



# NATIONAL GALLERY TECHNICAL BULLETIN

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Series editor **Ashok Roy**

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#### FRONT COVER

Details from Aelbert Cuyp, *The Large Dort* (PLATE 1, PAGE 71);  
Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *The Roman Campagna, with the  
Claudian Aqueduct* (PLATE 1, PAGE 89); Sassetta, Sansepolcro  
Altarpiece (PLATE 1, PAGE 8; PLATE 3, PAGE 10); Diego Velázquez,  
*Christ after the Flagellation contemplated by the Christian Soul*  
(PLATE 1, PAGE 53); Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot *Villeneuve-lès-  
Avignon* (PLATE 4, PAGE 91), Sebastiano del Piombo, *The Raising  
of Lazarus* (PLATE 1, PAGE 27)

#### TITLE PAGE

Sebastiano del Piombo, *The Raising of Lazarus*, detail

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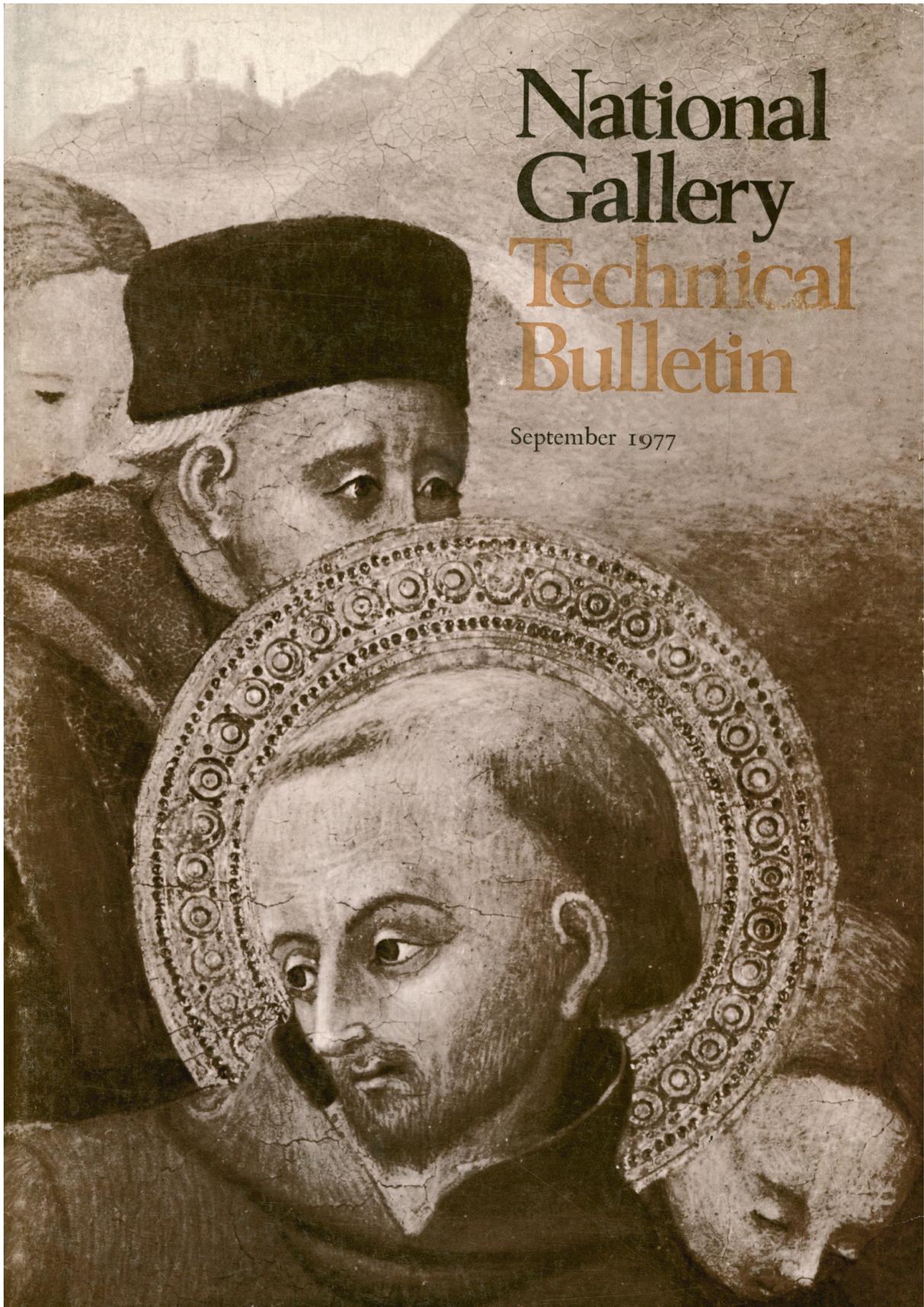
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# The *Technical Bulletin*: Past and Future

PLATE 1 Front cover of the first issue of the *Technical Bulletin*, 1, 1977, with a duotone detail from Sassetta's *The Legend of the Wolf of Gubbio* (NG 4762).

This is the 30th volume of the *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, and it is the final issue to appear in conventional print format. From the autumn of 2010, the *Technical Bulletin* will be re-launched as a free online journal on the National Gallery's website in an area of the site designated 'research'. There are several reasons for this radical change in publishing policy. The first is a prosaic one, namely the financial constraints of publishing a specialised journal, particularly a small-run printed journal containing many illustrations. The online *Bulletin* will keep its present title and appearance, transposed to an electronic format. Each new grouping of articles will be associated with a volume number so that the contents may be cited by researchers, and will in this way be regarded as contributing to the research literature of the subject. The National Gallery is committed to sustaining the *Technical Bulletin* in the long term on the web, and, as soon as copyright clearances for external images can be obtained, it is the Gallery's intention to place the full run of thirty back issues of the journal on the website.

To mark the process of transformation from conventional print to an on line presence, we will celebrate the final printed anniversary volume at the National Gallery with an international conference in September 2009. The principal themes of the conference have been chosen to advance subjects at the heart of the *Technical Bulletin*'s particular focus over many years: that is, the materials and techniques of European old master paintings.<sup>1</sup>

The second reason for a new approach to publishing is more positive. Not only will the *Technical Bulletin* online be available at no charge to anyone anywhere in the world who is interested in this publication's content, but there will be an increased awareness of the National Gallery's research on its collection – and of course of the collection itself. There are also other clear advantages to electronic publishing. Greater numbers of detailed illustrations from National Gallery sources become possible, and there is the future potential for searchability of content, links to related research, ease of revision in the light of new research, and increased speed of publication.

No one doubts the pleasures of well-produced printed publications, particularly those containing many illustrations, nor the convenience and durability of conventional books and journals. However, the literature of science already exploits electronic publications with great enthusiasm and effectiveness; some significant publications exist only in online versions. At the National Gallery, we would like to take advantage both of the benefits of rapid electronic communication of research, and of the pleasures of durable print matter. We intend therefore to explore a print-on-demand arrangement for the *Technical Bulletin* in addition to its online presence, although the precise nature of this service is for the future.

The *Burlington Magazine*, that great upholder of traditional values of scholarship, has acknowledged in a recent editorial the new significance of electronic media. 'None would dispute that the Internet is now essential for art-historical research and teaching. It enables blindingly fast searches of enormous amounts of data, and instantaneous communication, despite distance. The benefits

of being online are now part of the everyday working life of all art historians and curators in universities, museums and beyond.<sup>2</sup>

For these reasons, the National Gallery with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in New York, has designed a web-based project in electronic documentation of paintings by Raphael in the collection and elsewhere: <http://cima.ng-london.org.uk/documentation/>. This provides access to extensive material from art-historical, conservation-related, scientific and technical sources, all of which are illuminated by large numbers of digitised images. It is anticipated that these initiatives are the beginning of much wider research materials on paintings that will become available over the next few years on the National Gallery website – the online *Technical Bulletin* being part of that wider aspiration of making research more accessible.

This final printed volume is a fitting place to offer some thanks – firstly to the *Bulletin's* contributors over the years, overwhelmingly Gallery staff, supported by a few enthusiastic outside contributors interested in the technical study of the collection. Certain colleagues have been particularly dedicated to writing for the *Bulletin*, and the impressively high quality of their scholarship has meant that their reputations around the world in their fields of expertise have inevitably been enhanced. Special thanks for their tireless contributions to the publication are due to Jan Green, Managing Editor since the publication of Volume 14 in 1993, and to Diana Davies, who has edited and improved contributors' copy from that same year. Mention must also be made of the generosity of those who have supported the *Technical Bulletin* over the years with grants and financial contributions – Mrs Charles Wrightsman through the American Friends of the National Gallery, The Samuel H. Kress Foundation and The Elizabeth Cayzer Charitable Trust – to them and to their Boards we are extremely grateful.

The original idea for the *Technical Bulletin* was that of the then Scientific Adviser to the Trustees of the National Gallery – Garry Thomson (1925–2007). His thinking and intention is described in the Gallery's Annual Report for 1975–7: 'the Scientific Department is continuously carrying out analyses in three fields: pigments, paint media and colour measurement. ... Though a proportion of the results of this work has been made available in publications by members of the laboratory... much has not been readily accessible to colleagues in other museums. The need to remedy this was one of the chief reasons for creating a new annual journal.'<sup>3</sup> The first issue appeared in the autumn of 1977 (PLATE 1), but it was Garry Thomson's view that this new journal would rapidly run out of subjects; he predicted a maximum of three or four issues. This proved an underestimation of the potential that the National Gallery had within its organisational arrangements and its ways of working on the collection involving interdisciplinary studies of easel paintings that brings together, scientists, conservators and curators.<sup>4</sup> Although not a totally new idea, the Gallery's programme of work on its collection, and the presence of the Scientific Department – independent of Conservation, although committed to co-operation with that discipline – meant that the Gallery was very well placed to build on an established model of multidisciplinary working that had been advanced with the greatest energy, commitment and specialised knowledge by the late Joyce Plesters (1927–1996) (PLATE 2). She had joined the Gallery as a scientist to work on technical study of paintings in 1949. I have elsewhere described Joyce as 'the doyenne of the paint cross-section,'<sup>5</sup> but she was nothing less than the inventor of our field of material-based studies of paintings, and her

PLATE 2 The late Joyce Plesters with the newly acquired Laser Microspectral Analyser (LMA), about 1976.



influence still remains very much present in our working lives at the National Gallery. I was privileged to join the National Gallery's Scientific Department in 1977 to work for Joyce and it was her approach (and my own recent experience in academic publishing) that led to my first involvement with the *Technical Bulletin* from 1978 (Volume 2) and the development of its content with colleagues, particularly in the Scientific and Conservation Departments. This second issue contained the article – on Giovanni Bellini's *The Blood of the Redeemer* (NG 1233) – that was to become the prototype of tripartite co-operation between disciplines, although Joyce Plesters's own article on Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (NG 35) from the same volume remains one of the best known and most cited.<sup>6</sup>

Had they known of the possibility, Joyce Plesters and Garry Thomson, would have applauded this transformation of the *Technical Bulletin* into an online publication; furthermore, they would have seen the ecological advantages of electronic publishing as an important additional benefit. Both the *Technical Bulletin* Anniversary Conference held this year, and the *Technical Bulletin* – past and future – are dedicated to them.

### Ashok Roy

Editor, *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* (1978–present)

<sup>1</sup> 'Studying Old Master Paintings – Technology and Practice: The National Gallery *Technical Bulletin* 30th Anniversary Conference', The National Gallery, London, 16–18 September 2009. The proceedings of this Conference will be published by Archetype Books, London.

<sup>2</sup> Editorial, *The Burlington Magazine*, CL, July 2008, p. 443.

<sup>3</sup> *The National Gallery, July 1975–December 1977* (Annual Report), London 1978, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> The *Technical Bulletin* is perhaps best known for multidisciplinary articles on old master easel paintings, which carry a technical argument or a technical emphasis at their centre. Other articles on the study and care of easel paintings have appeared

over the years, including work on the history, technology and behaviour of traditional painting materials, environmental science and environmental management, lighting matters, conservation treatments, colour science and digital imaging research, and methods of analysis of the materials of painting.

<sup>5</sup> Ashok Roy, 'The Forbes Prize Lecture', IIC International Congress, Dublin, 1998, *IIC Bulletin*, No. 6, December 1998, pp. 1–5.

<sup>6</sup> Allan Braham, Martin Wyld and Joyce Plesters, 'The Blood of the Redeemer'; and Arthur Lucas and Joyce Plesters, 'Titian's "Bacchus and Ariadne"', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, 2, 1978, pp. 11–24, and pp. 25–47.