

Molly Faries

When Molly Faries joined the faculty of Indiana University in 1975, the Department of History of Art acquired not only a specialist in the traditional art-historical field of Northern Renaissance painting, but also a pioneer investigator in the newly emerging area of technical studies in art history. During 29 years at IU, Molly developed the application of a new technology, infrared reflectography, to the study of early European painting. Infrared reflectography, in effect, “sees through” paint layers to the artist’s original drawing. Its use brought to light an enormous body of material in the form of underdrawings (preparatory drawings made on a panel or canvas and later covered by the finished painting) and revolutionized the field of northern painting by providing new information about the working procedures of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century artists. The examination of underdrawings by Molly and her students revealed changes that had been made in a painting as work progressed and, in some cases, helped to establish authorship and place of origin. In combination with archival evidence, Molly’s work also illuminated workshop practices, that is, the day-to-day operations of a master painter and assistants working together to fulfill commissions and carry on the business of art. Molly received tenure at IU in 1978 and attained the rank of full professor in 1985; since 1998, she has also held a chair in Technical Studies in Art History at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

Molly’s teaching at IU has included graduate and undergraduate courses in North European painting of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. Several courses that she created made a special mark on the department’s curriculum. A History of the Print course, developed to serve the needs of printmaking students in the School of Fine Arts, made use of the IU Art Museum’s extensive collection of prints. Molly also introduced a museum studies course and a course called Art in the Making that offered IU students, including undergraduates, an unusual opportunity to study the technology of art with a renowned specialist.

An initial NEH Basic Research Grant to survey northern paintings in U.S. collections was expanded, with support from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, into a six-year graduate program, involving doctoral student research, summer workshops, and original investigations in the IU Art Museum and elsewhere. For her work with infrared reflectography, her study of Jan van Scorel, and her writings on a wide range of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Netherlandish masters, Molly received the College Art Association/National Institute of Conservation Joint Award for Distinction in Scholarship and Conservation in 1995. In 2001 she was awarded the American Institute for Conservation Caroline and Sheldon Keck Award for Excellence in Education. Over the years Molly has received a number of major grants, including fellowships at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art, the National Humanities Center, and the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Her more important publications include a monographic study of Jan van Scorel in the *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* (1975) and major exhibition catalogues devoted to Jan van Scorel (1977), sixteenth-century North-Netherlandish painting (1986), and Scorel’s Madonnas (2000). Since the middle of the 1990s she has contributed to exhibition catalogs and symposia on a number of well-known Netherlandish painters and in 2003 she completed an overview, *Recent Developments in the Technical Examination of Early Netherlandish Painting: Methodology, Limitations, and Perspectives*.

Through extensive field research, continuous publications, pioneering workshops, and willingness to share material with colleagues and students, Molly played a pivotal role in establishing a field that has come to be called Technical Art History, passing on her knowledge to graduate students who came from various parts of Europe and the United States to study with her. Since the middle of the 1970s Professor Faries has spent part of each year in traveling and working side-by-side with her students in museums in the United States, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Belgium, and elsewhere in Europe. On site, she and the students conducted technical examinations in collaboration with local curators and specialists. These study trips became the basis for numerous doctoral dissertations by IU students, many of whom went on to positions at universities and major art museums. Molly’s students enjoyed the rare privilege of living and working alongside their dissertation advisor, not only in Europe but also in Bloomington, where the house she shares with her partner Eileen Fry offered a sociable place of refuge to current and past Ph.D. students. The meticulous work of assembling photographic images of underdrawings was accompanied by good food and drink – on especially lucky occasions an Indonesian *rijstafel* – and the society of her beloved *keeshonden*, Casey and Ridley.

A few years ago one of Molly’s colleagues, Betsy Rosasco, an associate curator at the Princeton University Art Museum, paid eloquent tribute to Molly’s ongoing contributions as a scholar:

Molly Faries saw the potential uses of infrared reflectography for art history long before others grasped it, and in the decades since she began to exploit this technological tool, she has gained a formidable reputation in the field. It was a great pleasure to have her at Princeton, first as a participant in a symposium and then as director of an Infrared Reflectography workshop for graduate students. She was the most generous of collaborators in discussions at the symposium and during preparation of a subsequent publication. In the workshop, she was a highly effective teacher, sharing her knowledge with museum colleagues and students, and illuminating many dark areas through her vast experience in the field and her sound critical judgment. Her high reputation is justified by her own stellar publications, the impressive caliber of the students she has trained, and her standards of excellence in everything she undertakes. As a native Hoosier, I am very proud that she teaches at Indiana University.

Retirement from Indiana University represents a milestone in Molly's career, but her scholarly work will continue in the Netherlands, where she is currently a participant in three major grant projects: *Painting in Antwerp Before Iconoclasm: A Socio-Economic Approach*; a systematic catalog of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century collection of the Centraal Museum in Utrecht; and a Netherlands Research Organization priority project: *Molecular Studies in Conservation and Technical Studies in Art History*. Her IU colleagues salute her and wish her well in the next phase of her distinguished career.

Janet Kennedy