

## Differend situations in the preservation of contemporary art

The theoretical formulations of conservation and restoration come into constant conflict with practical situations and committed perspectives of the art in which the weight of history and materiality count less, but where authenticity is an objective to pursue, though sometimes at the expense of the so revered originality. The conservation-restoration theory defends from a historicist angle the conservation of the materiality, while curators and artists argue that for the artwork to remain alive and authentic, or to be able to survive the aesthetic experience, it is necessary to sacrifice materiality. Several situations of conflict emerge from such different perspectives. The importance of the conservation-restoration theory in decision making will be addressed, as well as the possibility of its potential adequacy to the requirements of conservation of contemporary art.

### Publications

«The Artist, the curator, the restorer and their conflicts within the context of contemporary art», in Theory and Practice in Conservation (Proceedings), Lisbon, LNEC, 2006.

Scientific supervision of the research project “Differend situations in the preservation of contemporary art” by Raquel Henriques da Silva and Ana Isabel Seruya. All other projects and case studies are the result of a collaboration between the DCR Painting Conservation and Restoration Laboratory (responsible Stephan Schäfer) and the Scientific Laboratory (responsible Maria João Melo) with the National Museum of Contemporary Art (Museu do Chiado - MNAC) and, for the case study on Julião Sarmento, with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (FCG-CAM).

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## MODERN ART CONSERVATION AT UNL



Owing to the artistic practice of the 20th Century, modern art suffers from complex technical and material alterations, rendering the conservation-restoration as well as preventive conservation increasingly complex and difficult. Therefore, the conservation and restoration of modern art has become one of the priorities of the Museum today. The conservation of modern art requires a new attitude, arising from the use of modern materials as well as the need to understand different concepts. In that context, the Master program developed at the Department of Conservation and Restoration has greatly contributed to the training of a new generation of conservation professionals, able to fill a gap on the Portuguese scene. Hence, the special interest of the Museum in the work and research developed by the DCR which has led to a close collaboration, if not to say a symbiotic relationship where both parties feed on. Moreover, the Chiado Museum – MNAC has over the past three years provided a variety of objects in need of conservation-restoration and requested their treatment at the DCR. The diversity of conservation problems imposed by these contemporary objects has been a great challenge and has contributed to the specialized training in different areas of modern art conservation. At the same time, the relationship has been extended by an internship program, offering the students practical training at the Museum by allowing them to become part of the “real-world” problems the Museum is facing in conservation and restoration as well as in the dynamics of museology.

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Ángelo de Sousa  
Untitled, 1962 (detail)

## Liaisons Dangereuses, Conservation of Contemporary Art: a study of the synthetic binding media in Portugal

This project is focused on the study of synthetic materials used by Portuguese artists in the twentieth century. The aim of the study is the molecular characterization of acrylic and vinyl emulsion paints used by the Portuguese artists since the 50's and the study of their photodegradation and evolution with time. Apart from binding media, pigments and other additives present in the paint formulation will be characterized, in order to understand their influence on the film's lifetime.

### Publications

*Eternity is in love with the productions of time*, an approach to Joaquim Rodrigo's classical palette in a vinyl synthetic medium. *Modern Paints Uncovered: Proceedings from the Symposium, May 16-19, 2006, London*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications, in press.

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José Escada  
Dans la Plage, 1968

## A study of the materials and techniques for the development of a conservation proposal for the object *Dans la plage* by José Escada

Compared to traditional paintings, the conservation of modern art objects clearly requires a different approach and more comprehensive studies in order to develop effective and least invasive conservation/restoration treatments. The object *Dans la plage* by José Escada, made of cellulose acetate sheets is an excellent example for these "new" requirements. Cellulose acetate undergoes a complex, multi-phase degradation process which had to be understood before a treatment proposal could be established. Specific material properties associated with the production process and the mere gravitational force have also been identified to add to the deterioration of the object. Upon conclusion of the study, it was possible to propose various options in terms of treatment of deformations and preventive conservation.

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Joaquim Rodrigo  
Untitled, 1958

## Analysis, Ethical Considerations, Conservation & Restoration of a painting by J. Rodrigo, 1958

The painting of Rodrigo dated 1958 involved a thorough study of materials and techniques due to various challenging conservation/restoration problems. This painting was found as a rolled-up canvas in Rodrigo's studio after his death and had since then been kept at Chiado Museum-MNAC. The primary objectives consisted of the removal of a highly resistant reddish-brown dirt layer, and treatment of the heavily deformed and creased canvas support, along with paint consolidation. Physical evidence indicated that most likely the can to wash brushes tipped over. Therefore, the task became to remove a pigmented oil layer from the original oil paint. The other prominent objective was to eliminate deformations and achieve consolidation without lining.

The conservation/restoration treatment and the ethical issues taken into account, have been presented at the International Museum Day, April 13th 2006.

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Julião Sarmiento  
Just a Skin Affair, 1988

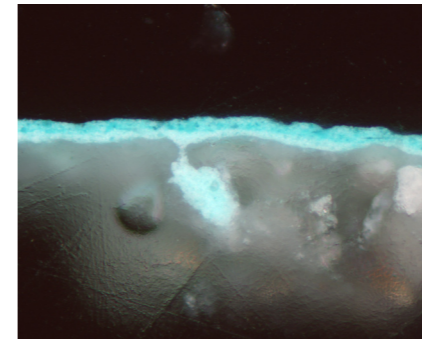
## Julião Sarmiento, a Portuguese Artist at Work: Study of *Just a Skin Affair* from 1988

Julião Sarmiento (b.1948) is a Portuguese contemporary artist, with international recognition. In this work a detailed study of the materials and techniques used by the artist in the painting *Just a Skin Affair* (1988) was carried out. An interdisciplinary approach involved an extensive artist interview and the collaboration with the Portuguese manufacturer of the materials used by the artist. The medium used by Sarmiento in this painting was identified, by FTIR microspectroscopy as a poly(vinyl) acetate. The pigments were identified by XRF microspectrometry, and by FTIR microspectroscopy. At least one layer was made with "garbage" and PVA.

### Publications

Julião Sarmiento, a Portuguese Artist at Work: Study of *Just a Skin Affair* from 1988. *Modern Paints Uncovered: Proceedings from the Symposium, May 16-19, 2006, London*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications, in press.

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Estrela Faria  
Untitled, late sixties (Cross-section, 20x)

## A mural painting by Estrela Faria, a FTIR study of a vinyl synthetic medium

Estrela Faria (1910-1976) was, in the second half of the sixties, invited to paint a mural at the entrance of a new high school in Lisbon, *Escola Secundária Padre António Vieira*, where she exploited a synthetic binding medium, either for artistic or economical reasons. The aim of this study was to characterize the binding medium and its state of conservation by infra red microspectroscopy ( $\mu$ FTIR), which was identified as rather well preserved poly(vinyl acetate).

### Publications

Ferreira, J., M. Melo, and A. Ramos. A mural painting by Estrela Faria: a FTIR study of a vinyl synthetic medium. In *Abstracts and Executive Summaries of Contributions of The Seventh Biennial Gathering of the Infrared and Raman User's Group*. New York, 28-31 March 2006, 75-76.

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Helena Almeida  
Untitled, 1969

## The study, intervention and preventive conservation of the "three dimensional painting-object" by Helena Almeida, 1969

The object in question is another example of the experimental spirit of the "modern" artist. It consists of a rolled and folded-up canvas being partially contained in a box type frame and "pouring" out of this restricted space, downwards with red, blue and yellow rolls attached, representing paint tubes of primary colors, from which paint, represented by thin PVC tubes is emerging. The way Helena Almeida put it, the object emerges from a two-dimensional into a three-dimensional space. Again, the materials and techniques chosen by the artist call for a completely individual approach in terms of its conservation, requiring an innovative and technical spirit in order to come up with solutions to the complex problems. For example, the object suffers from losses of paint due to improper storage and handling.