

EDITOR'S NOTE

Technical Research

Michiel Franken

It was announced in the previous eZine that the theme of the current issue would be the technical research of artworks. During various activities organized by CODART in recent years, attention has frequently been paid to this subject in lectures and market tables, and on tours of permanent displays, exhibitions and museum restoration studios. These tours were conducted not only by CODART members – curators of Dutch and Flemish art – but also by professionals in other disciplines, since the technical research of art objects takes place at the interface of art history, restoration and science. Each of these disciplines has its own history, methodology and technical jargon. Overstepping the traditional bounds of these fields – an essential part of interdisciplinary research – has proved extremely fruitful. It has yielded many new insights into gestational processes, signs of ageing, and the influence of past treatments on the current appearance of artworks. In addition, it has established new themes, such as studio practices, as facets of art-historical research.

Technical research is not, of course, constrained by national boundaries, yet a remarkable amount of research is done precisely in the field of Dutch and Flemish art. This has provided us with a great deal of information on the working methods and materials used by such artists as Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, Lucas van Leyden, Jan van Scorel, Pieter Bruegel, Peter Paul Rubens, Frans Hals, Anthony van Dyck, Rembrandt van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer and many others. Because such research is carried out directly on the objects themselves, it is hardly surprising that much of this work is done in museums, whether or not in conjunction with a restoration. Moreover, the results of such research are frequently presented in a museum context, in exhibitions and the accompanying publications, as well as in collection catalogues. There are even museums that publish magazines devoted exclusively to technical research.

The field of technical research is constantly moving forward. In addition to X-radiography, infrared reflectography, ultraviolet imaging, dendrochronological research and paint sample analysis – all of which have been in use for decades – new research techniques are being developed that exploit to the full the possibilities offered by computer-aided imaging.

From its beginnings in the first decades of the twentieth century, technical research has been an international concern. The exchange of data occurred – as it still does today – not only on an individual basis, through contact between researchers in different countries, but also during conferences. It is highly appropriate, therefore, to devote an entire issue of the eZine – CODART's digital magazine – to technical research and to include contributions from specialists in widely divergent fields.

After all, CODART aims to provide in various ways a platform for the exchange of knowledge that is the prime goal of our worldwide network of curators of Dutch and Flemish art.

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