

Should Joe Care? Continuity, Viability and Advocacy for Conservation

Friday June 11, 2010 1:30 pm to 5 pm*

Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa

In the midst of a dismal economic climate, Joe Public is likely thinking more about being conservative than about conservation, and the heritage community is suffering from his/her indifference. Recent cutbacks to the heritage sector, while abysmal, nevertheless reflect current attitudes towards priorities. At this critical juncture it is clear that it is necessary for our community to examine its own condition, take action to promote our existence and convince the public that what we do, matters. Not only will marketing, advocacy and public education be requisite for the future, but the profession must strive to strengthen itself from within by executing strategies for continuity and finding ways to make the community increasingly viable.

Please join us in Ottawa for the 2010 CAC Conference for a very special session that promises to inspire both introspection and action. Through a series of featured talks and panel discussions, we will evaluate our profession's current situation, address the challenges we now face and look forward to what lies ahead for the next decade. Recent situations, nationally and internationally, including the critical mass of conservators nearing retirement, the closing of conservation centres such as the Textile Conservation Centre University of Southampton and large scale institutional restructuring resulting in significant job losses in conservation, force us to take stock of the profession. Is conservation an essential service?

The CAC Ottawa conference in 2010 is the perfect time and place to host a session on the subject of continuity in the field and take full advantage of our central location and the wealth of knowledge available through national institutions, scholars and smaller organizations. How can we ensure knowledge transfer and a vibrant future for conservation in Canada? Conservation professionals must strive to harness the effects of changing priorities and technologies and use them to their advantage to remain current and further the advancement of the field. We suggest setting foot in the next decade with an honest look at our profession, the challenges we face, and our present and future position within the Canadian cultural heritage landscape.

***Panel discussion including a total of 1.5 hours of presentation, 1 hour of discussion and 20 minutes wrap-up. Open to all. Invitation will be extended to other cultural heritage professionals as well. The discussion may extend to a regular session if the topic generates interest.**

Panel:

- Jerry Podany** (*Moderator*) President, International Institute for Conservation, Senior Conservator of Antiquities, the Getty Villa
- Dr. Miriam Clavir** Conservator Emerita and Reserach Fellow, UBC Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver; Adjunct Lecturer, Graduate Program in Museology, UW, Seattle
- Dr. Marie-Claude Corbeil** Chair ICOM-CC; Manager, Analytical Research Laboratory Division, Canadian Conservation Institute
- Charlie Costain** Associate Director General and Director, Research Services and Training Directorate, Canadian Conservation Institute
- Gayle McIntyre** Coordinator, Collections Conservation and Management & Museum Management and Curatorship Programs, Fleming College
- Debra Hess Norris** Chair, Department of Art Conservation, Henry Francis DuPont Chair of Fine Arts; Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education, University of Delaware
- Kryisia Spirydowicz** Program Director and Associate Professor of Artifact Conservation, Queen's University, Kingston, Master of Art Conservation Program

SHOULD JOE (Josef, Ἰωσήφ, José, Giuseppe, 约瑟夫, Yosef, Jo,) CARE?

Jerry Podany,

Senior Conservator of Antiquities, J. Paul Getty Museum

President IIC

If we define conservation of heritage as the prolongation of an object's usefulness, we are already mired in the search for precision, struggling with the vagaries of both the act and the concept of conservation, as well as the meaning and identity of heritage...and usefulness. Whatever clarity we might achieve quickly dissipates with cultural and geographic distance, and with the passing of time. So what are we asking Joe to care about? Is it the physical symbols of ideas or emotions? Should he care about the effort to keep intact the portals through which we access memories, evidence, or experiences? Are we asking Joe to care about how we define ourselves at this moment and how we might choose to be remembered by what we pass on to the future? All of these choices are dynamic in nature, resistant to codification, and even though they may appear to be universal, they are quickly distinguished by the details that define life priorities for specific people, at specific times, and under specific circumstances.

As if fluctuating environment, flaking paint, warping wood, pollutants and yellowing paper aren't enough, as if the HOW isn't sufficiently demanding, we now ask WHY.

And yet "WHY?" is the essential question. We cannot ask the question of "Should Joe care?" if we don't fully understand the range of reasons we, as a profession, a discipline and a community, care. Do we "save the treasures of heritage for future generations" or do we manage access and change? Who defines what deserves the title of treasure and what does not? How distant is the "future"? And how do we balance access with change?

As a profession and as a community, conservators have been inherently inward-looking, focused on the immediate challenges presented by the response of materials to time, the elements and to use. We have been distracted by developing our own self definitions as we evolved to incorporate craftsmanship with connoisseurship, with science. The mantle of "saving and protecting", let alone restoring, has weighed heavily and the overlay of assumed objectivity has distracted us from sufficiently asking and debating WHY. As a result, we have not integrated ourselves in the daily lives and desires of...Joe.

If the products and messages of heritage are relevant now, and relevant to what will be bequeathed to the future, then we, those who attempt to manage loss, are also relevant and to a great degree, symbolic. We do not just fix things or even just fill the role of caretaker. By our very efforts we express what the world community cares about and cares for. By acting as mirrors we reflect back the shared values of humanity and the importance of preserving cumulative memory.

It's a privileged position that should be approached with humility and which relies on visibility and partnership to be valued and supported. Joe needs to be our partner, not just our assumed client.

Do I Really Have To? Are jobs in conservation dependant on working with people, not collections?

Miriam Clavir,

*Conservator Emerita and Research Fellow, UBC Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver,
6393 NW Marine Dr., Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z2, Canada,
Adjunct Lecturer, Graduate Program in Museology, UW, Seattle,*

The issues underlying this session relate, in part, to conservation's natural focus on physical, material heritage. A focus on people and serving society has remained rather a more distanced, idealized objective. In many museums today, though, "visitor experience", "partnerships" and "telling people's stories" have become the driving interest. Understandably, conservation professionals are ill-prepared if not irritable when asked to embrace new skills and devote time to working in the world outside of collections. But it has become increasingly necessary for our work to be seen by that world as more of a benefit and less as an expense or frill. My own and others opinions will be discussed on ideas such as:

1. Conservation education:

(a) Is it necessary for the profession to promote more opportunities to learn skills not viewed as core conservation knowledge, but related to it? Would broadening our scope ensure or dilute the continuing viability of the profession e.g. by acknowledging the importance of work experience or curriculum/workshop/thesis topics such as:

- external focus: talking to the media
- internal focus: linking environmental and cultural heritage sustainability
- employment focus: learning collections management, or studying the field of public programming and applying this to preservation.

(b) But how can we increase the subject matter or time devoted to conservation training and professional development, and continue to do what we have always done best, without more resources - the decline of which has prompted this session?

2. Comparisons with other professions and contexts:

(a) From the beginning of public service, libraries have convinced the public that what they do matters (e.g. Ranganathan's book, "The Five Laws of Library Science"). Why them and not us?

- Are conservators too rarified to embrace the goals of preservation librarians?

(b) Academic and museum contexts: can we be seen as benefitting these contexts as much as their other departments do?

(c) Advertising: why does it work so well? Does conservation promote itself using the same appealing tricks?

Conclusion:

Ideas will be presented, but the conclusion will come out of the whole session.

Should Joe Care? The Viability of Conservation through Public Engagement

Marie-Claude Corbeil

Manager, Canadian Conservation Institute

Chair of ICOM-CC

Whenever Joe is presented with before-and-after treatment shots or, even better, when he is given the opportunity to witness conservation professionals at work, Joe is always amazed. Every special exhibit on conservation has great success with the public. But does Joe care about the conservation of cultural heritage the same way he cares about preserving the environment, for example? Maybe not, probably because it is not integrated in his day to day life like caring for the environment does. Every day, Joe can contribute in his own little way to preserving the environment by recycling and taking measures to save energy, if he wishes to do so, of course. He could even become an activist if he is really passionate about it. But once Joe leaves the museum or the gallery, what could he do about conserving cultural heritage?

Conservation evolved to become a profession with high standards. Nowadays not just anybody can claim to be a conservator. Post-graduate education is required in many countries and some form of accreditation is becoming more and more frequent. Of course, we do not want Joe to start taking things in his own hands and carrying out procedures that only conservation professionals should be responsible for. At the same time, we would like to see Joe being as passionate about the conservation of cultural heritage as he is for the preservation of the environment. Because what the public (read voters) cares about will eventually become important for politicians, and politicians have the means to fund conservation and education for conservation professionals, and to legislate on the safeguarding of cultural heritage.

In 2002, ICOM-CC established a Task Force on Public Engagement, with the aims to engage and stimulate the public with regard to conservation. Papers on very interesting initiatives were subsequently presented at the 2005 and 2008 ICOM-CC Triennial Conferences, held in The Hague and New Delhi, respectively. However in 2008 the decision was made to disband the Task Force as we realised that it was functioning more like a Working Group, while a Task Force, by definition, was supposed to achieve its goal within a finite lifetime. Consequently, all ICOM-CC Working Groups were entrusted with the responsibility for public engagement.

This CAC special session provides an opportunity to review what we learned during the six years the Task Force was in operation, to determine if progress was made and if we should continue our efforts in this area, and how.

Should Joe Care? The Viability of Conservation through Public Engagement

Charlie Costain

*Associate Director General and Director, Research
Services and Training Directorate, Canadian
Conservation Institute*

The viability of a profession (or an enterprise) is dependent on society perceiving value in the services that they provide. If we are even posing the question of whether the conservation profession provides value which is recognized by Joe in the public and private sectors, then it seems that the value may not always be broadly apparent.

Most museums and galleries today focus on community rather than collections. Museums use phrases such as 'engaging the public,' 'connecting people and ideas,' or 'being a centre for information dissemination and discussion' in their mission statements and on their websites. It seems clear that in order for museums to survive as relevant institutions, they will need to continue to move in this direction. However, with this model the role of the collection, and preservation of the collection, is not as evident as it has been in the past. While most museums do take their preservation mandate seriously, this may be seen as an obligation, not a driver, with large collections perceived as overhead rather than an asset. Good storage and preservation of a collection does not attract publicity, endowments or visitors to the museum.

Conservators in private practice in Canada have a different set of challenges. There are relatively few wealthy private or corporate collectors in Canada who are willing to invest in the care of their collection. Conservation is often complex and time-consuming, and while today's citizens are accustomed to paying large sums of money for modern devices with short life-spans, they are less used to investing in the conservation and care of objects of lasting value.

Given these challenges, what is the future for the conservation profession in Canada? I think there are a number of reasons to be optimistic about Joe's outlook. In today's world, with its virtual environments and increasingly fast pace, linkages and touchstones with our past will become increasingly important to us as individuals and as a society. The emphasis on being 'green' and sustainable brings new challenges to museums, but also provides opportunities for the conservation profession to show leadership. New tools such as risk assessment are being developed which help translate the importance of preservation into business terms which can be understood by decision makers, such as cost/benefit analysis or return on investment. The risk management approach also allows conservators to provide options for the display or transport of collections, and to have a dialogue about risks rather than relying on strict standards. There will be new opportunities for conservators in the area of heritage interiors as conservators' knowledge of materials is recognized as an asset for preserving decorative elements in built heritage. And finally, there is a new generation of energetic and innovative conservators, who are bringing new ideas and new solutions to these challenges.

Without a Crystal Ball: Predicting the Training Needs of the Conservation Profession

Gayle McIntyre

*Coordinator, Collections Conservation and
Management & Museum Management and
Curatorship Programs, Fleming College*

Fleming College has offered training in heritage conservation practices since the mid 1970's. Beginning as a three year program with an intake of students every other year, the Art Conservation Techniques Program was replaced by the Collections Conservation and Management (CCM) Program in 1996. With an annual maximum intake of 20 students, the program is rare in the Canadian College system.

The strength of the program is its signature approach to applied learning. The curriculum represents a delicate balance between conservation and museo-logical theory, and rigorous hands on experience. Strong, healthy, positive working relationships with community partners afford students the privilege to learn in a variety of safe, comfortable and real environments. Projects are aligned with realities and needs of the field. Learning activities and assignments are often completed in situ. In addition, faculty, as learning designers, use actual job postings to create assignments and develop assessment criteria. The Program has a dedicated Advisory Committee. Their role as advocates is to offer thoughtful, timely and topical input into the curriculum. Each project students work on is characterized as a one-time opportunity to make a great first impression on the client, the program and the student.

Program faculty not only serve as educators and instructors but they are mentors, allies and links to the profession. The program aims to have the students treat their studies and their classes like a work place. The CAC Code of Ethics is embedded into each course and is reflected in evaluations. Earning a good reputation, demonstrating a strong work ethic and exemplifying strong team and interpersonal skills are validated in the program. Students gain core conservation skills, museum skills, and transferable skills.

There are few jobs in the field and obviously the competition is extreme. Retirements remain in the immediate forecast for the profession, but will those positions be preserved? The current employment trend is towards related jobs that integrate preservation skills with other museum skills, such as digitization, collections moves, and preservation planning. To be successful, graduates must be: highly skilled; have advanced computer skills and experience with technological applications; be mobile and flexible; and be willing to embrace a variety of entry level positions with a view to commit to life long learning. Graduates need to have the skills to multi-task across various museum disciplines.

Addressing Global Preservation Needs and Conservation Education and Training Ramifications

Debra Hess Norris

**Chair, Department of Art Conservation,
Henry Francis DuPont Chair of Fine Arts;
Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education,
University of Delaware**

The October 2009 Salzburg Global Seminar – Connecting to the World’s Collections: Making the Case of the Conservation and Preservation of Cultural Heritage - sponsored by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, convened an international group of 60 cultural heritage sector leaders from 32 countries and all five continents to develop effective strategies to optimize collection conservation, increase funding, and intensify public awareness. Participants included conservation and preservation specialists who work with museums and libraries, representatives of conservation training programs and professional associations, as well as cultural policymakers.

The primary goal of the Salzburg Global Seminar was to develop effective ways to promote the practice of conservation and to implement best collections preservation practices within a wide variety of cultural contexts. The Salzburg Declaration and resultant comprehensive report <http://www.salzburgglobal.org/2009/news.cfm?IDMedia=52858> articulates a series of challenges, needs, and opportunities relevant to our discussion in Canada, including (1) building international connections among preservation professionals and policy makers and the public, (2) casting the current global economic challenges as opportunities rather than barriers, (3) making members of society understand the value of cultural objects, (4) listening and learning from indigenous people about the safeguarding of their cultural heritage, and (5) demonstrating the impact of climate changes on preservation and the pressing necessity for heritage conservation to be represented in existing and forthcoming international agreements and treaties.

The Salzburg panel, Education and Training¹, identified a range of educational models, including multi-year degree courses for specialists as well as short and hybrid courses, workshops, professional exchanges, and apprenticeships – all with an attention to the realities of lifelong learning. Within this infrastructure, graduates with degrees must be prepared to enter the workforce – placement opportunities are needed. We must strengthen the job infrastructure and pipeline through the establishment of multi-year post-graduate fellowships in museums, libraries, archives, and regional conservation laboratories, and pursue new placements fostered through regional and international partnerships. Unfortunately, such partnerships may be more difficult owing to increasingly strict immigration laws.

Our graduates must have the critical thinking and highly technical skills to conduct conservation documentation and treatment, strengthen research, and demonstrate a strong understanding of and appreciation for cultural context and engagement. They must also be trained to the extent practical in leadership, advocacy, and collaboration with communities. Public engagement practices must be strengthened. We are excited about the capacity to build public engagement skills via the University of Delaware’s two-week seminar for graduate students in material cultural studies, entitled *From Avatars to Radio Sound Bites: Using Accessible Language and New Digital Technologies to Inspire the Public*. Sessions include dynamic teaching and speaking, media training for radio and television, innovations in museum education, and new instructional technologies. Leadership skills are integral to our work and imperative to longer term progress in advancing new thinking on environmental management within museums, research libraries, and other collecting repositories.

Pressing issues surrounding the need to diversify our profession must be addressed via deliberate planning and creativity. Arts and humanities summer institutes in art conservation for underrepresented advanced undergraduates committed to graduate study, and collaborations aimed at preserving at-risk collections in historically black colleges and universities have been pursued at the University of Delaware. Working with graduate programs globally, we must strengthen opportunities for cultural exchange and internships where students from different programs work in collaboration and on site in historical collections.

1 Moderator: Vinod Daniel, Head, Australian Museum, Cultural Heritage and Science Initiative, Australia.

Presenters: Kathy Dardes, Getty Conservation Institute, USA; Marcelle Scott, University of Melbourne, Australia Michele Cloonan, Simmons College, Boston, USA.

Hess Norris Continued...

Graduate conservation and education programs must continue to emphasize the principles of and practical approaches to preventive conservation, in addition to more traditional and essential training in the examination, analysis, and treatment of cultural objects. Our students should pursue opportunities to work more closely with those engaged in climate change research, and departments of conservation must better connect with departments and scientific laboratories associated with research and the environment on campus and beyond, offering jointly-sponsored courses and collaborative research opportunities – or simply inspiring those engaged in energy research to consider the intersection with art and culture. While steps have been taken to collaborate effectively with allied professionals, including art historians and artists, our track record with social scientists, engineers and material scientists must also be strengthened.

Similarly, we must work to secure additional government and private funds to support graduate fellowships and professional development travel. In doing so, we should better promote the achievements and accomplishments of our students and alums and demonstrate the value of conservation.

Cultural heritage deterioration can serve as a call to action and an opportunity to highlight the need to educate and train future conservation professionals. We must ensure that our work is connected to issues surrounding international social and economic development and civil society. And we must pursue innovative ways to do so - using social media tools, crowd-sourced technologies, and worldwide and very engaging advocacy campaigns¹ - that link the fundamentals of conservation research to the public good. A global advocacy campaign to raise awareness among children, teachers and families of the need to better protect our cultural heritage can link to the broader environmental impact and mandatory fossil fuel reduction strategies. Funds allocated for environmental conservation should include arts and culture in their purview.² We must better recognize policy and decision makers who have had a positive effect on the preservation of cultural heritage, especially as connected to responding to climate change, cultural diplomacy, and other societal challenges. Conservation students and recent alumni can and should advance our work in these new arenas.

Cultural heritage preservation **MUST** become a priority in existing and forthcoming legislation and policy. To do so, governments, non-governmental organizations, the cultural heritage sector, communities and stakeholders must work together. As we work to educate and train future conservation professionals, we must further commit to raise awareness about at-risk cultural heritage, ensuring that our conversations resonate with decision makers and the public, internationally.

1 In Salzburg, the working group on Raising Awareness and Support suggested the formation of an international alliance to develop a global advocacy campaign “Heritage —Pass it On”.

2 The recently passed Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment in Minnesota increased the general sales and use tax rate by three-eighths of one percentage point (0.375%) to 6.875% with the additional proceeds allotted to (1) an Outdoor Heritage Fund (33%) to be spent only to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for game, fish, and wildlife; (2) a Clean Water Fund (33%) to be spent only to protect, enhance, and restore water quality in lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater; (3) a Parks and Trails Fund (14.25%) to support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance; and (4!!) an Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund (19.75%) for arts, arts education, and arts access, to preserve Minnesota’s history and cultural heritage. The Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund will yield approximately \$48 million in FY 2010 and \$54.5 million in FY 2011 for Minnesota. There are practices to be modeled here nationally and perhaps globally.

Conservation Training: Current Challenges at the University Level

Krysia Spirydowicz

Director, Art Conservation Program

Queen's University Kingston, ON

The Art Conservation Program at Queen's University was established in the mid-1970s at a time when the importance of cultural heritage was recognized and supported by the Canadian government. This period of largesse led to a rapid expansion of museums, galleries and other cultural institutions across the country. Unfortunately, this relatively brief phase came to an abrupt end in the early 1990's as other priorities took precedence.

Swings in funding priorities have also had a significant impact on programs at Ontario universities. Recent issues include the importance of undergraduate versus graduate training and the merits of increasing intakes of international students. Frequent policy changes at the provincial level, often driven by political agendas and public opinion, have had devastating effects on the quality of small programs in the arts and humanities. In recent years, the Art Conservation Program at Queen's University has been struggling with these issues.

Major budget deficits are forecast for Ontario universities and these are attributed to a variety of factors including dwindling revenues from investments and student tuition as well as rising salaries and increased operating costs. The sustainability of small, specialized academic programs such as art conservation will depend on how we meet current challenges that include the following:

- A tightly-focused fundraising campaign will be essential to combat chronic underfunding.
- Partnerships with cultural institutions will need to be strengthened and redefined. Some partners may wish to assume a larger training role.
- The curriculum will be re-assessed in light of new developments in the field.

Conservation is still a young discipline in North America. As the first wave of university-educated conservators reach retirement, we are still defining ourselves as a profession. As storehouses of knowledge, academic training programs have an important role to play in this regard as they pass on the accumulated wisdom and practice of the present to the next generation of conservators.

We look forward to receiving suggestions and comments from our colleagues.