Don’t Fade Away: Saving the Vivid Yellows of Matisse and Van Gogh

The masterpieces of Henri Matisse, Vincent Van Gogh, Georges Seurat, as well as their Impressionist and early modernist contemporaries, are currently undergoing catastrophic changes including discoloration and paint loss. This damage, which threatens billions of dollars of our cultural heritage, is associated with three specific yellow pigments, cadmium yellow, chrome yellow, and zinc yellow. We routinely carry out the scientific analysis of objects of art to address questions about authenticity, state of preservation, and mechanisms of degradation. X-ray imaging and analysis methods are applied here to a study of how these yellow pigments are reacting with their environments and changing over time. The implications of these discoveries for the preservation and interpretation of these irreplaceable Impressionist and early modernist works will be discussed.

Thursday, April 3, 2014 • 6:00 P.M.
Mara Auditorium, Masters 110