Newsletter

Wood, Furniture, and Lacquer Working Group

Issue September 2023, Triennium 2020-2023

ICOM-CC

ICOM international council of museums – committee for conservation

Contents

Cover Image: Amsterdam Chest, attributed to Koami-workshop, c. 1635—c. 1645, wood, lacquer, gold and silver foil, crystal, silver, copper, h c.63.5cm × w c.144.5cm × d c.73cm.
Object-nr. AK-RAK-2013-3-1
http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.523323
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Editors: Stephanie Auffret, Jan Dorscheid

ISSN: 2708-6690

Introduction

Dear members,

This is our last Newsletter for the Triennium 2020-2023. I would like to start by thanking my group of Assistant Coordinators for all their help during this Triennium: Jan Dorscheid (Netherlands), Stéphanie Courtier (France), João Maria Petisca (Portugal); Genevieve Bieniosek (USA), Cécilia Gauvin (France) and Jing Han (China). Together, they brought expertise in furniture and other wooden artifacts conservation and science, wooden gilded surfaces, and Asian lacquer, which proved extremely valuable with the recent selection and editing of papers and posters for the Triennial Conference in Valencia. All ACOs are listed at the end of this Newsletter, with their affiliations and area of specialty.

As you all know, the 20th ICOM-CC Triennial Conference will take place in Valencia, Spain, between Monday 18th and Friday 22nd September 2023. I hope to see many of you there. Information on the conference can be found through this link: https://icom-cc2023.org/

Our Working Group will host a half-day session with seven presentations:

- "Unravelling a 17th century masterly prison escape: the quest to identify the original Hugo Grotius' bookchest", authored by Marta Domínguez-Delmás, Francien G. Bossema, Jan Dorscheid, K. Joost Batenburg, Paul van Duin, Robert van Langh.

- "The need for solarization in treatment of insect-infested wooden artefacts in Nigeria museums: A case study of National Museum, Lagos", authored by Ogechukwu Okpalanozie and Ibrahim Kamndu.

- "Conservation of the Red Sandalwood Pagoda During Qianlong Period in the Hall of Mental Cultivation in the Palace Museum (Beijing)", authored by Yangfan Xie, Le Wei, Xueyan Zhang, Daran Qin, Hanwen Liu, Yan Xun.

- "Restoration and protection of the Qing Dynasty Coromandel lacquer screens", authored by Ying Zhu, Lan Zhang, Jinzhang He, Jinghong Tu, Yuanze Lv, Bilian Zhu.

- "Lai rod nam, Thai lacquer decoration on wood court of King Sanphet VIII, Wat Sai", authored by Radchada Buntem.

- "A multi-analytical approach to the characterization of Chinese yellow and green carved lacquer layers", authored by Julie Chang and Michael Schilling.

- "Developing conservation practices for cleaning gilded surfaces: applications for PVOH-borax organogel complexes in the treatment of two gilded frames", authored by Genevieve Tobin and Malgorzata Sawicki.

Posters will include:

- "Australian Treasure from Europe; conservation treatment of a Medieval Episcopal Throne, XIV century", authored by Barbara Dabrowa and Grzegorz Dabrowa.

- "A New insight into the investigation of materials and manufacturing techniques used in painted wooden Bastet statue from the late period", authored by Mohamed Moustafa.

- "Changes in the composition of Asian lacquer film mixed with drying oil after ul-

traviolet irradiation", authored by Jongseo Park, Arlen Heginbotham, Herant Khanjian, Michael Schilling.

- "THE MOCK UP, a complementary element to understand the mechanical behavior of cradled panels paintings", authored by Norman Verschueren, Delphine Jullien, Jean-Christophe Dupré, Meriam El Ouahabi.

We will also host our business meeting at the end of the session. While it is my last term as Coordinator of our Working Group, I would welcome your suggestions for the next Triennium, which can be discussed in Valencia and beyond, with our new Coordinator. I the absence of a candidate, a Coordinator will be designated once the new Directory Board is in place after the Triennial Conference.

Unfortunately we could not manage to offer the virtual meetings and interim meeting we were hoping to organize, for a variety of reasons from people retiring to potential partners or ourselves (me and the Assistant Coordinators) being too busy with our own work, among other complications. Nevertheless, we have been able to plan what I hope will be a very successful session in Valencia. We are also reaching the completion of the Postprints of the 2016 interim meeting held in Potsdam, Germany, on the theme of "Historic and Modern Assemblages: Treatments of Wood Based Multimedia Artworks/Interiors in Context", edited by Stéphanie Auffret, Angelika Rauch and Stefanie Litjens. This publication, containing 18 papers and 6 extended abstracts will be available on the ICOM-CC publication platform, in a digital format. Our Working Group has also produced 2 Newsletters, including this one, providing many interesting project's updates by members and non-members.

Please enjoy the contents of this Newsletter and I hope to see many of you in Valencia in September!

Best wishes,

Stéphanie Auffret
Coordinator
Wood, Furniture, and Lacquer Working Group

Agenda

18-22 Sep. 2021

20th ICOM-CC Triennial Conference in Valencia, Spain
Conference Theme: Working towards a sustainable future

Program and registration: https://icom-cc2023.org

18-19 Oct. 2023

3rd International Symposium on Unearthed Woodware and Lacquerware Conservation, Jingzhou, Hubei Province, China

Information and registration can be requested by contacting Dr Yang Zhao at 729130036@qq.com

19-21 Oct. 2023

Wood Science and Technology III in Maastricht, The Netherlands
Conference Theme: Methods to examine panel paintings and their preventive remedial conservation

Program and registration: https://www.sral.nl/en/nieuws/wood-science-and-technology-iii

6-8 Nov. 2023

WAAC 49th Annual Meeting at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX, USA

Call for Papers: https://www.waac-us.org/callforpapers

21-25 May 2024

AIC 52nd Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, USA
Conference Theme: Expect the Unexpected: Embracing and Managing Change, Uncertainty, and Surprise

Call for submissions: https://www.culturalheritage.org/events/annual-meeting/current-meeting/call-for-submissions

Projects

Understanding the craquelure in the lacquered skin of *guqin*, a traditional Chinese musical instrument

by Aidi Bao

Guqin or *qin* is a Chinese plucked musical instrument consisting of seven silk strings and a long board-shaped wooden soundbox coated with thick layers of Asian lacquer materials. From an ancient ritual orchestra instrument to a symbolic artifact of Confucian virtue, *guqin* and its music have long been regarded as the most prestigious and sacred heritage in Chinese tradition. Ever since the collecting of antique *guqin* from the eleventh century, connoisseurs and players have cherished its surface craquelure (network of cracks) as cultural beauty and a sign of authenticity.

Although the traditional craquelure pattern names and the correlation between patterns and production periods are still widely accepted, this system is often considered to be arbitrary and contradictory by contemporary scholars and collectors. Re-lacquering and specific treatments called "cloud patches (云缀)," usually using re-lacquer to fill sanded cupping areas on the original dark surface to restore playability, have made the situation even more puzzling.

Fig 1. Restored "cloud patch" areas on historical guqin with red lacquer (left) and brown lacquer mixed with gold powders (right), Three Gorges Museum, Chongqing, China. © Aidi Bao

Aidi's dissertation aims to study the classification, materiality, and conservation ethics of *guqin*'s craquelure and surface coatings. An interdisciplinary approach is taken, combining archival research into ancient *guqin* treatises; digital documentation of historical *guqin*'s surfaces with RTI, multi-band imaging, and micro-CT; material characterization of historical coating samples with cross-section microscopy, SEM-EDS, FTIR, and Py-GC/MS; and artificial aging of mockups. So far, 21 samples have been analyzed, and the study group belongs to private collectors and to US and Chinese museums, including the Chongqing Three Gorges Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Museum of Asian Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Penn Museum.

It is found that the typical *guqin* coating consists of a sealant layer, two to three ground layers, and one to two lacquer layers. Fillers, such as deer antler powders, amber, and bronze filings, are identified in the ground layers, which

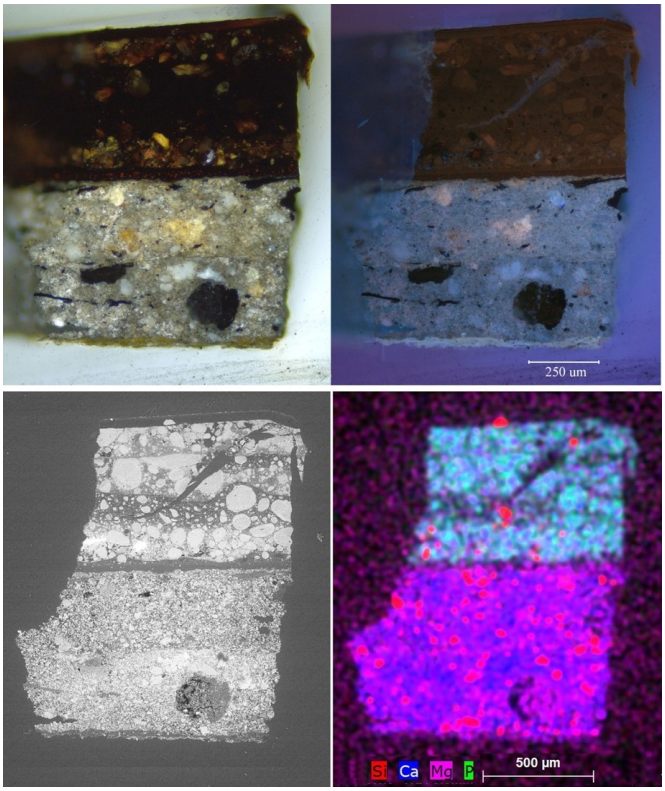


Fig 2. A cross-section coating sample showing original and historical restoration layers from the Ming-dynasty guqin "Autumn Ripples (秋波)," Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, Zhongshan, Guangdong Province, China. Optical microscopic images under visible light (upper left) and ultra-violet light (upper right), SEM-backscattered image (lower left), and SEM-elemental mapping image (lower right). © Aidi Bao

are pretty uncommon in other types of lacquered objects. *Laccol*, the lacquer species primarily sourced from Vietnam, is also detected in several coating samples. In addition, areas of restoration were studied and reveal different strategies of repair and dramatic changes in lacquering techniques throughout the instruments' finish history.

Ideally, this research will also benefit the lacquer conservation field by introducing a group of less-studied objects and the art craft tradition they present, and by looking into the crack-forming mechanisms in general.

Bio: Aidi Bao is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Preservation Studies at the University of Delaware, USA. Aidi also holds a MSc in archaeological material science from Erasmus Mundus joint program and a MA and BA in architecture from Tsinghua University, Beijing. She worked as a fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2022-2023, and as a project specialist for the survey and digital documentation of wall paintings and clay sculptures at various heritage sites in China, 2016-2018. Aidi's research interest is the material analysis and historical interpretation of lacquerware and decorative surfaces.

Email: baoaidi@gmail.com

Specially designed filler for painted and gilded wood: Aquazol 200 / Calcium Carbonate / Cellulose powder

by Pascale Patris, Objects Conservator
The Metropolitain Museum of Art

Introduction: The mechanical properties of materials are key elements in understanding how interventions in conservation treatments affect cultural heritage objects. Fragile or altered surfaces, like those of historical painted and gilded wooden objects, often require significant conservation treatment. This leads to critical decisions on treatment strategy, which focus on the use of minimally invasive and reversible conservation techniques. Specially designed fill materials, physically compatible with the surrounding materials, can give stability and durability to the fill. The mechanical properties of a fill material should also be comparable in stiffness and strength to its surrounding and be able to behave in a similar way.

A filler made of a mixture of chalk, powdered cellulose, and the synthetic resin Aquazol 200 was tested on wooden boards. In preparation for the filler, a coating of 5% Aquazol 200 in distilled water was applied to the wooden surface. Tests were performed to assess different mechanical characteristics such as strength, good adhesion, reversibility, and good cohesion for carvability. A filler/putty must have good carving and burnishing qualities, as well as desirable properties for the reintegration of painted and/or gilded surfaces. The shrinkage criterion was also investigated.

The synthetic resin *Aquazol 200* was selected as binder for the filler/putty mixture. With good adhesion, flexibility, and strength qualities, *Aquazol 200* is part of a family of thermoplastic polymers, which have good resistance to aging, and high reversibility. In the case of water-based painted and gilded surfaces on wood, ease of reversibility is essential: the specially designed filler is highly reversible in acetone and ethanol.

© Pascale Patris

Powdered Cellulose is derived from fibrous plants. Cellulose powder is a white, odorless, free-flowing powder that is virtually free of organic and inorganic contaminants. It is insoluble in water and in most organic solvents. Cellulose powders have the reputation of being easy and pleasant to work with, with a neutral pH, as well as high water absorbency and plasticity. They also provide good conformance and adhesion to a substrate. Powdered cellulose varieties can greatly differ in density and texture. Tests were completed on a range of cellulose powders of different particle sizes; based on these tests, Solka Floc SK-10 was selected.

Chalk is a soft, fine grained variety of limestone, the purest variety contain 99 percent of calcium carbonate CaCo3 in the form of the mineral calcite. Natural chalk, a soft, porous, and white powder, has been used extensively from earliest time in art. Traditionally, the 'best chalk for artists' use is said to be 'Champagne chalk' from Northern France. In Northern Europe, from early medieval times chalk was employed with animal glue for making the preparation layer of panel paintings. Used in much the same way gesso (gypsum) was used in Italy or Spain. Because of its composition and characteristics, the *specially designed filler* is like a gesso-based stucco.

The proportions of cellulose powder and CaCo3, as well as the concentration of the Aquazol 200

in distilled water (7% - 10% recommended), can be customized based on the desired ground characteristics and requirements for carving, surface replacement, and retouching. The filler/ putty is highly reversible in ethanol and acetone: an essential quality for use on water-based surfaces.

© Pascale Patris

Proposed Recipes

Filler/Putty for carving:

Aquazol 200 diluted in 10 % distilled water,

1:5 Cellulose powder Solka Floc SK-10 / Calcium carbonate (chalk Champagne)

Filler/Putty for surface replacement, retouching, and carving:

Aquazol 200 diluted 7% in distilled water,

1:5 Cellulose powder Solka Floc SK-10 / Calcium carbonate (chalk Champagne)

Materials

-Cellulose powder: SK-10 Powdered Cellulose J. Rettenmaier USA LP. 16369 US 131 Highway. Schoolcraft - MI 49087

-Chalk from Champagne – Kremer pigments.

-Aquazol 200 - Talas

References

Arslanoglu, Julie. *Evaluation of the Use of Aquazol as an Adhesive in Paintings Conservation. WAAC Newsletter*, May 2003, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 12-18". (Dealt with the properties and characteristics of the resin as determined by a series of empirical tests). *Aquazol as Used in Conservation Practice.* WAAC Newsletter. January 2004. Vol.26. number 1.

Rutheford J. Gettens, Elisabeth West Fitzhugh and Robert L. Feller. *Calcium Carbonate Whites.* Studies in Conservation, Vol.19, No. 3 (Aug. 1974) pp. 157-184

Email: Pascale.Patris@metmuseum.org

New progress in lacquerware research of the Palace Museum

by Mr Junrong Min and Dr Na Wang
The Palace Museum, Beijing, China

1. Establishment of Lacquerware Research Institute

In August 2022, The Institute of Gugong Studies unveiled the establishment of Lacquerware Research Institute, on the basis of Department of Objects and Decorative Arts, Department of Palace Life and Imperial Ritual, Department of Conservation Science, Library, and Department of Architectural Heritage of the Palace Museum, focusing on the research of historical and archaeological Chinese lacquerware. The Lacquerware Research Institute focuses on academic research and talents developments, combining cultural and historical research with scientific, technological analyses, as well as the conservation and restoration of lacquerware cultural relics, and is committed to building a comprehensive platform for lacquerware research.

Lacquerware Research Institute of The Institute of Gugong Studies was inaugurated at The Palace Museum in August 2022

The Lacquerware Research Institute looks forward to working with practitioners engaged in the research, conservation, creation and production of lacquerware cultural heritage, carrying out multi-knowledge crossed research, so as to effectively promote the progress of scientific research projects, promote the formation, transformation and utilization of scientific research achievements, promote the cooperation and exchanges between the Palace Museum and domestic and foreign museums, research institutions and universities, as well as to promote the inheritance and innovation of lacquerware technology and culture.

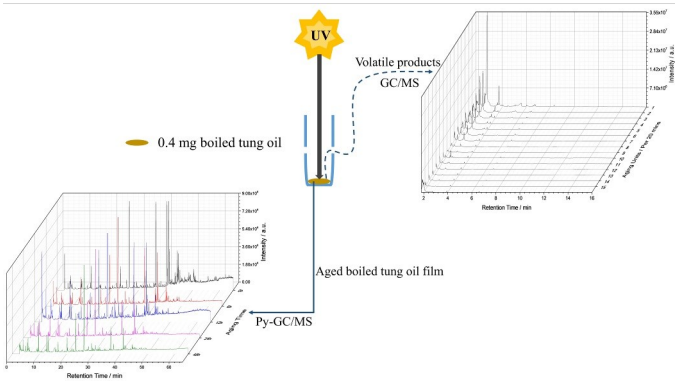
2. Latest scientific research

In recent years the Palace Museum team has undertaken various research projects on lacquerware including the National Key Research and Development Program of China 'Research on the value cognition and key technologies of organic movable cultural relics', the National Natural Science Foundation of China Program 'Research on the identification and aging degree evaluation of natural organic components in lacquerware relics', along with a number of scientific research projects of the Palace Museum.

So far, the Palace Museum has initially established a set of systemic scientific analysis methods for the identification of materials and technologies of traditional Chinese lacquerware, as well as methods for the scientific evaluation of the aging degree of Qi-lacquer (urushi) and drying oil, two main raw materials of Chinese lacquerware relics, and the methods have been applied to the research on materials, technologies and preservation status of more than 100 lacquerware relics.

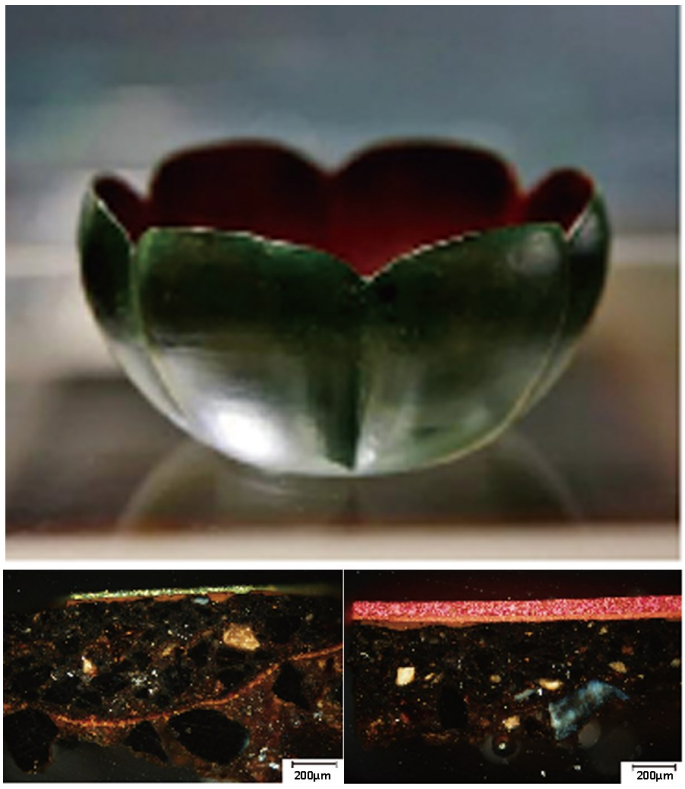
In terms of lacquerware from old collection of the Forbidden City, materials and technique of carved lacquer decorated panel from Fuwangge in the Forbidden City of Qianlong Period, Qing Dynasty, have been investigated (Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports 17 (2018) 529–537; https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2017.12.023), and aging degree of Qi-lacquer and boiled tung oil in different carved lacquer layers have been evaluated and compared (Microchemical Journal 187 (2023)

108414; https://doi.org/10.1016/j.microc.2023.108414). Based on the non-invasive method, near infrared and chemometrics, the content ratio of Qi-lacquer to tung oil in dozens of lacquerware relics in the Ming and Qing dynasties have been confirmed, and the change rule of tung oil content in carved, painted and black lacquerwares has been summarized (Studies in Conservation, 2021; https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2021.1945860). In terms of unearthed lacquerware, it has been confirmed that ingredients of the very rare 'dark-green lacquer' of a green lotus-shaped lacquer bowl unearthed from a Song Dynasty tomb at Bashi Town of Wuxi, was composed of orpiment, indigo, Qi-lacquer and drying oil (Sciences of Conservation and Archaeology, 35(1): 111-118).



Research results of UV and thermal aging of boiled tung oil (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.microc.2023.108414)

Scientific research achievements have provided strong scientific and technological support for the in-depth study of the historical, scientific and artistic values of related lacquerware relics, as well as the exchange and promotion of Chinese lacquerware technology.



Song Dynasty lotus-shaped green lacquer bowl unearthed in Wuxi (after restoration) and images of cross-section of its green and red lacquer (Sciences of Conservation and Archaeology, 35(1): 111-118)

故宫博物院漆器科研新进展

1. *漆器研究所成立*

故宫研究院2022年8月揭牌成立了漆器研究所，该所依托故宫博物院器物部、宫廷历史部、文保科技部、图书馆、古建部等部门，以中国历代漆器文物为主要研究对象；以学术研究和人

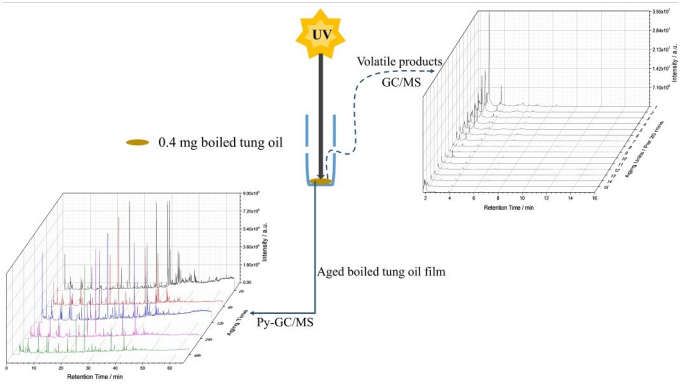
故宫研究院漆器研究所于2022年8月在故宫博物院揭牌成立

才培养为中心，将文化与历史研究同工艺材料科技检测，以及漆器文物保护修复相结合，构建漆器研究的综合性平台。期待携手院内外从事漆文化遗产研究、保护，以及创作、生产的从业人员，开展多学科交叉研究，有效推进科研课题项目的进展，促进科研成果的形成与转化利用，促进故宫博物院与国内外博物、研究机构以及高校之间的合作交流，推动漆工艺与文化的传承与创新。

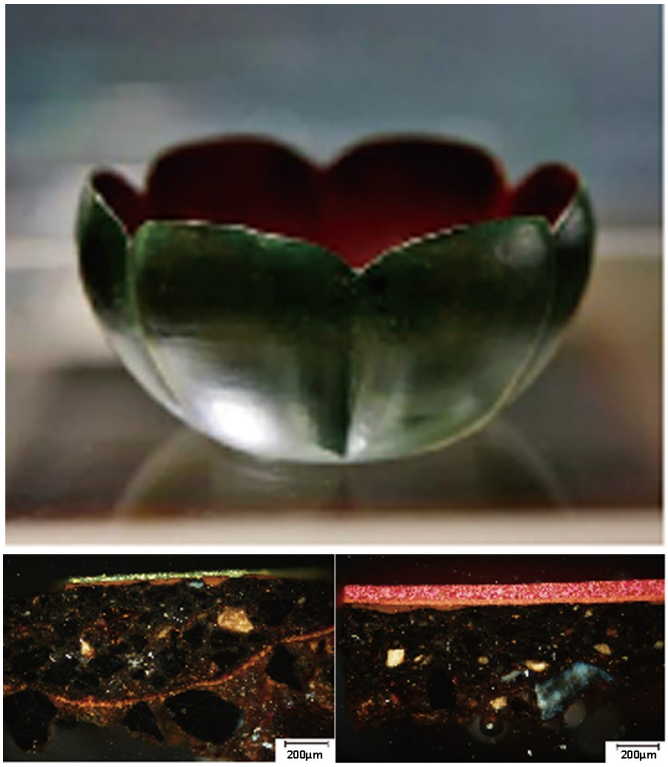
2. *最新科学研究成果*

故宫博物院承担了十三五国家重点研发计划"有机质可移动文物价值认知及关键技术研究"项目（项目编号：2019YFC1520300）、国家自然科学基金"漆器文物中天然有机成分的识别及老化程度评估方法研究"项目（项目编号：21904024），并开展了多项与漆器研究相关的故宫博物院科学研究课题。

故宫博物院目前已初步建立起中国传统漆器文物材质工艺科学分析体系，以及可用于漆器文物主要原材料大漆及干性油老化程度科学评估的方法，并应用于过百件漆器文物材质工艺、保存状况的研究。以故宫旧藏传世漆器文物为例，探究了故宫符望阁内檐雕漆饰品漆灰层、雕漆层原材料、髹饰方法（Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports 17 (2018) 529–537; https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2017.12.023），并对比研究了不同雕漆层中大漆、熟桐油的老化程度（Microchemical Journal 187 (2023) 108414; https://doi.org/10.1016/j.microc.2023.108414）；基于非侵入式的近红外光谱研究了明清时期数十件漆器文物大漆、桐油含量比，总结了雕漆、彩绘漆、黑漆中桐油含量变化规律（Studies in Conservation, 2021; https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2021.1945860）。以出土漆器文物为例，科学鉴别了无锡出土宋代罕见"绿沉漆"实物——绿髹荷花形漆钵的材质工艺，确定"绿沉"色是由雌黄、靛蓝与大漆和植物油调配而成（文物保护与考古科学，35(1): 111-118）。



熟桐油紫外光氧老化研究成果（https://doi.org/10.1016/j.microc.2023.108414 ）



无锡出土宋代绿髹荷花形漆钵（修复后）及其绿沉漆层、红漆层剖面层次结构（文物保护与考古科学，35(1): 111-118）

已取得的科研成果为相关文物历史、科学、艺术价值的深入研究，以及中国漆工艺的交流、推广提供了有力的科技支持。

Navigating Transculturality and Multiculturalism through Conservation

by Merry Chow

1. A people-centred approach and the shifting ground of cultural change

Over the past two decades, conservation practices have shifted to a people-centred approach, highlight a continuous community values in the sustainable care of cultural heritage. It aims to transform the conservation decision-making process to an open dialogue with the community, facilitated by various means of knowledge sharing. Meanwhile, against the backdrop of globalisation and decolonisation discourses, conservators are increasingly challenged with contemporary debates of cultural change. Two projects are explored, each presenting unique challenges and opportunities in addressing questions of transculturality and multiculturalism. What are the community values of a transcultural object? What conservation action is appropriate for an object that belongs to a transcultural and multicultural community? The first project delves into the transcultural identity of a wooden box with mother-of-pearl inlay, while the second project tackles the fate of a wooden polychrome sculpture removed as a result of decolonisation and Fallism movement.

2. Project 1 - The Transcultural Identity of A Wooden Box with Mother-of-Pearl Inlay

The wooden box, of unknown origin and age, arrived at the UCL Institute of Archaeology Conservation Laboratory as part of a research project on historical adhesives and Asian lacquer repair techniques. The box exhibited severe warping, a detached lid panel, and missing mother-of-pearl inlay, rendering it unsafe for handling and diminishing its significance (Fig.1).

Fig. 1 Wooden box with Mother-of-Pearl Inlay. D 27 cm, H 10 cm. Private owner. © Merry Chow 2021

During the initial consultation, the owner expressed a desire to restore the box's structural integrity, as it held sentimental value and had served as a sewing box of her deceased mother. It had accompanied them from Singapore to England during their migration in the 1980s.

As an academic in Southeast Asian Art, the owner would like a detailed technical investigation of the box, given the scarcity of similar objects. This box would serve as an excellent research subject for studying historical repairs in Asian lacquer, as it has remained unrepaired since its purchase. The reconstruction of a more comprehensive object biography, including tracing the "original" object and identifying subsequent restorations, not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the box but also revitalizes the connection between the object and its community (i.e. the owner's family).

Scientific investigation, including optical microscopy, 365nm ultra-violet light (UV), backscattered electrons imaging of scanning electron microscopy (SEM-BSE) and Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) revealed evidence of multiple restoration campaigns (Fig.2). Comparisons with similar Asian wooden objects in various museum collections, e.g. British Museum, Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, Vietnamese Women's Museum and the National Museum of Vietnamese History, suggested that the box was

likely a Vietnamese lacquered wooden betel box produced during or after the Nguyen Dynasty of the 19th to early 20th century.

Fig. 2 Highlighted in different colours are areas stylistically or materially different from the original mother-of-pearl decoration. The rim possibly underwent 5 separate campaigns of restoration. © Merry Chow 2021

The box had a complex transcultural identity, influenced by both its indigenous Southeast Asian cultural context of betel chewing and the decorative motifs associated with the prominent Sinitic influence in Vietnam's hybrid cultural identity.

As the object was brought to Singapore, where the Chinese community is one of the dominant ethnic groups, it was perceived as an East Asian object due to its "Chinese" decorative motifs. It was displayed alongside a collection of antique Chinese wooden furniture in the living room of the owner's childhood home. Subsequently, the wooden box was relocated to England in 1980. To establish a sense of home for the family and maintain a sense of continuity in their identity within the transcultural context of migration (Kuo 2018), the box was placed in a recreated setting in the new house, simulating the original domestic environment. Following the owner's mother's passing, this former domestic object encapsulated memories of the deceased and childhood in a distant homeland, intensifying the feeling of loss. Unintentionally neglected or left in a state of "stasis" within the intact domestic sphere of the deceased, the box became disengaged as part of the grieving process.

Transforming from a Vietnamese betel box to a sewing box in Singapore, then evolving into a memory object of a migrant family, and eventually becoming an inherited item neglected in storage, the object has undergone numerous changes in function and meaning across diverse cultural contexts. It has acquired a complex transcultural identity that embodies the narrative of acculturation following postcolonial migration, as well as cultural assimilation through state initiatives aimed at unifying multiple ethnicities within a cohesive framework of statehood and political territory. These dynamics are evident in the historical development of Vietnam after Chinese domination, as well as in other Southeast Asian countries during the post-colonial era, such as Malaysia, Laos, and Singapore (Benjamin 1976; Kalb 1997; Lian 1997; Jonsson 2012; Rocha and Yeoh 2020).

Biography of the Wooden Box	
Time of production (unknown time and location)	Produced in Vietnam as a betel box, possibly in Chuyên Mỹ Commune in Hanoi, the birth place of mother-of-pearl inlay in the Red River Delta. No earlier than 19th century.
Time of previous purchase (s) (unknown time and location)	Underwent possibly more than one incarnation under different ownership and multiple restorations.
Time of final purchase (unknown time and location)	Purchased by the owner's mother and used as a sewing box. Placed alongside a collection of traditional Chinese wooden furniture in the sitting room of a bungalow house in Singapore.
Migration in 1980s	Transported from Singapore to a house with central heating in England in 1980s due to migration of the family.
Early 2000s	Dried out gradually at an open area in the sitting room after a long period of neglect upon the death of the owner's mother.
2019 – 2020	Found in a fragile, damaged state with a warped, broken lid, flaking coating, and lost mother-of-pearl decorations. After loosely wrapped with tissue paper and stored inside a plastic container, the box was then transported to an apartment in London.
2021 – current	Undergoing scientific investigation and conservation treatment at the conservation laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology, University College London (UCL), United Kingdom.

Further research, including analysis using pyrolysis-gas chromatography–mass spectrometry with derivation by tetramethylammonium hydroxide (THM-Py-GC/MS), was recommended to understand traditional Vietnamese lacquer restoration techniques. Engaging in ongoing discussions with the community, i.e. the Tan family, was vital to negotiate conservation interventions, considering the preservation versus restoration approaches. It was essential to acknowledge that conserving the object with contemporary conservation approach (e.g. introduction of synthetic material) could alter its interpretation, irrespective of its cultural hybridity .

3. Project 2 – Decolonising UCL : What to do about Phineas?

Phineas is a large wooden carved polychrome statue representing a Scottish Highland Black Watch soldier of the British Army, commonly found outside tobacconist shops in the late 19th and early 20th century England. Initially 'captured' by students to celebrate the British Army's victory at the colonial Boer War, the statue was later donated to the Students' Union and became the official mascot of UCL's sports teams until 2020. Since 1900, it has played a significant role in the student experience at UCL, involving institutional rivalry and pranks among London universities. In 2019, the UCL Students' Union voted to remove the statue from Phineas Bar due to its association with British imperialism. This decision aimed to address how UCL presents itself to the world, acknowledges its past actions, and creates an inclusive environment for its diverse community as a Global University (UCL Students' Union 2019). The statue has remained in storage until its future could be determined.

Fig. 3 Phineas on public display inside the Beadle Box, South Cloister, UCL ©The Phineas Question Research Project 2022

Funded by UCL's Centre for Critical Heritage Studies and led by a team of conservation students and staff, the research project "Decolonizing UCL: What to Do about Phineas?" seeks to explore how complex historical legacies are memorialized through present-day objects and their interaction with diverse values and relationships. Public consultation on the future of the Phineas statue occurred from June to October 2022, aiming to support the Students' Union in making decisions about the statue's fate following its removal. Public engagement with Phineas took place in the South Cloisters at UCL, supplemented by social media platforms such as a website, Instagram, and Twitter for discussions and student involvement. UCL students and the wider community were invited to vote and comment on five proposed "Futures" for the statue through in-person surveys and online platforms. The proposal presented a range of possible outcomes for Phineas, from continued neglect in long-term storage to radical acts of creative disposal. In October 2022, a

panel discussion involving experts was held to debate appropriate conservation responses to contested heritage objects and the global Fallism movement. Most recently, the project was presented at the student conference "Should it stay or should it go? - Repatriation and decolonization in conservation" held at West Dean College in the United Kingdom in 25-26 June, 2023.

The consultation revealed that the majority of people within the current UCL community had little or no prior knowledge of Phineas and showed limited interest in the issue. The current UCL Students' Union committee faces two significant challenges: (i) making a decision that represents a transient, ever-changing, global student body with diverse cultural backgrounds, opinions, and priorities, and (ii) addressing the physical presence of the statue that demands action. However, simply providing more information and facilitating discussions may not overcome this collective amnesia and lack of attention in an era of information overload (Doyle and Roda 2019). In fact, social media campaigns manipulated by artificial intelligence in cultural wars can further polarize and fragment debates (Lanham 2006). While the project has not reached a final conclusion regarding the statue's future, it has successfully encouraged a fresh perspective on the Phineas issue and highlighted the need for action. Retaining contested heritage objects is not a neutral choice, as it requires significant time, effort, and resources to manage them within museum collections and public spaces. Perhaps the most radical approach for cultural heritage professionals engaged in this discussion is to refrain from intervening in the process, accept the evolving experiences related to Phineas, and facilitate ongoing change for contemporary students in addressing the implications of removing objects from public display.

Project website: https://decolonisingconser.wixsite.com/phineas/

Fig. 4 Phineas, covered by a white cloth inside the Object Learning Laboratory at UCL after the project has ended © The Phineas Question Research Project 2022

References

Benjamin, G. 1976. The cultural logic of Singapore's multiracialism. In: *Singapore: Society in Transition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 115–133.

Doyle, W. and Roda, C. 2019. Introduction. In: Doyle, W. and Roda, C. eds. *Communication in the Era of Attention Scarcity*. Cham: Palgrave Pivot

Jonsson, H. 2012. Manikin-ship: Value-added relatedness in Vietnamese museums, 1996-2005. *Australian Journal of Anthropology (The)* 23(2), pp. 212–228. doi: 10.1111/j.1757-6547.2012.00182.x.

Kalb, L.B. 1997. Nation building and culture display in Malaysian museums. *Museum Anthropology* 21(1), pp. 69–81.

Kuo, Y. 2018. *Lost Homelands Reinvented : Material Culture of the Chinese Diaspora and Their Family in Taiwan*. University College London (UCL).

Lanham, R.A. 2006. *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lian, K.F. 1997. Introduction: Ethnic Identity in Malaysia and Singapore. *Asian Journal of Social Science* 25 (2), pp. 1–6. Available at: https://brill.com/view/journals/ajss/25/2/article-p1_1.xml.

Rocha, Z.L. and Yeoh, B.S.A. 2020. Measuring Race, Mixed Race, and Multiracialism in Singapore. In: Rocha, Z. L. and Aspinall, P. J. eds. *The Palgrave International Handbook of Mixed Racial and Ethnic Classification*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 629–647. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22874-3_33.

UCL Students' Union 2019. A new future for Phineas? Available at: https://www7.studentsunionucl.org/mascotconsultation [Accessed: 10 June 2022].

Bio: Merry Chow, a recent graduate of the MSc in Conservation for Archaeology and Museums and the MA in Principles of Conservation at University College London (UCL), brings a diverse background in performing arts, contemporary art and Japanese architecture. During her conservation training, she undertook internships at St. Paul's Cathedral and the Sculpture and Installation Department at Tate. Recently, completed a placement funded by the . Currently employed at the conservation laboratory at UCL Institute of Archaeology, Merry's research focuses on the transcultural aspects of conservation practices, historical techniques of non-European lacquer, and reimagining conservation approaches through the lens of the Anthropocene.

Email: merry.chow.19@ucl.ac.uk/
merry.chow@gmail.com

Two important conservation projects completed at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam

by Paul van Duin, Head of Furniture Conservation, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

In 2019 the Rijksmuseum furniture conservation department started with the treatment of two very important recent acquisitions. One is the so-called 'Amsterdam chest', a large Japanese chest c.1640 decorated with Japanese lacquer belonging to the same group as the 'Mazarin chest' at the Victoria & Albert Museum (see ICOM-CC Wood, Furniture, and Lacquer Group Newsletter February 2019), the other one a large ebony cabinet inlaid with mother-of-pearl dated 1632 and attributed to the Amsterdam cabinetmaker Herman Doomer (c.1595-1650).

Amsterdam chest

The conservation of the high-quality lacquer work was carried out by Yoshihiko Yamashita, who previously treated the 'Mazarin chest' together with Shayne Rivers. The treatment of the 'Amsterdam chest' took 1,5 years, divided over 4 periods with an interruption of 2,5 years because of the travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yoshihiko Yamashita was assisted by Jan Dorscheid, who partly carried out and coordinated the research related to the analysis of the original materials and techniques as well as previous treatments, and who cleaned the metal mounts. The surface of the lacquer was covered with different European materials, such as linseed oil, shellac, wax and even acrylic paint. All from attempts in the past undoubtedly aimed at brightening up the lacquer. Dirt was engrained in these layers, especially on the decoration of the lid.

In the light of the complications and damages previous European materials have caused to the lacquer surface, and the uncertainties modern materials may cause in the future, it was decided to treat the 'Amsterdam chest' with the traditional Japanese method. Executed by a highly experienced lacquer conservator such as Yoshihiko Yamashita, this approach is undoubtedly the most sympathetic and re-treatable of all options.

Fig. 1 Amsterdam Chest
Object-nr. AK-RAK-2013-3-1,
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Approximately 9 months were needed to clean the surface. Because of the variation in European layers different mixtures of solvents were used, sometimes using Evolon, cut to the size of the part of the decoration that needed cleaning. After the cleaning process, the lacquer was impregnated with urushi-gatame, various times if needed. Subsequently the loose gold, silver, tin and mother-of-pearl foil was consolidated using Japanese hide glue and a *shimbari*-frame. Large dents and two missing sections from the moulding around the bottom were filled and then retouched with nashiji of a neutral tone. Lastly the decoration was treated with a layer of suri-urushi, as a protective layer. The conservation was successful in preserving the condition of the chest, and by cleaning the decoration this has become much more easy to read. The result of the removal of European layers is that the differences in particle size and colour of the gold and silver powder that was used to create the decoration are much more apparent.

Fig. 2 Doomer cabinet,
Object-nr. BK-2020-1
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Doomer cabinet

In addition to the cabinet by Herman Doomer dated c. 1640-1645 that has been in its collection since 1975, the Rijksmuseum bought in 2019 another cabinet by him, dated 1632. The slightly smaller cabinet shows Doomer's development in design, as the lower half is in the classical style of Hendrick de Keyser whereas the upper half has the baroque features that are so prominent in the cabinet of c. 1640-1645. The mother-of-pearl decorations of the 1632 cabinet are signed IB, of Jean Bellequin. The condition of the cabinet of 1632 was not very good. A large part of the intricate mouldings was loose and/or had been replaced with new mouldings, some of ebony, others of ebonized wood. Also large parts of the mother-of-pearl decoration were slightly lifting or had been replaced at different periods in time. Conservation treatment was carried out between 2020 and 2022. The conservation of the cabinet was carried out by Iskander Breebaart, with the assistance of Tirza Mol and our interns Marie Langhorst, Tatiana Maj and Welmoed Kreb. The five doors were treated by Jan Dorscheid. Virtually all mouldings were reglued, and the later added mouldings were replaced with exact copies in ebony, produced on a scraping device designed and made by Iskander Breebaart. Most of the mother-of-pearl was reglued to consolidate it and make it even with the surrounding ebony. Part of the later additions were regarded as acceptable, but missing and cruder executed sections were replaced with new mother-of-pearl. These were engraved, but the shading was omitted. From a distance the replaced parts blend in with the original decoration, on closer inspection they are easily distinguishable. The rich interior of the cabinet, veneered with snakewood, padouk and other tropical timbers and with a *perspectiefje* with gilded columns and mirrors was also consolidated, as the cabinet was opened for the public at monthly intervals during its presentation in the Rijksmuseum Gallery of Honour from November 2022 to June 2023. An overview of the conservation treatment was presented on 20th April this year at the Ebenist symposium in Amsterdam by Iskander Breebaart and Jan Dorscheid and will be published in the proceedings of the conference.

Email: P.van.Duin@rijksmuseum.nl

Gilding group of the French Section of the International Institute for Conservation (SFIIC)

by Stéphanie Courtier, conservator of gilded surfaces, C2RMF

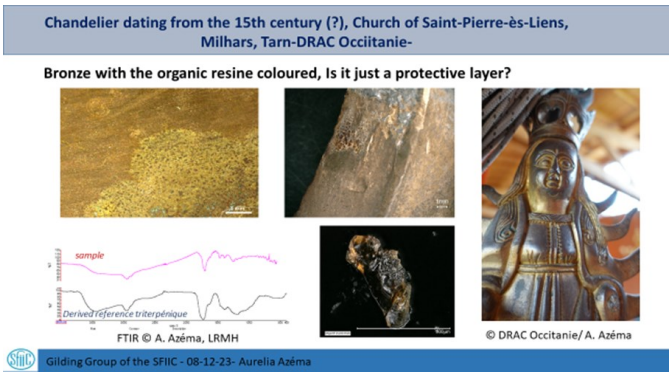
The Gilding group of the French Section of the International Institute for Conservation was created in 2017 by Stéphanie Courtier, conservator of gilded surfaces at the *Center for Research and Restoration of the Museums of France (C2RMF)*. It is comprised of 8 coordinators and brings together people with a common interest: metallic leaves or powders on any support. The members of this group are professionals 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.

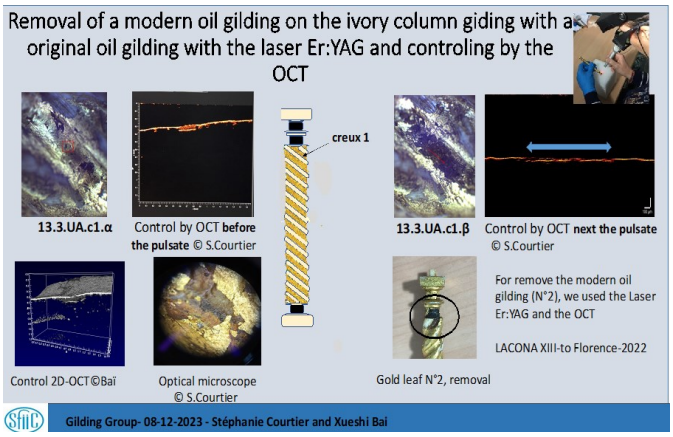
The 4th day of study of the gilding group took place in Paris in December 2022 at the C2RMF and was about « Historical, technical and material knowledge of the golden work: Contribution of analysis results to understand and guide the choices of restauration ». These presentations provided opportunities to present various research projects and the development of new approaches to restoration carried out in France and more broadly in Europe, additional knowledge on the ancient techniques of original gilding and decoration. Analytical results, combined with the conservator's expertise, allow them to, through their personal database (their experience) and their bibliographical sources, to discriminate between interventions, to bring to light original techniques and decorations, sometimes lost due to successive coverings linked to the history of the object, and to date certain later interventions by ancient techniques through the composition of the strata. These different parameters guide our work.

Among the eight presentations (see the program on the site https://sfiic.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Programme_-SFIIC_DORURE_-8_12_22.pdf), we were able to follow various past and current research themes. Specialists in metals surfaces delivered a variety of presentations, including:

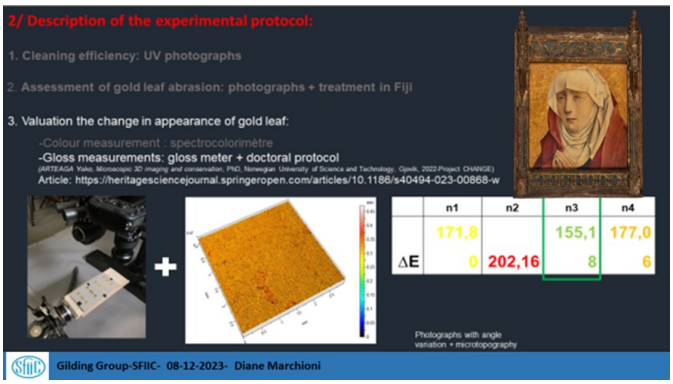
- Aurélia Azema's research on metal surfaces from 15th-century's historic monuments of the DRAC Occitanie;



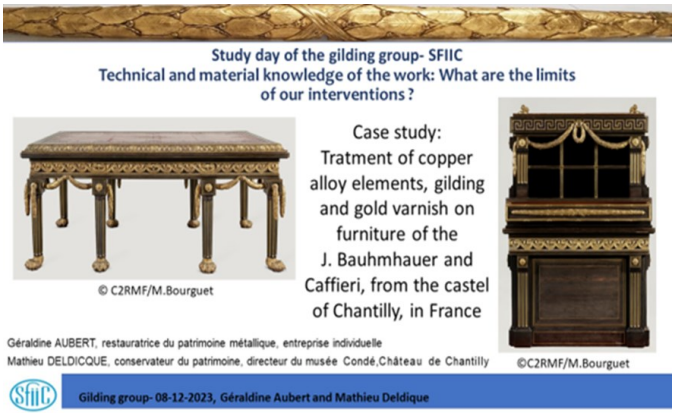
- the development at the Centre de recherche des musées de France (C2RMF) of a new approach to Er : YAG laser for the restoration of the gilded surface on the Bargueno, 16th-century travel desk in the Castel of Pau by Stéphanie Courtier, Xueshi Bai and Vincent Detalle;



- a research into chemical cleaning and its impact on the gilded surface from the 15th-century polychrome panel in the J-M André collection by Diane Marchioni, thesis at the Institut National du Patrimoine (INP);



-a research into techniques for colouring gilded bronzes during the restoration of the A. L. Lalile de Jully *cartonnier*. L. Lalile de Jully, from the Institut National du Patrimoine (INP);



- a research into the techniques used to colour gilded bronzes during the restoration of the *cartonnier* by A. L. Lalile de Jully, 18th century, Château de Chantilly in France.

The Coré periodicals includes a selection of presentations from the different SFIIC study days such as "Gold and the way: Techniques of gilding on wood through time", Stéphanie Courtier and Marie Dubost, Coré, N°1, 2021. www.SFIIC.com/Coré

Email: stephanie.courtier@culture.gouv.fr

Imprint

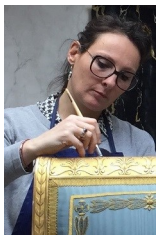
Coordinator of the Working Group

Stéphanie Auffret
Getty Conservation Institute
1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 700
Los Angeles, California 90049-1684
USA
E-mail: sauffret@getty.edu

Assistant Coordinators

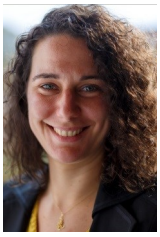
Genevieve Bieniosek
Furniture Conservator
Biltmore Estate
Asheville, North Carolina , USA
Email: gbieniosek@gmail.com

Stéphanie Courtier
Conservator of Gilded Wood
Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France (C2RMF), Paris
FRANCE
E-mail: stephnie.courtier@culture.gouv.fr



Jan Dorscheid
Associate Conservator of Furniture
Rijksmuseum
Museumstraat 1, Postbox 74888
1070 DN Amsterdam
The NETHERLANDS
E-mail:j.dorscheid@rijksmuseum.nl

Cécilia Gauvin
CEO, wood scientist
S-MA-C-H
Route de Suze la Rousse
84290, Sainte-Cécile-Les-Vignes
FRANCE
Email: consulting@ceciliagauvin.com



Jing Han
Assistant Professor
Shanghai University
Shanghai
CHINA
Email: jinghan8706@hotmail.com

Maria João Petisca
Integrated Ph.D. Researcher
Institute for the History of Art (IHA), NOVA FCSH
Avenida de Berna, 26-C,
1069-061 Lisboa
PORTUGAL
E-mail: mjpetisca@gmail.com