

## Lapis Lazuli (Houston, 21 Feb 09)

James Clifton

The 33rd Annual Ruth K. Shartle Symposium

February 21, 2009

1:00 PM - 6:00 PM

at the Caroline Wiess Law Building, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

This symposium is open to the public and free with general museum admission. Museum members always receive free admission. No registration required.

Lapis Lazuli: A Blue More Precious than Gold

Lapis lazuli has been used for millennia to create highly-prized objects and extraordinary works of art. Among the few deposits of this rare blue stone, those in the Kokcha River valley of present-day Afghanistan were the first to be mined, beginning approximately 6,000 years ago

Natural ultramarine is a blue pigment prepared from lapis lazuli through laborious grinding and refining of the stone. Its earliest documented use appears on Afghan cave temple walls from the sixth and seventh centuries. Ultramarine has also been identified on Persian miniatures, Chinese paintings, and Indian murals. In Medieval and Renaissance Europe, ultramarine was often reserved for the robes of Christ and the Virgin Mary in panel paintings and illuminated manuscripts. The manufacture of the pigment's synthetic form since the 1820s has made ultramarine more widely available to artists and for industrial purposes.

At the 33rd Annual Ruth K. Shartle Symposium, five distinguished speakers trace the dissemination of lapis lazuli over several millennia, discuss recent advances in art conservation-related scientific research on natural ultramarine, and explore the unique role of lapis lazuli in the arts of cultures around the world.

The 33rd Annual Ruth K. Shartle Symposium is made possible by a generous grant from The Brown Foundation, Inc.

### PROGRAM

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Dr. Anikó Bezur, Andrew W. Mellon Research Scientist, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Menil Collection, Houston

Lapis Lazuli and other Silk Road Gems

Mark Mauthner, Assistant Curator - Data Management Specialist, Gemological Institute of America, Carlsbad, California

Lapis Lazuli and Ultramarine: From Ancient Near East to Islam

Dr. Francesca Leoni, Assistant Curator of the Arts of the Islamic World, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Short Refreshment Break

Geological Sourcing of Lapis Lazuli from Works of Art

Dr. Gregory D. Smith, Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Professor of Conservation Science, Buffalo State College, Art Conservation Department, Buffalo, New York

"A noble, beautiful, and most perfect color, surpassing all colors": Lapis Lazuli and Ultramarine Blue in European Painting

Dr. James Clifton, Director of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation and Curator of Renaissance and Baroque Painting, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

How Does Ultramarine Blue Fade?

Dr. Eleonora Del Federico, Associate Professor of Chemistry, Department of Mathematics and Science, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York

Questions/Discussion

At the conclusion of the symposium you are invited to join the speakers for a wine reception in the lobby of the museum's Audrey Jones Beck Building.

#### LOCATION / FURTHER INFORMATION

Brown Auditorium Theater  
The Caroline Wiess Law Building  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston  
1001 Bissonnet  
713-639-7300  
lectures@mfah.org  
www.mfah.org

#### Reference:

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