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### **Restoration and conservation of thirteen Japanese Kakemono from the Missionary Ethnological Museum - Vatican Museums**

The Ethnological Museum holds a precious collection of painted scrolls from the Far East, the most notable of which is a collection of thirteen Japanese kakemono donated to Pope Pius XI in 1925 by the nobleman Katsutaro Inabata, Commander of the Pontifical Order of Pope St. Sylvester, on the occasion of the Jubilee. The works were brought to the Vatican from the diocese of Osaka by the foreign missions of Paris and were exhibited at the Lateran Museum in 1929. The thirteen paintings on scrolls of silk and paper, considered to be of excellent quality and of important documentary value, were produced by the great monk Kakei between 1667 and 1669 at the Buddhist temple Tentoku-in of Kanazawa. There is an inscription in Japanese characters on the reverse of all the scrolls, indicating the name of the deity represented, the name of the temple, that of the monk and the date of production. The Buddhist deities depicted are invoked according to a predetermined order for the expiation of the sins committed during the life of the deceased.

Following transfer of the collections from San Giovanni in Laterano to the new Missionary Ethnological Museum in 1975, the kakemono were exhibited vertically in glass cases along the principle route through the museum. The conditioning system of the museum, now considered obsolete, did not guarantee the correct microclimatic parameters for such works.

In 2001 the kakemono were in a somewhat precarious state of conservation. The tension resulting from the creation of a paper-silk "system" had caused deformations and detachment. The paper and the silk were torn at the levels of the upper hanging rods, caused in part by the strain of continuous suspension and the fragility of the constitutive materials.

On the painted scrolls there were numerous visible fine horizontal creases on both sides, damage typical of such items. There was a widespread superficial deposit on the items, insect excrement, small abrasions caused by lepidoptera and holes caused by woodworm. It was decided that restoration works would be carried out as part of the conservation project for the ethnological collections.

The conservation strategy was defined in its operative phases by means of a broad interdisciplinary comparison of eastern and western techniques and methods of intervention, with regard to the morphological, functional and structural characteristics of these fragile and complex works.

**Nadia Fiussello**  
**Stefania Passerini**



## “Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage”

In the field of cultural heritage, in this case relating to works from the Far East, the expressions "tangible" and "intangible" are inextricably linked, in the sense that one cannot live without the other, since the tangible is the fruit of the intangible, and the intangible contributes to feed the tangible. But by what means? Through knowledge, the fruit of centuries-old wisdom handed down from generation to generation; through the knowledge of the materials of which their constitutive elements are composed; through gestures and related procedures of production, also transmitted unchanged throughout the centuries. All this is intangible cultural heritage: the product of tradition, the voice of a people, manifested also in the respect for works of conservation and restoration, as these are an integral part of the cultural heritage of the population of which they are an expression; in a certain sense, they represent the cultural pride of a people. Thus the close relationship between Cultural Heritage, Tangible and Intangible, may be partly explained.

From my point of view, a failure to respect this pairing and to aim to substitute that which constitutes the intangible, even partly, with alternative solutions and different modi operandi (even when sought and concluded for the benefit of the work itself) is a serious error, as it compromises the living relationship between cultural tradition and its expression. In simpler terms, one may not accept de facto the work as a cultural expression of a tradition, and then, for its maintenance, make use of procedures which do not belong to that same tradition. It would be to unwittingly carry out an act of violence towards the cultural and structural integrity of the work, distorting and indeed losing its originality. Modernity, in the form of scientific research aimed at the identification of suitable elements or materials may be acceptable and represent a significant step in the research and study of conservation; however, if adopted and applied to works from different cultures, this may deny the traditional expression of a people, and therefore fails to respect, or may indeed even disrupt a part of that very cultural wealth, the living expression of the history of a population.

How can these risks be obviated? By means of a process of sensitisation to traditional methods, intended not only to explain that which is visible and immediate (the work of art understood in its dimensional, physical aspect) but above all that for which the work has been conceived, how this occurred, and why; or perhaps also through professional training courses; or through a series of media interventions. This could also create a new key to a more genuine understanding of the cultural roots of a people, a new and deeper dimension of cultural tourism aimed at the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. Therefore, it also forms part of an intercultural dialogue, expressed in this case through the profound act of comprehension, a sort of driving force, one hopes, in enabling the knowledge of and respect for a culture, through its various artistic expressions. A work of art is the fruit of profound inspiration; it is the attempt to transform, to render clear specific inspirations in and through particular forms; and the latter are products of the use of elements and materials that the artist has carefully chosen. In turn, the works of art themselves generate inspirations and messages in the observer, in the form perhaps of sensations, intuition and so on. The relationship between the artist-creator and the work of art enables one to perceive the artist's vision of life in that moment. It therefore provides unique testimony which functions not only through the creation of the work itself, but also through the use of characteristic materials for its production. The work must therefore be respected both in its appearance and its composition, as it is the product of a precise historic-cultural moment and thus represents a part of our universal heritage.

To alter or modify these elements, or to fail to take into consideration the above, means to change the very sense or function of the work; for this reason it is an obligation to respect the integrity and nature of the work.



### ***Rescue Conservation and Restoration Project of the Statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva in Dazu Rock Carvings***

The statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva is located on the south precipices of Giant Buddha Bay (Da Fo Wan in Chinese), Baoding Mountain at Dazu Rock Carvings, which is marked no. 8. It was carved in South Song Dynasty with over 800 years of history and it is an important constituent part of bas-reliefs on precipices of Giant Buddha Bay now. The niche for the Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva statue is 7.7 m high and 12.5 m wide, occupying 97m<sup>2</sup> of vertical face of the precipices. The surface decoration for the statue can be divided into gold foil painting and colored painting, its integral structure has been basically well preserved, but the statue has been suffering from serious disease through 800 years: common phenomenon of fading, cracking, lifting and exfoliation of gold foils; seriously weathering of base sandstone; most of color painted faqi (Buddhist ritual instrument) are complete, and remnant parts are in the form of powder, and cracking and mass collapse occur on some fingers. In order to better conserve the statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage, as the leading unit of the conservation project, has invited Dunhuang Academy, Peking University, China University of Geosciences, and Tsinghua University to carry out joint scientific research, as they all possess tremendous strength in scientific research, high quality of research personnel and advanced technical means. Technicians have made system survey on preservation condition of statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva since June, 2008: they adopted gridding methods to make manual and computer drafting and summary of thousand hands and faqi one by one, to systematically comprehend diseases conditions of bed rocks, gold foils and colored paintings; then they organized a multidisciplinary team composing of hydrology, geology, environment, chemistry, physics, and biology, to discuss working plans, detail research content, and finally resulted in 10 research subjects: test and evaluation of stability in carving part of the statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva; monitoring of air and indoor environment; monitoring and analysis of condensation water, research on mechanism of deterioration of weathering diseases in rocks, gold foils and colored paintings for the statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva; application of synthetic material into restoration experiment of small statue area; aging tests and indoor evaluation of reinforcement material for weathering sandstone and adhesive material for gold foils; application of traditional materials in partial statue restoration experiments and indoor aging tests; acquisition of 3D information and virtual restoration; permeating and reinforcing experiments of weathered sandstones; and tracking monitoring of restoration experiments results.

Till October 2010, all project organizations have carried out restoration and research activities on sites and in laboratories totally for over 80 people monthly, and completed different kinds of research and experiment reports for total 1,350 pages in approximately 500,000 characters; have gained deep comprehension of geology, environment, material and techniques the statue is faced with through all special researches and experiments, further strengthened pertinence in treatment of conservation and restoration, and accumulated a lot of experience of methods, techniques and materials in application of conservation and restoration. Small area restoration experiments of 2 m<sup>2</sup> have achieved good results which were carried out in late 2010. On January 21, 2011, the medium term of restoration experiments have passed expert acceptance for the rescue conservation project of the Statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva.

The Statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, incorporating carving, gilding, colored painting and many techniques and faced with many complicated influencing factors of geology, hydrology and the air, is a complicated project integrating conservation, restoration and research. The complexity and difficulties of the project can be rarely seen in cultural heritage conservation projects at home and abroad.

#### **Zhan Changfa**

Responsible for coordinating the activities for the Chinese National Heritage Conservation, Xi'an Center of Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage, Beijing



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## Conservation and restoration of wall paintings in Burma (Pagan) and Tibet (Dege County)

The conservation project for the wall paintings of the temples in Pagan, financed by UNESCO, began in 1982 (when what is now Myanmar was still called Burma) and continued until 1993.

The first two missions in 1982 and 1983 were dedicated to studying techniques, conservation problems, selection of the first nucleus of students and the materials needed for training and treatment.

The real didactic activity started in the third year and the temple of Kubyauk-gyi near Mynkaba village was chosen as the first worksite. It was completely restored, and the intervention regarded both the wall paintings (covering a surface of about 800 m<sup>2</sup>) and the exterior stuccoes.

Our first mission in eastern Tibet was in 1995: we were asked to detach the upper cell of the temple of Baiya, badly damaged by an earthquake.

The monastery was in a wild, remote spot at a height of 4,300 m, and to reach it one had to go over five mountain passes, some more than 5,000 m high. As there was no road for the final stretch, a day on horseback was necessary. The place was extraordinary, barely touched by human presence and of extreme fascination, especially when one arrived and entered the small interior courtyard, coming under the intense scrutiny of the few local inhabitants.

**Carlo Giantomassi, Donatella Zari**

Restorers, Italy



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## Restoring collections of prehistoric artefacts

The deep history of humanity is represented by some two million years of artefacts made of stone, bone, antler and ivory. While the conservation of the stone implements is relatively straightforward, the organic materials may be in poor condition and require specialist conservation. Such work is carried out by skilled conservators but in the world's oldest museums it is often necessary for curators to contribute a different set of skills to the restoration of collections. At the Vatican as at the British Museum scholars recognised stone tools as the most ancient products of humanity by the beginning of the eighteenth century. A century later interest in evolution encouraged the excavation of vast numbers of artefacts then acquired by museums. Restoring the history and significance of these collections then putting them to use not just for academic purposes or exhibitions but also to work in a variety of social contexts is the responsibility of the curator. Without this, the retention of such collections in high cost urban spaces is difficult to justify. The paper will provide examples from the Vatican and British Museum to show how this type of restoration can transform the value of items from our deepest past found in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Australasia.

**Jill Cook**

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## Conservation of polymaterial objects: conservation and restoration experiences in Mexico

Conservation and restoration issues for ethnological and archaeological objects must be done through an exhaustive diagnosis and study of the object to work on. This will help conservators to undertake a respectful and academic work that will give the objects the appropriate message at the museographer's display. An object should not be restored before a complete record and investigation of its previous cultural context has been carried out. This approach to the historical moment and context of the object will give a proper result on the restoration process the object will receive. Examples of diverse conservation treatments will be shown, as well as the multidisciplinary efforts that Mexican professionals on the preservation of cultural heritage undertake during conservation processes to achieve a restoration treatment that conserves not only the object as an isolated item, but the historical moment and ethnographic ritual meaning it was made for.

**Lilia Rivero Weber**

Coordinadora Nacional del Patrimonio Cultural Mexicano



### ***Restoration works and professional formation in Yemen***

In 2008, at the Istituto Veneto per i Beni Culturali (IVBC), which was already active in Yemen in the Great Mosque of Sana'a, a project was proposed for the conservation of the Al-Ashrafiya mosque in Ta'izz, which also included training activities for local professionals. The main aim of all the bodies involved (the Social Fund - executive body of the Ministry for Development, the IVBC and UNESCO) was to evaluate, through didactic activities and field work, the vast historic-artistic heritage of Yemen and to strengthen awareness, in both professionals and the general public, of the inestimable value of the works present throughout the territory.

The restoration and training project was initiated immediately, and has achieved excellent results, far greater than our initial expectations. These three years have seen the creation of a local team aware of the importance of its conservation activities and able, within the aspects we defined, to carry out procedures relating to artistic works of great cultural and ethno-anthropological value. The clearest demonstration of the value of the work of the IVBC is the fact that the workshop has remained active, despite the departure of the Italian expedition, for security reasons, in the middle of last March. Interruption to the work was avoided not only by means of new information technologies which enabled constant contact and an efficient exchange of information and directions regarding the work, but also, above all, due to the excellent professional and interpersonal relationships formed with the local restorers. The Al-Ashrafiya mosque, surmounted by nine domes, eight small and one large, is a jewel of Yemenite architecture. It was built, according to authoritative sources, in 1397 upon request by the sultan Ashraf II, the seventh descendent of the Rasulide dynasty, which for over two centuries governed over the greater part of Yemen and beyond from Hadramawt to Mecca, establishing the capital at Ta'izz. Al-Ashrafiya is a mosque-madrasa, or rather, a mosque which also functions as a school, and therefore has large spaces, such as lecture theatres and dormitories, intended for students and teachers. The materials used for the construction of the temple, erected by local, Iranian and Egyptian workers, are bricks, stone and plaster, while wood on the other hand is rarely used, as in all buildings in the city. The interior, especially in the prayer hall, is painted with a decorative style comparable only to that found in Aleppo in Syria, and the decorative plaster elements, uncommon in Yemen, imitate a model widespread in Egypt. In the great complex there are also tombs, eight of which are ancient, inserted in architectonic spaces comparable to western chapels, richly constructed and finely decorated, which belong to several important members of the royal family. Around twenty-five years ago, a static procedure led to the insertion of a reinforced concrete riddle within the structure of the walls, at the height of approximately 5 metres, to guarantee stability, which unfortunately disfigured the decorative fabric of almost all the internal walls corresponding to the small domes. The majority of the wall

paintings were whitewashed, a practice previously favoured for reasons of cleanliness and hygiene before the period of Ramadan.

Alongside the logistic and technical-operative aspects of the project, the presentation considers the interconnections between the Italian experts and local workers, in particular the reciprocal transmission of knowledge, which enabled the young Yemenites to master the most advanced techniques in the sector of conservation and provided the Italian restorers with a unique field experience, from both a human and professional perspective.

**Renzo Ravagnan e Paolo Mariani**

Istituto Veneto per i Beni Culturali



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### **Curatorial Knowledge and Conservation Expertise: a Binational Project on Mexican featherwork**

The rapid growth of the material and ideological value of ethnographic collections during the second half of the twentieth century has resulted in an unprecedented growth of the importance of conservation departments in ethnographic museums. All too often, however, curators look at conservation departments either as a mere service agency or even as competitors for limited financial resources and in the institutional power relationship, rather than as important allies in research, in which the complementary approaches to objects may be put to good use.

This paper offers a preliminary report on a project on Mexican featherwork of the sixteenth century undertaken jointly by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia of Mexico and the Museum of Ethnology of Vienna in Austria as an example for the mutual advantages of interdisciplinary and international cooperation based on the notion of shared cultural heritage. Although the primary focus of the project is the unique Ancient Mexican feather headdress in the museum in Vienna, its history, construction, and conservation, the implications of the project extend far beyond the study of a single artifact.

**Christian Feest**

University of Vienna



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### **The complex world of avian plumage: developing a technical and condition database for California Native American featherwork**

A conservation survey instrument designed to provide a searchable resource for information about indigenous featherwork has been successfully developed and piloted, focusing on material from California. Undyed feathers selected for their colors have diverse levels of cultural significance for featherwork in California and worldwide, and different colorant systems found in these feathers account for differences in their susceptibility to fading. The survey form uses controlled vocabularies and visual glossaries to assist stewards in recording feather descriptions, cultural modifications, attachment methods, and conditions, including evidence of color change. In developing the survey as a tool for searchable reference information, rather than as a device for comparing items within a single collection, a large user pool is both possible and desirable. The collections reviewed thus far include California native featherwork selected from eight major collections. This paper describes the survey design and preliminary results gained from a review of 124 feathered regalia and baskets.

**Ellen Pearlstein**

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### **Conservation of contemporary art & technical or ethnographic heritage. A new pedagogical challenge**

L'Institut National Du Patrimoine (the National Institute of Cultural Heritage) is an institution of higher education which bears ties with the French ministry of culture and communication. Its purpose is to recruit through competitive exams and initial training programmers curators of the French cultural heritage. It also selects through competitive exams and five years training programmers conservators of the French cultural heritage. Training programmers of both complementary trades within a same institute is a unique and original specificity one could not find anywhere else in Europe. Candidates choose a specialty as they prepare for the entrance examinations (painting, sculpture, furniture, fire arts, graphic arts, textile arts, photography). The training of restorers alternates theoretical lectures, practical work and outside work sites. Much of the course is common to different specialties. Many interdisciplinary exchanges allow students to go beyond the limits of their specialty.

The specificity of Inp, compared to other similar schools in Europe, is the specialization of teaching for five years. This choice produces a very high level of professionalism and directs the students to research, but market reality requires that they should also be prepared to approach the many composite objects that go beyond the strict confines of their specialty. To reflect the new challenges posed by multi-material objects, by moving objects or synthetic materials, a special seminar is offered to Inp 4th year students since 2008. This program allows students to confront the issues of conservation of contemporary art & technical or ethnographic heritage. For three months they gather from different specialties in the form of micro-enterprises responsible for carrying out a technical study on a museum piece. This is an opportunity for them to verify that the same methodology can be applied to each type of object, whatever it is. But they also discover the limits of their technical skills. The complementary nature of their experiences lead them to determine what they are able to design and undertake on these surprising objects, but also what requires absolutely to be drawn on the expertise of their colleagues of other specialties. Beyond questions about the different materials or their contradictory behavior to environmental conditions, students must also confront the question of the obsolescence of technical or multimedia components, and the necessary adaptations of ethic. These experiences are excellent preparation for professional life. They also ensure that the best training in the world is not enough to help a single specialist addressing complex study cases. Many avenues of research remain to be explored.

**Roch Payet**

Directeur des études, Département des restaurateurs  
Institut National du Patrimoine (Inp)



Looking back at Sharing Conservation Decisions, from its moment of inception until the final course in 2008, is an opportunity to reflect on its evolution in terms of both content and teaching approaches. The participants' feedback before, during and after the course has played a vital role in shaping the SCD courses, as well as the professional and teaching experiences of the course design and core teaching team. By analyzing key information gathered during the four courses it is possible to formulate a picture of the decision making challenges heritage professionals are facing in the 'real world'. In this way we can begin to gauge SCD's success not only in meeting the needs of the participants who have taken the course, but also its relevance to the conservation profession in general and possible future directions on the topic of conservation decision making.

### **Karen Abend**

Consultant ICCROM, USA - Italy

### **Catherine Antomarchi**

Unit Director, Collections Unit  
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## **The collections of polymaterial works: case studies of theory (ethics) of conservation in the experience of the ISCR**

The collections of polymaterial works, numerically prevalent in ethnographical collections and popular and religious arts and traditions, and, in some cases, in archaeological collections, may constitute, more than any other type of collection, a particularly complex system in which the ethics of conservation find a significant number of reasons for existence, alongside many professional challenges and the need to find specific, successful solutions.

The almost infinite variety and heterogeneity of the constitutive materials of the works in such collections, and the frequent co-presence in a single work of a great variety of materials - frequently unknown to us, as not present in the traditional Italian or western tradition - oblige museum professionals to adopt all the strategies, methodologies and known techniques for ensuring the conservation and transmission of this extremely fragile heritage. A heritage that in today's world is assuming ever greater importance: certainly still to be explored, studied, conserved, restored and evaluated; it is now shown to us as having important documentary value, providing knowledge of different cultures which, with ever increasing urgency, seek new ways of peaceful co-existence.

The ISCR (ex ICR) has always adopted a multidisciplinary approach due to the collaboration of experts from all the humanistic, scientific and technical disciplines involved in conservation and restoration, in its training school for restorers and its wide-ranging activities in consultation and training both in Italy and abroad. This attitude has promoted, and promotes, the continuous search for new solutions for conservation and restoration, and our rich experience over the last decade - both in research and study, and in training - has been orientated towards these types of works and collections, identified as exemplary cases offering the most important methodological and technical challenges in conservation and restoration.

A focus on these works has enabled, within the ISCR, the development of: (a) new synergies between the various laboratories specialising in different classes of materials and types of works; (b) new training courses for students of restoration in the ISCR Higher Training School and numerous training projects in Italy and abroad, including the course for restorers participating from 1999 in the conservation study for the ethnological collections of the Vatican Museums, and following the completion of the interventions defined in the conservation strategy; and (c) research aimed at defining methodologies and tools for the knowledge of a collection and project planning, with limited time

schedules and economic resources, according to a suitable conservation strategy, through studies of environments and collections. This research has been integrated with broad experience of real cases, and among these, the ethnological collections of the Vatican Museums constitute one of the exemplary cases confirming the validity of a professional ethic which sees the act of restoration as one of the necessary activities integrated within a broader "conservation strategy" seeking to reduce as far as possible the risks run by such works, and therefore also the need for restoration works, by optimising in primis environmental conditions and other factors responsible for the correct conservation of the collections.

Ten years on from the drafting of what was a highly innovative experimental project, the ISCR has achieved the computerisation of part of the records and normative instruments developed for the execution of this type of study of museum collections, in connection with the Carta del Rischio (Risk Card) and, financial resources permitting, hopes to be able to complete this work soon, as it represents a concrete and effective contribution to an ever broader, more widely acknowledged and practiced ethic of conservation.

**Bianca Fossà**

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