

Appendix press release:

Recovered paintings by Vincent van Gogh back on permanent display at the Van Gogh Museum from tomorrow

Background information about the conservation treatment

Conservation treatment of *View of the Sea at Scheveningen*

View of the Sea at Scheveningen (1882) is one of only two seascapes that Van Gogh painted in the Netherlands, and one of his first works in oil paint. *View of the Sea* has suffered a great deal over the years. Van Gogh painted it on paper, which was later fixed to panel during a conservation treatment. This panel was removed during a subsequent conservation treatment, and the work was attached to a canvas.

When the work was stolen from the museum, a piece of the painted paper measuring approximately 7 x 2 cm was torn from the bottom left-hand corner. In order to fill this lacuna, the scanning technique optical coherence tomography (OCT) was used to measure the thickness of the surrounding paint and the contours of the missing corner (this work was conducted by Northwestern University, Chicago). By combining this information with a raking light photograph from before the theft, the scientists were able to determine the relief, and therefore the surface. This was subsequently shaped in a 3D-printed mould. The filling from the mould was then attached to the painting by the conservator – the relief of the filling perfectly matched the brushstrokes of the original paint. Finally, the filling was retouched by hand, after an old photograph of the painting (in which the bottom left-hand corner is still intact).

A non-original varnish layer was also removed and old overpaint on the painting was retouched to make it visually less disturbing. This overpaint had discoloured and due to aging, had become insoluble. The remains of a signature ‘Vincent’ were discovered during the conservation treatment, but it is most likely that this was applied by someone else other than Van Gogh.

Conservation treatment of *Congregation Leaving the Reformed Church in Nuenen*

Congregation Leaving the Reformed Church in Nuenen was hardly damaged when it was stolen. Examination did reveal that the painting had multiple varnish layers; the top two of them consisting of a synthetic resin, which were applied during a conservation treatment in 1961. Extensive research revealed that this varnish – that was glossy and yellowed with age – could be removed safely without affecting the underlying original paint layers. Now that these varnish layers have been removed the original colours as intended by the artist can be appreciated once again.

During this treatment, an original varnish was also discovered. This protein-based layer, probably egg white, was applied by Van Gogh himself sometime between 1884 when he first worked on the painting, and the autumn of 1885, when he returned to it. The varnish was namely found on the surface of the paint from the first painting session, and under the overpaint added by the artist later. Van Gogh did not remove this so-called ‘saturating varnish’, which means it still covers almost the entire surface. When he applied the protein-based layer, the paint underneath was not yet completely dry. The paint and varnish have therefore formed a close bond. Due to this, and to the fact that Van Gogh did not remove the varnish on the painting, the conservators decided to leave this original layer intact.

Congregation Leaving the Reformed Church in Nuenen is the only early painting in the Van Gogh Museum collection with a protein-based varnish layer that was definitely applied by Van Gogh. In a few letters to his brother Theo from the period, he mentions applying a layer of egg white to paintings to ‘saturate’ the colours.

Note to editors (not for publication):

If you require additional information, please contact the Van Gogh Museum Press Office by calling +31 (0)20 5705 292 or sending an email to pressoffice@vangoghmuseum.nl

Images via: <https://vangoghmuseum.nl/en/news-and-press/press-image-bank>