

## Introduction to the Volume

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**T**HIS COLLECTION OF FIFTEEN PAPERS will, we hope, be the first in a series of occasional papers devoted to technical studies of the Kress Collection. Recent graduates and faculty of the Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts, as well as scholars in the fields of art history and paintings conservation have contributed to this volume. Much of their research was prompted by questions that arose during treatment of the paintings at the Conservation Center, and the resulting papers are grouped around two major themes of interest to the field of paintings conservation. The first, the history of conservation, is a topic whose increasing exploration gives an indication of the maturation of our profession. Conservation history as a formal study has been taken up by a number of researchers in the United States and abroad; seminal texts in the development of modern conservation theory are to be found in the 1996 volume of *Readings in Conservation* published by the Getty Conservation Institute.<sup>1</sup> Since 1975 there have been publications from the Working Group of the International Council of Museums—Committee for Conservation (ICOM-CC) devoted to conservation history, and more recently, the topic was a focus of the 2003 American Institute for Conservation annual meeting, inviting papers in the field of paintings by (among others) Elizabeth Darrow and Wendy Partridge.<sup>2</sup> Certain to become a definitive textbook on the subject is the new *Readings in Conservation* anthology, *Issues in the Conservation of Paintings*, which contains a wide range of historical and contemporary writings.<sup>3</sup> In Europe, N.S. Brommelle,<sup>4</sup> Michael von der Goltz,<sup>5</sup> Christine Sitwell,<sup>6</sup>

and Sylvie Béguin de Sudurat, among many others, have published significant accounts of paintings conservation history. Here in the U.S. the oral history projects of the International Museum of Photography and Film<sup>7</sup> and the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation have gathered the professional histories of American conservators and scientists. In the specific field of paintings, the Yale University symposium concerning the treatment history of the Jarvis Collection,<sup>8</sup> and the conservators Jean Portell, Rebecca Rushfield, Eric Gordon,<sup>9</sup> Katie Swerda<sup>10</sup> and Joyce Hill Stoner, have all made important contributions to the record of American conservation history. This volume offers three papers that further expand our critical knowledge in this area, as reflected through the lens of the early Italian picture collection of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

Wendy Partridge (IFA/CC 1999), a paintings conservator and scholar of conservation history, presents a comparison of two nineteenth-century philosophies towards the treatment of early Italian paintings that will prove useful to readers who wish to look beneath the overblown rhetoric of recent restoration controversies. Partridge's well-balanced paper contrasts Eastlake's approach to paintings as aesthetic objects requiring interpretation (cleaning and sometimes extensive retouching), with Cavalcaselle's reluctance to compensate for loss lest the inpainting interfere with the historical record of the object. These issues continue to engage museum curators and conservators today when they contemplate the treatment of a painting.

Ann Hoenigswald and Dianne Dwyer Modestini present two important chapters in American paintings conservation history that relate directly to the Kress Collection. Hoenigswald has written the first history of Stephen Pichetto and his role as a picture restorer in New York City and Washington, D.C. during the first half of the twentieth century. Her account of this restorer, who operated a large and active workshop that left its mark on thousands of pictures, fills a significant gap in the history of the painting

collection formed by Samuel H. and Rush Kress. As Hoenigswald writes, Pichetto fulfilled a number of roles for the Kress brothers: restorer, acquisitions advisor, connoisseur, researcher, collections care manager and installation designer. Mario and Dianne Dwyer Modestini offer the next chapter in the history of conservation at the Samuel H. Kress Foundation: Mario's role as its curator and conservator, called to New York by Rush Kress after Pichetto died in 1949. In a charming, first-person narrative told to his wife Dianne, who is paintings conservator for the Kress Collection and adjunct professor at the Conservation Center, Mario, the "lone survivor of those years," recounts his life in New York, Washington and the Pocono Mountains working on the Collection. From his first amusing description of cleaning a Paolo di Giovanni Fei to "show what he could do"—using a mixture of Pond's cold cream, Marseilles soap and linseed oil—to his collaborations with the scientist Robert Feller on field trials of new inpainting media and varnishes, we are captivated by his ingenuity, immense skill and professional modesty.

The second gathering of papers explores the interrelated themes of technical study and treatment. The Kress paintings discussed in this section are by Italian masters, with one exception—a paper on the techniques in the late paintings of Nicolaes Maes. They are presented in chronological order, beginning with a panel from the Trecento and ending with Guardi's *View of the Grand Canal with Dogana*. In most cases, a discovery about or reconsideration of a picture occurred because it was undergoing examination and treatment at the Conservation Center as part of a class in the Kress Program in Paintings Conservation. The students established the condition of the paintings and identified materials used in their making and subsequent repair, both necessary steps in formulating a treatment approach. Analysis was also carried out in the service of technical connoisseurship, or, as it is sometimes called, technical art history,<sup>11</sup> the discipline within art history in which physical data gathered from works of art are applied to the study of

workshop practice, authorship, function or original context, and authenticity. As Elise Effmann (IFA/CC 2000) writes in her paper “*View of the Molo: A Canaletto Attribution Reinstated*,” technical studies of individual paintings and artists’ techniques have “been important in establishing a clearer chronology and also in resolving issues of attribution.” Evidence uncovered during cleaning, knowledge accrued from prolonged observation, or a visit from a local scholar, have led the authors to draw new conclusions about the paintings.

Jennifer Sherman (IFA/CC 1997), paintings conservator and adjunct professor at the Conservation Center, combines our two themes in one paper. In her discussion of the Trecento polyptych *Madonna and Child with Four Saints* in the Birmingham Museum of Art attributed to the Goodhart Ducciesque Master, Sherman presents a study of technique and materials that shed light on its now-lost, original appearance. In the course of her paper she considers the more recent history of the picture and the possible role of Icilio Federico Ioni (or Joni), a highly skilled nineteenth-century gilder, restorer and forger. The art historian Charles R. Mack takes as a point of departure the cleaning by Mario and Dianne Dwyer Modestini of the transferred fresco of the *Nativity* by Botticelli (Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, South Carolina), and uses it to re-evaluate the painting and the artist’s workshop practice. In this process, he allows us to see the painting better, with more accuracy: established are Botticelli’s primary role in the execution of the fresco, the participation of workshop assistants (typical for Botticelli, even on so small a work) and the hand of later restorers. Dianne Dwyer Modestini and Mika Okawa present new information uncovered during treatment about the original appearance and later re-use of an early *Descro di Parto* (Birth Tray). Wendy Partridge’s account of the cleaning of six decorative panels based on *The Triumphs of Petrarch* from the Denver Art Museum revealed the richness of the original painting, obscured by layers of thick, yellowed varnish and discolored retouching. As she writes in her paper, the resulting clarification of detail allowed her to determine

the original function of the panels, discuss their possible attribution, and explore occasions for their commission. J.J.G. Alexander, Sherman Fairchild Professor of Fine Arts at the Institute of Fine Arts, saw the paintings at the Conservation Center and identified the tiny coats of arms concealed in two panels as belonging to the Gonzaga and Sforza families, thereby finding internal evidence for the circumstances of its commission.

Comparison of otherwise hard-to-see details in related pictures can often augment traditional methods of art historical analysis. Dianne Dwyer Modestini presents her detailed study of the Sieneese mid-fifteenth-century Kress triptych in El Paso within the context of four similar portable triptychs. Deftly considering the condition, painterly quality, painting technique and punchwork designs in each work, she looks afresh at a thorny problem of attribution among closely related pictures. Professor Modestini also contributes a short note on new thoughts about original context and painting methods that were made possible by the opportunity to study a painting during a conservation treatment—Guidoccio Cozzarelli’s *Scenes from the Life of the Virgin* (Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida). Annette Rupprecht, paintings conservator and Sheri Francis Shaneyfelt, art historian, consider the partially-preserved signature found during cleaning on Princeton University’s *Saint Sebastian*, attributed to the School of Perugino, and tentatively attribute the work to Eusebio de San Giorgio. In her paper, paintings conservator Molly March (IFA/CC 2002) presents a careful reading in its cleaned state of the brushstrokes, color, and layering structure of the Kress Foundation’s *Virgin Reading with Christ Child and Saint John*; her treatment of this picture attributed to the Michelangelo Associate led her to consider this long-overlooked painting in the context of recently cleaned pictures attributed to Michelangelo or his circle. Certain technical details that emerged, such as the distinctive hatch marks visible on this and two other pictures attributed to the same hand, will help scholars assign other paintings, and perhaps even a name, to this anonymous master.

Paintings conservator Laurent Sozzani (with Christopher McGlinchey, Museum of Modern Art conservation scientist and adjunct professor at the Conservation Center) examines a late portrait by the Netherlandish painter Nicolaes Maes in the Columbia Museum of Art. In his thorough examination of this and other pictures by Maes, Sozzani recreates the artist's portrait painting process in its skillful economy and presents an unusual use of a uniform red glaze applied to the background, perhaps unique to this painter, and explains how Maes's rapid application brought intense color and depth to his abbreviated modeling of forms.

Elise Effmann's detailed technical study of the materials and methods of *View of the Molo* is an excellent example of research completed by a conservator trained in art history, and complements perfectly the art historical consideration offered by Katharine Baetjer. The physical proximity of the *View of the Molo* afforded Baetjer, a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the opportunity to look anew at the picture and reconsider its demotion in the mid-twentieth century to a lesser artist. This re-examination led her to compare the Kress painting with another picture of the same view in Turin, and draw new conclusions about the authorship of the two canvases and their place in the artist's oeuvre. In the final paper, a short study by paintings conservator Helen Spande (IFA/CC 2003) supports the attribution to Francesco Guardi of *View of the Grand Canal with Dogana* in the Columbia Museum of Art through a careful compilation of details not visible to the naked eye; for example, X-radiography of the picture disclosed an entirely unrelated image under the one seen today, evidence of materials recycling and workshop frugality seen on other paintings by the same artist.

This collection of papers will serve not only to re-acquaint us with some of the Kress Collection's Italian paintings at a level of detail not offered before, but as a model for collaboration between art historian and conservator, student and mentor, or scientist and technical art historian. Such interdisciplinary alliances offer the best hope for our

most innovative and rewarding research into the history of art and conservation.

## NOTES

1. Nicholas Stanley Price, M. Kirby Talley, Jr., and Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro (eds.), *Readings in Conservation: Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Conservation Institute, 1996.
2. Elizabeth Darrow, "Alchemical transformations: Venice as laboratory for the restorer's art and science" (General Session, p. 4), and Wendy Partridge, "Retouching paintings in Europe from the 15th through the 19th centuries: debates, controversies, and methods" (Paintings Specialty Group Session, p. 29), in *Abstracts of Papers Presented at the 31st AIC Annual Meeting, Arlington, Virginia, June 5–10, 2003*.
3. David Bomford and Mark Leonard (eds.), *Readings in Conservation: Issues in the Conservation of Paintings*. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Conservation Institute, 2004.
4. N.S. Brommelle, "Material for a history of conservation: the 1850 and 1853 reports on the National Gallery," *Studies in Conservation*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1956), pp. 176–88.
5. Michael von der Goltz, "Is it useful to restore paintings? Aspects of a 1928 discussion on restoration in Germany and Austria" in *Preprints of the ICOM-CC 12th Triennial Meeting, Lyons, August 29–September 3, 1999*. London: James & James, 1999, pp. 200–205.
6. Christine Sitwell and Sarah Staniforth (eds.), *Studies in the History of Painting Restoration*. London: Archetype Publications, 1998.
7. P. Maynes and Grant B. Romer, "Documenting conservation through oral history: a case study" in *Preprints of the ICOM-CC 13th Triennial Meeting, Rio de Janeiro, September 22–27, 2002*. London: James & James, 2002, pp. 172–5.
8. Patricia Sherwin Garland, *Early Italian Paintings: Approaches to Conservation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Art Gallery, 2003.
9. Eric Gordon, "The restoration history of a late 15th-century German altarpiece and how it reflects philosophical trends in conservation" in *Preprints of the ICOM-CC 13th Triennial Meeting, Rio de Janeiro, September 22–27, 2002*. London: James & James, 2002, pp. 346–51.
10. Katie Swerda, "In their own words: painting conservation and restoration in 19th-century America according to the artists and restorers who recorded their practices and beliefs" in *Preprints of the ICOM-CC 13th Triennial Meeting, Rio de Janeiro, September 22–27, 2002*. London: James & James, 2002, pp. 198–202.
11. David Bomford, "The purposes of technical art history," *IIC Bulletin*, No. 1 (February 2002), pp. 4–7; see also Erma Hermens (ed.), *Looking through Paintings: The Study of Painting Techniques and Materials in Support of Art Historical Research*. London: Archetype Publications, 1998.



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