



## **The Art Beneath- Spike Bucklow**

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Through these microscopic cross-sections of thirteenth-to twentieth-century paintings, Spike Bucklow unearths the hidden processes, materials and techniques of Rembrandt, Carravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi, Walter Sickert, Claude Monet, Marianne North and more. Within one sample of paint, the size of a pin prick or full stop, lies a vast and complex geological strata; a masterpiece by Titian becomes an abstract landscape of yellowing varnish, crunchy blue lapis, a silken slab of lead white, sea shells floating in chalk, egg mingling with oil atop of taut canvas.

The Art Beneath, reorients painting as three-dimensional and durational, revealing the painter's patient assembling (and conservators' quiet retracing) of an artwork from ground up.

Selected from an academic collection of over 7,000 paint samples, this index of 120 abstract landscapes liberates the cross-section from its illustrative role in technical reports. The fragments simultaneously reveal the quiet act of conservation, like painting, to be both a science and an art.

The Art Beneath gives access to images that have previously only been seen in art conservation studios, in conservation laboratories and in the 'grey literature' that conservators produce for other conservators and the owners of great paintings. The images are usually inaccessible, not due to a desire for secrecy but for logistical reasons. They require a microscope to be seen and, in the conservation world, they are primarily considered to be 'technical' and 'illustrative' rather than of 'aesthetic' value in themselves.

The microscopic samples are a metaphor for the whole profession of art conservation. Like conservators themselves, these chips of paint are usually silent and invisible. But the work they do - speaking to scientists to provide information vital to the care of paintings - enables us all to continue appreciating the work of great artists. In a quiet conservator-like way, this book sings the praises of painters.

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