

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

Sabine Haag,
General Director of the
KHM-Museumsverband

The KHM-Museumsverband (KHM association of museums) currently employs nearly one hundred scholars in its research areas: the thirteen collections of the Kunsthistorisches Museum including the Conservation Science Department, the collections of the Weltmuseum Wien and the Theatermuseum, and the related conservation departments. As museums by their nature are object centred, museum research necessarily applies style-critical methods and explores the significance of provenance, material, and technique. University research has increasingly developed generalist, cross-disciplinary studies from interdisciplinary institutes, which have sometimes displaced object-based research. For museums and to convey socially relevant aspects, these cross-sectional topics are certainly valid. For the museum's core competencies of 'preservation' and 'investigation', however, fundamental object-based study and comparatively focused specialization continue to be indispensable and expedient.

In this context, our own Conservation Science Department occupies a special position. It primarily carries out investigations on the holdings of the KHM-Museumsverband. These include the non-destructive analysis of two- and three-dimensional objects using x-ray fluorescence, microscopic examination directly on objects, analyses of complex organic binding media systems, national and international co-operations, preventive conservation, support of conservators with data to improve storage conditions, air pollutant measurements, assessing the impermeability of exhibition cases, etc. The Conservation Science Department is a fundamental driver in the recently established Heritage Science research community, which seeks to improve and ensure the documentation, understanding, and preservation of cultural heritage through the trans-disciplinary networking of natural sciences, technology, and the humanities. Here we contribute at the European level to the sustainable creation and securing of expertise and the efficient transfer of knowledge.

Research in the museum usually occurs from within the individual collections and is thus closely connected with the availability of personnel and organisational resources. An FWF evaluation carried out in 2017 for the Kunsthistorisches Museum and 2018/19 for the Theatermuseum certified the institutions' generally excellent research accomplishments – even if it was noted, correctly, that the supporting infrastructure must continuously be improved to maintain our internationally recognized standards.

To me the continued, interdisciplinary, inter-departmental development of our research model is particularly important. In this context, the position created this year at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Head of Collections and Research, will do important work. We are also developing a sustainable digital strategy, to which the current volume of the Technical Studies contributes: This is printed in a limited edition, with the focus this year on the digital version (available through our website), which also offers audio-visual files for the first time.

For the continued support and programming of the publication series I am deeply grateful to Martina Griesser, Elke Oberthaler, and Matthias Manzini; the latter ably completes the editorial team following the deserved retirement of our colleague Alfons Huber.