



# *Newsletter*

Wood, Furniture, and Lacquer Working Group  
Issue May 2021, Triennium 2020-2023

ICOM-CC

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International council  
of museums – committee  
for conservation

# Contents

- 3**      **Introduction**
- 5**      **Agenda**
- 6**      **Top 3 Pandemic Online Experiences**
- 7**      **Projects**
- 11**     **Publications & Reviews**
- 12**     **Imprint**

*Cover Image:* Bernard II van Risenburgh (French, after 1696 - about 1766, master before 1730)  
*Commode*, about 1737, panels of Japanese lacquer on a coniferous substrate, and painted with European lacquer; 65.DA.4  
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

**Editors:** Stephanie Auffret, Jan Dorscheid

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ISSN: 2708-6690

# Introduction

Dear members,

Welcome to our first Newsletter for the triennium 2020-2023! The least we can say is that this triennium started in the most uncommon and challenging conditions... I am most grateful to the ones of you who were able to continue their membership within ICOM and more specifically our Working Group, while my sympathy goes to the ones who could not renew it as a result of the effects of the pandemic. It has been a deeply unsettling year, all of us having to respond to a variety of challenges, personal and professional.

I would like to start by thanking my wonderful group of Assistant Coordinators, some who were already part of the team during the last triennium, others who joined us last September, bringing new perspectives and energy to our Working Group. Former Assistant Coordinators (ACOs) who agreed to continue in their role include Jan Dorscheid (Netherlands), who kindly compiled this Newsletter, Stéphanie Courtier (France), João Petisca (Portugal); new ACOs are Genevieve Bieniosek (USA), Cécilia Gauvin (France) and Jing Han (China). While Genevieve brings additional expertise in furniture conservation, Cécilia and Jing bring to us their perspective as conservation scientists, covering wood and Asian lacquer. All ACOs are listed at the end of this Newsletter, with their affiliations and area of specialty. I am delighted to have such an international and diverse group.

Since the beginning of this triennium, we have worked on a program for our group, based on a survey sent out last fall, a planning meeting and individual conversations

with members. The triennial programme is available through this link: <http://www.icom-cc.org/167/Triennial%20programme/>

Both survey and discussions with members encouraged to combine virtual and in-person events for our group, allowing for broader access and potentially more opportunities to interact. As outlined in the triennial programme, we are considering virtual events on Asian lacquer (with the Scientific Research Working Group of ICOM-CC), musical instruments (with CIMCIM, the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Instruments and Music), and cleaning of wooden gilded surfaces; this last topic was suggested for a virtual session with practical demonstrations and discussions around different practices. We will keep you updated on progress made by e-mail and Newsletter. We are also exploring the possibility of an in-person Interim Meeting in 2022, on the theme of the conservation of wooden decorative surfaces. Contents would include consolidation and cleaning approaches of gilded, lacquer and polychrome wooden surfaces, as well as wood science. The latter aims to focus on the understanding of wood behavior and how it impacts degradation of the surface, as well as consolidation of the substrate. It is envisioned to incorporate discussions on ethical issues involved in treatment decision-making, reflect on ways to facilitate dialogue between conservators and other stakeholders, discuss education needs/offerings, as well as treatment approaches.

And of course, we will organize the Wood, Furniture and Lacquer Working Group session at the 20th ICOM-CC Triennial Conference in 2023.

I will let you look at the full program and am hoping that you will reach out to contribute to any topic listed as well as new ideas you would like to see the group turn its attention to.

In the meantime, I hope many of you will be able to attend the 19<sup>th</sup> ICOM-CC Triennial Conference, focused on the theme "Transcending Boundaries: Integrated Approaches to Conservation": <https://www.icom-cc2021.org/theme.aspx>. Our Working Group session is on Monday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, and our Planning Session (formerly Business Meeting) is on Thursday, May 20<sup>th</sup>. Please see the full program here: <https://www.icom-cc2021.org/preliminaryprogram.aspx>. Click on each day to get the program for that specific day.

We have a very rich program with 10 papers and 7 posters, covering a wide range of topics, with a high number of contributions on Asian and non-Asian lacquer, which is not surprising as the conference was supposed to take place in China...

Presentations had to be pre-recorded but we will have 3 Q&A sessions during our Monday session (May 17<sup>th</sup>), and more opportunities to exchange during our Planning Session on Thursday (May 20<sup>th</sup>). Please join us to demonstrate your appreciation to all the authors who worked hard to offer this rich program, despite changing conditions and the additional work it generated, for both authors and organizers.

Registered participants will be able to access presentations and posters outside of the live sessions; and papers and posters can be downloaded from the conference website.

With again many thanks to our team of Assistant Coordinators and to all of our members to make this group a vibrant one! Very best wishes,

Stéphanie Auffret  
*Coordinator*  
Wood, Furniture, and Lacquer Working Group



# Agenda

**17-21 May 2021**

**19<sup>th</sup> ICOM-CC Triennial Conference in Beijing** (*virtual*)

The Wood, Furniture and Lacquer Working Group session takes place Monday, April 17, planning session Thursday, May 20

Program and registration: <https://www.icom-cc2021.org/>

**3 May - 24 June 2021**

**AIC/SPNHC Joint Virtual Annual Meeting: Transform 2021** (*virtual*)

May 3-7 (Pre-sessions and Workshops), May 10 to June 24, (Main Conference)

Program and registration: <https://flame.firebird.systems/AIC/AIC2021/MyProgrammes#Programme.ItemPage.101.0>

Registration: <https://www.culturalheritage.org/events/annual-meeting/current-meeting>

**17 – 20 Sep. 2021**

**Malmstens Alumni Symposium: Woodworking Tools & Techniques - Past, Present & Future** (*in-person*)

Program and registration: <https://www.malmstensalumni.com/upcoming-symposium>

**4 – 5 Nov. 2021**

**RECH6 - International Meeting on Retouching of Cultural Heritage** (*virtual*)

Call for abstracts, deadline June (<http://rechgroup.pt/rech6.html>)

**17 – 19 Nov. 2021**

**10<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the GDR Sciences du Bois** (*in-person*)  
Montpellier, France.

Program and registration: <https://gdr-bois-2021.sciencesconf.org/>

**Postponed**

**Ebenist: Louis, Louis, Louis! Origins, flourishing and spread of an international furniture style** (*in-person*)

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Program: <https://ebenist.org/coming-symposium/>

# Top 3 Pandemic Online Experiences

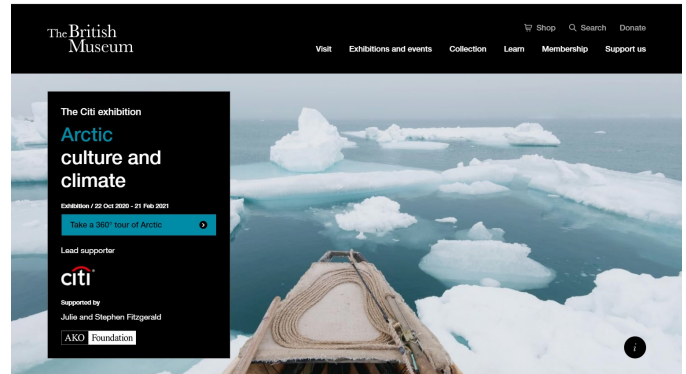
Besides the many difficulties that many of us were facing perhaps one of the noteworthy developments for the better is the whole world getting even closer together digitally. We all experienced yet another virtual meeting and were happy many postponed conference could at least take place online. And yet another facet of it are the emerging online experiences making exhibitions accessible for anyone across the globe. We have picked our favorite three:

## Arctic: Culture and Climate

at the British Museum, London

The British Museum has created a rich and immersive exhibition online where one can enjoy a virtual self-guided tour experiencing ancient objects revealing the resourcefulness of Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/arctic-culture-and-climate>

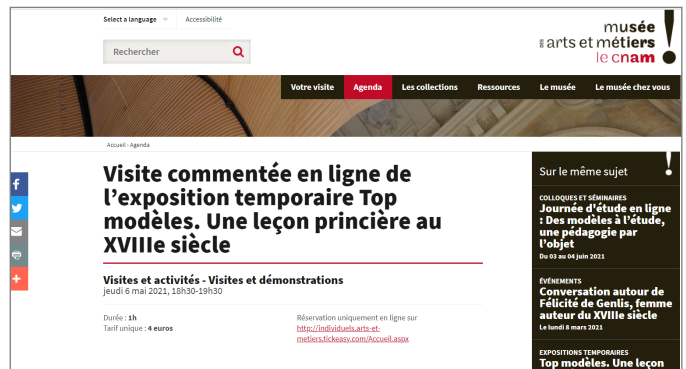


## Top modèles. Une leçon princière au XVIIIe siècle

at the Musée des Arts et Métiers, Paris

The Musée des Arts et Métiers has created the varied and rich "Online guided tour of the temporary exhibition "Top modèles. A princely lesson in the 18th century" including a lovely scaled carpenter workshop.

<https://www.arts-et-metiers.net/musee/visite-commentee-en-ligne-de-lexposition-temporaire-top-modeles-une-lecon-princiere-au-xviii>



## Rijksmuseum Unlocked: A bureau full of secrets

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has launched several wonderful short videos in the series "Rijksmuseum Unlocked" unravelling many secrets and telling the stories behind individual objects. "A Desk Full of Secrets" is featuring the hidden compartments of the exuberant Walderdorff bureau made by the most famous German cabinetmaker of his time, Abraham Roentgen.

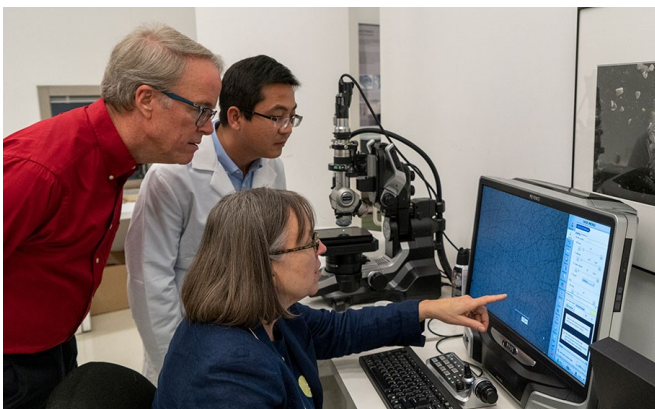
<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/stories/rijksmuseum-unlocked/story/bureau-vol-geheimen>



# Projects

## Surface changes of Asian lacquer during artificial ageing: A systematic study on the influence of different ingredients

Asian lacquer has a long history of application as a decorative and durable coating. During its usage, exhibition and storage, light is one of the most damaging factors. With long-term light exposure and changes in humidity, the lacquer polymer breaks down, accompanied by a series of physical, chemical and mechanical changes. Conservators have noticed that how a lacquer coating ages and the extent of aging are both closely related to its formulation. Based on a pioneer research in 2013/14 by Marianne Webb, a specialist in the conservation of Asian lacquer, with support from a lacquer research team at the Getty Conservation Institute, a further collaborative research by the two parties was launched in 2016, aiming at systematically studying the influence of different ingredients on the aging of Asian lacquer.



Michael Schilling, Xinying Hao and Marianne Webb examining the surface of an artificially-aged lacquer board with Keyence microscope.  
© 2019 J. Paul Getty Trust

Formulations for reference sample boards were specifically designed so the research team could examine the effect of individual ingredients. Three lacquer tree saps, namely urushi, laccol, and thitsi, different drying oils, pigments and resins were selected. The lacquer boards were step-aged in an Atlas Weather-Ometer (with special protective measures against micro water droplets in the aging chamber), plus 12 weeks of cycling between high and low relative humidity.

ty.

Surface appearance and morphology changes caused by the artificial aging were investigated by visual observation, visible photography, optical measurements and microscopy. The use of Rhopoint IQ for optical measurements was explored, including the measurement of gloss at 20°, 60° and 85°, haze, RIQ (Reflected Image Quality) and RSpec (Peak Specular Reflectance). The measurement of blanching of the aged surfaces and the causes of blanching were discussed. Keyence digital microscope enabled closer examination of surface morphology, and additional lighting and magnifications available allowed for better observation of the surfaces. Research results showed that surface appearance changes generally included increase in transparency, color changes, gloss loss and blanching; while surface morphology changes mainly included increases in roughness and waviness. The ingredients did play a key role in the changes in surface appearance and morphology during lacquer aging. The extents of changes affected by the individual ingredients were summarized and compared. The mechanisms of these influences were tentatively explained.

Additionally, pH and conductivity of the aged lacquer surfaces were studied. How different methods and parameters of extraction and measurement can affect the readings was innovatively explored. The relationship between pH readings, lacquer formulation and preservation state of lacquer was also clarified. Moreover, the color of the water extracts from the aged lacquer surfaces was examined together with the pH and conductivity readings and analytical results by gas chromatography – mass spectrometry (GC-MS) of the lacquer samples to find out influential factors on the color depth of the water extracts.

The research results not only promoted the knowledge of the influence of the different ingredients on the aging of Asian lacquer, but also

contribute to better strategies of exhibition, preservation and conservation of art objects



Visible photos of artificially-aged transparent laccol (left) and black urushi with linseed oil (right). The time of exposure in the Weather-Ometer was noted on each section. The four edges of each board were covered from light during WOM exposure. Marks on the right of each board were left during pH measurements.

© 2019 J. Paul Getty Trust

with Asian lacquer surfaces.

*Bio:* Jing Han received her bachelor's and master's degrees in conservation science from the School of Archaeology and Museology at Peking University, and her Ph.D. in art history from the Center for Textile Conservation and Technical Art History at the University of Glasgow. She worked as a Professional Fellow at the Getty Conservation Institute from 2017 to 2020, doing research on the aging and conservation of Asian lacquer surfaces. She will start working as an assistant research fellow at Shanghai University shortly on the research of historical organic materials.

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## Looking into Rijksmuseum's Maritime Collection: Provenance and Function of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Half Hull Models

The maritime collection of the Rijksmuseum contains around 1800 navy related models, including around 300 half hull models. Little is known about the function of these half models, their provenance and date of production. The half model research intends to illustrate how systematic technical research can contribute to the knowledge about half models.

A half model is a scale model from the starboard or portside half of a ship hull, mounted on a wooden backboard. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century half models were produced on ship wharfs along the Dutch coast and rivers. They are constructed in wood, painted and finished with a transparent varnish. Sometimes a label is attached to the backboard, with information on the scale, name and provenance of the model. Often the ink with which this information is written has degraded and the information is hard to read.



NG-MC-269, h 37 cm, w 126 cm, d 16,5 cm, collection Rijksmuseum, © Rijksmuseum

The function of half models is ambiguous. It is assumed that they played a role in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch shipbuilding industry, but what role exactly is not defined. The production of half models flourished in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, half a century after ship design drawings were introduced in the Netherlands. That indicates they were not crucial for the design process. What was their use? They may have been used as demonstration models or merely as



show pieces. Also, they could have been used to check 2D drawings in a 3D model, or to visualize the needed materials for planking. Finally, they could have been used as archival pieces.

The aim of the half-model research is to gain insight in the function, provenance and dating of the half models. By means of visual analysis, X-radiography and tool trace research, the production process is studied. Were the models build after drawings or were the drawings made after the models? Dendrochronological research may lead to more accurate dating of the models. By clustering the half models according to stylistic features, materials and tool traces, as well as dendrochronological data, they may be attributed to specific ship wharfs.

In some cases this may help to connect the half models to the actual ships built in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. In a future edition we hope to share the results of this fascinating research.

*Bio:* Tirza Mol has been assistant conservator of Ship- and Scale-models and Furniture at the Rijksmuseum since 2017. After completing a Master degree in psychology at the University of Amsterdam in 1994, Tirza Mol started a more practical study in cabinet making and boatbuilding. Her examen piece was a self-constructed Venetian gondola. After several years of work as a gondolier, cabinet maker and art-handler Tirza decided to join both practical and academical skills. In 2012 she started her studies in conservation at the University of Antwerp. During her bachelor and master she interned in the Kröller-Müller Museum and Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Email: T.Mol@rijksmuseum.nl

### **SFIIC Gilding group (French Section of the IIC)**

The Gilding group of the French Section of the International Institute of Conservation was created in 2017 by Stéphanie Courtier. It is comprised of 7 coordinators and brings together people with a common interest: metallic leaves

or powders on any support.

The members of this group are actors in charge of French cultural heritage, such as gilders, conservators, scientists, curators, educators, experts, etc...

Annual meetings are organized in order to exchange on treatment protocols and issues, treatment techniques/methods and research. These meetings aim to discuss the different approaches and experiences of professionals working with gilded surfaces on different substrates (wood, stone, metal, textile, terra-cotta, ivory, enamel, leather, glass) and within various specialties (decorative arts, sculptures, works of paper, painted surfaces, archaeological objects).

Several aspect are addressed, including, materiality, application techniques, restauration and conservation, with the aim to gather and disseminate the current knowledge on the topic, the arising of common issues and the development of a multidisciplinary network focused on a topic widely encountered in cultural heritage: gilding, gold leaf and gold powder.



Link to the latest virtual meeting, which took place on April 1st 2021, around the theme of "Gilding deciphered by analysis":

[https://sfiic.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Programme-Colloque-SFIIC-Dorure\\_01-avril-2021-28-03-211.pdf](https://sfiic.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Programme-Colloque-SFIIC-Dorure_01-avril-2021-28-03-211.pdf)

## ConNext Student Conference 2021

ConNext Student Conference is an online student conference organised by the University of Antwerp and the University of Amsterdam in collaboration with Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences (CICS) of the TH Köln, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Hildesheim (HAWK), the University of Applied Sciences Potsdam (FHP) and the University of Lincoln.

ConNext, or 'Conservation by the Next Generation', provides Bachelor, Master, PhD students and recent graduates from around the world an international platform to communicate their work and connect with one another. Students from all levels are encouraged to share their (ongoing) research, case studies and practical work. For most students this will be their first real conference experience; hence ConNext ensures an informal and friendly setting with room for error.

Nevertheless, ConNext follows a traditional conference trajectory with strict guidelines and deadlines, starting with a call for abstracts. Next, a thorough reviewing process by the organising committee provides individual feedback on the students' submitted abstracts. In turn, the reviewing process leads up to a selection of fifteen-minute paper presentations or five-minute poster pitches. The selected and revised abstracts are then published in the ConNext Book of Abstracts ([see ConNext 2021 Book of Abstracts here](#)).

For its first edition, we selected 30 abstracts discussing a wide variety of subjects, ranging from traditional decorative finishing materials and techniques to state-of-the-art imaging, the cleaning of gilding and the conservation of plastics.

ConNext organised five thematic two-hour evening sessions of paper presentations and poster pitches ([see the entire past programme here](#)). An inspiring twenty-minute keynote pa-

per from an established conservator opened each session:

**Session 1 - 'Surfaces and Coatings'** (12 April 2021): Shayne Rivers (West Dean College, UK);

**Session 2 - 'Dealing with the Elements'** (19 April 2021): Adrian Smith (former conservator Windsor Castle, Royal collection trust, UK);

**Session 3 - 'State of the Art'** (26 April 2021): Arlen Heginbotham (J. Paul Getty Museum, LA, US);

**Session 4 - 'Out of the Ordinary'** (3 May 2021): Tim Bechtold (Head of Conservation of the Neue Sammlung, International Design Museum Munich);

**Session 5 - 'Musical Instruments'** (10 May 2021): Friedemann Hellwig (Musical Instrument Conservator, Hamburg).

ConNext managed to connect students and alumni, yet also promoted networking with the teaching and research staff of the organising institutes. It bridged the different partner institutes, which might open up new collaborative research and educational initiatives, like this, in the future.

With its 343 registered participants from 34 different educational and research institutes of 12 different countries, the first ConNext 2021 edition is considered a success.

Other conservation programmes that might be interested are very welcome to join us in organising our next ConNext edition in 2022. We also invite and encourage other specialisations to adopt the concept. Therefore, we will be organising an online information event next August for all who might be interested. Please get in touch with the ConNext organisers' Vincent Cattersel and Sophie Glerum ([vincent.cattersel@uantwerpen.be](mailto:vincent.cattersel@uantwerpen.be) ; [s.a.glerum@uva.nl](mailto:s.a.glerum@uva.nl)), to inquire for more information or future participation.

# Publications and Reviews

## **The Silver Bed of the Dukes of Cadaval at the National Palace of Sintra**

The Cadaval bed is a remarkable piece of furniture and a Portuguese national treasure. It was acquired by Parques de Sintra in 2016 and is now in the exhibition at the Palácio Nacional de Sintra. This 17th-century bed is 2.96 meters high, 2.1 meters wide, and 2.32 meters long and has a wooden structure mostly decorated with silver-alloy and copper-alloy pieces. The bed belonged to the Cadaval family and the only similar example of Portuguese origin known is part of the treasure of the Basilica of Santa Maria of Elche, Spain. Due to the unique characteristics of this piece of furniture, and taking the opportunity provided by its conservation treatment, a material and technological study was conducted to identify the materials used and understand the object's production and decoration techniques. In depth studies and research were conducted by different scholars to understand the history and use, the time period, and the stylistic characteristics of the Cadaval bed. A compilation of all the studies developed was published by Parques de Sintra in the third issue of the monograph series "Collections In Focus" and is available in English here:

<https://www.parquesdesintra.pt/en/learn-at-home/digital-editions-and-articles/collections-in-focus-digital-editions/the-silver-bed-of-the-dukes-of-cadaval/>

## **French Rococo *Ébénisterie* in The J. Paul Getty Museum**

Luxurious pieces of furniture were produced by master craftsmen in eighteenth-century Paris for the French Royal family and aristocracy. The J. Paul Getty Museum houses a distinguished collection of twenty-eight pieces of Rococo *ébénisterie* furniture dating from 1735 to 1760 including pieces by Bernard van Risenburgh II, Jaques Dubois, and Jean François Oeben. In the recently published catalogue the Museum presents these

extraordinary works including thorough curatorial and conservation analysis. An in depth study of every individual piece reveals hidden aspects of these sophisticated pieces of furniture.

<https://www.getty.edu/publications/rococo/>

## **Le mobilier Boulle - Boulle furniture**

A special issue of *Technè* (n° 49, 2020) is dedicated to Boulle furniture and the associated project of the research and conservation of the Louvre's Boulle furniture collections. An overview is given over the history of collections and conservation practices in an international context, followed by current and recent case studies in various institutions. Technical analysis of the materials and challenges typically encountered are followed by a summary of related treatment projects and innovations conducted at the C2RMF. The contributions are in French or English.

<https://c2rmf.fr/diffuser/techne/techne-ndeg49>

## **American Furniture, 1650–1840: Highlights from the Philadelphia Museum of Art**

One of the finest collections of American Furniture by artisans from Philadelphia and southeastern Pennsylvania are housed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In this recent publication stylistic developments influenced by the availability of Caribbean mahogany and European imports are showcased. This volume provides an important resource for scholars of American furniture, highlighting how Philadelphia inspired the developing nation in style and aesthetics by the 1740s.

<https://www.philamuseum.org/publications/0-2-AmericanFurniture.html>

# Imprint

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