



# ETHNOGRAPHIC CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

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## Notes from the Committee Coordinator

The Hague will host ICOM-CC for its 14<sup>th</sup> Triennial Meeting from 12-16 September 2005. The meeting is gearing up to be a great success. Over 450 submissions were received for review by Working Group Coordinators for the Pre-Prints. Of the 450, only 150 can be accepted for the publication. Manuscripts were due to the Peer Review Committee mid-January and there were a total of eight submissions for the ethnographic working group: six papers and two abstracts for posters. All were well written and very interesting; the overall quality was very high. While there's no guarantee that all submissions will be accepted for publication, it is very encouraging to see so much interest in our group! You all make our working group active and exciting! Thank you very much to all the authors for their submissions.

This issue of the Ethnographic Working Group Newsletter has reviews of several meetings that have taken place during the past year. Thanks to all of the reviewers for sending in your comments. Although some of these meetings took place several months ago, we wanted to get information out worldwide. I hope you will enjoy catching up with our colleagues through these reports. Please know that we would love to print any meeting reviews that, especially pertaining to ethnographic collections. Jessica has done a great job getting together all of the submissions and editing the newsletter – many thanks!

A preliminary roster for the next Ethnographic Working Group co-ordinator, assistant co-ordinator, and newsletter editor has been made. We will be voting on the co-ordinator during our working group business meeting at The Hague. Statements from the candidates will be posted prior to elections. I hope you will all take the opportunity as voting members to be at the business meeting and vote on a new slate of officers. We will also decide on the upcoming triennial program at this meeting.

I would like to thank the following for putting forth their names for ICOM-CC Ethnographic Working Group Officers.

*Co-ordinator:* Carole Dignard, Canadian Conservation Institute, Ottawa, Canada.

*Assistant Co-ordinator:* Farideh Fekrsanati, Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, Netherlands.

*Newsletter Editor:* Jessica Johnson, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC, USA

*Ex-officio Co-ordinator:* Marian Kaminitz, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC, USA

For a bit of news closer to home, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) where Jessica and I work opened to the public on September 21, 2004. So far, there have been over 1 million visitors to the new museum. If you want to see pictures or learn a bit about the NMAI, you can visit the museum's website at <http://www.americanindian.si.edu>

I wish you a belated Happy New Year and hope you are all well. See you at The Hague!

Marian

## A Change in Membership Status for ICOM-CC

From Jan Wouters, on behalf of the  
ICOM-CC Directory Board

I would like to confirm...the creation of a membership status of ICOM-CC, different from the one which is generated through ICOM membership. Indeed, the ICOM-CC Fund is now active and has received more than 100 registrants so far for a membership status called "Friend" or "Student-Friend of ICOM-CC". All relevant information on either type of ICOM-CC

membership may be found at the ICOM-CC website at [www.icom-cc.icom.org](http://www.icom-cc.icom.org)

In the past...membership lists of individual working groups were composed of ICOM members, who had indicated ICOM-CC as the international committee they were interested in, and of non-members. To this will be added now also “Friends” and “Student-Friends”. Important actions that will further change working group membership are listed below.

1. from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2005 onwards, only working group members, whatever their status, will have access to all levels of information of the ICOM-CC website
2. from October 1<sup>st</sup> 2005 onwards, only working group members who are either members of ICOM or (Student) Friends of ICOM-CC, will have access to all levels of information of the ICOM-CC website
3. from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 onwards, all working group members who are neither a member of ICOM nor a (Student) Friend of ICOM-CC must be removed from the working group list

It is important to emphasize that ICOM-CC needs members in order to continue rendering services and organizing meetings the way it has done in the past and to try to do even better in the future! So, becoming a registered member means giving support to your professional network!

## Conference Reviews

### Review of the ICOM 2004 Seoul Meeting, October 2 – 5, 2004 Museums and Intangible Heritage

The following excerpts taken from The Korea Herald special report edition of October 4, 2004:

Experts from museums and galleries around the world have convened in Seoul for the 20<sup>th</sup> General Conference and 21<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the International Council of Museums.

It was the first time the meeting was held in Asia and about 2,000 members from 150 countries attended. The meeting was organized by the Korean National Committee of ICOM and held at the COEX convention center. The theme of the conference, “‘Museums and Intangible Heritage’ is in recognition of the fact that culture manifests itself not only in tangible forms but also through intangible elements. It is transmitted through generations by means of language, music, theatre, attitudes, gestures, practices, customs as well as

objects and places in which the ideas of human beings are located.”

The two keynote sessions were on “Museums and Intangible Heritage: Yesterday and Today,” and “Museums and Intangible Heritage: Future.” Former Korean Minister of Culture, Lee O-Young gave a talk entitled, “To Prepare a Vessel to Contain Lost Life: Preservation and Successful Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage”. This talk addressed the topic of modern technology and intangible heritage. Lee suggested that to preserve local cultures facing annihilation under the circumstances of market-oriented forces of globalization, the most urgent task is to affirm and agree that civilizations do not clash but are dependent upon each other. Additionally, modern technologies can be used to preserve, pass down, and promote intangible heritage.

Other keynote speakers identified ways that programs could expand beyond the confines of buildings to preserve intangible heritage and use new technologies to do so. Mr. Makio Matsuzono, director of the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan discussed museums, intangible cultural heritage and the spirit of



*The Fan Dance or Buchaechum is performed as part of the Traditional Korean Wedding ceremony, after the official announcement of the completion of the marriage.*

humanity. He noted that museums can function as an arena where people meet and develop their pride and identity, learn about their traditions, and hand it down to the next generation.

Mr. Yim Dawnhee, a member of the UNESCO international jury on intangible heritage, spoke of the Living Human Treasure System that has been in place in Korea since the 1960's. This system is a country wide process to identify national Human Treasures who are then required to pass on their learning such as theatre arts, wood carving, mask making, etc., to others so that the skills and cultural understanding are handed down in Korean culture.

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A final speaker, Mr. Richard Kurin, director of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, talked about the opportunities and challenges for museums and the cultures they represent. Looking into the future, he encouraged cultural organizations to document intangible cultural heritage and take part in its presentation, preservation, protection and transmission. He also questioned whether museums must be re-conceived and reconfigured to do so. (End of excerpts.)

These keynote addresses set the stage for several days of talks, discussions with colleagues and Korean cultural pageantry. There were numerous cultural presentations including a Lion Dance "Sajachum" performed at the welcome reception along with a show of Joseon Dynasty Royal Costumes, a traditional wedding ceremony, traditional folk music and dances, traditional drum dances and martial arts demonstrations. The final reception at the National Folk Museum of Korea was an opportunity for a presentation titled,

"Heritage meets the Digital". This was a major laser and light multimedia performance by Gongmyung, who creates new sounds with instruments of his own making, together with a computer graphic production.

The Korean people are extremely kind and hospitable. The delegates were all recipients of numerous well-organized cultural events that guaranteed our enjoyment of Seoul and the surrounding areas.

Concurrent sessions at the meeting included one by ICOM-CC entitled, "Preserving the Intangible: Sustaining the Material and the Symbolic". This session was moderated by Catherine Antomarchi, Collections Unit Director ICCROM, Rome and chaired by Jorgen Wadum, Chair ICOM-CC.

Speakers included: Alissandra Cummins, the newly elected President of the ICOM Executive Council and Director of the Barbados Museums and Historical Society. She spoke on, "Touching the Untouchable: Conserving traditional knowledge and cultural expression."

Mikkel Scharff, Head of Department, School of Conservation, Copenhagen spoke on "Reconstructing lost polychromy and the meaning of classical artifacts."

Speakers W. Richard West, Director of the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), Washington, DC and Marian A. Kaminitz, Head of Conservation, NMAI spoke on "Making a song visible: NMAI and community consultations."

John Moses, Conservator with the Canadian Museum of Civilization, spoke on "Museums, aboriginal communities, and the role of the conservator."



*Pungsan Korean Traditional paper making: making a sheet of paper from paper mulberry pulp.*

Tae Youn Lee, Professor Emeritus, Seoul National University, spoke on “Conservation of the Tripitaka Koreana – Strategy of the preservation on past and future.”

David Grattan, Acting Director Conservation and Scientific Services, Canadian Conservation Institute, Ottawa, gave a presentation on, “Preserving the intangible – the significance and challenge of electronic media.”

The final speaker, Ysbrand Hummelen spoke on “Capturing the versatility of tacit knowledge and non-tangible aspects in contemporary art.”

Following the presentations, there was a question and answer session and a lively discussion about where museums were headed in terms of conservation and involvement of communities, artists, and cultural involvement.

All in all, the meeting was a huge success and the delegates enjoyed good weather, great museums and cultural sites, and thought provoking discussions. The Koreans are to be congratulated on an incredible job. The next ICOM meeting will be held in 2007 in Vienna.

Marian Kaminitz

**American Institute for Conservation (AIC)  
23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting  
Portland, Oregon, June 9-14, 2004**

There were many talks of interest to ethnographic conservators at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual AIC. The theme of the conference was: the Art of Cleaning: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Philosophy. An antagonistic speech from keynote speaker James Beck of Art Watch and the even more aggressive rebuttal from Kirby Talley Jr. focused on paintings conservation and emphasized issues of making assumptions, outside collaboration, original condition, and invasive treatments that have been central to ethnographic conservation for some time.

The general session began with a talk by Landis Smith about the complexities of cleaning surfaces of Pueblo pottery. Loaded with useful technical details, this presentation emphasized the importance of combining documentation, ethnographic accounts and insights by curators and potters to make a decision regarding cleaning, noting that how a vessel should look is a moving target that changes with time and the viewer. Generally, there is a consensus that pots made as Western art can be cleaned to a higher degree than utilitarian wares. The type of clays and pigments used, firing conditions, surface finishing, “lime popping,” the

impact of use on wear patterns and residues, coatings applied by potters and dealers, and old cleaning and repair methods for Pueblo pottery and were discussed in detail.

Theresa Heady spoke about the ethics of working in the field and dealing with indigenous objects with cultural sensitivity. Her work at two Buddhist temples in Mongolia attempted to introduce our conservation values while respecting traditional practices that included resident artists re-painting old works, feeding resident birds as a religious ritual, and continuing replacement of old images with new ones. Students from the University of Mongolia were recruited to help with condition reporting.

Deborah Bede presented the work of Mary Brooks and Dinah Eastop, “Matter Out of Place: Analyzing Conceptual Shifts in Preservation Values.” The core of the paper involved four models of dirt: “Domestic” (related to household,) “Sacred” (such as relics,) “Art Historical” (particularly for authenticity,) and “Evidential” (including historical, forensic and legal significance.) Items with social ambiguity can be of greater interest, and the difference between a soiled or a clean object can impact its social significance.

Virginia Green discussed the decision making process in her lab for determining if an artifact has museum dirt or ethnographic dirt and some successful cases of reducing soiling. Her experience with the Hopi, for example, included the concept that history is unified and there was not a distinction between pre- and post-collection dirt. This led to an unexpected opportunity to save time in treatment. Other indigenous groups felt it disrespectful to the maker to display an object in less than perfect condition. Green found covering cotton swabs with crepeline for cleaning wood with ethanol kept cotton fiber out of the wood. She urged caution when cleaning opaque vs. translucent beads, since the inaccessible dirt inside translucent beads can make them appear gray after cleaning in contrast to the easier-to-clean opaque beads. Feather cleaning with non-ionic detergent and water followed by blow drying gave a nice appearance, but resulted in minor loss of barbs near the bottom of plumose feathers.

The Objects Specialty Group session began with fascinating research from Amber Tarnowski, Chris McNamara, Kristen Bearce and Ralph Mitchell about the nature of sticky microbes and dust on objects in historic houses. In this study, microbial populations were surprisingly greater indoors than they were in the soil outdoors. They feed on dust itself, with hydrocarbons from smog and pollution as sources of food as well. Most microorganisms are bacteria that produce a biofilm of copolymers (mainly

polysaccharides, proteins, and nucleic acids) that form a sticky film. This can make dust adhere to surfaces and becomes the food source for additional biological growth such as mold and fungus. Experiments testing effective methods of removal are now underway.

Sara Moy presented her research on the potential of Groom/Stick to deposit residues. The product is more likely to leave residues of titanium dioxide and silicone when it is aged or used at elevated temperatures. Using soiled Groom/Stick to take advantage of reduced tack is discouraged because it can transfer contaminants. Instead, reduced tack should be achieved from lower temperature. Storing Groom/Stick in the refrigerator reduces tack and also prolongs its useful life.

Stephen Koob gave a thorough review of why and how to clean glass from ancient to modern. He prefers Triton soaps 15:1 with a rinse in deionized or distilled water. Almost all glass can benefit from one good Museum cleaning during its lifetime, even crizzled glass, since washing removes the surface alkalis that can dissolve silica and free up more alkali over time. To extrapolate this information to bead disease, it would prolong the life of the bead to clean the alkali from its surface.

Joanna Minderop, Cheryl Podisiki, and Ruth Norton offered their reflections about deinstalling and cleaning the 1950's ethnographic and archaeological galleries at the Field Museum. Mounting methods were documented before deinstallation. Only 5% of 460 objects tested for arsenic were positive. Removing problem mounts from artifacts included the use of acetone poultices and vapor chambers to swell or dissolve adhesives. Wooden dowels were sometimes inserted into holes drilled into artifacts. These were removed by breaking the dowel flush with the surface, pricking a pilot hole with an awl, and drilling out most of the wood, followed by soaking the hole with acetone to facilitate picking out the remaining wood and adhesive bits.

The wooden artifacts session included a talk by Alan Levitan about preserving large wood artifacts that do not fit in cases but are not architectural. Desert climates pose risk from erosion by windblown particles and exposure to sunlight. Fluctuations in temperature and RH can cause popping of nails and loosening of joints. Carpenter ants like fungally rotted wood, and termites can be found up to the border of Southeast Alaska. Generally, insects are the most severe problem in the Southeastern US. The formosid termite is a new threat because it does not need to return to the soil on a daily basis, as do more common termites in the continental United States. In very cold zones, snow loading is a danger, but even painted surfaces can be preserved for

70 years or more. Sodium borates are an excellent line of defense against fungi and insects. They are water soluble, however, and leech out over time, even faster with soil contact. Softwood tends to decay from the inside out, and in one example of a large decayed interior cavity, mixing a foaming agent with the detergent helped to fully wet the surfaces. For repairs, Poly vinyl butyrols (PVB's) are useful indoors for good penetration and better reversibility than epoxies. Used 1:1 in alcohol, PVB is a good adhesive. For exterior use, epoxies hold up better but have limited reversibility and penetration. The latter can lead to an "eggshell" effect where a surface layer is hardened and brittle with soft, untreated material below. Wooden or acrylic cradles help store and preserve oversize wooden items.

Francesca Esmay and Roger Griffith contributed insights about cleaning methods for untreated wood. Although they were talking about plywood used by Donald Judd, it was interesting to hear how wet cleaning changed the color of the wood and could raise the grain. Dry cleaning by moving a blanket of crumbs along the grain with a large bristle brush or the use of a French polish rubber followed by vacuuming were preferred dry cleaning methods. Evaluation in the force of the rubbing revealed huge differences in personal style between conservators during treatment. Spectrophotometry showed a slight decrease in surface reflectance on some test panels after cleaning, but no drastic visible change.

The buzz during the coffee breaks included a debate whether or not the approval of a curator was carte blanche to proceed with cleaning. Another topic was the possibility that the practice of making a sharp distinction between cleaned and uncleaned areas for the purposes of a DT photograph may leave a "cleaning line" after treatment.

In the exhibitor's area, a new product called "dry-gel" shows promise for both desiccation and humidification procedures. The active ingredient is a corn starch based polymer that may be able to absorb more than 50 times its own weight in water, becoming a gel in the process. It is packaged in various sized paper packets. Artifex Equipment Inc is developing this product in conjunction with the National Agricultural Library of the USDA for use in book and paper conservation, but creative applications in ethnographic conservation may include humidification and disaster recovery.

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**Review of the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Workshop  
Canadian Association for the  
Conservation of Cultural Property  
Quebec City, May 26-27, 2004**

The 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Workshop and Conference of the Canadian Association for the Conservation of Cultural Property (CAC) was held in Quebec City this year, from May 26 through 30. The Workshop theme was “Unusual Materials, Unconventional Treatments” was hosted at Musée National des Beaux-arts du Québec on May 26 and 27, during the two days preceding the three-day CAC Conference (see next report).

The Workshop succeeded in bringing together a diverse group of conservators and other professionals from a range of specializations, and from across a wide region geographically. Regardless of the area of expertise (whether, for example, fine arts or ethnography), participants and observers benefited from the opportunity to interact with colleagues who had shared a common experience in successfully meeting particular challenges encountered while developing unconventional approaches, in response to unusual materials or exceptional circumstances.

Speakers (*and their presentations*) on the first day included Marie-Noel Challan Beval, Musée d'art Contemporain de Montréal (*Acquiring and Conserving Contemporary Art*); Claire Titus, private conservator, Halifax (*Reproductions as Art or Proxy*); Alain Depocal, Fondation Daniel Langlois, Montréal (*Variable Media: Documentation as a Preservation Strategy*); Caitlin Jones, Guggenheim Museum, New York (*Theory into Practice: The Variable Media Paradigm*); Richard Gagnier, National Gallery of Canada (*Characteristics and Requirements of Contemporary Art*); and Paul Marcon, Canadian Conservation Institute (*Packing Strategies for Complex and Unusual Artworks*).

Speakers (*and presentations*) on the second day were Katerina Malea and Maria Mertzani, Department of Antiquities & Works of Art, Athens (*Dealing with 'Sacred' and 'Criminal' Human Remains*); myself (John Moses, Canadian Museum of Civilization, *The Accommodation of Aboriginal Perspectives in Conservation, Collections Care, and Exhibition Practices*); Louis Gagnon, Avataq Cultural Institute (*Reclaiming the Heritage of Nunavik, and Its impact on Conservation Concerns*); and Martha Segal and Paul Robertson, Canadian Museum of Civilization

(*Collecting and Caring for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Artifacts at the Canadian Museum of Civilization*).

Of the presentations listed above, three in particular were of the hands-on variety, or challenged those in attendance with some manner of group participation. These were the sessions by Richard Gagnier (National Gallery of Canada) and Paul Marcon (Canadian Conservation Institute), which dealt with real-life situations relative to the safe packing and movement of awkward pieces; and the joint presentation by Martha Segal and Paul Robertson of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, which challenged participants to role-play either as conservators or curators, in achieving mutually acceptable outcomes relative to the collection and preservation of modern materials.

For conservators of ethnographic materials, the three presentations of particular relevance were those given by Louis Gagnon of the Avataq Cultural Institute; myself (Canadian Museum of Civilization); and Katerina Malea and Maria Mertzani, from Athens. Whereas as the talks by Louis Gagnon and myself were firmly couched in the ethics and sensitivities currently prevailing amongst North American conservators and other museum professionals dealing on a daily basis with contemporary Aboriginal issues in museums, the talk presented by Katerina Malea and Maria Mertzani from Greece (dealing as it did with strictly technical issues in the conservation of human remains) drove home the point to everyone in attendance, I think, that other professionals from other countries may continue to have entirely different (but perhaps no less valid) values and priorities when it comes to the treatment of such sensitive materials.

A round-table discussion, and question-and-answer period following our three presentations, generated a lively exchange. This largely concerned different national approaches and sensitivities to the presence of human remains in state-run museums; and the state of relations in different countries between their national public museum infrastructures, and any remaining indigenous groups, or national ethnic minorities.

With all of the talks and sessions, one theme in particular kept coming to the forefront. Specifically, this is the imperative for conservators, regardless of their area of specialization, to have the capacity to adapt their methods and approaches, adopt an interdisciplinary approach, and to be able to “think outside the box” as particular challenges arise. In some cases the objects themselves present these challenges; in other cases these are presented by unique circumstances associated with the stewardship of contentious materials. In either instance, it is becoming increasingly clear that conservators are responsible for more than the treatment of objects and the maintenance of environmental

standards, and that their role extends to responding to the concerns of a spectrum of stakeholders.

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### **Report on the 2004 Conference of the Canadian Association for Conservation**

The 30th Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for Conservation took place in Québec City from May 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> 2004. A wide range of talks were presented over the three days of the conference, with the first day devoted to archaeology, ethnology, new technologies and paper conservation, the second primarily to paintings conservation and the third day to textiles and legal issues. Two presentations focused specifically on issues in ethnographic conservation, while three looked more at archaeological concerns. Below is a summary of the two ethnographic talks, followed by a more brief description of the presentations included in the archaeological session.

Valerie Monahan, conservator with the Cultural Services Branch of the Government of Yukon, gave a fascinating talk on the Yukon "Ice Patch" Collection. In 1997 hikers in the mountains near Whitehorse, Yukon in northwest Canada, found caribou dung melting out of a patch of ice in an area where caribou had not been seen for many years. Radiocarbon dating of the dung proved it to be more than 2,000 years old; a wooden artifact found on the ice nearby was found to be over 4,000 years old. These Ice Patches are areas of permanent frost and snow that have served for thousands of years as a cool refuge for animals during the summer months. And for thousands of years, hunters have gone to these areas for prey. A unique archaeological collection has been gathered from the melting edges of the Ice Patches, documenting hunting practices for more than 7,000 thousand years. The hunting tools, made from bone, wood, antler, feather and sinew, are extremely well preserved due to having been frozen from the moment they were deposited. Conservation treatment involved principally freezing the objects to slowly dry them and providing appropriate storage for this fragile, yet frequently consulted collection.

Jill Plitnikas, conservator at the Field Museum in Chicago, gave a talk on the re-housing of this museum's large (over 1,000,000 objects) collection of archaeological and ethnographic artifacts and archives. The museum's storage facility was inadequate to provide stable environmental conditions and good access to the collections. At the time of the conference, the museum had undertaken the construction of a new

underground facility, with an adjunct team of two conservators and two collections managers focusing on the stability and access concerns. The artifacts were first surveyed for physical and chemical instability. This survey led to the provision of new housing and special microenvironments for many of the objects. Conservation treatments were undertaken only for objects in critical condition. Residue from previous pest infestations was cleaned and testing for pesticide residues on 10% of the collection was undertaken. The move of the collection is planned for 2005.

Kateri Morin, conservator with Parks Canada, Quebec City, detailed the treatment of a chair that had been in the first-class dining room of the Empress of Ireland, which sank in 1914 in fifteen minutes after being broad-sided by another ship in the St-Lawrence River, bringing 1012 passengers and crewmembers down with it. The chair had been recovered by an amateur diver who had let it air dry, resulting in severe shrinkage. The chair was re-immersed and treated by electrophoresis to extract salts and ions that threatened its long-term preservation.

Cathy Mathias, conservator at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, described a preservation project involving more than 200,000 archaeological iron objects excavated from the site of the Colony of Avalon, dating from 1621. The RP System (Revolutionary Preservation System), which provides an oxygen-free, low RH environment, was used to bag and store the fragile iron artifacts.

And finally, Jane Down, Conservation Scientist with the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa, reported on research investigating the degradation of cyanoacrylate adhesives in the presence and absence of fossils. (Cyanoacrylate adhesives are a popular choice for the repair of fossil material.) Research showed that butyl cyanoacrylates degrade more slowly than ethyl cyanoacrylates. Unfortunately, most cyanoacrylate adhesives on the market today are of the ethyl variety. Results also showed that acidic fossil material slows the degradation of the adhesive, while neutral or alkaline fossils increase degradation.

This conference was an important one, as it celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Canadian Association for Conservation. While only two papers focused specifically on ethnographic conservation, much pertinent information could be gleaned from the other talks. And as usual, it provided a great opportunity for conservators to meet and discuss concerns both formally and informally, something of utmost importance in a country where conservators are so widely spread out and so rarely have the chance to meet face to face.

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**United by Variety: Applied Arts and  
Ethnographic Objects in Conservation  
Mannheim/Germany, Reiss-Engelhorn  
Museum  
March 23 - 27, 2004**

The conference “United by Variety: Applied Arts and Ethnographic Objects in Conservation” took place in Mannheim, Germany, from March 23 -27. Approximately 140 participants and 21 speakers from Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Great Britain and the USA attended. The conference was organized by three specialty groups of the German conservation association “Verband der Restauratoren” (VdR): Applied Arts Objects, Ethnographic Objects and Leather & Related Materials. The conference title aptly addressed the intent of the organizers, which was to offer a wide range of talks in order to stimulate inter-disciplinary discussions, encourage exchanges on common issues, and to help delineate differences between the specialties.

The conference was divided into two thematically different parts. The first part consisted of presentations on the conservation of objects made from a large range of materials and material combinations, and lasted three days - Tuesday through Thursday. The second part was dedicated to a broad variety of preventive conservation issues and took place on the second last day of the conference, Friday. The presentations took the form of talks, posters, or videos.

Many of the presentations in the first part offered insight into unusual conservation treatment techniques, which could in turn be applied in a variety of conservation treatment situations. The presentations also clearly illustrated that an inter-disciplinary approach is often indispensable in objects conservation. For example, Ingrid Böhm spoke about the conservation of a sleigh bell harness, which was made of a combination of metal, leather and fabric. Kristin Krupa’s talk on the conservation of a gilded leather altar front dealt with the use of leather as a substrate for painting. Some of the presentations were on the conservation of less common object materials. For example, in one excellent talk Barbara Goldmann discussed the possibilities and limitations of the conservation of sugar - gum tragacanth art. Additionally, Isabel Kraus spoke on red corals,

their use in objects, their deterioration, and possible conservation solutions. A very interesting presentation by Regina Klee dealt with the conservation of beetle shells. In her talk on the conservation of fur, Katharina Mackert described a technique to re-attach tufts of fur, which had become detached because of insect infestation.

The host museum of the conference, the Reiss Engelhorn Museum, is in the midst of renovating its historic “Zeughaus”, which houses permanent and temporary exhibit spaces, as well as storage facilities. As this renovation was pertinent to the conference theme of preventive conservation, Petra Hesse-Mohr, Katharina Küster and Gisela Gulbins (all of the Reiss Engelhorn Museum) spoke on topics relative to the renovation. Their concrete and informative presentations included an overview of the redevelopment of the “Zeughaus”, a talk on developing an appropriate environmental control concept for the “Zeughaus” as a historic structure, and lastly, a talk on the use of Imdas Pro as a data base for the newly inventoried collections. On Thursday night and Saturday morning, tours of the already renovated storage facilities of the “Zeughaus” complemented the presentations and invited more in-depth discussion of these topics.

An instructive presentation on mount making for exhibits was given by Devorah Romanek and included a number of methods and materials which are not yet commonly used in Germany. Ms. Romanek also presented Diana Dicus’s talk on a standardized conservation survey, known as “the conservation assessment”, that is used in the assessment of small and medium sized museums. This assessment provides a basic structure to analyze issues relating to collections care and building maintenance in museums. In the United States, it is a basic requirement for institutions wishing to receive funds from Federal or private sources.

The regular breaks in between talks provided time for discussions and questions in a smaller forum, and allowed time for meeting new colleagues and maintaining existing professional and personal relationships. Another positive aspect of this conference was that presentations were given not only by long-term professionals, but also by students, who presented the results of their masters thesis or of other research they had done.

The only point of criticism I have to offer about the conference is that although the program was very well structured, the overall length of the conference was potentially wearing. In addition, it was difficult for many participants to completely understand the few

English presentations. It would have been worth the additional cost (in registration fee) to invest in simultaneous translation, which certainly would have drawn more foreign attendees as well.

Overall this was a very successful conference, both interesting and informative with a friendly and professional atmosphere, which helped to illicit relevant and provocative discussions on timely topics. I am sure that many of the presentations would be very interesting for a broader audience, but unfortunately the planned publication on CD-ROM could not be realized. It is therefore to be hoped that many of the speakers will publish their presentations in the VdR journal or elsewhere.

Many thanks go to the organizers of the three specialty groups, to the presenters, to the many people who otherwise helped and assisted, and to the host, the Reiss Engelhorn Museum in Mannheim for this professionally impressive and excellently organized conference.

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## **Upcoming Conference Information**

### **North American Textile Conservation Conference, 2005**

The North American Textile Conservation Conference Board met in Mexico City in November 2004 to plan for its November 2005 meeting "Recovering the Past: The Conservation of Archaeological and Ethnographic Textiles. The meeting will be held in Mexico City at the National School for Conservation, Restoration and Museology and the National Museum of Anthropology on November 10 - 11. The selected papers represent authors from 12 countries and will be given in either English or Spanish with simultaneous translation into English/Spanish. Conference preprints will also be bilingual. The conference will be preceded by two optional days of tours and workshops and followed by an optional tour to Teteohuacan. The Comité Nacional de Conservación Textile, which is based in Chile with members from many South American countries, will also hold its meeting in Mexico City the same week. This will be the first time textile conservators from North and South America will converge for meetings. Registration materials will be available in May 2005 on the website at: [www.natcc.inah.gob.mx](http://www.natcc.inah.gob.mx).

## **ICOM-CC 14<sup>th</sup> Triennial Meeting Our Cultural Past – Your Future**

The 14th Triennial Meeting of the International Council of Museums – Conservation Committee (ICOM-CC) takes place from 12 - 16 September 2005 in The Hague, the Netherlands. The main subject of the Congress will be the exploration and design of different strategies and methods aimed at involving the public in issues surrounding cultural heritage and its preservation. This ICOM-CC Congress is for all professional curators, conservators and other specialists in the field.

### **Program**

The programme of the congress exists of plenary sessions, working group meetings and excursions to cultural places focussing on conservation issues. The farewell party on Friday 16 September is sponsored by the Municipality of The Hague and is organised in the Town Hall called 'Het Atrium'.

At the moment the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, the organisers of the congress, put the finishing touches to the program. Watch the website [www.icom-cc2005.org](http://www.icom-cc2005.org) for program updates.

### **Grants**

ICOM is able to offer a limited number of bursaries to conservation professionals from developing countries in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, Middle East and Asia, Pacific Islands and South East Asia to attend the 14th Triennial Meeting of ICOM-CC. Grant application forms are available at the website, at [http://www.icom-cc2005.org/registration\\_and\\_fees/grants/?set\\_lang=en](http://www.icom-cc2005.org/registration_and_fees/grants/?set_lang=en)

### **Pre-Registration**

You can still pre-register for the Congress on our website, under the heading 'Registration and Fees': [http://www.icom-cc2005.org/registration\\_and\\_fees/](http://www.icom-cc2005.org/registration_and_fees/).

### **Note from the Newsletter Editor**

We're always looking for information to publish in the Newsletter. If you have anything that you would like us to publish, for example:

- a conference or course announcement
- information on a course or conference you've attended
- a short note on research you've been working on
- information on a new material or technique

Sent it to me at:

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