

Cleanliness Is Next to Godliness – Or Is It? Contemporary Conservation Practices Inspected

Open virtual lecture, given by Marie Clausén, University of Ottawa, on the 26th of May 2020 at 15.00–18.00 GMT+1

In 2018, a series of workshops and a podcast entitled [“Rent nog”](#) [What is Clean Enough?] were organized in Gothenburg and Uppsala, focusing on the philosophical and conservation-ethical aspects of 'cleanness' and 'dirt' in the context of art and architecture.*

This virtual lecture, *Cleanliness Is Next to Godliness – Or Is It? Contemporary Conservation Practices Inspected*, given by Marie Clausén, University of Ottawa, is the latest contribution to the “Rent nog” project. Host for this virtual lecture is “Rent nog”, ICOMOS Sweden’s scientific working group for mural paintings and the interdisciplinary research project entitled “Critical assessment of the significance of Wall Painting Conservation in Sweden,” at University of Gothenburg.

Zoom-link to the lecture:

<https://gu-se.zoom.us/j/65892706476?pwd=QnRTNWllOICZDQ5UEFXMTVtQmEwdz09>

Meeting ID: 658 9270 6476

Password: 019076

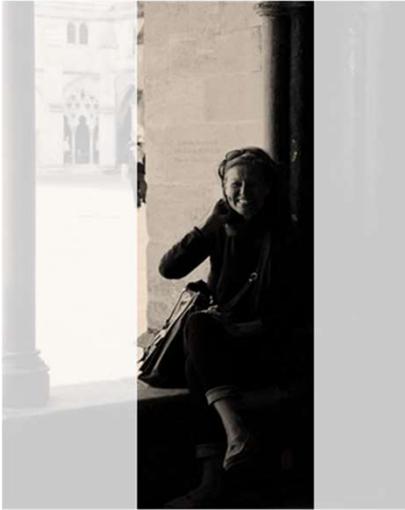
LECTURE OUTLINE

We will examine examples of recent, famous conservation–restoration projects, of both architecture and art, such as the Sistine Chapel (1980–1994), Chartres Cathedral (2008–ongoing), the Black Madonna of Chartres, Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper* (most recent intervention completed in 1999) and *Virgin and Child with St Anne* (2012), and Rembrandt van Rijn’s *The Night Watch* (2018–). Other works may also be discussed. We will consider questions such as:

- Should we be cleaning works of art and architecture?
- Is cleaning a legitimate form of preservation?
- What values do we ascribe dust, dirt, pollution and patina?
- What values do we conversely impute to cleanness and purity?
- Can cleaning be interpreted as a form of iconoclasm?
- Or is it to be understood as a form of archaeology (peeling back the layers)?
- How do we feel about the idea of the preservation of dilapidation?

Some of the thinkers with the help of whom we will reflect on the practice of cleaning as conservation are: Alois Riegl (age value); Mary Douglas (purity, pollution and taboos); Iain McGilchrist (the aesthetics of age); Jorge Otero-Pailos (the ethics of dust); Rem Koolhaas (non-intervention as preservation tactic); Henri Bergson (the concept of duration); Mircea Eliade (ritual cleansing); Juhani Pallasmaa (black purity); Henri Lefevbre (the relationship between the taboo and the holy), St Francis of Assisi (the relationship between dirt and death); and John Wesley (from whom I have cheekily borrowed part of my title).

* The inspiration for the workshop series “Rent nog” arose following an ICOMOS symposium on Medieval Murals in the Church Attics of Östergötland: Technical Art History, Reception History, Value held at Norrköping Art Museum in 2015. The published proceedings of this symposium presented a range of thoughts and questions about wall painting and cleaning that have inspired continued exchanges on this topic. “Rent nog” (2018–2019) was supported by the IIC Nordic Group – Swedish Section (NKF-S) – the Märta, Gunnar, Arvid Bothéns Foundation



LECTURER BIO

Marie Clausén is the author of "Sacred Architecture in a Secular Age: Anamnesis of Durham Cathedral" (Routledge 2016/2017). She holds bachelor's degrees in Political Science, Sociology, and Art History, and master's degrees in International Relations (University of Reading) and Art History (Uppsala University). She is currently pursuing a PhD in Religion at the Department of Classics and Religious Studies, University of Ottawa. Her doctoral research is focussed on the medieval churchscape of Norfolk, England, which boasts the highest density of medieval churches north of the Alps. Aside from her academic pursuits, Marie is a published poet, and has spent twenty years in the academic book publishing industry on either side of the Atlantic in a variety of editorial roles.

She was a participant in the recently released [podcast "What is Clean Enough?"](#) arranged and sponsored by the Märta, Gunnar, Arvid Bothéns Foundation, Disent, University of Gothenburg (Dept. Of Conservation), Early Modern Cultural History at Uppsala University, NTNU (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) University Museum, Trondheim.

HOSTS FOR THE LECTURE

- The project "[Rent nog](#)" [What is Clean Enough?]
- ICOMOS Sweden's, scientific [working group for mural paintings](#)
- The research project "Critical assessment of the significance of Wall Painting Conservation in Sweden"* , [University of Gothenburg](#)

Welcome!

* The multi-disciplinary research project entitled "Critical assessment of the significance of Wall Painting Conservation in Sweden" funded by the The National Heritage Board of Sweden R&D-program , coordinated by Austin Nevin at the University of Gothenburg will bring together local policy makers, regional museums, conservators, art historians and scientists to investigate the sustainable conservation and digital documentation of Sweden's wall paintings, and to provide access to conservation records. Partners in the project include, Stavroula Golfomitsou (University of Gothenburg) Henrik Widmark and Johan Eriksson (University of Uppsala), Jacob Kimvall (University of Stockholm) and Anna Henningson (Disent).

SUGGESTED READINGS

Connolly, Kate. "The Night Watch: Rembrandt painting to be restored under world's gaze," The Guardian, October 16, 2018:
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/oct/16/the-night-watch-rembrandtpainting-to-be-restored-under-worlds-gaze>

Koolhaas, Rem & Jorge Otero Pailos, Preservation Is Overtaking Us (GSAPP transcript, 2014): <https://www.arch.columbia.edu/books/reader/6-preservation-is-overtaking-us>

Ramm, Benjamin. "A Controversial Restoration That Wipes Away the Past," The New York Times, September 1, 2017:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/01/arts/design/chartres-cathedral-restoration-controversial.html>

Riegl, Alois. "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development" originally published in German in 1903, translated by Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo:
<https://courseworks2.columbia.edu/courses/10532/files/579062/preview?verifyr=MgAAgAMWmMdYXLjupF7bUH6MzbzuQaOef80wbkQw>