The Role of Scientific Analysis in the Study of Works of Art

Date: Friday, March 20, 2020
Time: 2:00-3:00 PM
Location: Segal Design Institute ITW Classroom (Rm 1-350), 2133 Sheridan Rd, Evanston

Study of the materials of works of art provides critical insights that are complementary to historical and iconographic information, shedding light on the artists’ choices and manipulation of materials, the physical and chemical changes that they undergo with time and how this influences their visual interpretation, and the ways in which they can best be preserved and displayed.

This lecture will introduce the material components of museum objects and the analytical techniques – from optical microscopy to advanced instrumental methods – that are used by scientists to characterize these materials. Case studies, with a focus on some uncommon varnished drawings by Joseph Yoakum from the Art Institute of Chicago’s collection, will illustrate the types of information that can be derived from such analyses.

Ken Sutherland is the Andrew W. Mellon Conservation Scientist in the Dept. of Conservation and Science at the Art Institute of Chicago. His research interests concern the characterization of organic materials in works of art, using mass spectrometric and other analytical techniques, to inform an understanding of their technique, condition and appearance. He held previous positions at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. He received a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Amsterdam, a diploma in the conservation of easel paintings from the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, and a B.Sc. in biochemistry from University College London.

Clara Granzotto recently joined the Art Institute of Chicago as the Andrew W Mellon Assistant Conservation Scientist. She received her Ph.D. in chemical sciences from the University of Venice, Italy, and the University of Lille, France. Clara conducted post-doctoral research at the Center for Scientific Studies in the Arts at Northwestern University, at the scientific department of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She specializes in the analysis of traditional organic binding media by mass spectrometry, with a focus on polysaccharides and proteins.