Materials and Techniques in Early Netherlandish Painting, with a focus on Pieter Bruegel the Elder

INSTRUCTOR: Prof. Ron Spronk
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Early Netherlandish paintings, as material objects, are complex layered structures that were produced with a broad range of materials in distinct stages. Methods of technical examination, such as X-radiography and infrared reflectography, provide complementary information about these objects and their production. This course surveys how Netherlandish paintings were produced, and why this information can be of critical importance for art historians. Topics will include: the division of labour within a workshop, how to ‘read’ X-radiographs and infrared reflectograms, and how to interpret the results of dendrochronological analyses. Although the examples used in this course will be limited to Netherlandish painting, many of these skills and concepts are applicable to other fields within the history of art.

The goal of the course is to provide the necessary toolset to critically read publications in the fast-emerging field of Technical Art History, with a special focus on the particular techniques applied by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525-1569), a highly versatile artist, and uniquely important in sixteenth century Netherlandish art. His remarkably varied oeuvre consists of, among others, drawings, print designs, panel paintings in oil, and paintings on cloth in distemper, a glue-based paint. From October 2, 2018 through January 13, 2019, the very first comprehensive exhibition on the artist was presented at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria, which was co-curated by prof. Spronk.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
A detailed course outline will be available during the first class. The course will involve readings, lectures, student presentations, and writing assignments.