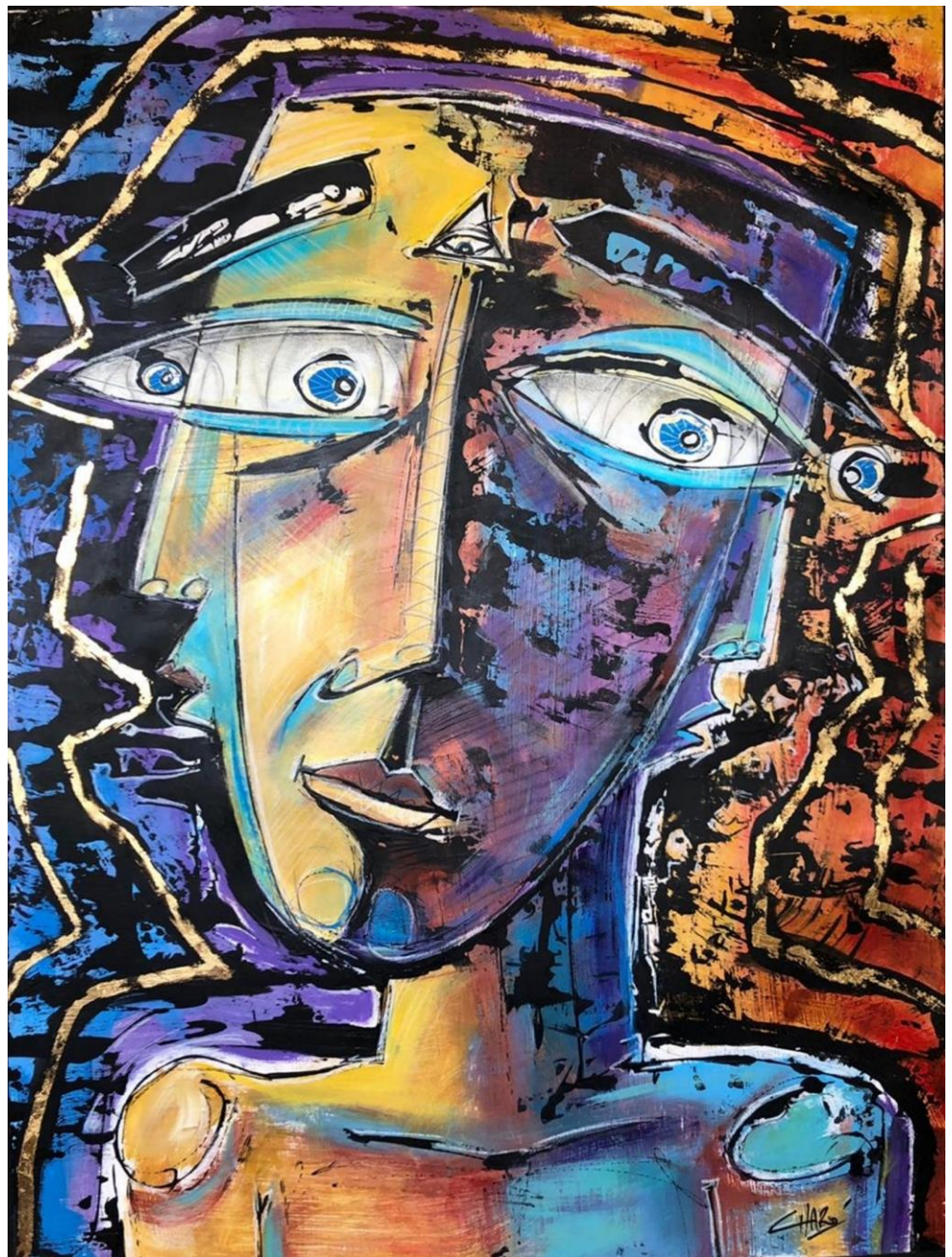


NEWSLETTER #23

DECEMBER 2021



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ICOM CC THEORY, HISTORY, AND ETHICS IN CONSERVATION WORKING GROUP NEWSLETTER

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Authors use American or British English in their contributions.

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DO YOU WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO OUR NEWSLETTER?

We accept contributions in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. We are looking for reviews, essays, op-eds, announcements, and research project overviews. We are committed to showcase projects and opinions from all over the world, so do not hesitate in contacting us with your ideas and texts!

Contact Hélia Marçal (h.marcal[at]ucl.ac.uk).

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

DAVINA KUH JAKOBI

I'm very pleased that we are able to bring you the 23rd issue of the ICOM-CC Theory, History, and Ethics of Conservation Working Group's Newsletter this December 2021. These past 21 months have brought us new and interesting challenges as we continue to navigate the Covid-19 pandemic. Most interestingly, it has been remarkable to watch the world transition to a more online platform, allowing us to both extend our presences and become more connected on a global scale. During this time, we have kept on going: our newsletter proudly presents and reflects upon the continuing work of our members and colleagues throughout the field.

As part of our newsletter, we are excited to introduce you to our Coordination Team for 2020-2023. Assistant Coordinator Patricia Engel has provided an article with her thoughts on the initial Covid-19 lockdowns in Austria, as well as her work with the European Research Centre for Book and Paper Conservation-Restoration, including information about the publications resulting from the international conference 'Book Conservation: One Philosophy, Many Interpretations' held virtually in 2020, the Centre's peer-reviewed periodical 'Conservation Update', the *MuLiBiNe* database, and the upcoming 'IPH (International Paper Historians) Congress' (August 2022). Assistant Coordinator Deepakshi Sharma has provided a perspective piece regarding her work as a consultant with the National Rail Museum in New Delhi, India focusing on the important topic of economic sustainability initiatives at the museum.

Several conference summaries and books reviews have been written for this edition: Esther van Duijn on 'The Making of Conservation Science' seminar, held in April 2021; Esther van Duijn and Petria Noble on their publication *Rembrandt Conservation Histories*; Brian Castiota on the November 2020 IIC seminar 'Conservation and Philosophy: Intersections and Interactions' (publication upcoming); Erling S. Skaug on his publication *The Nordic Centre for Restoration in Florence 1967-70: A summary on the 50th anniversary of the flood of Florence 1966*, which is available open access as PDF; and Hélia Marçal on the ICOM-CC's Triennial Conference's Theory, History, and Ethics of Conservation Session, held in May 2021. Additionally, Sanneke Stigter has provided an overview of the ongoing *Interviews in Conservation Research* project.

Finally, the expanding social justice movement both in America and abroad has shown us how necessary it is to consider and discuss issues related to diversity, equality, access, and inclusion (DEAI). I would like to commend Ayesha Fuentes for sharing the thought-provoking essay entitled 'Are We Decolonized Yet?' This personal and academic reflection on "decolonization" in conservation and the wider museum field is both relevant and poignant. Informative readings and resources have been included so that everyone can better understand our current and ever-changing social landscape and the importance of continuing these conversations.

We hope that you are all able to enjoy a restorative and peaceful holiday season, and wish you all the best for the coming year 2022, both professionally and personally. A special thanks to our Coordinator Hélia Marçal, my fellow Assistant Coordinators, and our authors for their contributions.



Image provided by Davina Kuh Jakobi

INTRODUCING ASSISTANT COORDINATORS



A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AS A WORKING ACADEMIC LIVING IN AUSTRIA

BY PATRICIA ENGEL

I work at the European Research Centre for Book and Paper Conservation-Restoration, at Zentrum für Kulturgüterschutz, DBU, University for Continuing Education, Krems, and I am currently an Assistant Coordinator for the ICOM-CC Working Group Theory, History, and Ethics of Conservation. The European Research Centre for Book and Paper Conservation Restoration is an international research centre dedicated to the research on the theory and practice of Book and Paper conservation - restoration. The Centre includes a team of about 50 colleagues worldwide, with a common goal to initiate, execute and support research, tools, and publications in the field of book and paper conservation-restoration.

Image provided by Patricia Engel

This contribution will be a personal reflection of a working professional in Krems, Austria, during the Covid-19 pandemic. During this pandemic, we had four lockdowns where we were only allowed to leave home to get food, help others, or play outdoor sports, if needed. We worked from home. This brought me periods of reflection, especially during cooking or baking, as baking involves periods when the dough needs to sit and wait. In particular, when we bake the local poppy seed Strudel, the yeast dough needs some time between mixing the ingredients and actual baking. The Strudel is made of a yeast dough and filled with ground poppy seeds cooked in milk, with a bit of cinnamon, plum jam, butter, a bit of salt and honey and raisins. The dough is rolled out, the filling is disseminated and then the Strudel is rolled up and baked. Baking and working was a nice combination.

Strudel sort of fed the brain, which was mandatory to prepare our conferences, including the international conference 'Book Conservation: One Philosophy, Many Interpretations' (programme available [here](#)). With the goal of expanding the scope and geographic area of the conference, as well as to give anyone who could not travel for one reason or another to participate nevertheless, we decided as early as summer 2019 to hold a hybrid conference to commemorate the 10th anniversary of our Centre. When the national (and international) lockdown came, we "only" had to skip the "in person" part, which allowed us to easily adapt the conference and run it as originally scheduled, on the 5th and 6th of November, 2020. The publication of selected papers from this conference is printed now and available at Berger printing house. During the presentations, general aspects of philosophy and theory in conservation, and also particular ways to implement these ideas in every day practical work were discussed. Finally, there were a few contributions on new analysis results. The book resulting from this conference can be seen [here](#).

We also used the lockdown as an occasion to push forward two other key areas of the Centre: our periodical and the *MuLiBiNe*, and [Conservation Update](#), our double-blind, peer-reviewed open access online journal with DOIs. We are always keen to have a wide diversity of themes and research articles on conservation theory, philosophy and ethics. Please feel warmly invited to contact the chief editors in case you want to hand in a paper or review for the journal.

MuLiBiNe is a multilingual bibliography network running a database composed of lists of contents and abstracts published in periodicals, focused on topics related to restoration/conservation of cultural heritage items (books and graphic art objects); as such, it collects information from officially approved and publicly accessible sources.

Every *MuLiBiNe* entry is composed of full quotation, keywords, and abstracts in any of the database's 28 languages. This means that the user may search for a keyword in one of the 28 languages and get a list of papers in which the keyword relates, no matter in which language the keyword was written originally. An example: if the user enters 'ink' in the search engine, they will get information about all articles in which 'ink' (English), 'Tinte' (German word for ink), 'atrament' (Polish word for ink), 'inchiostro' (Italian word for ink) etc. was originally used.

This is one of the projects of the European Research Centre for Book and Paper Conservation-Restoration to bridge language barriers in Europe and to:

- support practical conservation with latest research results by a Europe-wide consultation of what was done so far to be applied for the well-being of the cultural heritage items, and
- avoid duplication of research by providing a cross-language search engine to discover any papers published on the parbject and getting an overview of the available results at the initial phase of a new research project.

At the moment *MuLiBiNe* enables the browsing of about 100 periodicals worldwide. We encourage users to alert us to titles of other relevant periodicals that may be missing from the list.

Finally, I have been involved in the organization of another two events, 'Indonesian Conservation Theory for Cultural Heritage', which took place in November 2021, and the 'IPH (International Paper Historians) Congress', which will take place in August 2022 in Krems.

After so much work behind the computer, I sometimes needed a walk. I live on the outskirts of a small town, with vineyards all around, so it was easy to "escape the crowds" and be alone in nature. I took walks for several hours, relished the good air and – during the first lockdown in particular – the silence: no cars, no planes....

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE OF A MUSEUM CONSULTANT WORKING AT THE NATIONAL RAIL MUSEUM, NEW DELHI, INDIA

BY DEEPAKSHI SHARMA

Through this contribution, I would like to introduce myself as an Assistant Coordination for ICOM-CC's Working group for Theory, History, and Ethics of Conservation, while also presenting some of the key aspects of my current work as a museum consultant at the National Rail Museum (NRM) in New Dehli, India. At the NRM, my primary responsibility is curating exhibitions in the indoor and outdoor galleries as well as undertaking conservation on the indoor objects and archival collection. Simultaneously, I have also been involved in writing various articles and other research-based papers on the museum collection and exhibits as well as railways and industrial heritage for various blogs, journals, newsletters and magazines.



Image provided by Deepakshi Sharma

Our current approach is very much concerned with the sustainable development of the collection and the museum. For us, one of the key aspects of sustainable development follows the principles for economic sustainability, which means utilizing any available resources efficiently in order to achieve the maximum possible impact. Indeed, while museums may have initially been created with a focus on education, collection, preservation, and research, as society evolved, the economic role of museums has also become increasingly important. Museums now serve a vital role in helping cities sustain and promote themselves as cultural centres in the domestic and regional market, thus fulfilling the demands and expectations of visitors and investors.

Over the past few years, the National Rail Museum has utilized the resources available, following the principles of economic sustainability. This institution has dealt with two primary economical concerns: the efficient allocation of available resources and the problem of reconciling finite resources with a virtually infinite desire for goods and services. As part of this, the NRM has set "Economic Sustainability Goals" to access current and potential resources, and ultimately increase revenue mostly through tourism and visits.

Popular attractions at the NRM have always included the Toy & Joy Train Ride, steam and diesel simulators, and a 3D coach. These have increased our visitor numbers and the resulting ticket sale have contributed to NRM's economic sustainability.

Another effort to increase revenue to the museum has been through the NRM renting its lawns and auditorium for external parties, photo shoots, dinners, and other private events. The facilities and products provided by the on-site restaurant and food stalls have also contributed to increasing revenue at the NRM. To increase visitation and to elevate the economic growth in the museums, summer camp and winter events have been scheduled for children, which encourages learning as well. Souvenirs that are primarily railway-themed have also been popular at the museum: visitors have shown an appreciation for the products offered at the Souvenir Shoppe, which provide memories of their time at the NRM.

In our continuous effort to raise the economic sustainability, it has become evident that it is necessary to attract and invite the media to publicise the NRM at the national level. Hence, to draw the attention of the media, the NRM organised an exhibition on Mahatma Gandhi and railways in 2019, exhibited inside one of the old coaches already displayed within the NRM. The media covered it at the national level which resulted in further attracting visitors to the museum.

The NRM has also brought the flavour of Bollywood (a popular term for the Indian film industry) into the NRM. Mural paintings depicting the theme of Bollywood have been created on the walls of NRM. This effort has managed to not only draw the attention of the media but also the attention of Bollywood. This has resulted in on-site photo shoots and other promotional activities, which have been carried out by various Bollywood artists.

It is important that museums understand that they serve a much wider audience than those who physically visit the museum premises. It has become clear that these adopted practices have actually contributed to the growth of the NRM and contributed to the growth of other industries throughout the region.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how technological advancements and social media have increasingly created opportunities to keep people safe, informed, and connected. Online platforms offer us greater convenience and connectivity: staying connected with friends and colleagues worldwide via social media platforms like Facebook has provided us with quick access to information and research. To stay connected and share information, I have been given the responsibility to focus on social media and interaction with members in our Working Group. It includes updating content and curating our Working Group's Facebook page to spread information regarding our activities (such as call for papers/posters, newsletters, interim meeting announcements, and registration). This is an approach that aims to amplify our outreach within our diverse membership and their fields of expertise and interest.

REVIEWS

SEMINAR ON THE MAKING OF CONSERVATION SCIENCE

BY ESTHER VAN DUIJN

This overview also appeared in S. Grow (ed). "News in Conservation, Issue 85, August-September 2021", News in Conservation, vol. 85, London, International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 08/2021.

On the 29th and 30th of April 2021, the Brill-Nuncius seminar on 'The Making of Conservation Science' took place. This seminar was organized by Sven Dupré (Utrecht University, University of Amsterdam) and Esther van Duijn (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam) and funded by the Descartes Centre (Utrecht University) and Brill Publishers.

In May 2019, the symposium 'The Making of Art Expertise - Changing Practices of Art History & Conservation, 1850 – 1950', organized by Sven Dupré, Jenny Boulboulé, Jill Briggeman, Mariana Pinto, and Esther van Duijn, was held in Utrecht and Amsterdam. Its success launched the idea of a follow-up seminar about the period after WWII. To narrow down the scope, we concentrated on the disciplinary formation of conservation science, a field closely connected to the fields of conservation and (technical) art history. While the first half of the twentieth century witnessed the modest beginnings of a science-based conservation practice, the first museum laboratories, and the introduction of new technologies for the investigation and conservation of art (such as X-radiography and UV imagery), the second half of the twentieth century saw the consolidation of the developments that started before WWII with the establishment of international organizations (e.g. IIC and ICOM-CC), journals (e.g. *Studies in Conservation*, *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*), and institutes (e.g. the KIK-IRPA) in which the place of conservation science was negotiated. The seminar considered the post-WWII-period up to the 1970s when some conservation theorists, confronted with the processual and intangible aspects of contemporary art, questioned the dominance and principles of science-based conservation. The focus of the seminar would be on diverse professionals, including scientists and science policy-makers, collectors and conservators, museum professionals and administrators, and the institutional contexts in which these actors operated (e.g. museums, universities, laboratories, conservation studios).

Originally planned for May 2020, the pandemic forced us – like so many others – first to postpone the second seminar to 2021, and then to rethink its structure. We decided to make the seminar hybrid: the international speakers and all participants were virtually present, while the moderators and most commentators, all coming from the Netherlands, came together in a temporary studio in the Utrecht University Hall (Academiegebouw). The seminar was held over two afternoons, instead of one full day, to account for the time difference and include as many international participants as possible.

On Thursday the 29th of April the seminar began with a keynote lecture by Geert Vanpaemel, professor at the University of Leuven, who is specialized in the history of science. His lecture was titled: 'From Rome to Brussels. Science and art in the care of paintings'. It was commented on by Esther van Duijn. The next two lectures dealt with the scientific departments of two large museums, both with a rich history going back to the first half of the twentieth century. Jo Kirby, who herself has worked at the scientific department of the National Gallery London for many years, gave a wonderful lecture titled: 'Science and Conservation at the National Gallery, London: the 1950s to the 1970s'. The commentator for this lecture was Katrien Keune, head of the scientific department of the Rijksmuseum. The third and last presentation of the Thursday afternoon was given by Camille Bourdiel, working at the Centre d'histoire sociale des mondes contemporains (CHS) of the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne: 'The Laboratory of the Louvre museum after World War II: the movement towards universality, 1946-1968'. The commentator for this lecture was René de la Rie, currently professor at the University of Amsterdam, who specialized during his long career in the scientific research of picture varnishes.

On Friday the 30th of April, the first lecture of the afternoon was given by Michael von der Goltz, professor at the University of Hildesheim and conservator of paintings and wooden sculptures. The topic of his lecture was: 'Conservation in the early Federal Republic of Germany - A difficult way to interdisciplinarity'. Commentator on this lecture was Ernst Homburg, emeritus professor at the University of Maastricht, specialized in the history of science and technology. The next lecture was

Andrea Luciani, who had trained as an architect and is now working as senior lecturer in architecture at the Luleå University of Technology. The topic of his lecture – “‘The ideal of the ideal environment’: The influence of climate control on the emergence of preventive conservation theories”, was based on his PhD on the preservation of Architectural Heritage. Bart Ankersmit, working as senior researcher at the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE), commented on this presentation. The third lecture of the afternoon was given by Ron Spronk, professor at the Queen’s University in Kingston and the Radboud University in Nijmegen. Although the topic of his lecture – ‘Infrared reflectography, the first decades’ – fell somewhat outside the time frame that the seminar focused on, the organisers felt it was important to include the history of this innovative imaging technique that has meant so much for the fields of painting conservation and (technical) art history since the 1970s. The commentator for this lecture was Michiel Franken, curator technical documentation at the Netherlands Institute for Art History, or RKD, that – not incidentally – holds the IRR archive of professor van Asperen de Boer, the inventor of the technique. The closing lecture of the seminar was given by Salvador Muñoz-Viñas, professor at the University of Valencia, whose thought-provoking presentation was titled: ‘The role of science in the conservation world: a naïve exploration’. Perhaps equally thought-provoking were the comments given by Hanna Hölling, lecturer at the University College London and Research Professor at Bern University of the Arts. Both provided the seminar a fitting conclusion.

As organisers of a seminar, we can only do so much to make sure it is successful. Much depends on the presenters and, in our specific case, the commentators. I’m so happy that for The Making of Conservation Science our hopes and expectations were fully met, which was even more impressive given the fact that many institutions and archives were still closed in the months prior to the seminar.

Over the coming year, the lectures will be reworked into articles. Until then, the recordings of the seminar can be found [here](#).

ARCHETYPE AND RIJKSMUSEUM PUBLICATION: REMBRANDT CONSERVATION HISTORIES, EDITORS: ESTHER VAN DUIJN AND PETRIA NOBLE

BY ESTHER VAN DUIJN AND PETRIA NOBLE

On the 8th and 9th of November 2019 the Rijksmuseum organized an international symposium on the conservation history of paintings by Rembrandt. For the symposium, a scientific committee consisting of Petria Noble (Rijksmuseum), Esther van Duijn (Rijksmuseum), Gregor Weber (Rijksmuseum), Erma Hermens (Rijksmuseum/UvA), Robert van Langh (Rijksmuseum), Michiel Franken (RKD), Maartje Stols-Witlox (UvA) and Mireille te Marvelde (Frans Hals Museum) invited 24 speakers from 15 major international museums and institutions with large collections of Rembrandt paintings, as well as several other specialists in the field. Eight posters were selected through an open call. The symposium, which was attended by 165 participants from 19 countries around the world, has now resulted in a peer-reviewed publication that contains most of the presentations given at the symposium.

Paintings by Rembrandt, like other important masterpieces in museum collections, often have the dubious honour of having undergone numerous conservation treatments in the past.

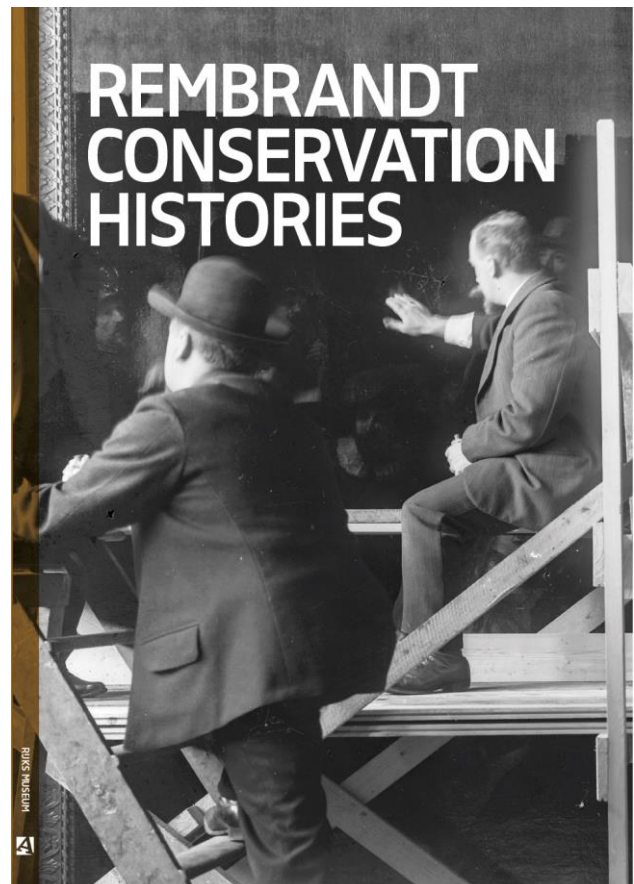


Image provided by Esther van Duijn and Petria Noble

Because of the significance of the paintings, these treatments are generally well documented. For example, ‘The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp’ from the collection of the Mauritshuis in The Hague has undergone twenty-three documented treatments. Meanwhile, there is documentation of well over twenty-five treatments on the Rijksmuseum’s ‘Night Watch’.

Rembrandt’s paintings are found in major collections all over the world. Every country has its own traditions, developments and approaches to conservation and important restorers have played a key role in the treatment and appearance of Rembrandt paintings. In *Rembrandt Conservation Histories*, experts address various aspects relating to the conservation history of paintings by Rembrandt and raise awareness of how the contemporary appearance and condition of these paintings can be explained, in part, by their treatment history.

The publication consists of the following papers:

- Petria Noble: Introduction
- Jørgen Wadum: From ten to zero and now two: the Rembrandts at Statens Museum for Kunst uncovered
- Noémie Étienne: Restoring Rembrandt and the making of art history
- Claire Betelu and Barbara Jouves: The conservation history of the Rembrandt paintings from the Musée du Louvre, 1793–1950
- Irina Sokolova: Brief overview of the conservation history of paintings by Rembrandt and his studio in the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 1760s–2018
- Christoph Schölzel, ‘... judiciously and appropriately made ...’: The restoration of Rembrandt paintings in the Dresden Gemäldegalerie
- Anne Harmssen, Thomas Krämer and Christiane Ehrenforth, Rembrandt re-stretched: 250 years of conservation history at the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Kassel
- Katja Kleinert and Claudia Laurenze-Landsberg: Three examples of far-reaching alterations to Rembrandt works in the Berlin Gemäldegalerie
- Jan Schmidt: Notes on early conservation treatments of the Rembrandt collection at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich
- Sibylle Schmitt: Rembrandt paintings ‘Pettenkofered’
- Thomas Krämer and Monika Kammer: Rembrandt and the ‘X-ray controversy’: historical and contemporary damage examinations of Rembrandt paintings at the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Kassel
- Esther van Duijn: ‘Like a drunkard, the diseased painting craved the regenerating alcohol ...’ The numerous varnish treatments of Rembrandt’s ‘Night Watch’ between 1889 and 1936
- Carol Pottasch, Susan Smelt and Petria Noble: The restoration(s) of Rembrandt’s ‘Saul and David’ between 1898 and 1900
- Michiel Franken: ‘What was the intent of the painter: that is what the restorer thinks about’. Rembrandt and the De Wild family, 1900–1930
- Jeroen Giltaij: New results and facts of three paintings by Rembrandt and his school treated in Rotterdam: ‘The Concord of the State’, ‘Titus at His Desk’ and ‘The Man in a Red Cap’
- Larry Keith: Rembrandt and conservation at the National Gallery, London
- Morwenna Blewett: ‘Dirt in the grooves’ and Rembrandts in London: treatment, documentation, and technical publications in the first half of the 20th century
- Alice Tate-Harte and Allison Goudie: Clouds and cracks: caring for Kenwood’s Rembrandt, 1929–69
- Dorothy Mahon: On the conservation history of Rembrandt paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and The Frick Collection, 1891–2018
- Dina Anchin and Alexandra Libby: Changing tastes, changing treatments: conservation histories of Rembrandt paintings at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
- Yvonne Szafran: Five Rembrandt paintings at the Getty: their conservation histories and a new look at ‘Saint Bartholomew’
- Joyce Hill Stoner: Histories of paintings conservation featuring approaches to the treatment of Rembrandt paintings
- Nadja Garthoff: The Rembrandt Database: a platform for the history of conservation and research on Rembrandt paintings

The collection of papers presented in this publication is unique, because it is the first publication to focus not on the conservation history of a certain period, or on a certain technique or material, but on the conservation history of the paintings of a single artist.

Rembrandt Conservation Histories can be bought on the [Archetype publications website](#), but the papers will also be available open access as PDF in the future.

CONFERENCE REVIEW OF CONSERVATION AND PHILOSOPHY: INTERSECTIONS AND INTERACTIONS

BY BRIAN CASTRIOTA

In November 2020, the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC) hosted a virtual symposium titled ‘Conservation and Philosophy: Intersections and Interactions’. Contributors from around the globe participated in a lively two-day exchange of ideas around the many ways in which philosophy underpins conservation practices, and how we as a field might come to grips with the practical and ethical challenges that we encounter through philosophical reflection and discourse. The many presentations and discussions that followed each session underscored how conservation practitioners are not passive automatons but active agents who play a decisive role in mediating and shaping the material culture we steward, and who engage not only with matter but also ideas, meanings, values, and people. This symposium demonstrated not only the importance but also the practical utility of philosophy and critical theory in our day-to-day decision-making and actions, and made explicit how critical reflections on the frameworks we have constructed to guide our actions are crucial for our practices to remain both relevant and ethical in a world that is in a state of constant flux and transformation.

Several of the contributions explored the function and value of copying and replication; Anthi Soulioti and Maria Charzidaki considered how replicas may function as legitimate manifestations of artworks and the ways in which replicas can preserve certain values, whilst Iryna Somyk-Ponomarenko and Antonina Mykolaiguk explored the value of copying and reconstruction as a means of understanding an object and revealing significances. Andrew Calver examined the curatorial dimension of replicas in relation to conservation ethics, and the risks posed by museums obfuscating the production histories of facsimiles in public displays. In her presentation exploring a “de-extinction” genomic model, Rebecca Gordon proposed how re-enactment and replication of works of art might be understood not as means of copying or cloning but a form of “hybridisation” that recognises the value of past materialisations and at the same time embraces alterity and becoming as virtues.

A number of contributors focused on the concept of authenticity and the ontology of heritage objects, drawing upon discourses from analytic philosophy. Elisa Bernard focused on the ontological status of classical sculptures as copies, and the value of fakes and forgeries as historical documents. Jacob Nadal’s contribution compared philosophical discourses around artwork ontology and preservation frameworks for library and archive materials, and considered the role preservation plays in mediating works of art and their tangible manifestations or instantiations. In my own contribution, I discussed how all heritage objects might be recognised as abstract entities instantiated by one or more concrete objects or events, and how authenticity judgements concern the degree to which a concrete object – like a particular painting, sculpture, installation, or performance – is perceived to embody those properties regarded by an individual as significant or essential.

In a similar vein, Ellie Sweetnam and Jane Henderson probed the situated nature of authenticity judgements and the ways in which conservation “interventions hold the power to change the alignment and the identity of the object”. They considered how a hot pink gap fill may not only be as justified as a beige fill, but may in some respects be more justified, with the conservator’s agency and actions rendered explicitly visible, further undoing the myth of the conservator’s supposed neutrality. Jonathan Ashley Smith’s contribution highlighted the situated nature of conservation ethics, which he argued are not fixed and eternal principles but subject to history, geography, fashion, and whim. Using the analogy of swear words – whose use we individually justify in specific contexts and settings – Ashley Smith reiterated his call for conservators to develop their own personalised, bespoke codes of ethics.

No doubt a reflection of the social upheaval prompted by the pandemic and glaring acts of violence and injustice exposed over the preceding months, many contributions also emphasised the urgency of people-centred approaches in conservation. Lisa Giombini problematised the notion of “respect” that is often invoked in conservation discourses; given how the original state of an object is irrecoverable or a fantasy, Giombini considered how it is in fact the “web of collective meanings”, values, and significance associated with a building or other heritage object that conservation interventions should be respecting. “Respect,” she argued, “refers back ultimately to people, for it is not the objects that we are serving through reconstruction; rather, it is the subjects.” Using frameworks from new materialism and feminist epistemologies, Hélia Marçal’s presentation explored the liminal nature of heritage objects, which exist in states of indeterminacy and becoming, and perpetually oscillate within various spheres of use, function, and value. Marçal emphasised the ethical imperative to both recognise the in-betweenness of cultural heritage objects as situated entities, and action people-centred approaches in conservation practices. Kate Clark similarly examined conservation’s entanglement with social and political forces, and the urgency — as a matter of ethics — to integrate values-based approaches to heritage conservation. While conservation interventions have long been recognised as value-driven actions, Clark argued that in the face of ongoing social injustices we can no longer maintain a false veil or neutrality over our actions (or inactions), and must foreground “understanding what matters and why” in our conservation decision-making and interventions, alongside technical studies.

As we can see, the contributors to this symposium brought together a variety of theoretical and philosophical discourses, each of which highlighted the value of critical reflection on our approaches and methodologies through diverse epistemologies. Collectively, these contributions demonstrated the necessity for conservation practitioners to have both a knowledge of historical and contemporary philosophical debates and concepts, and an ability to think critically about — and debate — our ethical remits and frameworks for practice.

A number of papers from the symposium have been and will be published in a forthcoming special issue of [Studies of Conservation](#).

A SUMMARY OF THE NORDIC CENTRE FOR RESTORATION IN FLORENCE (1967-70)

BY ERLING S. SKAUG

The disastrous flood of Florence in November 1966 was the worst in the city’s history, causing excessive damage to works of art, books, archival material and buildings. As soon as the waters receded, it became evident that the enormous task of conservation and restoration exceeded local capacity and could only be undertaken with additional assistance from abroad. This resulted in the largest collaborative international conservation response in history and considerable funding was raised by various organisations throughout the international community.

With the understanding that preserving the cultural heritage of Florence was a global responsibility, the idea to create a Nordic rescue project was formulated. Three Nordic envoys arrived Florence soon after the flood receded with the mission of setting up communication with the city’s authorities and evaluating Florence’s need for assistance.



*Image retrieved from the manuscript’s open access page.
Image by the Nordic Centre for Restoration in Florence.*

In February 1967, with government support, the Nordic Centre for Restoration in Florence was created, consisting of representatives from museums, libraries and ministries throughout Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. By summer 1967, a three-year project commenced with the plan to donate all technical equipment to the city upon completion of the project.

While the Nordic Center for Restoration maintained its own administration and secretariat, it operated under local supervision and in continuous dialogue with local authorities. Care was taken to use methods and materials that follow local traditions. Inevitably, this encounter between North European and Italian restoration professionals resulted in a fruitful exchange. In the wake of the post-flood works a scientific laboratory was established in Florence, publications appeared in a number and quality unprecedented in Italy, and a new framework for the education of restorers was created.

Five years ago, on the 50th anniversary of the flood, surviving individuals who had participated in the restoration efforts were encouraged to reconstruct and share our recollections of the work undertaken by the Nordic Centre for Restoration in Florence. I visited Florence just after the flood, and was in charge of the Nordic project for one of its three years. Although our reports and documentation appeared to have been mislaid by the Danish Ministry of Culture, and much of the materials that were left in Florence for the Soprintendenza's archives were similarly difficult to trace, I have tried to reconstruct the events of 1967 and tell the story in this 2016 publication. A number of selected case studies, including the transfer of panel paintings, have also been described in detail. The manuscript is now available online where it can be accessed free of charge [here](#).

LOOKING BACK AT THE 19TH ICOM-CC'S TRIENNIAL CONFERENCE THEORY, HISTORY, AND ETHICS OF CONSERVATION SESSION

BY HÉLIA MARÇAL

After a year filled with so many challenges and uncertainty, it was an absolute pleasure to attend the 19th ICOM-CC's Triennial Conference, which took place as an online event across various time zones, organised by our colleagues in Beijing.

The session dedicated to the Theory, History, and Ethics of Conservation Working Group took place on the third day of the event – Wednesday, 19th of May 2021. It was a full day of compelling and innovative presentations and discussions on a wide variety of contemporary issues, all of them relevant to various conservation specialities.

The session was divided into three panels: the first panel focused on theoretical and ethical approaches to conservation and its aims, the second panel looked at historical perspectives in the conservation of painted surfaces, and the third panel explored transdisciplinary approaches and frameworks for rethinking conservation.

The first panel started with Joel Taylor, who presented on the concept of future generations, continuing ideas that he started developing within the context of this Working Group [in 2013](#). In this paper, Taylor expands on the idea of how to define the future generation, providing a thought-provoking argument that reconciles the aims of conservation in relation to the past. The panel continued with a presentation by Muriel Verbeeck surrounding the notion of open work (a notion first rehearsed by Umberto Eco), revitalising the debate around the concept of authenticity in context. This contribution was complemented by that of Claudine Houbart (and Verbeeck), in which the concept of antifragility operated through that of the aims of conservation (where antifragility was not a measure of resilience, but as a sustainable reworking of the parameters that define what makes something fragile or not) was discussed. The panel ended with a contribution by Hélia Marçal, who spoke on the nature of conservation and how the practice is associated with other forms of knowledge-making, namely those of categorisation.

The second panel introduced an invigorating discussion on a varnishing controversy of paintings by Edvard Munch, headed by Thierry Ford, who brought together various sources to discuss a series of episodes in the history of these paintings. The session continued with a contribution by Noelle L.W. Streeton, who presented a study on the practice of paintings conservation in Norway in the 1960s. Streeton and co-authors developed a compelling argument on the reception of critical

perspectives by the Norwegian conservator Bjørn Kaland (1923–2013), while undertaking treatment of a crucial object. Studies like this bridge a gap in relevant literature and, in the case of this panel, introduced important discussions that were developed further by the presentations that followed. Iwataro Oka provided a pioneering review of the history of paintings conservation techniques in Japan, bringing together discussions that, again, not so often are seen in the field. Finally, Esther van Duijn provided a presentation that described the materials and methods used during the 1945–47 treatment of *The Night Watch* by Rembrandt.

In the third panel, Caitlin O’Grady provided a critical reflection of three concepts - time, expertise, and perspective – and how they impact conservation decision-making. On this topic of different approaches (or perspectives) to decision-making, Lena Porsmo Stoveland discussed the making of mock-ups in conservation research. In developing a methodology grounded on the notion of perspective, Stoveland demonstrated the importance of understanding one’s position when practising conservation. NagmEldeen Hamza also examined methodology, specifically in terms of developing an historical analysis of past treatments. This contribution addresses the (epistemological) context in which conservation takes place, while bringing a wealth of examples to the discussion. The panel (and the session) concluded with Joshua Hill, who prompted the audience to interrogate ways to promote intervention vigilance as a way to crowdsource the conservation community’s knowledge and experiences with materials and techniques.

The full papers (and posters) presented in this session can be found at the [ICOM-CC Publications Online Website](#).

As is to be expected with any Triennial Conference, the conference also allowed the Working Group to host a planning session with members and delegates. We had a very well-attended planning session on Friday, 21st May 2021, where we presented our Triennial Programme and explored, together with the attendees, specific areas of interest for the current triennium.

One of the topics raised by several people in the group attending the Planning Session related to terminology - not only in terms of how terminology and concepts in conservation theory and practice translate in various contexts, but also in how the field has experienced several attempts in creating glossaries and terminologies, as well as their historical and practical significance in the present. It was noted that a historical study on the evolution of terms could be developed in tandem with a critical reflection on concepts that underpin our practice and their context-specificity. This is a topic that could be further explored across various Working Groups and ICOM International Committees, and we are now in the process of reaching out to other Working Groups to gauge interest in pursuing this topic as a joint undertaking. Another important contribution noted that it would be important to understand how conservation is perceived by various professional groups and disciplines outside the field and discipline. There was consensus that this would be an important discussion to have, particularly with the intent of understanding how to facilitate partnerships and communication in conservation. We are keen to explore this topic within this Working Group and are also looking for interested members who would like to collaborate with us in creating a forum for this discussion.

ESSAYS

ARE WE DECOLONIZED YET?

BY AYESHA FUENTES

At the beginning of this year, with a disorienting surplus of time on my hands, I decided to attend every session on decolonization, equity, inclusion and/or social justice in museums and conservation practice to which I had digital access. I didn't make it six weeks before I was overwhelmed with webinars, informational resources, statements and toolkits. From a variety of conservation professionals, student groups, museum associations, critical heritage study networks to social media platforms, there have possibly never been so many ways to define, address and critically engage with entrenched and problematic histories, methods, and exclusions evident in our field, including its legacies of colonial administration and knowledge production, systemic eurocentrism and structural inequities in our institutions.

And yet, despite this wealth of materials and initiatives, the results of this process remain elusive. In fact, in many of these sessions I found myself wondering what a successfully decolonized conservation practice looks like: is it diverse representation and inclusive decision-making at all levels of management? Is it the revision of our ethical codes and guidelines? Is it the integration of intangible cultural practices into collections care, or the facilitation of increased access to collections for historically marginalized groups? Is it an emphasis on repatriation? It seems at each session or meeting, the term and its methods need to be defined as specific to the forum as well as its agents or stakeholders.

However, the mobility of decolonization as a concept is one of its greatest strengths: much of its work is about facilitating self-definition through decentralization and an appreciation of the complexity of our task and identities as conservators and material custodians. In the sessions I've attended (so far) I've seen the decolonization of conservation addressed in relation to racial justice and social change; neurodiversity and access; working conditions and hiring practices; corrective pathways for the displacement or delocalization of materials under colonial administration (both historic and present); sustainability and climate emergency response; and by questioning the "universal museum" and/or scientific materialism as a unique product of European rationalism and the authoritative arena for conservation practice.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that *decolonization* — like social justice and community engagement — is not a new concept or field of enquiry within conservation, but rather an innovative use of the term shaped by this particular moment in our connectivity and the transparency and empowerment it enables. However, this is an on-going project that requires collective action at both the personal and professional level: it requires each of us to invest in cultivating and implementing anti-colonial thinking. Furthermore, it is worth remembering that the legacy of decolonization is often a volatile process of political upheaval and social change born of a struggle for autonomy and self-determination; it has never been a purely intellectual exercise.

In terms of the utility of this effort to conservation practice, I find myself thinking about new, socially motivated ways to re-imagine and re-prioritize our work as conservators, technical historians, and educators: What if, for example, our main purpose was not to protect objects by attempting to resist entropy, but rather to facilitate their access to communities for material-based learning? If our decision-making processes and risk assessments relied on a variety of material knowledge traditions and value systems, how would we record them and make them transparent? What if working artists, preparators, interns, cleaners, students, gallery attendants, and technicians are all recognized and valued as conservation practitioners? What if conservation is not the invention of museums as a product of the European Enlightenment, but rather an interdisciplinary practice shaped by an historically realized expression of material care and knowledge exchange? What if there are an infinite number of ways to act or be trained as a conservator?

In conclusion, and to answer my own (rhetorical) question: no, I do not believe that we as a profession are decolonized and we will not be as long as we find ourselves searching for results that might be recognized as a personal or institutional achievement. No one will receive a certificate at the completion of any given workshop or meeting that will unequivocally

state that they are no longer the product or agent of colonial mindsets or power structures. This is an evolving problem in which each of us can potentially function as one part of the solution if we show up, learn and — rather than anticipate the validation of our efforts — apply ourselves as individuals to our own locally-defined and collective goals of decolonization through an ongoing critical engagement with our methods, vocabularies, practices, and inherited knowledge.

To that end, here are a few readings and resources that have facilitated my own journey as a conservator and educator, though I hope you'll each add to this list with what you find is most relevant to your own communities and languages:

[Foundation for Advancement in Conservation webinar series on social justice](#)

[Museums Association "Decolonising Museums" reading list](#)

[Museum Ethnographers Group "Repatriation Resource"](#)

[University College London's conference on Heritage, Participation, Performativity, Care](#)

[Precarious Workers Brigade](#), resources for arts interns and cultural workers

And for those of you who identify as POCs and would enjoy some solidarity in this very visible moment, check out [the Museum Detox network](#).¹

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¹ Editor's Note: POC is commonly used to refer to 'people of colour.'



Image: NICAS Colloquium. ©Louise Wijnberg

RESEARCH PROJECTS

INTERVIEWS IN CONSERVATION RESEARCH

BY SANNEKE STIGTER

Interviews in Conservation Research is a joint research project undertaken by the University of Amsterdam (UvA), Rijksmuseum, and the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE), funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) within the Creative Industry programme Knowledge Innovation Mapping (KIEM) and has been completed last year. It has paved the way for follow-up projects, such as *Collection Interviews* (RCE) and *Artwork Biographies and Institutional Memory (Art Bios In Me)* (UvA) in collaboration with the Kröller-Müller Museum and funded by the Netherlands Institute for Conservation+Art+Science (NICAS). These projects and collaborations are all part of the wider *Interviews in Conservation Initiative*, an UvA based, non-funded initiative in collaboration with several researchers, museums and institutes in the Netherlands. They all aim to advance working with interviews for conservation research in an effective and sustainable way.

Most interviews for research into artworks are conducted with people playing an important role in the lives of specific artworks, for instance on the occasion of an exhibition, an acquisition or to inform conservation, varying from one to three interviews per subject at the most. This is unique and valuable source material, which requires more attention to disclose for effective use than the often understaffed museums can provide for. A quick and efficient way to archive orally retrieved information would be highly beneficial to support the workflow in museums and to facilitate open science for academia.

For the *Interviews in Conservation Research* project, various expert meetings and network sessions have been organized to seek improvement and to establish what is needed to proceed with follow-up research to design and build the best infrastructure available for museums and institutions working with oral history methods to assess their art collections. We engaged the national facilities for sustainable archiving of research data, Data Archiving Network Services (DANS) of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). Their infrastructure and workflow has been designed for data managers and traditional oral history projects including many interviews on a specific theme, rather than one or two as is more common in conservation research, and where generally no data-managers are available. Despite the difficulties encountered, it was still confirmed by all members of our last expert meeting that DANS is the right place for oral history material to be stored for the long-term to disclose it for research purposes in the Netherlands.

With a total of over 30 datasets safely stored with DANS, and more underway, international presentations and a supportive network to continue and expand the research infrastructure, the project can be considered successful. It led to the launch of a new Oral History series in *KM*, a Dutch professional quarterly journal on the use of materials in works of art and design. In addition, the FAIC Oral History Project has included the Dutch conservator interviews that have been conducted and/or archived as part of the project.

A prolonged co-operation with the project partners is supported in a newly established network including that includes the required technical expertise. The [Interviews in Conservation Initiative](#) is ongoing, as interviews in conservation research are conducted every day to deepen our insight into our cultural heritage and broaden our perspective. For information and research output, visit the *Interviews in Conservation Research* project webpage and the [Interviews in Conservation Research data collection](#).

In the same line, a major grant was awarded to pursue our plans for structural funding *with Oral History – Stories at the Museum around Artworks* (OH-SMART), starting with a first three year funding through The Platform Digital Infrastructure SSH. For more on this new project, see [this](#) announcement.



Image: Cassette tapes. ©Esther van Duijn

