Training of Ceramics and Glass Conservation Specialists at the Russian State University for the Humanities

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Abstract
The Russian State University for the Humanities is the only institution in Russia that offers a graduate-level course in the conservation of the decorative arts. A unique feature of this program is that it is built around material specification rather than different types of arts.

The program in conservation of ceramics and glass combines the disciplines of the History of Arts Department with special courses on conservation that are based on four key subjects: theory, methodology, natural sciences, and practice. Practical studies are conducted in the laboratories of the Grabar Art Conservation Centre. The program is conducted by the authors, based on the results of many years of conservation practice and studies of history, chemistry, technology of materials, and conservation methods for ceramics and glass objects.

Keywords: education, conservation, glass, ceramics

Introduction
The conservation of objects of material culture is an extensive field, focusing on objects created by humankind and manufactured and decorated with physical, aesthetic, and other properties. Preservation and treatment of such complicated systems, which combine material and intellectual values, are extremely difficult tasks.

In Russia during the 20th century, conservation developed from a craft based on “secrets” and empirically derived knowledge into a science grounded in social and natural knowledge. Scientific conservation organizations were established, including the State Scientific Research Institute of Conservation (1957) and the Grabar Art Conservation Centre (1960s).1 From this time on, conservation science included not only historical and art studies and the practical conservation and restoration of artifacts, but also a comprehensive study of their material basis (physical-chemical, biological, etc.), the development of conservation materials and technologies, and the formulation of general principles of preservation.

In recent years, the focus of work with artifacts has shifted to remedial conservation (i.e., maximum retention of material basis and minimal change in artistic and historical appearance). Because any work on an object leaves the “imprint” of the conservator-restorer, determination of the permissible amount of intervention—which, to

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1. The Conservation Centre was founded in 1918 as the State Central Conservation Workshops, but it obtained the status of a scientific conservation organization in the 1960s.
some degree, changes material and aesthetic appearance — is very important.

University-Level Training of Conservation Specialists in Russia

Until recently, the training of conservation specialists at the university level was limited to preparing conservator-restorers of art and architecture. They were, and continue to be, educated at the Moscow State Artistic-Industrial University of Stroganov (which offers bachelor’s and master’s degrees in conservation); the Artistic Institute of Repin under the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg; the Russian Academy of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture; the Moscow State Academic Artistic Institute of Surikov; and the Moscow Architectural Institute (training architects who specialize in the “conservation and reconstruction of buildings”). No Russian universities offered programs for training students in the conservation of arts and crafts objects. Such training was conducted as part of specialized secondary education, and the conservation of glass and ceramics was not part of this small circle of specialties.

The department of conservation at the Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH) was created in 1993 as part of the School of Museology (now the History of Arts Department) to offer students an opportunity to specialize in the conservation of arts and crafts objects. Today, the RSUH is the only university-level institution in Russia that trains students in this area. The complete course requires five years of study.

Until now, there has been no consensus in Russia about what professional knowledge and skills are required for conservators. Creative arts-based courses were offered in the conservation of architecture and painting. Today, however, objects cannot be preserved without input from physicists, chemists, biologists, and other scientists. Examination methods derived from the natural sciences make it possible to obtain information about the composition, properties, technology, and history of materials. In addition, these methods assist in the attribution and conservation of artifacts.

Preparing Conservation Specialists at the RSUH

At the RSUH, students approach the subject of conservation from both sociocultural and natural-science vantage points. This interdisciplinary approach recognizes the importance of combining art-critical knowledge with practical and theoretical knowledge, which results in more careful treatment of museum pieces. The structure of this training is based, not on particular types of art (painting, graphic arts, sculpture, architecture, etc.), but on the particular materials from which works of art are created. Students can specialize in the conservation of library and archival materials, graphic arts, tempera painting, textiles, and works made of stone, wood, metal, glass, and ceramics.

The syllabus includes the basic disciplines of the History of Arts Department, as well as general theoretical courses in the natural sciences tailored to the specific needs of conservators of objects of material culture, including “Chemistry and Conservation,” “Biology and Conservation,” “Physical-Chemical Analysis in Conservation,” “Conservation Materials,” “Historical Technologies in Material Culture and Art,” “History and Ethics of Conservation,” and “Conservation Management.” Each area of specialization encompasses its own set of disciplines and offers detailed study of the historical and artistic features of objects of material culture, their methods of production, their basic properties, diagnostics of deterioration, and the nature and degree of the interaction of such materials with the environment. Museum, conservation, and pregraduate practice/internships are also provided.

Theoretical courses are taught by RSUH faculty members. Certified conservator-restorers from scientific research institutes, conservation organizations, museums, libraries, and storage facilities in Moscow are invited to direct practical training sessions. Participating organizations include the Grabar Art Conservation Centre, the Scientific Research Institute of Conservation, the Historical Museum, the Moscow Kremlin Museum, the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, and the Russian State Library. This practical training is conducted at these outside locations, not at the university.

Graduates of this program are recommended for work as conservator-restorers in museums, archives, libraries, and storage facilities; as keepers of museum collections and architectural monuments; as workers studying objects of material culture in scientific research institutes, conservation workshops, art galleries, and museums; and as lecturers in universities and high schools.
The Conservation Major

Students majoring in the conservation of ceramics and glass objects of material culture begin to take specialized courses in their junior year. These courses are available to full-time and part-time students (Galashevich 2003, p. 89).

Curriculum

Courses offer both theoretical and practical training, with a larger number of hours devoted to the former. Practical training begins later, in the second semester of the third year. This arrangement introduces students first to the properties of ceramics and glass, and to the methods of their manufacture (ibid., pp. 89–90). Then, under the direction of practicing conservator-restorers, students master techniques and skills of conservation and restoration of glass and ceramic objects.

The theoretical part of the curriculum includes three courses on the history of such objects, two courses on methods of studying them, and two courses on the technology of their production. This section concludes with an introduction to conditions for storing ceramics and glass objects in museum displays, galleries, and storage facilities (ibid., pp. 93–170 and 197–201).

Practical instruction consists of two courses on the conservation of glass and ceramic objects (ibid., pp. 171–196). Topics include types of damage to museum objects, methods of storage and packing for transportation of these objects, preconservation studies of artifacts, general systematic requirements, ethical standards of conservation and restoration, and the processes employed by conservator-restorers: dismantling objects, removing deposits from the surface, washing, cleaning, gluing and filling cracks with mastic, removing traces of old restorations, demineralizing and strengthening porous ceramics, gluing fragments, filling losses, and applying decorative and protective coatings on fills (Andreeva 1999, pp. 13–18 and 24–96).

Courses in this area of instruction also address the need for keeping proper conservation records. At the end of each project, the student prepares a treatment report with a photograph of the restored objects. The course titled “Photographic Documentation of Museum Objects” is required for all students. Conservation and restoration processes learned during the academic year are studied further during a summer internship.

Courses are based on an in-depth study of the history of glass and ceramic objects, on the chemistry and technology of these materials, and on methods for conserving them. Instructors assess the scientific achievements of researchers in Russia and elsewhere (Galashevich 2003, p. 90). Instead of offering a comprehensive overview of these subjects, faculty members reflect on characteristic examples, with the understanding that, after mastering the basics, students will be able to continue their search for new approaches and methods of study and conservation (ibid., p. 91).

Practical classes are held at the Grabar Art Conservation Centre, which offers a time-tested, proven system for training specialists. The Statute on Artists-Conservators, which was adopted about 1947, demanded “constant improvement” from each specialist. In 1955, the Grabar facility helped to create the State Certification Commission of the Ministry of Culture of the U.S.S.R., which determined the level of qualification of conservator-restorers. Student training at the Grabar Center is provided by museum staff members (internships), in which trainees initially master simple conservation and restoration processes and then advance to more complex techniques.

Conservation Materials and Objects

Because there has never been a Russian organization for the manufacture of conservation materials, the Grabar Centre has chiefly relied upon the production of the space and aircraft industries that it has adapted for use in its training programs, in association with the State Scientific Institute of Conservation. These materials are often similar to those employed by specialists in Europe and America. For instance, BMK-5 (a copolymer of butyl methacrylate with 5% methacrylic acid), which is manufactured in Russia, is used as multipurpose acrylate in conservation (Andreeva 1999, pp. 62–63).

In the initial stage of their practical training, students work on contemporary objects that are not of museum quality. As they progress, they are assigned to work on historical and museum pieces, usually as fourth-year undergraduates and in the preparation of theses.

Students’ Research

The results of this practical training are demonstrated at student scientific conferences. In October 2009, for
example, fourth-year undergraduates appeared at the round-table meeting “Questions of Preservation and Conservation of Objects of Material Culture,” where they discussed their work in the conservation and restoration of museum ceramics (Figs. 1–4).

Writers of theses by recent graduates of the RSUH conservation program include Svetlana Medvedeva. Her research, published under the title “Study and Conservation of the Italian Majolica Vessel of the 16th Century from Nizhny Novgorod State Art Museum,” established

Figure 1
Saltcellar, porcelain. Russia, Novikh’s Factory, late 19th century. Shown before, during, and after conservation.

Figure 2
Figure 3

Figure 4
Third- and fourth-year undergraduates in the conservation program at the Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH) at work in the Grabar Art Conservation Centre.
the origin of the vessel, more precisely defined its attribution, and described conservation efforts carried out on the piece (Fig. 5). When it was submitted for conservation, this object had a handle and neck made of wood. The student determined that the fills were made in the 19th century, but not later than 1884. Earlier fills had been made rather freely, resulting in proportional disharmony. The conservation council decided to dismantle the wooden handle and neck and to restore the lost fragments with gypsum. This work was recommended for publication.

Another RSUH student was employed as a laboratory assistant in the ceramics collection of the Kolomenskoe Estate Open-Air Museum. Her thesis was based on artifacts from that collection. “The Tiles of the Second Half of the 17th Century from the Collection of the Moscow State Integrated Art and Historical, Architectural, and Natural Landscape Museum-Reserve: Study and Conservation” is dedicated to the study and conservation of three rare tiles from Moscow and its environs. The conservation of these tiles called for various processes, ranging from the removal of surface deposits to the retouching/toning of the fills (Figs. 6–8).

By participating in archaeological excavations, students have an opportunity to find and sometimes to conserve artifacts. One example of this led to a thesis titled “Conservation and Attribution of a Pelike from the Excavations..."
Figure 7
Architectural tiles. Russia, second half of the 17th century. Moscow State Integrated Art and Historical, Architectural, and Natural Landscape Museum-Reserve. This photograph shows the conservation processes.
of Kara-Tobe, and Questions on the Technology of the Lacquer Coatings [surface decoration] of Antique Ceramics." The student participated in excavations of this Greco-Scythian settlement, and she investigated and conserved a pelike (a two-handled vessel with a body that flares toward the bottom, which is used to contain wine or oil) that is housed in the regional museum in the town of Saki. The conservation work on this object was performed in the Museum of Ethnography in Kiev. Assisting with this project was the conservator-restorer of that museum, who was herself a former intern in the Grabar Centre.

**Conclusion**

In her report on the 2007 meeting of the ICOM-CC Working Group at the Goriški Muzej Kromberk in Nova Gorica, Slovenia, Kate van Lookeren Campagne (2007) indicated that by 2010 the process of adopting the Bologna system would be completed. The Russian Federation, after joining the Bologna process in 2003, committed itself to put into practice all of its basic principles by 2010.

At the RSUH, the two-level system has been followed, at least in part, since 1992, but only 18 percent of students now adhere to it. The department of conservation plans to adopt the Bologna system for the next academic year (2010–2011). Students already enrolled in the program will continue to pursue the traditional specialist degree, which is awarded after five years of study, while newly admitted undergraduates will proceed according to the new regulations. The program is thus in a transitional period. It plans to offer a bachelor’s degree in conservation in the future.

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Figure 8

*Tile. Russia, second half of the 17th century. Moscow State Integrated Art and Historical, Architectural, and Natural Landscape Museum-Reserve. Shown before and after conservation.*
School of the History of Arts. The division based on the types of materials rather than the types of arts will probably be retained. Training programs in conservation at the master’s level will be opened in other departments, particularly that of cultural studies. But no final decisions have yet been made.

Nevertheless, 15 years of experience in training specialists in the conservation of the decorative and applied arts shows that the principles and approaches employed at the RSUH yield positive results. It prepares restorers and researchers who are quite capable of assuming responsibility for the conservation of our heritage.

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Glass and Ceramics Conservation 2010

Interim Meeting of the ICOM-CC Working Group
October 3–6, 2010
Corning, New York, U.S.A.

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2010931220

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Cire perdue figure made by Frederick Carder in the 1930s or 1940s, with a repair in which the epoxy is badly yellowed. The Corning Museum of Glass (59.4.426).
Interim Meeting of the ICOM-CC
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GLASS & CERAMICS
CONSERVATION
2010

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