

Materials in 9 Francesc Artigau's paintings from 1966.

Introduction

On the occasion of the process of conservation and restoration of a group of 9 works produced by the Pop artist Francesc Artigau (Barcelona, 1940) in the 1960s, a team of nine researchers from the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Barcelona (UB) have studied the artist's creative process in order to better know the genesis of the paintings, the materials and techniques used, and the circumstances that have affected them throughout the years.

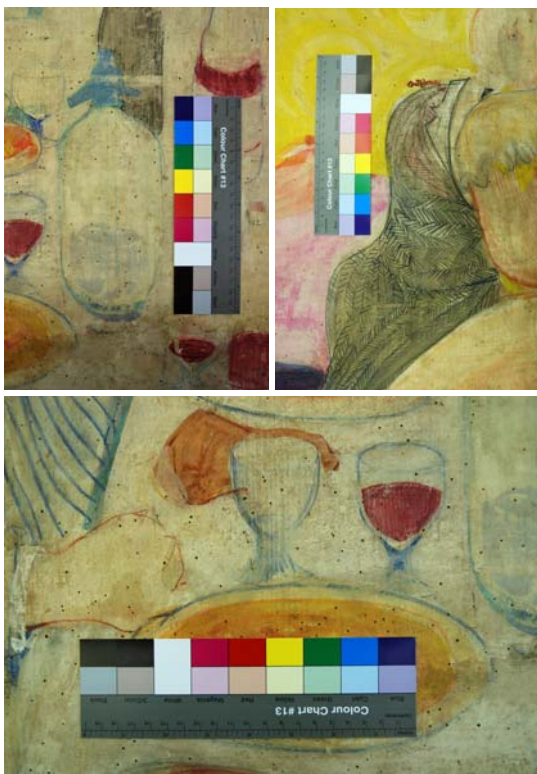
The goal of this study is to be able to properly face the challenge of their conservation and restoration, with all the necessary information, and resting reassured that every action to be taken is in every sense fully respectful towards the works.

Artigau's artistic training

Francesc Artigau's education was eminently academic. He studied engraving and painting at the *Escola d'Arts i Oficis* (Arts and Crafts School) and at the *Escola de Belles Arts de Sant Jordi* of Barcelona (St George's Fine Arts School of Barcelona). He declared himself an admirer of Piero della Francesca and Matisse, and despite the fact that his work from the sixties is part of the Pop-Art scene of the Barcelona avant-garde, the technical procedures used in his works are deeply rooted in the tradition. Great drawing artist and colorist, he never abandoned his figurative style and the topics related to everyday's life.



Cleaning process, using agar buffered at a pH of 5,5



Painting technique and conservation challenges

The 9 paintings were made over birch plywood supports that had undergone a process of tremendous deterioration due to humidity from the ground and dog urine (there were several dogs living together with this collection in a garage) as well as from non-professional attempts at cleaning the works. They have suffered the melamine-formaldehyde degradation (plywood adhesive) and a severe fungal and woodworm action.

The painting technique used by Artigau in these 9 works was as fragile and thin as a watercolour. The pictorial layer was made using commercial gouache (Talens®) mixed with egg yolk, applied on a traditional ground layer made of rabbit skin glue and calcium sulfate, prepared and extended by the artist himself, where the author made a graphite and coloured pencil drawing. The work was afterwards burnished with agate stone, and no coat of varnish was applied. The paint and ground layers also suffered from the effects of paint loss, damp spots, loss of cohesion of materials, fungi, grime imbedded into all levels, erosions, and traces from cleaning tools.

Apart from the information currently provided by the artist, cross-sections and compositional analyses have been undertaken to identify the materials and the microorganisms which have grown in the works over a time of neglected storage.

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