

MEDIA RELEASE

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New publication:

«Kunsttechnologische Forschungen zur Malerei von Cuno Amiet 1883–1914»

On 4 March 2015 the Swiss Institute for Art Research (SIK-ISEA) will publish the findings of its art technical research into the early paintings of Cuno Amiet: «Kunsttechnologische Forschungen zur Malerei von Cuno Amiet 1883–1914». This is the third volume in the series KUNSTmaterial. It was written by Karoline Beltinger, Ester S. B. Ferreira and Karin Wyss.

Cuno Amiet (1868–1961) trained as a painter and produced his early work at a time when theories of art were hotly contested. Not only did styles come and go in rapid succession, but painting techniques were also the subject of lively discourse. Amiet, always amenable to new ideas, happily tried out materials, procedures and techniques which offered new forms of expression, allegedly lasted longer or were currently in vogue. It is hardly surprising, then, that when some 60 works were analysed using the investigative methods of art technology, the striking plurality of styles in his early paintings was found to be directly reflected in their material and technical diversity.

In the new publication «Kunsttechnologische Forschungen zur Malerei von Cuno Amiet 1883–1914», Amiet's painting technique is assessed in the broader context of an interest displayed at the time in innovative and historical materials and techniques. Based on numerous written sources, their own technical examinations of paintings and new, partly yet unpublished research, Karoline Beltinger and her co-authors Ester S. B. Ferreira and Karin Wyss trace how Cuno Amiet and his Swiss contemporaries responded to the discourse around painting techniques, applied these genuine or alleged insights to their own work, and themselves helped to shape the discourse as artists, advisers and to some extent authors. One central theme is tempera, regarded by many painters around 1900 as superior to oils. A number of factors played their part here: the deteriorating quality of oil paints in the wake of new industrial manufacturing processes, a reawakening interest in historical techniques, a modernist delight in the light, bright colours and matt effects of quick-drying tempera, and a negative attitude to reputedly “greasy”, “smudgy” oils which yellowed and darkened with time. In addition, Switzerland's recent constitution as a federal state had led to more frequent public commissions for murals, as a result of which easel painters became more aware of tempera, a technique long associated with the mural.

The publication breaks down into eight chapters with a focus on the following themes: the origin of Amiet's painting materials in the light of their general availability, Amiet's painting supports, the issue of priming around 1900 in the context of debate between academic and avant-garde positions, Amiet's own priming practice, the interest in tempera expressed by himself and his contemporaries, and the wealth and variety of the techniques he used to apply paint. The volume

concludes with recent research into patterns of age-related damage encountered in Amiet's works. This book is richly illustrated; the informative findings derived from numerous scientific analyses are summarised in diagrams and tables. The annex contains summaries in English, transcriptions of Amiet's notes and formulas, selected literature and unpublished sources, a glossary of scientific investigation methods, and two indices.

Publication data

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Order publication

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