

## **Ari Tanhuanpää, Finnish National Gallery**

*'As through so many veils' – Technical art history from a critical viewpoint*

It is said that technical art history investigates the "physical reality" of works of art. Actually, this is the greatest merit of this research method. The denigration of corporeality, which we can find already in Plato, has led to the age-old disdain for physicality. Technical art history, however, also has its own pitfalls. In this approach, the essence of an artwork is seen in much the same way as in "traditional" art historical research with its emphasis on positivism and historicism. An artwork is conceived as an invariable entity, which reflects the artist's intention and the true essence of the artwork is considered to be concealed behind the artwork's semblance, "through which, as through so many veils, one would try to see or restore the true, full, ordinary meaning" (Derrida). The concentration of technical art history at the micro-level or on the physical subsurface strata of the painting, invisible to the unaided eye but attainable by analytical research methods, reflects the fact that it seeks to base its *raison d'être* primarily on the "hard sciences." My aim is to present an alternative to the prevalent research, which overlooks the polysemous nature of the artwork.

### Author Biography

**Ari Tanhuanpää** is a paintings conservator and art historian MA. He has worked as conservator at the Finnish National Gallery since 1997. His doctoral thesis at the University of Jyväskylä (Finland) concerns 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch art and conservation theories.