



Editorial

As early as the onset of the twentieth century, scientific techniques have been applied in art historical research. In 1930, the groundbreaking International Conference for the Study of Scientific Methods for the Examination and Preservation of Works of Art was held in Rome. A catalyst for technical research in the field of art history, the conference led to the founding of in-house laboratories by various major museums in Europe. Early research was mainly implemented to unmask forgeries and confirm (or reject) attributions. Initially, such efforts were met with guarded reserve and in some cases even fierce resistance by the more established art historians. Nowadays, few dispute the role of scientific means of analysis as a valuable, integral part of art historical research. Such methods are broadly applied, for example, to ascertain the materials and processes involved in the creation of works of art.

Two articles in this *Rijksmuseum Bulletin* combine art historical research with scientific technical analysis. Art historian Machtelt Brüggem Israëls and paintings conservator Giulia Sara de Vivo jointly examine a small Italian panel that only recently was still seen as a twentieth-century forgery. Technical analysis, however, confirms the use of fifteenth-century materials, as well as panel construction and painting methods typical of that same period. Based on this analysis, stylistic comparison and archival research, a new interpretation of the panel is proposed. It can now be regarded as a devotional copy of a fresco in the Italian town of Pistoia, depicting a Virgin of Humility, which, in the year 1490, miraculously began to perspire. Likely responsible for the Rijksmuseum panel is Niccolò di Mariano, the most active figurative painter in Pistoia at the time, whose style is recognizable in the work and whose other activities are in line with the production of this replica.

Art historian Esther Pitoun describes a new acquisition, a bronze statuette representing Christ at the Column. Stylistically, the sculpture bears a striking similarity to a bronze *Ecce Homo* acquired by the Rijksmuseum many decades ago. The scientist Arie Pappot's technical examination of the two bronzes reveals them to be casts produced concurrently in the same workshop, most likely in Paris, in the late seventeenth century. Based on the presence of a model for the *Christ at the Column* attributed to François du Quesnoy in his personal collection, the sculptor François Girardon now emerges as the probable maker of the *Ecce Homo*. He likely produced it to accompany his cast taken from Du Quesnoy's model.

Unfortunately, some artworks were destined to exist for only a brief period. This certainly applies to the centrepieces made of sugar produced in the eighteenth century, so-called 'desserts'. These ephemeral works once formed an important aspect of elite dining, but were not made to last. Technical research into these now non-extant creations would surely have produced remarkable insights. Fortunately, there are other inroads to further our understanding of these unique artworks. In his investigation, Alexander Dencher turns to registrations of these desserts in surviving written descriptions and very occasionally in prints, and devotes special attention to three very rare drawings, preserved despite their temporary nature. This allowed him to understand the design and execution of these compositions. The drawings show that confectioners are oftentimes to be viewed as autonomous artists.

Indisputable is the status of those artists involved in the new acquisitions presented by the Rijksmuseum Print Room. These works on paper – drawings, prints, a woodcut, a bible, a photograph and a photo collage – were produced by highly adept artists, some of whom are anonymous, others whose names are celebrated and a few deserving a re-evaluation. Without exception, each of these works enriches the Rijksmuseum collection in its own way.