Cochineal: At the Intersection of Cloth and Paint
Museum Workshop

Summary

Explore the relationships between a family of painters and their ancestral ties to the cloth dying industry in Venice. Delve into the origins of the family nickname “Tintoretto” (“the little dyer”) for the Robusti family of cloth dyers and Renaissance painters by getting hands-on experience with cochineal red. Since the vegetable and insect-based dye-stuffs for textile dyes and paints are the same, the Tintoretto name shifted in significance from one generation to the next. This workshop is recommended for curators and art historians interested in painting and/or textiles who would like to learn how to create pigments and try their hand at oil painting and cloth dyeing.

Objectives

Through lectures, demonstrations, and activities, participants will:

- Discuss the context of the Tintoretto family and its history
- Gain an overview of technical study on the paintings by Jacopo and Domenico Tintoretto
- Experience the creation of an organic red lake pigment
- Experience the process of textile dyeing using prepared wool
- Experiment freely with oil paint
- Compare and contrast organic dyes and pigments
- Experiment with extracting dye from colored fabrics
Workshop Outline

- Gallery tour highlighting the era, region and history of Italian Renaissance painting with an emphasis on the technical study on the paintings by Jacopo and Domenico Tintoretto
- Powerpoint introduction to organic pigments and the art history of cochineal red
- Demonstration of the creation of cochineal dye
- Demonstration of the making of oil paint
- Experiment with extracting dye from fabric

Activities

- Extract the brilliant red-purple dye from cochineal insects as part of a demonstration on the creation of pigments
- Use cochineal dye to color prepared wool
- Create and experiment with oil paint while attempting to emulate the techniques of the Tintoretto
- Conduct an experiment to extract red lake from dyed cloth shearings

Materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red Lakes</th>
<th>Oil paint</th>
<th>Wool Dyeing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cochineal insects</td>
<td>Linseed oil</td>
<td>Raw wool</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mortar and pestle</td>
<td>Dropper</td>
<td>Dish soap</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alum</td>
<td>Palette knife</td>
<td>Washing bowl</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potassium carbonate</td>
<td>Muller</td>
<td>Large pot or saucepan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glass beakers</td>
<td>Glass palette</td>
<td>Hot plate or kettle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glass stirring rods</td>
<td>Odorless mineral spirits</td>
<td>Large tongs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hot plate</td>
<td>Assortment of brushes</td>
<td>Clothesline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funnel</td>
<td>Canvas board</td>
<td>Clothespins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheesecloth</td>
<td>Paper palette</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silk</td>
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Resources

Internet Resources:

Video: “Cochineal Red: The Art History of a Color” Sunday at the Met lecture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art by Elena Phipp

Video: “In Search of Lost Colour: The Story of Natural Dyes”

"Organic Pigments" on the Kress Reconstruction Website

Books and Articles:


