

***Disciplines in motion:
The changing roles of curators and conservators***

Ron Spronk

***Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada
Radboud University, Nijmegen.***

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Dear Olga, thank you very much for your kind introduction, and thank you to the members of Programme Committee for the invitation to speak today. Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, it is a great pleasure to share with you today some thoughts about the conference theme of *CODART Vijftien*.

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Conserving the arts: the task of the curator and the conservator? My first thought, and probably many of you had a similar initial response, was that the answer to this question is a rather obvious one. Perhaps if we simply remove the question mark the issue would be settled.

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According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the meaning of the verb “to conserve” is: “to keep from harm, decay, loss or waste, especially with a view to later use. To preserve with care.” Naturally, conserving the arts is the shared task of both the curator and the conservator. And, for that matter, it is also the task of anyone else who works in a museum.

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In the announcement of the conference, the Programme Committee laid out the issues in more detail. I quote: “The cross-over of responsibilities sometimes leads to conflict: who decides on the conditions in which works of art are exhibited? Who determines the

restoration priorities? Who has the final say in approving loan requests? Yet despite the occasional frictions among curators and conservators, technical research plays an increasingly significant role in the art-historical interpretation of works of art and has become standard practice in studying museum collections.”

A few days after I saw the announcement, the Committee approached me with the request to address this topic, quite to my surprise, since I am neither a conservator nor a curator. But Adriaan and Sabine are persistent as well as charming, so here I am. I was also instructed to be polemic and to trigger discussion, ruffle some feathers along the way. I am not sure if I can deliver all that, but I’ll try my very best to keep you awake at least.

I will touch upon these issues in the second part of my talk, but before I do so, I hope you will allow me to start with looking at two restoration interventions from the past, by means of introduction.

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These two case studies are well-published events in the history of conservation, but it will be useful and interesting to reconsider them from the perspective of the theme of this conference, as food for thought. You will notice that in both cases it is the art historian who is firmly in charge of the situation.

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Our first case is set in Berlin in the eighteen-nineties, and our first lead character is Wilhelm von Bode. Bode was initially an assistant curator and then director of the sculpture collections in the Royal Museum. In 1890, Bode was appointed director of the Gemäldegalerie, where he starts working towards the development of the new Kaiser Friedrich Museum, which is to open in 1904. He was extremely successful in his enterprises, and in 1905 Bode would be appointed General Director of the Berlin museums. But we are now still in the early 1890s.

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At that time, six of the eight wing panels of the famous Ghent Altarpiece are part of the collections of the Gemäldegalerie, you see their installation her. Above the six original wing panels by Van Eyck hangs the copy of the central panel of the polyptych, the *Adoration of the Lamb*, painted by Michael Coxie. The Church Wardens of St. Bavo's cathedral had decided to sell these panels to generate much-needed cash for their church in 1815. Thanks to Napoleon, the polyptych was dispersed at the time...

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... and the four central panels are still at the Louvre in March 1815, they would only be returned to Belgium after the Battle of Waterloo, which took place three months later. The eight wing panels are not on view but in storage at the Cathedral at the time. After the end of Napoleon's reign, the four central panels are repatriated to Ghent, and returned to the Cathedral by May 10, 1816, where they are placed back on view in the Vijd Chapel. The wings however were not reassembled, and the agreed-upon sale of the six wing panels is still carried out. The panels of *Adam* and *Eve* were not sold, and remained in storage at the Cathedral.

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So in December 1816, the six panels, all painted on both sides, are sold to the Brussels art dealer Van Nieuwenhuys for 3000 guilders. In 1817, Nieuwenhuys sells them to Edward Solly, the famous British collector of Renaissance paintings who lived in Berlin. In 1821, Gustav Waagen brokered a major deal through which some 3000 works from the Solly collection were bought for the creation of the Berlin museums, and the six panels by Van Eyck ended up in the Gemäldegalerie, which was founded in 1830.

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As I mentioned, these six panels were painted on both sides, here you see their exteriors. In 1823, Gustav Waagen acquires Coxie's copy of the *Adoration of the Lamb*, and he makes an important find: he famously rediscovers the quatrain, the inscriptions on the lower exterior frames, here indicated with an arrow.

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These inscriptions are painted in miniscule script, here in the recent reconstruction and transcription of Hugo van der Velden. The four sections state that the altarpiece was started by Hubert van Eyck, (“a greater man than whom cannot be found”), that it was completed by Hubert’s brother Jan for Joos Vijd, and that the work was finished by May 6, 1432. This, and the art historical firestorm triggered by the quatrain, is of course all well-known and well-published.

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But let’s go back to 1880/81, when Bennewitz von Loefen painted his *Picture Gallery in the Altes Museum*. The painting shows the Northern skylight galleries at the top floor of the Altes Museum seen from the east, after a renovation that ended in April 1880. Before, these panels were displayed hanging on large hinges, in such a way that they could be opened and closed. But as we know from a later letter by Bode, which I will discuss in a second, this earlier installation had two large disadvantages: one could only see one side at a time, and the opening and closing of the heavy panels was not safe.

I am grateful to Anne van Grevenstein, for bringing this painting to my attention, and to Stephan Kemperdick for sending me this relatively high-resolution image of this painting, so we can zoom in on the display of the six panels by van Eyck...

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... and the copy of the *Adoration of the Lamb* above them. Coxie’s copy is clearly hanging *on* the wall, on two rods, but the six original wing panels are actually set *into* this wall, which was also open on the other side, so the reverses of the panels would be visible in the next gallery, on the other side of the wall. This is an elegant solution, but it came with some issues of its own, and this installation was dismantled after only four years, in the autumn of 1884.

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Here is a schematic reconstruction of this installation with images of these actual paintings. I also took the liberty to reconstruct the view from the other gallery, showing the reverses of the panels. This will probably look a bit a strange,...

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... but will explain why this installation was removed so swiftly. Especially the *Annunciation* panels look rather bizarre, and it is as if Gabriel is trying to tell Joos Vijd that he is to give birth, rather than the Virgin, but that Joos does not want to hear these happy tidings. It is fair to say that this installation does not really work.

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And, in addition, it was also not possible in this set up to read the four sections of the quatrain in the correct order.

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Here is Van der Velden's transcription again, but in the order as it would have appeared in the Altes Museum. It now started with the last two lines, and finished with the first two.

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In other words, Bode had a problem on his hands. He had six hugely important panels in his collection, with 12 paintings by Van Eyck, but the installation was too problematic for a modern museum, and would certainly not be acceptable for the new Kaiser Friedrich Museum that he was developing. Von Bode opted for a rather drastic but effective solution: to physically separate the painted surfaces of each of the 6 panels by splitting them, by sawing them lengthwise through the middle, so that there would be twelve individual paintings rather than six.

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On April 5, 1893, Von Bode writes a letter to the general directorate of the Berlin museums, asking for permission for this operation. He reports on tests that he had ordered on three other Netherlandish panels of lesser importance, which were split with a specially adapted

veneer machine. The tests established that the saw cut was perfectly straight, and the paint was not damaged in any way by the heavy rollers of this device. The tests were conducted in the presence his assistant Hugo von Tschudi and the restorer Aloys Hauser. In his letter, Bode emphasizes that this procedure is not uncommon, and that he had never witnessed any negative aspects of such treatments. He concludes with the assurance that he would personally be present during the procedure.

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The permission was granted, and the panels were all sawn lengthwise on a machine that was specially devised for this goal by a certain Otto Erdmann, who, on June 6, 1894, sends an invoice for 2,063 marks to the museum. The original engaged frames were also cut lengthwise. So now there are twelve panels, which could obviously be installed with much greater ease and coherence in different constellations, and the quatrain could be displayed in the correct order.

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The twelve panels were outfitted with cradles at the reverses, to provide additional strength to the now very thin support panels, and to avoid warping. During our 2010 campaign “Lasting Support,” it was established that all the panels from the polyptych are structurally actually in surprisingly good condition. The international committee of panel experts, some members of which you see here, was highly impressed with the craftsmanship with which the cradles were applied.

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But, it has to be said, this intervention was incredibly risky, and would never be executed today. The saw’s cut might have been perfectly straight, but the panels themselves obviously were not, and the thickness of the remaining, original oak supports now varies quite a bit. In the case of the *Singing Angels*, for example, the thickest part measures six millimetres, but the thinnest section is only one *millimetre* thick, as you see here. Perhaps Bode’s personal presence just made the difference...

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It is not known if Bode asked his restorer for an opinion on the treatment, and if Hauser had any reservations about it, they were not recorded. It was indeed the art historian, who, for what we may call 'curatorial convenience', irreversibly altered these panels and placed them at great risk in doing so.

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The Ghent Altarpiece has long since been reunited, but the twelve split wing panels are still a strongly complicating factor for the polyptych's upcoming restoration and rehousing. Since *Adam* and *Eve* kept their original format, structurally, the altarpiece now has three different family types of panels rather than two. Of course, as the saying goes, hindsight is 20/20, and we obviously cannot blame Bode for not predicting the Great War and the Treaty of Versailles that would arrange for the return of the panels to Ghent in 1919. And the notion of reversibility, now generally accepted as a guiding principle in restoration treatments, would only be developed many decades later. But the episode serves as a strong reminder to us all to be as conservative as possible with our interventions, just because we cannot predict the future.

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The Berlin Museum also forms the backdrop for the second case that I want to discuss today. In 1896, thus two years *after* the wing panels were split, Bode had appointed Max Jacob Friedländer as his curator. Friedländer was to succeed Bode as Director of the Gemäldegalerie in 1924, the same year that the first book of his fourteen-volume series *Die altniederländische Malerei* appeared. I am grateful to Suzanne Laemers for sending me this photograph.

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But let us fast forward to December 1931, when the great connoisseur of Early Netherlandish paintings in Berlin receives a first letter from Philip Hendy, the later

Director of the National Gallery in London, but at the time a young Curator of Paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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In this letter, Hendy asks Friedländer if he would be interested in having a painting from the Boston museum be sent to Berlin, to have it restored there by Helmut Ruhemann. Ruhemann, who was 40 years old in 1931, would become the most famous restorer of his generation. You see him on the right at a much later age, after 1968, with his book “The Cleaning of Paintings” on his lap. Ruhemann was the key advocate of the so-called ‘total cleaning’ method, in which all layers of discoloured varnish and overpaintings were removed, a method that would later, right after the Second World War, be at the center of the famous ‘cleaning controversy’ at the National Gallery London. But that is a different story altogether.

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Philip Hendy’s letter from December 1931 would be the beginning of a fascinating correspondence, a well-documented intersection of four formidable men, all deeply engaged in matters of art and art conservation, in which Edward Forbes would also play a key role. These letters and telegrams reveal how different views on conservation were developing in the Old and the New World, and between different generations. It also shows that at the time, just as with Bode, it was still the art historians who called the shots, even if they strongly disagreed among each other. But I should not get ahead of myself.

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The painting in question is Rogier van der Weyden’s famous *Saint Luke Drawing a Portrait of the Virgin*, nowadays generally considered to be a key work in his oeuvre, and among the most important Netherlandish paintings in North America. But at the time, around 1930, the status of the work in the MFA was hotly debated.

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It was generally accepted that the composition was by Rogier, but the big issue was which of the existing versions in Boston, Bruges, Munich and St Petersburg was the primary composition, after which the others were copied.

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Hendy had become convinced that the Boston panel was the primary version, and he had good arguments to make his case. In his first letter to Friedländer, he writes that the X-radiograph showed some large *pentimenti*, which implied that this work was the original composition.

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These *pentimenti* had been revealed by Alan Burroughs, who was working across the Charles river from Boston in Cambridge, at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum. Burroughs had embarked on a major project that would, for the first time, systematically use X-radiography in art historical research. And this X-radiograph, Burroughs noted, showed that the head of the Virgin was changed in position.

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Later technical examinations would time and again establish that Burroughs was correct in his assessment. I will show you only one example, the infrared reflectogram assembly of the head of the Virgin, which shows that the earlier painted position was also prepared in the underdrawing.

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Burroughs X-rays also revealed the poor state of preservation of some areas, especially the sky and the robe of the Virgin. Here you see the extensive losses in the robe. Note that there are two different fills detectable: one type that is fully X-ray opaque, and thus light on the image, and another type of fill that is X-ray transparent, and appears dark. In both the lighter and the darker areas the original paint has been fully lost. It was obvious to Hendy and to the Trustees of the museum that a restoration of the panel would much help the claim that this painting was indeed from Rogier's own hand. A committee was struck to

oversee the restoration, and Ruhemann, with his fast growing reputation, was an obvious choice as restorer.

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Friedländer reports back in a very short letter to Hendy that he would much welcome the occasion to study the painting, and that Ruhemann wants to do what he can in cleaning and restoring this work. Hendy replies on February 24, 1932, that the Trustees agreed to a cleaning by Ruhemann, and he asks Friedländer to oversee the treatment, since, and I quote: "... none of us know anything of Dr Ruhemann himself or his methods", unquote. Friedländer's next letter is even shorter than the first, and ignores Hendy's request for his supervision. The panel is shipped to Berlin anyway, where Ruhemann described it in a letter from March 19 1932 as a structurally sound painting of wonderful quality, but covered with layers of discoloured toned varnish and crude overpainting. Interestingly, all further correspondence about the treatment is with Ruhemann directly.

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The cleaning advances well, and Ruhemann regularly sends letters to Boston with photographs documenting the progress, one of which you see here, the annotated reverse is on the right. Ruhemann's documentation is exemplary for the time. In a few small areas Ruhemann also left the old varnish and overpaint intact, referencing the condition before his treatment. Some of these areas are still on the painting today.

Friedländer is now agreeing that the Boston panel is, indeed, the primary version. George Hulin de Loo and Emile Renders travel to Berlin to see the work in Ruhemann's studio and are in agreement. All seems to be going very well for Hendy's attempts to rehabilitate the Boston panel. On August 4, 1932, 4 days after the Nazi party had won the Federal elections, Hendy wrote Ruhemann, quote: "it does not matter how invisible the repaint becomes. I should like you to complete the restoration as perfectly as you are able."

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But a few weeks later, on August 30, 1932, *Edward Forbes* reports to the director at the MFA about his visit to Berlin. Forbes is a longtime Trustee of the Museum of Fine Arts, and member of the committee overseeing the restoration. Forbes is a true Renaissance man, who was a poet, painter, musician, composer, and a city planner. But he was also Director of Harvard's Fogg Art Museum, where he founded the first museum laboratory for research into materials and techniques in North America. It was Forbes who enabled Alan Burroughs to do his X-ray project at Harvard, for example...

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... and it was here that he created the lab where the chemist John Gettens and art historian George Stout were conducting their pioneering technical studies. They applied new scientific techniques to material analyses, developed innovative conservation and documentation techniques, and basically triggered the early professionalization of the discipline. The very first volume of *Technical Studies in the Field of Fine Arts* was published just weeks before Forbes' visit to Berlin. I don't have time to expand on this part of the story, but you will get my point: Forbes was very much at home in matters of art conservation, and he had very strong opinions about them. He also had a willing ear in Ned Holmes, director of the MFA Boston, and the boss of young Hendy.

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Forbes' letter to Holmes starts positive. Forbes is pleased with Ruhemann's "fine and careful" cleaning, which was almost completed in August 1932, so Forbes most probably saw the picture in this state, or very close to it. But Forbes' dismay and concern comes across loud and clear in discussing the planned inpaintings. According to Forbes, Friedländer wanted to have Ruhemann retouch the picture in such a way that it would appear to be in perfect condition, which was fully in line with Hendy's instructions. But in Forbes's opinion, this was unacceptable. Forbes considered it, quote "improper to touch in an old painting in a deceptive way... if he retouches it in a deceptive way, and people like it now, and if in 20 or 30 years from now people come round to my way of thinking it will be difficult then to undo the damage", unquote. Forbes then outlines four 'classes' of restoration, based on both the degree of visibility of retouching and of the size of the

painting. At the Fogg at that time, restorers were applying visible retouching in systems of hatchings and crosshatchings that can be described as proto-tratteggio.

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Here is an example of such a treatment, of a Girolamo di Benvenuto, which was restored by Arcadius Lyon at the Fogg in 1932, the same year as Forbes' trip to Berlin. The detail is from the cherub indicated with the arrow. In the large Benvenuto, a 'class 4 painting' on the Forbes scale, the deliberately broadly executed inpainting was still visible at a distance of three to six meter. For the Boston *Saint Luke*, Forbes proposed a 'class 3' restoration, where the reconstructed areas ought to be distinguishable at a distance of 1 to 3 meter.

Forbes also strongly opposed Friedländer's views on the inpainting medium. Friedländer had told Forbes that they generally retouched oil paintings with oil, and tempera pictures with tempera. Concerned about the reversibility of the treatment, Forbes advised the Committee to instruct Ruhemann, and I quote: "not to use oil in restoration because it darkens... Secondly to use some binding medium for his color which is different enough from the binding medium of the original picture so that it can be removed if desired later without endangering the original picture and third that ...

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... under no circumstances he will carry his restorations so far that it is hard to detect with a microscope." Forbes apparently felt strongly about these matters since his handwriting became rather agitated when he inserted the phrase, I hope you can read it: "*After all, Ruhemann's name is not Roger van der Weyden, nor is he living in the 15th century*". Ruhemann must have been utterly confused by these two *deeply* contradicting instructions, but Forbes clearly got his point across to the Committee.

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On December 2nd, 1932, Hendy makes a full about face and writes to Ruhemann, and I quote: "I should like to suggest as a general principle that while the repainting should allow the picture to seem quite complete at a little distance, it should be detected easily on closer

examination by the naked eye. I hope that you will use a medium so different from the original that the repaint could be easily removed without any possible harm to the rest of the picture, and I should be obliged if you would write me the formula you have used for both repaint and varnish, for reference when the picture has next to be attended to." End quote. On January 23, 1933, Ruhemann answers Hendy that he will follow all of his instructions. One week later, Hitler is sworn in as Chancellor of Germany.

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But Ruhemann still felt that it was necessary to create artificial craquelure in such areas as the sky, because the retouchings were too disturbingly visible without such cracks. On June 24, 1933 Ruhemann reported, quote: "I tried a long time by different means to match the sky colour without crackles, but it is impossible; so I decided finally to make the crackles and now I am getting on quicker," end quote. Ruhemann must have felt a huge pressure to finish the treatment; for two months already it was forbidden for Jews to work in government positions. Friedländer had already been removed as Director of the Gemäldegalerie, and Ruhemann himself had been told that he would have to leave very soon.

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Ruhemann's restoration is completed by the end of the summer of 1933, and the panel is shipped back to the US in September. Shortly after, Ruhemann is forced to leave the museum. Philip Hendy publishes an article on the painting in the Burlington, proclaiming its primacy, but he resigns from the MFA in October 1933 after a conflict with his Trustees (about his acquisition of a nude by Matisse). Hendy and Ruhemann both move to England, and will be closely collaborating for many decades to come at the National Gallery London. In 1934, Ruhemann's article "A Record of Restoration" was published in *Technical Studies*.

Surprisingly, the panel is fully restored again only 10 years later, in 1943. Quite ironically, the documentation of this last treatment is painfully sparse, certainly compared to the exemplary reporting of Ruhemann, and there is no record of why this restoration was

deemed necessary. But it is likely that the Museum of Fine Arts and Edward Forbes remained deeply concerned about Ruhemann's reversibility of the treatment.

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Ruhemann's article and all surviving correspondence are included as appendix to this collection of essays, edited by the late Carol Purtle and published by Brepols. Part of the book is also the article "A Material History of Rogier's *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin*," which I co-authored with Rhona MacBeth, Paintings Conservator at the MFA.

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Very briefly, and as a mere aside, I do want to mention that the emphasis on visible inpainting and the 'archaeological' approach to revealing losses could also lead to extremes. This is illustrated by the sad but well-published treatments of the Early Italian paintings at Yale University. Between 1951 and 1971, some hundred fifty paintings (out of two hundred) were stripped and left without any restoration, I will show you only two random examples...

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... this being the first, and I would like to thank my colleague Cathleen Hoeniger for these photographs. The before-treatment image is on the left. This campaign was led by Charles Seymour Junior, professor of art history at Yale and the curator of the Yale Art Gallery at the time, and the son of the Yale President. His goal was to remove all traces of any other hand than that of the original artist. The losses were regarded as regrettable, but it was felt that anything but the most minimal intervention would mislead viewers about what was original and what was not. Seymour believed that a teaching institution had a special obligation not to present "fakeries" in its galleries. Mark Aronson, chief conservator at the Yale Art Gallery from 1995 through 2007, called Seymour's drive a "purist zeal for the honest artifact".

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Here is a second example, the before-treatment image is again on the left. In several cases, the paintings were not only stripped but also overcleaned. Studying the long list of treated pictures, Aronson remarks that there must have been a rush in the treatments to serve Seymour's catalog, which was published in 1971. Only in a few cases treatment reports were created. But Aronson also observes that there was widespread praise for the treatments at the time in the media, and only very few critical voices about these treatments.

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The Yale Art Gallery is to be congratulated for embracing this problematic episode in its history through a symposium and this publication, in order to learn from its past, with support of the Getty Conservation Institute. The study of the *history* of conservation is a relatively new but fast developing area, and a clear sign of the field's coming to maturity. It is to be expected that the collaboration between art historians and conservators/restorers will receive more interest as well in the future. In 1977, George Stout, in looking back at the work at the Fogg, had characterized conservation as a, and I quote, "mongrel pup that crawled through the academic fence", a beautiful and apt image indeed.

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So, let's now look again at the earlier identified areas where the tasks of curators and conservators can overlap. It is obviously an open door to state that curators and conservators need to collaborate closely in conserving the arts. It is also obvious that the roles of the curator and the conservator have much changed over the years, since the shared arena of their activities, the art museums, have changed so dramatically. But it is also a truism that no museum is fully alike. Many museums don't have conservators on staff but use free lancers or centralized government facilities, which can come with their own sets of special complexities in collaboration. In short, different institutions have different problems, and different problems will require different solutions.

So I guess that you will have to allow me some generalisations. For example, I think we can state that art historians, be it museum directors, curators, or art history professors,

traditionally have had a much bigger say in these matters than art conservators did. The cases that I discussed illustrate that in the past the relationship between art historian and conservator was clearly more straightforward, but not one anybody would like to return to. I also think that generally spoken, over the last half-century or so, art conservators have gradually and successfully claimed a better position at the negotiation table in these matters, and have found a clearer and a louder voice in these negotiations. And that that voice is clearly needed is also obvious, since the number of loan exhibitions has increased dramatically in the last decades, and art works seem to be travelling more as ever before.

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But let us be very careful not to simplify matters, since conservators and curators obviously don't make decisions in isolation. There are registrars,

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... , and education departments, and exhibition departments, etcetera, etcetera, who are all legitimate stakeholders. We could give them all their own circles, but it is already starting to look like the Olympics. It seems to me that restoration treatments are too often exhibition driven, which can potentially create significant problems in regard to prioritization, financing, and, perhaps worst of all, set very rigid deadlines for the treatments themselves.

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But we do need to add at least one more circle. It strikes me that in our discussions in the coming two days we should somehow distinguish between *tasks* and *responsibilities*. Hence, the last and biggest circle here is for the museum director, since the final responsibility for conserving the collections lies there of course, and not with the individual curator or conservator. And if there are insurmountable problems between the curator and the conservator, it will be up to the director to make final decisions. And it is the director's task to strive towards an optimal infrastructure for conserving the collections, and to weigh the different and often conflicting needs of different departments in regard to financing, real estate, and staffing.

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It is hard to overestimate the importance of such an institutional infrastructure. I think we would all agree that a conservator should have a very big say in matters of collection care, loan requests, prevention, and in prioritizing restoration treatments, and many institutions have granted conservators a *de facto* veto right on these matters. But how often may we expect a conservator to weigh in with an unpopular opinion if he or she is hired on a temporary contract? If his or her job is on the line, how many loan requests can a conservator block that a curator or a director really needs to see granted to secure that one key loan to that one key exhibition? In my opinion, it should be a clear priority for museums with substantial volumes of loan traffic to have at least some of their conservators be appointed in a permanent position. But in addition to obvious financial implications, that also immediately triggers a need for permanent education and refresher trainings, since the field of conservation is still developing rapidly.

I would like to speak briefly about the last of these shared tasks on this list, my own field, technical research. It is here where the changing role of the conservator has probably become most visible for the outside world, since technical studies have become part of mainstream museum activities more and more, which is reflected in increased numbers of publications and exhibitions on the subject. But when you put your ear to the ground one can hear rumblings within the museum walls about this topic, and directors and curators can sometimes be heard complaining about conservators performing too few treatments because of their increased activities in research. We will talk more about that specific problem tomorrow in our panel discussion. But what I would like to address as my last topic today is the fact that the changed role of the conservator in regard to technical research is also directly related to a rather dramatic shift in the very nature of that type of research.

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The study of materials and techniques is by definition an interdisciplinary field, where art historians, art conservators, and scientists have collaborated effectively for many years.

Traditionally, it was often the art historian who mediated between the collaborating disciplines, and who formulated the overarching research questions. But if you will allow me yet another generalizing statement, I think that is a fair assessment that over the last two or three decades or so, the role of the scientist has become increasingly important in these collaborations, and for many good reasons. Conservation science has swiftly developed into a field of its own, and the equipment for instrumental analyses has become increasingly complex, triggering further specializations within conservation science. But other sciences are also becoming rapidly more important, and art works are now routinely examined in synchrotrons, with high-resolution 3-D microscopes, and with optical-coherence tomography. It is increasingly difficult for any interested art historian to keep track of these developments, fathom the outcomes of the research, let alone steer those activities. Digital imaging is becoming increasingly more sophisticated as well, and many of you know (or should know) that using Photoshop is simply not acceptable from a scientific point of view. One could of course learn MATLAB to perform algorithm-based stitching or registration of high-resolution images, but it is probably wiser to work with specialized computer scientists. And it is also no secret that scientific research is often money driven, and granting agencies are often easier satisfied with requests from the 'harder sciences' than from the humanities. To make a long story short, this field seems to be metrically expanding, whether we like it or not, and the art historian is often no longer the most logical mediator between the different fields involved. So rather than the model on your screen, ...

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... the model nowadays more often looks like this, with the conservator/restorer in the central, mediating role. The conservator is better equipped as translator, if you will, between the different scientists and the art historian. This new role for the conservator is also directly linked to changes in education and training. While the study of art history has largely moved away from the object in the last decades, and has also in general become shorter, the training of conservators at the academic level has significantly improved. And many professionals are crossing the academic fence between disciplines at an individual level. Several practicing conservators have also studied art history, and you will

hear from two of them (Jørgen Wadum and H  l  ne Dubois) later at this conference. And the chair of tomorrow's discussion, Nico van Hout, curator of the Antwerp Museum, is, as you know, also a trained conservator.

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But it does not work everywhere, and in some research projects, it has to be said, there is actually very little overlap between the disciplines, and the model of collaboration can start to look more like this one. In such a model the conservator can easily get trapped in an awkward situation.

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This changing role for the art conservator and the scientist in the studies of materials and techniques also appears to be reflected in how we refer to this field. Rather than 'technical art history', a very apt term in my opinion that was coined by David Bomford only 15 years ago, we now more and more see the term 'art technological research'....

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... following the German word "Kunsttechnologie". The ICOM CC working group that is most closely related to technical art history is named ATSR, for Art Technology Source Research. And J  rgen Wadum's new centre in Copenhagen is called *CATS*, the "Center for Art Technological Studies and Conservation".

In closing, the development of technical studies moving away from the art historian and art history is a logical and an organic one, but I must say that I am concerned that we might lose something very dear in the process. In my opinion, the more interesting interdisciplinary projects in this field were always driven by research questions that were firmly rooted in art history, rather than by technology or by conservation treatments. I don't think that want to study materials because we can. In that regard I much welcomed Martin Kemp's recent suggestion in the *Art Newspaper* that we should work harder on decoupling technical studies from conservation treatments. The study of materials and

technique allows us an incredible insight into an artists' intent, and for me that is the holy grail of art history. As you see, I myself haven't given up on technical art history just yet.

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Thank you very much.