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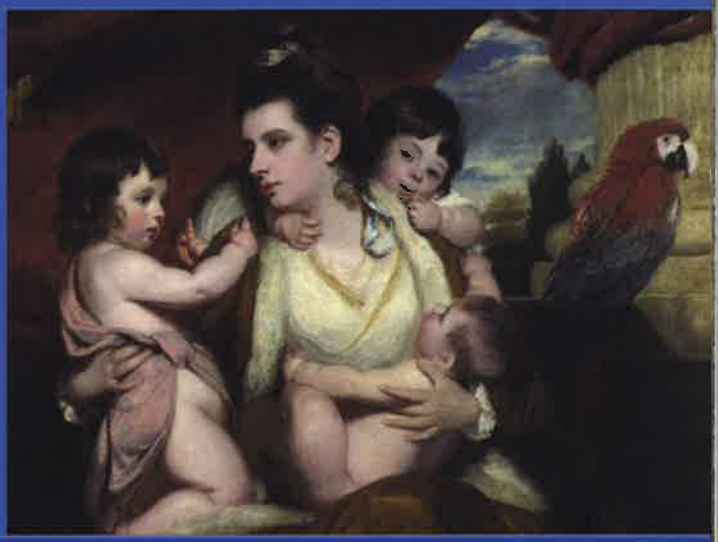

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Book Reviews

Airborne Pollutants in Museums, Galleries, and Archives: Risk Assessment, Control Strategies, and Preservation Management
Jean Tétreault
Canadian Conservation Institute, Ottawa (2003), ISBN 978-0-662-34059-1

Reviewed by Andreas Burmester

Early this morning I made the decision – while sitting on a Munich tram and looking out into the sunny Bavarian morning – not to write the review on Tétreault's book that I had been asked for months, a year or even longer ago. A good decision, for which I have good reasons. The book is a wonderful and useful tool, but it is not a book to read. This is what I would have expected of the book had I been asked to offer an opinion beforehand. I sometimes have the feeling that my lifetime is limited; how much left is unknown. And, I do not want to waste it reading telephone books, timetables or anything of that kind. This book offers a handful of good illustrations, useful for my teaching (scan, copy, paste, do not forget to quote the source), and it has around 40 pages of appendices and interesting tables, carefully worked out, which I often use just to get out a short report. Then I put it back on the shelf. Hold on – no, this is not honest. Actually, I would use these tables if I could only find my reading glasses. Because of the small font size, it takes an hour to read a page on which there is a table, and such a page again makes you think: what are we doing in this case, do we have this situation, do we have this material in one of our depositories? Then your mind – tired by the small type – slowly drifts away from air pollutants to shirts that have to be ironed, to the dishwasher that has to be emptied, to your bed where a real book is waiting. And, beside my bed are my reading glasses; they may help. Tétreault's book has a design from the 1980s. I am from the 1950s, but I do hope that I don't look as old-fashioned as this paperback book with its brown cover of indescribable design. In my suitcase, however, the book has survived serious disasters, melting chocolate and a loose piece of still-wet soap. Maybe brown is an undervalued colour for a cover, good as it is for travelling. Hold on: I notice that I am in the middle of a somewhat different book review...

Fine, we have ten colour plates, which are in fact repetitions of (oh, I found an English 20 pound note, which I used as a bookmark on one of my travels) bad black-and-white reproductions. What on earth led to this decision to separate the text from the colour illustrations? The time of cheap black-and-white printing is over; colour is about the same price. What is the price? Googling Jim Black's website leads to the surprising discovery that this valuable tool is not sold by Archetype. And the same is true for Siegl's bookstore here in Munich, our reliable local book dealer. You know both from the IIC Munich Congress (nice to speak to them again), but why did neither of them decide to offer this useful tool to their customers? I am convinced that it would be wise to publish a book review and then include Tétreault's masterpiece on the selling lists. Everybody who is interested in all those airborne compounds, which slowly transform your art objects into powder, which make them sticky, discoloured or even black, would buy it! Surely, follow my recommendation! It might be that this is why IIC asked me to write a review, to make Jim and Herrn Siegl aware that their shop is incomplete, that they could have far more customers, a golden age! Or, is the absence of this book from booksellers' lists just the result of an unfortunate selling policy of the Canadian Conservation Institute?

What I especially found useful in the book were those hand-drawn figures and flow charts, which help me to better understand the practical side and to clear my mind, to break problems down into single steps and not to lose control of my thoughts – to stop me thinking about shirts to be ironed and other daily *petitesses*. What unsettled me a bit was that the author was always trying to teach me. It is a bit like a set of instructions. You know those leaflets

you get if you buy a washing machine or a shaver. Have you ever reviewed a set of instructions? I tried very hard. I carried this book for months and thousands of kilometres, from Munich to London to Stockholm to Baskemölla to The Hague to Osnabrück to Cologne to Copenhagen; airborne pollutants became my steady companions.

Tétreault's approach of doing a proper risk assessment for each type of airborne pollutant finally leads to a well-balanced proposal of control strategies. This is how daily life is. Either swig a lot in a short time, or sip hundreds of glasses of wine spread over years. In the first example quantification is simple; just count the glasses. But how to quantify the very many nips, and how to draw any conclusion about the condition of my liver? How to quantify the corroding influence of a pollutant on a varnished painting, glazed and with an airtight backing? What are the parameters that affect the measurement and quantification of low-level monsters? Is the long-term monitoring of a wide range of airborne pollutants of benefit in preventive conservation? What do the figures tell us? Is the money worth spending? What is the influence of our air conditioning on the pollutant level? All this is explained in detail by Jean Tétreault, and I admire him for having produced this guide to the jungle of airborne pollutants in museums, galleries and archives. It offers wonderful rules of thumb and useful step-by-step instructions. What I often miss in my professional life, and what Tétreault offers, is the discussion of priorities, of the daily need to make compromises and decisions, identify advantages and at the same time accept the disadvantages involved. This book covers just what the subtitle promises: risk assessment, control strategies and preservation management. On one or two points an intelligent colleague might have added this or that, they may find the odd error in some of the captions, might dislike unexplained or obscure abbreviations, but for daily practice there is not much more to be added. It is just the right dose; use it in nips, keep it carefully on the shelf just behind your desk and leave it there when you retire!

After retirement it is no longer of any use. Outside, there is a life, where things are allowed to corrode, to fall to bits, to get crinkles, to age and finally to fall into a grave. He was on Earth for some time, but then he died, no long-term storage intended! Airborne pollutants are meaningless in heaven and hell, so simply leave Tétreault's book for later generations who will take over your responsibility. It will be of terribly good use!

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Monitoring for Gaseous Pollutants in Museum Environments
Cecily M. Grzywacz
Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles (2006), ISBN 978-0-89236-851-8

Reviewed by Mark Gilberg

Monitoring for Gaseous Pollutants in Museum Environments is a synthesis of Cecily Grzywacz's 20 years of research in testing museum environments and draws heavily from the Getty Conservation Institute's experience in developing and implementing an air quality monitoring program for the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center from 1996 to 1998. It is essentially a handbook for air quality monitoring for museum environments, though it focuses specifically on the use of passive sampling devices to conduct air quality monitoring studies, given their ease of use, ready availability and relatively low cost compared to active systems. While the book is in the Getty's Tools for Conservation series and targets the museum conservation community, it seeks a wider audience of individuals responsible for collections, and the methodology presented is intended for use by individuals without an extensive scientific background.

Divided into seven chapters and four appendices, the subject matter is well presented and organized with an extensive bibliography on pollutant damage to collections and materials. Chapter 1 provides an overview of gaseous pollutants in the museum environment, with an emphasis on current target pollutant levels for museums derived from the most recent and relevant sources of data. The effects of gaseous pollutants on museum objects are presented in a series of photo essays in Chapter 2, which illustrate the kinds of damage that can occur for a range of materials found in the museum environment. The subject of passive sampling is introduced in Chapter 3, with a detailed but thoroughly understandable overview of how passive sampling devices function and how pollutant concentrations are determined and reported. Both commercially and non-commercially available products to the conservation field are presented in Chapter 4, with detailed information on the various types of samplers presented