

# MURALS, STONE, AND ROCK ART WORKING GROUP NEWSLETTER

June 2025, No. 3

## Editors

Valerie Magar, Joshua Hill, and Leslie Rainer

## Coordination Team for 2023-2026

Leslie Rainer, Chiara Pasian, Joshua Hill, Abdullahi Abdulkadir and Valerie Magar



Detail of Roman mosaic, Archaeological Museum of Naples. *Image: Valerie Magar.*

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## EDITORIAL

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Welcome to volume 3 of the *Murals, Stone, and Rock Art Working Group Newsletter*, and a particularly warm welcome to our new members in the Working Group. We sincerely hope you have enjoyed the previous volumes, and that this space can become a place to show ongoing news from the field, and present small pieces with essays or project updates, that you may wish to share with your peers in the group.

On that note, on 24 April 2025, we had a very interesting webinar on 20<sup>th</sup> century frescoes, which showcased a variety of research studies and ongoing conservation work in different parts of the world. For those who could not join us, Leslie Rainer has prepared a synthesis of the discussions below. We hope that other topics for discussion will emerge for these biannual meetings. If you would like to propose a topic for our Fall session, whether a webinar with a few presentations, or a more open discussion, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Preparations for the 2026 Triennial Conference in Oslo, Norway, are well under way. We received a very strong set of abstracts for papers, and we expect to have an active and robust session. As the selection of proposed abstracts for papers is ongoing, the call for posters will open in July 2025. The theme *Cultural Connections in Conservation* should allow for many different perspectives from our Working Group; please see the [conference website](#) for full details and do

not hesitate to get in touch with the Working Group coordination team with any questions as you prepare your poster proposals. We are looking forward to a lively and varied session in Oslo, and we look forward to seeing all of you there.

Best regards,

Valerie, on behalf of the Working Group coordination team.

## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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*News from the field* welcomes submissions from our Working Group members to provide updates on activities and events (see below for instructions to submit for this section).

### Notes from the April 2025 Zoom on 20th Century Frescoes

By Leslie Rainer (Getty Conservation Institute)

On April 24, 2025, the Murals, Stone, and Rock Art Working Group held a bi-annual Zoom meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> century frescoes. Six speakers presented informally on research and projects on topics ranging from execution technique, condition and conservation of murals, created using the fresco technique in the early 20th century in Mexico, the United States, Switzerland, and Sweden by Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Fred Olmsted Jr., and Suzanne Scheuer, Gino Severini, and Otte Sköld. Presentations were followed by discussion among the twenty attendees. The presentations are summarized below:

Nathael Cano started out the meeting with an overview of the Mexican mural movement's use of fresco technique, presenting an interdisciplinary project on the meaning, temporal and social relationship of this technique through the development of an artistic tradition in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries; its interest, discussion, and reception in America and Europe; and a discussion of conservation processes (*strappo* and *stacco*, color retouching among others) for the understanding of its ageing and past treatment.

Kiernan Graves spoke about Diego Rivera's portable frescoes, and the issues of removing them from their original location to storage, with all of the logistics involved. She showed the materials and execution techniques he used for his portable frescoes and how they have impacted the condition of the panels.

Leslie Rainer presented on David Alfaro Siqueiros' innovative and experimental technique of fresco on cement in Los Angeles using a spray gun to apply the pigments in water to the surface

laid out in *giornate*, and how he added paint layers over. Exposure and whitewash were probable causes of deterioration leading to paint loss leaving a surface that the artist likely did not intend.

Chiara Pasian discussed a project on 20th century murals in public spaces in Gothenburg, Sweden, to survey, study original materials and techniques, and their condition. Materials and techniques will be studied first with non-invasive analyses, which will then guide analyses on microsamples. This presentation focused on the work of Otte Sköld who worked in the fresco technique in this period in Sweden.

Francesca Piqué and Maria Rosa Lanfranchi presented an overview of research carried out by SUPSI into Gino Severini's fresco technique as it evolved in church painting in Switzerland, using traditional and modern materials and techniques. The research incorporated visual examination, scientific study, art historical and archival research.

Samantha Emanuel presented on a project to uncover two 1930s-era frescoes at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI): *Marble Workers* (1935) by Fred Olmsted Jr., and *Roman Parilia* (1934) by Suzanne Scheuer, which revealed interesting aspects of the artists' technique, the frescoes' condition, and their distinct thematic compositions.

The presentations were all informative and interesting. The quality of the research was of a high caliber, with colleagues using a range of non-invasive diagnostic techniques for investigations, collaborating on interdisciplinary projects, from moving murals to researching the Mexican mural movement, studying artists' archives, and conducting practical conservation treatments. The documentation of technique of execution presented was excellent, and provided good evidence of fresco technique in the cases presented.

Following from these presentations, there was discussion among Zoom participants and speakers. Topics of discussion started from a definition of the term "fresco", and its use in the 20th century, noting that in most cases, the foundational technique of execution may have been fresco, but that that was almost always adapted, added to, and adjusted with lime-based, tempera, or modern paint layers. This led to a question of terminology, whether fresco was the correct term, or whether "fresco intention" might better describe the technique. It was clear from the different presentations that artists were innovating and experimenting with the technique, and learning it from primary sources in the case of Severini, who followed Cennini closely, as well as from fellow artists (e.g. Siqueiros, who learned it from Rivera). Rivera himself innovated through the creation of portable frescoes on furred out panels, and Otte Sköld seems to have been largely self-taught, and created intricate incisions from cartoons to transfer preliminary drawings to the fresh plaster. In San Francisco, the tradition was passed from artists to students in courses taught on the subject, as with Siqueiros in Los Angeles, in classes he taught on fresco painting.

Also discussed was the impetus for a fresco revival in the early twentieth century. From different

presentations, it was stated that this stemmed from political beliefs, and a desire for exterior murals painted for the people, often with political messaging. The fresco technique was the best adapted technique for this based on its durability and permanence, although Rivera saw the need for portable frescos based on his experience of having his murals destroyed, in some instances due to their political messages.

The mixture of presentations from different geographic regions gave an idea of the routes and connections of the fresco movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century between Mexico, the USA, and Europe, not necessarily in that order, but with exchange of ideas and information among artists working at the time

The topics presented formed a comprehensive overview of the materials and techniques of execution, impact of technique on condition, and conservation measures to be studied and carried out. From theoretical ideas to practical conservation issues, this session laid the groundwork for further discussion in the working group and among colleagues in the field. It was a small taste of what we hope will be a robust and stimulating program at the next triennial ICOM-CC congress in Oslo in September 2026.

List of presentations from April 25, 2025 bi-annual Zoom meeting:

**Nathael Cano** (Faculty Member, UNAM), *Pintar con colores los muros: meanings, materiality & conservation of Mexican's modern frescoes*

**Kiernan Graves** (Site & Studio Conservation, LLC), **Katey Corda** (Corda Conservation), **Anne Rosenthal** (Anne Rosenthal, Fine Art Conservation), *Original Technique & Conservation Issues of Diego Rivera's portable frescos*

**Leslie Rainer**, Getty Conservation Institute, *Towards a Technical Revolution of Painting: David Alfaro Siqueiros' manifesto on the materials and techniques used for cement fresco painting*

**Chiara Pasian**, University of Gothenburg, *Public art and the revival of the fresco in Sweden – Otte Sköld in Gothenburg*

**Francesca Piqué**, **Patrizia Moretti**, **Stefania Luppichini**, **Maria Rosa Lanfranchi**, SUPSI, *Gino Severini and his Wall Painting Technique: an Overview*

**Samantha Emmanuel** (Freelance, wall painting conservator), **Molly Lambert** (Principal, Architectural Conservation, Inc.), *Hidden Histories: Rediscovering 1930s-era frescoes at the San Francisco Art Institute*



## ESSAYS AND PROJECTS

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Our section on Essays and Projects offers space for our Working Group members to share reflections from the field, as well as more in-depth information on ongoing or recent projects with colleagues (see below for specific instructions for submissions).

### ***Pintar con colores los muros. Meanings, materiality and conservation of Mexico's modern frescoes***

Nathael Cano

The journey to the centennial of Mexican Muralism offered a revision of fresco technique as a cultural legacy with the aim to understand the meanings, social scope, and challenges for Mexican conservation projects. Based on a combined methodology including documentation and archival research; imaging and non-invasive analysis (Ruvalcaba Sil, 2018: 75) of murals and materials attributed to the fresco technique, in these few lines you will read a brief review of meanings, techniques, materiality, production and conservation.

#### **Meanings**

Mexican Muralism refers to a significant avantgarde that emerged in the early twentieth century. It involved artists creating large-scale or portable narrative murals with diverse techniques on public buildings, often with social, political, and historical topics.

Muralism shows agency by how it shapes social and political narratives through its physical presence (Indych-López, 2007). This suggests muralism as a tool of soft power (Marusek and Wagner, 2024), an influence of social perceptions and a means of fostering relationships in Mexico and beyond, inspiring similar artists in other parts of the world (González-Mello, 2020: 56; Villanueva, 2018; Indych-López 2009).

Regarding the artists and technique, Xavier Guerrero (1896-1974), Roberto Montenegro (1885-1968), Gerardo Murillo “Dr. Atl” (1875-1964), José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), Diego Rivera (1886-1957), David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974), María Izquierdo (1902-1955), Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), Aurora Reyes (1908-1985), Marion Greenwood (1909-1970), Juan O’Gorman (1905-1982), Amado de la Cueva (1891-1926), Arnold Belkin (1930-1992), José L. Gutiérrez (1900-1968), Jean Charlot (1898-1979), Fernando Leal (1896-1964), among other artists, produced murals using this technique for many reasons: one in common was the challenge of ageing through time, and environmental issues; the other was the challenge of using a combination of ancient techniques of “fresco” from the Pre-Hispanic and viceregal periods, and of the *buon fresco*

narrative found in treatises from the Italian renaissance (Orozco, 1993; Suárez, 1972: 13, 344-345; Charlot, 1963).

## Materiality

The history of frescoes regarding the technique and materials used, has been much discussed among painters, conservators, chemists, art historians, and critics of all times. But a mural, in the true sense of the word, is a large painting executed on a wall, and the term *buon fresco* is the technique “in which pigments are ground in water and mixed with lime upon the freshly laid plaster” (AAT, 2004: ID: 300403944) executed in sections or *giornate* (AAT, 2004: ID: 300178263). These definitions are complicated, because documentation (Gutiérrez, 1956; Gutiérrez and Roukes, 1965: 63-77; Gutiérrez, 1976; Siqueiros, 1979; Suárez, 1972: 344-345; Rivera y O’Gorman, 1987), 31-59: 17-43) and results by scientific analysis, offer diverse techniques and materials which the artists themselves defined in their paintings.

The Mexican painters prepared their walls based on oral communication, recipes and other sources available, improving the use of diverse supports, plasters and pigments (Charlot, 1963). Also, the treatises, recipes or narratives about Mexican frescoes by the artists provide guidelines for best practice to produce murals:

- Much and long practice is a must.
- It is essential to have a chemical knowledge of materials used, and to carefully examine the wall.
- Do not prepare large portable panels for exhibition or practice.
- The plaster base for the fresco consists of a mixture of lime putty, Portland cement, marble powder, and coconut fiber.
- The pigments used in fresco technique are the ones that will resist the alkalinity of the plaster and should be tested before they are used.
- Avoid retouching as much as possible. If needed, use Vinylite® or casein tempera (Suárez, 1972: 13, 344-345).

The techniques are diverse between 1922 and 1970:

- fresco on Marmoline (marble dust) and lime plaster
- fresco on cement plaster
- fresco with supplementary tempera
- fresco with supplementary oil painting
- fresco with supplementary Vinylite®

Diverse supports, additives, and fillers include:

- brick
- Celotex® (a type of thermal insulation board made from sugar-cane residue and asbestos)
- limestone walls
- cement
- Marmoline
- lime
- Portland cement
- coconut fiber

The color palette includes, according to Gutiérrez' treatise (1956: 11-42):

- White: lime putty
- Black: ivory
- Earth tones: burnt sienna, burnt umber, raw sienna, raw umber
- Yellows: ochre, cadmium yellow
- Reds: Pozzuoli red, iron red, Indian red, iron oxide red, cadmium red, cadmium orange
- Greens: Mexican earth, Cassel earth (a dark brown pigment listed among the greens), veridian, permanent green
- Blues: Ultramarine blue, cobalt blue, cerulean blue
- Purple: *almagre morado* (a purple colored iron oxide pigment widely used in Mexico)

It is relevant that documentation and analysis of pigments provides information on their use between 1930 and 1950 and the acquisition of these pigments and materials from art suppliers in America and Europe: Serra, Mexico City; The Calco Chemical Co., NY; City Chemical Corporation, NY; Windsor & Newton, UK; Madderton & Co, Ltd. Loughton, Essex; Le Moulin à Couleurs, France (Gutiérrez and Roukes, 1965: 63-77; Sierra Kehoe, 2018: 95).

### **Conservation**

Many Mexican frescoes faced changes applied by the artists themselves, earthquakes, the rejection of their contents, and their eventual destruction. The first and pioneering effort in conservation of modern paintings in Mexico was "the national commission of murals" in 1947 (DOF, 1947; López Orozco, 2014: 104). Siqueiros, Orozco and Rivera were involved. But this was not the best beginning, with the muralists still alive. Long discussions were described about who should be the conservator and what the guidelines should be (Gutiérrez, 1956: 42-43; Suárez, 1972: 369-378). As an example, the following is a discussion between the deputy of the National Center for Conservation of Fine Arts (CNCOA) and Roberto Montenegro:



*The painter produces the artwork, and it then takes on a life of its own. Once his work is finished, the painter can't touch it again, much less modify some of its parts. From then on, the only one who will have the right and pleasure to restore it will be the conservator, whose mission will be to keep the artwork alive, with the passage of time, neglect, indolence and accidents (Anon, n/d).*

By this time, murals were retouched with tempera or gouache paints and varnished with Acryloid®, paraffin, or dammar (Eliseo Mijangos, n/d, f 1-20). Those murals painted on walls with structural problems were detached using the *strappo* or *stacco* techniques, learned from Leoneto Tintori and Walter Vanelli from Italy and applied between 1965 and 1990 (Eliseo Mijangos, n/d, f 35-90). The supports at that time consisted of aluminum frames with epoxy resin, wooden supports, or paintings were lined on canvas adhered on polystyrene, fiberglass, and honeycomb (Eliseo Mijangos, n/d, f 35-90) (see Fig. 1 below).

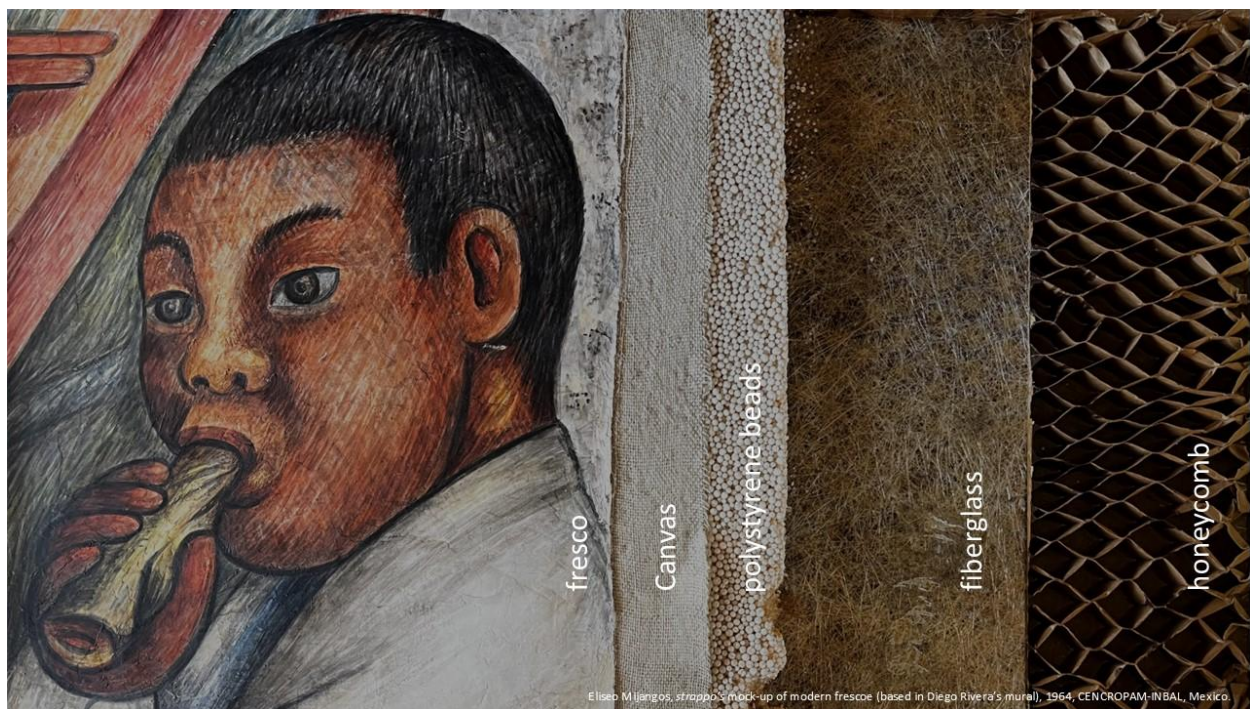


Figure 1: Eliseo Mijangos, Strappo mockup of modern fresco (based on Diego Rivera's mural), ca. 1964, CENCROPAM-INBAL, Mexico. Image: Nathael Cano, 2025.

### As a final reflection

The murals, as the body of the images, become sites of meaning-making, impacting how communities understand their history and social identity. Their conservation faces several challenges, but may this presentation serve as a call for collaborations in such a titanic task.

## Acknowledgments

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MUNAL-INBAL  
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FAAD-UNAM  
LANCIC Instituto de Física - UNAM  
Museo de San Ildefonso  
Museo Nacional de Antropología, MNA-INAH  
Instituto Politécnico Nacional, IPN  
Bibliothèque nationale de France  
The Jean Charlot Foundation  
Fideicomiso de los museos Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo  
Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute

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## RECENTLY COMPLETED THESES

We are keen to share abstracts of recently completed theses on topics relevant to conservation of murals, stone, and rock art up to 150 words.

### Conservation of the 20th C. gypsum-based wall paintings in the Sala della Caccia, Trefogli Castle (Switzerland)

María de los Dolores D’Alessio - [dalessiodolores@gmail.com](mailto:dalessiodolores@gmail.com)

Master of Arts in Conservation and Restoration, University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI)

Supervisors: Prof. Francesca Piqué and Prof. Maria Rosa Lanfranchi

The Trefogli Castle, a private residence in Torricella, Switzerland, owes its current appearance to a complete remodelling in the early 20th century. Its most important room, the Sala della Caccia,

features wall paintings on a gypsum-based plaster by Italian artist Luigi Faini in 1913. Over time, parts of the building fell into disrepair, and water infiltration severely damaged the wall paintings in the room's northwest corner: the Allegory of Summer and the Allegory of Autumn.

This master's thesis aimed to stabilize these deteriorated paintings. The research included in-depth studies on the little-studied original technology, diagnostics, and monitoring. The findings confirmed that deterioration was no longer active, but material loss persisted. A conservation treatment was developed, using funori to stabilize the paint layer and a novel gypsum-based method to consolidate the plaster. The intervention successfully stabilized the paintings, and long-term monitoring will assess the durability of the treatments.

## Stabilization of Mural Paintings in the Hypogeal Environment of Oceane Tomb, Viterbo, Italy

Sara Pascucci - [sarapascucci@yahoo.com](mailto:sarapascucci@yahoo.com)

Master of Arts in Conservation and Restoration, University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI)

Supervisors: Prof. Francesca Piqué, Conservator-Restorer Chiara Scioscia Santoro

Link: [https://geoscience-meeting.ch/sgm2023/wp-content/uploads/abstract\\_volume/SGM\\_2023\\_Symposium\\_14.pdf](https://geoscience-meeting.ch/sgm2023/wp-content/uploads/abstract_volume/SGM_2023_Symposium_14.pdf)

The Oceane Tomb is the only known painted funerary site in the Viterbo area (Italy). It is carved into volcanic rock and is decorated with wall paintings (1st–3rd centuries AD) composed of two layers of plaster: the arriccio contains amorphous-glassy compounds but lacks calcium carbonate and the intonaco contains carbonate fragments, *cocciopesto*, and lime as binder.

Conservation analysis revealed severe detachment, loss of cohesion of the intonaco, and invasive roots. The study is part of a conservation initiative led by the Soprintendenza Archeologica, Belle Arti e Paesaggio di Viterbo e dell'Etruria Meridionale, aiming to safeguard the wall paintings. Temporary facings were applied to critical areas with menthol as a volatile binder. Diammonium phosphate proved to be the most effective consolidant. Plaster adhesion was achieved with a pre-mixed grout developed for hypogeal environments. A sustainable approach to vegetation management was also proposed. This study serves as the foundation for the upcoming conservation intervention.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

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This section gathers recent publications linked to conservation and management of mural paintings, stone, and rock art. We would also love to receive book reviews from our members!

### Recent publications

Burnstock, A., T. Klemm, T. Laaser, K. Leonhard, W. Neugebauer und A. von Reden (eds.) (2024) *Kunstgeschichte, Kunsttechnologie und Restaurierung: neue Perspektiven der Zusammenarbeit: eine Einführung*, Reimer, Berlin.

Jablonski, M.A. and B. Russell (eds.) (2024) *Examining the built world through architectural finishes*, Archetype Publications, London.

Jáidar, Y., V. Magar y C. Ruiz Martín (eds.) (2025) *Criterios de conservación del patrimonio en piedra*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia/Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas-Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/ICCROM, México.

Rainer, L., L.F. Guerrero Baca, F. Matero and L. Meyer (eds.) (2005) *Terra 2022: Proceedings of the 13th World Congress on Earthen Architectural Heritage, Santa FE, New Mexico, USA, June 7-10 2022*, Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles.

Weyer, A. und U. Schädler Saub (2024) *Aus rot wird schwarz - und dann? Pigmentveränderungen an Kunst- und Kulturgut*, Hornemann Institut der HAWK Hildesheim/Göttingen, Hendrik Blässler Verlag, Berlin.

## NEW APPOINTMENTS

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We are happy to publicize new appointments in the Murals, Stone, and Rock Art community!

**Amarilli Rava** has been appointed as a Project Specialist at the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), Los Angeles, where she joins the Buildings and Sites Department. She brings extensive international experience in the conservation of wall paintings and architectural surfaces. Prior to joining the GCI, Amarilli co-founded and was Lead Conservator at Opus Conservation. She has held academic appointments at the Courtauld Institute of Art and at the University of Amsterdam, where she taught wall paintings conservation and supervised hands-on conservation projects. Amarilli holds a PhD in Conservation from the Courtauld Institute of Art where her research focused on the behavior and properties of organic adhesives. In her new role at the GCI,

she will support the Buildings and Sites department in the planning and execution of conservation projects for wall paintings and architectural surfaces, conducting applied research, developing educational activities, and collaborating with international teams to advance conservation practice.

**Lori Wong** was recently appointed as a senior program officer at Getty Foundation, where she oversees grant initiatives supporting the conservation of cultural heritage worldwide. An accredited conservator, she holds a Postgraduate Diploma in the Conservation of Wall Paintings from The Courtauld and an MBA from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Before joining the Foundation in 2025, she co-directed The Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Centre for Buddhist Art and Conservation and taught in the MA program in Art History and Conservation of Buddhist Heritage at The Courtauld (2022–2025). From 2002 to 2022, Lori worked with the Getty Conservation Institute on major heritage sites, including the Mogao Grottoes and Imperial Mountain Resort in China, the tomb of Tutankhamen and the Valley of the Queens in Egypt, and the site of Bagan in Myanmar. Her work is grounded in a commitment to the long-term sustainability of conservation, situating the field within broader economic, political, sociocultural, and environmental contexts.

## FUTURE CONTRIBUTIONS

If you would like to publish with our Newsletter or have ideas for the Newsletter please get in touch!

We welcome texts in English, French, Spanish or Italian.

Please send contributions to: [joshua.hill@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:joshua.hill@ntu.ac.uk)

We plan to publish the Newsletter in May and in November of each year. Contributions for the newsletter should be sent by **1 April** for the May volume and by **1 October** for the November volume.

All submissions must be sent in Word format and may be accompanied by images (\*.jpg or \*.tiff format with a resolution of 300 dpi and a minimal size of 1.5MB). Use only images for which you have permission to use and publish. Add a caption for the images, including the credit for the image. All submissions are subject to review by the editors.

- **News from the field:** 300-500 words and maximum two images



- **Essays and projects:** 2000-3000 words, including references (APA format) and maximum five images
- **Recently submitted theses:** abstracts of up to 150 words as well as the name of student, Institution, and course
- **Book reviews:** 300-500 words
- **New appointments:** 200 words and a photograph

## CALL FOR POSTERS

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The Call for Papers for the next ICOM-CC Triennial Conference, to be held in Oslo in September 2026, has passed but the Call for Posters will open in July 2025. The theme for the 2026 Triennial Conference is **Cultural Connections in Conservation**. See the [conference website](#) for full details and the timeline below for contributions.





## HOW TO JOIN ICOM-CC

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In order to join ICOM-CC, you need to join ICOM itself. This is done through the ICOM National Committee in your country of work and residence. The cost of ICOM membership varies from country to country - enquire with your National Committee. Once an ICOM member, select ICOM-CC as your official International Committee via your National Committee.

Some of the benefits of joining ICOM and ICOM-CC are:

- The ICOM card which grants free or reduced rate entry to museums around the world.
- Reduced registration fees at ICOM-CC Triennial Congresses and Working Group Interim Meetings (where applicable).
- Priority consideration for paper/poster acceptance at the ICOM-CC Triennial Conferences.
- The possibility to join any Working Groups you like and receive regular updates, news and announcements.

For those of you who are already ICOM-CC members but without an ICOM-CC web account, you can request an online account at [www.icom-cc.org](http://www.icom-cc.org) and then choose Murals, Stone, and Rock Art as one of your Working Groups. If you already have an ICOM-CC web account, then go to the Murals, Stone, and Rock Art Working Group webpage and click on the “Join This Working Group” button. For anyone with an institutional ICOM membership please contact Joan Reifsnyder ([secretariat@icom-cc.org](mailto:secretariat@icom-cc.org)) if you are interested in becoming a designated representative (there can be a maximum of three per institutional membership).

Please make sure to join the Murals, Stone, and Rock Art Working Group as the majority of communication will only go to members.

Join us on social media:



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