

## Museums and Social Harmony

The ICOM General Assembly and Conference, held in Shanghai in November 2010 on the theme *Museums and Social Harmony*, was attended by 3,350 professionals from 120 countries, and took place at the Expo site. The International Conservation Committee is a member of the 'ICOM family' but is usually under represented at the General Assembly because ICOM-CC, as the international committee with the largest membership, holds its own triennial conference.

Conservation had a presence at the General Assembly. It was the subject of Resolution 7: "The General Assembly welcomes and endorses the clarification and definition of conservation terminology including "preventive conservation", "remedial conservation" and "restoration" as the preferred terms characterising the various forms of action to conserve the tangible cultural heritage which was adopted by ICOM-CC at its 15<sup>th</sup> Triennial Conference in New Delhi 22-26 September 2008." The definitions will be posted on the ICON website. For the resolution on museums and cultural tourism, the word "preservation" was added, so it now reads: "The General Assembly commends all appropriate museum initiatives which make museums more attractive to the public and which enhance their ability to contribute to education, training, cultural understanding and preservation."

### **ICOM-CC presentations**

ICOM-CC organised a one-day study trip to the China National Silk Museum and the nearby regional conservation facility for the province of Hangzhou, and a half-day session of presentations, which are introduced here. <http://chinasilkmuseum.com>

Under the title *The Stuff of Life*, Eve Graves, University of the Arts Camberwell, demonstrated the power of everyday objects to evoke memories (see fig 1). She argued that it was essential for conservation students to appreciate the importance that objects have for people. She explained how her students are introduced to working with collections and the public from their first week of their conservation studies. Like the Demos report, *It's a Material World* (Jones and Holden 2008), she focused on the use of objects in collections rather than on the objects *per se*.

Professor Debra Hess Norris, Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation, USA considered *Recent advances and current challenges in the education*. She summarised the Salzburg Global Seminar of 2009 and referred to the Salzburg Declaration. She stressed the importance of Faculty exchange and sustainability for conservation education. Like the Demos report she stressed the need to build excitement in and advocacy for conservation. <http://www.iiconservation.org/news/?p=703>  
<http://www.salzburgglobal.org/2009/News.cfm?IDMedia=52858>

Evita Yeung So, Curator (Conservation) 3D, Hong Kong Heritage Museum, gave a detailed account of the rationale and plan to establish conservation education in Hong Kong. It was interesting to hear about the award-winning film *Echoes of the Rainbow* (2010 Alex Law) which led to a significant change in the decision to demolish the 1960s Wing Lee residential street in Hong Kong.

Lawrence Chin, Cindy Wong and Ahmad Mashadi, National University of Singapore considered the leasing of a museum laboratory by a freelance conservator who worked privately and for the museum. Laiming Wu of the Shanghai Museum gave a detailed introduction of environmental monitoring and control, and plans to develop a national quality management platform starting with 250 museums. He stressed the importance of developing a national standard (for China) of a modified form of the Oddy test.

Maniatis Nikolaos from the Technological Educational Institute of Athens, Greece, presented a multi-author paper on *The role of conservator in safeguarding cultural diversity and enhancing regional socio-economic sustainability*. He showed clips of interviews with elderly Greek villagers to find out more about the objects they have contributed to a museum newly established as part of a strategy to promote cultural tourism. The researchers were surprised how emotional some of the informants were when using and explaining the working tools in the museum.

Catherine Smith, Clothing and Textile Sciences University of Otago, New Zealand, discussed *Intangible heritage in New Zealand museums: what role for conservation?* She explored the specificities of conserving cultural heritage defined as taonga, a Māori term which may be translated as a cultural treasure which encompasses objects, plants, places, languages and rights. She explained that Māori view taonga as dynamic and part of contemporary relationships and not just a material inheritance. She stressed the importance of involving the Māori community in conservation decisions. Examples included the conservation of an eel trap with missing parts filled by netting made by a Māori weaver (Smith 2006), and a preservation workshop where sharing food and accommodation, was fundamental to its success.

In *Conservation of living heritage, or can we adapt principles to local needs?* Sabine Cotte, Paintings Conservator, Melbourne, Australia developed her ideas on conservation in the Himalayas presented at the ICOM-CC meeting in New Delhi 2008. She stressed the importance of establishing for what purpose the conservation intervention was required by the local communities and of sharing decision-making and intervention with local artists and other experts. Preventive conservation and maintenance were emphasised and she introduced the *Handbook of Preventive Conservation for Dzongs and Lhakhangs* (Cotte and Nock 1998), developed for Bhutanese care takers. It can be downloaded from [www.collasia2010.org](http://www.collasia2010.org)

As co-authors of the presentation *Cultural heritage conservation as a medium of social integrity after political, social and economic disruption in Iraqi Kurdistan*, with Lolan Sipan, Founding Director of the Kurdish Textile Museum we (Deisser and Eastop) provide an abstract of our paper: The Kurdish Textile Museum was set up in Erbil in 2004 to save important elements of this nomadic culture, textiles and their making. Preservation measures include: documentation of textiles and techniques of production; safe storage and display of the KTM textile collection; capacity-building courses for Iraqi museum staff from different institutions; knowledge-transfer of textile technologies to young Iraqi Kurds (Fig 2-4). This conservation work demonstrates the interdependence of

conserving natural, tangible and intangible heritage, recognising the economic, political and social benefits of conservation, and the importance of multi-sector partnerships. Please contact us if you want an illustrated abstract in the four ICOM languages plus others. [www.kurdishtextilemuseum.com](http://www.kurdishtextilemuseum.com)

Iwona Szmelter of the Faculty of Conservation-Restoration of Works of Art, Poland, presented a paper entitled: *Sustainable development in museums in transformation context-complex*. She highlighted the complex interrelationship between conserving and curating contemporary art. For example, the reinstallation of a contemporary artwork can involve the conservator becoming the fabricator. She concluded by stressing the importance of understanding and analysing the specific mission of each museum. [www.asp.poznan.pl/wykladowcy/bio/?id=szmelter](http://www.asp.poznan.pl/wykladowcy/bio/?id=szmelter)

Hanneke van der Beek presented a paper she co-authored with Agnes W. Brokerhof, both from the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, on the preliminary results of a protocol for assessing the *Effectiveness of virtual access to collections*. They explained the problem of terminology as regards virtual collections and the broad spectrum between real and virtual with degrees of variation. This promises to be a very useful piece of work. [www.icn.nl](http://www.icn.nl)

## References

Cotte, S. and Nock, D. 1998. *Handbook of Preventive Conservation for Dzongs and Lhakhangs*. Bhutan: Royal Government of Bhutan.

Jones, S. and Holden, J. 2008. *It's a Material World. Caring for the Public Realm*. London: Demos.

Smith, C. and Winkelbauer, H. 2006. Conservation of a Māori eel trap: Practical and ethical issues. In: D. Saunders, J.H. Townsend and S. Woodcock (eds) *The Object in Context: Crossing Conservation Boundaries*. London: IIC: 128 – 132.

Anne-Marie Deisser, PhD  
Preventive Conservation Consultant  
Affiliated Conservator, Textile Kurdish Museum, Erbil, Iraq  
[adeisser@gmail.com](mailto:adeisser@gmail.com)

Dinah Eastop, PhD, FIIC, ACR  
Clothworkers Research Fellow, The National Archives, UK  
[D.D.Eastop@soton.ac.uk](mailto:D.D.Eastop@soton.ac.uk)