

Types, Diagnosis, and Repairing of Damage to Paintings and Calligraphy: A study based on the NPM Collection

Liu Fang-ju
Painting and Calligraphy Department
The National Palace Museum

Abstract

Chinese Painting and Calligraphy are executed on delicate and fragile medium such as paper or silk. As the NPM collection goes as far back as to the East Jin, Sui, and Tang dynasties, and down to the modern era, most of these age-old works of art have already shown different degrees of natural deterioration, losing their original appearance. Exhibitions and publication incur further damage because of constant moving, rolling up, hanging, and lighting. In order to slow the degradation and to repair various kinds of damage, the Museum has set up a Mounting Studio of conservation and restoration, for the purpose of helping the articles to both exhibit and store better.

The present paper focuses on the NPM paintings and calligraphy collection, taking the image data acquired during the process of preservation, inspection, and conservation to cross-reference with the literature of the old and the recent. The results are compiled into a database of damage description records, an essential task for preserving cultural articles in the same way hospitals must keep track of symptoms in a patient's medical history. Treating properly necessitates diagnosing correctly the causes and characteristics of the damage. Only a suitable conservation plan can effectively extend the life of a precious article.

Keywords: damage to paintings and calligraphy, deterioration, preservation, restoration, conservation, the National Palace Museum (NPM)