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## REVIEW OF *MASTERING INPAINTING* WORKSHOP, QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY 2-5<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST AND 9-12<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2005

Arriving for the first day of James Bernstein's *Mastering Inpainting* workshop at the Queensland Art Gallery was a bit like turning up for an elaborate dinner party. Instead of an arrangement of cutlery, plates and glass wear, each place for the 14 participants was located by name tag and carefully set with table easel, canvases, cards and papers, pigment bottles and parts for a 'make your own' mahlstick. The sideboard was laden with an enormous array of pigments, pencils, brushes and tools. For the Conservation gourmards, the challenge was pacing oneself over the four days; should one gorge on the delicious range of blacks, play with putties, shimmer with iridescent mica powders, or cool down with pearly neutral ochres? It was all a little overwhelming in a delicious kind of way.

Jim Bernstein has his own private practice in San Francisco and is a well-known paintings conservator working on a huge range of painting types, bringing to each his expertise in pigment, colour and retouching. Of particular interest to many participants were his experiences with modern colour-field, matte paintings; the bane of many when faced with a scratch across an unbroken field of intense colour and a curator or artist declaring the painting unexhibitable without intervention. Instead of throwing arms in the air and declaring 'it can't be done', Jim Bernstein encouraged us to believe it was all possible; with a selection of hundreds of pigments finding a close matching colour straight from the jar seemed an infinitely easier option than laborious colour matching from a trusty limited selection of colours. After all, the brilliance of many of the modern organic pigments simply cannot be duplicated using a palette of 19<sup>th</sup> century pigments.

Slowly over the four days Jim talked us through an enormous range of pigments, discussing their intrinsic qualities of opacity, tinting strength, stability and granular size. It was a revelation to consider that coarsely ground and low tinting strength pigments such as vine black might be useful to impart a speckled granular appearance. While almost everyone was seduced by spinel black, a fine, dense and completely opaque black developed for the Stealth Bombers. Likewise a discussion of the merits of different brushes, in particular 'spotters' with smaller bellies holding less paint and producing more controlled dots, was of great interest. Other tools experimented with included spatter brushes, micro-sanding wands, minarette spatulas, pointed scrapers made from genuine ivory piano keys to name but a few. Of course a variety of mediums were also introduced and demonstrated.

The efforts of the Queensland Art Gallery Conservation Department as hosts were outstanding. Truly inspirational were Lyn Steader's efforts in sourcing an Aladdin's cave of materials, mostly from the USA. So often it is easier to make do in Australia with a limited range of materials because sourcing items is so difficult. Some of the most valuable pages in the take home manual are the suppliers lists (both Australian and USA), many of which have extensive internet catalogues. Our first afternoon back at the Art Gallery of New South Wales necessitated a trip to the local art supply shops in Sydney to discover what could be found close by. We were gobsmacked to find almost a complete collection of Kremer pigments right under our noses at Parkers, Sydney Fine Art Supplies in The Rocks. We immediately brought up a fair amount of the stock of rich Italian and light French ochres, umbers and pale neutrals. While filling our basket with the cheap earths we couldn't however pass up the expensive bag of spinel black, for who knows when you might have to retouch a Stealth Bomber?

Our heartfelt thanks go to Jim Bernstein (who had to repeat his efforts to a second group of lucky conservators the following week) and the QAG gang; Anne Carter, Lyn Streader, John Hook, Gillian Osmond and Nicola Hall, and the sponsors; Queensland Art Gallery and AICCM. Drinks hosted by Pacific Data Systems on Wednesday evening were pretty fine too.

Paula Dredge  
Art Gallery of New South Wales