

Report from the 17th ICOM-CC Triennial Conference, 15-19 September 2014, Melbourne, Australia

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The 17th Triennial Conference of the International Council of Museums Committee for Conservation (ICOM-CC) was held in Melbourne, Australia between 15 and 19th September 2014. The conference theme was: *Building Strong Culture through Conservation*. It was attended by over 650 delegates representing 50 countries.

These triennial conferences bring together conservation and museum professionals as well as conservation students from all over the world for an intensive week of activities exploring current research and initiatives in the field of cultural heritage conservation. It is one of the two large, global conferences in cultural heritage conservation; the other being that held every other year by the International Institute for Conservation (IIC). This year the IIC held its conference in Hong Kong the week following the ICOM-CC conference in Melbourne. It was a hectic two weeks for many cultural heritage professionals!

Each ICOM-CC conference is a joint initiative of ICOM-CC and partners in the host country. The Australian National Organizing Committee for the 17th Triennial Conference was composed of the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation of the University of Melbourne and the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) - Australia's leaders in conservation education, training and practice. The last time ICOM-CC held one of its triennial conferences on the Australian continent was in 1987.

The program for ICOM-CC's 17th Triennial Conference in Melbourne reflected the conference theme - *Building Strong Culture through Conservation*—as well as the activities of ICOM-CC's twenty-one specialized Working Groups. The structure of ICOM-CC's Triennial Conferences consist of: an Opening Session, Working Group Sessions, Poster Sessions, Plenary Session, opening and closing General Assemblies, technical visits, and a trade fair.

The 2014 Conference Opening Session included presentations by Lyndel V. Prott, Professor Ma Xiaolin, and Dr. Shao Anding. Lyndel V. Prott led a discussion on 'Comprehensive Conservation', exploring how professionals work together as 'wardens of civilization'. She highlighted the challenges, and ways the international community and local communities work together. Professor Ma Xiaolin examined the latest archaeology site and artifacts conservation in China's Henan province, and how various professional groups work together, from the planners who identify a site for development to historians who provide information about it, the archaeologists who undertake the excavations, and the conservators whose knowledge informs all of these processes. Finally, Dr. Shao Anding described how conservation partnerships uncover important information, and showed why important questions about cultural preservation require support at local community, professional community, and international community levels.

The ICOM-CC's twenty-one specialized Working Groups are as follows:

WG 1 Art Technological Source Research	WG 2 Documentation
WG 3 Education and Training in Conservation	WG 4 Ethnographic Collections

WG 5 Glass and Ceramics	WG 6 Graphic Documents
WG 7 Leather and Related Materials	WG 8 Legal Issues in Conservation
WG 9 Metals	WG 10 Modern Materials and Contemporary Art
WG 11 Murals, Stone, and Rock Art	WG 12 Natural History Collections
WG 13 Paintings	WG 14 Photographic Materials
WG 15 Preventive Conservation	WG 16 Scientific Research
WG 17 Sculpture, Polychromy, and Architectural Decoration	WG 18 Textiles
WG 19 Theory and History of Conservation	WG 20 Wet Organic Archaeological Materials
WG 21 Wood, Furniture, and Lacquer	

Over 150 papers were delivered over five days. Working Group sessions are held in parallel. For conference delegates to be able to attend a wide range of presentations spread between Working Groups, it is critical that the venue for the conference provides for easy movement between session rooms. Furthermore, it is critical that the sessions hold to the advertised timeslot so that delegates can plan for and organize moving between presentations.

The ICOM-CC Melbourne Conference was held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, located in the centre of the city. The venue was well-suited for the parallel-session nature of the conference. It was relatively easy to move back and forth between Working Group sessions during the sessions. By and large the sessions held to their time schedule, thus enabling and encouraging delegates to move between sessions.

The ICOM-CC Triennial Conferences are also known for their Poster sessions. The posters are an integral part of each of the twenty-one Working Group themes. At the Melbourne venue, over one hundred posters were displayed throughout the day just outside the rooms where the Working Group Sessions were held. They were well-visited, becoming a natural focus during coffee and lunch breaks.

It is impossible to attend all the working group sessions, so delegates tend to select papers of interest. Working in conservation education and training, WG 3 Education and Training in Conservation was of special interest; however, I found myself attending presentations in a wide range of working groups including WG 18 Textiles, WG 20 Wet Organic Archaeological Materials, WG 19 Theory and History of Conservation, WG 12 Natural History Collections, etc. Again, the venue enabled and encouraged popping in and out of sessions. I found the Education and Training in Conservation offering of papers disappointing because being a conservation educator I am interested in the pedagogy and delivering of conservation training. Predominantly, the papers did not address the training of conservators but of spreading conservation education/training to communities, etc. This was unfortunate because there are few forums that focus on delivering conservation education and training to future conservators. I did not deliver a paper at the conference but did have a poster

presentation in the Education and Training in Conservation poster group entitled: *Common Platform' Courses Promote Conservation* (attached).

I wish to express my gratitude to Swedish ICOM for financial support to make my participation in the ICOM-CC Conference possible.

The 18th ICOM-CC Triennial Conference will be held in Copenhagen between 4 and 8th September 2017 with the theme: *Linking Past and Future*.

'Common platform' courses promote conservation

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As conservation courses continue to be threatened with budget cutbacks and closure, many resort to offering a selection of more general, 'common platform' courses to increase student numbers. These courses present a challenge in getting both the specialist/non-specialist balance of content and the methods of delivery right to a broader audience of tomorrow's citizens. Frequently, the 'common platform' can be seen to require dumbing down of the range of specialities that might be funnelled into such a course. On the other hand, such a course can promote a profound appreciation of the material cultural in our everyday lives. A case in point is the School of Cultural Property Conservation's postgraduate course entitled 'Care of Museum Collections' at the National Yunlin University of Science and Technology (NYUST) in Douliou, Taiwan. The course was one of the school's 'common platform' offerings with a class makeup of students majoring in intangible heritage studies, built heritage, etc. Its delivery was highly visual and interactive in nature due to it being taught in English. NYUST is situated in a campus of gardens and open spaces graced with large and small sculptures in a variety of forms, executed in natural and modern synthetic materials. Together, they constitute a major public outdoor sculpture collection. As part of course requirements, students carried out a condition survey of the NYUST sculpture collection. The exercise was a transition from classroom theory to practical experience with an immediate issue in their everyday environment. Each student was assigned three sculptures, was equipped with a survey form, and reported his/her findings to the class in the form of a PowerPoint presentation – that both their fellow Taiwanese-speaking classmates and English-speaking course tutor could understand. As non-specialist surveyors, they carried out a modest visual technical examination to identify the fabrication methods and materials, damage, and ascertain the mechanisms of deterioration. The survey consisted of onsite field investigation and background search on the NYUST Art Center's website. Where possible, they tried to identify the artwork and the artist. The course timeframe did not allow for preparing a comprehensive survey report; however, the completed survey forms and student PowerPoint presentations of their findings form a permanent record of the condition of the collection at a specific point in time, which can be consulted when developing a campus outdoor sculpture preservation plan. Prior to carrying out the survey, the students were aware of outdoor sculptures on the campus, especially some of the prominently placed large installations, but they had never thought of the sculptures aggregately as a collection. Once conscious of the sculptures as a collection, the students realised how much they contribute to the quality of life on campus and they developed a sense of respect for this tremendous public asset. They recommended that signs and plaques be mounted with the sculpture to inform about the pieces and to promote appreciation, awareness and concern for the university's collection. They suggested pieces be marked on campus maps and that the university more actively promote its existence.