

**Project to survey reference collections of artist material specimens and to conduct a feasibility study for shared cataloguing practice**

Knowledge derived from historical artist reference materials is fundamental to contemporary conservation practice. Exemplified by the establishment of the Department for Technical Studies in 1928 by Edward Forbes at Harvard's Fogg Museum, research based on reference collections provides the foundation for greater understanding of material culture as well as the working practices of individual artists. This value is broadly recognized and is reflected in the creation and maintenance of numerous repositories of artist materials that richly inform the technical history of art and artifacts.

Funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Arts and Cultural Heritage Program, The Lens Media Lab at Yale University will study the development of an online, open access platform for cataloging reference collections of artist materials (e.g. pigments, resins, papers, etc.). The project goals are two-fold: (1) to conduct an international survey of significant repositories of artist material reference samples and (2) to identify a viable model for online dissemination of associated catalog information. This work would provide the basis for evaluating the potential value of increased access to artist reference materials for fields including technical art history and conservation. The survey also would identify potential institutional partners willing and able to share catalog information on the reference samples they possess and those that would likewise permit and enable scholarly access to these materials. This work would be coupled to research into the application and integration of emergent semantic web models for accessing cultural heritage collections for the cataloging artist material references.

The principal deliverable of the project would be a report with detailed findings from the survey, including significant collections of artist material references, combined with the description of a workable model for online dissemination of associated catalog information. The report also would provide an assessment of the potential scholarly benefits of greater access to specific artist material reference collections and would identify likely partners prepared to undertake future work in this area. Assuming a positive evaluation and encouraging results, the report could form the basis for a further proposal to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for the development of an open access platform cataloging reference collections of artist materials as well as an online implementation of this model for selected collections of significant and diverse media.

Principal investigator:

Paul Messier

Pritzker Director, Lens Media Lab

Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Yale University West Campus

Email: paul.messier@yale.edu

Telephone: (203) 737-3159