Dear Sculpture, Polychromy and Architectural Decorations Working Group Member,

Over the last 6 years, I have not managed to compile a single newsletter for this Working Group! This is by no means a reflection of a lack of newsworthy activities and interests of this Working Group - rather the opposite; conferences, seminars, workshops, projects, publications and discussions relating to Sculpture, Polychromy and Architectural Decorations have been plenty.

Simultaneously, and seemingly beyond or outside our individual and shared professional working environments, natural disasters, conflict, economic instabilities and climate change have and are affecting and endangering our cultural heritage, but also the safety and well-being of ourselves, our loved ones and the communities we are part of.

The current Health crisis presented by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, being an unprecedented event in our living memory, ushering in times of great uncertainty.

Discussing suitable adhesives to correctly re-adhere small fragments to a sculptural medieval image or obtaining data from scientific analysis to establish qualitative information of pigments and binders present may appear somewhat less urgent, relevant and significant in the bigger context of the World.

Yet, it is these actions of our human curiosity and instinct to care, that define and motivate conservation as a practice of practical problem solving and collaboration towards the preservation of our shared cultural heritage. Observing, recording and documentation of this heritage, the means of preservation; not only of the physical manifestation itself- but as evidence for its existence, how it came to be, why it came to be, what it meant, signified, expressed and the ‘agents of deterioration’ that led to its ruination, abandonment, destruction or decay.

In other words the actions we take now to record, document and conserve layers of paint, materials, tool marks and construction techniques of sculptural components, 3-dimensional structures and architectural decorations are the actions towards sustaining cultural heritage into the future. Keeping in touch, sharing our experience with each other, and supporting one another, I view as the purpose of ICOM, ICOM-CC and of this Working Group and what we do has never been more relevant and urgent than now.

In the last triennium (2017-2020) our Working Group has continued to grow in membership numbers. We have a strong online presence on social media with our ICOM-CC Sculpture, Polychromy and Architectural Decorations Facebook page having now exceeded 1500 followers.

Much of this Facebook group has been managed by myself and one of our current Assistant Coordinators, Ana Bidarra. We had some guest posts from some of our members but also from other ICOM-CC Working Group members demonstrating the cross disciplinary nature of conservation and specialisms of our working group. If you haven’t come across our Facebook page yet, check it out, follow us and participate: https://www.facebook.com/sculpturepolychromyandarchitecturaldecorations/

In May 2019, we held our Working Group interim meeting at the Tomar Polytechnic
Institute, Tomar, Portugal, on the subject of ‘Conserving the Ephemeral: Light’.

Presentations and posters provided a broad and inspiring program for the two-day event and the post prints are currently in the editorial process to be published and made available by the end of this year. Further details will be announced and shared via the ICOM-CC webpage, e-mail updates and Facebook group.

Looking ahead to the (now rescheduled) ICOM-CC Triennial Conference in Beijing, Assistant Coordinators Ana Bidarra, Stefanie Litjens, Emmanuelle Mercier and myself reviewed submitted abstracts and after peer review, eight abstracts were chosen to be developed into papers and for oral presentation.

This is always a difficult process, the limitations posed by time and logistics of the Triennial Conferences in regard to parallel sessions of the 21 working groups, can only accommodate a limited number of presentations. Selection criteria are also different to academic publications, as the Working Group’s Triennial Programme will be taken into account, the conference theme of the Triennial Conference and the host’s cultural environment.

I believe that the eight papers selected provide our Working Group with an exciting program for our Working Group sessions at the Triennial Conference in Beijing alongside selected poster contributions and will inspire and stimulate most interesting discussions, exchange of ideas, networking and future collaborations.

I am writing this in early August 2020, and despite the great uncertainties I hope that many Sculpture, Polychromy, and Architectural Decorations Working Group members will be able to participate in the Triennial Conference, now scheduled for May 17 – 21, 2021.

The ICOM-CC Directory Board and Working Group Coordinators recently held a Zoom meeting to discuss plans for the current and next triennial periods.

The current triennium will end in September 2020 when the new one will begin. Outgoing Coordinators will end their terms in September this year, but will work with incoming Coordinators on planning and moderating the Working Group sessions at the Triennial Conference next May 2021. The Directory Board is encouraging Coordinators to host video planning meetings for Working Group members.

Assistant coordinator Ana Bidarra and myself are currently organising the online meeting for our Working Group’s planning meeting for Saturday the 29th August 2020.

Further details and invitation to join as a member of this working group will be forwarded via the Emailing list in the coming weeks, so please look out and check your mail (including Spam folders) for this invite and join in!

The planning meeting is one of various opportunities for you to share your ideas, comments, concerns and suggestions for and with the working group. Even though ‘face-to-face’ meetings are irreplaceable for communication, I am very excited to explore the online meeting platforms as an additional tool that facilitates meaningful communication across borders and time zones. It will allow many of us to participate, where travel costs and time away from work may have prevented participation in ICOM, ICOM-CC and our Working Group activities.

It is new to all of us and in that capacity an exciting moment to be part of exploring and developing new methods of collaboration, networking, and communication.

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August 2020
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New Coordinator for the Sculpture, Polychromy and Architectural Decorations working group

With the conclusion of the triennial period 2017-2020, I have served as Working Group coordinator for two successive triennia and will step down from this role.

It has been six inspiring and wonderful years, meeting many of you at our interim meetings (Madrid 2015, Potsdam 2016, Tomar 2019) and triennial conferences (Melbourne 2014, Copenhagen 2017). Despite, what appears to be a long time, I still feel that often, I have only just managed to address the ‘tip of the iceberg’ so to speak, and have been acutely aware of many members of our Working Group having remained less prominent and visible throughout the previous six years of publications, presentations and attendances at our interim meetings and triennial conferences.

From personal experience I appreciate the realities many practicing conservators face and the challenges that make it difficult to attend and or contribute to the working program, publications and events.

These realities have a distorting impact on the true depth of our Working Group member’s skills, knowledge, expertise, feats and dedication to the preservation of our cultural heritage.

With the current emergence of technology in facilitating online meetings and events, I see a real opportunity to at least make a beginning to rebalance this imbalance. It is not there to replace or substitute the personal direct communications and encounters of our peers, colleagues and friends, but an additional channel, I urge you to become engaged with in evolving our Working Group’s communication, and participation in the planning, organisation and shaping of its future direction.

I also encourage you to support Ana Bidarra in her candidacy for the role of Working Group Coordinator for Sculpture, Polychromy and Architectural Decorations by making use of your voice and placing your vote for the Working Group’s coordinator elections beginning 31st August and ending 15th September 2020.

Read Ana’s statement and those of other candidates for the various ICOM-CC working groups here: http://www.icom-cc.org/353/candidates-for-directory-board-and-for-working-group-coordinators-2020-2023/candidates-for-icom-cc-working-group-coordinators-2020-2023/#.Xyq2l4i6MdV

Our planning meeting on the 29th of August 2020, will be an opportunity to meet Ana and myself, and to raise any queries, comments and suggestions you may have.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude and Thank-you to you for making this working group such a rich resource for learning and development in this field of conservation and like to thank following individuals for their assistance, help, patience and time devoted to the publications, the interim meetings, editorial contributions, conference planning and assistance and all other administrative tasks of this working group over the past six years:
The interim meeting was held at the Instituto Politecnico de Tomar, in Portugal, over two days on the subject of light as artist media. Twenty-two paper presentations ranging from philosophical and theoretical enquiries and definitions of ‘light’ from medieval to contemporary art making were presented alongside case studies concerning conservation investigation, treatment challenges and solutions focused on the preservation of the element light as part to and of the artwork.

Case studies concerned individual sculptures (medieval to contemporary), installation art (medieval altars and contemporary), and interiors-architectural spatial entities. 97 participants from France, UK, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, the Netherlands, USA, Mexico, Brazil and Norway attended the meeting representing early career conservation professionals, students and senior conservators in addition to architects and curators.

Throughout the conference discussions continued in the coffee and tea breaks with poster presentations and technical visits to the workshops and studios of the Institute by the staff.

There is no doubt that the event facilitated opportunities for networking, new ideas, research interest and collaboration for the future.
Publications


Contributions are published in English and Spanish as presented in Madrid, with paper abstracts translated into both English and Spanish.

Post prints for the colloque on ‘Historic and Modern Assemblages’ held in Potsdam in April 2016 by the ICOM-CC working groups for Wood, Furniture and Lacquer and Sculpture, Polychromy and Architectural Decorations are intended to be published. For information on progress contact the Coordinator for the ICOM-CC Wood, Furniture and Lacquer working group.

As mentioned above, the publication of the post prints for the conference ‘Conserving the Ephemeral: Light’, Tomar, May 2019 is aimed to become available at the end of this year (2020).