

Abstract:

Innovative watermark research in Dutch drawings: a pilot project at the RKD

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The RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History in The Hague provides access to knowledge, research, and information about Netherlandish art in an international context. In the pilot project, "Innovative research into watermarks in Dutch drawings," the RKD systematically investigates watermarks in a set of c. 500 seventeenth century Dutch drawings, focusing on those in the oeuvre of Rembrandt and his circle. The project involves collaboration with six Dutch and French collections to analyze 17th century drawings and aims to present freely accessible watermark data within RKD Research, linked to artwork and artist information.

This initiative, funded by E-RIHS (European Research Infrastructure for Heritage Science) addresses the important role of watermarks in paper for understanding art production, dating, and provenance, while showing the RKD's engagement with computational art history and to enhance digital accessibility. As traditional watermark research methods are often time-consuming and yield noisy images, we assess with a group of students the opportunities of the new Watermark Imaging System (WImSy), developed by Yale University. This mobile device is capable of rapidly visualizing and capturing both surface and internal paper structures under various lighting conditions. Complementary video-overlay and marking-tool software facilitates precise comparison and identification of watermarks, significantly improving accuracy, especially as watermark libraries expand.

This project allows the RKD to contribute meaningfully to innovative art historical research and digital humanities. By showcasing the WImSy and associated software, the RKD aims to build a network of collaborators and promote knowledge sharing. This presentation will serve as a call to action for international collaboration and a demonstration of the RKD's commitment to open access resources and the sharing of data and expertise of Netherlandish artworks on paper to the community.