



MULTIDISCIPLINARY
CONSERVATION
A HOLISTIC
VIEW FOR
HISTORIC
INTERIORS
ROME 23-26 MARCH 2010
ICOM-CC INTERIM MEETING



JOINT INTERIM MEETING OF FIVE ICOM-CC WORKING GROUPS:

- Leather and Related Materials
- Murals, Stone and Rock Art
- Sculpture, Polychromy, and Architectural Decoration
- Textile
- Wood, Furniture, and Lacquer

Preface

The idea for this meeting was first broached at the 15th ICOM-CC Triennial Meeting held in New Delhi, September 2008 and is the continuation of a successful earlier collaboration, a Joint Interim Meeting that took place in Krakow 2007 entitled ‘**Upholstery+**’. The initial partnership of three Working Groups, *Leather and Related Materials*, *Textiles*, and *Wood, Furniture, and Lacquer*, has expanded in Rome 2010 to include the *Sculpture, Polychromy, and Architectural Decoration* as well as the *Murals, Stone, and Rock Art* groups. While the 2007 Joint Interim Meeting was dedicated to multidisciplinary aspects relating to one object, “the chair”, the Rome 2010 Meeting encompasses a broader multidisciplinary subject, the “historic interior” itself.

The topic of this meeting is an important one, as it poses particular challenges due to the constraints often imposed by the building fabric. In addition, the conservation of historic interiors not only draws from many conservation specialisations but also from many other fields. Furthermore, historic buildings and their interiors form part of national heritage of every country and culture. These buildings and their interiors usually consist of multiple facets and materials often altering dramatically throughout their life spans due to change imposed by society, their environment and use. It is through the conservation and restoration of these buildings and the collections therein that the cultural identity of our past can be preserved and transferred to our future. It is thus essential to consider these entities in a holistic manner using a multidisciplinary collaborative approach, without imposing any sense of hierarchy for the conservation of the individual artefacts or collections housed within.

Keywords such as holistic, multidisciplinary, collaborative, communication are predominant in the terminology of current conservation policy. It is the aim of this meeting and the resulting proceedings, to draw attention to these keywords and the concepts. Papers and posters were selected to present a global overview of the historic interior and the treatment of objects and decorative elements contained within. It is hoped that the presented themes, problems and prospected solutions will stimulate an ongoing and interesting debate and provide hints for reflections and treatments as well as further the goals of the conservation profession.

The meeting in itself was the product of a multidisciplinary collaboration between five working groups within a multinational organisation that promotes a holistic approach to conservation. The call for papers delivered a huge response and validated the idea for focusing on the historic interior. Almost ninety abstracts were submitted of which, over a period of three days, forty-six papers and

thirty-three posters, peer reviewed, were presented by authors from twenty-five countries to an audience of 245 participants. The Unione Nazionale Industria Conciaria (UNIC) kindly provided financial support to 25 students to attend the conference. The posters and papers collectively outline the key issues relevant to an holistic approach for the historic interior: these cover policy, methodology, protocol, diagnosis, scientific analysis, education, practical treatments, as well as historical and aesthetical aspects. Issues regarding preventive measures, conservation, restoration, reconstruction, replication are discussed and the end-use and role that stakeholders must play are stressed.

The emphasis of most papers has been on treating the interior as a whole connected strongly, not only to its physical structure, but also to its historical context and function of the building. The importance of a multidisciplinary approach has been accented. The conclusions have shown that no one speciality should be considered paramount, nor can individual objects be treated in isolation, thus a global holistic approach is a must and a balanced strategy is often necessary. Links between experts, professionals, curators, surveyors, architects, conservators, caretakers, end-users, stakeholders, and the public (to name but a few) must be open and transparent. The benefits of teamwork and collaboration to provide good methodological practice and flexible protocols are clear. The role of the public as interactive viewers is also discussed in many papers and the suggestion that structural hierarchies should be dissolved where possible is often raised. This allows the object, ie the historic interior, to remain as the main focus, allowing a continued engagement with the past.

The Directory Board of ICOM-CC has encouraged the organisation of joint interim meetings and this meeting has indeed been a 'showcase' for ICOM-CC activities. It has provided an occasion for many professionals from different field to gather to discuss ongoing projects and strengthen contacts between conservators, art historians and scientific experts. The successful objective of the meeting has been to deliver an overview of the complex conservation problems involved when dealing with the preservation and conservation of historic interiors within a multidisciplinary and holistic framework. It is hoped that the accompanying web-based publication will become a seminal resource for future reference.

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Elsje Janssen, Mariabianca Paris, Malgorzata Sawicki, Kate Seymour, and Andrew Thorn

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