

## WHY, OH WHY, DO PAINTINGS CRACK?

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ABSTRACT - I came, I saw, it was cracked already.

### INTRODUCTION

I used to wonder about cracklure - like whether to spell it sensitive (*craquelure*) or not. Some people say crackle, but that makes me think of the crispy hairy layer you pull off a roast pig, and that takes forever to chew, so you swallow it down and try hard not to barf. I would reserve that term, I think, for badly burned Breughels. And why *lure*? Is this the hidden advertising, the al-lure, the ve-lure, the come-hither-lure for the connoisseur of cracklure? I prefer just plain cracks myself, or cracking, like get cracking you great fatty triglyceride bastards. Well, maybe crack pattern, for high occasions, like journal articles.

### NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

I used to know, but I've forgotten. I think some people don't like cracks in paintings. At least, not ones that weren't there last time they counted them. But who counts cracks? Is this Sesame Street? How? With golf counters, rulers, computers? Crack counters deserve to be unhappy, and die early, God help them. Maybe dirt in cracks is the problem. That must be it. Nasty cracks. Like filthy fingernails at Grandma's and it's Sunday dinner time. *A priori* evil. No, I remember now, its cracks that makes flakes. That's it. No one likes flakes. I remember. My ex yelled it a lot.

### EXPERIMENT

OK, OK, I did some experiments. Good ones. Believe me, excellent ones. But boring. My God, you wouldn't believe. Boring. Boring. Well, OK, maybe not brilliant, either. Actually, stupid. Truly stupid. And boring. I think one of the reviewers said "monumentally and profoundly stupid and boring" but I think that was only directed at me personally, not at the study *per se*. I liked "monumentally and profoundly" but the stupid and boring part, well, I admit it hurt. NOT! Get serious, I'm no woosie geek, I'm a scientist.

So, first we (CCCI) commissioned 50 paintings at \$5,000 each. These were all portraits of the director, so he could use them afterwards as Christmas presents. (Am I stupid?) Then I aged them naturally for a year, during which time I watched them. Carefully. Very carefully. I had done other experiments before, for which I was told I had missed the point, so I didn't want to miss it this time. I watched every day at first, and an assistant watched every night, in case it was a nocturnal emission. After six months, we needed to get back to our committee work, so we set up a video camera, and just watched the video each Friday, on fast forward. After a year, nothing. We sent the videos to an Andy Warhol tribute, and won a prize, but I missed the thrill of poke-in-the-eye data. I thought of my old physics professor, who said I was just an asshole, but I knew I was a conservation scientist. It said so on my card. There had to be a way to get gut-wrenching data. Accelerate the ageing. I baked 'em. After a day at 300°C, they all cracked like pig skins, only more bubbled, fewer hairs. Babe-o-rama. I figure the bake was equivalent to about a millenium at room temperature, so it proved all cracked paintings must be octo-cento, or earlier, or just fire-damaged. This meant curators would have to revise their histories, a lot. It was an exciting moment for me, watching science screw up art history.

### *DISCUSSION*

My data fits nicely with the work of Muckabout and Al. Definitely. Those guys had shown that a Finicky Element Model that cost a bomb and needed gigabytes gave the same results as mine, more or less. Well, close. Sort of. OK, OK, only the units were the same, we used the same units. OK, OK, they didn't use SI, and we had to, some stupid policy thing. We could have had American units if not for some stupid twisted policy thing. Man, if I were in private industry, no uptight bureaucrats... Then there's the work of Bilbo. I don't understand it at all. Is it me, or what? Does anyone understand it? Could you send me a short summary if you know what the ---- he's on about. I get so pissed off reading his stuff. It takes forever to figure it out, and then I discover it's worse than my stuff. Much worse. Well, similar. OK, OK, not as bad. So, sue me. You should live so long.

### *CONCLUSIONS*

I dunno. Conclusions terrify me. I avoid them. You should too, you seem like a good kid. Me, it's into the sunset, campadre, a dying breed, old farts, old boys, the good old days, cock and bull, rinky-dink, all that. *Ciao...*