

BOOK REVIEWS

Painting restoration before “La Restauration”: The origins of the profession in France, Ann Massing, Cambridge: Hamilton Kerr Institute, and London-Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers/ Brepols, 2012, 320 pages, hardcover, \$162, ISBN 978-1-905375-34-9.

The restoration of paintings in Paris, 1750–1815: Practice, discourse, materiality, Noémie Étienne, translated from the French by Sharon Grevet, Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2017 (originally published in France, 2012), 302 pages, paperback, \$69.95, ISBN 978-1-60605-16-7.

In 2012, two books of outstanding quality appeared, both devoted to crucial developments in painting restoration in France during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, at the time when the Louvre Museum was first officially opened to the public. British conservator Ann Massing published *Painting restoration before “La Restauration”* and in the same year, art historian Noémie Étienne published *La restauration des peintures à Paris (1750–1815)*. Since Étienne’s book has just appeared in an English translation sponsored by the Getty Conservation Institute, it would seem appropriate to compare the quite different ways in which these authors treat their subject.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, scholars have identified the period from 1740 to 1815 in Paris as the “moment” when the “modern” practice of painting restoration emerged, in direct association with the treatment of the famous pictures at the Louvre. A sequence of historical circumstances have been seen as creating the environment in which restoration transitioned from a private workshop practice of artists and artisans to a more standardized and disciplined profession within the museum institution. It seems to have been fundamental that the French kings had assembled a large, varied, and valuable collection of pictures, which were cared for by court artists from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Scholars draw attention to a critical juncture by the middle of the eighteenth century, because some of the gems in the royal collection by Raphael and Andrea del Sarto were suffering from major structural problems. Faith was placed in the expertise of Robert Picault, a talented but showy artisan with knowledge of the use of chemicals for the separation of paint layers from destabilized wooden supports. Beginning in 1749, Picault performed several transfers, removing the paint layers from their original panels and placing them on new canvases. These risky and highly invasive treatments were presented by journalists as scientifically based marvels and caught wide attention, bringing greater publicity to art restoration than before.

The next chain of events that provoked dramatic changes in restoration in Paris resulted from the political upheavals of the French Revolution, and the aggressive international behavior of the new French government, the Directory, during the French Wars on the continent that followed soon thereafter. In the wake of the revolution, when rooms in the Louvre Palace were opened as a public gallery in 1793, many of the pictures formerly owned by the kings were displayed as treasures belonging to the French citizenry, in addition to paintings newly acquired from suppressed churches and from the collections of *émigrés*. Art restoration took on increased significance when it was the patrimony of France that required safeguarding. Moreover, when hundreds more paintings arrived as spoils of war from the French military campaigns on the continent, the public turned to look with fervent interest at the treasure trove in the Louvre.

Yet some of the confiscated paintings, which had been celebrated since the time of Giorgio Vasari, such as Raphael’s *Madonna di Foligno*, arrived in very poor condition due to centuries of uncontrolled humidity in church chapels and because the panel supports were destabilized by woodboring insects. Before exhibiting these trophies, an enormous enterprise of restoration was undertaken. Leaders in art and science watched closely as restorers treated grand Flemish and Italian altarpieces in the laboratories at the Louvre. Moreover, once the restored pictures were displayed in the Louvre, art critics voiced their opinions on the success of the treatments.

Given the importance of this period for the practice of restoration in connection with the rise of the modern museum, it should come as little surprise that previous scholars have provided the foundation upon which Ann Massing and Noémie Étienne build. Most notably, Gilberte Émile-Mâle’s archival research, presented in a sequence of journal articles from 1956 to 1997, has inspired further investigation. Among art historians, Andrew McClellan is appreciated for having included restoration in his widely read study of the opening of the Louvre as a public museum, *Inventing the Louvre* (Cambridge UP, 1994). McClellan contended that advanced “standards of restoration in France” made the period important, but also advised art historians to pay more attention to restoration because of its bearing on esthetic values: “attitudes toward restoration and conservation shed light on ways in which art was viewed in the late eighteenth century” (McClellan, 72). Furthermore, in an article on the restoration of Raphael’s famous altarpiece in 1800, McClellan specifically associated the Louvre with the advent of modern restoration: “following the birth of the first public museums ... restoration emerged as a distinct and recognized profession, requiring specialized skills informed by science and the history of art” (McClellan 1995, Raphael’s *Foligno Madonna* at the Louvre in 1800, *Art Journal*, 80).

More significant for the history of restoration as an academic field has been the impact of Alessandro Conti. His remarkable survey, *Storia del restauro e della conservazione delle opere d'arte* (1973, 1988, 2002), reached a large audience in Europe, and since the English translation (translated by Helen Glanville, Elsevier, 2007), Conti's achievement has been more fully understood in the UK and North America. Yet Conti does not appear in the index of Ann Massing's book or of Noémie Étienne's original French study, though in the English translation Étienne indexed three mentions of Conti's work. The lack of acknowledgement of Conti's fundamental scholarship may be related to his approach as an Italian national. In his predominantly Italian history of restoration and restorers, Conti downplayed and devoted comparatively little space to the French developments. Conti also put French practitioners such as Robert Picault in their place when he explained that the Parisian "inventions" of transfer and detachment had been developed earlier in Italy. In addition, Conti argued that many of the treatments on the confiscated paintings were not impressive, and in fact several caused serious damage: "in the restorations in the Musée central des Arts, their results were frequently rather modest ... and often had irreversible consequences, as was well demonstrated by the new restoration of Raphael's *Saint Cecilia* (translated by Glanville 2007, 247)." As an Italian, Conti naturally commented on the offensive nature of the French looting, particularly the destructive removal of Italy's treasures under Napoleon.

In other words, Ann Massing and Noémie Étienne are returning to a period in the history of painting restoration in France, the significance of which, as a turning point in the emergence of the modern profession, has been discussed by several scholars. Yet Massing and Étienne, recognizing the importance of further inquiry, have each undertaken a great deal more research in archival and printed sources, and have reconsidered the developments in much more detail. Although there are considerable areas of overlap, Massing and Étienne approach the material and organize the discussions very differently, and seem to have designed their studies to attract somewhat different audiences. Apparently, Massing and Étienne initially undertook their projects without full knowledge of each other, as witnessed by the fact that they each only cite one article or book chapter by the other scholar in the 2012 editions of their books. Massing came to the subject as a practicing painting conservator in Britain, with a background in art history, and with a strong interest in the development of her profession. In contrast, Étienne researched the topic as an art history PhD student, from a French academic perspective and in the French language. As part of the 2017 English translation, Étienne has been able to include the appraisal that Massing's book offers "the first far-reaching approach to the subject" (Étienne, 3).

Massing's achievement certainly is far-reaching. In comparison to Étienne's more focused and analytical approach in her medium-sized book, Massing's study is both more

substantial in its physical presence and also more complete. She has produced a full history of the practice of painting restoration within the context of the French royal galleries and the Louvre Museum, from the origins of the picture collection in the Renaissance under King François I, until the close of the second restoration of the Bourbon monarchy and the reign of Charles X in 1830. Massing's approach is straightforward, systematic, and descriptive, since her organization is chronological, and she provides a detailed profile of each of the major painting restorers and curators in turn. For each central personality, she gives an ample biography based on the documents, she charts their career and enumerates many of the paintings they treated, and she discusses whether they played a role in the debates on restoration, as several did. Massing pays particular attention to each practitioner's restoration techniques, explaining the methods in a very clear way for the benefit of present-day conservators among others.

Massing's treatment is both broad in scope and impressively detailed, exposing the substantial nature of her research for over a decade, which included stints in the French archives when research grants allowed her to take leave from her work as a painting conservator and administrator at the Hamilton Kerr Institute of Cambridge University. Her book will be attractive to a wide readership because of the clarity of the narrative and the addition of many illustrations using historical prints and reproductions of works of art. This exquisitely produced book invites a selective approach to the reading because of the way the text is laid-out in small, separate units, signaled by sub-headings, rather in the manner of a reference work. In addition to the overarching narrative, there are different kinds of insertions and appendices, when important topics require further explanation. For instance, Massing presents the events surrounding the transfer from panel to canvas of Raphael's *Madonna di Foligno*, and how François-Toussaint Hacquin was entrusted with the structural procedure by the Louvre administration, as part of her discussion of Hacquin's career in Chapter 8. Additionally, she explains how the technical process employed by Hacquin was published in a small catalogue, made available for purchase to museum visitors, when the painting went on view after its restoration in 1802. However, for the benefit of her readers, Massing also includes the original French text of the catalogue description of Hacquin's transfer in her Appendix 8.2. Furthermore, she explains in point-form how the treatment proceeded, step-by-step, within the body of her narrative (Massing, 179–180).

Historical charts are also inserted for the non-specialist, including the main events of the French Revolution (Massing, 107), and the history of the Musée du Louvre (Massing, 187). Therefore, the book allows one to flip through the carefully planned pages to locate specific historical periods, restorers, paintings, treatments of interest, and other closely related subjects, such as how the transfer method was conveyed in early publications in France (Massing, 42–49). The only problem presented by the insertions

is that sometimes information is repeated when sections of the primary narrative in a chapter overlap significantly with the additional material, as happens in the discussion of Robert Picault's early transfers (Massing, 32–34 and 44–45). In contrast, the book's index is surprisingly unspecific, since the decision was taken to list only proper names, which means there is no indexing of specific restoration techniques or individual paintings under artists' names.

In contrast to Massing's comprehensive study, Noémie Étienne, who is a professor of art history at the University of Bern in Switzerland, explores a more specific group of themes and questions related to art restoration in Paris. Étienne focuses on a more restricted time period, featuring the years she identifies as most critical for the transformation of restoration practice, extending from the Fall of the Bastille and the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789 to the end of Napoleon's short reign as Emperor in 1815. Her more targeted objectives, her critical approach, and her search for original insights, align with the fact that the project was undertaken as a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Geneva and the Sorbonne in Paris. In this review, I will restrict discussion to Étienne's ideas on the range of employment undertaken by restorers and how the scope of their practice can be defined, as well as her views on how key administrators at the Louvre altered the interpretation of art restoration. Yet Étienne also probes how the politics of the day affected restoration, how restoration treatments were received by art critics and the public, and to what extent restoration was conceived as altering the integrity of the work of art. In search of new evidence, Étienne has undertaken intensive documentary research primarily in the Archives nationales de Paris, the Archives des musées nationaux, and the Archives de la Ville de Paris, but also in Belgium and Italy. Nevertheless, because Étienne organizes her study thematically around certain pressing questions, the book is not as straightforward a read as the chronological narrative of Massing.

Attuned to the position of restoration history within academic scholarship, Étienne also betrays a more overt ambition for her subject from a methodological point of view than is evident in Massing's book. Following on the arguments of Andrew McClellan, Étienne likewise seeks to expand the relevance of this field by explaining how restoration treatments reveal shifts in the esthetic conceptions of works of art. Étienne contends that the history of restoration should be important to a larger academic readership of historians of art, culture, and society. Indeed, she hopes to extract the history of restoration from its niche, where it exists as an area of intersection between art conservation and art history of interest to relatively few. Admirably, Étienne brings the subject into fruitful interdisciplinary discussions in the humanities by demonstrating how an understanding of restoration history is implicit to the "material turn" in art historical and material culture studies.

It is telling how these two scholars frame their field of study in very different ways, both in relation to the length

of chronological time covered and in terms of the breadth of their geographical compass within the city of Paris. For instance, even though Massing explores restoration in France over a much longer period of time than Étienne, the sphere of work practices that Massing investigates is more restricted. She follows the French royal collection from its inception, charts the development of the collection at the Louvre, and concentrates on the restorers appointed first by the crown and later by the administration of the Louvre Museum. Taking as her point of departure major events in the political history of France, Massing identifies periods when the expansion of the collection necessitated restoration changes because new experts were placed in charge. For instance, by the time Louis XIV was established in his long reign on the throne, the collection had grown ten-fold to about two thousand pictures, which required a more systematic approach to care. Hence, Charles Lebrun, the King's First Painter, was appointed in 1663 to be the first *garde des tableaux*, a position he held until his death in 1690. Similarly, after the Revolution, during the period of the French Wars on the continent from 1794 to 1799, the arrival at the Louvre of hundreds of confiscated paintings from the Low Countries, the Rhineland and the Italian peninsula, provided the impulse for better management of the pictures placed in storage, restored and exhibited at the Louvre.

On the other hand, Étienne deliberately moves away from an exclusive preoccupation with the Louvre. Indeed, concerned to address the present state of the literature, Étienne questions the way the history of restoration in France has been written, with the institutional setting of the Louvre identified as the crucible where significant innovations took place. She also faults a narrative approach that traces chronologically the rise of a sequence of prominent restoration experts, because of the reliance upon a traditional model of historical development "to indicate a continuous progression" (Étienne, 29). In addition, Étienne pushes back against the biographical approach, which is the framework often used to discuss the history of restoration, including by Alessandro Conti. Instead of shaping her inquiry around the most prominent restorers and their innovative procedures, Étienne focuses either on restoration as "a collective activity" involving several individuals in a workshop (Étienne, 19), or on restoration as one of several activities performed by an individual. Yet it could be argued that biographies serve to clarify the different skill sets of those who collaborated in restoration work, helping us to understand the perspective brought by a transfer expert with experience in carpentry, as opposed to a traditionally trained artist working on the paint surface. As mentioned already, Massing incorporates biographical sketches in combination with a chronological narrative, and the result is a sequence of interesting and informative discussions.

Encouraged by her archival research, Étienne locates restoration at the Louvre Museum within an expanded geographical sphere, which encompasses restorers operating

in the whole center of the city of Paris. Having widened the frame, Étienne finds that some established views in the literature have to be revised, since the Louvre restorers, instead of being specialists, turn up in other contexts wearing different hats. Many were active for private clients and in dealers' shops, including taking on such work as copying paintings. Often their professional practice was defined in relation to the commercial activities of the Parisian art market rather than in accordance with specialist restoration treatments at the museum. For instance, Mathias Röser, who performed some pictorial treatments on Italian masterpieces at the Louvre, made his living in Paris as a "landscape painter," and Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun, before he was a curator at the Louvre, was a learned painter, carried out restoration work for private clients, and was also a successful art dealer (Étienne, 12–13).

Certainly, Étienne is not unique in recognizing that the restorers who worked for the French crown or the Louvre also took on private commissions. Massing pays considerable attention to restorers' work outside the compass of the Louvre. In fact, Massing features a wealth of documentation concerning restoration businesses in Paris, including really interesting records of a few women who ran successful restoration workshops, particularly the Widow Godefroid (Chapter 3). Nevertheless, the crucial difference is that Étienne lays greater stress on interpreting the patterns of employment. Étienne charts the work portfolios of a substantial group of artists and craft practitioners, for whom restoration was part of a spectrum of activities. Because of the challenge of making a living wage, it was only occasionally that restoration became an exclusive or specialized pursuit.

By posing creative and discerning questions on the basis of impressive research, Étienne is able to challenge prevalent assumptions and offer new interpretations that advance the field. Most importantly, Étienne believes the established conception of the rise of modern restoration specialists at the post-Revolution Louvre represents an oversimplification. By emphasizing how revealing it is that several of the Louvre restorers were not exclusively specialized, but instead actively solicited private work, Étienne seeks to redefine how restoration was practiced and by whom. Rather than affirming the progressive transition from restoration as a workshop practice to specialized professionals at the Louvre, Étienne charts the activities of versatile and adaptable art practitioners in Paris, who moved fluidly within the realms of private workshops, the art market, and the art museum. Restoration was one of a number of skills undertaken by a varied group of artists and crafts people, whose training and employment were not consistent. As their private work could encompass not only copying but also forging paintings, their practice was not uniformly "modern" or "progressive" (Étienne, 49). Nevertheless, some of the treatments carried out on highly valued, old master paintings at the Louvre in the first decade of the

nineteenth century, under the watchful eyes of learned curators, were advanced and specialized. Although it is too simple to say that restoration became progressively more specialized and scientifically based, there were periods at the Louvre when curators like Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun closely supervised ground-breaking treatments by particularly talented restorers.

Significantly, the contrasting perspectives manifest in these books can be encapsulated by examining how each scholar discusses the key figure of Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun (1748–1813). Le Brun, who was the grand-nephew of the French King's Painter, Charles Lebrun, became the first curator in charge of restoration at the Louvre under the Directory. Le Brun is the main subject of Massing's Chapter 6, though she introduces him earlier because of his friendship with the controversial painting restorer and political activist Jean-Michel Picault. As Massing explains, both Le Brun and Jacques-Louis David promoted J.-M. Picault's career at the Louvre against strong resistance from the previous administration. Massing presents Le Brun as "a man of many talents," and provides a detailed biographical exploration of his training as a painter under excellent masters in Paris, his career as a "well known dealer-connoisseur," and his marriage to the portrait-painter Marie-Louise Elisabeth Vigée (Massing, 132). Massing also discusses Le Brun's accomplishments as the first *Commissaire-expert* appointed to be in charge of restoration at the Louvre from 1797 to 1802.

Close to the opening of Chapter 6, Massing includes a reproduction of Le Brun's *Self-Portrait*, which she describes as Le Brun "showing himself holding his treatise on painting in one hand and a palette in the other" (Massing, 132). Significantly, Étienne uses the same image on the cover of the English translation of her book, signaling the importance of the *Self-Portrait* for her arguments. Indeed, Étienne spends much more time on the analysis of Le Brun's portrait, which she interprets as evidence of "self-definition" and "legitimization" (Étienne, 61). Her interpretation of the portrait forms part of Étienne's concern to characterize the "experts" who contributed to shaping new approaches to restoration in Paris. In the case of Le Brun, it is her goal to explain his pronounced influence on restoration at the Louvre.

The self-portrait, which Le Brun proudly exhibited in 1795, was intended as a statement. As Étienne observes, through the vehicle of the painting, Le Brun draws attention to the breadth of his professional credentials. He portrays himself formally dressed, in a long dark jacket and top hat, standing in his workshop, and holding a painter's palette. Le Brun forefronts his artistic practice and his superior education, since he includes several leather-bound books, and shows himself leafing through a folio volume, which is open to reveal large engraved plates and areas of text. Étienne contends that the books serve to advertise his erudition in artistic matters as one learned in the Liberal Arts,

and that Le Brun's subtler objective was to overthrow the supremacy of the painters long in charge at the Louvre. Le Brun had also gained expertise in evaluating works of art as a successful dealer. Not only could he confidently attribute and explain the significance of paintings, but he could also pronounce on their condition and restoration needs (Étienne, 58).


Étienne believes this portfolio of achievement secured Le Brun's appointment as the first *commissaire-expert* in charge of restoration at the Louvre, which in turn led to his rise in social stature. In comparison to his great-uncle, Charles Lebrun, who was primarily the King's Painter, J.B.P. Le Brun approached his curatorial activities with a perspective determined by a different combination of education and experience. Le Brun brought with him the mindset of the art market, where good condition contributed to the value of a picture, and poor condition signaled the necessity of restoration. Étienne shows how the intellectual and esthetic perspective of those in charge could influence restoration. For instance, it is significant that when Le Brun proposed to write a catalogue of the Louvre pictures, he wished to incorporate information on the condition of the paintings (Étienne, 61). Importantly, Étienne detects the arrival of a new pattern at the Louvre under Le Brun, in which an experienced and learned curator assessed the restoration needs of paintings, and the restorers carried out treatments under his watchful eye. Le Brun claimed a sophisticated understanding of the historical and technical features of the pictures in his care, and this knowledge contributed to a period of more disciplined restoration practice under his guidance at the Louvre (Étienne, 62).

In conclusion, Ann Massing and Noémie Étienne approach the subject of the rise of painting restoration as a distinctive profession in Paris during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in contrasting ways, though each extends and deepens previous discussions of this highly significant moment for the transformation of the discipline. Massing presents a comprehensive and biographical survey of the most prominent restorers and curators appointed initially by the French court for the royal collection and later by the administration of the Louvre Museum. Hers is the first book-length treatment of this topic in English, and because of the careful, interesting, and accessible way she fashions the material, Massing's work will have a pronounced and lasting impact. Whereas it has not been Noémie Étienne's purpose to survey an expansive field, she tackles particularly momentous aspects of the subject in an adventurous and pointedly original manner. On the basis of extensive archival research, she emphasizes how painting restoration in the city of Paris in the years straddling 1800 was practiced by a variety of skilled individuals in workshops, within the compass of art dealerships, and on contract at court or, after 1793, at the newly public Louvre Museum. Testing the oft-repeated belief that the specialized "modern" profession of restoration emerged in the context of the Louvre from earlier traditions of workshop practice, Étienne wisely concludes that "progressive" treatments

happened at the Louvre when the circumstances were propitious, as under the learned and experienced supervision of J.B.P. Le Brun, but not consistently. The education and experience that restorers and curators brought to their practice shaped their approaches to the surface appearance, the material nature, and the restoration of paintings. Although Étienne's study is more academic than Massing's accessible and beautifully designed book, Étienne impressively prompts revisions to pervasive conceptions in the literature and shapes novel interpretations.

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Platinum and palladium photographs: Technical history, connoisseurship, and preservation, edited by Constance McCabe, Washington, DC: American Institute for Conservation, 2017, 504 pages, hardcover, \$75, ISBN 978-0-99786-790-9. <http://store.conservation-us.org>.

Platinum and palladium prints, as their name suggests, use platinum and/or palladium salts as light sensitive material to create an image. The one-layer photographic process gives rise to well-known distinctive characteristics that are useful in identifying it without scientific analysis: rich tonal range, matte surface with visible paper fiber, deep blacks, and a soft image are common associations. But sometimes, they also exhibit confusing signs of degradation that were long thought to be uncommon for this process. Fading, mirroring, unusual tone, surface shine, and unusual surface texture were not expected to be observed in platinum prints. In 2011, conservators, scientists, and curators joined forces to study the platinum and palladium photographic process. The book *Platinum and Palladium Photographs: Technical History, Connoisseurship, and Preservation* published by the Photographic Materials Group (PMG) of the American Institute for Conservation (AIC) is the result of the collaboration of curators, scientists, conservators, and photographers giving broad, deep insight into the current state of the research and knowledge of platinum and palladium photographs.

The publication is intended for a large audience, from curators and conservators to scientists and photographers. It compiles 38 long and short articles divided into three main sections. While there is relevant information for everyone in this lengthy volume, it will no doubt be most useful to conservators of photography.