

Review: ICOM-CC Sculpture and Architectural decoration Group Interim Meeting
Painting the Flesh, Madrid Nov. 19-20th 2015.

A few weeks ago, the ICOM-CC Sculpture, Polychromy, and Architectural Decorations Working Group met in Madrid, Spain for a conference focused on European and South American polychrome wooden sculptures from the 11th to 18th centuries, with the theme "Painting the flesh." The meeting was held at two venues in Madrid, with a lovely opening reception at the National Museum of Archaeology (<http://www.man.es>).

Talks were presented in English and Spanish, and focused on a wide variety of subjects dealing with technical examinations and treatment as well as ethics of restoration. The Museum of the Americas (<http://www.mecd.gob.es/museodeamerica>) hosted the first day of talks and the Spanish Institute for Cultural Heritage (<http://ipce.mcu.es/>) hosted the second day of presentations in their landmark building.

Two very interesting talks on the history of art discussed sculptures of the "Black Virgin" type and depictions of Christ's blood in Mexican crucifixes. Several talks touched on the *pulimento* technique of painting flesh tones and investigated contemporary sources (Francisco Pacheco a favorite reference) and questions of the changing preference for matte or shiny surfaces for flesh tones over time. Issues of the history of flesh painting were covered for different geographic areas; with a talk about medieval painting techniques in Belgium, (by Emmanuelle Mercier from the Royal Institute of Cultural Heritage, Belgium), demonstrations of reconstructions of German painting techniques by the team at the Liebieghaus (Frankfurt), and several talks on Andalusian sculpture. In particular, several talks addressed polychrome sculpture from Sevilla, with a good demonstration of recuperation of polychromy from under layers of overpaint, and an extremely thorough discussion of relationships between different artists in the 17th century and their methods, based on historical documentation.

Several talks spoke to the difficulty of dealing with multiple campaigns of past treatments (and overpaints) and the ethics involved in making decisions about new restoration. Of particular note was an interesting example of sculptures from Brussels placed in a Baroque framework in the Laredo Altarpiece treated by IPCE and presented by Laura Ceballos. Similarly, issues of repainted sculptures in religious contexts in Mexico as well as Belgium were presented and provoked thoughtful discussion. The conference ended with an excellent summary of the issues of polychrome sculpture by Ana Carrason, which laid out a framework for the examination and documentation of sculptures with many excellent illustrations of techniques used in European sculpture.

The conference was a great opportunity to connect with colleagues throughout Europe and the world: thanks to the organizers and speakers for a wonderful interchange of research and new ideas. Since the conference was presented in two languages, the proceedings will be available online in both English and Spanish.

Jessica Walthew
Mellon Conservation Fellow,
Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art