This lecture will explore the role of the conservator and conservation scientist in authenticity studies that straddle the Arts-Science interface. Dr. Smith will take the audience through the technical analysis of the Robert Lawrence Trotter forgery case and describe the construction of a typical folk art painting while highlighting the “red flags” that might indicate a fake or forgery.

Case background: In 1990 Robert L. Trotter was sentenced to 10 months in federal prison for the faking, forging, and deceitful sale of American folk art paintings. Although 55 ’Trotter fakes’ were known to have been created, only 16 paintings were ever recovered. One fake is already exhibiting serious degradation due to the inherent vices of the materials chosen by Trotter for his forgeries, and it is expected that the 39 unaccounted for paintings will likely begin appearing in conservation studios. Therefore, a full “reverse engineering” of the faked painting was undertaken in the hopes of providing conservators with tell-tale clues that will help to unmask these faked works.

Suggested Reading: