The International Institution for Conservation (IIC) launched a new full-color conservation newspaper News in Conservation (NiC) in 2007 and transitioned into a completely digital e-magazine in 2011. Published six times a year, NiC provides a platform for members of the conservation community to share the latest research, interviews, and reviews; to promote new events, products, and opportunities; and to call for papers, ideas, and involvement. NiC also provides updates from the IIC Council and Regional Groups. NiC continues to evolve to better fit the needs and interests of our increasingly global conservation profession.

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The tragedy of the Notre Dame Cathedral fire has focused us all on the emotional impact that loss of our heritage has on the broader population and not just on those of us who work directly on the conservation of historic and artistic works. The damage wrought at, say, Palmyra or on the Bamiyan Buddhas could be said to be equally devastating in terms of loss of cultural heritage and significance, but Notre Dame has struck a greater chord in our community because so many of us have had a direct association with this latest disaster. IIC’s French Group (SFIC) and their president, M Roland May, have been receiving many offers of support from conservators around the world, and they have also been prominent in answering technical questions from the media. Roland tells me that the damage is predominantly architectural, namely to the roof of the Cathedral rather than to the artefacts contained inside it which mercifully suffered only minor impact from both the fire and the resulting torrent of water. So, there is not likely to be a major need for conservators as the Cathedral’s restoration gets underway. That said, our IIC 2020 Congress (to be held in Edinburgh, Scotland), with its theme of Current practices and challenges in built heritage, will look closely at the issues arising from—and the lessons that can be learnt by—conservators working collaboratively with those connected to conservation of the built environment.

On a separate note, my correspondence with Roland has highlighted the nature of employment for conservators in France which is predominantly freelance rather than through an institution. Those that are employed in institutions tend to concentrate on preventive and exhibition preparation, a trend we are seeing around the world. This reflects the fact that a growing percentage of the hands-on work being undertaken in our profession is done by private or freelance conservators. Although I started my career as an institutional conservator, I have worked privately for most of it. As your President, let me be clear that I represent all our members in whatever capacity they are employed. It is becoming evident to IIC that a significant proportion—approximately 30 percent—of our membership are working privately, and I want to make sure that we cater to their needs as much as we do to the needs of our institutional colleagues.

The intriguing overlay to me as a private conservator has always been the business of conservation. We are primarily conservators who have found ourselves running a business, rather than business-men and -women who, having pondered what business we will go into, have chosen conservation. We are therefore ultimately driven by the satisfaction achieved in the conservation work we do, rather than satisfaction found merely in running a business successfully. And therein lies the irony; to survive as private conservators we need to be able to run a business. This requires a whole set of skills in which few of us are trained, whether it be marketing, accountancy or the simple issue of understanding and meeting client expectations. No curator is readily available to discuss how or why a particular treatment should be undertaken. No communications team is on-hand to advise on how to respond to media requests. And, perhaps most significantly, few clients are prepared to pay for the research or post-treatment papers necessary for submission to peer-reviewed journals that are important to all of us as professional conservators.

I hope in the months to come that IIC will start to work through how we can provide better tangible support to our freelance members. In the meantime, do please email me at president@iiconservation.org on this or other matters.

With my best wishes,

Julian Bickersteth
IIC President
NOTRE DAME DE PARIS: IIC RESPONDS AND LOOKS AHEAD

The devastating fire that so severely damaged Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris in April this year has caused great sorrow and concern worldwide. Not only has there been substantial loss from one of the world’s most important Gothic cathedrals, but it has been emotionally felt by us all, being so well known through history, tourism and personal connection. IIC joins with the French people in grieving over this tragic event.

Difficult as it is at this time to look forward, IIC, as the international community of professional conservators, is emboldened by the experience of other such disasters to see how some good can come from this event. Our profession will play a vital part in the conservation of the surviving elements, from the artefacts within to the building’s fabric. Conservators also offer expertise in the techniques and methods of past craftspeople and preserve the skills that will enable the rebuilding and future maintenance of the Cathedral.

IIC and the Section Française de l’IIC (SEIIC) have been part of the linked response by the international conservation community to the fire. President of SEIIC Roland May was interviewed by the Art Newspaper and there commented that the debate in France is “extremely emotional because this symbolic monument has been destroyed—it’s not the same as a restoration campaign”. We note that in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, French President Emmanuel Macron committed his government to the process of rebuilding and regeneration of the Cathedral, and various other parties have offered substantial sums for this work. This should ensure that the cathedral is restored in the most appropriate way and should be informed by research, investigation and discussion about what has been lost and what can be rebuilt.

We also pay tribute to the Paris Fire Brigade who saved Notre Dame from an even greater disaster. We know now that the Cathedral was within “15 to 30 minutes of complete destruction” when, crucially, firefighters remained inside the building to stop the flames reaching its bell towers. Last year at the IIC Turin Congress, Lieutenant-Colonel Thierry Burger, fire prevention advisor for Heritage Assets at the French Ministry of Culture and Communication, spoke to the IIC community about the work of the Paris Fire Brigade and its connection to protecting cultural heritage; Lt. Col Burger was...
also involved in rescue and recovery at the Notre Dame fire. You can watch his talk from our Dialogue ‘Culture Cannot Wait’ here. IIC Vice-President Amber Kerr, who organised the Turin Congress Dialogue, had a response from Lt. Col. Burger as follows:

Je tenais à vous remercier pour votre message de soutien. Effectivement lors de mon intervention à Turin en septembre dernier j’avais mis en évidence l’importance de disposer d’un plan de sauvegarde des biens culturels et d’engager des actions conjointes avec les services de secours.

At IIC we stand with our colleagues at SFIIC and beyond in offering whatever support and assistance we can to ensure this iconic building is fully restored to its rightful place in Paris and in the hearts of those who treasure it around the world.

**WVU BECOMES FIRST THE UNIVERSITY IN THE USA TO OFFER TECHNICAL ART HISTORY DEGREE**

Students interested in the science behind art and its conservation will now be able to study at West Virginia University (WVU) in the Bachelor of Arts in Technical Art History program, the first degree of its kind in the nation.

“Technical art history is an exciting and relatively new interdisciplinary research field that brings together the humanities, science, and art,” said Rhonda Reymond, associate professor of art history. “It incorporates the close study of a physical object using scientific methods with the humanities-based research of art history. These scientific techniques, or research into the internal structures of a work of art, give us new insights into historical artistic techniques of making and materials as well as changes to the artifact that have occurred over time.”

Technical art history majors will take a variety of courses focusing on art history, scientific analysis, and studio arts.

“The scientific analysis in technical art history can tell us of chemical components of paint and metalwork on a chair, what kind of wood was used, what tools might have been used, or if there was a later intervention to the materials or original processes, such as adding glue or modifying the chair with additions or alterations,” Reymond said. “From there the art historical component extends this scientific analysis through external research that questions the original and altered form of the chair and where it was commonly produced or how a particular non-indigenous wood or the metalwork got to that center of manufacture.”

“The studio arts training of the technical art historian means they might try to recreate the chair to further understand its production and any anomalies,” Reymond added. “These analyses may find that particular tools were introduced to a region well before we thought they were, or that there were plants common to an area used for paint pigment that no longer thrive in that locale or that we must care for and preserve objects in different ways because of their chemical makeup.”

Because WVU offers a wide range of majors and courses, it is the ideal location for a technical art history major.

“The technical art history major is an ideal fit for WVU because we not only have the art history major within the School of Art & Design but also a studio art department that has majors in a variety of media,” Reymond said. “Students have access to courses in chemistry and physics, among other sciences, and the University has one of the foremost forensic and
Students interested in the science behind art and its conservation will now be able to study at West Virginia University in the Bachelor of Arts in Technical Art History program, the first degree of its kind in the nation. © 2019 West Virginia University.

investigative science programs in the country. Courses offered in anthropology also enhance the technical art history major as do some through public history.”

Extra-curricular activities and programs offered at WVU will also benefit technical art history majors.

“Beyond coursework, students can gain practical experience through the Art Museum of WVU, plus the other two museums on campus, as well as through state and regional museums and conservation centers,” Reymond said. “The School of Art & Design also offers courses through its affiliation with San Gemini Preservation Studies in Italy, which fits perfectly with the curriculum of a technical art history major.”

WVU has hired Hanna Szczepanowska as a visiting assistant professor to teach many of the courses within the technical art history major. Szczepanowska most recently worked as a senior conservation scientist in Singapore to design a conservation laboratory and sustainable research program to be used for museum professionals. While in Singapore, she conducted field work exploring indigenous materials quintessential to Southeast Asia like rattan, lacquer, and gutta percha. Szczepanowska received her Ph.D. in material science from Universite de Lyon, France.

“Students will bridge art with its material aspect, shedding light on the techniques, methods, forms, and shapes used and misused by artists,” Szczepanowski said. “The intricacies of technological ingenuity underlying art creations over the span of centuries, analysis of materials, and their preservation will be the core of this major. My professional trajectory spans across continents and art historical periods; from Northern Europe and North America to Southeast Asia, from the early medieval illuminations to aboriginal art. I am excited to share those experiences with students and bring my knowledge to the classroom.”

The original story and more information can be found here: [https://wvutoday.wvu.edu/stories/2019/05/16/wvu-becomes-first-university-in-u-s-to-offer-technical-art-history-degree](https://wvutoday.wvu.edu/stories/2019/05/16/wvu-becomes-first-university-in-u-s-to-offer-technical-art-history-degree)