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FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY  
IN CONSERVATION

## Digital Protocols

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I tried to find a good image of the Rowland Lockey painting, painted in 1593 -after Holbein the Younger's contemporary work- of the *Sir Thomas More, his father, his household and his descendents* prompted by [an article](#) in the Sunday Times (Nicholas Hellen) about the interventions made at the order of Sir Roy Strong - then Director of the National Portrait Gallery in London. Of course there are many high resolution photographs of the present, altered, object - it is in the Gallery and is well documented - an iconic image (3m x 2.25m), a marvellous and strangely intimate painting of a Tudor household - Erasmus said it was like being in the room with the family. What I couldn't find was a good record of the painting before the removal of the Catholic artefacts (five shields and two scrolls) which Strong was apparently advised were later additions and which he instructed should be removed as they were 'horrid'.

Serendipitously, on the same page as the article about the Lockey painting was another piece -this by Dalya Alberge- which concerned a work that can be seen (from March 15th to June 25th) in the National Gallery -the re-creation of the Borgherini Chapel from the church of San Pietro in Montorio. This is very nearly a contemporary work to the Holbein - but in this case is still a truly Catholic image - painted by the partnership of Michelangelo and his protégé Sebastiano between 1516 and 1524 -*The Transfiguration and Flagellation of Christ*. This second work of art is still in Rome. It has been meticulously recorded in three dimensions and colour by the Foundation and re-created exactly for the [exhibition](#) at the National Gallery in London devoted to the partnership (sadly the re-creation is at 0.9:1 scale as that was needed to fit it into the NG space; the digital file is, of course, 1:1). It is a tremendous piece of work and tells many stories about digital re-creation, when finely executed.

But -there is something else. Of the Michelangelo/Sebastiano we have a perfect recording so that at any time in the future, whatever intervention -accidental or intended- may occur to the original, researchers (and also you and I) will still have the digitally preserved original to refer to -and even re-create from. In the case of the Lockey's *Sir Thomas More* we don't have that- or the information that the erased shields and words might help us understand -the possibly powerful statement by the C16th family that is now lost.

This strange juxtaposition in the Sunday Times reminds us of a lesson we are learning - and luckily it is becoming standard practice, an established protocol - that before ANY intervention we should record what we have in the highest definition possible then we would never have to regret the changes that might be made. The more custodians of our heritage have access to the technology we have developed the better and we want them to have it now- as the National Gallery does. With your help we can ensure this happens.

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