

Tempera Painting (Munich, 15–17 Mar 18)

Pinakothek der Moderne, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen in Munich,

Germany, Mar 15–17, 2018

Deadline: May 31, 2017

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Conference on 'Tempera painting between 1800 and 1950. Experiments and innovations from the Nazarene movement to abstract art'

hosted by the Doerner Institut and funded by VolkswagenStiftung and the EU project H2020 IPERION CH

The conference aims to explore the revival of tempera painting between 1800 and 1950 from the perspectives of art history, technical art history, conservation and material analysis. In the 19th century, the defining feature of tempera paints was their water-miscibility – a characteristic that clearly separated them from oil paints. In the first half of the 20th century, this use of the term was extended by some scholars and artists to every mixture of aqueous and non-aqueous binding media.

The renewed interest in tempera paints in the 19th century was, in part, due to a growing dissatisfaction with oil paints, which were felt to have too many drawbacks, such as insufficient luminosity of colour, slowness in drying and a tendency to crack, wrinkle and darken as they aged. Tempera, revered as part of the lost technique of the 'Old Masters', seemed a failsafe means with which to address the problems at hand. The study and 'rediscovery' of historic tempera systems took various forms: scholarship applied to the ancient texts on painting, such as Cennino Cennini's *Il libro dell'arte*, direct examination of the paintings of antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as well as material analysis and characterisation.

These findings influenced artists' practice and their choices of binding media: They experimented with a growing number of historically oriented and at the same time innovative tempera formulations. These could contain any of the following ingredients, often in complex combinations: egg, animal glue, plant gums, casein, waxes, soaps, milk, resins, glycerine and even drying oils.

These paints were used both in Europe and America in manifold ways and with various motivations: At the beginning of the 19th century mural painters of the German Nazarene movement used tempera, later followed by those of the Wilhelmine era and by the French artist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. From c. 1850 onwards, tempera paints were employed in easel painting by many artists of a wide variety of schools (e.g. Academism, Symbolism, Historicism, Expressionism, New Realism, Surrealism, Futurism), including Arnold Böcklin, Wassily Kandinsky, Otto Mueller, Paul Klee, Otto Dix, Giorgio de Chirico and Gino Severini. However, they were also used for polychromy of sculpture, miniature painting on paper, scene painting and for room decoration.

To better understand the tempera revival and its consequences for 19th and 20th-century art, the conference aims to create an interdisciplinary platform for knowledge exchange. A program of lectures and poster presentations will be complemented by practical workshops on tempera painting based on historic recipes as well as guided tours to Munich galleries, where we will explore the visual effects of tempera paints in 19th and early 20th-century works of art.

The conference will focus on the following topics:

1. The bigger picture: Exploring the cultural historical context of the 19th and early 20th century's interest in painting techniques of the past.

- developments in nineteenth and twentieth-century art theory (e.g. "material-oriented aesthetics") and discussion of their possible interactions with the interest in tempera painting
- tempera painting as an alternative trajectory to the dominant history of oil painting
- the various impacts of industrialization on artists' materials, ideas and working processes in relation to the interest in painting techniques of the past
- interactions between tempera painting techniques with other contemporaneous technologies (e.g. photography, printing processes, newly introduced machines for paint application such as air-brush etc.)

2. A closer look at the sources: terminology and interpretation of 19th and early 20th-century sources on tempera painting.

- art-technical sources on tempera painting techniques
- problems of terminology and language: meaning and interchangeability of the terms 'tempera', 'Leimfarbe', 'Wasserfarbe', 'watercolor', 'distemper', 'peinture a la colle', 'détrempe', 'tempera grassa' etc. in 19th and 20th-century sources

3. In the studio: the practice of tempera painting between 1800 and 1950 and possible implications for conservation decisions.

- the manifold ways of working in tempera on different supports, for painting sculpture, for mural, scene and decorative painting in European countries and in North and South America
- artists' individual motivations, their definition(s) of the term 'tempera', their sources and materials and their role models
- relations between individual painting techniques or working processes and the artistic content

4. A closer look at the material: Methods for the scientific investigation of complex binder mixtures and materials in multilayered works of art. Progress and challenges in analysis and interpretation of analytical results.

We invite art historians, technical art historians, conservators, and conservation and academic scientists to submit abstracts in English, of maximum 500 words, for lectures or posters. They must contain the title, name(s) of author(s) and indicate the kind of contribution intended (lecture or poster). All contributions will be held in English. Help for translations of lecture manuscripts can be provided on request. Please send the abstracts together with a short biography (max 100 words) by 31 May 2017 to tempera@doernerinstitut.de. We intend to publish all lectures and posters as postprints.

We are happy to support young researchers with travel grants (max. 350€ each). Their applications should contain the abovementioned abstract, the short biography and a short description of the individual scientific or scholarly interest (the latter max. 100 words).

For further information please go to www.doernerinstitut.de/tempera_2018/en/index.html

Reference:

CFP: Tempera Painting (Munich, 15-17 Mar 18). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 31, 2017 (accessed Apr 6, 2026),

<<https://arthist.net/archive/15106>>.