



RESEARCH2REALITY

Shining a light on research & innovation.

Preserving the Past for Our Future

Interview with Professor Ron Martin
Chemist, Western University

How can we use science to analyze art?

If you live in a huge universe, it's very different from thinking you live in the Earth and that's the only place. If you look at art, it makes a big difference. You say, you know the red in that art was the most expensive colour that was available at the time, and it was used really sparingly. So it goes everywhere. How many of the chemicals they used in art were poisonous? And that goes over to, you know, how many toxic chemicals are we using today? Why are they toxic? What size are they? It's just question after question after question – they're all fascinating.

What are the specific applications of your research?

Why should we as a society want to preserve art? When we stop preserving art, we forget about our past, and we forget where we are. And we don't stop to think of where we're going. The thing that science brings to society are questions about what our planet is built like, and if we're human beings living on it, where do we go? How did people think about it in the past? You can tell how they thought about the natural world from what they painted. You can tell how they thought about each other from all the pictures that they do. And unless these things are preserved and appreciated, we're never going to move forward in an intelligent way.