GETTY FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES NEW GRANT INITIATIVE TO PRESERVE CRITICAL CONSERVATION SKILLS FOR PAINTINGS ON CANVAS

LOS ANGELES – The Getty Foundation announced today the launch of Conserving Canvas, a new initiative that aims to ensure that critical conservation skills needed to care for paintings on canvas do not disappear. Conserving Canvas will keep much-needed skills alive through a number of grants that support the conservation of paintings, workshops, seminars, training residencies, and a major symposium. The initiative’s initial projects support the study and conservation of world-renowned works on canvas, including Thomas Gainsborough’s The Blue Boy (1770), Anthony van Dyck’s Equestrian Portrait of Charles I (1637-8), and François Boucher’s Vertumnus and Pomona (1757).

The inaugural Conserving Canvas grantees include The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA; the National Gallery, London; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Statens Historiska Museer, Sweden; Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg, the Netherlands; University of Glasgow, Scotland; and Yale University.
“Through extensive consultation with specialists in the conservation field including experts at the Getty, we heard that there is a growing skills gap between senior conservators who learned treatments of paintings on canvas decades ago and newer museum conservators who need to address pressing problems for paintings in their own collections,” says Deborah Marrow, director of the Getty Foundation. “Conserving Canvas creates opportunities for international collaboration among conservation professionals, so that critical knowledge can be shared, discussed, and disseminated.”

Canvas supports became popular at the end of the 15th century, and have continued to be the primary material on which painters create their work. For centuries, it was common for restorers and conservators to protect these paintings by backing or lining them with another canvas to add general structural strength or repair rips and tears. As these linings age, some can create strains on the original canvas that cause the paint layer to separate and “cup” away from the fabric support. In other instances bubbles can form, often significantly disfiguring the painted image.

Recent decades have seen the field embrace minimal intervention for paintings on canvas—altering an existing artwork as little as possible—as best practice, but this comes at a price. Today many paintings in museum collections around the world that were lined—and now have structural failures—are not being treated, largely because conservators feel insufficiently experienced with existing practices for safe intervention. While this loss of ‘bench skills’ is a concern for the field-at-large, it is particularly pressing for the care of paintings on canvas. There are thousands of old master paintings on fabric supports that were lined in the past, and these works are now beginning to need re-treatment. In addition, modern and contemporary paintings – especially larger works – tend to be more delicate due to the often experimental nature of artist’s materials and techniques. If the issue is not addressed, several generations of conservators are at risk of not being prepared to care for masterpieces on canvas in collections worldwide.

Conserving Canvas will foster inter-generational and inter-organizational sharing of information and best practices by creating opportunities where conservators can regain knowledge about past conservation techniques, work together to make decisions, and experience hands-on training. To this end, a major symposium that addresses the state of the field, the first such meeting since 1974, will be held at Yale University in October 2019.
"For years museum conservators have adopted a ‘wait and monitor’ approach to any major structural intervention on canvas paintings. But the danger is that once treatment can no longer be delayed, the experts with direct knowledge of lining and re-lining won’t be there to offer help," says Antoine Wilmering, senior program officer at the Getty Foundation. "The field will benefit when conservators are aware of the full range of treatment options available for canvas paintings, whether that is lining or re-lining the canvas, removing a lining and its adhesives, tear mending or re-weaving losses in a canvas, or any other type of intervention. Conserving Canvas will provide international dialogue and opportunities to see these techniques in action so that professionals can advance their practice before it's too late."

More information about Conserving Canvas can be found at:

Conserving Canvas: Grants Awarded

The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA

Thomas Gainsborough’s The Blue Boy is the most famous painting in the Huntington’s collection, having been on display for nearly 100 years without interruption. Despite the best of care, conservation treatment is now necessary to address lifting and flaking paint, the separation of the canvas from its support lining, and the accrual of layers of varnish on the painting’s surface. A grant is allowing the Huntington to bring together highly respected experts in the conservation of 18th-century British canvas paintings in order to finalize the treatment plan for addressing the structural concerns. A cohort of conservators is gaining valuable experience by participating in the decision-making process and structural intervention of this highly significant and celebrated canvas painting. During the year-long conservation treatment, The Blue Boy is remaining largely on public view in order to educate vast audiences about the field of preservation.

Grant awarded: $150,000 (2018)
The National Gallery, London
With Getty support, the National Gallery, London is undertaking a major conservation treatment of one of the most prominent canvas paintings in its collection, Anthony van Dyck’s *Equestrian Portrait of Charles I* (1637-8). Since its acquisition in 1885, the monumental work—which depicts the king as the divinely chosen ruler of Great Britain—has rarely been off view. While the painting is in relatively good condition, the present lining is failing, and the original canvas is too weak to hold the painting up by itself. Old tears are lifting at the edges, and a network of surface cracks (which indicate the painting has been rolled in the past) disrupt the image. Additionally, the picture surface is somewhat rippled in parts from earlier structural treatments. Led by National Gallery conservators, a complex conservation intervention will remove the current lining and apply a new one. Visiting conservators will receive training in the techniques and complex logistics of relining a large and fragile painting, an undertaking in which the National Gallery’s conservation department has particular expertise. A culminating workshop will share the project results with a larger group of 20–30 specialists in the field.

*Grant awarded: £70,800 (2018)*

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA
François Boucher’s *Vertumnus and Pomona* (1757) is one of the largest paintings in the European collection of the Legion of Honor, which together with the de Young museum compose the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. For many years, the painting was the focal point of a large gallery devoted to 18th-century French and Italian art; however, upon the gallery’s reinstallation in 2013, the painting was removed from display due to its appearance. The work had become increasingly compromised by canvas distortions, a failing lining, yellowed surface varnish, and discolored retouching. Led by senior conservators, the Getty grant-funded conservation treatment will create the opportunity for a group of visiting museum conservators to develop hands-on skills in lining and canvas repair, while also engaging in dialogue about surface aesthetics and treatment methodology. A related technical study will address long-standing questions about the painting’s early history.
Grant awarded: $129,000 (2018)

Statens Historiska Museer, Stockholm, Sweden

Sweden’s National Historical Museums is organizing a 13-day collections-based seminar for up to 16 conservators and curators to study canvas paintings at Skokloster Castle in Sweden. The seminar provides a hands-on introduction to the mechanical behavior of paintings on cloth supports, the deterioration of materials such as canvas and adhesives, and the aesthetic impact of different canvas conservation treatment methods. A workshop on tear mending is offering conservators the chance to learn a newer, less invasive repair technique, while case studies involving three 17th-century paintings from the collection—including Jacob Jordaens’s *The Return of the Holy Family from Egypt*—promote problem-solving skills. The Skokloster collection is especially well-suited for training exercises given its lack of climate control over the centuries; trainees can witness firsthand the effects of uncontrolled climate conditions on the collection’s lined and unlined paintings and discuss possible conservation treatments.

Grant awarded: 1,130,000 kr (2018)
Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg (SRAL), Maastricht, The Netherlands

A Getty grant is supporting an advanced conservation workshop on mist lining, a minimally invasive technique developed to stabilize paintings on canvas. The practice, which was developed in the 1980s, involves the application of minimal amounts of adhesive, heat, and pressure to join a lining canvas to the reverse of the original painting. Since mist lining is still a relatively new technique and not yet a part of many conservators' ‘toolkit,’ the advanced workshop is especially timely for the field.

The workshop will consist of a two-phase program. A group of selected practicing mid-career conservators will be invited to SRAL for a week-long workshop outlining the technique and its variables. Follow-up residencies of two weeks will allow the same conservators to put new skills and acquired knowledge into practice. These slightly longer, bench-skill workshops involve the actual treatment of paintings requiring lining. This format will ensure the promotion of in-depth learning about this particular conservation approach and promote a collaborative network able to further disseminate this technique.

Grant awarded: €234,000 (2018)

University of Glasgow, Scotland

A Getty grant is bringing pairs of conservators-curators to the College of Arts and The Hunterian at the University of Glasgow for training workshops related to the conservation of five canvas paintings from The Hunterian and the National Galleries of Scotland, including Sir Joshua Reynolds's Lady Maynard (c.1759-60). The workshops, which focus on the interdisciplinary involvement of both curators and conservators, are conceived around the principle that canvas conservation is part of a holistic process which interrelates all aspects of the condition, aesthetic, interpretation, and presentation of the painting. Participants will research the evolution of lining materials and techniques, and review how past structural treatments affect a painting’s appearance. They will
also examine the visual presentation of paintings with different approaches to treatments with reference to the collections at The Hunterian, National Galleries of Scotland, Glasgow Museums, and Yale University. Afterwards they will complete individual month-long residencies in Scotland to treat the five selected paintings.

*Grant awarded: £115,000 (2018)*

**Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut**

The Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage at Yale University is organizing an international symposium on the conservation of canvas paintings to be held in October 2019 for conservators, conservation scientists, and curators. This will be the first major international gathering on the subject since 1974. The symposium will address historical approaches to the structural treatment of canvas paintings; current methods, materials, and research; and the challenges facing the structural conservation of modern and contemporary works. With today’s field embracing minimal-intervention techniques and maintaining differing opinions on the efficacy of more invasive approaches, the symposium will provide a long overdue forum to reevaluate historical and current practices as well as inform future directions for the conservation of canvas paintings.

*Grant awarded: $212,000 (2018)*

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**The J. Paul Getty Trust** is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Malibu.

**The Getty Foundation** fulfills the philanthropic mission of the Getty Trust by supporting individuals and institutions committed to advancing the greater understanding and preservation of the visual arts in Los Angeles and throughout the world. Through strategic grant initiatives, the Foundation strengthens art history as a global discipline, promotes the interdisciplinary practice of conservation, increases access to museum and archival collections, and develops current and future leaders in the visual arts. It carries out its work in collaboration with the other Getty Programs to ensure that they individually and collectively achieve maximum effect. Additional information is available at www.getty.edu/foundation.