

Obituary: Jaap Boon, 4 January 1947 - 4 April 2024

Submitted by sharragrow on 08 Jul 2024

Image



It is with great sadness that we learned of the sudden passing of Prof Dr Jaap Boon. Jaap Boon was at the forefront of molecular research on artworks and played a significant role in the development of conservation science field. Jaap Boon has been instrumental in our careers and has been a great inspiration to many of us.

Jaap studied geology and chemistry at the Universities of Amsterdam and Utrecht and at Delft Technical University. His PhD and post-doc studies focused on molecular geochemistry, both in marine experimental biology and fossil remains at different institutions in the Netherlands and the USA. In 1983 he became research associate at the FOM Institute for Atomic and Molecular Physics (AMOLF) in Amsterdam. He held the position of group leader and later head of molecular physics and professor of analytical mass spectrometry at the University of

Amsterdam.

His first surveys relating to the field of conservation science started in 1991, involving Tate London, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and the Limburg Conservation Studio (SRAL) in Maastricht.

Jaap was the mastermind of the NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) Priority Project MOLART (Molecular aspects of ageing in art) that fundamentally changed the conservation science field which has continued to expand ever since. MOLART started in 1995 with about 10 PhD and other projects on various fundamental aspects of the composition and aging processes in paintings. Later, Jaap was central in the development of seven PhD projects in the framework of the NWO De Mayerne Program (2002-2006). Facilitated by new analytical developments, Jaap was eager and quick to move into chemical microscopy and spectroscopic imaging of pigments, binding media and their interactions. In these multi-disciplinary programmes, museums and science based academic partners collaborated in conservation science. They have been highly influential in shaping the development of conservation research in the Netherlands and laid the foundation of the Netherlands Institute for Conservation+Art+Science+ (NICAS) founded in 2015.

In 2006 he shifted his field of activities at AMOLF to nano-biomaterials, such as the structure of eggshells, using electron microscopy and X-ray tomography. His passion for art remained, and he found new ways of working with conservators and other professionals in the museum world by starting his own company, JAAP Enterprise for Art Scientific Studies, in 2007, working together with a large number of museums throughout Europe. He worked with them as a research associate and/or sold his research instrumentation (the polisher and the digital microscopy system) all over the world. For longstanding work and impact on chemistry and physics applied to art research, he received the Gilles Holst Gold Medal from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) in 2007.

Jaap was an immensely creative thinker and an inspiring force that motivated and stimulated both his students and colleagues. Jaap had a broad range of interests and knowledge, which always led to engaging and insightful discussions with him. He could be quite direct and persuasive, especially in the early stages of his career, but he always dedicated himself to supporting his students in successfully completing their research journeys. His boundless passion for science was a source of inspiration for us all.

Last but not least, Jaap was also a prolific artist, always interested in the chemical and physical processes behind the making. Many colleagues who had become friends remember the personal gifts he surprised them with—jewellery, and more recently, pottery.

Jaap's significance in the field of conservation and conservation science cannot be overstated. We are forever grateful for his work and dedication.

Our thoughts are with his wife Donna Mehos and his daughter Gaia and sons Costa and Nicolaas.

Prof Dr Katrien Keune, Rijksmuseum and University of Amsterdam (PhD student, De Mayerne 2002)

Prof Dr Klaas Jan van den Berg, Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands and University of Amsterdam (post-doc, MOLART 1995)