

MEDIA RELEASE

FORENSIC INVESTIGATION INTO THE MYSTERIES OF CONSERVING MINIMALIST PAINTINGS REVEALED IN SPECIAL EXHIBITION OF AD REINHARDT *BLACK PAINTING*

Irreparably Damaged Painting by Ad Reinhardt is Focus of Conservation Study and the Development of New Restoration Techniques and Criteria for Authenticity

Exhibition: *IMAGELESS: The Scientific Study and Experimental Treatment of an Ad Reinhardt Black Painting*

Venue: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, New York City

Dates: July 11 – September 14, 2008

(NEW YORK, NY – March 14, 2008) – In 2001 an important but irreparably damaged painting by Ad Reinhardt, *Black Painting* (1960-1966), was donated by AXA Art Insurance to the Guggenheim Museum as part of an unprecedented conservation research study and collaboration with The Museum of Modern Art. Over the next five years, conservators, scientists, curators, and artists who participated in the AXA Art Conservation Project carried out a complete physical examination and scientific analyses of the work which helped to create a dossier of information about Reinhardt's working methods and subsequent experimental restoration techniques used on the painting.

The exhibition *Imageless: The Scientific Study and Experimental Treatment of an Ad Reinhardt Black Painting* will present a focused presentation whereby the public will enter the world of the conservator as forensic scientist, working collaboratively with a group of experts, to uncover the mystery hidden beneath the monochromatic black painting. Through didactic materials, mock-ups, and presentation of sample materials, the public will learn the extent of such a comprehensive research project in the field of conservation. For comparative viewing and appreciation of the subtleties of surface, the exhibition will also include an adjacent room with several pristine Reinhardt paintings.

Imageless: The Scientific Study and Experimental Treatment of an Ad Reinhardt Black Painting is organized by Carol Stringari, Chief Conservator of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation's Conservation Department, in collaboration with the Sackler Center for Arts Education.

This exhibition is made possible by a generous grant from AXA Art Insurance Corporation and AXA Foundation.

The study presented in this exhibition contributed to the consideration of how imageless surfaces and flat planes of color are perceived; how an artist's hand (or lack of hand) confers meaning; and the essential criteria for authenticity. The in-depth study of the Reinhardt painting brought to the fore a number of concerns about the challenging treatment of minimalist or monochromatic paintings, their vulnerability, ethical choices in conservation, and experimental methodologies for treating these surfaces.

A number of techniques were tested to treat the surface of the Reinhardt work, both to remove layers of overpaint and to treat blemishes, cracking and burnishes on the surface. In particular, several laser techniques were tested extensively to establish their efficacy in the treatment of difficult monochromatic surfaces, which present particular challenges for conservators. Several lasers were tested at the Foundation for Research and Technology, Institute of Electronic Structure and Laser in Crete, Greece. An excimer laser was coupled with an advanced workstation designed by Art Innovations in Enschede, to carefully control the laser and perform Laser Induced Spectroscopy (LIBS) during cleaning. A number of conservators and scientists collaborated on the design and experimental laser treatment, which utilized the mechanized easel and "optical arm" to deliver the laser to the surface with the most favorable parameters. The system that was utilized produced promising results, and since that time the team has proposed a number of improvements to refine this technique.

Through various analytical methods such as Fourier Transform Infrared Analysis (FTIR), Scanning electron microscopy (SEM), Raman spectroscopy, and laser induced breakdown spectroscopy (LIBS), the team was able to identify the chemical composition of the materials, and identify restoration layers and damages above the surface of the original painting.

Through this intimate viewing of the surface and the accompanying presentation on the conservation processes, the viewer will be able to appreciate the extraordinary technique of the artist, and the importance of understanding these fine details of an imageless painting, which is so often bypassed by the casual viewer and misunderstood by the general public. Through the eyes of conservators, artists and scholars the paintings will be made accessible, encourage discourse and present knowledge about the physical components of a highly conceptual and important artwork from the 1960's.

Education Programs

A full schedule of educational programs will be presented under the auspices of the Sackler Center for Arts Education during the run of the exhibition. Box Office at 212 423 3587 or visit www.guggenheim.org/education. Included among these programs will be *Imageless: Symposium*, on Saturday, September 13. Organized by Carol Stringari, Chief Conservator, and made possible by the National Endowment for the Arts, this day-long event will feature invited art and science professionals in an exploration of the perception of monochromatic paintings and new research practices in the conservation of these fragile uninflected surfaces.

Admission and Museum Hours

\$18 adults, \$15 students/seniors (65+), children under 12 free.

Admission includes audio guide.

Saturday to Wednesday, 10 AM to 5:45 PM;

Friday, 10 AM to 7:45 PM.

Closed Thursday.

On Friday evenings, beginning at 5:45 PM, the museum hosts Pay What You Wish.

For general information call, 212 423 3500, or visit www.guggenheim.org.

#1087

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Guggenheim MUSEUM

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