

Examination of Henryk Siemiradzki's *Portrait of a Lady on a Palette* (1884)

Summary

The painting entitled *Portrait of a Lady on a Palette* (1884) from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw underwent analysis as part of a research project aiming to identify the painting technique of Henryk Siemiradzki (1843–1902). An atypical support, which is the palette and the paints which have been preserved on it, make the work unique. The formal analysis of the composition draws attention to the artist's creative temperament, undoubtedly going beyond the stringent rules of academic art. It seems the fact that the painting bears both the date and the artist's signature is evidence that it is more than just an ordinary sketch.

The opportunity to examine almost pure paints squeezed out of tubes made it possible to identify not only individual pigments used by the painter and the way of combining them in the painting, but also some ready-made mixes of paints. The analysis was carried out with the method of X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectroscopy. Among the paints found on the palette there are, for example, vermillion green and brilliant yellow, which were sold as ready-made mixes at the time. Worthy of note is also the identification of Van Dyck pink, a pigment which, as additional analysis showed, was often used by Siemiradzki. Interestingly it is hardly ever mentioned in literature or recognised in the works of other 19th-century painters.