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Program in Postgraduate and Doctoral Studies in the Discipline of Conservation

Dissertation for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree

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JAPANNING IN SWEDEN 1680s – 1790s.

Characteristics and preservation of orientalized coatings on wooden substrates.

Abstract

Japanning (Swe. *lacqverat arbete*, *lacquerarearbete*, or *japanering*) is originally an English term used to denote European imitations of the oriental counterparts - *urushi wares* or "true" *lacquerworks* (Chin. *Ch'i* or *Tchichou*, Jap. *Urushi*). By "original" *japanning* is understood a variety of European coating techniques aiming to render gloss, colour, and relief, covering all the frontage surfaces of a substrate. This manufacture is considered to have been localized to towns in southern Sweden. The artefacts studied in this context are more or less good representatives of the craft of japanning, from the end of the 17th century to the end of the 18th century, encompassing the Baroque, Rococo, and Gustavian periods. These periods are contemporary with the time of the evolvement of early industry in Sweden, as well as with the publication of many handbooks, treatises, and recipes about japanning in Europe.

Problems in operative conservation of japanned artefacts may be comprehended as being dependent on two major factors. Primarily, prior to this study, no comparative analyses of coating techniques had yet been carried out on potentially Swedish artefacts. Second, these problems might also be considered as a consequence of museum policies, which implies that Swedish museums hitherto have not benefited from analyses and thorough examinations of objects, as much as possible and desirable. Consequently, sound use of collections and preservation strategies for conservation priorities with regard to accepted professional standards had not yet been established.

This dissertation is intended to contribute to the understanding of Swedish japanned artefacts as such and their state of preservation. It is focused on material-technical aspects of the artefacts, and is thus mainly oriented at an operative level. A review of Swedish japanned objects in museum collections has revealed an apparent and wide variation in macroscopically observable visual conditions. Closer investigation on the topic has demonstrated the nature of japanning in terms of substances and processes of manufacture, as well as changes and treatments of the objects, either during their service lives, or after acquisition to museums.

The overall aim is to find means to maintain the cultural historical qualities inherent in authentic artefacts, to prevent damage and loss of information, and further to encourage sound use in short- and long-term.

The results include a set of characteristics which can be used for preventive conservation guiding principles, as well as issues of attribution. In addition, the results may be used to direct research in preferred preventive and remedial conservation treatments, and the development of better standards of practice.

Key words: conservation, japanning, lacquer, coating, analysis, recipe

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