Technical Exchange

Don't Look Into My Eyes

The workhorse Optivisor has earned a place high in the toolbag of most every myopic conservator. Still, as a fashion statement, the Optivisor positions itself somewhere between surgical headgear and sunglasses for the blind.

But now the old specs get some new specs: mounting on the Quasar LS Lighting System transforms the Optivisor's standard view into a vision of really remarkable clarity and depth. With no obstruction to the visual field, the LS's bank of six high-intensity LEDs pours oodles of shadowless, penetrating illumination into the deepest holes and crevices. Indeed, the lamp is intense enough for habitual wearers to adopt a downcast gaze and cringing demeanor around colleagues to avoid blinding them with a quick, ingratiating glance to the eyes.

The "System" consists of a lightweight plastic frame which snaps over the Optivisor's existing lens plate, connected to a battery pack. And here is the only fly in an otherwise perfect ointment. When loaded with batteries, the pack weighs just under 3 ounces - enough to become annoying when side-mounted, as the instructions recommend. We found the system worked best with the battery pack attached to the center of the Optivisor's "brim" with a strip of Velcro. Gaffers tape secured the loose wires.

With the Quasar System, you'll pull out your drab old Optivisor with new purpose and pride. The light rack is rugged, easy to use, and the claim of up to 96 hours of use from its pair of AA batteries seems credible. The LS Lighting System installs with a pair of plastic clips, works with acrylic or glass lenses, and the LEDs have a life expectancy of 100,000 hours. The price is $21.95, plus shipping at www.loupe-magnifier.com/quasar_is_lighting_system.htm.

In politics, it's been said that light is the best disinfectant. In conservation, this souped-up Optivisor will reveal, in plain sight, just where to place the Biocide.

Paul Gordon

How the PVOH Sponge Got its Stick

Once upon a time, in a studio not so far away, O my Best Beloved, there was a cotton swab, and it left fibers behind wherever it rolled. It left linters, and snagged impasto, at least some of the time, and was well loved, but not perfect.

During the course of the treatment of a large contemporary painting at the Getty Conservation Institute, a better way to apply and remove an aqueous cleaning solution evolved. This may not be new to everyone, but it was new to us, and it proved to be very handy.

GCI summer intern Jennifer Hickey (NYU) and I were cleaning Doug Wheeler's *Untitled*, 1964. It was painted with Liquitex acrylic ground and paints, and had never been treated. For these two reasons, it was an interesting case study for the GCI's Cleaning Acrylic Painted Surfaces (CAPS) project, and the treatment was undertaken in Tom Learner's lab at GCI.

After determining the best aqueous cleaning solution we had begun cleaning the large (7'4" x 6'10") painting by rolling and rinsing with large cotton swabs. The surface of the painting has a very rough surface as the acrylic ground was applied by spray. The rough surface held lots of cotton fibers. In addition to being annoying, removing the fibers caused some loss of the textured surface – we could find tiny dots of acrylic ground accumulating on the ground and easel below the painting.

Tiarna Doherty, JPGM paintings conservator, had been experimenting with various sponges on acrylic paintings, but this surface was too rough to wipe with a sponge.

The first solution, was to carve a PVOH (poly(vinyl) alcohol) sponge into two large and very roughly shaped cylinders. One sponge was used to apply the cleaning solution and the other was used to apply the clearing solution. Each sponge was dampened, and then first the cleaning solutions and then the rinse was rolled onto the surface of the painting with a gloved hand.

Each sponge was wrung out into a container before rewetting in fresh cleaning or rinse solution.

Getty dec. arts conservator Arlen Heginbotham dropped by the lab, looked at our wonky, hand-carved sponges and had a better idea. He made a core-drill out of a piece of scrap copper tubing. He used a drill press to make us two perfect cylindrical sponges out of a well dried-out PVOH sponge. (The sponge which is purchased wetted and sealed in a plastic bag needs to be rinsed out and allowed to

dry completely so it becomes very hard all the way through before the drill can be used.)

Private conservator Carolyn Tallent visited the lab to see the treatment and suggested that we put Arlen's sponges on swab sticks. Thin swab sticks didn't work well – the wood got waterlogged quickly and flexed too much, but thick bamboo swab sticks worked very nicely.

Carolyn figured that someone must make cylindrical PVOH sponges and did some checking on the Internet. She found a company in Indiana that manufactures them in a many variations, including 2" long 1/2" diameter tubes. (Most of the companies selling PVOH materials seem to be based in China or Korea.)

Unfortunately, they are not cheap. If one buys a bag of 100, they are $.90 each, with price breaks for more.

Qty. 100 - $ .90 each
500 - $ .74 each
1000 - $. 60 each
5000 - $. 48 each

It would obviously be great if a conservation supplier could repackage these for us. Since they can be re-used, one wouldn't need a huge stock of them.

PVA Unlimited
PO Box 1552, Warsaw, IN 46581
Bob South
voice (574) 269-2782
fax (574) 269-2756
bobsouth@comcast.net
www.sponge-pva.com

And, that is how, my Best Beloved, the cotton swab became the PVOH sponge swab. [With apologies to Rudyard Kipling.]

Chris Stavroudis

It's a Lab Tool *and* a Fashion Statement.

Dapaway® Disposable Dappen Dishes are made for dentists and dental hygienists as a convenient way to have fill materials and tooth polish at hand, as it were. The cups are made of polyester, which should tolerate the materials we use for fills.

I got my samples from my hygientist; you can order them through local dental suppliers, or probably your dentist can get them. (Another case where it would be convient for a conservation supplier to stock them.) A box of approximately 1000 cups with one holder is about $25. Ordering a holder alone is $10. (!)

One useful aspect: it's very easy to place your thumb over the top to keep the fill material from drying out.

Carolyn Tallent

WAAC Publications

Handling Guide for Anthropology Collections

Straightforward text is paired with humorous illustrations in 41 pages of "do's and don'ts" of collection handling. A Guide to Handling Anthropological Museum Collections was written by Arizona State Museum conservator Nancy Odegaard and illustrated by conservation technician Grace Katterman. This manual was designed to be used by researchers, docents, volunteers, visitors, students, staff or others who have not received formal training in the handling of museum artifacts. Paperbound and printed on acid-free stock.

Price: $8.85
($6.60 copy for orders >10 copies)

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Back numbers of the *Newsletter* are available. Issues Vol.1 - Vol.14, #3 (Sept. 1992) are $5/copy. Issues Vol.15 - Vol.29, #3 (Sept. 1997) are $10/copy. Issues Vol.30 (Jan. 2008) and after are $15/copy. A 20% discount will be given to libraries seeking to obtain back issues to complete a "run" and for purchases of ten copies or more of an issue.

Prices include shipping and handling. Make checks payable to WAAC drawn in US dollars on a US bank.

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