

Book review: Hans Hofmann: The Artist's Materials. Dawn V. Rogala

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Book reviewed by Ria German-Carter

This comprehensive book on the life, work and materials of Hans Hofmann will be of great interest to conservators, conservation scientists, art historians, curators, artists, and students. The technical information regarding paint materials and techniques is an especially relevant reference for conservators and conservation scientists, as no comprehensive study on Hofmann's materials has been comprised thus far.

A thorough background is provided of Hans Hofmann as artist and teacher; from his study, teaching and work in Germany, Paris and the United States. The book delves into how Hofmann's work and teaching influenced many important post WW II artists such as Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Franz Kline and Clyfford Still, and Hofmann's place within the oeuvre of the Abstract Expressionism.

The book is divided into Hofmann's early years in Europe, working in Paris in 1904 with Robert Delaunay, Henri Matisse and others. His palette reflects colors used by the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters during this period. Later working and teaching in Munich, (Hofmann's school in Munich in the late 1920's included students Louise Nevelson, Alfred Jensen and Wolfgang Paalen, who left Paris to attend) Hofmann used experimental paint formulations of new organic and inorganic pigments introduced at the turn of the century in Germany. At the beginning of WWII, Hofmann's art was deemed "subversive". He came to the United States to teach, and his schools in New York City and Provincetown MA, and later Berkeley CA were teeming with young American artists eager to learn from his artistic experience in Europe.

Hofmann moved from a concentration on teaching, to creating new work in the 1950's which constitutes his "late work" (from 1950-1964). Rogala concentrates her research on 26 paintings from this period as well as 8 palettes from the Hofmann trust, for her analysis of his materials. It was at this time that the bright colored rectilinear forms emerge in his paintings. The book explores the new formulations of paints used by Hofmann and WPA artists such as Pollock, Kline, and Newman, and how these materials influenced Hofmann's work and methods. The use of an alkyd ground (formulated by the house paint industry) in combination with zinc white tube paint is discussed at length and the probable condition issues caused by their use. It is the use of the combination of industrial paints and traditional artist paints and techniques, as well as the heavy build-up of paint that Rogala deems to have caused many of the reoccurring condition issues in Hofmann's paintings. Also of particular interest is Hofmann's use of localized preparatory layers in some paintings: Dark preparatory layers (black and phthalocyanine green paint applied directly to the canvas) under cool colors, and warm colors applied over a white alkyd ground layer. Some orange colors were applied directly to the canvas with no ground

beneath at all.

The author has delved into her research of the study group of Hofmann's late career paintings and artist palettes and presents findings regarding medium, pigment, conservation materials found, as well as common reoccurring condition issues, such as fatty acid migration, cracking of paint layers, exudates, brittleness, and possible causes for these conditions. The scientific analysis is thorough, and the supporting tables and graphs are relevant and easy to read and interpret.

Ms. Rogala has conveyed her passion for her subject through her in-depth study of Hans Hofmann and has thoroughly immersed herself in her subject, having spent 15 years studying and treating works by Hans Hofmann in various museum conservation labs after completing her PhD in Preservation Studies at the University of Delaware. I would recommend this reference highly to anyone who works with or studies modern paintings and their aging characteristics.