Objects from Indigenous and World Cultures: Conservation Newsletter

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LETTER FROM YOUR COORDINATOR

Dear Colleagues,

It has been a rather impactful first half of 2020 for all of us. The World looks like a different place than at the beginning of the year and we have not yet fully grasped the long term changes that will come forth as a result from the global pandemic that we all are dealing with; let's hope the long term will bring changes that make us better citizens of this world. This said I hope all of you are doing well under the given circumstances, I know many of you will be affected directly or indirectly by the pandemic. The online conservation community has been rather active in this period and has provided a lot of support and guidance, which I have been very thankful for. ICOM has published a number of resources and guidelines around COVID 19 https://icom.museum/en/covid-19/ which might be helpful, also we have included Resources provided by ICCROM in this Newsletter.

I am delighted still to be able to share with you our 3rd Newsletter and the last of the 2017-2020 triennium. It is heartening to see our community taking up so many different challenges related to the objects from Indigenous and World Cultures. Marci Burton and al. outline interdisciplinary research projects stemming from the African objects collection of the Fowler Museum, UCLA, (USA), showing that there is so much potential history to be discovered from

this collection. Anoek de Pepe (Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium) shares her treatment of a Chokwe mask, made from a plant fibre and bark cloth base covered with resin and the challenges posed by the embrittlement of the black resin coating. Moving to another part of the world, Serena Francone and Alessandra Montedoro (Museo delle Civiltà, Rome, Italy) take us to their treatments of two beautiful Thai objects involving complex cleaning and retouching. And the interview between Miriam Clavir and Heidi Swierenga from the Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, Canada) gives fascinating insights into the way our profession has changed in the last four decades, sharpening its reflection and embracing the task of giving voice to the multiple communities who created the objects currently housed in collections. Sabine Cotte and Catherine Smith have brought together all these articles and Information. Thank you all – editors and contributors – for the hard work, without your contribution this Newsletter would not be possible!

The 3rd year of the triennium is coming to an end and has been predominantly keeping all of us busy with the preparations for the Triennial Conference in Beijing, which will now take place from 17 – 21 May 2021. We hope that many will be able to attend in person, despite disappearing budgets and uncertainty in travel possibilities – the Directory Board (DB) of ICOM-CC is keeping a close watch on the situation and Coordinators (CO) of the Working Groups are in contact with the DB. The latest issue of On Board http://www.icom-cc.org/54/document/on-board-vol-19-june-2020/?id=1705#.XviTQS2w3GJ will provide you with more detailed information on the current situation and how the triennial ending will be curated in light of the current situation.

Aside from finalizing the Preprints Publication, one of the main upcoming activities will be the election of the new DB and CO for the next ICOM-CC triennium. I will not stand as a candidate for Coordinator but am very excited to announce that Catherine Smith one of our current Assistant Coordinators is standing candidate; this is awesome! Catherine is the subject of our profile in this newsletter, and for all the candidates to WG please refer to http://www.icom-cc.org/353/candidates-for-directory-board-and-for-working-group-coordinators-2020-2023/candidates-for-icom-cc-working-group-coordinators-2020-2023/#.XtO47y-w3GI.
For the candidates to the DB please refer to http://www.icom-cc.org/352/candidates-for-directory-board-and-for-working-group-coordinators-2020-2023/candidates-for-icom-cc-directory-board-2020-2023/#.XtO4rC-w1Z0. There you will find further information on how the voting will work and what is needed. Please do keep in mind, that in order to be able to vote you have to be registered as a voting member of ICOM-CC and have an open ICOM-CC web account by **AUGUST 15 2020**.

The triennium will still end in September 2020, which also means that a new Triennial Programme will need to be drafted. Currently the idea is to organize an online meeting with the members in order to draft this program, which I think will deliver a great opportunity for active participation by a larger percentage of the membership. More Information on how this meeting will be organized will be forthcoming as soon as we have it and will be reaching you through the WG mail!
Through amazing Work done by Lucie Monot and Ana Carolina Delgado Vieira, we have been able to update the biocide bibliography on our page http://www.icom-cc.org/84/Biocides%20in%20Collections%20/#.XwH-0UHgo2w and Lucie Monot is currently also working on extending the section on abstracts from the past Triennial Conferences.

Our online community has been growing steadily, we have now 1788 following our Facebook page and I would like to encourage our members to actively share information on this page

and if you are not yet following us, please do so and invite friends and colleagues to do so as well.

I also would like to include a link to an open letter that has been addressed to ICOM on June 25th http://www.icom-cc.org/54/document/?id=1706#.XwH_7EHgo2y following the resignation of ICOM President Suay Aksoy and the concerns arising from this and the events surrounding the resignation.
This has been a longer and more eventful words from the Coordinator section, but the past months have been very eventful on many levels indeed.

Last but not least I would like to invite you to contact me or any of the Assistant Coordinators if you have any suggestions or ideas for our Working Group, for the coming months or for the next Triennium, we would appreciate to hear from you. Enjoy reading and I look forward to hearing from you and receiving suggestions and further contributions.
With heartfelt regards, stay healthy and may you be safe in your environment

Farideh Fekrsanati

PROFILE: Dr CATHERINE SMITH

I work as a Senior Lecturer in the Archaeology Programme (and am an Associate Investigator in the Dodd-Walls Centre for Photonic and Quantum Technologies, and a member of the Indigenous Science Research Theme) at the University of Otago, New Zealand. My professional training is as an objects conservator (University of Canberra, Australia) and before I became an academic I worked in cultural institutions in Australia (National Gallery of Victoria, Museum Victoria, Australian Museum) and New Zealand (Otago Museum).

My academic work centres on the analysis of pre-contact Māori textiles and developing innovation in provenancing and materials investigation. Current research questions include interrogating links between Māori textiles and their Polynesian antecedents, and using material science to reveal information relating to plants, their use and importance in Māori society. Through exploring textiles, I try to illuminate the relationships between people, plants and culture in New Zealand. I also undertake conservation science research with a team of

scientists relating to the specific preservation needs of Māori textiles, and New Zealand cultural institutions. You can view some of my publications here
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Catherine_Smith9

The major research project I'm currently working on (with Dr Donna Campbell and Mrs Ranui Ngarimu) is called 'Whakaarahia anō te rā kaihau! Raise up again the billowing sail! Revitalising cultural knowledge through analysis of Te Rā, the Māori sail'. This Te Apārangi Royal Society of New Zealand funded project will recover knowledge about Te Rā, the sole remaining Māori sail, by bringing together Māori weaving practitioners and materials science approaches to explore the intersections between Mātauranga Māori and Western science. Our project blog is here if you'd like to see Te Rā and some of our work
https://earlymaoritextiles.wordpress.com/

I've been a member of ICOM-CC since 2008, and Committee Member of the Objects from Indigenous and Worlds Cultures Working Group, and Co-Editor of our Newsletter (with Dr Sabine Cotte) since 2014. Prior to that I served as the Pacific representative of the Name Change Committee, Ethnographic Conservation Special Interest Group (SIG) in 2010. I am a Full Member of The New Zealand Conservators of Cultural Material (NZZCM; since 2000), and served as President 2011-13, Vice-President 2007-2008, and on the Membership Committee Member 2009-2013.

I'm also a member of the Editorial Board of the AICCM Bulletin (Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material). As an Australia and New Zealand citizen, my principle focus since joining ICOM-CC has been to represent the views of non-European conservation and arts practitioners and institutions. I am also interested in promoting access, inclusivity and diversity in both ICOM-CC voices and membership. Aside from these interests, I really enjoy being a part of ICOM-CC because I get to meet and engage with a group of like-minded professionals, which is really important when you are geographically isolated!

ARTICLE

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH: AFRICAN ARTS RESEARCH AT THE FOWLER MUSEUM AT UCLA

Marci J. Burton (Conservation Fellow), *Carlee S. Forbes* (Curatorial Fellow), *Erica P. Jones* (Associate Curator of African Art), and *Christian de Brer* (Head of Conservation), Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA

Project Overview and Background

In 2019, the Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) embarked on a multi-year collaborative research project, generously funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The project focuses on the African material from one of the museum's foundational collections; a donation from the Sir Henry Wellcome Trust that arrived at the museum in 1965, a mere two years after the museum had been established. The project engages conservation and curatorial research in detailed assessments of materiality, original ethnographic context, exhibition history, and provenance. Through this research, we hope to reconstruct detailed histories for many objects in the collection and bring new depth to our

understanding of the uses, economic exchanges, and means of production for these works of art. The acquisition of this knowledge will help to shift our inquiry outward to engage with questions increasingly facing museums around the world about the histories of their collections, as well as the lives of the objects within them and their responsibilities to communities of origin.

The gift from the Wellcome Trust was substantial, numbering over 30,000 objects, with examples from every inhabited continent. The total number of objects from Africa included in this gift exceeds 6,800: 3,573 martial objects (spears, staffs, blades and other types of weaponry); 2,588 objects of everyday use (domestic wares, personal adornment, and miscellany); and 800 masks and sculpture in various media. The collection was amassed by Sir Henry S. Wellcome, who was born in the United States in 1853, and made a fortune as a pharmaceutical executive in the UK, especially after co-founding Burroughs Wellcome and Company in London in 1880. Wellcome invested heavily in medical research, including on indigenous methods of treating diseases and collecting artifacts related to healing. He eventually built one of the world's largest research collections, numbering over one million objects, including: manuscripts, medical and non-medical tools, architecture, weapons, and sacred and domestic art objects from around the world.

Analysis of the objects, their origins, and their movement is particularly salient as the Wellcome Collection encapsulates a distinct moment in history when increasingly intrusive colonial and commercial endeavours brought a flood of objects to European countries, which in turn fuelled a culture of institutional and private collecting. He employed a group of agents who purchased objects for him at auctions, private collections, and antique shops across Europe. Wellcome contracted with anthropologists to send him things that they collected while engaged in field work throughout the world. He even began accepting donations from friends and colleagues as word spread about his ambition to build his own museum.

Wellcome died in 1936 before realizing his dream of creating a museum, and the Trust, formed after his death to oversee his estate, eventually became overwhelmed by the financial and logistical burdens of storing the massive collection. A series of dispersals transferred objects to museums across the globe. As the objects were dispersed, so too was the accompanying data that Wellcome employees had compiled on these objects. Many objects were accompanied by 3 x 5-inch cards containing descriptions, provenance data, and previous accession numbers.
Some of the institutions that received African material were: the British Museum, the Liverpool Museum, Pitt Rivers Museum, Horniman Museum, Cambridge Museum of Anthropology, Royal Scottish Museum, Glasgow City Museum, the National Museum of Ghana, the National Museum of Nigeria, The Zambia Museum (Kampala), the Livingstone Museum (Livingston, Zambia), and the Fowler. Almost all of the dispersed objects were collected prior to Wellcome's death in 1936. With its provenance documentation, accompanying archives (available through the Wellcome Trust's extensive holdings), and origins in the early 20th century, the Fowler's Wellcome collection provides a rare opportunity to research many aspects of object origins, movement, and meaning.

Collaborative Approaches

To accomplish research goals, the Mellon funding has allowed the Fowler to hire a conservation and a curatorial fellow who distinctly focus on the Wellcome collection. Both fellows collaborate with Fowler staff to create a simultaneous, cross-pollination approach to research the functions of these works of art, processes of creation and restoration, and piece together distinct histories of African objects within the collection. This ambitious study marks the first time for these objects to be examined and researched so extensively since the museum's acquisition of the collection in 1965.

Collaboration between curatorial and conservation research has been at the heart of this project from the beginning. The first stages of this project have been to examine a group of 800 focus objects, selected on the basis of likely interest to the broader field, with an emphasis on masks, sculptures, and other canonical types of African arts. Fowler researchers first visually inspected each object on this priority list, noting their condition, state of preservation, noteworthy materials, and future research potential. These notes helped researchers to sort the objects into groupings based on the growing list of potential avenues for joint curatorial/conservation research, resulting in a short list of sixteen categories for further study. This research is ongoing and ever evolving, for the purposes of this newsletter, we will highlight some of the key projects currently in-progress and goals for the future.

Ongoing and Future Projects

Gold weights

Ghanaian gold weights (copper alloy weights, made by Akan-speaking metalworkers, first used for measuring gold and then becoming a hallmark of the tourist trade), offer an intriguing first case study of combining material analysis and provenance research. These small weights appear in a variety of forms (Figure 1). Many are rectangular-shaped with geometric designs, and there also are multiple examples of figurative form weights, which can include birds, snakes, trumpets, men, rifles, and sandals, to name a few. The weights were formed using the lost wax casting method, sometimes using organic material, such as a beetle, seed or a crab claw, in the wax mold to create naturalistic forms.

***Figure 1**. Gold Weights. Artist(s) unknown. Ghana. Copper alloy. Collected by Edward Patterson, c. 1901-3. Gift of the Wellcome Trust, X65.9241, X65.9242, X65.9290, X65.9291, X65.9518; Fowler Museum at UCLA*

Over 400 gold weights are in the Fowler's Wellcome collection and comprise various shapes, figures, and even have differences in the color hue of the copper alloy metal. Each weight was

analyzed with portable X-ray fluorescence (pXRF) spectroscopy to determine the elements present within the metal alloy. Strong signals for copper and zinc, the base elements for brass were detected, a rather expected outcome as Akan metalsmiths are known to cast with brass. However, varying signals for trace elements were also detected in the weights, and include tin, antimony, arsenic, lead and even in a few cases, gold. We are now analyzing the collected data to determine if any of the weights are made from similar copper alloys. We know the names of many of the weights' collectors, and we are eager to examine if the combined material and archival data can help to establish original provenance as well as and material sources and artist workshop origins. This test case illustrates how the project's collaborative methodology can work by allowing team members to use their specific approaches simultaneously to explore a group of objects.

Wood ID

The carved, wooden African objects from the Wellcome collection provide a novel approach for considering materiality, artistic process, use, and markets for sale. The wooden objects exhibit a large variety of signs of use—some have extensive wear while others have little, if any. Through identification of wood species, this research questions if different tree sources were preferred for making objects of use versus objects for the commercial and tourist markets. Knowledge of the different wood identities that comprise the collection will also inform possible condition susceptibilities, as well as support provenance data when linked to trees found in geographic regions of Africa.

While many efforts are currently ongoing in many institutions, a large gap in identification of African trees used to create these sculptural works still exists. Frequently, the only material listed is "wood." Thus, we have selected 62 wooden African objects from the Wellcome collection for wood identification analysis. Presently, the identified groups are: Dan-style masks from West Africa, ikenga figures from Nigeria, nkisi power figures from western Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Kuba cups from central DRC.

An example of such a duality of function can be observed in the collection of West African masks. There are those in the collection that have eyeholes or costume attachment sites, and patinas of worn, darkened wood from excessive wear (Figure 2(a)). In comparison, the collection has several examples of masks from the same culture and region that lack any such features of use, and could have been commissioned for sale or trade (Figure 2(b)).

Figure 2: (a): *Yoruba-style mask with evidence of use, such as holes at the base of the mask to attach to a costume, eye holes and a large loss of wood on the proper right ear. A very similar Yoruba mask in the collection* ***(b)*** *lacks any eye holes or sites to attach to a costume. Both are: Ancestor headdress (ere egungun), Possibly carved by one of the sons of Adugbologe of Emere quarter, Abeokuta, Nigeria. Ebya Style, Abeokuta, Nigeria. Early 20th century. Wood and pigment. Gift of the Wellcome Trust, X65.4747, X65.4746; Fowler Museum at UCLA.*

Our approach to wood species identification includes the assessment of wood cross-sections sampled from the object using polarized light microscopy. With observation of the wood morphology, an identification of hardwood vs. softwood can be determined, and in some cases, a possible species identification can be made (Figure 3). The chemotaxonomy, or the chemical composition of the wood will also be analyzed by collaborating with the Getty Conservation Institute and apply their method of thermal desorption pyrolysis gas chromatography mass spectroscopy (TD-Py-GC/MS) to micro samples of wood collected from the objects. This process relies on known wood standards to match chemical extractives in the wood to make a tree species identification.

Figure 3: *(Left): Mask. Unknown Artist. Dan style, Liberia. c. early 20th century. Wood, pigment and cloth. Gift of the Wellcome Trust, X65.4783; Fowler Museum at UCLA. (Right): Wood section (taken from X65.4783) under cross-polarized light microscopy. The resin canal (ovular feature, bottom right in section) and wood tissue composed of mostly tracheids informs this mask to be made from a softwood species of tree.*

Repairs

While the known record of context, provenance, and use of the Wellcome African objects varies in completeness, even lesser documented is their conservation history. After conducting an in-person survey of all the objects in the collection, the research team discovered that many exhibit treatment interventions made post-manufacture. Repair campaigns range from structural to surface modifications, carried out by both local audiences who made and used the objects before collection by Wellcome, and by non-originating cultures, post collection. We refer to the repairs that were made by their originating community in Africa as "original repairs," and they include iron nails, raffia fiber, wood, strips of metal, natural pigments, etc. (Figure 4). Post-collection repair materials observed include adhesives, resins and bulked pastes, small and uniform stainless-steel nails, foam, modern paints, etc. A number of parties may be responsible for these later repairs: European auction houses or private collectors who later sold the objects to Wellcome, by the Wellcome Trust, or the Fowler Museum in 1965. Studying these interventions will help to better understand the ways the objects were used, both locally in their original contexts, and abroad in European collections.

Figure 4: *Carved open container that may have been used for holding milk. A strip of bent aluminium was later laced into the worn wood and reinforced with thick adhesive to repair the crack at the object's base. Uganda, early 20th century. Wood and aluminum. Gift of the Wellcome Trust, X65.12672A; Fowler Museum at UCLA.*

We are currently studying these post manufacture modifications to uncover the collection's history of conservation and restoration. Ultraviolet (UV) induced-visible fluorescence has been the most useful diagnostic tool for identifying modifications made to the surface, such as locating replacement pieces and areas of modern inpainting (Figure 5). The project also has plans to assess the structural repairs on wooden objects with X-radiography. We will stabilize and preserve both original and post-collection repairs while research into these repair technologies will provide further data on the history of the objects' movements.

Figure 5: *Grave Figure. Repaired breaks in the proper right arm of the figure are evident in normal light (left) but UV energy reveals the extent of the adhesive application (white fluorescence) and inpainting on the wood surface adjacent to the breaks (yellow-green fluorescence) (right). Kongo style, Democratic Republic of Congo. Early 20th century. Wood and pigment. Gift of the Wellcome Trust, X65.7496; Fowler Museum at UCLA.*

Future Projects

Beads

A material, technical, and archival analysis of beaded objects could help us to better understand the long history of interactions between African communities and foreign markets. Beaded objects from the Wellcome collection span several geographic regions of Africa, with the largest collection from South Africa. Currently, a non-invasive technical study of the beaded materials is underway to learn about the material composition of the beads, including elements used to manufacture the different colors of beads. An exciting find during a preliminary analysis with UV energy revealed a bright characteristic green fluorescence with some of the pale-yellow beads, indicating the presence of uranium in the glass matrix, as observed in this early 20th century catalogue from Randles Bros and Hudson (Figure 6). Confirmation of uranium in the pale-yellow glass beads was confirmed with pXRF analysis. We then will augment this information with further literary and materials study to see a connection of materials trade, stylistic patterns, and use of materials to create the beaded works.

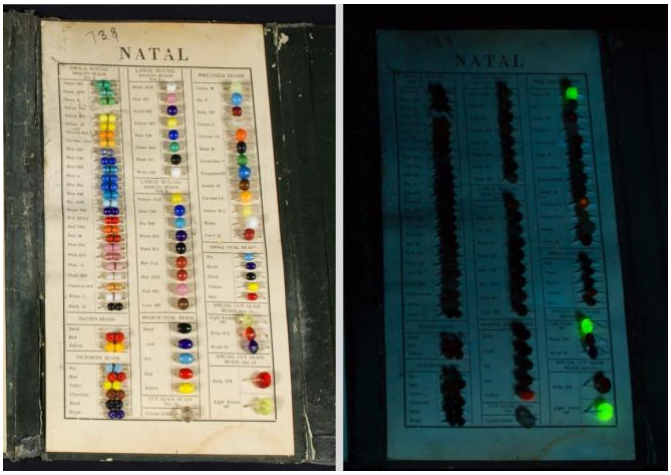

Figure 6: *Bead Catalogue. Special cut glass "amber" beads exhibit bright green fluorescence characteristic of uranium (right). Glass beads, plastic beads, cardboard, paper, thread, fabric. Randles Bros. and Hudson, Durban, South Africa. Early 20th century. Anonymous Gift, X91.4988; Fowler Museum at UCLA.*

A single object: Nkisi Nkondi

The cases described to this point all include a comparative approach to examine several objects within a group. However, one of our projects focuses on an in-depth analysis of a single figure's materiality and possible provenance. A large power figure, *nkisi nkondi,* from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is well-known to Fowler visitors and is frequently exhibited as one of the masterpieces of the collection (Figure 7). Standing over three feet tall, the nkisi is carved from a solid piece of wood and embellished with cloth, several layers of cordage, metal alloy, beads, cowrie shells, mirror inlaid eyes, hundreds of iron alloy nails, as well as layers of pigment and organic surface coatings. While the exterior materials and surfaces are well observed, the interior of the figure and locations covered by other materials, such as the portions hidden under layers of cordage, are not accessible for examination. To address this, the nkisi will be scanned with Computed Tomography, or "CT–scanned", to visually assess the object with layers of X-rays. Computed Tomography is normally a diagnostic tool in the medical field but has tremendous potential with the analysis of layered and hollow objects, such as the nkisi. "Slices" of digital X-ray images are collected during the scan of the entire object, which can be looked at individually to observe sections of the object without the problem of superimposition by adjacent layers of materials. In addition, we will perform a full technical investigation into materials identification and construction technology.

Figure 7: *Power figure (nkisi nkondi). Artist unknown, Yombe Style. Democratic Republic of the Congo. 19th century. Wood, metal, nails, mirrors, cloth, cordage, beads, cowrie shell. Gift of the Wellcome Trust, X65.5837; Fowler Museum at UCLA.*

Conclusion

These case studies represent just a few of the ongoing and emerging projects from the first stage of our Mellon project on the African material in the Wellcome collection at the Fowler Museum. Preliminary analysis of the copper alloys of Ghanaian gold weights, species of trees

that comprise wooden objects and the repairs made to them will combine with findings from archival and curatorial inquiry, thus allowing the fellows to explore the lives of the objects at many stages: from creation, to use, to collection and display. It is only with a better understanding of the paths these objects have taken that we can construct a more informed sense of how to proceed with them in the future; a future that will allow us, as caretakers, to honor the objects makers and past owners and all that they can teach us today.

We are dedicated to maintain a public presence and sharing and disseminating our findings with the field and community. The project posts weekly on the Fowler Museum's Instagram page (@FowlerMuseum) with the hashtag #WellcomeWednesdays. This series aims to bring our Mellon research to the public by highlighting objects being studied, presenting historical individuals linked to the objects, and posing questions to the public. Please follow and comment on our Instagram!

ARTICLE

EMBRITTLEMENT OF BLACK RESIN: DISCOVERIES DURING THE CHALLENGING CONSERVATION TREATMENT OF A CHOKWE *MUKANDA* MASK

Anoek De Paepe, Objects conservator, Royal Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren, Belgium)

Introduction

This paper discusses the main deterioration problems of Chokwe *mukanda* masks in the collection of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA), with the emphasis on the embrittlement of the black resin typically used on the masks. Furthermore, the paper describes the conservation treatment of one mask a Chokwe *mukanda* mask (SJ.2319) currently housed at the RMCA (fig.1) for travel and display.

***Figure 1**: Chokwe mask SJ.2319 (Courtesy of A. De Paepe, Collection of Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren©).*

Historical background

The Mukanda mask SJ.2319 has only been in the collection since 1998 but has a long history. According to archival sources (an old index cart from the Jesuits) the mask was collected by Father Jacques Delaere (1898-1977) in October 1934 (RMCA file DA. 24). Father Delaere was a Belgian Jesuit missionary who worked in Kwango (*Muhaku*) (RMCA file D.E. 904). In 1893, the Belgian Jesuits started a mission to Kwango with seven missionaries for the re-establishment of the Catholic church. By 1931, ninety-one missionaries were spread over several regions over the Democratic Republique of Congo. They founded 23 primary schools, 10 colleges and 2 minor seminaries. (Mkenda 2019, 437) From 1910 onwards, the Belgian Jesuits established a close contact with the RMCA (Wolmark 2015). In 1998, the order of the Jesuits gave their collection, including this Chokwe mask that was previously stored in the mission museum in Leuven-Heverlee (Belgium), in long-term loan to the RMCA. The mask was made by members of the Chokwe, a large cultural group with a territory between north-eastern Angola, north-western Zambia, and south-western Congo, where Kwango is located between the Kwango and Kasai rivers (Bastin 1984, 40; Constantine 2001, 6) (fig.2). Since Delaere worked in Kwango province, the mask was probably collected and made in this region.

***Figure 2**: Map of location Kwango province (Muhaku) (http://ambardcpretoria.com/geography.html).*

The mask was identified by Father Delaere as a mask worn during the *mukanda,* the initiation ritual whereby each boy reaching puberty becomes initiated to the adolescence life. The education of Chokwe boys into manhood was accompanied with multiple rituals and ceremonies described by anthropologists (Bastin, 1968 and Crowley, 1966). During this ritual, boys were spending from a few months up to a year in a small grass hut in complete isolation from the rest of society. This period can be seen as a symbolic death of their childhood (Jordán 1999, 20). During the initiation, the boys were getting circumcised and they were hazed by masked figures. Furthermore, they were getting social reinsertion lessons, and were initiated in the tribal secrets, magic practise and sexuality (Crowley 1966, 520; Jordán 1999, 20). The Chokwe believed that sexuality is an expression of a personal link to the cosmos rather than a personal act of pleasure (Kaputu 2017, 218). Apart from education in singing, dancing and playing musical instruments, the boys learned the art and craft of making knotted fibre costumes and wooden and bark cloth masks. (Crowley 1966, 520) At the end of the isolation they were reborn as adults and reintroduced into society (Jordán 1999, 20).

The Chokwe in Zambia were calling the masks *makishi* (sing. *likishi*) while in Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo the masks are known as *akishi* (sing. *mukishi*) (Jordán 2006, 16). There are many different types of *akishi* masks, the characters distinguish themselves by different hairdos (Jordán 2006; Bastin 1968, 63). The initiated boys and men used *akishi* masks to pretend to be spirits in order to keep women and non-initiated kids away from the *mukanda* camp (Constantine 2001, 7). These spirits are supposed to be famous men like chiefs, rich men, hunters and men with many children or important ancestors. The true identity of the men wearing the *akishi* masks is one of the secrets of the *mukanda* camp. (Jordán 2006, 17).

Masks were usually not recycled, the men preferred to make new masks rather than using the old ones again. A new mask contained stronger powers and new was identified with youth. Once the masks were used it was believed that they had lost their power. (Crowley 1966, 522) However, some camp leaders were keeping the small masks, that could be easily hidden from women, for the next *mukanda* ritual. The larger masks were always destroyed since women could find them. Traditionally there were set on fire after use together with the whole *mukanda* built camp, so that the camp and content could be returned to the ancestors. (Crowley 1966, 522; Bastin 1993, 41; Jordán 2006, 27-28)

Since it is the habit to destroy the masks after the *mukanda*, it is not surprisingly that the amount of *Akishi* masks in museum collections is not that high (Constantine 2001, 19). The majority of the *mukanda* masks of the Chokwe in the collection of the RMCA were collected by the herpetologist Gaston de Witte (1879-1980) in the region of Dilolo in the province of Kwango (fig.3). He documented the names of each mask and he took pictures of men wearing the masks with the costume they belong to (Bouttiaux 2009, 32). These masks are all made with similar materials as resin, plant fibre, cloth but the masks have different shapes that are characteristic for a specific type mask. When comparing this *Mukanda* mask with the other masks of the museum's collection, it can be stated that this mask is unique because of the rare high hat and the fact that this hat not is covered with black resin.

***Figure 3**: Gaston de Witte showing the collected mask and the Akishi costume worn by a person of the society, AP.0.0.35601 photo G. de Witte (Courtesy of Royal Museum for Central Africa, Collection of Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren©).*

Examination of the materials, techniques and condition of the mask

The word *Akishi* comprises the entire outfit of a young man which consist of "the head", the mask and "the body", the costume (Jordán 2006, 17). Hence, this particular mask (SJ.2319) is part of an entire costume. The costume belonging to this mask is an open-structured knotted plant fibre costume that covers the entire body (Bastin 1993, 79). The mask is assembled from a semi-flexible front "the face", made from bark cloth covered with resin, and a flexible back from knotted plant fibres and the above mentioned sturdy high hat composed of branches and twigs.

The front of this mask is composed of bark cloth covered with a black resin (fig.1). The black resin is probably applied onto the bark cloth and then modelled to a face. The face of the mask has a very characteristically shaped chin that symbolises the ancestor's spirits and the forces of nature (Bastin 1968, 63). Two narrow horizontal slits in two circle shaped cloths are representing the eyes. Between the eyes is a small long nose, and the mouth is made by a horizontal gap in the resin. On the inside of the mask, a bark cloth is visible. Stitches made with plant fibre thread along the edge of the chin area illustrate how the bark cloth is attached to the frame. These stiches are probably original but there is no certainty of that fact.

The most common deterioration problem with this type of mask in the collection of the RMCA is the degradation of the black resin. Thorough observation of the surface and toolmarks of the resin reveals that this resinous material was probably flexible upon application and has become very hard and brittle over time. As a result, there is a constant tension between the flexible bast fibre cloth support and the rigid resinous superficial layer which results in material loss of chunks of rigid resin over time. This observation is supported by accounts in

literature about the resin and its use. The resin originates from the *Canarium Scheinfurthii* tree, the local name is *mupafu* (Bastin 1993, 79; 'Tervuren Xylarium Wood Database' n.d.). When the tree is wounded by cutting into the bark, it excretes the terpenoid based resin that is produced in the bark (Odegaard et al. 2014, 30; Langenheim 2003, 126). The resin must have been difficult to work with because it is known to dry quickly and when dry it becomes breakable like glass (Bastin 1993, 79). Since the resin has the tendency to break, this type of masks is very fragile and thus it is difficult to use them and transport them without causing damages (Bastin 1968, 63).
The deterioration of the resin is possibly caused by the slow loss of the terpenoids (Florian 1990, 236). So, it is not unexpected that the condition of the resin on this mask should be so bad, since it was not made to have a long lifespan. (Crowley 1966, 522; Bastin 1993, 41) To ensure that the resin of the mask is *mupafu*, an analysis with gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) is necessary to give certainty (Nordby 2009, 54).

The black resin covering the mask is unstable and in need of conservation. Three types of deterioration of the resin could be identified. There are a number of severe cracks due to embrittlement of the resin, especially around the chin (fig.4). A second fragile area is located along the edge of the proper right eye, a very unstable and flexible fracture. Furthermore, there the resin has small but dangerous fissures around the corners of the mouth, these hairline cracks make the entire chin moveable. These cracks are unstable, and there is a high possibility that those areas will have material loss in the future. Since the resin is so fragile, the cracks could have been the result of use, transport, and handling. Especially the damages along the corners of the mouth are unstable since only two small areas are connecting the chin to the rest of the face. The bark cloth that holds the resin together, appears to be in a good condition (fig.5).

***Figure 4**: Detail of the embrittlement of the black resin (Courtesy of A. De Paepe, Collection of Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren©).*

***Figure 5**: Detail of the bark cloth (Courtesy of A. De Paepe, Collection of Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren©).*

Certain areas of the resin are covered with red cloth and pale coloured plant fibres, which are used to emphases characteristics of the face. According to Crowley, on Chokwe masks bright colours are desired above dull colours for underlining the characteristics of the face. Preferred materials are red trade cloth, white paper, plant fibres and commercial red and white paint instead of the traditionally used *ngula* or *pemba* (white clay) (Crowley, 1966, 522). To accentuate the eyes, the nose, the chin, and the forehead; bright red dyed cloth is applied onto the black resin probably when the resin was still wet. The cloth is made by felting, a treatment of wool fibres with moist, pressure, warmth, and attrition (Diehl, de Graaf, and de Jonghe 1991, 106). The red cloth is contoured through the application of a pale uncoloured plant fibre.

The bonding between the resin and the adhered cloth and plant fibre, is very weak (fig. 6) resulting in partial loosening or completed detaching of the cloth and fibres. The cloth under the proper right eye, the cloth on the nose, the plant fibre on the edges of the chin and above the proper left side of the mouth has disappeared over time. Plant fibre residues and an old bad-quality picture that is attached on the old index cart indicate that the eyes were also framed with plant fibres. Fortunately, the plant fibres above the mouth and the cloth of the eye are still intact.

***Figure 6**: Weak bond between the red cloth and the resin (Courtesy of A. De Paepe, Collection of Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren©).*

Conservation treatment

The mask will be exhibited at the Musée Quai Branly (Paris). The transportation and display of the mask, would have raised the risk of further damaging the object significantly. The resin could break further which would cause material loss. Therefore, it was decided to stabilize and consolidate the resin before travel.

Solubility testing and research into consolidation methods

Once the surface dust was removed from the mask, a solubility test was carried out. Therefore, the solubility or swelling of the resin was tested in deionized water, ethanol and acetone by swabbing the surface of a sample and through immersion of the sample in the solvent. All solvents, except for deionized water activated the resin. The aim of the consolidation was to leave the original resin unaltered and therefore a water-based consolidant would be the most likely option. A water-based consolidant is also the most compatible material with bark cloth. For the treatment of bark cloth, the literature suggests that starch paste is most preferable. (Florian, 1990, 168)

But, conservation treatments of broken and brittle resins have been carried out in the (distant) past using different methods, solvents and adhesives.

Corne and Heuman used activating solvents (Corne and Heuman 1982). The solvents were intentionally used to make the original brittle resin along the cracks tacky and use this stickiness to re-adhere them together. The cracks remained bonded after the solvent was evaporated. Performing this kind of treatment is not without risk, there is a high chance is to alter the surface when pressure is applied, or to darken the surface of the solvent-treated resin or to cause a white haze on the surface.

Another successful treatment of brittle resin has been carried out using polyvinyl acetate (Florian 1990, 236). This category PVAC adhesives is, when dried, insoluble in water. Removing these consolidants is only possible by means of ethanol or hazardous solvents, like xylene or toluene. Since the resin on the Chokwe mask reacts to ethanol, the use of a polyvinyl acetate is not an option because the application would be irreversible.

Lastly, consolidation with methylcellulose (Methocel A4C and A15C) is described in the literature (Florian 1990, 237). Methylcellulose is a cellulose based adhesive that is non-toxic, and it is easily soluble in cold water even after drying (Down 2015, 56-57). This type of consolidant, was a good candidate for this specific Chokwe mask treatment.

A comparable methylcellulose, Culminal MC2000, was used. A test was carried out on a small detached piece ($\pm$ 4 mm) of resin. To test the adhesive, the small piece was broken in half and the two pieces were re-adhered using a solution of 2,5% Culminal MC2000 in deionized water. This solution did not have enough bonding strength to merge the two pieces together. A less diluted mixture was too viscous to use, because it could not penetrate deep enough in the cracks to consolidate the resin well. Thus, to add extra strength to the adhesive, wheat starch paste was added to the solution. A mixture of a very high diluted wheat starch pastes in deionized water and 2,5% culminal MC 2000 in deionized water on a 1:1 ratio was tested. The small pieces could be merged together with this combination of methylcellulose and wheat starch paste, so this was very promising. The wheat starch past gives a good bonding strength and with the addition of methylcellulose, the consolidant keeps flexible.

Stabilization of the black resin

A small crack at the side of the proper right eye, near the side of the mask was consolidated first. The consolidation of this crack worked well and therefore this treatment was continued for the consolidation of the rest of the cracked and loose resin on the mask.

Some areas needed a filling since the gap between two pieces of resin was too large. These cracks were invisibly filled with mends of Japanese tissue toned with Golden acrylics Fluids. Japanese tissue is a flexible, strong, and light weight material, its properties resemble the bark cloth base of the mask onto which the resin is applied. The colour can easily be adjusted with well-known conservation-grade paints e.g. Golden Acrylic Fluids. In this case, a kozo fibred tissue was preferred for its long fibres composed of a high percentage of alpha cellulose, that makes them strong. Kozo fibres are originating from the inner bark of the mulberry tree (De Paepe 2018, 52).

Re-adhering red cloth and plant fibres

Once the cracks in the resin were consolidated, the red cloth and the plant fibres were re-adhered to the mask. Since the mixture of Culminal MC2000 and wheat starch paste worked really well for the consolidation of the cracks is was also considered for the re-adhering of the red-cloth and plant fibres.

First, the colourfastness of the red cloth needed to be tested. If the red colours bled, a non-soluble adhesive could be used. To test the colour fastness two fibres of the red cloth were sampled. One sample was placed on a blotting paper, a drop of cold deionized water was dropped onto the fibre and the fibre was covered with a microscope slide. After 30 min, there was no sign of bleeding and no trace of the red dye on the blotting paper. An ultimate colour fastness test was carried out using the second sample. This sample was added to a glass test tube filled with deionized water. The test tube was heated in a bain-marie for approximately 30 min. Afterwards, the fibre was placed on a blotting paper. In the water of the test tube and on the blotting paper there were no traces of red dye. Consequently, assuming the colour fastness of the red cloth excellent, it was safe to use a water-soluble adhesive.

The loose decorative elements were re-adhered with the mixture of diluted wheat starch paste in deionized water and 2,5% Culminal MC 2000 in deionized water in a 1 on 1 ratio (fig. 11).

***Figure 7**: After consolidation of the resin and re-adhering the red cloth and plant fibre (Courtesy of A. De Paepe, Collection of Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren©).*

***Figure 12**: After treatment (Courtesy of A. De Paepe, Collection of Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren©).*

Conclusion

Chokwe masks made from a plant fibre and bark cloth base covered with resin are fragile and they pose specific conservation challenges. Thus far, the treatment of the Chokwe mask (SJ.2319) has been successful and the object is ready for travel and almost ready for display. A customized mount needs to be made to display the mask safely with the necessary support. Furthermore, the stability as well as the overall appearance and readability of the mask is improved by re-adhering the loosened fibres and cloth (fig. 12). Unfortunately, there is not enough knowledge about the materials that are used for the creation of this type of masks. An in-depth study in the identification of the resin and its characteristics and possible conservation materials is necessary.

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TWO CONSERVATION TREATMENTS OF THAI CULTURAL HERITAGE AT MUSEO DELLE CIVILTÀ, ROME.

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The **Museo delle Civiltà** (Museum of Civilizations) is located in Rome. It was established in September 2016 as part of a complex plan to reform the structures of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage. The intention was to create a cultural centre in the EUR district that would bring together in a single body four important national museums: the prehistoric ethnographic Museum "Luigi Pigorini", the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions "Lamberto Loria", the Museum of Oriental Art "Giuseppe Tucci" and the Museum of the High Middle Ages "Alessandra Vaccaro".
In 2017, they were joined by the Italian-African museum, established in 1923 as the Colonial Museum. The birth of this important place of culture has allowed for an unified and innovative management, enhancement and promotion of archaeological and ethnographic collections unique in Italy, in order to reach a wider audience for those areas of heritage currently considered to be of exclusive interest to specialists and enthusiasts.
Last year an important exhibition of Thai figurative art was organized on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of Friendship and Trade between Italy and Thailand. Curated by Roberto Ciarla and Fiorella Rispoli, and titled "Ancient Siam: The Splendor of the Thai kingdoms", it was held in the museum between May and November 2019. Objects made of heterogeneous materials from antiquity to the XXth century from the Museo delle Civiltà's collections were on display. Between September 2018 and April 2019, conservation treatments on some of these artifacts had been carried out in the Conservation Department of the museum.
Here we want to illustrate the interventions of cleaning and retouching performed on a Buddha's head from the XVI-XVII century and a lacquer bookcase gilded with the *Lai Rod Nam* technique from the second half of the XIX century. These works of art and religious faith are both part of the collection of the Museum of Oriental Art "Giuseppe Tucci", once located in the Palazzo Brancaccio in the center of the city. Both conservation treatments were carried out following a similar methodological approach. For the cleaning process, products of natural origin were used to control the release of water, thus reducing the wettability of delicate surfaces but exploiting the surfactant power of these substances at the same time. The retouching was performed with different techniques but with the same intention to obtain a distinction of the materials used and a perceptive recognition at close range of the pictorial intervention, so as to guarantee respect for the original.

1. Buddha's head

The Buddha's head (Figure 1), made of stucco with distinctive features and elegant shapes, is placed on a small base supported by a metal shaft. The characteristics which represent the superhuman and benevolent nature of the Buddha are the large sinuous curves that start from the eyebrows and end on the mouth in a slight smile. The elongated look is embellished with inlays of mother-of-pearl and blue glass. The head probably belonged to a life-size statue, in a standing or seated position and in the 'gesture' of contact with the earth.

Figure 1. The Buddha's head before treatment, with the brown layer on the original stucco.

The inner core is made of bricks and quartz powders (sand) covered by numerous overlapping layers which are gradually more and more refined and polished, made with a liquid or semi-liquid mixture probably composed by clay or chalk or raw rice thickened with vegetable adhesives. The upper brown layer, a later addition (varnish maybe) was very fragile and had fallen in some areas, showing the original ivory-coloured and translucent stucco of the face below (Figure 1). It is very likely that the statue was built to be placed outside, as evidenced by the use of building materials such as the bricks in raw clay found in the core, which are far more durable than the wood fibers or linen fabrics usually used. Hair consisting of small cones or curls, repainted over time, was made through the use of molds, a technique proper to Southeast Asia for the realization of details such as hairstyle and jewelry. The use of the molds is detectable also through the traces of the housings (seats) left empty by the fallen curls and the dark dough which composes them, which is very different from the rest of the materials.
At first view, it was clear that the strong chromatic contrast between the partially fallen brown tint and the original ivory colour, had allowed the dark fragments to dominate the chromatic perception of the entire face. For this reason, it was necessary to remove this superficial dark layer and after some attempts, aimed at the constant control of each action, all brown was removed, using a chelating agent in an aqueous solution thickened with Vanzan®. This transparent gel made of a high molecular weight polysaccharide (Xanthan gum), allowed a perfect control of the solvent action on the surface. During this cleaning intervention, a large grey concrete insert was highlighted on the neck, which was very hard and impossible to remove. The retouching of this rather problematic part was made using the *tratteggio* technique (Figure 2) described by Cesare Brandi in his "Theory of restoration" in 1963 It is a critical phenomenology in which the image of the work, recognized as such through the consciousness of the viewer, is reconstituted - through a methodological connection - in its double material consistency, both aesthetic and historical. The retouching was thus performed with close vertical lines using watercolours. This technique has allowed the close-up recognition of the aesthetic treatment and its perfect mimesis at a distance.

Figure 2. A detail of the retouching with the tratteggio technique on the neck of the Buddha's head.

Figure 3. The Buddha's head after the conservation treatment carried out by Alessandra Montedoro. Photo credits: Fabio Naccari, Museo delle Civiltà, Rome (Italy).

2. Gilded lacquer bookcase

Figure 4. The Too Phra Tamma before the conservation treatment carried out by Serena Francone. It is possible to see the presence of red lacquer inside the bookcase. Photo credits: Fabio Naccari, Museo delle Civiltà, Rome (Italy).

The bookcase (Figure 4) is a *Too Phra Tamma* (*Tamma* is a Thai word corresponding to the Sanskrit *Dharma*, which means Law/Truth), that is a special cabinet for the Sacred Canon containing the Buddha's teachings written on palm leaves. It has a troncopiramidal body, placed on a base supported by four angular legs of the *kha singh* type (that is "lion-legged") ending with a sphere, probably a reference to the "luminous pearl" identified with the Buddha's Word. On the side panels and on the two frontal doors there is a representation of two battles: in the upper part, a divine battle between the heavenly dancer Nang Upsorn and the demon Nontuk, and in the lower part, nobles on elephants and soldiers of various ethnicity, probably an allusion to the so-called "Battle of the Elephants" held in 1592 at Nong Sarai between Naresuan, the monarch of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, and Mingyi Swa, son of the Burmese king Nanda Bayin.

This *Too Phra Tamma* is very important because it is connected to the Orientalist Giuseppe Tucci. During the 1950s Tucci worked for the development of cultural relations between Italy and the kingdom of Thailand, also thanks to the support of his friend the Italian artist Corrado Feroci, who had entered in the Thai Government service in 1924. The bookcase was a gift offered to Tucci during one of the many visits of delegations of men of culture and important politicians of the Thai Government.

The *Too Phra Tamma* is made of Teak wood covered by many layers of polished black lacquer and gilded with the *Lai Rod Nam* technique (which literally means "ornaments washed with water"). This involves the use of a yellow gummy paint to cover the parts of the drawing which have to remain black, then a thin layer of lacquer is spread over the whole surface and gold

leaves are applied on the whole surface as well. After about twenty hours, the surface is washed with water, which detaches the gold leaves from the yellow gummy paint areas, bringing out the golden decoration.

Before the conservation treatment, the surface of the bookcase showed a consistent layer of dirt, lacquer losses located on the metal hinges of the doors and widespread abrasions. Above all, there was a considerable aesthetic damage on the front side due to an abrasive substance dropped from above, which had completely or partially removed the gilding in correspondence with the main scene of the battle representation. Moreover, numerous alteration stains were visible especially in the lower part of the figured panels.

At the beginning, the cleaning intervention had favoured dry methods: the gilded surface was cleaned using vacuum cleaner and vulcanized rubbers. Then an aqueous cleaning was necessary to remove the different alteration stains, so a solution of 0.3% Funori at 35°C was used in this way: first application by brush and Japanese paper interposition; rinse with swabs (Figure 5). As a result, all the stains and cohesive dirt was removed, while the contact of the lacquer with water was controlled by the use of Funori, which is a highly hygroscopic polysaccharide.

Figure 5. The cleaning of the gilded surface using the Funori solution.

Particular attention was paid to the phase of retouching: in fact, it was important not to cover the wear marks on the surface, for example in the area close to the metal hooks of the doors.

It was decided to use a methodology which allows for the distinction between the retouching materials and the original ones, using watercolours applied with the dotted technique (Figure 6). An important factor for the exhibition of the restored *Too Phra Tamma* was the lighting system: as the retouching was done mixing golden powder with gum arabic, the area was more or less visible depending of the lighting direction. Thanks to a frontal lighting, the retouching was not detectable at a distance, thus obtaining a reconstruction of the aesthetic integrity of the frontal representation.

Figure 6. A detail before and after the retouching with the dotted technique.

At the moment, the collection of the Museum of Oriental Art "Giuseppe Tucci" is only partially displayed and the two conserved artifacts are kept in the storage. But the museum's new set-up, connected with the Museo delle Civiltà's enlargement project, is scheduled for completion by the end of next year. Therefore, the Buddha's head and the *Too Phra Tamma* should be on display by 2022.

INTERVIEW

CONTINUING THE LIFE OF OBJECTS: MOA'S PAST + PRESENT CONSERVATORS IN DIALOGUE

A version of this interview can be found on MOA's website:
https://moa.ubc.ca/2019/10/continuing-the-life-of-objects-moas-past-present-conservators-in-dialogue/

Heidi Swierenga, Miriam Clavir, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, interviewed by Hailey Mah, MOA's Marketing and Communications Assistant.

The Museum of Anthropology (MOA) houses collections from Indigenous cultures around the world but it is best known for the Northwest coast treasures that it holds – many of which

came out of local Indigenous communities after the years of Potlatch prohibition that was implemented by the Canadian government. The 1980s were an interesting time to be a conservator at this institution - a slow rumbling was starting to build under the foundations upon which conservation was based. The rumblings served to shake up the established methods of museum practice and challenged the presumed understanding of what was valued.

MOA's conservators know first-hand that the process of caring for museum objects has ethical, political and emotional dimensions. As MOA's first conservator, serving full-time from 1980 to 2004, Dr. Miriam Clavir developed the Museum's framework for maintaining both the physical properties and intangible heritage of objects. Her award-winning book, *Preserving What is Valued: Museums, Conservation, and First Nations*, explores this topic through extensive interviews and personal experience. Heidi Swierenga is currently the Senior Conservator at MOA. She has expanded MOA's conservation practice to work with and within the many varied concerns expressed by Indigenous people. She has continued to evolve MOA's understanding of what is really valued.

Conservator Emerita Dr. Miriam Clavir and Senior Conservator Heidi Swierenga were interviewed in the spring of 2019 by Hailey Mah, MOA's Marketing and Communications Assistant, about MOA's first community loan and how it impacted the evolution of conservation at MOA.

MOA Conservator Emerita Miriam Clavir and MOA Senior Conservator Heidi Swierenga. Photo by Hailey Mah.

MC: MOA's director Michael Ames asked me to sign the loan form, and this was in 1983. Gloria Cranmer Webster had asked to borrow an old piece that was in MOA's permanent collection legally, but her family had the rights to it. In conservation, I was trained to preserve the physical object, and here we were, gaining the realization that the object was more than the physical object. That's what started me researching and ended up as the book [*Preserving What Is Valued*]. When the request was made, Michael said, more or less, "You sign the loan forms, Miriam, I want to see if a conservator will sign the loan forms." Because, you know, a mask that is going to be danced [at a potlatch] around a fire, maybe worn outside in the rain

-- we know that it may physically change in some way. And I figured I was either going to be drummed out of my profession if I signed the loan forms or drummed out of my job if I didn't. I signed the loan forms because the loan was about preservation of heritage, and this started my re-think of the perspectives behind accepted conservation practise.

At the time there weren't many requests, at least until Expo 86 when the request came to borrow the Thunderbird costume which was made by Calvin Hunt. It was wanted by the artist to dance in 25 performances. So, this wasn't a spiritual request to maintain spiritual practices. This was more like entertainment, as well as showing the audience what this aspect of his culture was like. And … this was interesting because my recollection is that one of the wooden leg pieces of the costume developed a long crack during a dance. So, the dancers repaired it, and it came back with this big line of glue down the front … we left it. It marked the event and the loan.

HS: The same dance costume was asked to be used this past year at a potlatch. And this was one of the rare times where we said that we wouldn't be able to pull [the loan] together in time, because the potlatch was one week away and we didn't have adequate transport. Also, the costume needed some additional repair because the rabbit skin on the leggings is now quite dry and it wouldn't have survived being danced. We would have wanted the artist to do the repairs, or at least consult on the work and there wasn't enough time to do this. So, in this instance we all agreed that it should be danced again and that we would try to be better organized next time the same request came in. There's no question, nobody wants to dance anything if there is a risk of having a piece fall off while it is being danced in the Bighouse.

MC: Exactly. In the research for my book I talked to about 30 different Indigenous people from many nations, about all of these preservation issues, and whether something can be danced or preserved. And I got answers such as, by dancing you're preserving cultural heritage. But, if you're doing something that's going to damage the object, well, answers centred on not wanting that if it was due to the motion of dancing, but that there can be occasions where objects are ritually broken.

One other point I wanted to bring up was in 1986 there was one of the first conservation meetings about what were called ethnographic objects. *(Symposium '86* at the Canadian Conservation Institute). It was a very important because it was the first one, and Gloria Cranmer Webster came and talked there. She was the only Indigenous person there -- things now would be different. But she was a curator in her own right as well as having been associated with MOA, and it was she who really got everything together, both funding and repatriation, so that the U'Mista Cultural Centre was created and opened in 1980. Anyway, I went [to the symposium] with two of our curators, Betsy Johnson and Audrey Shane, and this was [notable] at a conservation symposium that curators and conservators would give a paper together. In the question period, there was a man from a decorative arts museum who stood up, and, these aren't his exact words, but basically what he said was, "I am so appalled by what you are doing, you are letting these things be used, how could you--"

HS: "-- how could you call yourself a conservator? You're violating your code of ethics."

MC: Exactly. And it said in the code of ethics that I was supposed to preserve the integrity of the object [for future generations] ... Preserving physical integrity was paramount. He said, "What, do you think I'm going to allow our porcelain to be used?"

HS: Not understanding the difference of context at all.

MC: We were battling within the profession about what we were doing in terms of conservation. And we were considered by some people to be unethical.

HS: This has been slow to change - about 10 years ago I had the same reaction from another colleague when I talked about one of the collections access visits that we had had with a group of basket makers. The weavers had come in to participate in a reciprocal learning exchange. It was a wonderful familial atmosphere and people were so happy to see the works that had been made by weavers in their community - their aunties and grandmothers. When these visits happen, staff will provide a bit of care and handling guidance at the beginning and then we step aside. It was a very comfortable atmosphere and at one point someone lifted up a woven basket lid by the handle and the handle popped off. It could have been a very embarrassing moment but we just kept going, and nobody made a very big deal out of all of it. Following the meeting it was repaired by a conservation intern who had this great project to do with an interesting backstory. The conservator that I was telling this story to was as appalled as the gentleman who stood up [at Symposium '86] because we had allowed the damage to take place. It was all about the physical object still. And it was difficult for this individual see that there was great value in the exchange that had happened that day and that it could not have happened as well if the weavers had been denied the ability to touch, handle, and feel the pieces themselves. Yes, every basket is important but it is still important with the repair having been done.

MC: It's part of the history of the object.

HS: Which is what we've learned from the owners of the treasures and belongings that we now hold in the Museum. Like the headdress and masks that go to a potlatch – sometimes they are modified to make them stronger so that they can withstand being danced; we'll leave those modifications in place because they are part of the history of those pieces.

MC: It was such an evolution from how I was originally trained, to preserve the physical integrity of the object, towards what Heidi is talking about. And early on... Indigenous people who would come in would not necessarily be allowed to handle the objects. You know, the curator would lift and turn it, or the collections managers. And usually they tried to keep me out of the room because they were afraid that as a conservator, I would be a naysayer. I was conflicted because of my training, and I wanted to research all these questions. It became an amazing opportunity to go and talk about conservation with Indigenous people, other conservators, faculty in Philosophy whose field was ethics, the law department, and more.

HM: I actually did read the transcription of the Symposium '86 with Betsy and Audrey, and I remember, it's quite notable because of that contentious question period at the end.

HS: You wouldn't have that now - the whole landscape has shifted, especially in light of UNDRIP and more recently the Calls to Action that were issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission here in Canada. It's great that things have changed, and MOA is now just one of many institutions that works in this way. Miriam's experience at MOA, and the book that came out of that has been helpful in getting others to this place in terms of practice.

HM: so I guess, Miriam it sounds like... between that time when you started in 1980 to your retirement it sounds like you really saw a large change in the way that conservation was sort of approached and handled, and maybe would you say that a lot of the issues that came up during your time have those been addressed, or do you find that there's still just as much ongoing discourse?

MC: Well, also the whole cultural context outside has changed.

HS: The landscape has changed.

MC: A lot. Because I remember also… when the Canadian constitution was repatriated [in 1982] and First Nations rights were not included [in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms] and there were demonstrations across Canada…anyway, as I remember a number of Indigenous people marched on the Vancouver Museum down on Kits Point. And they closed the doors. You would have to check the stories but this is what I remember. And then they came up here and Dr. Michael Ames opened the doors, and he got food and chairs for the elders and people sat around in the Great Hall and he had two clowns come in and entertain the kids, and people stayed overnight. And the next morning, the people who remained sang an honour song to the staff here.

HM: Heidi, picking up from when you started to now, has the ongoing broader social discourse --- how has your practice responded to those contemporary discourses around conservation.

HS: I think the biggest change has been the awareness on the part of communities that access requests are possible, that materials can travel back to communities for use. The word is slowly getting out and we're getting more requests every year. When I started, there might have been one every other year, and now we do several... and making these loans happen has become one of our biggest priorities. What has also become clear is that talking about the use of collections with our colleagues and our students is critical. As it becomes accepted, or normalized, it becomes better understood that these loans are possible and that and they won't be drummed out of the profession.

MC: The code of ethics has changed.

HS: --The code of ethics has changed, and now it has to be changed again. It's an evolving practice, and increasingly it is becoming the accepted way of doing work, so much so that often it is now the conservators who are the ones who are pushing this on their institutions. And I can point to many, many other institutions now, not only in Canada but also some in Europe as well as in the US, who are practicing the same way.

MC: and in New Zealand, for example … It's also the fear factor for conservators [that has decreased], like Heidi said, the museum people realize that no, the objects are not going to deteriorate in a negative way.

HS: And the question of whether something can be used or changed to facilitate use is not one that can be answered by one conservator. It's a group decision; a group made up of several people including conservator, curator, collections manager, and most importantly the person who has made the request; the family member who has the rights to speak for the belonging itself. We figure out what is workable together. Maybe it can't be danced but instead it will be carried onto the floor of the Bighouse to be witnessed.

HM: And Heidi you mentioned that you have been getting an increasing number of requests from communities to use objects. I think you mentioned earlier about the Thunderbird costume that had been danced before and had been requested for use again. Is there any ongoing relationships that you've created through requests, or maybe people that you've worked with multiple times?

HS: Yes, absolutely there's are many. There is a Chilkat robe in the collection that is borrowed by the weaver who created it at least once a year for different events. The last event that he borrowed it for was for was a two-day potlatch. We lost track of how many times it was danced. So many times, by so many different people. It was so amazing and powerful to witness. The way that the weaving changes as it is used becomes part of the weaving, part of its history.

HM: - Was this piece acquired with the understanding that it would be loaned out and used and danced?

HS: Not at the beginning, no. It had been commissioned around 20 years ago for the exhibit "*My Ancestors Are Still Dancing*" but once the robe was completed and it came time to fill out the paperwork the curator involved asked the weaver if he would ever want to borrow it back. As he tells it this seemed like a pretty strange idea at the time, especially coming from a museum, but after a few years he did borrow it back and now it keeps going and going. And it's all up to that maker; he is the one that requests the loan of his robe.

MC: - And it's not necessarily just used by his family.

HS: - No not at all. He's the one who's making the decision about who's allowed to dance his robe.

HM: In most cases, then, do you accompany the piece to the potlatch?

HS: Yes, one of the workarounds that we have for insurance is that as long as a MOA staff person travels with the borrowed piece then additional loan insurance isn't required. This then removes one of the barriers to access since the insurance can be prohibitively expensive.

HM: Do you think that being in communities, when the objects are being used by their original owners or makers, this has had an important impact in what you consider for those types of requests in the future?

HS: It's had a profound impact on me, seeing how important it is to the families…it absolutely unequivocally provides you with affirmation that this is something that has to happen.

MC: and it is how we practice our profession. You know, it's had that kind of an effect. This is what we do as conservators.

HM: Miriam, in your book you lay out some best practices for conservators and interested parties in how to navigate that relationship between preserving cultural heritage and objects. Was there anything when conducting your research for that book that really made… things click for you, or was a turning point?

MC: There wasn't one thing. But all those questions I asked, that you see in Chapter 3 and in the chapter on New Zealand, and with the responses which Indigenous people gave me, I really did keep having my eyes opened and my thinking expanded. And my behaviour hit me, too, like talking too much instead of listening. Plus, conservators aren't schooled in research with people, not interviewees. It really was good for me, not only because of what was said but also, personal and emotional, not just intellectual, points of view were expressed.

HM: On the topic of museum acquisition and repatriation, will this continue to be addressed? What other things in the future are on the forefront of these ethical issues for conservators and for museums moving forward?

MC: I think a lot of it is just the kind of work that Heidi is doing. It has to get out to the general public more, not just to the conservation audience. And you'll always have people who think that museums are dusty and static, and you'll have people who are, you know, either very much for or very much against repatriation. But I think everything sort of changes, and whether it changes in a progressive way or whether it changes in other ways, I find it very hard, anyway, to predict what's going to be at the forefront in the future.

HS: I think the biggest one that we face right now is … we've just really been talking about one thing, really. Conservation, the use of belongings in communities. But there are bigger questions for institutions, because, UNDRIP has been out for over a decade, a really embarrassingly long time. And I think thanks to the TRC's call to action, there are more conversations happening, at least in Canada, about the practice of ethics in institutions,

around the display and the interpretation and the care of Indigenous belongings. And that's where the conversations need to continue. What are we as institutions prepared to do to respond to the calls to action? What does it mean to respond? At this point, I don't know that there is an answer, and the conversations that we've had to this date say that there isn't a prescribed answer, but it's more of a process moving forward. That's a great conversation to have, and I'm really glad to be part of it and I think that it's important for conservation to be part of that.

CONFERENCES AND WEB RESOURCES

- **ICOM-CC 19th Triennial Conference. Transcending Boundaries: Integrated Approaches to Conservation**

Due to the COVID pandemic, the dates for ICOM-CC 19th triennial conference are now 17-21 May 2021. The theme for the conference focuses on bringing together in the same forum the knowledge, traditions, and skills of the East and the West. The ICOM website statement reminds us that museums have no borders – they have networks. We think that this is also the case for cultural heritage conservation. The Triennial Conference theme is a channel where one can explore this concept. What are the backgrounds for our selection of conservation methods and materials? What are the features and properties we strive to achieve when working with our artefacts?
The aim of this theme is to help professionals in the field from all around the world learn from one other's practices, philosophies, and materials. We hope to receive the usual excellent Preprint contributions for the 19th Triennial Conference in Beijing, China, in 2021 and sincerely hope there will be numerous contributions - both posters and papers - that touch on this conference theme.

- **Heritage in Times of COVID**

Below a message from ICCROM's director general Webber Ndoro

Dear members of the ICCROM Community,

Like all of you, we have been monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic, implementing a range of measures to ensure the safety of our staff while continuing to carry out our mission to promote the conservation of cultural heritage around the world. This is first and foremost a health crisis, and our thoughts go to those who are unwell, anxious or grieving.

With lockdowns in place in the host countries of both of our offices – Italy and the United Arab Emirates – staff is working from home, planning for the postponement of some of those activities slated to take place in coming weeks, while at the same time seeking out new ways to provide content and support for conservation professionals and institutions within our Member States.

We are firm believers in the power of cultural heritage, and its ability to help make the world a better place. By providing an enabling environment for Member States to preserve their cultural heritage, we aim to contribute to the environmental, social and economic

sustainability of communities. Now more than ever, we are thinking about what our work means to the people we train, the communities they serve, and our vast network of partners from around the world.

COVID-19 has placed an enormous burden on institutions and colleagues who must care for and manage cultural heritage of all types. Our team has been working to prepare a dedicated web area that will offer resources and advice in dealing with Heritage in Times of COVID, which includes assessment forms, but also stories coming from our network about culture's role in these difficult times. We open up the space to others to help us share relevant information that can benefit conservation professionals and institutions in every area of the world. We are extremely grateful to those in our network who have shared their knowledge with us, and to all those that have reached out to us during this period.

We have also a declaration and call to action for those in our field to come together to seek ways to use heritage as a tool of recovery and resilience, while protecting its vulnerabilities and those who represent our vast sector.

We salute the efforts of all heritage workers and institutions who are facing an extremely challenging and unprecedented situation. Know that we are here to help, and together we will work united to safeguard our heritage and enhance its value as a driver of development and well-being.

Sincerely,
Webber Ndoro
Director-General

Visit the Heritage in Times of COVID web area

COVID-19: Call of ICCROM for Protecting Heritage
(also in French, Spanish, Arabic and Italian)

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Here are the details of our current team.

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FROM THE EDITORS

We'd like to thank all of those who contributed to this Newsletter, and to invite all members to contribute to the future newsletters. Please ensure that any submissions are made in Word document format without any embedded footnotes or images –please provide figures and tables as referred to in text listed and numbered in a separate document. We are looking forward to welcome new coordinators and assistant coordinators for this triennium.
Stay safe, and all the best,
Sabine Cotte and Catherine Smith