

**John Shearman and Marcia B. Hall, editors, *The Princeton Raphael Symposium: Science in the Service of Art History*.  
Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990**

Cathleen Hoeniger

Volume 17, numéro 2, 1990

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1073079ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073079ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)

1918-4778 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Hoeniger, C. (1990). Compte rendu de [John Shearman and Marcia B. Hall, editors, *The Princeton Raphael Symposium: Science in the Service of Art History*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 17(2), 184–185. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073079ar>

---

## LIVRES / BOOKS

---

JOHN SHEARMAN and MARCIA B. HALL, editors *The Princeton Raphael Symposium: Science in the Service of Art History*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990.

It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of dialogue between art historians and art conservators for the enrichment of both disciplines. Conservators can help train art historians in reading the surface and structure of a painting, its condition and techniques; and, in turn, art historians can assist in broadening the detailed, scientific insights of conservators by providing historical contexts and investigating the cultural dimensions of restoration history and the history of artists' materials and methods. To stimulate communication of this kind, John Shearman and Marcia B. Hall organized an international symposium focusing on the works of the Italian Renaissance master, Raphael, which was held at Princeton in October 1983, on the occasion of the fifth centennial of the artist's birth and in celebration of the first centennial of the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. The conference was also designed to exploit and publicize the scientific findings on Raphael's paintings generated when works were examined and restored in preparation for centenary exhibitions at major art museums in Europe and North America. The collected papers, recently published by Princeton University Press as *The Raphael Symposium: Science in the Service of Art History*, together constitute one of the first modern attempts to securely document the techniques of a major Western artistic figure.

The collection opens with two expansive and impressive papers by the convenors of the conference and editors of the publication, Marcia Hall and John Shearman. In her introductory remarks, Hall stresses the importance of the emerging sub-discipline, history of technique. Since the 1940s, progress in the technology used in the scientific examination of works of art has made such research a major source of new data in the field of art history. However, as Hall points out, much of this information emerges in conservation laboratories as a result of restoration problems, and rarely correlates with the questions asked by art historians. She underscores the need for mutual understanding between restorer and historian if new research of this kind is to bear fruit. Hall argues for the potential of such collaborative investigation as demonstrated by the material assembled on Raphael's works. Although, as she recognizes, the papers presented here do not constitute an exhaustive survey of Raphael's techniques but rather form a collection of recent discoveries with particular emphasis on Raphael's underdrawing techniques and aspects of his colour, the publication should serve as a model and point the way for future research.

In his contribution concerning the historian and the conservator, Shearman continues where Hall left off

but in a more muted tone. He stresses the problematic aspects of interdisciplinary work between the art historian and conservator, most notably the tendency on the part of the historian to accept scientific evidence passively as fact. Shearman advises instead a more critical evaluation of experimental data and, hence, a collaboration based on fuller mutual comprehension. He then suggests specific areas in Raphael research for further interdisciplinary enquiry, hinting in his descriptive questioning at how a collaborative dialogue might take place.

These two papers contribute in major ways to the future of the sub-discipline of technical studies. With their comprehensive and synthetic approaches, these essays summarize general findings of the conference, acting in this way also as concluding remarks. But perhaps more important still, Hall and Shearman also bring methodological issues to the fore and seek to establish ground rules for the new sub-discipline.

Also included among the opening papers is a brief introduction to current techniques in the scientific examination of paintings by J. R. J. van Asperen de Boer, who acted as scientific consultant for the conference. The Dutch physicist is well known as the scientist who perfected the technology used in infrared reflectography, and for his clear introductions to this and other current means of scientific examination. Van Asperen's paper outlines the methods of x-radiography, infrared reflectography, and the extraction and analysis of paint cross-sections for the layman. Although a necessary preface to a collection devoted to the results of such scientific research, this reader found his contribution overly short, a summary of similar earlier publications.

The body of the volume, however, is comprised of 14 essays on individual works or groups of works by Raphael, by 16 different contributors, among them conservators, conservation-scientists, and museum curators. In terms of general subject matter, these can be divided into two groups with some papers straddling both areas: the technique and material composition of Raphael's works, and their restoration history.

The interdisciplinary subject of artists' techniques is becoming increasingly popular in recent years. In the past 10 years, model studies include Gridley McKim-Smith's extended essay on the technique of six paintings by Velasquez in the Prado, *Examining Velasquez* (New Haven, 1988), and a sequence of brilliant articles on the techniques of notable paintings in the *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, a publication of London's National Gallery, now sadly in jeopardy due to lack of funds. Joyce Plesters, formerly head of the Scientific Department at the National Gallery, made numerous contributions to the bulletin, and, through these, we have come to know and respect the pioneering spirit and quality of her work. Plesters's two papers in *The*

*Raphael Symposium*, on technical aspects of some Raphael paintings in the National Gallery and on the cartoons for the Vatican tapestries, are infused with characteristic authority and clarity of expression. Her descriptions of the technical findings in each case, from the material composition of the supports and grounds to the methods used to model the various pigments, are exemplary. Of particular interest are Plesters's findings concerning the close correspondence of specific Flemish and Raphaellesque oil-painting techniques, which point up the importance of Northern influence during this period and will, it is hoped, stimulate further research.

One other excellent paper is by Hubertus von Sonnenburg, on the examination of Raphael's paintings in Munich. In this essay von Sonnenburg provides a very careful description of the materials and techniques found in two works from Raphael's Florentine period (1504-1508), the *Tempi Madonna* and the *Canigiani Holy Family*. Exploring their individual features from the support up, von Sonnenburg also extends the relevance of his enquiry by drawing numerous comparisons with the techniques of other examined paintings by Raphael. For this reason, his is one of the most comprehensive contributions to the study of Raphael's painting technique in the collection. It was wonderful to hear the recent news that von Sonnenburg is now working out of North America, as head of the painting conservation studios at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The other essays on technique are less worthy of note, either on account of their more narrow scope or because of a relative lack of new information due to limited scientific investigation of the works. Nevertheless, it is important to stress the range of aspects of technical enquiry represented in the volume, from dendrochronological studies of the nature and structure of the wood supports used in Raphael's panel-paintings, to the techniques employed in the interior decorative marble facing of the Chigi Chapel in Rome (a subject which seems somewhat out of place), as well as numerous accounts of the various stages of Raphael's painting techniques. These diverse topics seem to have been assembled in response to John Shearman's clearly articulated plea for greater variety in our research on aspects of Raphael's technique (p. 12). Indeed, participants were issued at the outset with a number of questions or problems that it was hoped their papers would address. And in this way the outcome was moulded to reflect the diversity of Raphael as an artist and technician and the optimal breadth of the emerging sub-discipline.

The second interdisciplinary area investigated in a few of the papers is restoration history. Although tracing the restoration history of a work has, to a certain extent, formed part of the traditional routine of the conservator—the equivalent to the art connoisseur's searching of an object's provenance—as a sub-discipline of art history this area of research is very new and, to my mind, full of potential. The only extensive, recent study concerning the history of restoration is Alessandro Conti's cursory and very limited survey, *Storia del restauro e della conservazione delle opere d'arte* (Milan, 1973). Consequently, the few contributions to this area in *The Raphael Symposium* are extremely signif-

icant, particularly Raffaella Rossi Manaresi's account of the restoration history of Raphael's Bologna *St. Cecilia Altarpiece* and his *Madonna di Foligno*. As she recounts, both altarpieces were taken to France in the late eighteenth century by Napoleon's army, and in Paris at the Musée Central des Arts, both were restored and in the process transferred from panel to canvas, changing the surface qualities of the paintings. Subsequently, after it was returned to Bologna in 1815, the *St. Cecilia Altarpiece* underwent at least two treatments during which three layers of varnish and two intermediary strata of brown patina were added to the surface, altering the chromatic effects to suit contemporary aesthetic tastes. Only recently have these accretions been removed to recover Raphael's original chromatic balance so valued by modern observers. Indeed, studies like this one cannot help but reveal how tastes have changed and how with these changes works of art have been subjected to physical transformations to bring them into line with contemporary aesthetic standards. Clearly, the fabric of a work of art is far from static; and from an object's ever-changing physical make-up we can learn a lot about the cultural contexts in which it has been and is appreciated.

The text of this large volume is lavishly and attractively printed, in three languages, English, French, and Italian, and there are remarkably few editorial slips. Unfortunately, however, the colour plates are a disappointment. In many of the overall plates the colour distortions are quite extreme, which seems somewhat ironic in a book so concerned with an artist's colouring techniques and his newly cleaned works. Yet, as John Shearman recently explained, because of publication costs they were compelled to print all the colour plates at the same time, and the contrasts had to be raised so that the differently coloured layers of the paint cross-sections would be absolutely clear.

CATHLEEN HOENIGER  
*Queen's University*

---

JEAN-PAUL BOUILLON, éd. *La Critique d'art en France 1850-1900*. Université de Saint-Etienne, travaux LXIII, Centre Interdisciplinaire d'Etudes et de Recherches sur l'Expression Contemporaine, 1989, 231 p.

Ce volume réunit les actes d'un colloque international consacré à la critique d'art en France entre 1850 et 1900. Les quinze études regroupées et présentées par Jean-Paul Bouillon tracent la voie vers une connaissance élargie des conditions de la prise de parole dans la critique d'art de la deuxième moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Résultat d'un programme de recherche conjoint engagé par les départements d'Histoire de l'Art des universités de Clermont-Ferrand et de Montréal, *la Critique d'art en France 1850-1900* place d'emblée le lecteur devant la complexité des enjeux du discours sur l'art en montrant que loin d'être monolithique, il relève d'une diversité d'options culturelles.

Les contributions aux travaux de ce colloque sont réparties dans un ordre chronologique en trois temps