigenous ontologies (spring 2018), history (fall 2018), materials science (spring 2019), and philosophy (fall 2019).

When one examines a painted surface, whether a New Kingdom Egyptian sarcophagus or a John

academicevents@bgc.bard.edu Singer Sargent portrait, it appears as

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though the paint is dry, and is therefore no longer interacting with itself or its environment. Nothing could be further from the truth. Paint is constantly active, responding to its surroundings and reacting with (for example) the water, light, and oxygen in its local environment. This can result in fading, darkening, or any number of other visual and physical phenomena including chalking and spalling. Other works of cultural heritage are similarly restive, from medieval stained glasses to modern and contemporary works prepared from a diversity of alloys and plastics. Objects that appear stable (such as a bronze with a green patina) can be rapidly reduced to dust in the wrong environment. More than one type of museum object (such as ancient Egyptian faience and cellulose nitrate film) have been known to degrade via explosion, and in the latter example to also “infect” their neighboring objects through the production of volatile corrosive gases. While one can easily identify a “dirty dozen” of artists’ pigments that are among the

most active (such as Vincent Van Gogh's infamous geranium lake red), the constant innovations of artists, chemists, and materials scientists means that there is a ready supply of challenging new objects and systems for art conservators and cultural heritage scientists to study and preserve. The input of art historians, historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists in this type of object-oriented study is critical to understanding the interpretation challenges represented by these altered works. Join us for two days of discussion about object change, from the molecular to the catastrophic to the magnificent, and learn about the surprising afterlives of works of art that are made from continuously evolving materials.

Thursday, March 28

9–9:15 am

Welcome and Introduction

Peter N. Miller, Bard Graduate Center

Jennifer L. Mass, Bard Graduate Center

9:15 am–12:30 pm

Metamorphosis and the Modern

James Coddington, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University

Jessica Walthew, Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum

Margo Delidow, Whryta

Contemporary Art Conservation;

Whitney Museum of American Art

Clara Rojas Sebesta, Whitney

Museum of American Art

Chris McGlinchey, The Museum of Modern Art

12:30–1:30 pm

Lunch Break

1:30–4:45 pm

Undead Objects: Preservation of the Source Code

Marc Sebastian Walton,
Northwestern University

Deena Engel, New York University

Catherine S. Mallinckrodt, Virginia
Museum of Fine Arts

Ashley Duhrkoop, Virginia Museum
of Fine Arts

Pepe Karmel, New York University

James Coddington, Institute of Fine
Arts, New York University

Friday, March 29

9–9:15 am

Welcome and Introduction

Jennifer L. Mass, Bard Graduate
Center

9:15 am–12:30 pm

**The Death of a Painting: Metal Soaps
and Molecular Self Assembly**

Francesca Casadio, The Art Institute
of Chicago

Barbara Berrie, National Gallery of
Art

Silvia Centeno, The Metropolitan
Museum of Art

Petria Noble, Rijksmuseum

12:30–1:30 pm

Lunch Break

1:30–4:45 pm

**The Afterlife: Materials Research and
Reanimating Objects**

Matthew Collins, Natural History
Museum of Denmark

Glenn Gates, The Walters Art
Museum

Tim Wess, University of the
Sunshine Coast

Marco Leona, The Metropolitan
Museum of Art

*This event is part of our **Cultures of***

*Conservation initiative, supported by
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.*

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