This document contains slides presented at the conference *Academic Demarcations: Disciplines and Interdisciplinarity*, 13-14 September 2012 at the University of Oslo, **and may only be quoted after informing the author:**

Noëlle Streeton - n.l.w.streeton@iakh.uio.no
Sitting between stools: Conservation research between the Humanities and Physical Sciences

Noëlle Streeton
Conservation Studies, Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History
University of Oslo
Albert Philippot, Belgian Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Brussels, 1950

The Adoration of the Lamb (The Ghent Altarpiece), dedicated May 1432, Cathedral of Saint Bavo, Ghent
Objects and Beliefs in Norway, ca. 800–1535

Liturgical objects and beliefs in Norway through the medieval period and up to the beginning of the Reformation will be examined in a working group convened by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Noëlle Streeton from Autumn 2011

Discussions will take their inspiration from altarpieces and polychrome sculpture in the Kulturhistorisk Museum (KHM). The aim is to elaborate on a range of issues associated with, but not limited to, physicality and spiritual resonances; methods appropriate for the interdisciplinary study of medieval objects, fragments and documentary sources; and the historical circumstances surrounding the production, consumption, adaptation and conservation of objects from the medieval period…
After the Black Death: Painting and Polychrome Sculpture in Norway, 1350–1550

An interdisciplinary project based in Conservation Studies centres on the Cultural History Museum’s collection of late-medieval liturgical objects

About the project

The Cultural History Museum (KHM) of the University of Oslo holds a large and internationally important group of folding altarpieces, polychrome sculpture and painted crucifixes. The majority of the c. 65 objects are thought to have been imported to Norway from northern Germany and the Low Countries after 1350 and possibly as late as the 1550s – the historical period between the first wave of Bubonic Plague and the early years of the Reformation…..

X-ray, relief from Slagen altarpiece, KHM C.2124
Conservation – an empirical science devoted to the preventive and remedial treatment of culturally significant objects and structures.
A conservator – a person who takes actions to avoid, slow or manage the rate of physical alterations of objects or structures of cultural significance.
A conservator – a person who takes actions to avoid, slow or manage the rate of physical alterations of objects or structures of cultural significance.
A conservator – a person who takes actions to avoid, slow or manage the rate of physical alterations of objects or structures of cultural significance.
A conservator – a person who takes actions to avoid, slow or manage the rate of physical alterations of objects or structures of cultural significance.
A conservator – a person who takes actions to avoid, slow or manage the rate of physical alterations of objects or structures of cultural significance.
A conservator – a person who takes actions to avoid, slow or manage the rate of physical alterations of objects or structures of cultural significance.
Academia:
1st/2nd degree

Post-graduate qualification

Fine Arts
History/History of Art
Chemistry/Archaeometry
Physics/Engineering

Restoration
Conservation
Conservation Science

Apprenticeship
Conservators are doers. Scholars are thinkers.
Stout called conservation: “a mongrel pup that had crawled through the academic fence”.

mongrel = an inferior dog of indefinable breed. A derogatory term for something that is not genuine and inferior.
Edvard Munch (1863–1944)
11 monumental canvas paintings,
1909–1916
Conservation (treatment)       Conservation (investigation)          Conservation Science

Fine Arts              History/ History of Art
Chemistry              Physics

Historian of Painting / Art Technology
Attributed to the Master of Flémalle (workshop of Robert Campin, Saint Veronica, c. 1430, Städel Museum, Frankfurt, inv. 939A

- fluidity of paint
- underlayers
- order of painting
- original palette
- effects of damage
- retouching
- colour changes
- function
Vestment cupboard/storage for liturgical texts

Attributed to the Master of Flémalle (workshop of Robert Campin, *Saint Veronica*, *The Virgin and Child*, and the *Trinity*, c. 1430, Städel Museum, Frankfurt
Problem
Objective aims and rigidity of the sciences

+ Variability inherent to describing works of art

= Problematic narratives
Research in the Humanities:

Position or Question
(relevant to an object, collection, collector, idea...)

Evidence  Evidence  Evidence  Evidence  Evidence  Evidence
Scientific Method:

Observation

Hypothesis (research question)

Prediction of results

Systematic, experimental testing of predictions

Conclusions: was the hypothesis right or wrong?
Profound loss of original material (painting, gilding and ground layers)
Substantial, uneven overpainting
Systematic study?

Relief, Saint Ursula Altarpiece, Slagen church (c. 1480–1490)
Research for Conservation / History of Painting Technology:

Position or Question (relative to scientific hypothesis)

Visual Evidence
Scientific Evidence
Historical Evidence
Condition
Other
Data is neutral, until it is interpreted.
Painting and polychrome sculpture, 1100–1600
Interpretation, material histories and conservation

Oslo forum: 26–27 November 2010
...freed from the feeling of being a tool for other researchers and from the temptation of considering the other researchers in the same way.

Giorgio Urbani, 1981
Thanks to

Members of the Objects and Beliefs research group, University of Oslo (UiO)
Tine Frøysaker, Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History (IAKH), UiO
Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, IAKH, UiO
Lena Liepe, Dept. of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas (IFIKK), UiO
Kaja Kollandsrud, Cultural History Museum, UiO
Jørgen Wadum, Centre for Art Technological Studies and Conservation, Copenhagen
Jana Sanyova, Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK/IRPA), Brussels
Jochen Sander, Städel Museum, Frankfurt
Libby Sheldon, University College London