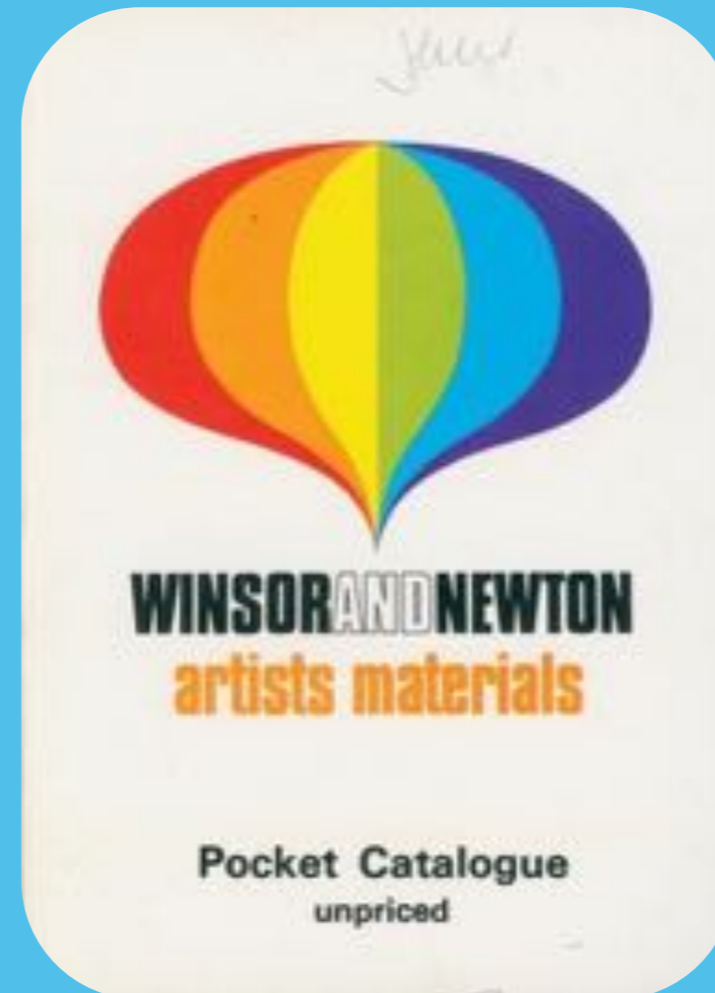


# Adaptation, Innovation, and Collaboration: Cataloguing the Studio Materials of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham

## Introduction

This work placement involved the cataloguing and research of documents relating to the materials used by Wilhelmina Barns-Graham. Specifically, this involved the organisation of four boxes of documents held by the Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust, spanning a period from 1960 to 2004, which included documents relating to the purchase of artist materials, framing, and a significant archive of marketing materials, including product brochures and colour charts. Combined with a significant collection of artists' materials held by the WBG, these documents portray an artist who stood at the vanguard of painting until her death in 2004.

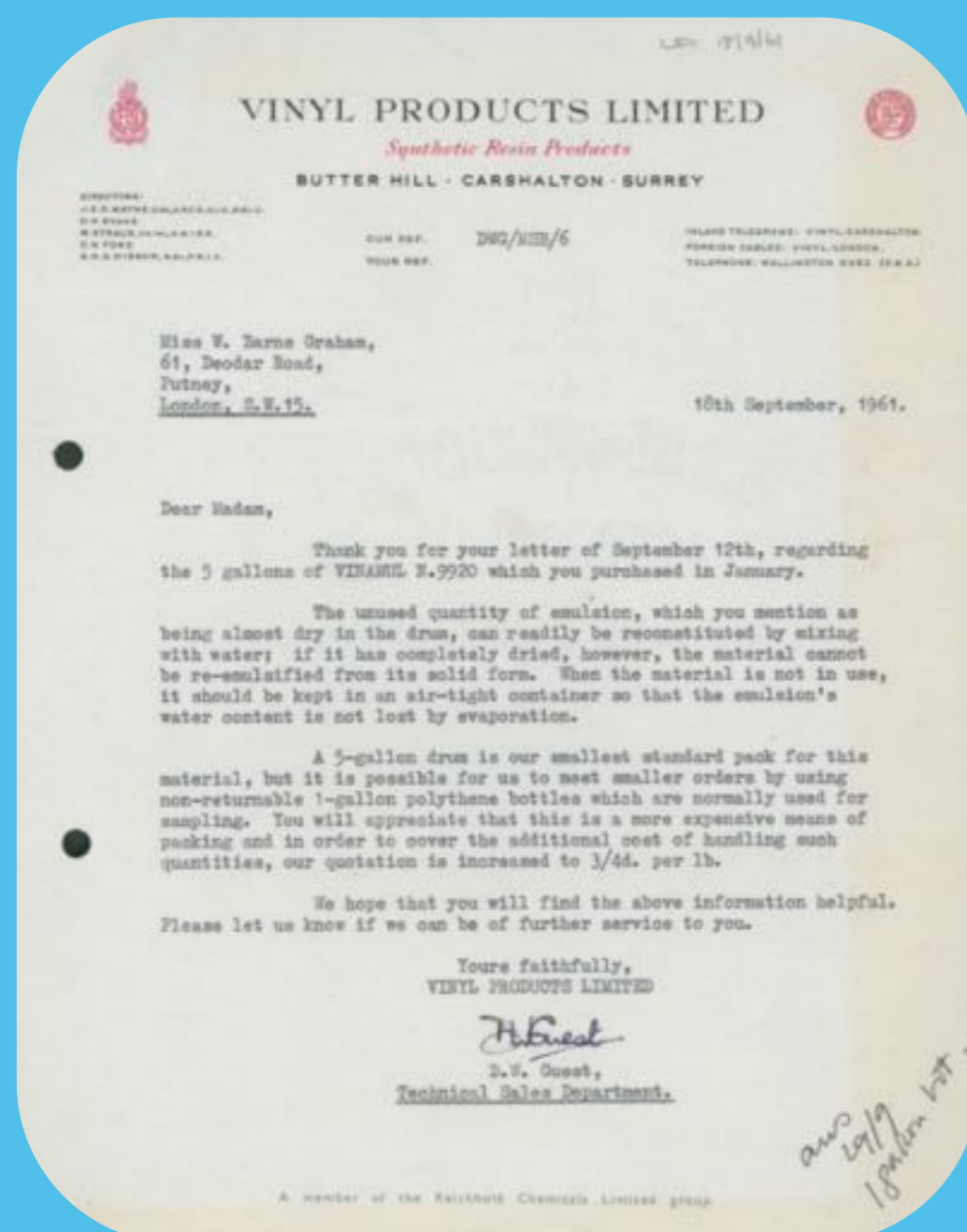
Examples of materials catalogues within the WBG archive.  
(Images taken on placement with the permission on the WBG)



## Methodology

The cataloguing process involved reorganising four previously unclassified boxes of documents into four distinct classifications: Art Material Manufacturers and Suppliers (WBG/6/5/1/2), Fine Art Marketing Materials (WBG/6/5/2), Framers (WBG/6/5/1/1), and Framing Marketing materials (WBG/6/5/3). The documents within each category were then separated into folders corresponding to suppliers and manufacturers, which were organised chronologically. The WBG adheres to the General International Standard Archival Description 'ISAD(g)', which defines six mandatory fields requiring population when cataloguing archival materials: 1. Reference Code, 2. Title, 3. Creator, 4. Dates of Creation, 5. Extent of the unit of description, 6. Level of description. Using this process, I was able to accurately catalogue each item whilst identifying potential documents of significance for additional research.

Letter to WBG from Vinyl Products Limited, 18/09/1961  
(Images taken on placement with the permission on the WBG)



## Materials

Uncovered during the cataloguing process were documents relating to 10 artist's materials suppliers, including notable businesses such as Atlantis Art, London and Greyfriars Art Shop, Edinburgh. Additionally, there are documents relating to 19 materials manufacturers, including notable paint brands such as Lefranc Bourgeois, Lascaux, Winsor and Newton, Daler-Rowney, and Liquitex. The earliest documents are from the 1960s and include product catalogues for brands such as C. Roberson and Co. and Winsor and Newton. Later additions include a colour chart for paint manufacturer Golden Artist Colours. During the cataloguing process, several documents came to light of particular interest, including a letter from Vinyl Products Limited dated 18/09/1961. This correspondence refers to the purchase of a 5-gallon barrel of the material Vinamul, a polyvinyl acetate (PVA). The artist's use for this material is currently unknown, though several works from around this period, notably the painting 'Buckets', 1959, exhibit interesting properties that may warrant further enquiry.

Feature of the painting 'Buckets', 1959, Oil on Canvas. © Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust



## Wilhelmina Barns-Graham and Rowan James

Another notable feature of the documents catalogued was the involvement of Barns-Graham's friend and studio manager, Rowan James. Beginning her employment with Barns-Graham in 1973, James undertook an integral role in helping to facilitate the artist's studio practice. From 1973 onward, James's name appears with increasing frequency throughout the archival materials. As evidenced by this, we see a crucial aspect of James's role, which included procuring and researching artists' materials. Notably, most of the documents are addressed directly to James, which helps to demonstrate the extent of James's involvement in Barns-Graham's practice.

Rowan James with WBG at Balmungo, Scotland. Photo: Antonia Reeve. © Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust



## Conclusion

Barns-Graham remains an enigmatic figure within contemporary and modern art, and there is a great deal more research to be conducted into her practice, notably the artist's use of experimental and innovative materials. Through the process of cataloguing these documents, this project has sought to uncover the intricacies and nuances of the artist's use of materials. Following an exploration of the materials underlying her work, we can ascertain that Barns-Graham championed non-conventional methods of creation and media, whether by her early adoption of acrylic paints, or the professional collaboration underlined by her friendship with Rowan James. In any event, Barns-Graham continues to excite debate and exploration, both of her work and materials, which show an exuberant view of the world through the adoption of colour.

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