MMca

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MUSÉES
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COMMITTEE FOR CONSERVATION
COMITÉ POUR LA CONSERVATION
COMITÉ PARA LA CONSERVACIÓN

Modern Materials & Contemporary Art

Modern Materials and Contemporary Art is the official newsletter
of the ICOM-CC Working Group Modern Materials and Contemporary Art.

Number 10 August 2004

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1. From your co-ordinator

Dear members,

Here is the 10th newsletter of the Working Group carrying a lot of information on modern materials.

In ten days most members of the working group will meet each other in Bilbao at the IIC conference on Modern Art, Modern Museums.

It will be a great conference, you can look at the IIC website or read in this newsletter what talks you are going to attend or miss. But maybe you can make up your mind and decide to go to Spain after all.

A new chance for modern materials & contemporary art adepts is to go to the conference in Germany about the conservation of design chairs. Followed by, a week later, in Germany again, this time Cologne you can go and experience the set backs of the conservation of plastics. Everything looks very interesting.

Wishing you all a pleasant time, hope you enjoy the newsletter and find it useful. Thanks you all who have sent us information to include. Keep it coming.
Thea

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2. IIC Conference Bilbao

- **Modern Art, New Museums**

IIC's Twentieth International Congress will take place in Bilbao, northern Spain, 13-18 September 2004, at the invitation of the Guggenheim Museum together with Bilbao's city and regional governments. This will be a wonderful opportunity for those who have never visited Bilbao to see the extraordinary Frank Gehry building at the heart of this fascinating and historic city; those already familiar with Gehry's masterpiece will need no reminding of its importance as an architectural phenomenon and as a world-class showcase for modern and contemporary art.

The subject of the conference will be 'Modern Art, New Museums' - a title that consciously reflects the double theme that any encounter with the Guggenheim evokes. It will be a conference to interest conservators, curators, art historians, conservation scientists, architects and museum managers. Its scope will be broad, encompassing the whole field of modern (i.e., post-1900) art and newly-created exhibition spaces of recent years - whether they are new buildings, extensions to old buildings or adaptations of previous structures.

The accepted papers are listed below. The programme can be found at www.IICBilbao2004.org

Papers

Sharing knowledge for the conservation of contemporary art: changing roles in a museum without walls?
IJsbrand Hummelen & Tatja Scholte

Anselm Kiefer at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao: towards a new methodology for the preventive conservation of contemporary artworks
Silvia Lindner & Ana Vitoria

Launching a new museum: upward displacement air-conditioning and computer-controlled daylight illumination
Marcus Herdin

The management of display equipment in time-based media installations
Pip Laurenson

Conserving junk and movement: machines by Jean Tinguely
Reinhard Bek

The degradation of polyester polyurethane: a preliminary study of 1960s foam-laminated dresses
Doon Lovett

The restoration of a group of works of art by Piero Gilardi
Antonio Rava

Weighing the options: analysis and treatment of Paul Thek's *Fishman* as a vehicle for public education
Tatiana Ausema

The maladies of mill-produced metal in modern art
Eleonora E. Nagy

The conservation of Arp's bronzes: preserving the sculpture's history or the artist's intent?
Martha C. Singer

Conservation of a work by Soto: treatment of iron corrosion on paint
Rebecca Timmermans

Conservation of murals in the Alameda Theatre: reviving former cutting-edge fluorescent paint and black-light technology
Jia-sun Tsang

Living artist, living artwork? The problem of faded colour photographs in the work of Ger van Elk
Sanneke Stigter

Pop revisited: the collage and assemblage work of Tom Wesselmann
Daria Keynan

Kaleidoscopic exuberance and colour asceticism: Edelfelt's *Portrait of Ackté*
Tuulikki Kilpinen

Analysis of the painted oeuvre of Jean-Paul Riopelle: from oil to mixed media
Marie-Claude Corbeil

A technical investigation of paints used by Jackson Pollock in his drip or poured paintings
Susan Lake

Reversal versus retirement: the study and treatment of *Black Painting, 1960-66* by Ad Reinhardt
Carol Stringari

Intuition and the incidental: the paintings of Barnett Newman
Suzanne Penn

Palermo at work
Pia Gottschaller

Into the new millennium: conservation input for four twenty-first century arts buildings
Thomas Dixon

The Museum of Scotland and conservation issues of commissioned art
Jim Tate

Glasgow's Burrell Collection: experiences from twenty years of a new museum
Norman H. Tennent

Meaning matters: collaborating with contemporary artists
Laura Davies & Jackie Heuman

Handling White Cube
Tom Hale

Textile or art? The conservation, display and storage of modern textile art
Ann French

The big picture: conservation research program for contemporary color photographs
Christopher McGlinchey

Creative collaborations: preservation dialogues between artists and fine art publishers
Kristi Dahm & Margo McFarland

Creating an illusion: the complexities of conserving working drawings by Bridget Riley
Sophia Fairclough & Caroline Harrison

The works of John DeAndrea: an evolution of techniques, materials and stability
Carl Patterson & Jessica Fletcher

Josef Albers's monumental *Homage to the Square*
James Hamm

The migration of surfactants in acrylic emulsion paint films
Aviva Burnstock

Unusual substitute materials in paintings, based on the example of Socialist Realism in Eastern Europe
Iwona Szmelter

The conservation of Beat Art, with a focus on Jay DeFeo
Niccolo Caldararo

The conservation of four monumental shuttlecocks
Paul L. Benson

The AXA Art Conservation Project in cooperation with the Vitra Design Museum: research into glassfibre-reinforced polyester
Kathrin Kessler

Modern plastics: do they suffer from the cold?
Yvonne Shashoua

Operation Panamarenko
Claartje van Haaften

Reworking an interior sketchbook: the conservation and display of *'rød og blå' Anamorphosis*
Lorraine Maule

Readymade - made ready: the treatment of Marcel Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?*
Kate Moomaw

Les demoiselles d'Avignon: core of Picasso's laboratory
Michael Duffy

The following review papers will be published in the volume of contributions but will not be given as lectures:

Mounting substrates for contemporary photographs
Sylvie Pénichon

America's colormen: Bocour, Levison, Gamblin, and Golden
Joyce Hill Stoner

ASTM International standards for artists' materials and their effects on modern paints
Mark D. Gottsegen

Characterization of alkyd paint media by gas chromatography-mass spectrometry
Michael R. Schilling, Joy Keeney & Tom Learner

Posters

Contemporary artistic photography
Almudena Arana, Maria Dolores Rodriguez Laso, Maria Angel Olazabal & Maite Perez Alonso
Universidad del Pais Vasco, Bilbao, Spain

Examination and treatment of color field paintings at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
Tatiana Z Ausema & Susan Lake
Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington DC, USA

Ghostly transferred images of modern paintings: distracting accretions or severe damage?
Ursula Baumer, Florian Schwemer & Johann Koller
Doerner-Institut, Munich, Germany

Rubber in contemporary artworks: research on solid rubber used as sculptural material
Lydia Beerkens
Wijchen, Netherlands

Molecular characterization and mapping of twentieth-century synthetic organic pigments and additives in paints
Jaap J. Boon, Nicolas Wyplosz, Frank Hoogland, Marc Duursma, Katrien Keune & Tom Learner
FOM Institute AMOLF, Amsterdam, Netherlands

A mammouth undertaking: conservation of a contemporary theater curtain
Eva Burnham
Montreal, Canada

Vibrational spectroscopy for the characterization of toners in modern artworks
Kepa Castro, Almudena Ruiz-Helguera, Paula Otaolea, Susana Jodra & Juan Manuel Madariaga
Universidad del Pais Vasco, Bilbao, Spain

De-restoration and mechanical conservation of a canvas painting by Boccioni
Paolo Cremonesi, Barbara Ferriani, Antonio Iaccarino, Carlo Serino & Marina Pugliese
Civico Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan, Italy

Finish fetish: treatment of a polyester resin and fiberglass work
Julia Day, Aniko Bezur & Jonathan Thornton
Buffalo State College, Buffalo NY, USA

Moholy-Nagy's 'vision in motion' stilled: a study of wire mesh plastic laminate deterioration mechanisms
Isabelle Duvernois
Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA

Climate control vitrines
Jorge Garcia Gomez-Tejedor & Begoña Juarez Marcos
Museo Nacional Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain

Daniel Argimon's 'Mas Ganda': the stabilization of a work of art damaged by careless handling
Rosa M. Gasol, Maribel Hernandez, Alodia Ruiz & Cristina Soler
Escola d'Arts i Oficis, Diputacion de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

Trial testing chelating agents and surfactants for the cleaning of unvarnished paint layers
Agatha Grima & Ioanna Kakoulli
ReCoop, Siggiewi, Malta

Susceptibility of polymers used in artworks to biodeterioration by environmental microorganisms
Ji-Dong Gu & Su-Fen Yen
University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, PR China

Alternatives to lining - local moisture treatment and tear mending
Elsa Guerreiro
International Fine Art Conservation Studios, Bristol, UK

Acrylic emulsion paint films and their properties before and after exposure to water: overview of recent developments
Eric Hagan, Rebecca Ploeger, Herbert F. Shurvell & Alison Murray
Queen's University, Kingston, Canada

Integrating contemporary art into old collections
Pamela Hatchfield

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston MA, USA

Russian avant-garde: the Costakis Collection at the State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece
Maria Kokkori & Alexandros Bouras
Courtauld Institute of Art, London, UK

New spaces for contemporary art in Lima, Peru
Rosanna Kuon
Museo de Arte de Lima, Lima, Peru

Object or concept? Acknowledging the diversity of stakeholders in conserving modern art
Frances Lennard & Charlotte Dew
Textile Conservation Centre, Winchester, UK

Application of digital technology in the accurate replication and preservation of slide-based works of art
Haida Liang, Pip Laurenson & David Saunders
National Gallery, London, UK

Non-destructive Raman identification of dyes and pigments in colour lithographic inks present in early posters
Virginia Lladó Buisán & Silvia A. Centeno
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA

JunFunori: a natural polymer from red algae to consolidate matt paint
Françoise Michel, Thomas Geiger, Anita Reichlin, Juerg Schleuniger & Genevieve Teoh-Sapkota
Landesmuseum, Zurich, Switzerland

A new white for Matisse: thermo-set dimethylol urea melamine resin with titanium dioxide
Roisin Miles & Dinah Eastop
National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland

Conservation considerations in a twenty-first century building
Paulette Reading & Carl Patterson
Denver Art Museum, Denver CO, USA

Ochre in works of Nikolaus Lang
Christina Spaarschuh
Technische Universität München, Munich, Germany

Living with art: preventive conservation strategies for a private collection
Eugenia Stamatopoulou, Niki Naoumidou & Anastasia Polymeropoulou
Dakis Joannou Collection Foundation, Athens, Greece

Exhibiting modern paintings in glazed frames in hot and humid museums
Franciza Toledo, Magali Sehn, Mario Sousa Junior, Sergio Brazolin & Stephen Hackney
Recife, Brasil

Inorganic composition of inks: an approach to the discrimination and characterization of prints
Anna Vila & Jose F. García
Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

The physical properties of modern commercially available primings and their interaction with subsequent paint layers
Christina Young, Rebecca Gregg, Roger Hibberd, James Walker & Tom Learner
Courtauld Institute of Art, London, UK

3. What is new?

The Malta Centre for Restoration will host a COST Action G8 Training School entitled: **Innovative tools for exhibition purposes: environmental and damage assessment** between the 29th of October and the 03rd of November 2004.

The objectives of the COST Action G8 training school are to raise awareness amongst museum professionals of the effect of the environment on museum objects and to introduce them to some of the latest tools available to monitor environmental parameters. The possibilities, use and interpretation of results of various dosimeters developed by EU research programmes will be discussed during theoretical and practical sessions.
Candidates whose application has been approved will receive a grant from the EU COST Office.
For more information please consult the following website: http://www.mcr.edu.mt/newsEvents/events/2004/costG8/TrainingSchool/. A poster can be downloaded from the website for promotion within your institution. Do not hesitate too to forward this message to colleagues that could be interested.

Please note that candidates' applications should reach MCR by **15 September 2004.**

Dr Christian Degrigny and Ms Clara von Waldthausen
Coordinators of the COST Action G8 training school

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4. Membership costs

The following query about joining ICOM-cc as a friend has raised and has anyone else the same concern from non EU citizens?

"How do us UK-ites best pay for becoming a Friend of ICOM? The only options given to me so far are bank transfers in Euros or dollars. Both would incur a lot of bank charges (aprrox £25) for anyone in this country. "

answer from the DB

The DB is considering introducing on-line payment on our website. The drawback of this system is, that it will cost us a considerable monthly fee to implement and have. This may therefore prove less cost-effective on the long run, but we'll continue to investigate how to make it all easier (with or without Blair).

The following info comes from an information brochure (1 April 2004) by the Dutch ABN-AMRO Bank, the bank used by ICOM-CC.

Cashless debits
Transfer using form:
- in accordance with EC criteria**1** EUR 1,00
- not in accordance with EC criteria**1** 0.1% + EUR 4.00 subject to a min. of EUR 7.00 and a max. of EUR 70.00

Electronic transfer:
- in accordance with EC criteria**1** EUR 0,06
- not in accordance with EC criteria**1** 0.1% + EUR 4.00 subject to a min. of EUR 4.50 and a max. of EUR 45.00

Cheques:
Outgoing payment via banker's draft 0.1% + EUR 14.00 subject to a min. of EUR 17.00 and a max. of drawn on an ABN AMRO branch EUR 80.00 outside the Netherlands

Payments

Electronic payments via the Internet are always more cost-effective than transfer forms.

Foreign payments

Always quote the BIC and IBAN for amounts of up to EUR 12,500.00 in the EU.

You will find ABN-AMRO branches in many all countries.
Check it here:
http://www.abnamro.com/com/about/worldwide_presence.asp

The ICOM-CC EURO account:
IBAN: NL66ABNA0520477898
BIC (also called a SWIFT-address):
ABNANL2A.

The ICOM-CC USD account:
IBAN: NL09ABNA0520572238.
BIC (also called a SWIFT-address):
ABNANL2A.

Bank Address:
ABN-AMRO
Kneuterdijk 8
2514 EN The Hague
The Netherlands

1 EC criteria: transfer in/between EU countries, in Euro, carrying a full and correct IBAN and BIC, and not exceeding EUR 12,500, shared transaction charges and without special instructions.

5. ICOM-CC Triennial Meeting in the Hague September 2005

NOTICES

Please note that the ICOM-CC 2005 Triennial Meeting website is on-line!

http://www.icom-cc2005.org

Abstracts accepted by the Modern Materials and Contemporary Art Working Group to be full papers at the Triennial Meeting in The Hague in 2005

There were 12 abstracts submitted to the Modern Materials and Contemporary Art Working Group for consideration as papers for the ICOM-CC triennial meeting in The Hague in September 2005. This is a record number and reflects the high activity in the area of examination and conservation of modern materials. Abstracts were ranked with respect to the following criteria:

Relevance to the Working Group's aim and triennial program
Increasing the knowledge base of the specialization
Usefulness to conservation
Relevance to the conference's Plenary Session theme 'Our Cultural Past-Your Future'.
Demonstrating collaboration between disciplines

Unfortunately, due to limited space in the preprints, it is not possible to find a place for all abstracts, so the following 7 authors have been selected to submit full papers in November. There is no guarantee that all papers will be accepted.

Thank you to all who submitted abstracts. We look forward to hear the presentation at the Triennial Meeting in The Hague.

Author/s	Title of paper
Lydia Beerkens, The Netherlands	Solid rubber as sculptural material in contemporary art
Glenn Alan Gates, USA	Reproducing and cleaning Morris Louis' paintings
Frederika Huys (SMAK, Gent Belgium) and Thea van Oosten (ICN, The Netherlands)	The Aeromodeller OO-PL The Conservation of a PVC Balloon
Kathrin Kessler (Vitra Design Museum, Germany),Thea van Oosten and Henk van Keulen (ICN, the Netherlands)	"Pesce, polyurethane and what happens today - Results from the AXA Art Conservation Project in Cooperation with the Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein, Germany"
Dominique Scalarone and Oscar Chiantore, Italy	Ageing studies of acrylic emulsion paints
Yvonne Shashoua, Denmark	Storing plastics in the Cold-less good than harm?
Sanneke Stigter, The Netherlands	To replace or not to replace:photographic material in site-specific Conceptual art

Yvonne

6. Symposia/ conferences

4th symposium on restoring synthetic materials

Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein/ Lörrach, 24 – 25 November 2004

Plastics – past and present

With plastic objects having become such an integral feature of everyday life, it is impossible to imagine modern society without them. Often they involve unassuming articles of daily use, some of which might someday become collector's items. In the fields of art and design, plastics have likewise found use for several decades now, such as the Nanas by Niki de Saint Phalle and the Panton Chair. As a result, all manner of objects made of synthetic materials have been increasingly turning up in private and public collections, with the value of these works rising as well. Looking at the market, this can be seen in the insurance sums as well as in the number of such pieces at auctions and the prices they attain.

The production of plastic objects has never featured long use and durability as its primary goal. Nonetheless, today it is the task of museums and collectors to preserve these documents of technical and design-related developments. While the aging properties of time-honoured materials such as wood and metal are well known, the degredation processes for synthetic materials have scarcely been documented. One thing we know with certainty, however, is that the aging of plastics occurs much faster than with other materials, in some cases even over the course of just a generation. These processes endanger not only the maintenance of value for the works of art and design but even their sheer existence as well.

On one hand, the goal of the cooperation between AXA Art and the Vitra Design Museum is the concrete development of new techniques for the conservation and restoration of works made of synthetic materials. On the other, the project aims to create guidelines and recommendations for dealing with plastic objects, such as for exhibitions, transport or storage, which will be subsequently communicated to a broad target audience including collectors, conservators, gallery owners, museums, forwarders and plastics manufacturers.

At this fourth symposium, the project's findings thus far will be presented to a wide range of those interested in art and plastics. The symposium will focus on four areas. It will begin with an introduction of the history of plastics and the damage seen with synthetic materials. Second, the insurer will examine the issues from the perspective of maintenance of value. Third, concrete examples from various areas of art and conservation will demonstrate some initial approaches and solutions. In conclusion, symposium attendees will visit exhibitions and conservation labs of various area museums and manufacturing facilities, such as a synthetic foam production plant.

The definitive symposium programme will be available starting in end-August. The symposium language is English. The participation fee of 115 euros – 70 euros for students – includes symposium materials and concluding documentation, as well as 2x lunch and refreshments.
Information requests & registration should be submitted no later than 10 November 2004 to: Vitra Design Museum, Alexa Tepen, alexa.tepen@design-museum.de, Tel.: +49 (0)7621 702 3153

From setback to success

3d Conference of the Working Group Modern Art – Modern Cultural Heritage of the German Conservator Association VDR

December 3 and 4, 2004
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany

The symposium is dedicated to the practical aspects of conservation and restoration of modern and contemporary art, as well as of modern cultural heritage. The main conference language will be German, although three talks will be held in English. Registration can be made via the internet at www.restauratoren.de (see section Fachgruppe Moderne Kunst - Kulturgut der Moderne) by mid September or contact Barbara Sommermeyer at sommermeyer@hamburger-kunsthalle.de or sommerbar@web.de.

PROGRAMM

FREITAG, 3.12.04

9.30 Uhr
Eröffnung des Tagungsbüros

10.30 Uhr
Begrüßung
Kasper König, Direktor des Museum Ludwig
Kornelius Goetz, Präsident des VDR
Barbara Sommermeyer, Vorsitzende Fachgruppe Moderne Kunst / Kulturgut der Moderne, VDR

11.00 Uhr
Stefan Zumbühl, (Bern, CH)
Deformationsinhibierung an großformatigen Gemälden – lose und feste Stabilisierung an zwei Objekten von Anselm Kiefer

11.45 Uhr
Astrid Schubert, (Augsburg, D)
Magnetkissen – Angepasste Druckausübung auf strukturierte Oberflächen

12.30 Uhr
Mittagspause

13.45 Uhr
Andreas Hoppmann, (Köln, D), Astrid Schubert, (Augsburg, D)
Wasserschaden an einem Gemälde von Max Bill

14.30 Uhr
Andrea Pataki, (Stuttgart, D)
Farbstabilisierung eines modernen Kunstobjektes mit Aerosolen

15.15 Uhr
Lydia Beerkens, (Wijchen, NL), Simone Mager, (Köln, D)
Keith Haring: Art or Graffiti. The Restoration of Keith Harings ‚Drawing on elevator' (1986) in the Art Academy Utrecht (in englischer Sprache)

16.00 Uhr **Pause**

16.30 Uhr
Miriam Demandewitz, (Köln, D)
Plastilin als Werkstoff – Überlegungen und Versuche zur Konservierung und Restaurierung am Beispiel von Projektionsmodellen aus dem Nachlass des Bühnenkünstlers Heinrich Wendel

17.15 Uhr
Barbara Sommermeyer (Hamburg, D)
Plastillin in Metallschubladen von Christian Boltanski

18.30 Uhr **Ende**

19.00 Uhr
Geselliger Abend im ‚Brauhaus Früh am Dom'
(gleich neben der Domplatte)

SAMSTAG, 4.12.04

9.30 Uhr
Sanneke Stigter, (Amsterdam, NL)
Retouching with Light (in englischer Sprache)

10.15 Uhr
Friederike Waentig, (Köln, D), Kathrin Keßler, (Weil am Rhein, D),
Durch Neugier zum Erfolg – Kleben von Kunststoffen Untersuchungen zum Verkleben von Polyester

11.00 Uhr Pause

11.30 Uhr
Louise Cone, (Kopenhagen, DK)

Repairing Two Damaged PVC Artworks (in englischer Sprache)

12.15 Uhr
Anna Comiotto, (Bern, CH)
Haftungsprobleme auf Polyethylen – Entwicklung eines Gerätes zur Verbesserung der Haftung von Klebemitteln

13.00 Uhr **Mittagspause**

14.30 Uhr
Anja Wolf, (Düsseldorf, D)
Die Verfüllung von Rissen in Plexiglas am Beispiel der Arbeit „Strahlenfall“ von Gerhard Hoehme

15.15 Uhr
Monika Neuner, (Paris, F), Olivier Béringuer, (Paris, F)
Restaurierung des Modells des Pavillons Saint Gobain der Internationalen Ausstellung 1937 aus dem Departement Architektur des Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

16.00 Uhr Schlusswort

7. News for researchers

Laboratories on Science and Technology for the conservation of European Cultural Heritage (LabS TECH)

Please visit the site and get familiar with the LabS TECH Network of researchers. ICOM-CC WG-members are invited to contact relevant LabS TECH people for x-linking into collaboration on research and exchange of information. Both LabS TECH and ICOM-CC can profit from a closer collaboration. Although LabS TECH is a EU-project this does not limit ICOM-CC colleagues from all around the world to participate with ideas, suggestions and active participation with the researchers and their projects.
Do also take a look at the LabS-TECH website: http://www.chm.unipg.it/chimgen/LabS-TECH.html

8. From our members

Star wars

The original vintage Star Wars action figures are among the most popular ever produced; for this reason they are highly sought after today with collectors paying hundreds and thousands of dollars for those which are rare and in mint condition. A Canadian collector of Star Wars action figures produced during the late 70s and 80s explained that the collecting community are worried about the longevity of the figures, since an increasing number are exhibiting degradation. Of greatest concern are fading of colours, discolouration and the development of white crystals on the surfaces of figures.

Collectors have assumed for many years that these crystals are evidence of biological growth and treated them with ozone. This has not remedied the situation.

Many model figures were made from PVC plasticized (softened) with phthalate plasticizers. Plasticizers are oily materials which are just physically mixed into the PVC polymer. Because they are attached physically and have no chemical bonds to hold them in place, they can migrate out with changes of temperature, when the PVC figures are pressed or bent, or when they are stored in a high relative humidity (moist) atmosphere. When the plasticizer comes to the surface, it either evaporates immediately, if it has a sufficiently low boiling point, or sits on the surfaces until it receives enough energy to evaporate, if it has a higher boiling point. If it sits on the surfaces, they feel tacky or sticky.

When the plasticizer leaves the PVC, and there is energy in the form of light or heat, the PVC becomes stiff and it begins to deteriorate. PVC goes through a series of colour changes from white to yellow to orange, red, brown and black. During this process, PVC produces hydrogen chloride.

Once this deterioration has occurred, there is no way back-the changes are permanent. This may explain the discolouration of the blue elephant, but it may also be due to fading of the colouring material in the presence of light.

The story continues because the acid conditions provided by hydrogen chloride causes the plasticizer to degrade to form acidic white crystals, phthalic acid. The white crystals

can be dissolved in water and the tackiness due to plasticizer at surfaces can be washed off. Optimum storage to slow down future deterioration is dark and cool. Even better is for collectors to put Star War figures in a glass container (coffee jar, jam jar) and close the lid so that more plasticizer cannot come out. Storage in polyethylene plastic bags should be avoided because it readily absorbs plasticizer.

Yvonne Shashoua*, Senior scientist at the National Museum of Denmark*

Plastics workshop held at West Dean College Winchester England 4- 7 April 2004
Collaboration between West Dean College (England) and ICN (the Netherlands)

Plastics are so intertwined in our daily life that a life without this material is hard to imagine. The majority of our present-day activities wouldn't even be feasible without plastics. Think of the use of computers, telecommunications, packaging, domestic appliances and modern design. This is the 'Plastic Century.'

Museum collections nowadays contain increasing amounts of plastic objects. Since the production of the first plastics at the beginning of the last century, a wide variety of plastics have been brought on the market. The first plastic objects were intended as replacements for those made from expensive precious materials like ivory and tortoiseshell and were made only a few at a the time. With the introduction of the injection mould in the 1930s it became possible to mass-produce plastic objects. The purpose was to produce an object or item of packaging as cheaply as possible. Plastic objects often have a relatively short life cycle and need to be replaced after a certain period of time.

The quality of plastics with regard to durability is not what museums would wish for. Plastic degrades, despite the fact that some believe that plastics are unbreakable and imperishable. For some time conservators, restorers and scientists have been confronted with objects showing signs of decay (deterioration). When plastic ages it often has an "induction time" when it hardly shows any sign of deterioration. The induction time is followed by a phase when the object ages rapidly.

Plastics can be found in ethnographic collections and textile collections as reproductions of precious materials like ivory, tortoise and amber. They appear in modern art collections (three-dimensional non-traditional art), in applied art collections and in museums

with scientific equipment collections. When you think of it almost every museum has plastics in its collection and the amount will only increase over the years.

The conservation of plastic objects

But how should we handle plastic and plastic objects in collections? Can we identify plastics or different types of plastics? Many are not yet familiar with this relatively young material. Guidelines have been drawn up with regard to passive conservation of plastics but the active conservation of plastics is still in its infancy.

The identification of Plastics

This course aims to acquaint conservators, restorers and conservation scientists with the current state of knowledge regarding prevention, identification, degradation and conservation of plastics in our cultural heritage.

Thea van Oosten *(course leader)*

Applicants of the Plastics workshop (April 2004)

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Deadline for Contributions to Next Issue of the Newsletter is December 31 2004

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