

University of Pennsylvania
Graduate Department in Historic Preservation
HPSV 740-301 Conservation Seminar: Architectural Surface Finishes
Lecturer: Cassie Myers
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Spring 2024
Conservation Lab, 051 Duhring Wing
Tuesdays 3:30-6:30pm

Course Description

Architectural surface finishes are among the most ephemeral of all materials in the built environment. Enduring harsh conditions and subject to frequent change, they are intrinsically vulnerable and, as a result, are often replaced or disappear entirely. Yet, despite their changeability, finishes are extraordinarily important. They offer insight into architectural alterations and conditions. They imbue buildings with meaning, influence the perception and expression of design, and the effect color and light. Finishes ornament, imitate, and fool the eye. They function as disinfectants, insecticides, and water-proofing. They are reflections of economies, trade, and natural resources. They demonstrate people's mythologies, beliefs, aesthetics, and aspirations. Because architectural surface finishes encompass a wide range of material types and possibilities for conservation intervention, approaches to their treatment vary widely. On the one hand, in a departure from pure conservation convention, they are commonly replicated. On the other hand, treatments may rise to the same level as that of murals or painted sculpture. These differences in levels of approach call on conservation principles and charters for guidance, while sometimes stirring debate and igniting controversies on questions of consistency, original fabric, and authenticity.

Over the course of the semester by way of lectures, lab exercises, demonstrations and a case study, students will gain understanding of the history, materials, craft and technology of which architectural finishes in the west have been most commonly made, in addition to sources for researching them, the types and causes of deterioration and treatment. One class will also address historic plaster. Lectures on history and technology by the instructor will be complemented by guest lectures. Students will learn about primary sources materials at the Special Collections at Fisher Library from Frank Matero. Catherine Matsen, Conservation Scientist from Winterthur Museum, will lecture on advanced methods of finishes analysis. We will also learn from each other in discussion.

This is an interactive class. Students will be expected to actively participate in discussions and activities. In-class exercises and assignments will help build skills and knowledge of historic finishes. Discussions and assigned reporting on readings will occur at the beginning of many of the classes. Quizzes will reinforce important knowledge. Short assignments of one to two pages each will precede a final case study assignment at Lynnewood Hall, the Widener estate designed by Horace Trumbauer in Elkins Park. Working as a group on site for two visits and in the lab, students will report on the microscopic analysis of finishes and relate findings to paint technology and style of the period, finishes of similar buildings of the period; and changes to the building. They will present their finding to the "client" and others in the final class. Students will be responsible for transportation to and from the site for the two site visits and for preparing themselves to work in unheated conditions.

By the end of the seminar, students will have gained the following knowledge and skills: general understanding of the history of finishes and knowledge of related research; general understanding of the chemistry, technology, appearance and performance of historic finishes; knowledge of historic plasters; knowledge of analytical protocols and needs for specialist consultation; ability to organize, plan and execute a finishes analysis; ability to adopt flexible approaches and demonstrate self-direction for solving problems; and to demonstrate a critical understanding of best practices for conservation project management and intervention based on principles and ethics of the conservation profession.

Prerequisites: Conservation Science HSPV 555. Exceptions will be considered and granted as possible by permit from the department.

Materials Collection Inventory: acl.design.upenn.edu

Cassie Myers (she/her) is a conservator of mural paintings and architectural finishes in private practice in Philadelphia. In addition to conservation treatment commissions, she conducts finishes analyses and advises clients on conservation planning and preservation policy development. First educated in Art History and then as a fine arts conservator in the United States, where she worked in museums (North Carolina Museum of Art, Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Brooklyn Museum) she went on to study in Italy by way of fellowship sponsorship (Samuel H. Kress Foundation Fellowship and UNESCO Fellowship at ICCROM and L'Istituto Centrale per Restauro and in the field) before returning to the US and fine arts conservation positions. At mid-career, she expanded her expertise through studies in Historic Preservation and Architectural Conservation (HSPV, Penn 1992). She has held positions in museums, the private sector, the federal government (GSA, Central Office, Washington, DC), and at research institutions.

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Preliminary Schedule

This schedule may be revised. It will be augmented and distributed on the first day of class.

SECTION. DATE	SUBJECT	FORMAT
Section 1:		
History Technology Chemistry. Documentary Research		
January 23, 2024 Class 1	Introduction to course: content, structure, grades. What is a finish? Color and contextual significance. History of Finishes. Case Study of Finishes Analysis	Lecture Exchange
January 30, 2024 Class 2	Technology of Finishes Materials, properties, solubilities Making Finishes- materials, mixing and applying	Lecture Hands-on
February 6, 2024 Class 3	Documentary Research. Primary sources Gilded Age Interiors. Finishes. Lynnewood Hall	Lecture- FGM Lecture- CSM
Section 2		
Analysis Types and Causes of Deterioration Treatment Case Study		
February 13, 2024 Class 4	Site Visit 1. Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park	Introduction by Director Hands -on
February 20, 2024 Class 5	Sample Preparation. Taking, Embedding, Cutting, and Polishing Samples. Alternate methods of sample preparation. Where to take samples. On site investigation- excavating and exposing historic finishes.	Lecture Hands-on
February 27, 2024 Class 6	Applied Microscopy. Reading Stratigraphies: Microscopical analysis of cross-sectional samples. Photomicrography of cross sectional samples Pigment Analysis: Microchemical spot testing and PLM Organizing data	Lecture Hands-on
Spring Break		
March 5, 2024 March 12, 2024 Class 7	Media Characterization with Fluorescence Microscopy Color Theory. Color Matching Presenting Information and Reporting.	Lecture and hands-on
March 19, 2024	Deterioration-Types and Diagnostics Conservation Treatment Considerations and Approaches	
March 26, 2024 Class 9	Site Visit 2- Lynnewood Hall On site Investigation. Exposing historic finishes. Resampling. Color matching.	Lecture
April 2, 2024 Class 10	When to seek additional analysis. Benefits and limitation of micro- analysis. Guest Lecturer. Catherine Matsen. Winterthur Museum and Gardens	Lecture Discussion
Section 3		
Treatment (Cont'd) Plaster Plain and Decorative Final Presentation		
April 9, 2024 Class 11	Plaster- plain and decorative. Materials, technology, types and causes of deterioration. Treatment.	Lecture Hands-on
April 16, 2024 Class 12	TBD Studio Day- Work on assignments together OR Additional Lecture and demo as needed.	
April 23, 2024 Class 13	Restoration versus Conservation versus Documentation only. Weighing Risks and Benefits of Intervention. Discussion within philosophical tenets of conservation	Lecture and Discussion
April 30, 2024 Class 14	Final Student Presentation	

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