Analysis of the Morton C. Bradley Historical Pigment Collection

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This project is one of the initial studies to be undertaken as a collaboration between the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History at the University of Texas at Dallas, the Dallas Museum of Art and the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics at UT Dallas.

Project Summary

The aim of this project is to characterize the approximately 300 pigments within the Morton C. Bradley, Jr.’s historical pigment collection. The research will involve the application of a wide range of analytical techniques including sophisticated high sensitivity instruments for major, minor and trace element analysis, in order to provenance the pigment materials used at different times. The project provides an excellent opportunity to use novel analytical approaches to characterise pigments. The examination of the Bradley collection will provide vital information about availability, manufacturing and use of pigments in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Morton Bradley, Jr. (1912-2004) was a paintings conservator for the Fogg Art Museum from 1944-1950, and in private practice until 2004. Upon his death a large historical pigment collection was discovered at his home in Arlington, Massachusetts. The collection numbered close to 300 containers of pigment and medium, dating from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century. The importance of the collection is due in part to its size, pristine condition, the span of time the pigments were manufactured and sold, and the variety of makers and dealers. The study could illuminate not only trends in manufacturing, but also may reveal the types of materials available in different times and locations. Several colors were made for only a short time, providing a unique opportunity to analyze pigments during a time of innovation and change. The collection is un-catalogued and virtually unknown.

The pigment collection is housed in two types of containers, a wooden or metal exterior screw cap tube that both contain large plastic vials of pigment capped with a cork top. The exterior tubes are marked by a system of hash marks developed by Bradley; their meaning is a mystery. Many of the containers have original labels and notations listing where they were purchased, how much they cost and other information. It is the intention of this project to characterize the pigments. Further work will document the associated information noted on the various vials, which include information about the manufacturer, sample date, date and price of purchase, and where the sample was purchased.

Resources:


Further information:

For further information and/or to initiate an informal discussion please contact:

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