**The Laboratory of the Louvre museum after World War II: the movement towards universality, 1946-1968.**

**Camille Bourdiel**

Founded by Carlos Mainini in 1931, the Laboratory of the Louvre museum was in the wake of a long tradition. Since Jacques Alexandre Charles held a physical cabinet beside royal collections by the time of Louis XVI (c. 1780), many progresses had been made in the field of chemical and physical research applied to works of art. The radiologist André Chéron played a leading role in France by using radiography on paintings during the 1910’s ; after a brilliant demonstration on the Portrait of Dauphin Charles-Orland by Jean Hey, showing many repaints on its background in front of the Director of the Department of Paintings, the idea of creating a laboratory dedicated to the Louvre’s collection made its way through the curator’s minds, leading to its official creation as part of the Department of Paintings. In 1936, 23-year-old PhD student in archaeology, Madeleine Hours, is hired as the team’s secretary, and archivist/librarian of the Institute. Her professional and personal journey is well known, thanks to her memoirs *Une vie au Louvre*. With her brilliant narrative style, she relates the beginnings of World War II and the crating of the Louvre collections (including the Winged Victory of Samothrace, da Vinci’s Mona Lisa and Géricault’s huge masterpiece The raft of the Medusa). The equipments of the Mainini Institute were to be crated as well ; its containers were sent to Chambord and then Montal castles by the end of August 1939, while some of them remained in the basement of the Louvre during the whole conflict.

In 1946, Jean Vergnet-Ruiz, former director of the laboratory and then inspector of province museums, called Madeleine Hours back to entrust her with the Laboratory of the Louvre museum. The 53 crates were opened; many objects, including numerous photographic plates, were broken, while the X-ray tube was obsolete. François Destaville, former watchman of the museum and a trained photographer, was, with Madeleine Hours, the only staff member (both of them were volunteers) managing a budget of 30 000 Anciens Francs - 45,60€ in February 2021!

In those conditions, Madeleine Hours can easily be defined as a cornerstone of the service, furthermore, the development of the laboratory can be linked to her professional career.

During the 1946-1970 period, Madeleine Hours updated the equipment, recruited new staff members and increased the activity of the laboratory. It would later develop its services in both geographical -working for other museums such as Dijon’s Museum of Fine Arts- or typological meanings, with the first inquiries on Egyptian or Oriental Archaeological objects from the Louvre and the Sainte-Foy-de-Conques (IXth-XIth centuries), examined in 1954-1955.

This paper will discuss how Madeleine Hours and her collaborators have elaborated an efficient strategy by creating solid relationships with their European and American colleagues (her first trip on the other side of the Atlantic dates from 1957), with a focus on the 1946-1955 period due to our access to archives, by creating numerous exhibitions on scientific examinations applied to works of art or taking part to exhibitions lead by other institutions, increasing the service’s budget by showing its significance in the field of Art History. The Louvre Laboratory’s team soon took part to international commissions; the Adoration of the Lamb Commission in 1951; The Leonardo Da Vinci conservation International Commission in 1952, the Corpus de la Peinture des Anciens Pays-Bas Meridionaux in from 1951 to 1962. Madeleine Hours even presents her own TV show from 1958 onwards.

Finally, in 1968, year of the relocation of the laboratory to the Flore pavilion, the service is able to enlarge its premises to welcome the up-do-date equipment of the service, whose widened scope of activities lead to a new designation “Laboratoire de recherche des musées de France” – Research Laboratory of Musées de France.