

8th International Conference on Watermarks in Digital Collections

Title: *The Watermarks Project: documenting watermarks from the 17th century Dutch drawings collection at the Rijksmuseum with low-energy X-ray radiography*

Abstract

The Conservation and Science Department of the Rijksmuseum is currently working on the Watermarks Project. Employing low-energy X-ray radiography, the ongoing documentation campaign focuses on the most prestigious section of the museum's drawings collection: Rembrandt, his pupils and other 17th century Dutch artists.

Low-energy X-ray radiography is combined with imaging plates as it enables the visualization of the watermark without interference from unpigmented drawings or sketches. Within the project, not only high-resolution digital images of the watermark (when it is present) are taken, but the entire sheet of paper used for the drawing is captured, unveiling the chain and laid line structure.

Radiographs of several thousands of Dutch drawings are expected to be taken over a period of two years with the aim of making the high-resolution images available to the Watermark community and to the broader audience by publishing the results online, freely available, on the museum website.

As the project progresses, the digital images are being systematically organized and shared internally with colleagues as an initial step. Concurrently, a preliminary index of the identified watermarks is being compiled.

The imaging campaign has been ongoing for over a year, during which the use of the X-ray unit has garnered interest from others as well. Through the museum's Research Request Form, artworks on paper from various collections have been analyzed, yielding new and fascinating insights. This demonstrates the technique's versatility and utility for studying a wide range of paper-based artworks.

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