Devising a Database: Wilhelmina Barns-Graham’s Artist Materials

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Introduction – Twenty-Six Boxes

In collaboration with the Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust in Edinburgh, Andy Grace Hayes and Amy Johnstone completed the cataloguing with documentation, data visualisation and rehousing of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham’s (b. 1912) studio materials from those once stored in St. Ives, Cornwall and St. Andrews, Fife. Working across painting, drawing and printmaking; the late abstract artist was a member of the Penwith Society of Arts—a group of abstract artists formed in 1949. The documentation of Barns-Graham’s materials will aid in future understanding and technical analysis of her extant works for researchers, curators and conservators.

The database holds information on the object’s (possible) manufacturer, name, colour, pigment number, manufacturer’s classification, manufacturer’s series, material (such as oil or acrylic), type, quantity, and any further details.

Finished excel database, WBG Artist Materials Database, 2022.

Condition, notable additions such as inscriptions by the artist, and suppliers labels were recorded.

Each box was labelled with a unique alphanumerical, and inside boxes were given a further hierarchical label.

An item in the third box (3C), for example, with two boxes inside (1C, 2C, 3C) may have the ID 3C_2C_217. The first of the internal box identifiers (IC) always identified items loose in the outer box itself.

Each catalogued item was photographed with a paper label, colour key and scale.

Image files were then renamed and stored in folders corresponding to box alphanumericals.

Documentation was largely taken on mobile devices; due to ease of access and easy handling qualities.

Information was stored on a joint OneDrive in addition to the Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust’s intranet system.

Outside the scope of the project, but the information is hoped to be integrated with the Trust’s collections management system.

Percentage of all oil paints are Winsor & Newton (267 items)

Of Acrylics:

- 18.9% are Golden brand.
- 17.2% are Winsor & Newton.
- 16.8% are Lascaux.
- 35.3% are Rowney.

Colour breakdown of the WBG Artist Materials

Statistics:

- 1,859 unique records in the Artist Materials Database
- 71% of all oil paints are Winsor & Newton
- Of Acrylics:
  - 18.9% are Golden brand.
  - 17.2% are Winsor & Newton.
  - 16.8% are Lascaux.
  - 35.3% are Rowney.

Documentation for objects

- 22V_21V_1635 & 22V_21V_1636.
- Two Winsor & Newton Artists’ Oil Colour in Cadmium Red and Cadmium Red Deep, respectively.
- Inside a Rowney box, 2022.

Documentation of the archive documentation. An iPhone 8 mounted on Manfrotto 290 Dual tripod, central column set to 90°, 2022.

Image, Amy Johnstone.