Analysing textiles found in Francis Bacon's studio to aid authentication of his artworks

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In an on-going art technological research project, Bacon's artworks and documents as well as materials attributed to the artist are being investigated. The aim is to elucidate Bacon's working process and to help with authentication and conservation.

Visual examination, Cross-sections, PLM, FTIR, (Py)GCMS, SEM-EDX

Francis Bacon Project - Approach - Further Study

The MATERIALS found in Bacon's studio document his working process and give further insights for interpretation of his work (sketches, written notes, cloths).

The examined PAINTINGS show marks of working tools such as various fabrics which highlight Bacon's delicate surface shaping process. Whether this is useful for dating is presently being investigated.

Detailed information about paint formulation and observations such as surface pattern or the delution of paint, collected in a searchable DATABASE, enhance our understanding of the buildup of Bacon's artworks and allow complex comparisons.

Cloths - Fibres - Pattern

Francis Bacon used various textiles to apply and modulate paint on his canvas paintings. Pattern and fibres of textiles found in his studio and on paintings were compared to investigate if these could help with dating and authentication.

From six types of textile patterns (A-F) which were found in the studio (including the pattern of two paint rolls which could also have left fibres on the paintings), three types (A-C) were found as imprints on paintings. The most common pattern types on paintings are A and B. The pattern of the rolls could not be found as imprint but their use is suggested in some backgrounds which show small, evenly spread peaks.

Eight different fibre types (I-VIII) have been analysed using PLM and FTIR. The most common one on paintings is cotton followed by animal hair. The initial results show many similarities (e.g. morphology, Vis spectra) and give evidence that Bacon used the fabrics which can be found in the studio for the painting process.

Red fibres have been found on various paintings and compared. Examples from paintings:

- C05 - Study of head for Lucian Freud, 1967
- C09 - Three Studies of the Male Back, 1970
- C10 - In Memory of Georgia Dyer, 1971

Bacon refined his technique over his working life and this evolution can be reconstructed by comparing the different patterns found on his paintings.

Figure in a Mountain Landscape, 1956 is the earliest painting we have analysed which shows this technique though with this work its use is probably accidental.

In contrast to the early subtle application in the 1950s (only type A pattern), the works in the 1960s show obvious and well-placed patterns. Here, the artist seems to have planned his use of this technique and executes it confidently.

In the 1960s, he also begins to use corduroy fabric (pattern type B) which shows a distinct pattern of parallel lines whereby thin and thick corduroy lines can be distinguished.

Patterns and fibres found on the fabrics in the studio and on the paintings are comparable. Dating of Bacon’s works seems possible to a limited extent by analysis of the evidence of his pattern application. This will have obvious benefits to art historians researching this artist.

Left: Textiles found in Bacon's studio

Acknowledgements: We thank the Forensic Science Centre at Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne; and the Estate of Francis Bacon for sponsoring this research project and giving permission to publish images of works by Bacon; the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane; and Tate Britain, London for access to their archival material and paintings; the Kunsthalle Zürich and Fondation Beyeler, Rüthen/Basel, Sämling/Ernst and Hildy Beyeler for access to their paintings by Bacon.

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