

Japanese Scroll Painting Conservation

A course jointly organised by
the Institute of Paper Conservation and the Victoria & Albert Museum
Department of Paper Conservation

Tutor: Mr Philip Meredith
Assistant: Ms Pauline Webber
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The first day we went through the materials used in Japanese paper conservation, various kinds of paper, silk, pigments and paste. We also practised the use of different Japanese tools for paper conservation.

Brushes, paper knives, bamboo spatulas and drying boards (karibari) are the very important tools to make the scroll mounting possible.



We started with paste making, selecting paper and cutting paper in correct way. We finished the day seeing a video – “Repair and remounting of Cultural Properties in Japan”.

The second day our tutor Mr Philip showed us different kinds of scroll mounting from the collection of the V&A. We refreshed our knowledge of scroll mounting's history and development.



The structures and materials used in the hanging scrolls were still the topic of the day. We practised with lining paper on silk, joins of different parts of mounting materials, drying options and smoothing creases caused by physical damage by mankind. Mr Philip demonstrated the cutting / fitting roller ends and even the correct way to tie the strings and to make knots.



The third day we learned that the most important thing we can do now, with our knowledge on scroll mounting, is to have total control on how scrolls can be displayed and stored in the best and most safe way. We discussed the causes of different kinds of damage. Both preventive and active conservation methods were also presented.



We also had the pleasure to meet Mr Simon Fleury, mounter at the V&A paper conservation department. He spent six weeks in Japan to learn box-making. He gave us a talk with slides on his studies with the Japanese masters. Those specially designed boxes of paulownia or cedar wood have been used for hundreds of years in Japan for protecting the scrolls from burning, moist and shakes during transport.

We carried out the practising of cleaning treatment, crease reinforcing strips, braids, delamination and discussed on storage options.



Mr Philip showed us slides from the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden where about 2000 scroll paintings in Japanese collection are stored. The Dutch government have provided a budget of 200 million guilders to be spent between 1992 – 2000 on improving the conditions of the collections within the Netherlands. The National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden holds the oldest and largest collection of Japanese arts in the Netherlands and was high on the priority list of the museums in need of assistance.

The first phase of the plan for the museum consisted of registration of all objects of the collection on computers. Objects were taken out of the old storerooms, given bar-code labels and photographed for visual access via a database, which also includes all available information on each object. New storage space was provided with temperature and climate control. Because of the scale of the project, work on objects in the collection was restricted to passive conservation during the first phase.

Active conservation work on the collection followed completion of the first phase. The team of handlers was trained to move the collection. They carried out non-intrusive cleaning when necessary and provided simple and safe forms of packing objects before transfer to the new depots.

The work with this Japanese collection showed us a very clear example of the importance of correct storage methods. The scrolls stored in paulownia boxes were in good condition, because the boxes provided a clean, safe micro-climate that protected the scroll from sudden changes in temperature and humidity and allowed the scroll to be transported without shock to the object.

The original paulownia / cedar boxes are unfortunately extremely expensive. When no original boxes existed, corrugated acid-free cardboard boxes were used to store a number of scrolls together. The boxes were fitted with ethafoam supports inside for the roller ends or acid-free card dividers to prevent them from rolling within the box.

The three-day's workshop finished late Thursday evening.

On Friday Mr Philip gave a lecture to the conservation department at V&A on Japanese decorated processed paper in 1900-century. It was very interesting for us who works with Japanese paper conservation. This kind of decorated paper is widely used in scroll mounting and as book covers.

Our tutor Mr Philip Meredith is the head of the Far Eastern Conservation Centre (founded 1993) in Leiden within the National Museum of Ethnology. He studied and worked in the workshop of Usami Shokakudo in Kyoto for 11 years.



Susanne Press and Pauline Webber

Pauline Webber is the head of the Paper conservation in V&A. She is also a very experienced paper conservator of far east paintings. The 10 course participants were from Swaziland, United States, Uruguay, Portugal, Sweden and also five from London private conservation studios.

This well-organised workshop gave us a great opportunity not only to improve our conservation skills and quality on Japanese scroll mounting and other Japanese paper based objects, but we were also able to share our experiences with colleagues from the field. It was even more interesting for me to meet the most experienced and respected master on Japanese paper conservation in Europe, Mr Philip . I've heard his name and read his articles ever since I started my paper conservation education many years ago. I do wish someday to visit Mr Philip Meredith and practise at his studio or invite him to our museum for advice and consulting.

Lin Zhang Freund