

### Infra red imaging

A new high resolution system is unveiled at the Hamilton Kerr – page 3

### Spotlight on IIC Austria

IIC Austria celebrates its 30th birthday! Read about the group's activities – pages 4 and 5

### Preserving polychromy

Gabo winner Catarina Gersão de Alarcão on polychrome stone sculpture – page 6

No. 13, August 2009

# News in Conservation

The newspaper of the International Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works



Dresden's historic waterfront, no longer on the World Heritage List

## Dresden struck off World Heritage List

UNESCO has announced that Dresden's Elbe Valley World Heritage site has been removed from the World Heritage List. The World Heritage Committee, meeting in Seville, Spain in late June decreed that Dresden could no longer retain its status as a site of outstanding universal value due to the construction of a four-lane bridge in the heart of the cultural landscape.

An 18km stretch along the river Elbe was inscribed as a cultural landscape in 2004 but was placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2006 as a response to the planned Waldschlösschen Bridge.

The German authorities had been urged by many international organisations, including IIC, to consider other options, such as the building of a tunnel. Having pressed ahead with the controversial bridge development, UNESCO responded by removing Dresden from the World Heritage List, as warned, at the end of June 2009.

It is only the second time that a site has

A winter view of the Bronze Pagoda on Mount Wutai, a sacred Buddhist mountain in China, newly inscribed on the World Heritage List. Temples have been built on the site since the 1st century AD to the early 20th century



© UNESCO/Yang Haiming

been removed from the list and the first removal for a cultural as opposed to natural site. Oman's Arabian Oryx Sanctuary was delisted in 2007. UNESCO has said that Dresden's Elbe Valley can be reconsidered for World Heritage listing in the future, but under revised criteria.

At the same time as announcing the delisting of Dresden, UNESCO has inscribed eleven new cultural sites on the World Heritage List from countries all over the world including Cape Verde, Spain, Peru, China, Iran and Kyrgyzstan. More details about the sites and their importance can be found on the UNESCO website: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/536/>

A mural from Manjusri Hall, Foguang Temple, Mount Wutai



© UNESCO/Liu Hao

## Support for Abruzzo abbey

The World Monuments Fund (WMF) has committed to a multimillion euro project at the medieval Abbey of San Clemente a Casauria, in Abruzzo. Located in the Pescara province of Abruzzo, the abbey is an exceptional example of Romanesque architecture and was badly damaged in the April 6, 2009 earthquake that struck the region.

The earthquake caused the tympanum to collapse into the nave of the church, damaging the ambon (pulpit) and a large medieval stone Paschal candlestick. This collapse occurred over the grave of Pope Saint Clement, whose relics have been retrieved from the rubble. With matching funds from the Fondazione Pescarabruzzo, temporary metal scaffolding has already been installed in order to protect the ambon and Paschal candlestick from further damage. WMF will first undertake the urgent repairs required to prevent further damage, and then create an overall plan to coordinate further restoration work.



The abbey's tympanum collapsed as a result of the April 6, 2009 earthquake. The abbey before the collapse below



Work at the abbey will begin in autumn 2009 and is expected to take about a year to complete. The conservation of the abbey is being overseen by WMF Europe, based in Paris, working in collaboration with the Fondazione Pescarabruzzo, the Commissario per la ricostruzione in Abruzzo, and the Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici e Paesaggistici per l'Abruzzo.

## Conservation DistList suspended

Citing the difficult current economic climate, Stanford University Libraries has had to cease its support of Conservation Online (CoOL) and its most well-known facility, the Conservation DistList. The DistList has provided a forum for conservators worldwide to discuss conservation methods and treatments, find conservation materials, as well as advertise conferences, courses and jobs for more than twenty years.

As of the cessation of postings in June 2009, the DistList could boast more than 9500 subscribers worldwide, generating more than 120,000 conservation related documents, on most conceivable conservation-related topics.

The American Institute for Conservation (AIC) has expressed its intention to keep CoOL and the DistList safe, viable, objective, and accessible for the conservation community worldwide. Having reviewed a proposal from AIC, Stanford University Libraries has agreed that AIC will take future responsibility for CoOL and the Conservation DistList. The transfer of content from the Stanford servers will take place immediately with expert guidance

from CoOL. AIC have stated their intention that the DistList will be operational as soon as possible.

Walter Henry, the creator and moderator of the DistList, has said, "Once we have operations going again, we will be soliciting comments and advice from the community about CoOL's future development paths and about means for making it sustainable."

Walter Henry also expressed his surprise at the response of the conservation community at large stating, "After the demise of CoOL was announced, the conservation community mobilized with a speed and intensity I'd rarely seen before and within a matter of days the AIC began talking with Stanford University about taking over responsibility for CoOL and the Conservation DistList. I can't begin to express how moved I have been by the warmth of the community response, both in word and deed, from individuals and organizations."

While the DistList is not yet accepting submissions or new registrations, comments or questions about its return can be sent to [coolinfo@conservation-us.org](mailto:coolinfo@conservation-us.org)

# Editorial

A lot has been happening lately in terms of conservation on the web. Since the last issue of *News in Conservation*, the conservation DistList, a forum used by nearly 10,000 conservators worldwide for advice, discussion and listings, has been stopped and latterly resurrected. The threatened loss of such a useful resource raises major questions as to whether and how we archive and preserve the sort of information the DistList generates. I for one was concerned at the thought of its passing and was mightily relieved to hear that it will now be relaunched under the aegis of the American Institute for Conservation. Elsewhere in this issue we see new web projects spring up both the National Portrait Gallery's list of historical British restorers and the Getty Thesaurus project which will define object types, processes, materials, and products used in conservation as well as providing a literature search facility.

## A lot has been happening lately in terms of conservation on the web

It is hard to assess how the current worldwide economic climate is affecting conservation. On the one hand, new resources and systems, such as the Infrared rig at the Hamilton Kerr Institute (page 3), are being developed, but on the other museum job cuts have taken place and institutions such as Stanford University can no longer support ventures such as CoOL and the DistList. There seem to be worrying trends, certainly in the United Kingdom, where two conservation courses will be closing this year. It seems the fortunes of the profession are mixed in this time of worldwide economic uncertainty.

Conservation in Austria certainly seems strong: on pages 4 and 5 this issue, we have a special feature on the Austrian group of IIC which celebrates its 30th birthday this year. We also hear from Catarina Gersão de Alarcão about how her work on polychrome sculpture in Portugal was informed by her Gabo scholarship to England and the USA (page 6). Finally this issue, on page 7, Alan Phenix offers his ideas on the future development of *Studies in Conservation*. He's been in the Editor's job just over six months and here expresses his ideas about how he is already developing *Studies*. Get in touch about this, or with news, views and stories via [news@iiconservation.org](mailto:news@iiconservation.org).

Lucy Wrapson  
Editor

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# News in brief...

## UNESCO's final report on damage to Babylon released

The archaeological site of Babylon, used by coalition forces as a military base between 2003 and 2004, has sustained substantial damage, according to the final UNESCO report.

"In view of Babylon's historical and archaeological significance, recent allegations of damage to the site during its military use were particularly serious," explains Mohamed Djelid, director of UNESCO's Office for Iraq. "The report is key because it establishes a description of damages on which there is international agreement. Without pointing fingers, we now have a clear picture of the situation. It provides the starting-point for the major challenge of restoration and conservation."

According to UNESCO, the report evaluates the current condition of the site, compiling a number of national reports and recent inspections. The report also details recommendations for the future protection and conservation of Babylon and can be found on UNESCO's website at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001831/183134E.pdf>

## UK conservation course to close

The joint Royal College of Art and Victoria and Albert Museum MA course in Conservation is to close. The course was begun in 1989 and has gained an international reputation. The closure of the course is said to have come as a result of a change in priorities for the V&A Museum, which is now planning a work-based Conservation Development Programme at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) rather than degree level.

## New online resource on British restorers 1630-1950

A list of historical British painting restorers has been published online by the UK's National Portrait Gallery. Compiled by the Portrait Gallery's chief curator, Jacob Simon, the list is a directory of leading picture, sculpture and paper restorers active in Britain before 1950, who worked on major collections or who advertised extensively in art

periodicals. It joins directories devoted to British picture framemakers, 1750-1950 and British artists' suppliers, 1650-1950. The directory can be accessed on: <http://www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/directory-of-british-picture-restorers.php>



Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London

Giuseppe Marchi, pupil of Reynolds. Marchi gained a reputation for restoring Reynolds's pictures which suffered from notoriously fugitive pigments and experimental techniques

## Professor Winfried Heiber (1 January 1938-28 May 2009)

It is with great regret that we report the death of Professor Winfried Heiber, one of the most influential conservators of his generation. Winfried Heiber trained as a paintings conservator at the Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart before a thirty year career as a conservator in private practice. In 1993, he became a Professor in the Conservation Department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden, Germany, where he remained until his retirement in 2004. He continued to teach and be involved in conservation right up until he became too ill to work.

Herr Heiber is perhaps best known around the world for his development of a thread-by thread tear re-weaving method for canvas paintings, a subject on which he published extensively. He gave workshops on his methodology worldwide and taught generations of conservation students, profoundly influencing the development of modern painting conservation. He leaves his loving wife Christa and son Andreas.

# Member's News

## Conservation Angels

Each year, as a part of its annual meeting, the American Institute for Conservation organizes an "Angels Project," partnering conservators with a local museum or cultural heritage institution to provide conservation support. The 2009 AIC Angels Project took place on the 19th May at the Sherman Indian Museum in Riverside, CA.

Located about 60 miles east of Los Angeles, the museum is on the campus of the Sherman Indian High School. The museum's collection contains objects representing tribes from all over the United States, as well as school records, photographs and other memorabilia. The museum currently has two part-time staff members, who, in addition to managing and maintaining the museum and its collection, are involved in the cultural education programs at the high school, for which the museum serves as a resource.

While the museum is rich in culture and history, it has limited space and limited funding. The goal of the 2009 Angels Project was to help the museum stabilize and improve storage of and access to selected objects and archival materials in the collection. The intention was also to prepare the collection for an eventual expansion into a larger facility.

Fifteen conservation professionals from across the country participated in the project. By the end of the day, the volunteers had managed to inventory and re-house a collection of bound school records, including student rosters dating back to 1897; re-house and stabilize newspaper clippings, scrapbooks and photo albums; and inventory, clean and re-house ethnographic objects from two separate storage spaces. In addition to completing this work, the volunteers created templates and provided materials to allow the museum staff to continue these projects. The project's success was in no small part due to the generous donation of time and supplies from many organizations and individuals.

*Molly Gleason*

## The Conservation Thesaurus: Improving Access to Conservation Resources

The Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) is moving ahead with the creation of a conservation thesaurus (CT) in collaboration with the professional community. While an

earlier project was begun as a proof-of-concept in the late 1980s, the implementation of a new production system has now made it possible to embark on a full-scale thesaurus.

The CT will enable users to identify, document, search, and retrieve object types, processes, materials, and products used in conservation. The structure of a thesaurus makes it possible to search by entering any associated variant terms; in other words, the user does not need to know the exact term for the process or material. The CT will not dictate usage, but rather will gather together different terms used to represent the same concept.

The Conservation Thesaurus can also be used to facilitate indexing and retrieval of conservation literature, to enhance access to online resources, and to provide standardized nomenclature for documentation. The CT will provide a useful searching tool for conservation library holdings as well as for AATA Online.

With more than twenty years of experience in the construction of thesauri, the Getty is well positioned to spearhead this project. The Getty vocabularies, currently comprised of the Art & Architecture Thesaurus (AAT\*), Union List of Artist Names (ULAN\*), and the Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names (TGN\*), provide searchable links to records for one-and-a-half million people, places, and objects.

Initially, the Getty will determine the degree of overlap between terms in the Art & Architecture Thesaurus (AAT) and the indexing terms used by AATA Online. Based on the results, the GCI will develop a draft version of the basic hierarchical structure for the Conservation Thesaurus. While the two vocabularies (CT and AAT) will be distinct, records will be linked to maximize searching. The draft structure and editorial guidelines will be distributed for comment by the conservation community. As with AATA Online, the strength of the CT lies in its contributors. The aim is to incorporate all the various conservation dictionaries, glossaries, and related lists of terms that have been developed over the years and offer a combined and powerful searching tool to the professional community, free of charge.

Further information on the Conservation Thesaurus will be available on the GCI website <http://getty.edu/conservation> and via the GCI Bulletin. If you are interested in contributing, please write to [ct@getty.edu](mailto:ct@getty.edu).

*Janet Bridgland*

# High resolution Infra red reflectography at the touch of a button

Infra red images of paintings have long been used to gain information about what lies beneath the surface of a picture. The technique can help detect later retouching and changes to paint layers, as well as revealing fascinating views of the original drawings used to sketch the painting. Chris Titmus, the photographer from the Hamilton Kerr Institute, describes how a newly developed scanning system is changing the way he images paintings.

A new, fully automated, fine art infra red scanning system, SatScan, is not just a prime example of what modern technology can achieve – it also shows how a scientific tool with micron positioning accuracy can be created from standard industrial components.

A prototype of SatScan has been installed at the Hamilton Kerr Institute in Cambridge, a centre of excellence for paintings conservation. The system is the brainchild of the Hamilton Kerr Institute, working with motion control specialist, SmartDrive, in league with the linear motion company, HepcoMotion®. The Hamilton Kerr Institute has provided the expert knowledge needed for the SatScan development and is now using the system on a daily basis for the technical examination of paintings.

The system control and specially developed automated image-stitching software is not limited to infra red imaging. It also enables distortion-free high resolution digital photographs of large works of art to be taken for further study. For the art conservation world this represents a significant imaging breakthrough meaning that high resolution infra red and normal light photographs can easily be compared.

The system developed by SmartDrive is called SatScan and as its name implies the technology mimics that used in mapping systems, with the optics 'flying' over or across the subject. SatScan works by moving digital and infrared camera heads incrementally around the work of art using encoder technology to achieve precision positioning. The rig is capable of handling paintings of up to 4 metres x 3 metres and can yield an image of 62400 x 46800 pixels.

"We know the position of the carriage to within ±1 micron," explains the system's

designer, Dennis Murphy of SmartDrive. "We're achieving this from automation components with industrial tolerances of 100 – 200 microns. In scientific terms we are also using relatively low resolution, off-the-shelf cameras. But by grabbing a small field of view – maybe just an inch or two square – and holding it perpendicular to the painting we can take images that are completely distortion free. The important aspect here is that each image has a uniform scale. As a result, they are easier to join and provide much greater detail."

Historically infra red reflectography at the Hamilton Kerr Institute has been a time consuming and costly exercise. It involved manually moving a Vidicon camera into position, capturing a small infra red image and then using manual stitching software. Imaging a small painting was a day's work using this method and even then the complete image wasn't always clear. A further problem with the old system was the danger of an image burning onto the camera tube, necessitating regular replacement and adding to the process cost. Just having the camera switched on could cost in the region of £30 per hour.

**The rig is capable of handling paintings of up to 4 metres x 3 metres and can yield an image of 62400 x 46800 pixels**

The new SatScan system is completely automatic. Once the painting is in position and the routine checks are completed, we press a button, then the image capture process begins and the software stitches it all together. In an hour or two we can achieve what used to require a whole day. Indeed the system is also allowing us to work in a way we wouldn't have considered before – in the past it would only have been viable to look at selected areas of some paintings whereas now we can examine works of art as large as



Painting illustrating the infra red camera's results is Titian's "Nymph and Faun", from The Lord Egremont Collection at Petworth House, Courtesy of the National Trust



3m x 4m, the range of the rig.

The computing power that is now readily available is perhaps the single most important factor in the development of SatScan. This has allowed SmartDrive to use off-the-shelf components to create this bespoke system. The source of all the mechanical elements was SmartDrive's longstanding partner, HepcoMotion® who designed the entire system mechanics on 3D CAD. It then built and tested the system at its factory in Tiverton, Devon.

SmartDrive have invested a high level of design engineering skill into this project. This involved the careful consideration of inertia matching to achieve both drive power and fine control over motion. The stitching technology is however the jewel in the system's crown. This Windows compatible operating system took SmartDrive nearly three and half years to perfect, and quickly transforms digital data into an exceptionally clear infra red or photographic image of the artwork.

The rig is currently equipped with a Basler A631fc visible light digital camera and a VDS NIR-300 InGaAs IR camera. This is sensitive in the infra red to 1700nm giving us a comparable penetration to an old-style Vidicon, but without all the hassle. The rig will capture, save each individual shot, and finally stitch the images together without further input.

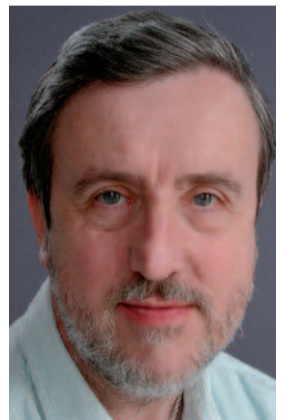
In addition to the system developed with the Hamilton Kerr for larger works of art, SmartDrive is developing another for examining museum artefacts in standard 500mm square trays, typically fossils or archaeological finds. Also in view is a microscope version for imaging objects whose size is measured in microns rather

than metres.

The Hamilton Kerr rig continues to undergo further development – the inclusion of a laser to provide dimensioning and topographical data is currently in progress and preliminary tests have been very positive.

## Biography

Chris worked for many years for the National Health Service, having qualified as a medical and forensic photographer. He was lured away to work in the commercial and corporate sector at a time



when he was running a photographic department covering seven hospitals. Over the years Chris has been a director of a number of photographic companies. He was elected President of the British Institute of Professional Photographers and also spent several years as their Finance Director. Chris began working with the Hamilton Kerr Institute back in 1997 and has been involved with much of their work ever since. Although the subject material is very different from his early days in the industry, there are a lot of similarities in his application of modern imaging techniques to conservation.

For further information contact Chris Titmus, Hamilton Kerr Institute. [cjt50@cam.ac.uk](mailto:cjt50@cam.ac.uk)

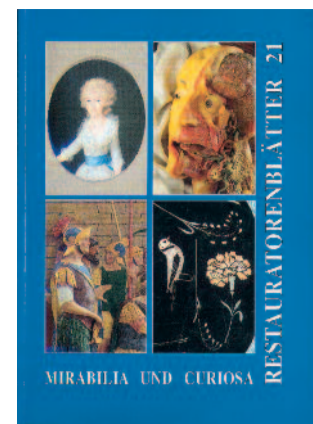
Painting featured with rig is a portrait of Sir William Fitzwilliam after Hans Holbein. Courtesy of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge



The IIC Austrian section was founded in 1979 and so celebrates its 30th birthday this year. We hear from IIC Austria members about their work in this special feature to mark the anniversary



Cover of Restauratorenblätter vol. 21, 2001



©Manfred Koller

# Thirty Years of IIC-Austria



Members visiting medieval and Baroque monuments at Krems, Lower Austria in 2008 during the annual meeting

In 1973, 1976 and 1978 the *Bundesdenkmalamt's* Conservation Studios in Vienna held meetings of conservators on topical themes and published the lectures under a series entitled *Restauratorenblätter*. The following year, IIC permitted the newly-founded association of Austrian conservators to call itself "the Austrian Section of the IIC". In 1980, the IIC wished to hold its 9th Annual International Conference in Vienna, and local IIC members formed the preparatory team. The meeting's great success meant that by the end of 1980, IIC-Austria had 270 members. Professor Franz Mairinger, then Rector of the Academy of Fine Arts was the first chairman of the IIC Austrian section, serving as the host for board meetings until 1986.

**The meeting's great success meant that by the end of 1980, IIC-Austria had 270 members**

From the beginning, the board comprised specialists from monuments preservation, museums and the universities and art schools. as a nationally and internationally connected institution, the Conservation Studios of the *Bundesdenkmalamt* not only acted as the Austrian IIC office but also provided practical and logistic support. At the first General Meeting on March 26, 1980 the founding board was endorsed by a membership vote and it was agreed that membership dues should fund future annual volumes of the

*Restauratorenblätter* (RB) IIC-Austria series. From the start, IIC-Austria's main objectives were to assist all the professional groups and individuals involved in monuments preservation and museum collections by providing a platform for the exchange of information, continuing education and publicity, yet within an international context and according to the tenets established by IIC. Therefore, IIC-Austria membership was open not only to conservators, but all those interested or working in monuments preservation, museums and associated fields.

A statistical survey of IIC-Austria's work since 1979 reveals ca. 110 specialist lectures, some 40 special tours, 20 excursions within the framework of annual meetings and ca. 450 articles, not to mention over 1,000 news items. Besides these "measurable" results from over 30 years' activity, the intangible effects of facilitated communication should not be overlooked: the transfer of ideas and methodology between colleagues, the awareness of the problems, possibilities and limitations of working in the preservation of artistic and cultural heritage in the various institutions, as independent professionals and for the interested public. All of those colleagues over the years who served on the Board and the authors and lecturers from home and abroad, as well as those many staff members from the *Bundesdenkmalamt's* conservation workshops have participated in this creation of a vital forum in Austria to realise the ideas and goals of the IIC.

Further information: E-mail: [iic.austria@bda.at](mailto:iic.austria@bda.at), Website: <http://www.bda.at/text/136/1089/5417/>

*Manfred Koller, Head of Austrian Federal Office Conservation Studios, President and honorary fellow of IIC-Austria.*

## Conservation Department, University of Applied Arts Vienna



Students from the University of Applied Arts Vienna, Conservation Department undertaking collections care



© University of Applied Arts Vienna, Conservation Department

The preservation and conservation of cultural heritage is the focal point of the Conservation Department at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, since 1999 headed by Professor Gabriela Krist. The course includes not only the practice of restoration, but also examination and analysis, as well as the development and implementation of concepts for care and preservation. The five year course, equips students with an academic degree and diploma which is equivalent to a Masters degree (Mag.art.).

**From the very beginning work is carried out on original artefacts from renowned public and private collections as well as from the Federal Office for the Care of Monuments**

The curriculum is arranged in two segments balanced between theory and hands-on practice. From the very beginning work is carried out on original artefacts from

renowned public and private collections as well as from the Federal Office for the Care of Monuments. The extensive international network of the institute also provides the students with work on projects abroad. The focus is on project-oriented examination and analysis, utilising knowledge of artistic techniques and technology with modern methodology within a framework of ethical considerations.

The four specialty areas offered are grouped around the conservation and restoration of paintings, objects, textiles and stone. Additionally, students have the possibility to narrow their focus of conservation specialisation, e.g. archaeological finds or contemporary art. Learning about methods for preventive care of artistic and cultural artefacts is an important feature in all the specialty areas, as is the development of long-term preservation strategies for historic collections. Graduates of the programme will not only be equipped with the knowledge of their own areas of specialisation but also with a basis for interdisciplinary work, especially in the field of preventive conservation.

For more information about studying, entrance exams and projects: [www.dieangewandte.at/restaurierung](http://www.dieangewandte.at/restaurierung)

Please contact [kons-rest@uni-ak.ac.at](mailto:kons-rest@uni-ak.ac.at)

*Gabriela Krist professor and Head of the Institute for Restoration and Conservation at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna.*

## A 1763 painted cloth from Kirche am Hof, Vienna



Conservation of the large-scale textile frieze in the Bundesdenkmalamt's painting studio in Vienna; paintings conservator Brigitte Futscher and textile conservator Silvia Zechmeister



Textile conservator Silvia Zechmeister weaving textile infills

This large-scale painting forms part of the decoration of a two-storey organ loft added to the high-Gothic "Kirche am Hof" hall church around 1763. The painting (1.80 x 20m/36m<sup>2</sup>) is set into wainscoting which stretches the entire width of the organ loft. The painted frieze divides the west wall into 11 panels which represent different aspects of the legend of Mary.

A conservation concept was developed based on a sample treatment which involved the selection of a section (5.6m<sup>2</sup>) representative of the general condition of the canvas and which was examined and restored in the studios of the *Bundesdenkmalamt's* (Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments) Department for Conservation and Restoration. The resultant findings shaped the subsequent treatment of the whole frieze. The conservation and restoration was undertaken with an interdisciplinary team of paintings, textile and wood conservators.

The glue-bound painting on canvas is from the genre known as "Tüchleinmalerei". Its linear depictions have been painted over underdrawings and are filled out with pigmented washes heightened in white. The painted areas are interspersed with blank, ungrounded canvas. The pictorial panels are framed with ochre-coloured garlands, foliate ornament and cartouches in imitation of stucco.

Additionally, polychrome garlands of flowers which "grow" into the images and interconnect the panels over the blank white areas intertwine with the painted frame. The enormous variation in the state of preservation of the painted areas is dependant on their location. Ultraviolet exposure and the effects of damp in the areas near the window, as well as the mechanical stresses in the lower pictorial areas, have caused great damage.

Preventive measures including UV-protection, application of protective backing and mechanical safeguarding of the lower pictorial area were part of the re-mounting process.

Detailed documentation of the entire treatment is available from the *Bundesdenkmalamt's* Department for Conservation and Restoration.

Preliminary examination was undertaken by Mag. Natascha Müllauer; Brigitte Futscher undertook the painting conservation, the textile work was in the hands of Silvia Zechmeister. Other members of the team were Departmental Conservator Wolfgang Martin, the project leader Mag. M. Vigl, scientific advice and analyses undertaken by Dr H. Paschinger and Dr. R. Linke of the BDA's laboratory. *Michael Vigl, Head of the BDA Paintings Conservation department and lecturer at the University of Applied Arts Vienna.*

## Studying the Artistic Process: Kupelwieser's "History of Austria"



Marmorsaal (Ceremonial Hall) at the Niederösterreichische Statthalterei (Lower Austrian Government Building, Vienna): Frescoes by Leopold Kupelwieser

This April, Sigrid Eyb-Green, completed her doctoral dissertation at the Institute for Conservation-Restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, on the Austrian artist Leopold Kupelwieser. From 1848 until 1851 Kupelwieser decorated the Ceremonial Hall of the Lower Austrian Government Building with a series of frescoes, illustrating Austria's history from the time of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius until the *Congress of Vienna* in 1815. This ambitious endeavour was at the time unprecedented in terms of complexity of the subject, monumentality of its scale and choice of technique.

The study reconstructs the creative process from a recently discovered first written concept to the fresco paintings, using the artist's sketches, watercolours, studies and cartoons as well as a small model fresco painting. The comprehensive collection of the Kupelwieser Archive at the Provincial Museum of Lower Austria includes 48 cartoons, over 100 sketches, several sketchbooks and other materials linked to this project. Written sources such as the artist's drafts, letters, contracts, memoirs of his students and children and contemporary reviews were investigated and interpreted.

The artist's materials – ranging from papers and drawing media to pigments found in splashes of colour on the cartoons – were analysed and compared to technological source literature as well as other artist's works of the time. Traces of fabrication and usage on Kupelwieser's sketches and cartoons were carefully construed, allowing a unique insight into both conceptual and material development of the artist's work. Based on these observations, the procedural method involved – such as creating large sheets of paper for the cartoon, and transferring the composition to the wall – was revealed.

Leopold Kupelwieser, who is generally known for his religious paintings, was in close proximity to the artists' group called the *Nazarenes*. Kupelwieser's frescoes and preceding preparatory work fit in context with the group's defining ideas, especially the role and importance of cartoons and the ideological argumentation for the revival of fresco painting.

*Sigrid Eyb-Green teaches paper conservation at the Institute for Conservation-Restoration (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna) and finished her PhD in 2009.*

## Conservation at the Kunstkammer and Schatzkammer, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



Conservator Helene Hanzer consolidates the enamel of Benvenuto Cellini's Salt Cellar during the extensive conservation project to repair the damages caused following its theft in 2003

The conservation department of the Kunstkammer, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



The singular collections of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum's Kunstkammer and Schatzkammer encompass around 10,000 objects, documenting artistic and artisanal creative processes from the late Middle Ages to the Neo-Classical period. The particular challenge for the conservators of the Kunstkammer lies in the great diversity of the collection with respect to the material composition and production techniques of its objects. Exact knowledge of the specific characteristics of a great variety of materials is necessary in order to reach the correct decisions for the conservation and preservation of each individual work of art. Alongside the preparation of treatments, the conservation department considers the creation of optimal conditions of preservation with regard to room environment, air cleanliness, light, and exhibition technology as its central responsibility. Interdisciplinary investigations into

production techniques and research into historical technologies are also important tasks of the department.

The museum's extensive loan activities and exhibition projects provide additional demands. These include assessment of objects as to their suitability for loan and creating condition reports, the conception of packing systems, and the couriering of objects. The recording of environmental conditions, shocks and vibration stresses during transport and the analysis and interpretation of these results form a foundation for such activities. Three academically trained conservators work in the department, though at present the team has been expanded by four additional specialists for the extensive preparatory work for the new installation of the Kunstkammer.

*Helene Hanzer, Head of the Conservation Department of the Kunstkammer.*

# Challenging polychromy

Catarina Gersão de Alarcão describes how a Gabo scholarship has helped inform her work on a major project at the Museu Nacional Machado de Castro in Portugal. For three months last summer, Catarina travelled to England and the USA to compare the principles and techniques behind sculpture conservation in the three countries.



I have worked in polychrome stone sculpture at the Museu Nacional in Coimbra, Portugal since 1997. During the last five years the museum has been closed for a building and renovation program which will put on show more of its collections in new galleries. This program has led to the de-installation of eight enormous 16th century polychrome limestone altarpieces, mostly by the French sculptor Jean de Rouen. They were originally located in churches and cloisters in Coimbra and were built into the fabric of the museum between 1958 and 1967 under its 3rd director, Reis Santos. Thanks to a Gabo Trust Travelling Scholarship, last year I was able to go on a fact-finding mission to major museums in England and the USA to help inform practice during the ongoing de- and re-installation of the polychrome altarpieces.

The de-installation of such large and heavy objects, reaching dimensions as large as 4 x 3 x 0.5 metres and comprising many pieces, some of them weighing almost a tonne, has required an immense amount of effort and resources. It has proved to be an enormous challenge in which we have had to make many independent decisions.

The methodology followed was consistent for all the altarpieces. First, close examination and photographic documentation were carried out. A detailed survey of each altarpiece was used to assess their condition,

which was also an opportunity to understand better the techniques of manufacture – carving from low to high relief, gilding, polychromy and use of precious stones – as well as past treatments and previous mounting systems. During this process we tried to understand the original structure of the altarpieces and to establish the core sections, joins and fills. All individual pieces, between 11 and 40 per altarpiece, were numbered and the position of each piece was indicated in photographic overviews. Secondly, areas of crumbling stone or flaking polychromy or gilding were faced with paper tissue and animal glue.

## Deciding to desalinate has been one of the greatest challenges, as it is an extremely interventive treatment

As the altarpieces were put together with a profusion of cement, bricks, scrim, plaster, mortar and metal fixings, the process of de-installation has been long, complicated, extremely laborious and physically demanding. The releasing of all pieces was done by hand, with mallets and chisels. In some difficult cases, when the condition of the stone allowed it, electric power drills were used. Once released, all the individual pieces were transferred to a supporting pallet, tailored to fit their profile, size and weight. A sophisticated system with appropriate lifting equipment was devised to facilitate safe lowering to the ground.

All the fragments were then packed and transported to the temporary conservation studio where they were treated. This was done by removing the facings with moistened natural sponges, followed by the removal, where possible, of old and visually



Lifting part of an altarpiece into the desalination tank

disturbing interventions, deleterious substances and oxidised metallic elements.

The cleaning process was slow and careful to avoid over-cleaning and to reach a homogenous appearance. Dry and wet cleaning techniques were used, often simultaneously. For dry cleaning soft bristle brushes, scalpels, chisels with varied size and shapes, hammers, electric erasers and a filtered vacuum cleaner were used. Mixtures with de-ionised water and non ionic detergents and organic solvents were mainly chosen for the wet cleaning. At the same time the polychromy and gilding were consolidated and fixed in place with acrylic resin, by brush, and non-aqueous ethylene vinyl acetate copolymer, by heated spatula. Where the stone surface had detached scales, they were re-adhered with acrylic resin. Also, to recover some objects' physical integrity it was necessary to glue some pieces. For small pieces, acrylic resin was used, polyester resin being employed for larger structural repairs.

As the altarpieces had been fixed to walls, most of the pieces had problems from soluble salts. The stone was in poor condition and there was also detachment of paint layers. Deciding to desalinate has been one of the greatest challenges, as it is an extremely interventive treatment. We were concerned because the pieces are so large, the polychromy so delicate and we were obviously not able to see what really happens in the interior of the stone during the process.

We opted to reduce the salt content by water-bath desalination, given the large scale of the objects. Building such a large tank was a challenge in itself considering the museum's small budget. However, poulticing on such a massive scale would have been very difficult, more expensive and even more time-consuming. Before the immersion of the objects, microcrystalline wax was applied to

protect the polychrome surfaces during the process.

In all these years I've been asking myself what approaches are most effective when you have polychrome stone sculptures with loss of cohesion. Should one consolidate or desalinate? I don't have yet a definite answer but in this case I think we have made the correct choice.

With my travels to England and to the United States I was able to share different experiences and approaches to sculpture conservation. In the past I have read widely and consulted bibliographies, but sharing people's actual work experience with objects is completely different and extremely rewarding. You understand that even if you do not have all the answers, you can work collaboratively to find them.

I found that the purposes and the principles of polychrome stone sculpture conservation are very similar in the three countries, Portugal, England and the USA. The products used are also chemically similar, varying mainly in their trade names. The great differences I would say are the working conditions, in terms of space, equipment and funds available, and the interdisciplinary nature of the work outside Portugal, which obviously has an effect on the methodologies adopted. In Portugal, cultural heritage is still not a priority and there is a long way to go.

The next step in the project will be the re-installation of the altarpieces in the new building which should begin this year and I am sure it will be, again, a great challenge!

### Biography



Catarina Gersão de Alarcão has a BA in Conservation and Restoration from the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Receiving a scholarship from the Ministry of Culture in 1997, she attended the *Istituto Centrale per il Restauro* in Rome. Since 1997, she has worked at the National Museum Machado de Castro and is responsible for the conservation and restoration workshop. As well as coordinating the museum's exhibitions, Catarina provides training for students, and has published extensively.

Email: catarinaalarcao@gmail.com

The system used to de-install the altarpieces



The cleaning process



The tank built for water-bath desalination in action



# IIC News

## 2010 Istanbul Congress update

Although the Congress in Istanbul is more than a year away, planning and preparation are well underway.

The theme "Conservation and the Eastern Mediterranean" has proved very popular. The Technical Committee has selected around 60 abstracts and has invited authors to submit draft manuscripts. These will be reviewed in October, at which point selected papers will be chosen to appear in the Congress pre-prints.

We can now confirm the Technical Committee members as follows: Talal Akasheh (Hashemite University, Jordan); Sharon Cather (Courtauld Institute of Art, London) (Chair); Terry Drayman-Weisser (Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore); Hande Kökten (Ankara University); Ravit Linn (Israel Antiquities Authority); Hossam Mahdy (Private Consultant, Egypt); Austin Nevin (Courtauld Institute of Art and Politecnico di Milano); and Paul Schwartzbaum (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation).

A number of innovations introduced at the 2008 London Congress have been retained for the planning of the Istanbul meeting: presentations will be shorter and there will be more time for discussion; more time will be made available to interact with the authors of posters and lunches, tea and coffee are included in the registration fee. Also, as at the London Congress, a whole day will be reserved for organised cultural tourism, replacing the traditional single afternoon slot.

We will pass on more details to you in forthcoming issue of News in Conservation, so keep an eye out for them, as well as on the IIC website!

## The Gabo Trust – IIC Travelling Scholarship

The Gabo Trust and the IIC are pleased to announce the first call for applications for the 2010 Travelling Scholarships. Applications are invited from Individual Members and Fellows of IIC who are conservators practising in either the public or private sector.

### What is the Travelling Scholarship?

The Travelling Scholarship is a bursary to allow individuals who are current paid-up members of IIC to take a study-focused tour anywhere in the world, with the aim of carrying out research on the conservation of sculpture and meeting and seeing the work of other conservators, and learning about their differing approaches, ethics, materials



One of last year's Gabo winners, Anne Cummins, walking through Antony Gormley's Inside Australia installation in a remote salt pan in Western Australia

and methods. The Travelling Scholar is required to make a written report on their tour, with photographs, in order not only to benefit their own career but also to enrich the worldwide body of knowledge of the conservation of sculpture.

The winners' written reports and photographic records should be produced with a view to their appearing on the IIC website as well as being available for use by the Gabo Trust and being held in the Tate archives. Winners will have twelve months to complete the tour from when the Scholarship is awarded and a further month to lodge their report at the IIC office.

The award will normally be paid as a single lump sum up to a maximum of £5,000 Sterling or the equivalent in US Dollars or Euros at the time of award. There is a maximum of two awards to be made in any round of the Travelling Scholarship.

These Scholarships are directly concerned with the conservation of sculpture in all its aspects and are not restricted to any particular period or culture, but some benefit to modern and contemporary sculpture (post 1880) must be apparent in the application.

### The Gabo Trust

The Gabo Trust was founded in 1988 by the family of the sculptor Naum Gabo. Aware of the problems with new materials in modern and contemporary sculpture, they set up the Gabo Trust to increase conservation resources in institutional collections and to further the education of conservators.

The Gabo Trust is a UK-based charity, but this is an internationally available award.

### How do I apply?

The application form is available from the IIC website – [www.iiconservation.org](http://www.iiconservation.org).

Your application must include an estimate of the amount of money required (in Pounds Sterling, US Dollars or Euros) and a proposed itinerary of countries, venues and sites to be visited.

With your application a signed letter of

support will be required from a Referee, who must be a person of standing, with training, experience and a background in conservation; this may be a senior colleague, tutor or another individual familiar with your work and experience; this person need not be a member of IIC, but should nevertheless clearly state their professional credentials.

Completed applications should be received at the IIC office no later than 30 November 2009.

Your completed application package should be sent by post or fax or (as an attachment) by email to:

IIC/Gabo Trust Travelling Scholarship  
IIC  
6 Buckingham Street  
London WC2N 6BA  
UK  
[iic@iiconservation.org.uk](mailto:iic@iiconservation.org.uk)  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7976 1564

### How will winners be notified?

The results will be notified by post, fax or e-mail to all applicants by the end of January 2010.

### What happens then?

Within a month of being notified of their being awarded a Travelling Scholarship, individuals must confirm to the IIC office the dates of their intended tour. This can be booked through an agency who can offer a comprehensive travel and accommodation itinerary, such as Trailfinders ([www.trailfinders.com](http://www.trailfinders.com)) for those resident in the United Kingdom, the Irish republic or Australia.

The award monies will be paid to the Scholar when they have booked their travel – a verified paper copy of the invoice(s) will be required by IIC before payment is sent.

## Alan Phenix: New Editor in Chief, Studies in Conservation



I have to admit it was not without a fair amount of trepidation that I took over the role of Editor in Chief of *Studies in Conservation* at the beginning of January 2009. In part, my apprehension stemmed from knowing that it will be a hard act to follow David Saunders, who has fulfilled this role so ably, energetically and conscientiously on a de facto basis for many years. I'm sure I can speak on behalf of the entire conservation profession in offering a very warm 'thanks' to David for his sustained, sterling work for *Studies* since he first joined the board of editors for Volume 36 in 1991. But part of my apprehension about assuming this function comes from knowing that it is not going to be an easy job in itself. Indeed, an important factor in my decision to accept was feeling confident that I had the backing of my employers, and I must thank my seniors at the Getty Conservation Institute, especially Tom Learner, Giacomo Chiari and Tim Whalen

for giving their approval and support to allow me to take on the role.

I am under no illusions about the challenges that lie ahead with *Studies*. These are tough times for serial professional/academic publications, especially for one in a highly diverse, multi-disciplinary field such as ours. Doubtless I'm not the first to say that the diversity of conservation is both the beauty and the burden of the subject. I am keen to maintain, as much as possible, the very broad scope of subject matter content that the journal has established as its 'territory' over the course of its near 60-year history; but this breadth of scope and the ever-increasing sophistication of research, especially on the scientific side of the field, combine to place considerable demands on the editors and referees. It is probably appropriate at this point for me to thank also these unsung heroes of our field who put a great deal of (voluntary!) time and effort into ensuring that *Studies* is produced to the highest standards of content, presentation and peer-review. In the very early days of *Studies*, there was just a single editor; but as the discipline of conservation has developed and enlarged, so the board of editors has had to increase in number to cover the volume of papers received and the diversity of the subject matter. We presently have seven editors including myself, but still we are short of expertise in certain areas. Among our immediate primary tasks are to search for and engage at least two new editors, and those processes have already begun.

In considering the future for *Studies*, I hope to keep faithful to IIC's own view of the journal: "*Studies in Conservation* aims to be the premier international peer-reviewed journal for the conservation of historic and artistic works." If we are to hold onto this aspiration, which is dependent largely on the quantity and quality of papers submitted, responding to two immediate priorities seems fairly essential: one is speeding up the processes of submission, review and editing of papers, the other is online publishing of the journal in addition to hardcopy. With regard to the former, I hope that in the very near future we will have new procedures in place which streamline the submission, review and editing processes of *Studies*. Issues from previous years can already be accessed online by current members, though IIC's web page. The question of online current-issue full-text, fast-track publication of the journal is already a matter of discussion by the IIC Council. I look forward to seeing this idea taken forward to fruition. I believe strongly that if we can achieve these goals, then *Studies* will attract the depth, breadth and quality of contributions that are in balance with our aspirations.

*Alan Phenix is a paintings conservator, educator and conservation scientist. He is presently a Scientist at the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), Los Angeles, USA.*

### Thanks to Fi Jordan

Fi Jordan and Marika Spring have worked together very successfully on volumes 8 and 9 of *Reviews in Conservation*. Sadly, Fi has told IIC that volume 10, due by the end of this year, will be her last one. Editing requires hard work, dedication, and good writing skills, as well as communications and other interpersonal skills. IIC is extremely grateful to Fi for all her hard work, and I am particularly grateful that she has given more than six months notice of her need to concentrate her energies on other things. Marika Spring will be continuing to edit future volumes.

*Joyce Townsend  
Director of Publications*

# Vacancy

## Editor for IIC's Website

IIC is seeking voluntary expertise to help ensure that its website remains current, useful and dynamic. We invite inquiries from conservation professionals and others regarding the new position of Website Editor.

The Website Editor should have knowledge of php and html web software as well as Dreamweaver. Familiarity with mysql would be useful, as well as some experience with the mark-up of web pages. Ready access to fast electronic communications will be essential. This role will be supported by the IIC's external web managers, Adaptive Technologies, and IIC staff and Officers.

This will be a voluntary, part-time, position.

If you are interested, please send a CV and letter of interest to [iic@iiconservation.org](mailto:iic@iiconservation.org) by 12 September 2009. Please draw this position to the attention of others you think would be interested in an exciting challenge and in making a significant contribution to the fields of heritage conservation.

