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Conservation of Tibetan Thangka Paintings from the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin

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ABSTRACT: This article describes the treatment of three thangka paintings. Close collaboration between paper and textile conservation disciplines led to devising treatment strategies to conserve the painted images whilst retaining the integrity of the pieces as a whole. In all of the cases described, it was necessary to consolidate the paint surfaces to prevent further losses of pigment occurring. Proposed is a low tech answer which is effective and uses little equipment. Materials can be sourced locally or brought in with minimum expense, and although skill is required, it is a skill that can be taught in the field. Most importantly, it remains easily reversible. In each case the thangka paintings retained the ability to be used in the manner that they were made for, were stable in any type of environment, no writing or images to the back were obscured, and at all times the thangka paintings retained their integrity, became stable, cleaner and visually more coherent. The main treatment issues were to consolidate the flaking paint and to strengthen the textile substrate without compromising the overall flexibility.

BIOGRAPHIES: *Mike Wheeler* has worked as a Senior Paper Conservator at the Victoria and Albert Museum since 1995. He has been a tutor on the RCA/V&A Conservation Course, specialising in Indian and Asian Art on Paper and the conservation of architectural drawings. He has lectured and taught in Australia, India, Netherlands, Finland and Singapore. He has advised on projects in India & Egypt. After graduating from the University of Northumbria in 1984 he worked in Sheffield for the Area Museums Service before emigrating to New Zealand to take up the position of paper conservator at the Auckland City Art Gallery in May 1987. He was awarded the Andrew W. Mellon fellowship at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City in 1990. In 1993-94 he worked at the Better Image in New York City as a conservator of photographs and carried out three months field work at the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta, India in 1995. Mike has been an accredited member of the Institute of Conservation since 2000 and is a member of the professional accreditation committee.

Teresa Heady has worked as a textile and ethnographic conservator for over 20 years, first at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, freelancing for several years after leaving the Met, then took up a position at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco before emigrating to England to be first year Lecturer at the Textile Conservation Centre at Hampton Court. From there she moved to be Deputy Head of Collections Conservation and Care at the Horniman Museum and Gardens. While there for 6 years she also was acting Head and spent several months teaching preventive conservation and conservation in Mongolia, Tibet, Nepal and India. She then went on sabbatical for a year and worked with the Textile and Thangka collections among other conservation duties at the Rikjes Musee voor Volkenkunde in Leiden, the

Netherlands. From there she worked in Nepal as part of a team from UNESCO teaching the conservation of Thangka paintings to a group of Nepalese, Bhutanese, Tibetan and Indian professional conservators, collections care managers and monks from different monasteries throughout the Himalayas. For the past 3 years she has been the Senior Objects conservator at St Paul's Cathedral, London and has various duties from collections care to the conservation of objects, preventive conservation and environmental monitoring of the entire contents of the Cathedral. She still spends time teaching thangka conservation in Europe and Asia as well as teaching on the RCA/V&A master program for conservation and at the Camberwell School of Art's BA conservation program and is doing a part time masters in the Art and Archaeology of Tibet and the Himalayas at the School for Oriental and African Studies, London.

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