

Contemporary Art: Challenges for conservation



Close up of surface of Francis Bacon revealing dust and dirt applied by the artist



Close up of surface of Francis Bacon revealing cotton wool left in the paint surface by the artist

In their drive to push boundaries, contemporary artists are no longer content to limit themselves to traditional artists materials and are as likely to cast aside canvas, bronze, oil and pigments and work with materials such as blood, hair or in even half a sheep. As you can imagine, this presents a whole new set of challenges for the conservator specializing in contemporary painting. A Francis Bacon painting, recently restored at the studio, presented one such challenge when research revealed that much of the dust and cotton wool fibres stuck in the paint surface were added by the artist himself and were an integral part of the artist's creative process. Cleaning had therefore to proceed with great caution and the utmost care was taken not to disturb the artists' original intention. Of greater challenge to the modern conservator is the ethical problems present when tasked with the preservation of what are effectively ephemeral pieces. Recent news headlines have highlighted the plight of contemporary collectors whose valuable pieces have started to deteriorate before their eyes; Damien Hirst's shark preserved in formaldehyde and Tracy Emin's 'Unmade Bed' for example. These cases have raised important questions about the longevity of contemporary works of art made with unconventional materials. Located at the heart of the contemporary art market, Simon Gillespie's studio have the experience and expertise required to meet the technical and ethical challenges involved in the restoration and preservation of contemporary art.

New Members of Staff: Léonie Ainapore - Head of Studio



Léonie has BA hons degree in the History of Art and a postgraduate qualification in Conservation of Easel Painting from the Courtauld Institute of art. She has worked for a variety of museums, institutions and private studios.