

Archives of technical documentation at the RKD

Edwin Buijsen, Curator research and technical documentation, RKD, The Hague

Nowadays numerous techniques, varying from X-radiography to paint sample analysis, are being employed to provide new insights into the genesis and material condition of works of art. The results of this, however, are not always easily accessible. Generally only a limited amount of material is published and quite often museums and institutions possessing technical documentation do not know exactly what they have in-house. Consequently, much of interest remains inaccessible to other researchers.

More than a decade ago the RKD started the project *Technical documentation of works of art* (TD) with the objective to better disclose the results of technical research for everyone professionally interested in the material aspects of paintings and the history of art production. Several institutions, individual researchers and private restorers have already placed their material at our disposal to make it accessible for others. This includes the archives of Prof. Van Asperen de Boer and Prof. Molly Faries, both pioneers in infrared reflectography (IRR): a now established research method which allows one to see through paint layers, so that - under specific circumstances - the underlying sketch, or underdrawing, becomes visible. The core of their material consists of infrared reflectograms (with the accompanying documentation) of more than 2000 paintings, including many works by Netherlandish artists. In addition to this the RKD also has its own IRR equipment to examine paintings upon request or for special projects, the results of which are incorporated into our archives.

Technical documentation at the RKD is not limited to IRR, but covers other research techniques as well. Since 1999 we are the formal owner of the archive of the Rembrandt Research Project (RRP). This material, including a large number of x-ray photographs and reports on paint sample analysis, will be moved to our premises after the completion of the RRP. Thanks to CODART member Ron Spronk, the Harvard University Art Museums (HUAM) have chosen the RKD as the only non-American location where one can consult a digital copy of the visual material of the 2001 exhibition *Mondrian: The Transatlantic Paintings*. Also noteworthy is the acquisition of some important archives from private restorers, containing a wealth of documentation on paintings in Dutch museums and private collections.

To allow researchers to take stock quickly of the technical documentation available in their specific field of interest we have developed a database (*RKDtechnical*) which contains essential object and research information, enabling the user to find out which paintings have been examined, what kind of technique was applied and where the material itself can be found. The scope of this database is not restricted to the RKD itself, but it also refers to material which is kept elsewhere. For instance, last year we have started a pilot project with the Mauritshuis concerning their technical documentation on Rembrandt and Vermeer. At the moment the database can only

be used within the RKD, but we hope to make it accessible on our website in the near future. The material kept at the RKD can be consulted by appointment, but we also offer the possibility to order digital material on CD for study at home or for publication.

For additional information, feel free to contact Edwin Buijsen:

T +31 70 333 9719

E buijsen@rkd