

Condition Report

W. Sawyer Metal Advertisement Sign

And

W. Sawyer Wood-type on Paper Advertisement Poster

Aimee Sawyers

481-3664

March 8, 2006

ARTH 404

Professor Amanda Gray

Condition Report – Prepared by Aimee Sawyers (student #:481-3664), March 8, 2006

This report provides a detailed description and condition analysis of two objects from the William Sawyer Collection, located in the Queen's Archives, Kathleen Ryan Hall, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

OBJECT #1:

Artist: William Sawyer; Canada, 1820-89

Date: unknown, mid to late 1800's based on the Artist's life span and oeuvre

Type of Object: metal advertisement sign

Artifact Identification #: folio D15

OBJECT #2:

Artist: William Sawyer; Canada, 1820-89

Date: unknown, mid to late 1800's based on the artist's life span and oeuvre

Type of Object: wood type print on paper, advertisement poster

Artifact Identification #: folio D15

The first object that I examined is a composite, rectangular, metal, advertisement sign from the William Sawyer collection, housed at the Queen's archives (fig.1). The exact dimensions of the object are 30.7 X 43.6 centimeters. While both the front and posterior of the object are coated in a black enamel of some description, it is evident in areas of minor paint loss that the metal support beneath is a dull, silver-grey colour. It is also very thin and flexible, and the object as a whole is quite light-weight. I am not positive as to the specific type of metal that this object consists of however due to its intended use as an advertisement sign, possibly exposed to environmental elements, and likely displayed in an easily accessible, unprotected space, I will speculate that the support metal is one that would have been fairly inexpensive and readily available at the time; for example, iron or steel. As stated previously, both the front and back surfaces of the object are evenly coated in black, shiny enamel that is presumably oil based. The black coating is quite smooth in texture. Juxtaposed on the surface of the enamel coating are two lines of gold text, as well as a thin gold border around the perimeter of sign. Upon initial examination it was unclear as to whether the metal support was first coated or gilded in the gold colour and then overlaid with black, leaving areas of gold exposed to create the script and the border, or whether the black layer was applied first, followed by the gold coloured text and border. However, with the use of raking light, as well as very careful examination under the microscope, I have concluded that the latter proposal is the case.

The first line of text reads "W. Sawyer," and is written in large block lettering arched across the top of the sign, the font closely resembles "Times New Roman" font, and has a stenciled appearance to it, as the lettering is very uniform and evenly spaced. The consistency of this text is particularly noticeable if one compares the two "W's." The probability of this first line of text having been stenciled is further supported by comparing the first line of text on the object of interest to the lettering of another set of advertisement signs, likely created more or less around the same time (fig. 2). One is able to clearly see that the lettering on the signs that I have referenced for comparison sake, varies in size, spacing, shape, not only from one sign to the next, but also from letter to letter on the same sign. The text on these signs has quite obviously been painted free-hand based on their variance and the pencil layout lines left behind (fig. 3 & 4). Also in gold text, the second line on the W. Sawyer sign reads "Portrait Painter." However, instead of stenciled block lettering, this text is inscribed in a scroll-like font and is written in a straight line close to the bottom of the sign. It also seems as though this portion of the text was written free-hand by the artist, as the two "P's," and the "r's" in the phrase are noticeably

different in shape and size. Further indicating that the second line was free-handed, the letters in the word 'Painter' become more tightly spaced, smaller in size, and the angle on which they are slanted becomes less extreme compared to the letters in 'Portrait,' (fig.5). Regardless of size, shape, orientation, and style, all of the lettering is depicted in a low-luster, brassy-gold tone. The material used for the gold lettering and the border of the sign was not immediately obvious. Gold metallic paint of some sort was one possibility however no brush strokes are visible in the lettering, and by again comparing this object with the other set of signs previously noted, one can see that the colour and metallic appearance of the lettering on the W. Sawyer sign is very different from the set of signs which are clearly painted with a gold-tone paint. As suggested previously, gilding was another possibility however, based on my limited knowledge of metal gilding, the texture of the gold lettering and border is far too uneven to be gilded. I therefore came to the conclusion that the lettering of the W. Sawyer sign was done in a form of gold leaf. Although with age, the majority of the leaf has become quite dull and brassy in colour, by examining the lettering and border under a microscope and even with the naked eye, in some spots one is able to see the bright gold edges characteristic of gold leaf, around the perimeters of the letters and border. With the microscope I was also able to see the slightly decayed edges typical of gold leaf. Under the microscope the texture of the gold leaf appeared grainy and almost wrinkled or tented.

The object that I examined in conjunction with the metal sign is also part of the Queen's Archives' William Sawyer Collection. It is a work on paper and like the metal sign was intended to be a form of advertisement (fig. 6). The primary support of this object is a thin, light weight, quite low-grade paper similar to newsprint. Also, the paper is matte and has a smooth texture however one is able to see the fibres of the paper with the naked eye. Furthermore, the paper support is white or off-white in colour (now discoloured to a yellow-brown), and slight impurities, which are significantly darker in colour, can be noticed throughout the paper. The exact dimensions of this object are 26.2 X 34.4 centimeters. The only image on this object is text, and like the metal sign, this text reads "W. Sawyer, Portrait Painter." The text on the paper object is divided into two lines in the same way as the metal sign with "W. Sawyer," on the first line, and "Portrait Painter.," on the second line. Also like the metal sign, each line of text has been printed with a different font type. However, both types of font used on the paper object are block-like instead of one being scroll-like, and the first line of text is done in a substantially larger font size than the text on the second line. Additionally, both lines of text are straight as opposed to the first line being arched, as is the case on the metal sign, and the lines of text are perfectly centred within the dimensions of the paper support. The lettering was printed onto the paper in black ink using a wood-block printing method. We know that wood-type printing was used due to the embossing of the paper around each letter. Also, the grain of the wood can be seen in the lettering of the word 'Painter,' (fig.7). This portion of the text is also slightly lighter than the rest which I feel could be the result of uneven inking of the wood-block, or an uneven pressure setting on the press used to print the poster. There is no date, label, or hand-written signature anywhere on this paper object.

The overall condition of the metal advertisement sign is quite satisfactory. Due to the fact that this object is comprised of one solid piece of light-weight metal which is minimally corroded and is not cracked, the object can be considered fairly stable. It was therefore sturdy enough to be turned over and examined on both sides, as well as moved carefully in order to study the artifact under magnification. On both the front and the back of the object, slight scratches in the black enamel are scattered generally. However, in the bottom-middle of the

front side of the sign, there are two marked scuff marks. One is approximately 2.54 centimeters in length and extends on a forty-five degree angle from the bottom edge of the object inwards. The second marked scuff is approximately 11.4 centimeters in length, and extends horizontally across the sign in a wide 'u' shape. Above the first 'r' in the word 'Portrait,' there are two moderate scratches that cross over one another, and extend upward on a forty-five degree angle for approximately 6.4 centimeters. Scattered generally over both the front and back of the sign there are slight flecks of paint loss. This damage is somewhat more concentrated over the word 'Portrait.' In the top left of the object, directly under the 'W,' there is a marked dent in the surface of the metal as if something were dropped on the sign. There are two more marked dents in the metal at the middle-right on the front of the sign. These damages appear to be the result of the metal being bent upwards slightly, and then bent straight again. The most severe damage that affects this object can be seen in the corners of the artifact. The bottom-right corner of the front of the sign is most severely damaged (fig.8). First of all, under the 'i' in the word 'painter,' a marked crease line can be seen. It appears as though the corner was bent upwards and to the left, and then pressed down flat again, leaving the crease mark from the bend. Further towards the bottom-right corner of the front of the sign, there is more damage to the object as a result of bending the metal. Here it appears that the corner was bent towards the back of the sign and then pressed flat again. However, when the corner was forced flat again, the artifact suffered damage to its paint along the fold line in the form of buckling. There has also been slight flaking of the black enamel along this bend site. Also in the bottom-right area of the front of the sign, the corner of the metal was severely dog-eared towards the back of the sign at some point, and then bent back to a flat position again. There is now a marked crease in the metal and a substantial amount of black enamel has flaked off the metal along this crease. The very tip of this corner still remains dog-eared towards the front of the sign. The front, upper right corner of this object also represents a damage site (fig.9). This corner also appears to have been dog-eared towards the front of the sign at some point and then bent flat again. The tip of the corner still remains bent up slightly. Like the bottom-right corner, the metal has been left creased and there has been some moderate paint loss along the crease line. However, in this corner, where the metal support has been exposed, corrosion of the metal has begun to take place and slight amounts of rust have formed. The tip of the front, top-left corner has been broken off completely, and similarly to the front, top-right corner, rust has begun to form here (fig10). Like the two right corners, the front, bottom-left corner has also been bent. However the damage left in this corner appears to be compression lines as though the sign may have been dropped on this corner (fig.11). Here, creases have been left in the metal and the corner remains slightly bent in an accordion shape. In this area of the sign there has been negligible paint flaking. At the centre-right of the front of the object there is a narrow area that extends for approximately 7.6 centimeters, from edge of the sign to the 'R' in 'Sawyer,' that seems as though it must have had something spilled on it. This area is slightly discoloured, it lacks the shine of the black enamel covering the rest of the sign and is cloudy in colour.

The gold leaf in which the lettering and the border of this object have been treated has also suffered marked damage over time. Obvious scratches in, and losses of the gold leaf are scattered generally over the entire object. Specifically, the gold leaf in the 'W' of 'Sawyer' (fig.12), the first 'r' and 't' of 'Portrait' (fig. 13), and the 'P' of 'Painter,' has suffered more severe damage, in the form of loss (fig 14). The gold leaf of the 'r,' and the 't' seems to have been scraped away in some manner. In the 'P' of 'Painter,' it appears that the leaf has flaked off. In both of these areas, the support metal has been exposed, and seems to be corroding slightly.

Similarly, throughout the gold leaf border, there are many instances of moderate loss of gold leaf resulting in the exposure of the base metal. Furthermore, in many of the areas where loss of gold leaf has occurred, it seems as though one is able to see brownish-coloured remains of the sizing used to adhere the gold leaf to the metal.

In my opinion, like the metal advertisement sign, the paper advertisement poster is in quite good condition. It is not overly brittle and could fairly easily be turned over in order to examine the posterior of the artifact. However, due to the nature of the primary support material of this object, I feel that the paper advertisement poster is far less stable than the metal sign. Paper has a tendency to weaken and become brittle with age. While this paper artifact is presently in good condition, I predict that with time, it will become increasingly fragile, especially considering the fact that the primary support of the object is a thin, low-grade paper to begin with. Overall, this artifact is quite clean. However, a few examples of localized soiling are present in certain areas of this object. To begin, on the top-left side of the front of the object, there is a heart-shaped discrete stain that is moderately darker than the rest of the paper and is approximately 2.54 centimeters in diameter (fig. 15). At some areas of the edges on the front of the poster, small spot stains exist. These stains are brownish-yellow in colour and are significantly darker than the rest of the paper. In my opinion, they are likely liquid stains as the perimeter of the stains are distinct and noticeably darker than the main area of the stains. A grouping of these stains can be noticed on the front, bottom-right edge the paper, and a few more are located along the front, bottom edge of the object (fig. 16). In the front, upper left corner of the artifact, there is another example of what I have identified as a liquid stain. However, I consider this stain quite a bit more extreme than the smaller spots around the edges of the paper. It is in the shape of a half circle, and is an extremely dark yellow-brown colour in comparison with the overall paper colour (fig. 17). Around the perimeter of the object, one can see that all of the edges and corners are slightly darkened to a grey-brown colour. I would suggest that this staining is an example of diffused staining, as there is no real boundary to these stains. They simply blend gradually into the overall yellowing of the paper. I feel that this staining is likely the result of careless handling of the poster with bare fingers. Aside from the previously discussed staining, the overall colour of the object is moderately yellowed. This object does not seem to have been exposed to extreme amounts of light as the paper is not severely yellowed, is not overly brittle and the printed text is not faded in any way. The only visible problem with the printed text is the thin, dark brown halo that exists around all of the lettering. In my opinion, this is likely the result of a reaction between the low-grade paper and the oil based ink used to print the text. The halo appears to be some of the ink's oil content bleeding outward from where it was printed. The posterior of this object looks very similar to the front. The impurities in the paper are consistent and the overall discolouration of the paper is consistent. However, the dark, half-circle shaped stain in the upper left area of the front of the artifact has bled through so that it is also visible on the back. Furthermore, some of the black ink from the printing of the text has seeped through to the back of the paper. Over the entirety of the object, there exists slight wrinkling and buckling of the paper, suggesting that the poster may have been rolled at some point. The edges however, are where the object has been most damaged by wrinkling and creasing. The front, bottom, right, and top edges of the object are all marked with long, diagonal creases that extend one edge of the paper to the next (fig 18). This creasing has given the bottom and top edges of the paper a wave-like appearance, and the right side of the paper accordion style creases. Likely, this creasing is the result of careless handling and scrunching of the paper. At the top-left corner on the front side of the object, one can see that this corner has been dog-eared

towards the back of the poster twice. Two distinct and quite extreme creases are now present in this area of the object (fig. 19). There are however, no losses, holes, cuts, tears, or splits in the paper support of this object.

In my opinion, the primary concern regarding the conservation and restoration of the metal advertisement sign is to maintain its generally good and stable condition. In order to do so, the main issue that needs to be addressed is the rust that has already formed on the object, and also the areas of metal that are exposed and therefore have the potential to become corroded. Firstly, the rusted areas must be stabilized so that future risk of deterioration is minimized. According to my research on the conservation of painted and polychromed metal work, this may involve removing areas of flaking, blistering paint where rust is visible, in order to check the extent of corrosion. As stated by Diana Heath in her article "The conservation of painted and polychromed metal work, two case studies from the V&A Museum," it is "out of the question to treat rust without exposing it." This removal of damaged paint could simply be done with scalpels and metal scrapers however care should be taken not to disturb any stable paint layers. In the case study provided by Heath, once the damaged paint was removed from the object, nodular rust was removed mechanically using scrapers, 'blunted' scalpel blades and '0000 grade' steel wool wrapped around bamboo skewers. Additionally, a rust converter that Heath refers to as 'Trustan 23' was then applied locally, using fine, sable hair brushes. According to Heath, 'Trustan 23' leaves no harmful residue on the object and "acts readily on active iron oxide goethite $\text{FeO}(\text{OH})$ converting it to magnetite Fe_3O_4 , - a stable black oxide." This same process may be applicable to the metal object that I studied, however a conservator should be consulted and appropriate testing should be performed.

Once the rusted areas have been treated, areas of exposed metal should be retouched and sealed so that further corrosion does not take place. Areas of the sign that are bent or dog-eared should likely be flattened as much as possible so that they do not get caught on anything and in turn, bend more severely. Sections of the text and border where gold leaf has been lost could be toned or replaced, however this would be quite an extensive undertaking and the application of new gold leaf may be more distracting than the areas of loss, as it would be much brighter than the aged gold leaf. This object may also benefit from an all-over surface cleaning so that the cloudy stain at the centre-right of the object might be removed. However, care must be taken not to further disturb the gold leaf.

In my opinion, this object can be safely stored, displayed, and carefully handled. However, this object should be displayed and stored in a protective enclosure in order to protect it from excessive handling and dust that may collect on the surface of the object and in the uneven texture of the gold leaf. A stable RH should be maintained around this object in both storage and display so that the paint layers are not damaged by the different expansion and contraction reactions of the paint material and the metal. While metal objects are best preserved at an RH level below 30%, minimal damage will be caused to the artifact if it is stored at the standard RH level for mixed collections. Although the metal component of this object will not be adversely affected by exposure to light, the object is coated in a black paint and should therefore be stored and displayed in low light levels to prevent damage to the enamel. In both storage and display, this object should be kept off the ground and out of harms way of any overhead piping, as water damage will cause the metal, of which the artifact is composed, to rust. In storage, display, and handling, this object should not be put in direct contact with any other form of metal as the metal object may react adversely. Proper gloves should be worn when handling this object to avoid the transfer of oils onto the object.

Like the metal advertisement sign, the primary concern for the paper object is also to maintain its overall good condition, and keep it as stable as possible considering the fact that it is a work on paper. Nevertheless, this object would benefit from an overall surface cleaning as the dark stain in the upper-left portion of the object, the small stains along the edges, the heart-shaped stain at the top of the piece, and the darkening of the paper's edges are distracting to the eye. However extreme caution would need to be employed as the use of eraser particles may prove to be too abrasive for the thin paper of which this object is composed. Tests should be carried out to ensure that the paper would not be damaged by surface cleaning. Although this object has no tears, holes, or losses to repair, I feel that it would be appropriate to attempt to flatten the paper as much as possible. The marked creasing around the perimeter of the artifact is quite distracting to the viewing of the object as a whole. Furthermore, although I have not noticed any evidence, this object should be inspected for biological infestation by mould or insects before it is stored or displayed.

Similar to the metal object, I feel that the paper advertisement poster is safe to be stored, displayed, and very carefully handled. As far as storage is concerned, this object should be kept enclosed in an archival box that is well-suited to the size of the object itself. As discussed previously, the paper used for this object is quite light-weight so, to effectively make use of storage space, could therefore be stored in a box with other paper objects of the same paper quality, similar size, and weight. There should however be acid-free interleaving between each layer of paper and one should be cautious not to over-pack the archival box so as to avoid compressing and placing strain on the lowermost papers. The temperature and RH in the storage vault where this object is housed should be kept low and below 50% respectively. Low temperature and RH levels help to slow the deterioration of paper and increases its lifespan. The storage area should also be kept dark whenever possible.

In both storage and display of this object, the environment should be kept clean, and dust, insect, and rodent free. This object should be kept above ground level, away from outside walls that may be subject to fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity, away from piping of any kind and out of direct sunlight. Exposure to water will destroy this object and exposure to sunlight will cause the paper to become brittle and yellow and the image to fade.

For display, this object should be kept enclosed to prevent touching and soiling of the object. Matting the sign with an archival mat board and then placing the sign behind glass is a possibility however I feel that this treatment may alter the context in which this object is meant to be seen. Different possibilities for display, that would better suit the original context of this object, will need to be explored. Perhaps a storage case where all of the paper can be seen, all the while keeping it enclosed, would be more appropriate. Although a lower temperature and RH level are most appropriate for this work, in display human comfort must be considered and it is therefore appropriate to display this work in a maximum temperature of 21 degrees Celsius. Light levels should be kept as low as possible so that the object is not damaged but bright enough that the object can be seen. Damaging UV rays should always be filtered.

Although this object is presently stable enough to be handled, handling should be kept to a bare minimum and appropriate gloves should always be worn.

Almeida

Bibliography

- Heath, Diana. "The conservation of painted and polychromed metal work, two case studies from the V&A Museum," in *Conservation of Metals: Problems in the treatment of metal-organic and metal-inorganic composite objects*, International Restorer Seminar: 1-10 July 1989, ed. Márta Járó. Veszprém: István Éri, 1990.
- LeBlanc, Raymond. *Gold Leaf Techniques*, 3rd ed. Cincinnati: ST Publications, 1986.
- Henley's Twentieth Century Formulas, Recipes and Processes*, Avenel 1979 ed., s.v. "Gilding Steel," U.S.A.: Crown Publishers Inc., 1979.

W. SAWYER,

Portrait Painter.

Fig #1.

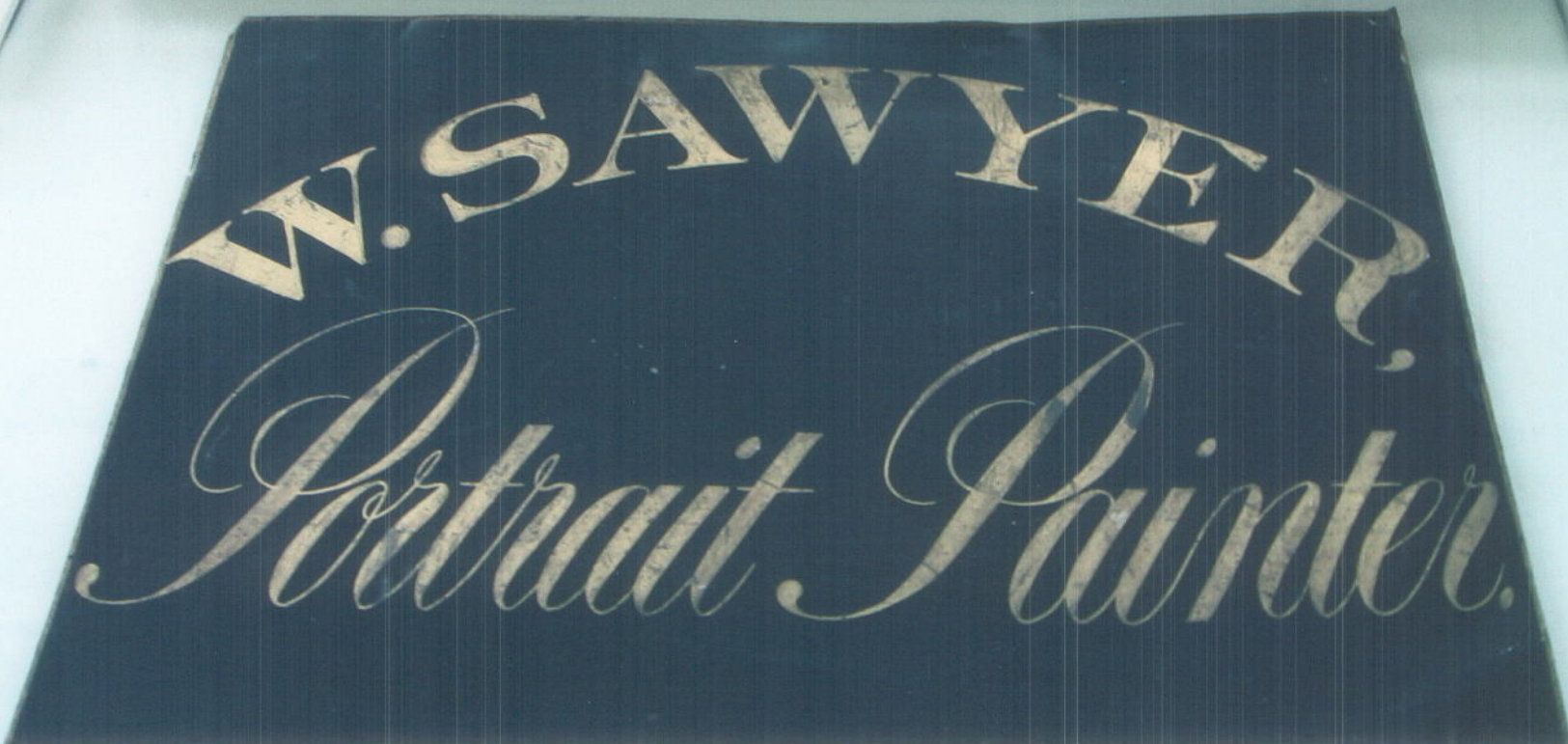


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

W. SAWYER,
PORTRAIT PAINTER.



Fig. 8

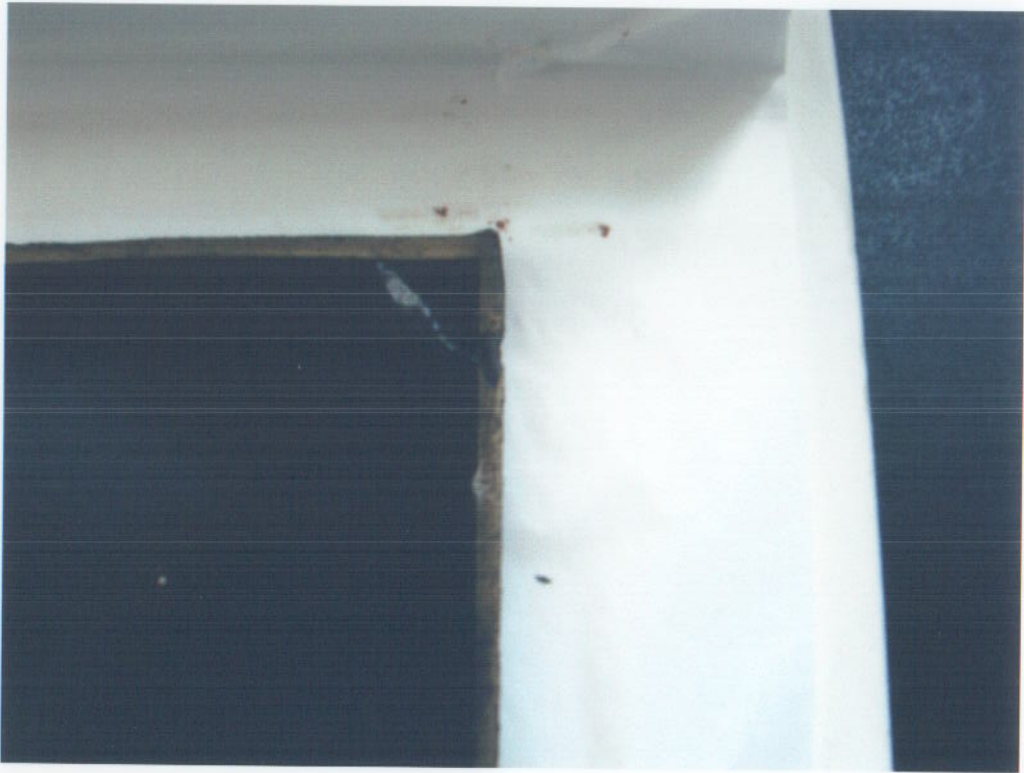


Fig. 9

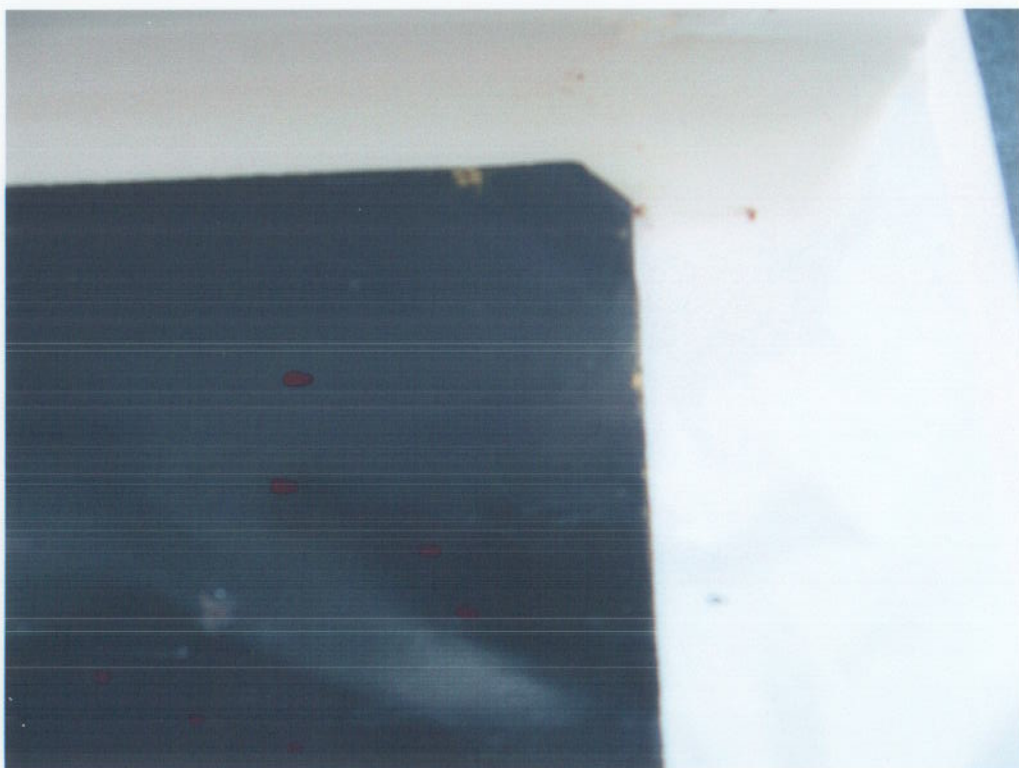


Fig. 10

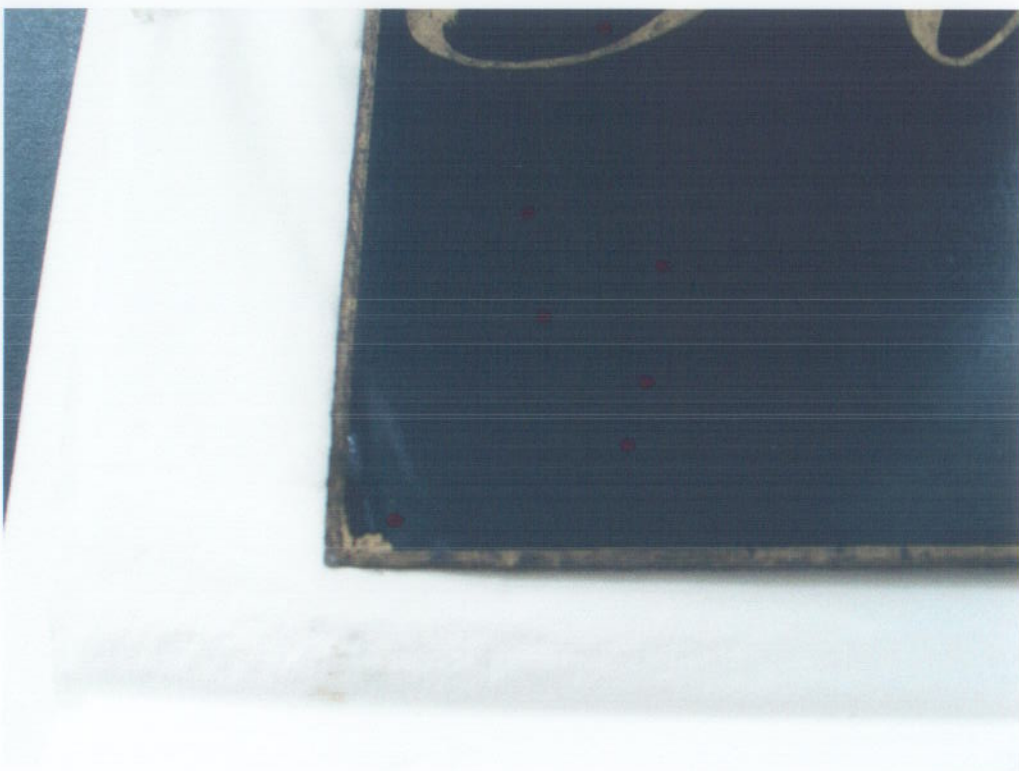


Fig. 11



Fig. 13



Fig. 12

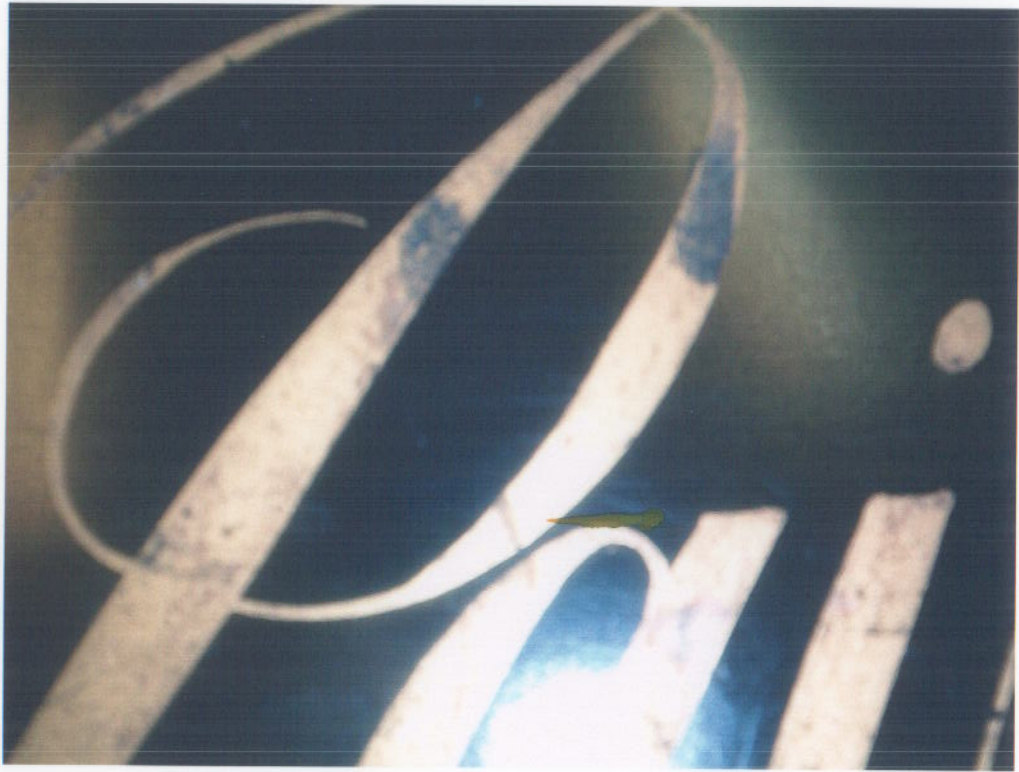


Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

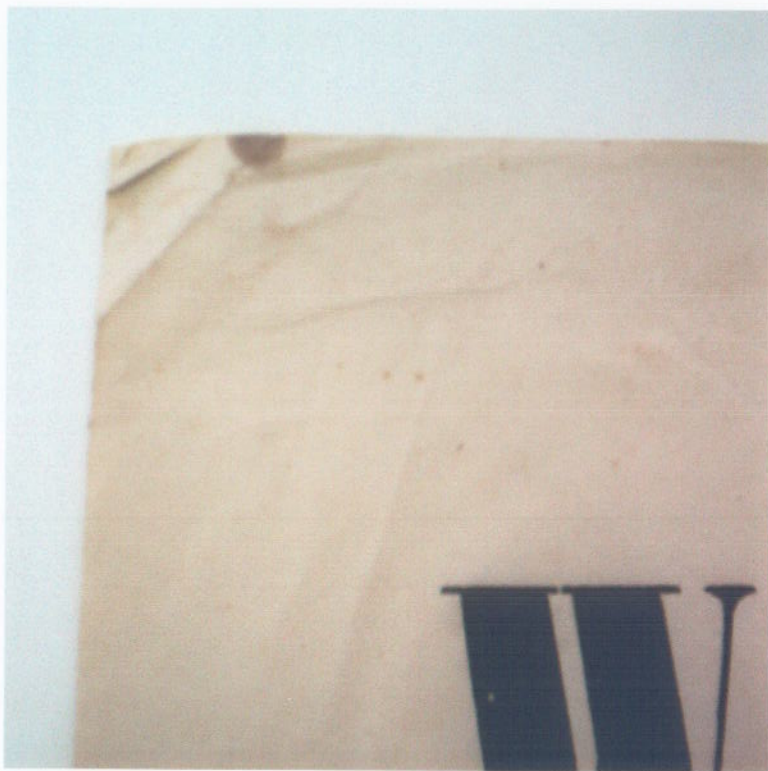


Fig. 19