

Call for Presentations

ICOM-CC Working Groups

Modern Materials & Contemporary Art

&

Theory, History and Ethics of Conservation

Virtual Joint Interim Meeting

*Title: **Participation and Community Involvement in***

Conservation of Contemporary Art in Institutional Collections

Date: 19 February, 2025

Time: TBA

This virtual joint interim meeting - organized by the ICOM-CC's Theory, History, and Ethics of Conservation and Modern Material and Contemporary Art Working Groups - aims to explore community participation in conserving contemporary art within institutional collections. It intends to address the disconnect between museums' growing participatory approaches and their limited application in contemporary art collection care.

The goal is to examine how contemporary art conservation practices are involving communities, the value of “expert knowledge” in these settings, and the challenges and hurdles that arise in practice.

How do institutional practices maintain professional standards whilst working with communities, and what roles do conservation professionals assume in these contexts? What does community participation look like beyond the assumed binary between conservation professionals and “non-experts”? How are diverse perspectives brought together and how is (or isn't) consensus achieved? By showcasing both successful and unsuccessful participatory efforts, it aims to map current practices and discuss future initiatives.

CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS

As reflected in ICOM's new museum definition, global understandings of and expectations towards museums are shifting. The new definition moves away from language focused on objects and collections to socially focused language about collaboration, participation, and inclusion, recognizing museums as social and political spaces. Since the early 21st century, museums worldwide have been striving to become more involving, a trend epitomized by Nina Simon's influential book *The Participatory Museum*¹. While curatorial and educational departments have readily embraced this participatory approach, the

¹ Simon, *The Participatory Museum*.

area of collection care, including conservation, has been slower to adapt.² Although over the last decades participatory decision-making has gained traction in built heritage³ and public art conservation⁴, and—within the museum framework—in the care of ethnographic and historical collections,⁵ examples of public involvement in conservation in art museums seem to be rather rare.

Conservation nowadays is understood as a broad concept that considers objects as contextual and contingent.⁶ However, within the discourse on contemporary art conservation the social dimensions of the conservation object have been successively overlooked. While communities are recognized as important stakeholders in conservation decision-making processes also in this particular area,⁷ which raises questions concerning the justice of the conservation process in its social context.⁸

Within our profession equity, diversity, and inclusion are now recognized as crucial for creating a more just and sustainable world, including in the realm of museum practices. In conservation, the field's professionalization has led to specialized knowledge requirements typically gained through years of study, making it accessible only to a privileged few. This trend is partly a result of increasingly sophisticated standards emerging from conservation's development as an academic discipline and the rise of evidence-based, scientific approaches. However, restricting collection care practices to professionals, while excluding community members—including artists (other than the artwork's creator) and other stakeholders deemed “unqualified”—as well as other actors within the institutional realm, can potentially render decisions related to conservation efforts obscure and create a disconnect between communities and their art collections.

The conservation field has long been grounded in principles of protection, prevention, and control. Although this tendency recently shifted, for decades, discussions in preventive conservation primarily focused on restricting access to artifacts rather than expanding it. Revealing technical details of conservation treatments to the public was often considered inappropriate, as it was feared this might encourage individuals to attempt their own conservation efforts instead of consulting specialists. This approach diverges notably in the conservation of contemporary art, where the conceptual and technical intricacies of the objects necessitate a more collaborative approach. This openness inherently affords opportunities for engagement, particularly with creators and technical experts from various fields, making it potentially easier to integrate diverse forms of participation and community involvement in this domain.

² Marçal, “Conservation in an Era of Participation.”

³ See e.g: Chitty, *Heritage, Conservation and Communities Engagement, Participation and Capacity Building*.

⁴ See e.g: Wharton, “Dynamics of Participatory Conservation: The Kamehameha I Sculpture Project.”

⁵ See e.g: Clavir, *Preserving What Is Valued*.

⁶ Marçal and Macedo, “From the Periphery to the Centre: Community Engagement and Justice in Conservation Decision Making.”

⁷ See e.g: García Celma, “Supporting Decision-Making When Conserving Contemporary Art.”

⁸ Marçal and Macedo, “From the Periphery to the Centre: Community Engagement and Justice in Conservation Decision Making.”

Based on this premise, **we invite 15-minute presentations** highlighting both successful and unsuccessful examples of participation and community involvement in the conservation of contemporary art within public collections. While the meeting aims to map existing practices, we also welcome presentations showcasing projects and initiatives currently under development, slated for implementation in the near future. Below are guiding questions for submissions:

1. How does / doesn't the conservation of contemporary art accommodate the different voices of communities in decision-making processes? What are the benefits, challenges and limitations?
2. In what ways does the field of contemporary art conservation benefit from integrating community voices in decision making and in doing conservation?
3. What are the feasible ways of doing this within the strict museum rules?
4. What are the main challenges in facilitating participation in conservation decision-making and practice in museums?
5. How can we maneuver between the need for enhancing participation and public involvement in conservation and the potential risks to the works entrusted to conservation care?
6. Community representatives who are deemed experts are often invited into spaces to share in care responsibilities, even taking the lead on doing preservation work, but how far outwardly can/should this extend? It expands upon the premise of question
7. How can conservators define or participate in building a community of care around a contemporary artwork in a museum collection? What does the role of the conservator become in this context?

The meeting will be virtual, open to both members and non-members.

Key dates:

- **December 20, 2025:** Deadline for submitting proposals
- **January 15, 2026:** Informing speakers via email invitation
- **End of January, 2026:** Announcing the program and opening registration
- **February 19, 2026:** Virtual Join Interim Meeting

Instructions for submission of papers and posters:

- The full title of the presentation
- Full names, job title, institution, and e-mail address of the contact author
- Abstract of the presentation (between 300 and 500 words)
- Biographies of authors (max. 100 words)

Send your submission to the following email address:

ICOMCC.JointInterimMeeting@gmail.com

Lead Organizers:

Aga Wielocha and Brian Castriota (Assistants Coordinators – ICOM-CC Theory, History and Ethics of Conservation Working Group).

Selection Committee:

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Organizers and Event Facilitators:

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References:

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Fekrsanati, Farideh, and Hélia Marçal. "Affirming Change in Participatory Practices of Cultural Conservation." In *Participatory Practices in Art and Cultural Heritage*, edited by Christoph Rausch, Ruth Benschop, Emilie Sitzia, and Vivian van Saaze, 5:127–41. *Studies in Art, Heritage, Law and the Market*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05694-9_10.

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Simon, Nina. *The Participatory Museum*. Museum 2.0, 2010.

Wharton, Glenn. "Dynamics of Participatory Conservation: The Kamehameha I Sculpture Project." *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 47, no. 3 (2008): 159–73.