Thus Painted Prince Eugen
Investigations of pigments, painting technique and artistic expression based on scientific methods


Abstract: The subject of this dissertation concerns the pigments and the painting technique used in the work of the Swedish artist, Prince Eugen (1865-1947).

As the fourth son of King Oscar II and Queen Sophia, Eugen was a member of the royal Swedish family. He began painting early in his life, but his career as an artist commenced in earnest when he travelled to Paris to enrich his education at the end of the 1880s. There he learned oil-painting techniques from artists like Bonnat, Puis de Chavannes and Roll. Hence, during his studies in Paris, Eugen became versed in the modern oil-painting techniques of the time. However, upon his return to Scandinavia, and to Sweden in particular, he began to search for his own form of artistic expression.

Prince Eugen currently enjoys a prominent position in Swedish art history. In terms of style, his oeuvre belongs to the period associated with National Romanticism. In terms of subject matter, he mainly painted landscapes. Eugen was an active painter until his death in August 1947.

Although it has been recognised that Eugen changed artistic expression and painting techniques several times over the course of his career, virtually nothing has been known about the materials and methods he used. To remedy this dearth of information, his paintings, including their material features and painting techniques, have been extensively examined as the subject of this dissertation. The results of these analyses show that one of his artistic intentions was to create depth in his paintings. Over the years of his productivity, he deployed different methods to improve his technique and to work towards achieving this goal. Eugen admired the Old Masters like Rembrandt, Rubens, Titian and others, and he wanted to learn their technique. Yet, during Eugen’s lifetime the old traditions and traditional knowledge concerning the materials and painting technique used by the Old Masters had been temporarily lost. In order to obtain as much knowledge as he could about these old traditions, he made contact with the Swiss painter, Arnold Böcklin, although the two never met in person. Prior to this, Eugen had received a Böcklin recipe from the Norwegian painter, Hans Heyerdahl, which described one of Böcklin’s resin colours. Eugen made several attempts using this paint, but after a few years of experimentation, he abandoned the resin colours and adopted mixed technique.

The colours in several of Eugen’s paintings have changed from the original, although such changes have manifested in different ways and on account of different factors. Some paintings, or some areas of a specific painting, have darkened; whereas in other cases, the colours have bleached. In some instances, the transparency of the paint has itself changed. The resulting nature and effects of transformations thus portray a very complex state of affairs. Eugen’s variations in painting technique and the combination of different materials that he used, most likely constitute the main reasons why many of his paintings require restoration.

Keywords: Prince Eugen’s paintings, Prince Eugen’s painting techniques, Prince Eugen’s pigments, Prince Eugen’s artistic expression. Pigment identification, colour changes, conservation, Böcklin’s resin colours, polarization microscopy, fluorescence microscopy, medium analyses, painting examinations, fluorescence examinations in UV, IR-examinations, x-ray fluorescence analyses, x-ray diffraction analyses, E-SEM scanning electron microscopy.

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