V. E. Mandrij, University of Konstanz / University of Amsterdam
"The Lepidochromy Technique: Capturing Colors of Butterflies and Moths in Books and Paintings"

Abstract:

The Clark Library houses a rare copy of *Pressed Specimens of Butterflies and Moths* (1905),compiled by Yasushi Nawa, and one exemplar of *As Nature Shows Them: Moths and Butterflies of the United States East of the Rocky Mountains* (1900), published by Sherman F. Denton. Both authors represented butterflies and moths with lepidochromy, a technique that consists in transferring the colorful scales of dead lepidopterans by printing their wings onto the pages.

The technique is documented centuries before these books and by diverse groups of makers. The English ornithologist George Edwards published a recipe describing the steps to perform lepidochromy in *Essays Upon Natural History and Other Miscellaneous Subjects* (1770), also part of the Clark Library collection. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch painter Otto Marseus van Schrieck and other painters used lepidochromy in oil paintings representing floral and *sottobosco* still lifes. In the sixteenth century, the Flemish miniaturist Joris Hoefnagel also performed lepidochromy on vellum and paper.

This paper will discuss the various ways naturalists and artists used lepidochromic images to capture and conserve lepidopteran colors for epistemological and aesthetic purposes in books and paintings.

Bio:

V.E. Mandrij (pronouns: they/them) obtained their PhD in art history (Magna Cum Laude) at the University of Konstanz in the research program *Changing Frames. Art History and Art Technology in Exchange* in collaboration with the State Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart (Germany, 2018-2023). Their thesis investigated the lepidochromy technique in the *sottobosco* paintings by the Dutch painter Otto Marseus van Schrieck (c. 1620-1678) and in nineteenth-century scientific plates. To conduct this research, Mandrij combined interdisciplinary methodologies from art history and conservation sciences.

Mandrij is currently expanding their research on lepidochromy by studying the exchanges between naturalists and artists. They partly conducted their research as a fellow at the Vossius Center for History of Humanities and Sciences at the University of Amsterdam.

Mandrij authored articles published in multi-authored volumes, including in volume 71 of the *Netherlands Yearbook of Art History* (2021). They are currently co-editing (with Giulia Simonini) an anthology on insects and colors in art and natural history that will be published by Brill in 2024 (in the series *Emergence of Natural History*). Mandrij is also a co-founder of the research group *Ecologies of Premodern Art* hosted by the Ulmer Verein, a German association of art historians.