



Riga, Latvia

Advancing Conservation & Collaboration with the Latvian Society of Restorers

By Kate Seymour | Founder, Art Conservation Education



Earlier this month, **Art Conservation Education** had the distinct privilege of partnering with the Latvian Society of Restorers and the Art Academy of Latvia (Latvijas Mākslas akadēmija) to host an intensive, four-day technical workshop focused on advanced filling and retouching systems.

Studio shot from the May 2026 Filling and Retouching Workshop hosted by the Art Academy, Riga.

The atmosphere in the Riga studios was charged with a shared purpose: to push past conventional techniques and dive deep into the chemical precision, material science, and optical physics that define modern, museum-grade art restoration for the reintegration of painted surfaces.

This collaborative initiative provided a vital platform for deep technical exchange, allowing participants to share regional troubleshooting strategies and real-world case studies from their respective laboratories. By combining thorough chemical theory with intensive, hands-on studio practice, the sessions underscored the importance of continuous professional development in preserving cultural heritage at the highest contemporary standards.



Discussing the merits of different studio formulations for filling materials.

“We explored new formulations moving beyond standard protocols to advance our technical skills and strengthen our community connections.”

DACE PĀŽE, LECTURER, ART ACADEMY OF LATVIA (LATVIJAS MĀKSLAS AKADĒMIJA), RIGA



Adhesive solutions used in the workshop to make studio formulations

Art conservation is a delicate dance between historical reverence and rigorous material science. Over the course of four intensive days, our cohort of practicing professionals tackled complex preservation challenges by focusing on custom-formulated solutions for reintegration strategies.

Rather than relying on pre-manufactured commercial products, the daily sessions challenged participants to synthesise their own fillers and mediums, tailoring the physical and optical properties to match specific structural losses.

The participants explored the interaction between the binding medium and inert material, observing how the same proportional combination resulted in different viscosities, stiffnesses, and brittleness.

Key Studio Workstreams:

Advanced Filling Systems: Formulating bespoke filling materials utilising synthetic polymer emulsions (Evacon R (EVA), *Conservation by Design*) and cellulose ethers (Tylose MH 300 P2 (cellulose ether), *Kremer Pigmente*) bulked with different inert materials like Kaolin, Chalk, and Aluminum Hydroxide.

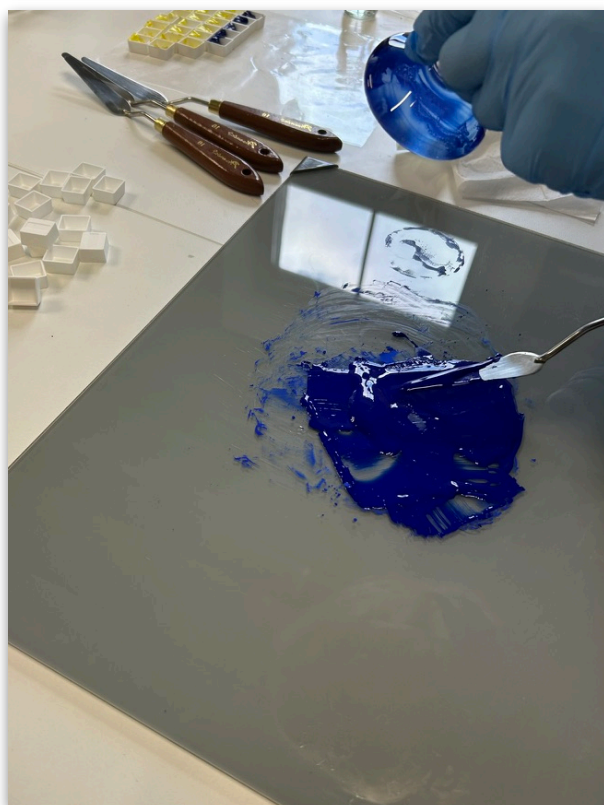
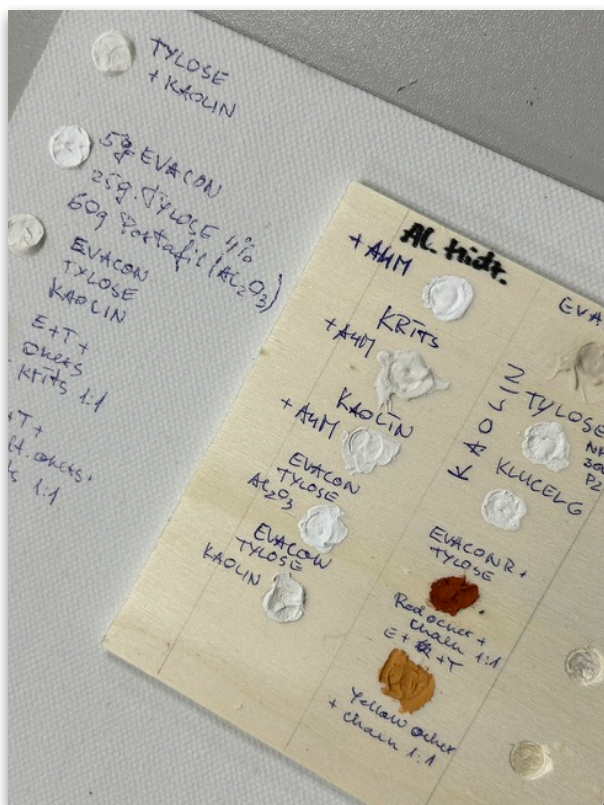
Custom Wax-Resin Formulations: Engineering stable, pigmented retouching sticks using specialised blends of Regalrez 1126 and Cosmoloid H80 for textured thermoplastic fillers.

Self-Made Aquazol Colours: Exploring the chemical characteristics and handling quirks of Aquazol-based paints, focusing closely on flexibility and strict archival reversibility.

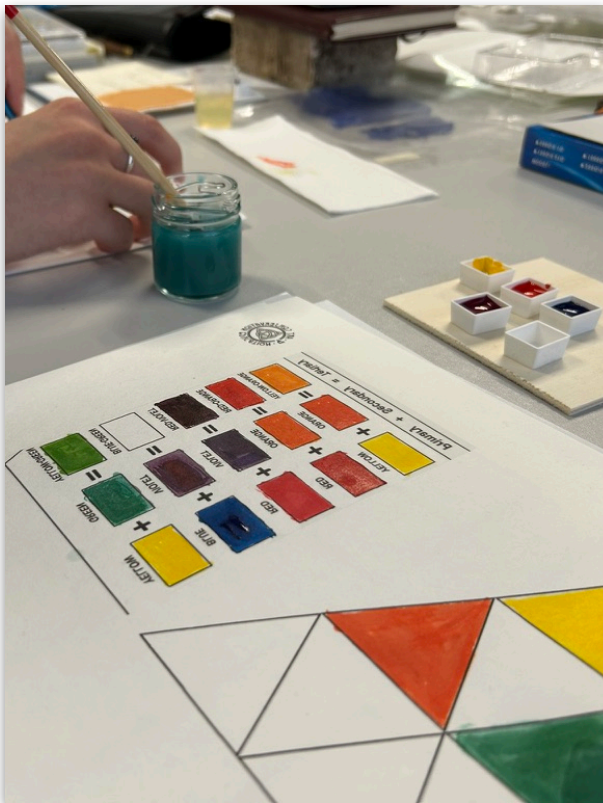
A flawless, invisible repair relies entirely on an understanding of texture, colour and light interaction. Formulating fillers for different painted surfaces and mastering texturing moves a retouch from being distinguishable to becoming invisible.

“the job of the restorer is a most thankless one. In the best case, no one is aware of him His mastery remains invisible, but his failing becomes evident.... Restoration is nevertheless a necessary bad thing.”

MAX FRIEDLÄNDER



Studio formulations of different filling materials and retouching media.



Mastering Colour Mixing

The second half of the masterclass shifted focus toward rigorous scientific colour theory. Utilising diagnostic templates, participants systematically mapped colour trajectories from pure primary anchors— Blue, Yellow, and Red—into complex secondary and desaturated tertiary fields. The participants created tints by adding white and shades by adding black to the tertiary colours. The exercise showed how shifting the warmth or coolness of the primary colours a range of browns, greys and pinks were created.

Lastly, after a ‘short’ history of aesthetically reintegration in Italy, outlining the changes in philosophy, approach, and materials from Vasari to modern times, we discussed the merits and disadvantages of *Tratteggio*. This distinguishable retouching technique has roots as far back as the 17th century, but was systematised and promoted by Caesar Brandi in the mid 20th century. The system uses complex colour theory and highly skilled manual dexterity to apply vertical lines of colour to a white background. Once applied the applied lines of colours merge in the eye to approach that of the original, but remain visible at a viewing distance. Florentine adaptations of this retouching system were also discussed.

Time was too short to develop skills in this system but the participants mastered the rhythm required to apply the individual brushstrokes and established how to load their brushes.



Studio formulations of different filling materials and retouching media.



While the technical advancements were immense, the true success of the workshop lay in the high-level professional exchange. The cross-border dialogue, shared troubleshooting strategies, and collaborative spirit demonstrated by the Latvian conservation community set a high standard for our field.

We want to extend our deepest gratitude to the Latvian Society of Restorers and President Ronalds Lūsis for their brilliant organisation, and to the Art Academy of Latvia for opening their historic doors. Special thanks to Dace Pāže, Lecturer at the Art Academy of Latvia, for providing a world-class environment and guidance for professional development. Thanks to Viktorija Gičeva - Nikitina and Rēzija Zēgnere for their assistance in preparing and setting up the workshop and the materials.

To all our participants who walked away with well-deserved certificates and custom sample matrices: Thank you for your dedication, your precision, and your unyielding passion for preserving our cultural heritage.

Group photo from the May 2026 Filling and Retouching Workshop hosted by the Art Academy, Riga.

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