

MA in the Conservation of Wall Painting Programme Specification

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Purpose and philosophy

The purpose of the course is *to ensure the improved care of wall paintings through providing appropriate education in their conservation*. The philosophy governing the content and structure of the programme is that *the minimum intervention necessary to ensure the preservation of the wall paintings should be determined by a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach*. Thus the training seeks to impart a methodology emphasising investigation and analysis of the component materials and techniques, and diagnosis and control of the causes of deterioration in order to allow selection of a strategy of preventive or passive conservation in line with accepted professional practices and respect for the integrity and values of the object and its context.

The nature of wall painting conservation derives from the inherent characteristics of the objects themselves which, without exception, were intended to be integral to their architectural setting. Thus, conservation must be conditioned by the primacy of the context, both physical and aesthetic, and by respect for the multiple and varying values. For these reasons, the expertise of a wall paintings conservator must include:

- *understanding of the original techniques and historical considerations which inform assessment of the condition, character and values of the painting;*
- *understanding of the chemical and physical properties and the decay mechanisms of the painting and of the building of which it is a part in order to assess the state of conservation of the painting, its support, and overall environment;*
- *competence to develop and evaluate intervention options, and to select and implement a strategy consistent with the principles of preventative conservation and minimum intervention;*
- *an appreciation of the ethical and historical considerations underlying the final presentation of the conserved painting within an historic building.*

The wall paintings conservator is therefore seen as a professional competent in each relevant area, and the training must reflect this. The conservator should also have sufficient familiarity with related fields to

determine what further investigations may be needed. Exposure to the nature of art historical endeavour and the needs of art historical research should result in a continuing dialogue between the conservator and art historian. Additionally, in a relatively small and rapidly evolving field, the conservator has a responsibility for the development of the discipline through involvement in research and technological advances and their dissemination.

Academic level and duration

The *academic level* of the programme is determined by the diversity and degree of expertise required, and by the expectation that the conservator will contribute to the development of the discipline.

The interdisciplinary nature of the course presupposes methodological and analytical skills comparable to those required for a postgraduate degree. Consequently, students should already have acquired the intellectual maturity provided by a first degree, and, in view of the varied demands of the curriculum, should already have specialist knowledge in at least one area relevant to the course.

The programme not only accommodates students from different disciplines, but benefits from the interaction among students from diverse backgrounds. The curriculum takes account of their different strengths. Thus, in the first year, when the amount of formal teaching is greatest, science graduates are not required to take the basic science course, and similarly art history graduates are exempted from the written examination in the history of European wall painting.

The duration of the course is dictated by the complexity and diversity of its contents and their progressive integration through practical work and research. In the first year the emphasis is on formal instruction in a wide range of subjects, with an increasing focus on the development of practical skills and judgement in the second year. In the third year, this focus is reinforced through extended research and practical projects.

Admission criteria and student selection

Basic criteria are that candidates should normally: have at least an upper second honours degree, or an international equivalent recognised by the University of London, in a relevant subject in the humanities or sciences; be able to demonstrate manual dexterity; have normal colour vision; be competent in the English language to a recognised international standard.

Additional criteria that would be taken into account are: evidence of commitment to the field which might include previous conservation experience; likely ability to work well in a team; knowledge of more than one language.

Selection is normally based on: a written application which includes a short essay; written references; an interview.

The **interviewing procedure** includes: a personal interview before a board; tests of manual dexterity and colour vision; a brief written test requiring comment on a variety of wall paintings, allowing assessment of how the candidate approaches the tasks of observation and analysis in an unfamiliar situation.

Course objectives and structure

Objectives

The course seeks to provide the student with a strong foundation in all aspects of wall paintings conservation which would allow the design and implementation of an intervention under the supervision of an experienced conservator. Consequently, on completion of the course the student will be able to:

- contribute to the assessment of the values of the painting and its context;
- examine and assess the original and later materials of both the painting and its support and the implications these have for deterioration and intervention;
- identify relevant factors of deterioration and evaluate the likely effects on the painting of measures proposed for their control;
- contribute to the design and implementation of a programme of conservation which may include: preventative measures to address the causes of detrimental change; passive measures to address the activation mechanisms of deterioration; emergency and protective interventions; remedial treatments; and design and implement monitoring and maintenance programmes;
- produce full written, graphic and photographic documentation;
- participate in the development of the profession, for instance through the presentation and publication of papers.

Structure

The course is structured to provide a broad foundation in wall painting conservation chiefly through formal instruction in the first and second years. This is applied through direct, supervised implementation of diagnostic, analytical and treatment methodologies during fieldwork projects which begin in the first year, and increase as a proportion of the curriculum in the second and third years. As the course progresses there is greater emphasis on the student's individual work, with less formal teaching but more individual tutoring, monitoring and guidance, and it is at this stage that the development of practical skills and critical judgement in the preventive and remedial aspects of conservation is particularly developed. By the third year, the knowledge acquired through formal components of teaching in the first and second years is fully integrated with practice, with the student's time predominantly devoted to fieldwork and research.

Year 1

This year focuses on the acquisition of knowledge in the primary areas of basic science, the theory and practice of the conservation, the technology and history of wall paintings, and on documentation. The teaching further provides a preliminary approach to problems of deterioration, while practical work, including a substantial period of fieldwork, introduces the range of conservation interventions and develops manual skills.

Year 2

Formal instruction is concentrated on diagnosis and control of environmental factors related to deterioration, on scientific examination of wall paintings and their supporting structures, and on the theory and materials of cleaning and consolidation of wall

paintings. Approximately 50% of the year is devoted to practical work in the field.

Year 3

Most of the year is devoted to major fieldwork programmes; in addition there is a research project of approximately three months' duration on an aspect of the conservation, examination, recording or original techniques of wall paintings.

Teaching methods

Continuity in instruction and supervision is provided by the permanent staff, but considerable advantage is also taken of extra-mural teaching and supervision by established practitioners in the UK and abroad. The latter allows specialised instruction in practical work, and in specific areas such as biodeterioration and optical mineralogy. Exposure to the interaction of different experts and disciplines is both stimulating to the students and familiarises them with the diversity of the expertise required in wall painting conservation. It also broadens the range of options available to the students when formulating an overall approach to conservation or when selecting a specific treatment.

The various teaching methods and types of work required of the students are related to the objectives of each component of the course and include:

lectures: to impart factual information;

seminars: to provide a forum for open discussion, and to allow assessment of the development of the individual student's critical abilities;

student seminars: to develop skills in gathering, organising and presenting a body of information, including visual material;

essays: to develop skills in written communication and research methodology;

reports: to assess the student's ability to undertake investigations and present results;

practical work: to develop manual skills, to apply information imparted in the formal teaching to the analysis and solution of practical problems, and to enable the student to exercise judgement in diverse situations;

tutoring: to provide individual guidance, and to allow monitoring of the student's progress.

Assessment

Various methods of assessment are used to ensure periodically that students have achieved a satisfactory standard in each subject area, and to monitor continuously the student's progress with a view to taking remedial measures if indicated.

Both formal and informal mechanisms of assessment are used. Formal assessment comprises written examinations and practical *vivas* administered by a Board of Examiners. Informal, continuous assessment is carried out by the staff, and is based on didactic exercises—essays, seminars, revision questions, etc.—and supervision of practical work.

Students must demonstrate competence in each of the subject areas in order to be advanced in the programme. The type of assessment is linked to the nature of the teaching and the training objectives. Thus, when the objective is the acquisition of a body of factual information, assessment is

normally by written examination, whereas if the intent is the development of individual skills and judgement, assessment is by *viva*. Accordingly, if a student fails a written examination, this may be retaken once. However, failure of the practical *viva*, indicating a lack of the requisite skills and/or critical judgement, disqualifies a student from continuing in the programme.

The requirement that students pass each component of the programme stems from the premise that the award of the diploma expressly indicates that the individual has a strong foundation in all aspects of wall painting conservation and is capable of designing and implementing an intervention under the supervision of an experienced conservator. While it is recognised that students have varying aptitudes and interests and may well subsequently choose to specialise in a particular field, such as environmental monitoring or scientific research, the training programme is primarily intended to produce conservators with the required competence in each of the three primary areas — theory and practice of conservation, science and art history.

At the end of the first year students sit written examinations (with adaptations for first-degree subjects) in:

- chemistry and physics for conservation;
- materials and technology of wall paintings and their supporting structures;
- theory and practice of conservation; and
- history of European wall paintings and conservation;
- and are given a *viva voce* on all aspects their performance.

At the end of the second year students sit written examinations in :

- environmental causes of deterioration;
- scientific examination; and
- cleaning and consolidation;
- and are given a *viva voce*; this *viva* involves a much more significant component of individual work, allowing a more informed assessment of the development of skills and judgement.

Final assessment at the end of the third year is based on the examination of the dissertation and the *viva voce* on all aspects of the student's performance. For the final assessment of the MA, students receive a distinction, pass, or fail.

Informal, continuous assessment, which includes written evaluations by extra-mural fieldwork supervisors, allows staff to monitor a student's progress in each subject area, and to make adjustments in the curriculum and supervision as necessary. Consequently, not only deficiencies but also strengths can be accommodated within the relatively small group of students.

Syllabus

First year

The objective is to provide the necessary grounding in the chemical and physical properties of the constituents of wall paintings and their supporting structures, and of conservation materials; to develop an appreciation of the objects through historical study; to introduce principal conservation treatments; and to foster the development of practical and critical skills.

Course 1: Chemistry and physics for conservation

The objective is to provide the basis for an understanding of the behaviour of materials used in conservation and of the constituents of wall paintings. The content is tailored to provide wall painting-specific examples. Formal instruction is provided in the first two terms of the first year, and students sit a written 3-hour examination at the end of the spring term.

Course 2: Materials and technology of wall paintings and their supporting structures

The objectives are to provide an introduction to the history of wall painting technology from antiquity to the present, through the use of primary sources and technical studies, and an understanding of the chemical and physical properties of the materials of wall paintings and their supports and the implications these have both for deterioration and treatment. Formal instruction is provided in the first two terms of the first year; students present a seminar, and sit a take-home examination at the end of the spring term.

Course 3: Theory and practice of conservation

The objectives are to provide an understanding of the approaches to conservation and their history, to introduce the performance characteristics and working properties of the range of interventions used in wall painting conservation, to provide an understanding of the chemical and physical properties of materials used in wall painting conservation to allow evaluation of their suitability and appropriate application. Formal instruction is provided in the first two terms of the first year; students present a seminar and submit an essay, and sit a take-home examination at the end of the spring term.

Course 4: History of European Wall Painting and Conservation: Medieval

The objectives are to provide an introduction to the development and significance of medieval wall paintings, and to the history and ethics of conservation, to develop an historical perspective on conservation treatments, and respect for the integrity of the object and its context. Formal instruction is provided in the first two terms of the first year, students present a seminar, and sit a 3-hour written examination at the end of the spring term.

Course 5: Practical Work

The objectives are to familiarise the students with the materials and processes of wall painting through the production of three technologically accurate replicas, and to introduce the range of remedial interventions used in wall painting conservation by means of supervised instruction and practical application which includes the use of added and ancillary conservation materials and a range of application methodologies. A substantial proportion of the first year is devoted to this component of the curriculum, including approximately one day per week during periods of formal instruction, and one or two periods of on-site fieldwork of about 8 weeks principally during the summer term. Students maintain a practical notebook, and submit a written report on the fieldwork project. Examination is by *viva voce* at the end of the year.

Course 6: Documentation

The objectives are to introduce the principles, theory and practice of all forms of documentation and to ensure competency in prevailing techniques, in particular photography and computer-based graphic documentation. Formal instruction is in the first two terms of the first year, and practical application is intensive during site-based field projects. Examination is by *viva voce* at the end of the year.

Course 7: Site Visits

The objectives are to develop appreciation of wall paintings and their context; to examine original techniques, previous treatments, and present condition of a wide range of wall paintings and their supporting structures. Visits are undertaken during periods of formal instruction, and also during on-site field projects. Students maintain a notebook, and examination is by *viva voce* at the end of the year.

Second year

The objectives are to complete formal training with continued instruction in art history and history of conservation, and with new courses in deterioration, scientific examination, and the theory and materials of cleaning and consolidation of wall paintings; to provide for extended periods of fieldwork to allow the synthesis and application of knowledge gained through formal instruction, and the development of practical skills and judgement, and to prepare for the final-year research project by means of a literature survey and project proposal.

Course 8: Environmental Causes of Deterioration of Wall Paintings and their Supporting Structures: Diagnosis, Prevention and Control

The objectives are to provide theoretical, historical and practical knowledge of the mechanisms of deterioration and the nature of alteration of the materials of wall paintings and their supporting structures; to provide training in methods of measurement/identification (including the use of computer-based equipment), analysis (e.g. core sampling), interpretation, prevention and control. Formal instruction is normally provided in the autumn term; students present a seminar, undertake a monitoring exercise and report, and write an essay. They sit a 3-hour written examination at the end of the spring term.

Course 9: Scientific Examination

The objectives are to provide an overview of the uses and types of analysis, to ensure practical competence with routine methods and familiarity with instrumental techniques for the examination and analysis of original and added materials of wall paintings and their supports. Formal instruction is normally provided in the spring term; students undertake a technical study of a fragment from the department's collection and write a report, and they sit a 3-hour written examination at the end of the spring term.

Course 10: Cleaning and Consolidation of Wall Paintings: Theory, Materials and Practice

The objectives are to provide an overview of the theory and history of cleaning and consolidation treatments specifically related to wall paintings; to provide in-depth coverage of the scientific foundation of such treatments, and to relate this to field application. Formal instruction is normally provided during the first two terms and includes

practical sessions; students carry out practical exercises. They sit a take-home examination at the end of the spring term and are also examined by *viva voce* at the end of the year.

Course 11: Fieldwork

The objectives are to develop skills and critical judgement in the application of the formal and practical teaching, and to strongly encourage the synthesis of various curriculum components through this application. Substantial periods of fieldwork are undertaken during the year, typically 12-15 weeks. Students produce reports on the fieldwork projects and are examined by *viva voce* at the end of the year.

Research Project

In preparation for the final-year research project, the students select a topic, undertake a literature survey and submit a proposal for consideration by the Board of Studies at their July meeting.

Third year

The objectives are to develop diagnostic, analytical, practical and communication skills related both to conservation and research.

Research Project

The objectives are to identify and structure a research topic, and to demonstrate the acquisition of the requisite methodological and communication skills to carry out the project. The research may be on any aspect of either the materials and techniques of wall paintings or of the methods or materials used in their conservation, examination, or recording. Students are allocated 13 weeks during term in the third year for work on their research project. Supervision is provided on a structured basis, and for specialist areas may also involve an external supervisor in addition to the departmental supervisor. A dissertation of approximately 15,000 words (excluding appendices) is due by 18 June. The dissertation is examined by the Board of Examiners and also forms part of the *viva voce* at the end of the year.

Fieldwork

The objectives are to continue to develop practical and diagnostic skills as well as critical judgement within the context of participation in an expanding range of conservation programmes, and to provide an interpretative link between conservation theory and its field application. The balance of the year, approximately 20 weeks, is taken up with field projects. Students produce reports on these projects, and, as appropriate, specialist reports for particular aspects of related investigations. Examination is by *viva voce* at the end of the year.