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Praha

## QUESTIONS CONCERNING „BELLE-MATIÈRE“

The origin of the notion *belle-matière* is derived from the colloquial speech of connoisseurs and artists who, for several centuries, have thus defined certain artistic qualities of paintings. When we admit that a painting — this applies only to table pictures — has *belle-matière*, or shortly just *matière*, it means high appreciation in the eyes of the initiated. Roughly speaking, this term indicates that the matter of the colours in which the painting is accomplished has become beautiful due to the work of the artist, and thus it has enriched the aesthetic effect of the painting.

Of course, it is erroneous to believe that those paintings that have not *belle-matière* cannot also be beautiful.<sup>1</sup> This must be said at the very beginning. Let us just remember Florentine quattrocento. On the other hand, historical experience has shown that *belle-matière* with all its attributes occurs only at the highest artistic levels.

This fact in itself could be enough to require that closer attention should be paid to the notion *belle-matière* than it has received in artistic historical literature until recently. The term has existed more or less unofficially and was only used by authors who were also connoisseurs. Mostly it was if not unknown then indifferent to the academic history of art. Only in the past few years we have seen the tendency to rehabilitate it and this again in writings of those historians of art who are close to connoisseurship, but still in relation to other problems.

And also — as it is usual and natural too, not without relation to certain currents in contemporary painting. In vanguard painting, especially since the Second World War, those currents have asserted themselves that lay such emphasis on painting matter that they consider it as the main or even the only element of the painting. (Of many others we can name the French painter Fautrier, who for the sake of painting matter even gave up colour.) Thus painting matter gains independence as, for instance, painter's handwriting has gained independence in contemporary art.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As, for instance, Maurice Sachs in *Nouvelle revue française* VII, 1935, who wanted to divide all painting schematically into painting that had full *matière* and painting without it. The one (represented by Rembrandt, for example) was said to be "physical and humane", the other (represented by Cézanne, for instance) was said to be "abstract, dry and inhumane". Apparently *belle-matière* was here mistaken for *matière*, and also it was directed against modern art.

<sup>2</sup> See Vojtěch Volavka, [*Questions Concerning Contemporary Painter's Handwriting*]. *Výtvarné umění* VIII, 1958—1959, 502—519.

Even this study is not without certain relation to these tendencies, mainly, however, it is a logical continuation of the author's investigation of painting as it developed in his practice before the war, and it is mainly directed at painter's handwriting.<sup>3</sup> In this respect the study is similar to all the attempts that have been made so far, i.e. this study will also consider painting matter. This time the aim of the consideration is to concentrate on painting matter, isolate it as a notion that could incorporate from expert empirism into the system of the method of history of art, could be incorporated into the fundamental artistic historical terms and accepted as one of the criteria useful for dating, localization and attribution.

In view of the required limited volume of the text it is, of course, possible to treat this whole complex of problems only roughly and in main points. As to literature, it is also possible to mention only in passing what the most typical problem and what can at the same time suggest the main features of the content and volume of the notion painting matter as we have known it until now.

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We come across the term *belle-matière* (according to our knowledge) for the first time in French expert literature of the 18th century. In his biography of Watteau<sup>4</sup> the famous connoisseur Count de Caylus reproached this artist — whose work belongs to the most delightful examples of *belle-matière* — for the fact that he endangered the durability of his painting matter by excess of fatty ingredients. (By the way, it proved later on that he had not been right.) Mostly, however, the observation of painting matter was related to the study of painter's handwriting. At the beginning of the 19th century another French connoisseur, F. X. Burtin,<sup>5</sup> considered the aspect of the deepness of painter's handwriting and thus, naturally, he also approached painting matter.

Soon this interest was taken over from France even in other countries and even the history of art could not avoid it entirely. E. F. von Rumohr from Berlin, one of the first representatives of scientific art history, was, of course, more of an exception in this respect. As early as 1831, he worked on his

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<sup>3</sup> An older study *Painter's Handwriting in the French Painting of Our Time* was published in 1934, a study *Painting and Painter's Handwriting* was published in 1939. Both books were published by the State Graphic School in Prague. (I do not mention here the numerous concrete applications of these methods to various themes, to monographs, for example.) Already in the first book at every picture that was examined also the quality of painting matter was mentioned and the photographs took it into account too. It was similar in the second book, but in addition special attention was paid to *belle-matière* of some paintings, such as Raphael's so-called Garvagh-Madonnas of London (pp. 41—42). In general *belle-matière* was mentioned in the French summary (p. 143). This second book was written on the basis of the results of my working stay in the scientific laboratory in the Louvre in 1936—1937 and the foreword was written by the then head of the department of paintings in the Louvre, René Huyghe. Let me mention that after more than thirty years the first work achieved strange appreciation when J. P. Hodin, London critic and former Czechoslovak citizen, published it several times in English under his name, with only a few deformations. He even included an overwhelming majority of original special photographs as was found out by a committee appointed for this purpose by the Czechoslovak section of AICA.

<sup>4</sup> *La vie de Antoine Watteau* . . . . . published by Ch. Henry, 1887, Paris, from a manuscript from the year 1748.

<sup>5</sup> *Traité théorique et pratique des connaissances qui sont nécessaires à tout amateur des tableaux*. First edition Valenciennes, 1808.

study on Raphael.<sup>6</sup> Together with painting matter as a criterion for the verification of attributions and apart from brush handwriting (Pinsselführung) the quality of painting matter (Auftrag, Impasto) is for him decisive for the acceptance or refusal of a painting. This quality was not, of course, analysed in greater detail and its characterisation remained mostly rather general even though we met with terms such as Schmelz or textur der Körper in Rumohr's vocabulary.<sup>7</sup>

While the following academic science of the Neo-Renaissance period did not take much interest in these aspects, the development of chemistry and the growing necessity to preserve historical monuments were a stimulus for new technological literature that in many respects contributed to the knowledge of painting matter even though more in the framework of the outline of the development of painting technique.<sup>8</sup> In a short time that followed, however, A. P. Laurie<sup>9</sup> published the first results of his scientific investigation of painting and thus he opened a new way to a more refined analysis of painting, including painting matter. This proved beneficial even for laboratories that were being established in museums, at first in the corner of conservators' workshops — after the First World War. Some of them gradually became independent and became a basis on which scientific investigation of painting could be carried out, others, as for instance Mainini's laboratory in the Louvre (today the Research Laboratory of French National Museums) were even founded for this purpose (1934). Artistic-historically directed tendencies that continued the road started by Laurie began to assert themselves in this field already in the 20's. Their most significant representative was a group of research workers round Edward W. Forbes, who was the director of Fogg Museum at Harvard University (USA).<sup>10</sup> Already before the beginning of the Second World War, the interest evoked by this special research had also extended to the field of general history of art. Henri Focillon, who cited<sup>11</sup> as a fitting formulation of his own opinion the statement of G. Mirbeau "Give me a square centimetre of a painting and I shall know if it is from a good painter", was doubtful about the "tactile values" of painting as if he foresaw that by ten years the modern painting would become an autonomous object recognizing not only optical, but also tactual percepts.<sup>12</sup> René Huyghe<sup>13</sup> defined painting matter as a "new source of knowledge". He was still closer to these aspects as a connoisseur

<sup>6</sup> *Italienische Forschungen III.*

<sup>7</sup> How these terms were well-founded can be seen from the fact that still a hundred years later they were in a similar connection used by another Berlin investigator, Max Friedländer, who was in the first place a connoisseur, too (*Kenner und Kennerschaft*. Berlin 1947).

<sup>8</sup> For example, the work of the painter Ernst Berger, *Beiträge zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Maltechnik*. Munich 1904.

<sup>9</sup> *The pigments and mediums of the old masters*. London 1914.

<sup>10</sup> The results that were, however, mainly directed at painter's handwriting were summarized by Alan Borroughs in his work *Art Criticism a Laboratory*. Boston 1938.

<sup>11</sup> In an essay *Eloge de la main*. Paris 1939 (in German 1959, Basle).

<sup>12</sup> Focillon's contemporary B. Berenson was also aware of the significance of the tactile values of painting. In his book *Esthétique et Histoire des arts visuels* (Paris 1953) he cited Bergson (*Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*. Paris 1932): „Pour notre science le corps est essentiellement ce qu'il est pour le toucher, il a une forme et une dimension déterminée, indépendantes de nous, il occupe certaine place dans l'espace . . . l'image visuelle . . . (est) une apparence dont il faudrait toujours corriger les variations en revenant à l'image tactile . . .“ We also know a similar consideration from the works of F. W. Schiller.

<sup>13</sup> *Dialogue avec le Visible*. Paris 1955. In his further works, *L'art et l'âme*. Paris 1960, and *Les puissances de l'image*. Paris 1965, he goes into greater detail.

and former museum worker. He spoke of "royaume pictural" and on several examples suggested aesthetic values of painting matter.

A year later a study on Corot was published. It was written by G. Bazin, a former collaborator of Huyghe. On the occasion of Corot exhibition that took place at that time, Bazin reviewed Corot's attributions in an analogical way as once Rumohr did in the case of Raphael. The study was published in a newly founded Bulletin of the Louvre laboratory,<sup>14</sup> the administration of which had in the meantime been taken up by Mme Madeleine Hours,<sup>15</sup> who in her analyses of a painting work took into account also painting matter.

The growing orientation of vanguard painting towards painting matter in the second half of the 20th century reflected itself also in aesthetics and in a new upsurge of technological literature. René Passeron,<sup>16</sup> who was also a critic, favourably evaluated "peinture du materiau" in all ways of performance, and in the spirit of the conception of the painter Dubuffet<sup>17</sup> he raised an oratorical question: "Which lover of painting would not like to fondle with his fingers thee high pastes of Nicolas de Stael or . . . . . the exquisite passages of Renoir, but also the satin surfaces Ingres?" At the same time he did not forget to point out that painting — in contrast to Braille's writing — was not intended for blind people.

H. Hofstätter,<sup>18</sup> who was also a historian, paid special attention to the combination of various material, the range of which was so enriched by Delaunay.<sup>19</sup> H. Hofstätter had been interested in it since the time that Picasso and Braque added into painting matter sand and sawdust, from collage to decollage and he drew the correct conclusion that this was all in relation to old traditional efforts how to enrich a painting by tactile values and by latent space restricted to two dimensions.

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The study of painting matter is related to some serious difficulties. On the one hand, it is the access to monuments and their bad state of preservation — these circumstances are infaust in more numerous cases than we would expect, and on the other hand, it is mainly the imperfection of possibilities of chemical analysis. The analysis of media and diluters is — either due to quality or quantity — in common laboratory practice almost hopeless, and it can be tried perhaps by means of chromatography, the application of which, however, has not been common so far. And thus we have to rely on experience gained either by means of physical methods or with the naked eye or to rely on our own knowledge or that published by experienced experts. It is advisable to use written historical sources concerning technology as critically as possible.

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<sup>14</sup> *Le problème de l'authenticité dans l'œuvre de Corot*. Bulletin du Laboratoire du Musée de Louvre I, 1956, Number 1.

<sup>15</sup> It was published as a book under the title *A la découverte de la peinture*. Paris 1957 and *Les secrets des chefs d'œuvre*. Paris 1964.

<sup>16</sup> *L'œuvre pictural et les fonctions de l'apparence*. Paris 1962.

<sup>17</sup> J. Dubuffet, *Prospectus aux amateurs de tout genre*. Paris 1946.

<sup>18</sup> *Geschichte der Kunst und der künstlerischen Techniken*. Munich, 1964.

<sup>19</sup> P. Francastel, *Du Cubisme à l'art abstrait*. Paris 1958, unpublished notes of Rob. Delaunay.

In the already cited book *Painting and Painter's Handwriting* of 1939<sup>20</sup> late works of J. B. Simeon Chardin were quoted as a classic example of belle-matière, beautiful matter that became the artistic centre of gravity of the painting if at the same time it was thematically simplified and the size of the painting limited. By usual laboratory methods the excellent state of preservation was verified, and when the technological origin of the coloured deposit was considered, it proved as the most probable possibility that this very homogenous paste did not originate, as some people believed, in the Venetian method of laying glaze on the lower material subpainting. More likely, it was gradually laid by a regular addition of tiny particles similar to the method of sculptural work so that its superficial texture was a result of its internal structure. The porous structure of a pottery jug cannot be considered as the result of a mere imitation of the surface of things as it occurs, often with the use of illusive means, in the Netherlandish still-life painting of the 17th century or in early Chardin's still-life paintings that are still tributary to the Netherlandish painting in many respects (*La raie, Le lièvre mort*). It is true that this matière, "hard and durable as a mineral",<sup>21</sup> is here in agreement with the structure of the jug so that we can even feel its roughness by our fingers.

But this is not its only task. In this case it is not a mere coincidence, but this type of painting matter in itself apparently satisfies the artist as we can judge from the fact that we come across it also in other of his paintings where, however, it interprets different natural structures. We are reminded of it by the head and bust of the mother in the painting *Benedicite*.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the detail of the face of *Pourvoyeuse*<sup>23</sup> shows another paste, in a different way beautiful type of matière, softer and puffier as if it were from flakes of thick cream. The relation to the traditional manner of painting of "French realists from Le Nain to Corot" can be certainly traced,<sup>24</sup> but we would hardly expect from these masters similar polysensorial sensations as we get from Chardin, whose belle-matière transgresses in its effect on the spectator into tactile sphere.<sup>25</sup> Chardin is much more complicated. In his late paintings we can even trace an extremely broad range of different structures. Thus, for instance, the smooth and glossy coating on the shaded part of the wall in the background of *Pourvoyeuse* produces a contrast to the rich and as if fluffy adjacent matière of the face of the figure, whereas on the lighted part of this wall the layer of the pigment is higher and softer again. Although even here matière evokes tactual associations, it is not an interpretation of various materials because the associations are more general, and are not exclusively tied up to a definite type of structures of the depicted objects. However, it is also not an optional differentiation of the surface of the painting.

<sup>20</sup> See note 3. On page 216.

<sup>21</sup> Huyghe, l. c. See also ill. no. 122 made after the topography no. 3120 (a detail at direct illumination) from the archives of documents of Laboratoire de recherches des Musées de France in the Louvre.

<sup>22</sup> See the juxtaposition on double-page no. 53—54 in the mentioned book *Painting and Painter's Handwriting*.

<sup>23</sup> No. 3114 of the archives of documents of the Louvre laboratory. The detail includes also a bit of the bonnet. The photograph here interprets matière well.

<sup>24</sup> M. Hours, *Les secrets*, l. c., 47.

<sup>25</sup> An observation of Berenson (l. c.) can be mentioned here as a comment on problems of the effect of a work of art and on the possibilities of their transgressing from one sense sphere into another. Berenson compares his impression of the colourfulness of Venetian Renaissance painting with music.

Without doubt, it is a purposeful orchestration of the structure of painting matter alone, the effect of which is thus accentuated in the whole composition of the painting similar to the effect of pigment in a coloured composition.

The technical way in which this effect used to be achieved has not been revealed so far. Most likely, it can be achieved by varying different diluters, here not only the density of the paint is changed, but also the magnitude of the grain of the pigment, apparently according to the finer or rougher friction of the pigment. We can assume with more certainty that this beautiful grain of high pastes which is a result of the oxygenation of the surfaces of a painting in the course of time — as in the case of fine patina on a bronze statue — was planned by Chardin on the basis of the experience that a correctly accomplished paste painting is still maturing a long time after its accomplishment.

Chardin's beautiful matter which belongs to the most outstanding examples of such re-evaluation of painting matter that it becomes an independent creative factor, should not only be considered as one of the most interesting phenomena in the painting of the 18th century. It also represents one of the most attractive links of the development of beautiful painting matter from the time of its origin beginning with Giorgione, Titian and Correggio, to Rubens and finally to Watteau. After Chardin's death, however, the whole art changed, and also belle-matière disappeared from the world for several generations. The coloured coating of early David's *The Sabine Women* is not only flat and dry, but we can say it is dead.<sup>27</sup> It neither wants to interpret the difference of the material structure of depicted objects, nor refers to the traditional matter-of-factness of French painting manner. Francastel is right when he maintains that David wanted to imitate antiquity "tout cru", and Delacroix, who said that that painting lacked epidermis everywhere. David's matière is in its revolutionariness quite abstract, and is actually only a sort of necessary evil that simply serves as building material for figures understood from the sculptor's angle, but it is without the intention to build them organically from core to surface as we could see in some cases with Chardin.

Without doubt, it is not necessary to repeat that this fact does not mean negative evaluation. Within the framework of David's artistic opinion belle-matière was really not the question. David's early sculptorally felt compositions that would actually prefer to be reliefs, simply despise all the sensualistically founded epoch that is just over, and they stem from a genuine intellectual and idealistic revolutionary ideological basis. It is even more interesting that this painter who had made his début under the sponsorship of Boucher was very much interested in Correggio's painting. His later work also showed that he did not turn his back on belle-matière because he would not perhaps understand it or would not be able to cope with it.<sup>28</sup> The portraits of Mme Récamier and Mme Lenoir showed again a new, adroit method of painting in which the coloured paints had more open surface and were more vivid than those in his early paintings. They were mostly thin, transparent coloured layers<sup>29</sup> which were

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<sup>26</sup> See also *Painting and Painter's Handwriting*, l. c.

<sup>27</sup> No. 3673 of the above-cited archives, the photograph taken at direct illumination, this character is well expressed.

<sup>28</sup> The painting *The Sabine Women* was finished in 1799 though, but it was began in 1789.

<sup>29</sup> The radiograph of *The Portrait of Pope Pius VII* shows hardly anything, it only faintly suggests the white paint of the bonnet.

mutually differentiated by his technique by means of various kinds of brushes and rougher or finer grain of pigment. Goulinat<sup>30</sup> praised the lightness of these liquid paints which reminded him of water-colour painting and he characterized matière as being very distinguished, though not rich.

Of course, in this differentiation of the surface of the painting, the orchestration of structures — as was the case of Chardin — was not the question. Moreover, the thin painting matter was here much more primitive and meagre because it had been accomplished without sensuous absorption. It did not evoke tactile associations either. This sensuous branch was in David's painting committed in a different way, more in haptic shape — as a sense of gravity.<sup>31</sup> It can be said that the artist did not feel here neither the surface nor the internal composition of things, but he was feeling their weight. And so even in late David's paintings the thing which is generally called painting matter did not become an independent artistic factor. It was not artistically functional. Only Ingres created of it a definite type of painting technique that can be considered as a sort of counterpart of belle-matière of the 18th century.

Ingres also conceived reality sculptorally, even though in a little different way than David had done. In his conception, however, reality was partly not so burly, and partly it also had its surface and the artist was interested in it. But he was interested in it in such a way that he equalized it by smoothing it for all kinds of material. In fact, it was a refinement of David's approach to painting problems, but at the same time Ingres seemed still more dogmatic. In his theoretical view he went so far that he recommended to judge paintings according to print engravings that — as he said — would more clearly show the composition and its weak points.<sup>32</sup> In practice, however, he proved not to be that indifferent to painting technique and the matter he was working with. He only tried to minimize the materialization of the coloured paint<sup>33</sup> and free it — as much as possible — from vibration which, of course, represents one of the main attractions of painting matter. Thin glazes that formed the surface of this painting were, therefore, very stable, but at the same time they were not dead. The complexion of the female incarnates that he interpreted embraced very closely the whole riches of Ingres's modelling which can be demonstrated on the back of the famous Baigneuse in the Louvre, but simultaneously it kept a certain degree of elasticity even if it gave the impression that it was very strained.

The real nature of this painting will be revealed only by extreme illumination.<sup>34</sup> It will turn out that it is not that much the complexion of the incarnates that is in question, and neither the complexion of the painting. On the contrary, the surface of the female back, even that of the whole painting makes the impression of a delicate relief from a fine-grain sandstone, while the thin layer of pigment creating — by means of light — these plastic values is dense and opaque, similar to the surface of a statue indeed. A sort of qualitative transformation is taking place here. As if this matière did not serve for painting but sculptural purposes.

<sup>30</sup> In *L'Art vivant* XII, 1925.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. also the above-cited Focillon's essay *Eloge de la main*.

<sup>32</sup> *Écrit sur l'art*, published 1947.

<sup>33</sup> Hardly anything can be seen on the radiograph of Turkish Bath. Even if the lightest vegetable pigments were used, such a result would be striking.

<sup>34</sup> Photograph no. 3411 from the already cited archives. See ill. no. 125.



A detail of the portrait of Mlle Rivière<sup>35</sup> where the coloured paint seems even more polished gives the impression that technically it is a sort of a variant of Rubens's enamel paints done by the use of thickened oil and by the addition of Venetian turpentine. Although at that time pigments in tin tubes already existed, the pigment was apparently stirred by hand, and a small number of fine crumbs was preserved that pleasantly enlivened the mirror surface.

From the technical point of view the last results of classicist theory, as interpreted by Ingres, would be returning to home tradition of Rubens (that so essentially influenced the French 18th century) more than to Italian mannerism which — concerning style — is so close to them, but the porcelain *matière* of which is not so delicate and refined.

At the highest level of period production it is, however, an isolated phenomenon. In comparison with it the smooth painting of academicians gives the impression of paper and here we cannot speak *matière* in our sense of the word. The future lies with a different manner of painting — it is the one that was initiated in romanticism, but that is demonstrated — from our point of view — in the purest way in the work of Ingres's contemporary J. B. Corot. Though Corot also proceeds from classicist sphere, his painting matter, however, develops in the opposite direction. In relation to romantic sensualism and in accordance with realistic components of his art, Corot in his late works, after a caesura lasting from the end of the 18th century, creates new painting matter which fully deserves the attribute "beautiful". The antagonism of the time in which two so different great painters can live next to each other can be demonstrated on two of their standard works: Ingres's *Baigneuse* and Corot's *Woman with Pearl*. On two pairs of photographs of details the difference can be seen with the naked eye. Compared to the detail of Ingres's *Baigneuse*, the detail of hands of Corot's *Woman with Pearl*<sup>36</sup> shows a fatty thick paste with a vibrating surface which is so open that underneath we can see the structure of mortar-like dough that serves as building material for rounded volumes. Corot still feels shape very plastically, but he already lives reality with all his senses, and so his painting interpretation of shape is directed toward the second half of the 19th century. A microphotographic detail from the painting *Woman with Pearl*<sup>37</sup> which serves in this juxtaposition as a counterpart of the abovementioned detail from Ingres's portrait of Mlle Rivière, clearly demonstrates the surprising richness and freshness of this matter that, no doubt, has returned to fatty traditional French *matière*, but its structure and texture is differentiated in quite a new manner.

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At the end we can summarize the results of our consideration into a few main points.

Painting matter (*matière*) exists in the modern European wall hanging painting as an autonomous creative factor. In cases where the artistic re-evaluation of physical substance of the matter with which the painter works is most evident, and where it reflects most of the artist's delight from painting, the definition of painting matter as beautiful — *belle-matière* — is most justified here.

<sup>35</sup> Picture no. 3237 has been taken at direct illumination though, but it correctly represents the character of *matière*. See print no. 123.

<sup>36</sup> No. 5847, full-length, direct illumination. See ill. no. 126.

<sup>37</sup> No. 3394, the upper part of the sleeve, direct illumination. See ill. no. 124.

Here its purpose is also most obvious. It is namely one of the means of expression for the painter who wants — contrary to others — extend the sensuous basis of creation and perception. If the significance of painting matter in history increases towards contemporaneity, it can be seen in relation to the advancing differentiation of the nervous and sensuous system of modern man as it is also demonstrated by the development of modern art itself.

A prerequisite that can give rise to beautiful painting matter is the sensualist perception of reality. That's why it occurs only periodically in history and in local regions of this orientation, and the extent of its incidence is in direct proportion to the significance of the sensualist component in life. At one and the same time that bears such features we can, of course, also come across artists who do not strive for *matière* because their personal disposition is different (Puvis de Chavannes). Similarly then we find analogical exceptions in periods orientated in an opposite direction. Within one and the same period there can also exist local exceptions as it has been suggested in relation to the difference between Venetian and Florentine Renaissance schools, for instance. And finally, there are also differences even within the work of one artist. This is a very frequent case and is caused by gradual maturation of a personality (Chardin, Corot). As to the differences in the composition and character of painting matter, we shall consider them separately.

At different levels of its perfection painting matter can have different significance. For example, it can only emphasize the material intrinsic essence of reality (realism of the French 17th century) or it can serve for the interpretation of the nature of various material or in some cases in combination with other efforts it can, for instance, serve for the interpretation of plastic art. Sometimes, in relation to similar tendencies, also the highest degree of painting matter occurs and in this case the making of it gives pleasure to the artist, which is the stimulus.

The artistic value of painting matter does not depend on technical circumstances, such as the quantity of the matter (the height of the paste, half-paste, glanze), chemical and mechanical composition of the material used (diluter, medium, the way of stirring the pigment), optical qualities of pigments (their colorific or "valeur" use), or the working procedure (a laid-on painting or a *la prima*). By these processes only the physical form of painting matter is changed — its density, corporeality, grain, fineness or fatness. These are the only material possibilities that are available for the painter in the creation of painting matter as artistic value.

In expert practice, of course, physical form of painting matter is still a more important factor than its artistic value. It is the physical form according to which we can more easily distinguish the already mentioned individual types than according to the level of artistic value and perfection. And here material prerequisites are decisive. The most influential of them is a tool (brush, knife, finger) that during the spreading of paint can partly crush the pigment, and partly create from it *belle-matière* by means of improvised elaboration in painting *à la prima*, for instance (Manet). A brush more or less dipped in a diluter then glides instinctively in the pigment, kneads it, changes its density and character — can conjure up enamel from it or a furrowed field, and as a result of it the painter's handwriting in such case essentially participates in the creation of *belle-matière*. This participation is definitely higher than, for instance, that in the divided working process of the laid-on painting which, of course, does not exclude

a partial application of painting à la prima as can be seen in some places of Hals's paintings, for instance. Here instinct plays the main role, but it does not mean that it would be possible to replace order by wilfulness that would cover up uncertainly and bewilderment.<sup>38</sup>

Apart from painter's handwriting whose relation to painting matter is relatively close, the preparation of pigments has also an essential influence on the composition of painting matter. It has been found that the fine Flemish painting of the 16th and 17th century was accomplished by pigments stired very finely.<sup>39</sup> Since the 1830's when they began to use pigments in tin tubes that had been prepared in advance, some of these technical prerequisites have changed. But the incidence of the artistic value of painting matter has not changed, only its structure and relation to texture has become more complicated. And the main virtue of belle-matière has not changed, either. It is the ability to evoke in the spectator a more complex sensation by engaging other sense organs apart from the eye.

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What has been said here about painting matter within the framework of theory can lead to some consequences significant for practice too. First of all, it is the inferiority of replicas and prints. With the exception of specific pictures, such as microphotography or photography at extreme illumination, photography can here serve only as an aid for better memory, and in this case it is even less valuable than in photography in general. Second, it is necessary to recommend to those who protect monuments that they should try to preserve the original state of this aspect of painting which is irreparable. At the end it should be noted that a perfect elucidation of the notion painting matter with all its aspects and its historical development will naturally require much more further work, especially in laboratories. The intention of this study, which is the first concise summary of the results of the author's working stay in the Louvre laboratory (1968—1969), was only to open the systematic investigation of these problems.<sup>40</sup>

*Translated by Fr. Pertl*

<sup>38</sup> Matière that has been accomplished in this way, and which is the opposite of belle-matière is in the French sublanguage of studios called „cuisine“, which means that the painter in vain lets others look into his kitchen which is not clean enough. This is the case at lower levels of quality or with painters whose artistic level of expression is too unsteady.

<sup>39</sup> M. Hours, *Les secrets*, l. c.

<sup>40</sup> It is my pleasant duty to thank those who have kindly made it possible for me to study the questions of painting matter during my working stay in the Research Laboratory of French National Museums in the Louvre in 1968—1969. Besides Mr Chatelain, director of French Museums, they are especially Mme M. Guinet-Pechadre from the head office of French Museums and Mme M. Hours, curator in the Louvre and director of the Louvre laboratory. I thank Mr Laclotte, head curator of the department of paintings in the Louvre, for the permission to publish here photographs from the archives of the laboratory. Through the generosity of a grant by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation it was possible to confront the results of the research undertaken in Paris with the important paintings at the American museums and collections. I thank to Miss Mary M. Davis who enabled me the award.

## K OTÁZCE „BELLE-MATIÈRE“

Tato studie je prvním pokusem izolovat pojem belle-matière, který dosud nebyl teoreticky fixován, ačkoli se s ním na poli znalectví dávno běžně pracuje. Podobně jako malířský rukopis, s nímž ostatně těsně souvisí, je belle-matière integrující součástí malířského přednesu. Je výsledkem umělceva zpracování hmoty barviva během tvůrčího procesu a představuje specifickou estetickou hodnotu malby. Není sice podmínkou dobré malby, ale setkáváme se s ní v dějinách vždycky jen na nejvyšší umělecké úrovni. Termín belle-matière se poprvé vyskytuje ve francouzské znalecké literatuře 18. století a od té doby jej lze v různých obměnách sledovat až podnes, i když spíš příležitostně a bez přesnějšího ohraničení jeho významu. Podmínkou vzniku belle-matière je sensualistické vnímání skutečnosti a proto se vyskytuje jen v obdobích a místních okruzích takto orientovaných. Na různých stupních své dokonalosti může mít malířská hmota různý smysl. Může například jen zdůrazňovat věcnou bytostnost skutečnosti (realismus francouzského 17. století), nebo může sloužit výkladu povahy různých materiálů (nizozemské a španělské barokní zátiší), popřípadě může zároveň sledovat i jiné cíle, např. akcentování plastičnosti předmětů. Nejoprávněnější je označení hmoty, s níž malíř pracuje, jako krásné, jako belle-matière tam, kde je umělecké přehodnocení její fyzické podstaty nejpatrnější (Chardin). Je to nejvyšší stupeň, který je sám sobě účelem, ačkoli se může při tom vyskytovat i ve spojení s ostatními výše zmíněnými tendencemi. Zde se též nejzřetelněji odráží umělceva rozkoš z malby, kterou s ním může sdílet i citlivý divák, a projevuje se tu i hlavní ctnost belle-matière: Schopnost vyvolávat u diváka komplexnější zážitky zaangažování i jiných smyslových orgánů kromě zraku, například hmatu.

Umělecká hodnota malířské hmoty není závislá na technických okolnostech, jako je kvantum hmoty, výška pasty, lazura, nebo chemické a mechanické složení použitých materiálů či optické kvality pigmentů nebo pracovní postup. To jsou jen materiální možnosti, které jsou umělci k dispozici při tvorbě malířské hmoty jako estetické hodnoty. Ve znalecké praxi je ovšem fyzická struktura malířské hmoty důležitá. Může pomáhat při datování, lokalizaci a atribuci obrazu — jde vždycky jen o závěsný obraz — někdy vydatněji než její umělecká hodnota (nástroj a ředidlo u Maneta nebo Halse, jemnost tření pigmentu ve flámské malbě 16. a 17. století apod.). Z mnohých obtíží, které se staví do cesty studiu malířské hmoty, je třeba jmenovat aspoň nedokonalost dosavadních možností chemické analýzy, kde lze aplikovat leda chromatografii, ale té se až dosud téměř nepoužívá. Z fyzikálních metod je poměrně nejrentabilnější makrofotografie, jak jí bylo použito i v tomto pojednání na příkladech juxtapozice polárních protikladů Chardin—Ingres a Ingres—Corot.

Autor děkuje Ředitelství francouzských Národních muzeí, paní M. Hours, ředitelce Laboratoře francouzských Národních muzeí, a presidiu Samuel H. Kress Foundation, jejichž laskavostí mu bylo toto studium umožněno.

