Mixed-medium painting on a wooden panel by Lucas Cranach the Elder, depicting Christ on the cross between the two thieves. Signed with a snake and dated 1515 at bottom left, it measures 55 × 39 cm. Stolen from a museum in Gotha, Germany, in 1945, museum inventory number 3011. (Reference OA 32-218-U31136/97 Interpol Wiesbaden.)

Photo by courtesy of the ICPO-Interpol General Secretariat, Lyons, France. While the General Secretariat would prefer not to publish notices about works of art whose ownership is contested by one or more countries (e.g., works of art which disappeared during the Second World War), it has nevertheless decided to publish the present notice because the requesting NCB has stated that it does not know where the missing property is.
Preventive conservation: a mere fad or far-reaching change?

Gaeël de Guichen

Over the last twenty or more years, the museum profession has incorporated a new term, ‘preventive conservation’ to add to those of ‘conservation’ and ‘restoration’. How this came about and its thoroughgoing implications for the future of the cultural heritage is explained by ICCROM’s Gaeël de Guichen, one of the most well-known and respected spokesmen on this question.

Museum collections have rarely been bequeathed to us by a miracle of nature. And if we are able to admire and study them today and understand their messages, it is because, in most cases, their successive owners, who were convinced of their value, made unstinting efforts to pass them on as intact as possible to succeeding generations, sometimes carrying out conservation and restoration work to this end.

Conservation and restoration are two words which denote two different types of activity with quite distinct aims, and which have never been given a clear definition by the profession as a whole. As a result, each national and international association provides and disseminates its own individual interpretation. These definitions thus vary from country to country, and even within countries.

In the interest of greater clarity, I should like to propose the definitions which follow:

Conservation. Any direct or indirect human activity which is aimed at increasing the life expectancy of either intact or damaged collections. For example: removal of salt from a ceramic collection; removal of acid from graphic documents; disinfection of an ethnographic collection; dehumidification of stored collections of metal objects; reduction of lighting in a temporary exhibition of tapestry.

Restoration. Any direct human activity which is aimed at ensuring that a damaged object in a collection regains its aesthetic or (sometimes original) historic condition. For example: sculpting the missing finger of a statue; removing the superimposed part of a painting; brightening up fading writing; gluing back together pieces of broken ceramic.

One might even compare conservation and restoration work to medicine and plastic surgery, respectively.

But to complicate an already rather confused situation (I personally received over 1,000 written definitions from as many professionals from over seventy countries), during the last twenty or so years, the degree of terminological complication has been insidiously increased with the introduction of a subtle distinction between preventive conservation and curative conservation. In the same way that curative medicine concerns living beings suffering from illness, curative conservation concerns an item of heritage which risks being lost because of the presence in it of an active destructive agent: insects in wood, mould on paper, salts in ceramics, or simply an object unable to bear its own weight. By contrast, preventive conservation, in like manner to preventive medicine, concerns all items of heritage, be they in a sound state or one of active deterioration. It is aimed at protecting them against all types of natural and human aggression.

Preventive conservation came into being as a response by the profession to the drastic changes which have been taking place in the environment and heritage since the last century. What had previously been private heritage protected by the individual owner against mild forms of aggression has now become public heritage which has to be protected by the public against new and much more violent forms of aggression.

Given this complete change, the safeguarding of heritage now necessitates, first of all, public and professional awareness of the issues involved, as well as an appropriate strategy. Unfortunately, this awareness of the new situation is very slow in
taking shape, as witnessed by the following examples: although no one (layperson or professional) can deny the destructive effect of pollution on marble and limestone, there are still too many professionals who fail to protect the collections of fabrics in their charge against artificial lighting; while some museums can take pride (sic) in reserve facilities which ensure the full protection of collections, thousands of others pile up their non-exhibited collections in deplorable conditions; similarly, a number of countries take great pains to inventory their collections in order to be able to locate and keep trace of them (if not actually to document them), but so many others do not even know how many objects they have in their national museums, and although the Netherlands launched in 1990 the Delta Plan, which is aimed at fully protecting the country’s heritage, no other country has yet followed this example.

Preventive conservation means to think differently, so that: yesterday’s ‘object’ becomes today’s ‘collections’; yesterday’s ‘room’ becomes today’s ‘buildings’; yesterday’s ‘individual’ becomes today’s ‘team’; yesterday’s ‘present’ becomes today’s ‘future’; yesterday’s ‘professionals’ become today’s ‘public’ (in its broad sense); yesterday’s ‘secret’ becomes today’s ‘communication’; yesterday’s ‘how?’ becomes today’s ‘why?’.

The strategy consists in adopting preventive conservation as an essential aspect of the functioning of museums. The establishment of order in the reserve collections should be followed by the identification of collections, action taken on items which risk being lost (curative conservation) and, then, a comprehensive preventive conservation plan. Next to come should be the work of interpretation (aesthetic in character, by the restoration laboratory; historical and technical, by the research laboratory), dissemination (permanent and temporary exhibitions, catalogues, derived products, conferences). The final stage is one of enjoyment. This long-awaited stage is very seldom reached, however, as there will always be a number of technical, administrative or legal problems (or, simply, a strike by museum personnel!), which will prevent heads of museums from resting on the laurels which they had thought were well deserved.

Contrary to what some members of the profession may believe, preventive conservation means much more than mere maintenance and climate-monitoring. It is much more than a passing fad and will gradually become part and parcel of the museum profession to which it is certain to bring profound changes. These will involve training, organization, planning and the public.

Training. The entire museum staff, from the administrator to the architect, the technician to the curator-in-chief, and the guardian to the guide, should be trained in preventive conservation or instructed in its basic concepts.

Organization. Specific posts should be created in the major museums, and in the others additional responsibilities should be included in the required job qualifications.

Planning. Budgetary provisions should be made and amounts reallocated for action to be taken before any damage takes place.

The public. Steps should be systematically taken to ensure that the public is informed of the value as well as the fragility of exhibits. Such information should appear
on display frames, in publications and catalogues, and be given by guides and speakers.

In this way, a comprehensive plan of preventive conservation will be gradually established in each museum, which might be defined as: ‘A project encompassing everybody involved with the heritage of a public or private establishment which provides for the concerted implementation of well-defined direct and indirect measures aimed at the natural and human causes of deterioration in order to increase the life expectancy of the collections and guarantee the dissemination of the message they carry.’

Lay people might well ask: Why did we have to wait until the end of the century before museum professionals began to set up a policy for the preventive conservation of collections? A mystery, no doubt, but as the saying goes: ‘Better late than never.’

Finally, it has to be said that in certain contexts in which movable and immovable cultural heritage exist (historic towns, monuments, archaeological sites, libraries, archives), an identical analysis could be made and similar conclusions no doubt drawn.
A strategy for preventive conservation training
Magdalena Krebs

Tackling the problems of conservation on a national scale with few qualified professionals on hand was the challenge facing the museums of Chile. Magdalena Krebs explains how strategic planning and an emphasis on training has dramatically changed a once-bleak situation. The author is an architect and, since 1998, the director of the Centro Nacional de Conservación y Restauración (National Centre for Conservation and Restoration) in Chile.

The first evaluation of all of Chile’s museums was carried out with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the early 1980s. It involved the systematic collection of information on museum infrastructures, collections, staff strengths, publics and financing. The study concluded that the most serious problem was that of the state of conservation of the collections, and attributed responsibility for this to the lack of specialized staff, the generalized ignorance of conservation methods and techniques, and the scarce infrastructure.

At the time, Chile possessed 132 museums, 26 of which were the responsibility of the Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos (Board of Libraries, Archives and Museums), which is in charge of national and regional museums, the National Library and Archives and public libraries. The other museums are either municipal, university, private or belong to church parishes and congregations. Most of the museums are small, with collections not exceeding 5,000 objects, and have a skeleton staff of a director, one or two professionals and a number of helpers and guardians.

In response to the findings of the evaluation, and given the impossibility in the short term of providing all the museums in its charge with the required equipment, resources and staff, the Board of Libraries, Archives and Museums created the Centro Nacional de Conservación y Restauración (CNCR) in October 1982 and entrusted it with the task of breathing new life into the domains of conservation and restoration. Its work was to be aimed at the institutions covered by the Board and it was also to advise all public-oriented bodies which took care of cultural heritage. The first director of the centre was Guillermo Joiko, who was trained at the Central Institute for Restoration in Rome and had subsequently worked in the Colombia National Restoration Centre in Bogotá.

The greatest problem was finding qualified professionals to begin the work. Several European-trained restorers were engaged, but otherwise the choice fell on people in related professions who were ready to receive training based on courses, internships and study. The great difficulty experienced in establishing a team led Guillermo Joiko to give very high priority to the task of training in the work of the fledgling organization.

This absence of restoration skills was more or less universal in Chile and at the same time as CNCR was established, restoration laboratories had to be created in three museums and the National Archives, while the rest of the country totally lacked infrastructure and qualified personnel. It was decided to begin the work by creating awareness of the subject of conservation. Accordingly, Gaeël de Guichen from ICCROM in Rome was requested in 1984 to give a basic four-day course to a group of forty directors from museums throughout the country. The theme was ‘Preventive Conservation’, and it captured the imagination of the
young professionals of CNCR who saw it as the basis for beginning a work that could take in all the country’s museums, using a strategy which would give priority to collections over individual objects.

In 1988, it was decided to take a qualitative leap by offering conservation training to a substantial number of museum staff members. First of all, a group of restorers were to be thoroughly trained in preventive conservation, committing themselves to continue to transmit their skills to museum personnel. CNCR organized a three-year training programme in a joint project with ICCROM and with assistance from the Andes Foundation, a Chilean body which provides resources for projects promoting heritage conservation. During the first year, Gaël de Guichen and Benoît de Tapol gave a month-long course to a group of ten instructors. Most of them came from CNCR, but there were also professionals and technicians working in museums. They learnt about the causes and reasons for the deterioration of objects, concepts of humidity and temperature, and the characteristics of light and its effects on objects. Another theme focused on providing them with teaching methods and techniques to enable them to pass on the skills thus acquired. An important additional benefit from the course was the creation of links between professionals from different museums and cities, resulting in a network of peer groups of professionals.

The second year of the programme was aimed at putting the skills acquired into practice and preparing materials with examples and situations characteristic of Chilean reality. The participants carried out studies on climate and light in their individual institutions which were then submitted to the museum directors, and the solutions to the problems presented are now being envisaged. CNCR carried out photographic documentation work on the state of the collections and the positive or negative conditions in which they were stored or exhibited. The objective was to have graphic and instructional materials available which could be shown to the authorities and future course participants to demonstrate the state of collections and the causes of their deterioration. Major emphasis is given in the teaching process to information on the specific conditions in Chile’s museums, because of the greater impact which such information is thought to have.

The third year of the programme consisted of pairs of instructors giving five two-week courses nationwide in museums situated in areas of the country with very different climatic conditions. This choice was made – rather than inviting all the participants to CNCR – because although it was thought that it would require a greater organizational effort and level of resources, it was important both for strengthening CNCR’s relations with the regional bodies and for establishing ties between the museums in a given region. Moreover, it was thought more useful that the participants should conduct studies on the collections closest to them. In this way, training was given to ten instructors and fifty other individuals between 1988 and 1992.

**Broadening the scope**

A second phase in museum staff training began in 1994. The evaluation of the first
project led us to the conclusion that the programme had to continue, because to have the desired impact it was not enough to have only one skilled person in each institution who could neither constitute a team nor influence the decisions taken. In order to facilitate organization and reduce expenditure, different sets of courses were organized, some for professionals and technical staff, such as ‘Introduction to Preventive Conservation’ and ‘Handling of Museum Collections in Storage’, and others aimed at ancillary staff, such as ‘Handling and Cleaning of Museum Objects’ and ‘Packaging Techniques for Collections’. Since then, the courses have been organized on a more or less periodical basis, and the system of giving them in various areas of the country has been maintained.

CNCR’s evaluation of these courses, which are in general highly rated by participants, made clear that they have played an extremely significant role in introducing the subject of preventive conservation, a concept which is now well known in the context of museums in Chile, in contrast to the situation fifteen years ago when the first introductory course was given to museum directors. It has also helped to give national publicity to the work of CNCR, creating ties between instructors, participants and institutions.

None the less, when we began the programme we thought that it would not be enough to guarantee the preservation of the collections over time, given that although the participants were experienced in museum work, they came from other disciplines and the conservation of collections was not their only responsibility. Consequently, the courses also came to draw attention to situations which put collections at risk, to explain the first-aid action which could be taken and how to handle objects, as well as pointing out that specialists had to be sought to attend to more serious problems. We also concluded that as long as the museums did not have conservation professionals in their own teams, or at least in their vicinity, it would be difficult to guarantee that the collections would all be checked and monitored on a permanent basis. As a result, other lines of action were established alongside the training programme.

In 1984, a university training programme for conservators and restorers was begun by the Arts School of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile in conjunction with CNCR, and continued until 1992 when it became the sole responsibility of the university. The programme provides general training in conservation and restoration to pupils who have completed an initial level of arts education. The concept of preventive conservation was included from the beginning, with two lecturer posts being specifically devoted to it. It is aimed at ensuring that future restorers will have a wide vision of collections and knowledge of the processes of deterioration and the environmental conditions that objects require for their conservation. These professionals have gradually integrated into the museums and been able to promote wide-ranging projects for the improvement of collections.

CNCR also organizes specialized courses for young professionals, many of whom come from the university programme which provides only very general training and not the specialization which would enable them to work on objects. These courses, which often benefit from the participation of foreign teachers, put systematic emphasis on preventive conservation and are aimed at professionals with working experience in collections.

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Some have been organized at the regional level.

At the request of a number of institutions, and in many cases as part of an overall project, training was also provided in the fields of bibliographic and archaeological heritage, and was tailored to provide solutions for specific problems. Courses in preventive conservation were organized, in addition to internships that enabled specialists to work for a period of time with CNCR. Special emphasis was placed on the protection of archaeological sites and recently excavated material by introducing a methodology to organize and protect the objects both at the time of the excavation itself and during their transport and subsequent storage in museums.

To assist people who have participated in courses and who, in most cases, do relatively solitary work, CNCR has set up a library to disseminate information by post upon request. This programme, which began in 1996, has received few requests to date but they are on the increase and we hope that it will be a useful way of maintaining contact with both people and institutions. We are also working on the production of reference material, both by translating documentation from other languages and by formulating recommendations which take into account our specific situation.

Outside the field of training, CNCR has established a general policy ensuring that each time an institution requests restoration work on a specific object, or assistance for mounting a temporary exhibition, an offer is made to evaluate the conditions in which objects are exhibited or stored. Most of this work, which begins in the context of restoration, ends up as a larger-scale project aimed, first of all, at ensuring the overall conservation of the collections, with priority being given to organizing storage facilities, advising on the installation of laboratories, co-ordinating the work of teams responsible for documentation and installations, as well as the improvement of exhibition rooms.

In other cases, CNCR makes direct proposals to certain bodies, notably the Board of Libraries, Archives and Museums, to set up joint programmes for the improvement of display and storage conditions. In such cases, the work is carried out in concert with the teams responsible for research, documentation and the organization of exhibitions. Although project co-ordination leaves room for improvement, we have carried out a number of reasonably successful programmes, especially in small museums with insufficient staff.

Although we still have a long way to go, especially regarding display conditions in our museums, we believe that the strategy of integrating preventive conservation into each activity of CNCR has begun gradually to bear fruit. Many of the collections in the country are still maintained in sub-standard conditions, but success stories now exist which we hope will be emulated by new museums. For us, the most significant fact is the training of a group of professionals with the experience required for tackling large-scale work.
The Delta Plan: a nationwide rescue operation

M. Kirby Talley Jr

A byword in the international museum community, the Delta Plan for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage has made the Netherlands a leader in the field of preventive conservation. Moreover, it has demonstrated how enlightened political vision and commitment can buttress the efforts of heritage professionals to benefit the community at large. M. Kirby Talley Jr is an art historian, author, educator and Executive Counsellor for International Cultural Heritage Policy at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands. He was the Founding Director of the State Training School for Restorers in the Netherlands; Director of the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio; and Curator of Old Master Paintings for the Netherlands State Collections. In 1989, he drew up the Delta Plan for the Preservation of the Netherlands Cultural Heritage for the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. A contributing editor to Art News, Dr Talley publishes and lectures extensively. His latest book, as co-author and co-editor, is Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage, published by the Getty Conservation Institute in 1996. He is currently serving as Acting Director of the St Petersburg International Centre for Preservation, an initiative of the Getty Conservation Institute, the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Municipal Government of St Petersburg. In 1996 the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands joined the founding partners in support of this project.

Only during the past thirty years or so has conservation slowly but surely been taken more seriously by the policy-making museum professionals – trustees, directors and curators. Before then, it was frequently regarded as a troublesome necessity and a financial burden. Money spent to hire conservators, equip conservation studios, install proper air-conditioning systems, refurbish or build depositories that meet stringent standards for responsible storage was too often seen as money withdrawn from exhibitions, acquisitions, scholarly research, travel for study purposes and education departments. All of these ‘curatorial’ activities are vital to any museum that wishes to maintain its position as a viable cultural institution. However, it cannot be denied that in the past preference clearly lay with such activities at the cost of conservation. However, in recent years it has become increasingly apparent that priorities are changing and that museums are now expending far more thought, energy, and money on their fundamental raison d’être – the optimum maintenance of their collections.

While the conservation profession has played an invaluable role in this much-needed change in attitude, a large element of fortuity cannot be denied. Thanks to the rapid dissemination of news, environmental issues have become public issues worldwide. Conservation in its broadest context is ‘hot’ news these days and has even, in a sense, become fashionable. The growing awareness that our natural resources and clean environment are diminishing at an alarming rate, and that effective measures must be implemented today rather than tomorrow, has had a positive spillover effect on our recognition of the fact that the same holds true for the preservation of our cultural and historical heritage.

In 1989 the then Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Cultural Affairs of the Netherlands decided that a plan should be developed to address the problem of conservation work-in-arrears in museums. During the election that brought a new government to power in 1990, conservation, in its broadest context, was one of the major issues. Election manifestos even mentioned the words ‘cultural heritage’, and when the new government assumed power extra funds for the conservation of our cultural and historical heritage were made available. These funds, however, did not just drop out of the national treasury like manna from heaven. It took an immense effort on the part of ministry officials and museum and conservation professionals to present a convincing case.

While people were aware that there were immense problems with conservation work-in-arrears, with climate and lighting control in buildings, with adequate and responsible storage facilities, no one knew exactly how great the overall dilemma was. The Netherlands has more than 700 museums. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (‘Cultural Affairs’ was moved to this ministry in 1994) is directly responsible for seventeen of these, and provides a full subsidy for four more. It is also responsible for cultural policy in general, and its museum policy extends to all museums and museum services – at national, regional, and local levels – which collect, house, study and display items reflecting the cultural and historical heritage of the Netherlands. The task of determining the actual extent of conservation work-in-arrears was rather daunting. How was it done?

The tip of the iceberg was first sighted by the Court of Audit’s report drawn up in 1987 on the state museums. Estimates made...
by the museums themselves were presented in preparation for their forthcoming autonomy from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. In keeping with its declaration of policy on taking office, the new government announced that it would make additional funds available for cultural affairs. In view of the backlogs, priority was accorded to the cultural heritage sector.

Funds were made available to the Cultural Heritage Policy Department of the then Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Cultural Affairs to undertake an even more thorough survey. The resulting plan was christened the ‘Delta Plan for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage’, appropriately named after the Zeeland Delta Works which protect the Netherlands from her friend and enemy, the sea. Parliament made it a condition that the state museums would only be granted autonomy if and when sufficient guarantees could be furnished that the management and conservation of their collections were on a sound footing. Thus, the implementation of the Delta Plan was a precondition for the success of the autonomy process.

A three-stage plan

After having secured funds to undertake this plan, the then Minister of Cultural Affairs, Ms Hedy d’Ancona, assured Parliament that her ministry would identify where backlogs had occurred and establish selection criteria and policy intentions with regard to the management of collections. The plan was divided into three stages: locating/identifying the backlogs; developing specific plans for tackling them; and the salvage operation itself.

The assumption underlying the Delta Plan is that primary responsibility for the proper management of collections rests with those who manage them. While the central government has a particular responsibility for the collections held by state museums, other museums obviously make a major contribution to the preservation of the national heritage and consequently also benefited from the Delta Plan.

When the go-ahead to proceed with the plan was given there were only six months available to prepare inventories of work-in-arrears in both state and other museums. Haste was of the essence. While our goal was certainly noble and enjoyed a high priority, it was not the only one in the country up for funding by Parliament. Priorities with politicians have a way of changing rapidly; therefore, we needed good results – and quickly. Initial preparations and final report-writing required three months. This left just a meagre three months for the actual inventory itself. Impossible, one might be inclined to say. Everyone, however, was well aware of the importance of this undertaking and the unique chance that was being offered by Parliament. While people grumbled, they nevertheless worked with vigour and commitment to complete the task on time.

Backlogs in registration and documentation were looked at first in the state museum collections. Following that, inventories of the shortcomings in building stock – storerooms and exhibition space, air-conditioning, heating, lighting and the like – were made. Finally, inventories were done of conservation and restoration work-in-arrears in state and non-state museums. Whenever possible, outside
firms were hired to assist, but estimating the amount of work involved in clearing up conservation and restoration backlogs had to be carried out by museum staff on top of their normal workloads.

On 12 December 1990 the minister presented Parliament with the results of the inventories. The problem was far greater than anticipated. The shortfall for the twenty-one state museums alone was as follows: registration: £9 million; building stock and climate control: £30 million; conservation and restoration: £125 million. This added up to £164 million, and a similar shortfall existed for the other museums.

In order to establish the extent of work-in-arrears, a standard form of registration was needed. Such a standard form did not exist and the ministry therefore laid down guidelines for a basic registration. These were kept to an absolute minimum: what the object is, where it came from and where it now is. An outside firm was requested to fix averages for the time and money needed to catalogue different kinds of objects. In this manner the registration of work-in-arrears was able to be quantified quickly and unambiguously.

Quantifying conservation and restoration backlogs is a horse of another colour. It was not only important to know where the backlogs were, but also which items were threatened. Were our prized collections in danger? Or were objects in storerooms in the greatest jeopardy? Were the backlogs more extensive in the area of paintings, textiles, etc.? In order to draw up a truly effective plan of implementation clear answers to these questions were needed.

Collections were first divided into homogeneous parts, or sub-collections, such as textiles, prints, glass, etc. Such ordering is easy, but problems begin to arise when you start considering the relative importance of objects and/or collections. A system of cultural/historical standards that clearly expresses the quality of a collection was drawn up by museum professionals. This system is sufficiently abstract (while at the same time unambiguous), for it to be able to be applied, with some adjustment, to all museum collections.

The following four categories were defined:

**Category A** includes objects that enjoy the highest status due to their uniqueness. They are holotypes or prototypes. They can also serve as singular examples in the development of an artist, a school, movement or style.

**Category B** covers objects that are important because of their presentation value (or attractiveness). Their provenance can also contribute to their inclusion in Category B. Objects in ensembles also belong in this category.
class, along with objects with an important documentary value. They are often, but not permanently, on display.

Category C objects, while not possessing qualities sufficient to promote them to the A or B status, are still important to the collection since they round it out or add significance to its overall context. They are, however, kept in long-term storage rather than placed on display.

Category D is reserved for the left-overs, which never should have entered the collection in the first place. Objects that in no way complement or fit into the collection, along with those so severely damaged that restoration is useless, are given this lowest classification.

Without such qualitative categories no priorities within collections could have been established for tackling backlogs.

Once the nature and importance of a collection were determined, the conservation and restoration work-in-arrears could be assessed. In just three months a very detailed picture emerged as to the size of the backlogs. Summaries were also made by museum, type of collection and by cultural/historical importance.

Difficult choices, clear priorities

Since unlimited funding could not be expected from Parliament between 1992 and 2001 to solve the problems made apparent by the inventories, the minister also presented Parliament with criteria outlining the choices which had to be made and the priorities which had to be established.

First of all, priority was given to eliminating backlogs in registration of collections for the simple reason that without accurate registration of all objects no realistic management and conservation plans can be drawn up. Secondly, priority was given to preventive conservation — that is, improvements to buildings where objects are displayed and/or stored, and improvements to their immediate environment.

Active conservation was limited to the most important categories of objects since funds were simply not sufficient to do everything. However, objects of less cultural/historical value, or objects in store, will be protected by preventive conservation measures. Actual restoration was excluded from the goals of the Delta Plan which was, and still is, first and foremost a rescue operation. Museums are, of course, free to use their own budgets for restoration.

Once Stage 1 of the Delta Plan was completed, museums were requested to submit plans indicating how they intended to tackle their backlogs and how long such work would take. The state museums have all completed this second stage. Other museums have been given the opportunity of profiting from the Delta Plan by submitting grant applications for conservation projects.

Additional staff was, and will be, employed to assist in eliminating backlogs in both registration and conservation. The number of students enrolled at the State Training School for Restorers in Amsterdam has been increased and the curricula expanded...
to meet changing needs. Plans have also been realized to establish a combined training and employment scheme for repository and conservation staff and cataloguers. Thanks to the Delta Plan, existing museum staff have developed a far more professional approach with regard to collection management and conservation. Norms, guidelines, and standards of quality with regard to collections have been developed, and they will be reviewed and adjusted from time to time.

Within a very brief period a climate was created that recognizes the importance of the preservation of our cultural and historical heritage. The enthusiasm of museum personnel for conservation, as a result of the Delta Plan, is clearly noticeable and has greatly contributed to the success of the operation to date. This climate has to be as carefully maintained as the humidity levels in museums, but the advantages of doing so are such that it is unthinkable that anyone involved in the Netherlands museum world will ever again underestimate the importance of conservation.

While the Netherlands is privileged in being one of the world’s wealthiest countries, no one should underestimate the work that went on behind the scenes to convince the politicians of the importance of investing public money in the preservation of the country’s cultural heritage. Former Minister Hedy d’Ancona deserves great praise for securing Parliament’s support of the Delta Plan, and the politicians are the real heroes behind the Delta Plan and its success. Heritage professionals the world over must learn how to lobby effectively politicians who, in general, are none too concerned with heritage preservation issues. Every cent helps, but even when money is scarce, or unavailable, effective preventive conservation measures can be implemented by inventive conservation professionals. The point is that nothing is to be gained by saying that nothing can be done unless there is money. Some of the best preventive conservation measures I have ever seen have been in ‘poorer’ countries. What I saw was due to the inventive minds of professionals who are thoroughly devoted to the long-term well-being of the collections under their charge and who refuse to be daunted either by a lack of funds, or the indifference of the decision-makers, whether in their own institutions, or in more significant positions of power.

Author’s note. This article owes much to my account of the Delta Plan that appeared as: ‘Viewpoints: A Nation Mobilizes for Conservation’, ICCROM Newsletter, 19 June 1993, pp. 6–8.
Preventive conservation on a day-to-day basis: the Antoine Vivenel Museum in Compiègne

Eric Blanchegorge

The Antoine Vivenel Museum in Compiègne, north of Paris, is a traditional municipal museum of the fine arts and archaeology whose abundant collections represent every age and style and are, hence, of all physical descriptions. It owes its existence to the generosity of a local patron, Antoine Vivenel. An entrepreneur and architect, Vivenel made his fortune in Paris during the reign of Louis Philippe (1830–48), and used it to set up the Compiègne museum, a task which he undertook between 1839 and 1848. His intention was to make it a model institution, the Musée des Études (Museum of Studies), bringing together ancient and modern art works, natural history collections, a gallery of plaster casts from the antique originals, classrooms for instruction in drawing and music — in short, an institution with an educational purpose. Today, the museum still bears witness to his passion for Greek ceramics, Renaissance art and architectural drawing. To these have been added, over the years, a number of works of art and mementos of a more local nature, as well as the very substantial and important finds of the archaeological excavations that have been conducted in Compiègne since the Second Empire. In 1952, the museum was housed in the Hôtel de Songeons, a noble residence dating from the very end of the eighteenth century, characteristic of the style of architecture once favoured by Compiègne’s aristocracy and bequeathed to the city by its last owner, the Comte de Songeons. This background, by no means exceptional for such an institution, implies a legacy of a highly chequered kind.

The museum covers a total built-up area of nearly 1,800 m², occupied by three separate buildings: a four-storey main residential building covering 1,200 m², with two side wings each of 300 m², on three levels. One-quarter of this building is today insalubrious, and remains partially unused. Exhibitions of works, both permanent and temporary, occupy approximately 600 m². An additional 760 m² are assigned to the reserves, including 250 m² of attic space, to which no alterations have ever been made. Administration and reception areas occupy 115 m² and 130 m² respectively. The conversion of this building and its fitting out as a museum took place in 1952; part of the facilities, still in use, date from this period. A final refitting was undertaken in 1977/78, and in all essential respects the museum presents the appearance it acquired at that date. Only part of the alarm system is more recent. These areas suffer from three defects: the increasingly outdated nature of the facilities, their dispersal and their non-specialized nature. Reserve collections have proliferated in various parts of the building, making continual comings-and-goings necessary; cupboards used for their storage are located under the display cabinets in the exhibition rooms; the textile reserve is also used to store items from the library’s reserve collection of rare and valuable books, as well as old postcards; there are no technical premises, and many handling operations are carried out either in the offices or in the exhibition rooms, sometimes in the presence of the public. Where works are placed is frequently determined by their size and weight. Such situations are all too common in many museums throughout the world.

The collections contain approximately 30,000 to 35,000 items, roughly 2,100 of which, that is, 6 to 7 per cent, are on display. They are made up of numerous sub-sets: regional archaeology, Mediterranean archaeology, paintings, graphic arts, photographs, sculptures (including the plaster-cast gallery) objets d’art, textiles, coins, regional ethnography,
non-European arts, archives, etc. They are accompanied by a wealth of documentation. This is today distributed among an art history and archaeology library (which contains approximately 3,000 works, including 1,500 periodicals, occupying 46 linear metres, and which adds some hundred new titles to its holdings each year), a substantial body of archives, originating from the museum and the former owners of the Hôtel de Songeons, a series of more than 1,000 dossiers on works which have been compiled since 1993, a photograph library, and a vital, expanding collection of administrative documentation.

The staff is composed of ‘territorial’ or local area officials and temporary workers. It comprises a curator, a secretary, two officers from France’s National Heritage Department in charge of reception and surveillance services, a maintenance operative, four part-time temporary lecturers and a teacher seconded for two hours a week by the Ministry of Education. Since October 1977, municipal museums have in fact had at their disposal a major educational service, the so-called Bureau d’Animation, which caters for some 22,000 children a year. To this must be added the services, as and when required, of trainees and volunteers.

In 1997, the City of Compiègne spent more than 2 million francs on its museums, three-quarters of which went on staff costs. There is, naturally, a specific budget for such costs, directly administered by the curator. In 1995, this amounted to 880,000 francs. In 1996, it was scaled down to 580,000 francs, representing a reduction of 300,000 francs affecting the item for technical capital outlay and restoration work. In 1997, it was increased to 723,000 francs, an amount renewed, approximately, in 1998. Of these sums, more than half is earmarked for expenditure that cannot be curtailed: temporary contracts and operational expenditure proper. In addition, there is an Association of Friends of the Museum, some 150 members strong, which provides it with a modest budget supplement and runs the museum shops.

The museum thus remains a small and somewhat isolated entity within the municipal services, one whose resources are relatively limited in relation to those of other comparable structures. It receives some 15,000 visitors a year, two-thirds of these in the form of school groups. It has not been spared by the general budget cuts that are severely affecting many French towns and cities, and its investment budget has declined since 1994. However, it continues to survive,
undergoing a slow but stubborn process of metamorphosis, with its curator enjoying considerable freedom of choice in how the establishment’s cultural programme is implemented.

What solutions? What action?

At the time of the appointment of a new curator, in May 1993, the museum’s position was found to be critical: disorder, including material disorder, reigned supreme — so much so that it proved impossible to make good use of the collections or even to ensure their mere physical survival. Nothing had been done, despite, or rather because of, expectations and ideas that were all too wild and fanciful. The ensuing discouragement was bound to lead, in the absence of any compromise, to resignation. There could be only one solution: the complete reorganization of the museum in the context not of an overall renovation with costly operations but of a programme of work conducted on a day-to-day basis by all categories of staff, using the annual budget. The aim therefore had to be, first and foremost, to take stock of the collections and the building in order to carry out a policy of preventive conservation based on the existing situation — a policy that respected the history of the site and the works themselves.

The first stage has consisted in counting the works, ordering and classifying them: in other words, going through and updating the inventory. However, although it is now equipped, like many French-language museums, with the ‘Micro-musée’ software program, the museum will be able to produce a comprehensive inventory of its collections only in some eight years’ time; both time and qualified personnel are lacking to undertake so colossal a task. Today, nearly 11,500 works have been recorded. This general reorganization enables a more rational approach to be taken to the collections, and hence a timetable of operations to be drawn up. In addition, the digitization of the images of part of the works thus processed ensures that they are not subject to too frequent handling. The inventory is, in short, in various respects, a means of preserving not only a record but also the physical integrity of the collections, and as such is part and parcel of the policy of preventive conservation.
The museum team and its curator cannot do everything themselves. Accordingly, the services of outside professionals have been enlisted, including conservation and restoration specialists (most notably Compiègne's own Institut de Recherche et de Restauration Archéologique et Paléométallurgique (IRRAP)). Under an annually renewed contract, this institute undertakes a climatological study of the building and puts forward, in the light of its findings, solutions that, if not ideal, can at least be most speedily and readily implemented. It has thus been possible to identify three climate zones in the building's main wing, corresponding to the cellars (reserves of stone works), the first and second levels (permanent exhibition and offices) and the attic, itself partially converted into reserves for paintings and art objects. These results have led to improvements in the situation of the works located in each of these zones, either as a result of technical refittings, such as window-seals and curtains, the installation of appropriate dehumidifying equipment, or quite simply by the relocation of those works whose environment could not be improved. In fact, the slightest problem directly or remotely affecting any work in the collections obliges the curator to call in IRRAP, which acts as a partner and not as a mere service provider, and whose advice then allows the most satisfactory technical solution to be applied (relocation, packing up, securing to a pedestal or stand, cleaning, etc.), so enabling the work to be preserved. Concurrently with the climatological study, an overall survey of the state of the main reserve, located in the attic, and of the works stored there, was undertaken in February 1995 by a group of postgraduate students from the Preventive Conservation Department of the University of Paris-I, in order to identify here, likewise, any short- or medium-term possibilities of improvement.

More specifically, certain types of collection called for more urgent attention; a diagnosis of their state of conservation needed to be made. An identical approach was taken, and the assistance of the University of Paris-I was sought. On the basis of proposals put forward by the students enrolled in the MST graphic arts restoration course (Science and Technology M.A.), who were brought to the museum by their instructor on the occasion of a practical exercise in the overall rehabilitation of a collection, a proper exhibition room for drawings was fitted out by the technical departments of the City of Compiègne in one of the offices of the Conservation Department: the proposals covered the choice of room, drawing up the necessary plans for its refitting, deciding on the furnishings in accordance with the type of storage space to be provided for the drawings and prints, determining the size to match the scale of the collection and removal of dust and grime from a proportion of the works. As a result, the collection can be gradually restored in accordance with the beauty of the works, their historical importance, their condition, or more immediate requirements. Those items that have been restored are stored in ‘final’ archive boxes, and the others in strong, acid-free paper folders, ‘temporary’ boxes, the drawers of map cabinets or cupboards.

It seems preferable to deal with the collections in this way, by homogeneous groups: graphic art, first and foremost drawings; then textiles. All the Coptic and modern fabrics have been cleaned and stored in a piece of furniture made to measure in accordance with the restorers' specifications. The paintings have been dealt with in the same way: individual plastic jackets in moulded polypropylene have been made for all the small and medium formats, numbering some 200
works. In accordance with the specifications provided by IRRAP, the preparation and cutting up of a total of 240 m² into sheets measuring 240 × 160 cm were undertaken by the museum team. Since the budget, and lack of space, have not allowed wire-mesh-covered sliding panels to be installed, such 'packaging' serves to prevent the frames from rubbing against the wooden surfaces of the compartments used for storing the paintings, and the canvases from being in contact with one another. This intermediary solution, both inexpensive and easy to apply, goes some way towards offsetting the lack of more high-performance equipment. After all, the purpose of preventive conservation is also, surely, to adapt first and foremost to the realities of the present.

Since 1997, the plaster-cast collection has been the subject of a comprehensive study by the MST trainee sculpture restorers, under the supervision of their instructors. Some 370 statues, busts and bas-reliefs are currently being examined; after a status report, they are cleaned and protected under plastic film. Their transfer from the damp, unconverted cellars of our neighbour, the Palace of Compiègne, and their storage in the reserves of the Hôtel de Songeons, are also stages in the operation. In 1998, the furniture required for such storage will be made, saving this collection once and for all from a slow process of destruction. In such cases, preventive conservation, which of course cannot remain an isolated practice, is allied to a certain limited form of restoration of the works themselves.

What resources?

These choices, dictated by pragmatic, not to say ad hoc, considerations, naturally have budgetary consequences. Approximately 370,000 francs was earmarked in 1995 for conservation and restoration, nearly one-third of the sum being devoted to conservation. In 1996, this budget was reduced to 88,000 francs. It was increased again in 1997 to 227,000 francs. In view of the total resources available to the museum, it is clear how far the priority given to such issues means that it is necessary to rule out, for the time being, many other activities: no prestige exhibitions, no publications, no large-scale public-relations exercises. Despite the fluctuation of the budget from one year to the next, it has been possible to maintain the same policy and to perpetuate the choices that it entails.

In order to implement this policy of preventive conservation, it is not enough simply to have at one's disposal a certain quantity of funds; what is needed above all is the skill and know-how of qualified men and women of goodwill. The museum staff has adapted readily. In many cases staff members have helped,
through their day-to-day work in the institution, to get it back into working order and to add to the improvements envisaged. Two of the municipal museums’ heritage officers have taken special training courses. Thus knowledge is not channelled through a single individual and the staff have not remained on the sidelines, but have taken a keen interest and become directly involved in most of the activities mentioned. Preventive conservation is also an ideal way of upgrading the daily work of staff, who all too often are restricted to carrying out tasks involving no genuine exercise of responsibility. The existence of IRRAP ensures that the curator can call at any time upon an independent agency whose advice, constantly sought, prevents errors of judgement from being made: two heads being generally better than one. This takes the isolation out of decision-making, an all too common state of affairs in our provincial institutions. Moreover, such attention to matters of preventive conservation triggers a favourable response among restorers, thereby facilitating the establishment of the collaborative schemes described above.

All this does not prevent the occasional hitch or setback, or the need to adapt the policy thus initiated to meet unforeseen contingencies. For example, the conversion of one of the cellars to serve as a reserve for wooden items proved a failure. Recording climatic variations does not make them any the less detrimental to certain works, the monitoring of whose condition cannot be relaxed. Much remains to be done, and preventive conservation calls for constant effort.

In the Antoine Vivenel Museum, emphasis is focused, or contingent, upon conservation and restoration. To be sure, this is to be explained by the situation of the works, and the dangers to which they were, until quite recently, exposed; the fact remains that such an emphasis also depends on the choices made by the curator in charge of the collections and on the possibilities of interdisciplinary collaboration that may be open to him or her. Compiegne benefits in fact from its proximity to Paris, from the presence of IRRAP, and from real flexibility in matters of management. Rather than a mere series of operations, it is thus able to work out a genuine programme – one that, taking account of the complexity of the works and their material conservation, contributes to the establishment’s overall policy.

In the light of the experience of the past five years, closer collaboration between curators and restorers may be regarded as an effective means of coping rapidly with difficult situations and practical day-to-day problems that cannot be solved in isolation. Preventive conservation draws on the complementary nature of their training and qualification, in pursuit of a common objective, namely, the safeguarding of collections.

Acknowledgements: May I be allowed to mention here – alas, all too briefly – all those who have been good enough to contribute to the rehabilitation of the Antoine Vivenel Museum: the entire IRRAP team, in particular Florence Bertin and Frédéric Masse, Claude Laroque, Florence Herrenschmidt and Isabelle Lambert, Patricia del Pra and Marie-Flore Levoir, all the 1994/95 class of students of the DESS Diploma in Preventive Conservation, directed in Compiegne by Margeret Mac-Cord and Denis Guillemand, and the students enrolled for the University of Paris-I MST degree course, supervised in Compiegne by Claude Laroque and subsequently by Anne Courcelle and Véronique Legoux.
Who cares? Conservation in a contemporary context

Carole Milner

Conservation ‘is not an end in itself but a means to an end’, emphasizes Carole Milner. Properly understood, this means that care of collections and access to them cannot be seen as separate and competing objectives but must be viewed as the twin pillars that underpin all museum functions. The author has been Head of Conservation and Collection Care at the Museums & Galleries Commission, London, since 1994. In her present role she deals largely with issues of conservation policy, advocacy and management for the United Kingdom’s 2,500 museums. Previous to this she worked extensively abroad as a conservator and as a teacher and trainer of adults. She has been United Kingdom delegate to ICCROM since 1995.

The United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) has a population of almost 60 million. Spread across the country are its 2,500 museums and galleries. These range from the nineteen large nationals, such as London’s National Gallery and Victoria and Albert Museum (with its budget of £29 million and a staff of 800), to city museums like Glasgow and Bristol, and to small community museums with possibly no permanent staff and budgets of just a few hundred pounds. Collections contain everything from fine art to beetles and battleships. Objects can be as small as historic cave fauna which can only be identified through microscopes or as large as the largest object of all – the building itself which houses the collection.

The first national museum in the world, the British Museum, was founded in 1753 but there were no public art galleries in England until the nineteenth century. The Museums Act of 1845 enabled town councils to establish public museums of art and science and a further Act of 1850 stipulated that such museums should be free. These museums and galleries provided a sense of identity and became emblems of great civic pride. They were intended to delight and improve the visitor’s mind and those with the desire for self-improvement flocked to them, sometimes travelling long distances to do so.

Today they perform a multiplicity of roles. Some are temples of art and culture. Others preserve all that remains of our industrial heritage – textile mills, coal and tin mines – and what was once the day-to-day life and cultural identity of a whole region, town or street. Others are more like heritage centres with their ‘living experiences’, automat and interactives. What they all have in common are their primary aims: to care for and make accessible their collections for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of the public. That is the context in which conservation operates today in the United Kingdom.

Conservation and access – balanced priorities

This context implies, by definition, a balancing act. On the one hand, all objects are subject to decay and deterioration, depending on their constituent nature, the environment they are kept in, the treatment they receive and the use that is made of them. Materially, they need to be looked after and given proper treatment. They belong to the nation and we have a collective ‘duty of care’ to ensure they are preserved for posterity.

On the other hand, our museums and galleries are part of the growing leisure industry. In the United Kingdom, especially since the advent of weekend opening in 1995, they are in competition with leisure centres, theme parks, shopping malls and sports complexes. They have to compete for their markets and that competition is increasingly fierce. The buzz words at all levels for museums in the United Kingdom are: access, information technology, entertainment, education, enjoyment. In the current climate of restrictions, it is easy to forget that some degree of balance has to be kept between the resources being ploughed into front-of-house activities to attract the public into museums and those required for the behind-the-scenes care which sustains the collections for their longer-term use.

Conservation should not be perceived as a competing priority but one which underpins so many other museum activities. It is
not an end in itself but a means to an end. That end is ensuring that we can continue to use and enjoy our heritage not only today but for generations to come. Our museums attract around 75 million visits a year and 60 per cent of overseas tourists visit the United Kingdom precisely because of the lure of its museums and galleries. Cultural tourism is of growing economic importance but our heritage is a non-renewable resource and is under increasing threat. A simple ‘good housekeeping’ adage says it all: ‘If you want to keep it, look after it!’ Access and care go hand-in-hand as balanced priorities at every level: in museums, historic buildings and heritage sites, nationally and internationally. That is the route to managed sustainability.

Rights and responsibilities

So who is responsible for making sure this happens? Whose job is it to care about our collections and to care for them? At one end of the spectrum we have the bench conservator working on his or her object in the conservation laboratory, state or private. Further up the chain we have the person at the other end who pushes the button which sets this process off and enables it to happen.

The planning process is where it all starts. Overall needs, of which conservation is only one, have to be assessed in the light of the museum’s mission statement, its aims and objectives and forward plan. Priorities must be established, decisions made and funding allocated accordingly. Only then can the rest of the work begin. The duty of caring for collections is a collective one but the statutory responsibility lies ultimately with those who are owners or trustees who may or may not be the active decision-makers. The next layer of responsibility lies with the planners and those who take the decisions – directors, managers and administrators, curators, keepers and collections managers. Once the decisions are made and the funding allocated, the responsibility for actual care and treatment passes down the line to those with the specific expertise: conservation professionals, specialists in the care of collections, conservation teachers and scientists. They do some of the work and are likely to supervise the work of others to whom tasks are allotted under supervision, such as conservation technicians, students and volunteers. When the objects are back on display or in use there are those whose day-to-day vigilance can ensure that potential threats are identified and alarm bells set ringing – the guardians and warders, volunteers, cleaners, security guards and even museum visitors themselves. Key actors on a par with the rest are all who are involved with the construction, renovation and maintenance of the buildings in which the collections are housed –

British conservation and restoration is recognized around the world for its excellence. A tradition in caring for heritage material, backed up by high-quality training, research and supplies, has created some of the leading practitioners in the field.
engineers, architects, buildings maintenance teams and so on.

Finally, outside the museum building with its administrative, professional and technical personnel, are the national, regional and local policy-makers. Their decisions to cut grants, reduce budgets, promote the heritage, close or open more museums, establish regional or national preservation plans such as the Delta Plan (in the Netherlands) will, of course, set the stage for all other decisions, weakening or strengthening them.

When they work in synergy, these responsibilities link together and form an effective chain. However, the chain can break at any point – a leaking roof, an unidentified pest infestation, improperly trained conservators, unsupervised helpers, a lack of long-term vision or leadership, inadequate forward planning. That is when, sooner or later, the objects and collections will fall victim to someone’s dereliction of duty along the way.

Why do such breakdowns occur? It is usually because the right connections are not being made. The fact that integrated conservation is a collective responsibility throws up the need for effective communication at all levels. This means good teamwork within institutions, better networking outside them and a concerted effort to promote greater understanding and appreciation of conservation by the general public and all other stakeholders.

In the United Kingdom we are fortunate in having networks and structures in place which facilitate reasonable two-way communications – bottom up as well as top down! Government departments fund the work of national advisory and standard-setting bodies such as the Museums & Galleries Commission (MGC). This, in turn, supports the activities of a network of ten regional organizations (Area Museum Councils) and their 2,500 member museums and associated organizations. Close links are maintained with training centres and with key representative bodies such as the Museums Association and the Conservation Forum (an umbrella body which represents the eleven main conservation professional bodies). By getting actively involved in their work, constructive relationships have also been forged with international organizations.
such as ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) and the Getty Conservation Institute.

**Issues and implications**

With all this in mind, what are the needs of conservation today and what implications are there for the way we manage our responsibilities and seek to organize the care we give to our museum collections at institutional, national, European and international levels?

In order to care for their collections and to manage that process effectively and efficiently, museums need, first and foremost, to know what they have got and where it is. They need to know what condition their collections are in and what the priorities are for their use, as this will determine the level of care and treatment given. Then, in practical terms, they need:

- support with conservation planning and management – models and tools for assessing needs and measuring progress in raising standards, as well as hard, contextualized information on needs and provision to help argue the case for funding convincingly;
- reliable information and advice on how to care for their collections;
- access to competent, qualified conservation professionals who meet the necessary technical, professional and ethical standards;
- guidance on establishing constructive contractual relationships and consensus over the standards to be met and what constitutes ‘value for money’;
- access to training for all those who are in any way engaged in caring for collections;
- help in raising awareness and promoting the work they do to look after their collections.

Underpinning all this, they need the support at every level for the principle that care and access go hand-in-hand as balanced priorities within museums, and that this is the way to the sustainability of our cultural heritage.

The United Kingdom with its structured network of support and information services has made good progress in many of these areas. However, because of the great number of museums and decreasing levels of revenue funding, there is a

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*Education and enjoyment – conservators from the National Museums & Galleries of Wales in conversation with a group of schoolchildren. This project won the 1997 Jerwood Foundation/MGC Award for Communicating Conservation.*
danger of serious backlogs building up. Statistics show, for instance, that only 3 per cent of museums estimate they have enough storage space for expansion of their collections; only 12 per cent have air conditioning and more than half evaluate their environmental data less than once a year, if ever!

The impact of the contract culture has made itself felt in every sector of the country. Patterns of conservation need and provision have altered and the boundaries between public and private sectors have blurred. There are few ivory towers left, funding is ever tighter and, public or private sector, we all now function in a competitive market. The need for standards and for organizations which set and monitor them has become self-evident. The Museum Registration Scheme run by the MGC sets institutional standards for all areas of museum activity including conservation, and the Digest of Museum Statistics (DOMUS) database provides overview information on progress towards meeting those standards. The MGC’s database of conservation practices, the Conservation Register, provides information to British museums, heritage organizations and the public on 700 independent conservation practices which meet consensus standards. Finally, the conservation profession is taking increasing control of professional standards and, through the Conservation Forum, a more unified approach to the regulation of these standards through systems of accreditation.

To do a little crystal-ball gazing, there are issues in the United Kingdom which will inevitably impact on the way conservation evolves into the millennium. Can we go on opening new museums and collecting when we already can’t look after what we’ve got? Should a new acquisition be made dependent on the availability of resources for the long-term care of the object? Do we need to prioritize both our collections and the objects in them for long-term preservation? Should we reassess our policies on use and accept that certain objects will be used and ultimately lost? In a world of theme parks, Disneyland and back-through-time experiences how important is ‘the real thing’ going to be in fifty years’ time – will the ‘virtual museum’ take over, replacing direct contact with the objects and what implications will that have for conservation?

There is currently in Europe a tangible rise in the level of mutual concern over threats to the preservation of our common cultural heritage. This has been reflected in the momentum for change that has been building up since the beginning of 1997. The main concerns of the conservation professionals and decision-makers appear to be standards in training and education, conditions for research, and the qualifications, competence and responsibilities of those who can, if improperly prepared, pose the most direct threat to the objects and collections – the conservator-restorers themselves.

These issues have all been picked up in a series of meetings which have taken place over the last year. The first was the ‘Centres of Excellence’ workshops which took place in Amsterdam in May 1997. This was followed by the ECCO (European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers’ Organizations) conference, held in Florence. Finally, in October 1997, a European Summit held in Pavia, Italy, produced a number of key recommendations for future action which have now been transmitted to the European Union and other key national and international decision-making bodies.1
Communication, which is always linguistically awkward on these occasions, is not helped by the fact that concepts which form the basis of work being undertaken in one country may not even exist in another or have no simple one-to-one translation. Ultimately, however, the important thing is not that we should all agree on everything but that we should be talking constructively to each other. Despite the difficulties, over the last year European conservation professionals in the movable heritage sector have succeeded in presenting their concerns and possible ways forward in a cohesive manner to the powers that be and this is now bearing fruit: 'United we bargain, divided we beg!'

Finally, setting the context for us all, are the wider international concerns for the long-term preservation of our cultural heritage, both movable and immovable. These appear to centre around issues of sustainability, the impact of cultural tourism and the role of conservation as a key stabilization factor and as a conduit for economic and social development. Efforts are being made in some countries to gather statistical information on conservation needs and provision and to quantify the economic impact of conservation and the cost/benefits of long-term strategies for preservation. Many countries want access to more conservation management and planning tools in order to empower them in the decision-making process whilst others are still overwhelmingly concerned with the need for further technical assistance and training. A number of these issues have been gradually moving up the agenda for ICCROM and, at the General Assembly of ICCROM’s ninety-four member states in December 1997, they were voted into the new biennial programme as core areas for development.

**Accentuate the positive . . .**

Conservation in the United Kingdom, as elsewhere, has evolved: from heritage skills and crafts, to repair and reconstruction, to restoration, conservation, care and maintenance, preservation and rescue. Priorities, perceptions, patterns of employment and funding are all changing rapidly. We have to rise to these new challenges and become ever more effective advocates for conservation at every level: public, professional and political.

Who cares? We all do. But it is only by pulling together, pooling resources and expertise, looking outwards rather than inwards and building on what we have in common that we will be able to ensure a safe future for our collective past.

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**Note**

If the collection is the heart of the museum, it may be said that documentation is its head; both constitute the vital organs of the institution and their constant interaction is essential for its survival. How this basic premise of sound conservation policy has been taught to a generation of African museum professionals is described by Alain Godonou, a specialist from Benin who holds a Higher Specialized Studies Diploma (DESS) in preventive conservation from the University of Paris-I Panthéon-Sorbonne. He worked as researcher at Benin’s Direction des Musées, Monuments et Sites and subsequently as curator of the Palais Royal in Porto-Novo. Since 1996 he has been participating actively in ICCROM’s PREMA Programme (PREvention in the Museums of Africa), in which connection he is responsible for PREMA House in Porto-Novo where various training sessions for African museum professionals are held.

To document its collections, for any museum, is a fundamental duty stemming directly from its conservation function; preventive conservation presupposes knowledge of all the objects in a museum’s collections. In fact, objects without information are almost meaningless: information is the other half of the object, distinguishing it from all other artefacts and justifying its presence in the museum and the interest and the care bestowed on it. Documenting collections simply means organizing this information.

Well-organized museographical documentation facilitates access to collections and makes for good museum management; it makes it possible to know what objects are held and what are not or no longer held by the museum, facilitating exchanges with researchers and enhancing exhibitions. In short, it is a professional tool whose proper use will make possible the museum’s development.

Since its launching in 1990, ICCROM’s PREMA Programme has given pride of place to this aspect of museum work in its training. Given the importance of the subject and the shortcomings noted from the outset in African museums, it was decided to hold, from 1996 onwards, thematic workshops based on a new teaching approach.

The first regional documentation course for Central African museums, organized jointly by the Bantu Regional Cultural Programme of the European Union, the PREMA Programme and the Congolese Ministry of Culture and Arts, was held in Brazzaville, Congo, from 25 March to 10 April 1996. It was attended by 21 museum workers from 15 museums in 8 Central African countries and was a practical response to the express need of museums in the subregion to improve or in some cases create their documentation system.

In fact, at the close of the seminar-workshop for senior officials of museums in Central Africa (Libreville, 17–21 July 1975) a documentation course was seen as the foremost regional priority; twelve national projects out of the twenty-three prepared related to the updating of documentation. A survey conducted beforehand in the ten museums represented had concluded that while all the museums had the main elements of documentation in place (an inventory, card indexes, files), they were not seen as an organized system, i.e. a system whose different parts are interlinked and arranged to serve a purpose. The different components were scattered and fragmentary, belonging to different systems that had been initiated in the past and subsequently abandoned. Successive curators had been confronted with the problem of documentation and sometimes tried to cope with it, each in their own way. Seven of the museums acknowledged that they had not adopted any method of classification for their collections, and the three which said they had done so were unable to describe their system. In the museums surveyed staff did not have a clear understanding of documentation: the terms employed varied from one individual to another, sometimes within the same museum, and often related to quite different concepts.

The simultaneous utilization of different types of card for the same purpose and the difficulty experienced by participants in describing their own documentation system are two indications that this subject needs attention. In any case, observation of current practice in many museums makes it clear that documenting collections is seen above all as filling in cards rather than as preparing an essential
management and study tool. In fact the computer was perceived as the ideal and definitive solution to the problem. A whole new generation of museum staff now establishing itself is taking over defective, inappropriate and/or incomplete documentation systems without either the ‘keys’ for their use or the tools to analyse, develop or transform them.

This situation is obviously not specific to Central Africa. It is more or less the same in other subregions of the continent and elsewhere, sometimes even worse. As a result of the enormous possibilities offered by computerization, more and more museums throughout the world have in recent years begun to modernize their documentation systems.

**The PREMA ‘mini-museum’**

In a bid to make the documentation course more dynamic, a method based on simulation exercises was devised. Two-thirds of the 90-hour course are given over to practical work, using a miniature museum with all the features of a properly managed institution. The ‘mini-museum’ was designed especially for the purposes of this training, as an aid to teaching the management of collections and, more particularly, museographical documentation. Its collections, which to date total approximately 100 pieces, are made up of souvenirs brought from different African countries by members of the PREMA team and gifts of craftwork from former participants.

The complete documentation system set up for this small collection includes: an inventory; a digital file or master file; three index files (category, material of which the object is made, geographical origin); a record of movements, and a simple computerized data file in DB3. It is accompanied by a thesaurus of categories, types and names of objects. The mini-museum’s exhibits are identified by an inventory number in Indian ink, using the tripartite numbering system.

A mini-storeroom was designed to hold the collection, made up of nine wooden storage units and a unit with plastic drawers in which the objects are arranged. Each unit and each shelf is numbered so as to have a precise location code for each
object. Apart from all the other aspects of the preparation of the course, this equipment took one and a half months of meticulous work to assemble and organize.

The whole mini-museum (collections and documentation) is taken to all the training locations. It makes possible a lively, 'hands on' approach which gives the course the attraction of a game, motivating participants and facilitating a practical use and understanding of the different constituent parts of a documentation system. Full understanding and mastery of museographical documentation are contingent, according to the experiment developed by PREMA, upon the understanding of and the ability to use each of the elements that have just been enumerated, taken individually and in their interaction.

The mini-museum is accompanied by ten technical files labelled as follows: What does a documentation system consist of?; The inventory; Card indexes and files; Checking the inventory; Small guide on the marking of objects by hand; Various recommendations for the description of objects; Notes on taking measurements; The head of documentation: post description; The head of acquisitions: post description; Memorandum on preparing and carrying out collection operations. Each of these technical files summarizes and provides practical information; given their success, there are plans to have them published and distributed.

Training starts with practical work on the mini-museum, in groups, plunging participants into the subject straight away. The exercises proposed include the following:

- You wish to mount an exhibition on Ghana. Make a list of the objects that you have by: (a) looking at the collections; (b) consulting the inventory; (c) consulting the card indexes. Note down each time how long you took.
- A researcher who is working on the attributes of power in traditional Africa comes to consult you. Make a list of the objects that you wish to show him/her
by: (a) looking at the collections; (b) consulting the inventory; (c) consulting the card indexes. Note down each time how long you took.

- You see there is an infestation of insects in the mini-museum’s storeroom. Make a list of the objects that you must keep a particularly close eye on in this situation by: (a) looking at the collections; (b) consulting the inventory; (c) consulting the card indexes. Note down each time how long you took.

The aim of these initial exercises is to help participants to identify the various ways of accessing information and to see which are the most rapid and the most reliable. This enables them to become familiar with the different elements of the documentation system and see how useful they are, how they can be used, and how they interrelate.

From experience, participants readily concluded that it is very difficult to find something without a ‘key’. Objects cannot be located easily in a museum’s storerooms without a reliable access system, indicating precisely where each object is to be found.

Other kinds of exercises on additional questions relating to the management of collections are also foreseen, such as the following:

- You are asked to write an article on the mini-museum, giving a detailed account of the collection. Write an article, not exceeding one page, using the following data: the collection was assembled from the year ... to the year ...; total number of objects (you may also just give an estimate); number of countries represented; number of objects in organic material; the best represented category.

- If you were asked to add to the collection in the PREMA mini-museum, which objects would you acquire? Base your answer on the existing documentation.

These two exercises were devised to induce the participants to use all the documents at their disposal so as to understand how they interconnect. It also allows them to practise analysing a collection and to see, on the basis of their analysis, how to determine its strengths and its weaknesses and propose, for instance, an acquisitions policy.

After the experiment carried out with the museum professionals of Central Africa in Brazzaville, the mini-museum was used in...
Conakry to train Guinean technicians from the museum in Porto-Novo, Benin, in the eighth PREMA university course programme; an educational museum based on the mini-museum has been designed for use at the Université Senghor in Alexandria, Egypt.

Thanks to the mini-museum, training objectives in terms of the acquisition of skills are achieved at very high levels, which often exceed 90 per cent. Participants frequently express regret, however, that very little time is spent on the use of information technology. Out of the ninety hours scheduled for the basic training module, only four are devoted to this subject. This was deliberate, since a course on the computerization of collections cannot possibly be given in so little time. Instead there is an introduction to the possibilities that information technology can offer in documentation management; the information to be computerized must, however, come from practice with manual documentation that is being properly used.

The use of computers in itself requires a relatively long learning process and practical habits that cannot possibly be acquired in so short a time. As a general rule scarcely 10 per cent of the participants in this training course, all of whom come from African museums, are familiar with computers.

The importance attributed to this subject is symptomatic. Admittedly, there is a prestige value attached to it, but it would be wrong to see nothing more than that. We must acknowledge that there is a computer problem in Africa south of the Sahara. Although elsewhere the computer is an integral part of professional and even private life, here it is in its infancy and its use is still spreading very slowly. Can African countries continue to neglect the use of a tool that has become basic elsewhere? If not, how can we meet the costs of investment, maintenance, training, etc.? It is fairly clear that the computer problem goes beyond the framework of the museum.

Training only one person on a museum’s staff on the computerization of collections while the public users and other staff members remain untutored is risky. It is not very different from former practices that have led to the present situation of collections whose history has been lost because museum ‘senior staff members’ had all the information in their own heads and/or notes. When those persons are absent or have retired it becomes impossible, or at least very arduous, to work on the collections concerned.

PREMA never recommends that existing documentation be abandoned in order to adopt another system. How could anyone do that who has seen African museums full of card indexes that have been started but never completed and inventories that have not been kept up to date? What we recommend is that existing documentation should be analysed so as to pinpoint its shortcomings, and that in cases where several systems have been handed down from the past one should be chosen and progressively enhanced. There is no ideal solution; the essential is to have a system that the museum’s team understands, that can easily be explained and passed on and that is regularly updated.
The restorer: key player in preventive conservation

Eléonore Kissel

Before examining the main subject of this article, namely, the scope for integrating restorers into preventive conservation projects, I will first of all try to define the different activities covered by the disciplines whose common objective is to safeguard cultural property, and second, will briefly determine how the various responsibilities are shared by museum personnel. I should mention at the outset that this article concerns practices in French museums only; other kinds of heritage institutions such as archives, libraries and historical sites and monuments, as well as the situation in other countries are not reflected here.

What do the terms ‘restoration’, ‘curative conservation’ and ‘preventive conservation’ mean, and who are the individuals responsible for carrying out each of these tasks in the heritage institutions?

French popular usage gives a meaning to the term ‘restoration’ which is different from its technical definition, and this leads to confusion when the subject of restoration is being discussed in public. Following the definition given by the English-speaking world, ‘restoration’ was described in 1992 as all the work carried out on a cultural property in order to improve understanding of it.\(^1\) The work in question is therefore optional, and executed on an object whose continued existence is not at issue. By contrast, ‘curative conservation’ can be defined as encompassing all the work done on a damaged object in order to rescue it from danger. None the less, both verbal and written shortcuts show how even today the term ‘restoration’ and, therefore, that of ‘restorer’ are readily used in a broader sense which takes in all the work done direct on an object. Bearing this in mind and to avoid any confusion, the term ‘conservation-restoration’ will be used in this article, but together with that of ‘restorer’, and it is hoped that readers will accept this refusal to submit to official terminology.\(^2\)

Restoration and curative conservation work both concern individual objects which have usually suffered damage, whereas preventive conservation is a different discipline whose purpose is to lessen the risks of deterioration. As a result, on the one hand, preventive conservation work is, in general, aimed primarily at the environment rather than at individual objects, although it is understood that it is the materiality of the object which determines the nature of the actions taken. On the other hand, given that action aimed at the environment often benefits several objects, justification for such action is seen in terms of its expected impact on the collection as a whole rather than on individual objects.

Adopting a broader view of material conservation issues, which are defined not in terms of a potential improvement of the state of the object but, rather, a stabilization of its present condition, requires a considerable change of perspective on the part of the restorer. This new angle of analysis leads the restorer to accept that his or her preventive conservation work will not bring back the object’s lost splendour, but that, at most, it will continue to exist for the initiation and pleasure of future generations. This is what restoration work means in both psychological and concrete terms – restorers can, perhaps, merely lessen the effects of deterioration agents by ensuring the daily, although perhaps minimal, protection of the collections.

This shift in role is not without real significance, given the scale of the effects...
Piling up various types of objects in the reserves without regard to their shapes or materials creates problems of access and conservation and makes an inventory extremely difficult to undertake.

of any major action aimed at a collection of objects or their environment. The actions taken and results obtained in the context of prevention and protection against damage are often unspectacular, but the responsibility is none the less heavy given that any mistake made risks affecting thousands, if not millions, of objects.

Who does what? In theory …

These introductory remarks bring us to the question of whether restorers are the right people for the work of preventive conservation. Are they able to do such work given a training and professional activity centred on the treatment of individual objects? Can restorers justifiably claim to be specialized in preventive conservation?

To be able to answer this question, we have to look into the origins of preventive conservation as a discipline in its own right. The relevant bibliography is very revealing: the basic reference works have mostly been written by restorers. Why? First, because of what I would call the physiological reason that conservation-restoration is, by far, the discipline which is closest to the materiality of the object from which it derives its raison d’être and substance. The second reason is linked to the specific circumstance of museum professionals, especially in North America, being faced with the problem of both the increasing quantity of collections and increased pressure for the conservation of the works. The restorers working in museums gradually found themselves having to justify the way the funds allocated to their sector of activity were used. Public financing decreased whilst private financing increased, and the new ‘investors’ have been demanding the production of tangible results as they would do in the business world. In this way, it became unacceptable to use money from private foundations to finance, for instance, a specific conservation-restoration action if the conditions of storage of the restored work were unsatisfactory. This simple and consistent principle obtains whether the financing is public or private, but it is still far from being systematically applied in the domain of culture. To sum up, the foregoing informs us about both the geographic origins of preventive conservation and the existence of a literature specific to restorers, many of whom have become, officially or unofficially, fully fledged ‘preservation managers’ as well as personnel who work direct on individual objects.

… and in practice

Who are the people responsible for carrying out preventive conservation work in French museums in day-to-day practice, and how is it done?

Until now, only conservators had been able to do such work. Once again, the reasons for this were structural, with the management of museum collections having always been governed by the presence and decision-making of conservators, and conservators alone. Very few museums have administrators among their executives; only a few managers are
integrated into the organizational structure, and salaried restorers are extremely rare. At the same time, restorers play a prominent role in museums with which they have always maintained a tradition of co-operation, and are called to work for them when deteriorated objects require their attention. In most cases, the restorer’s services are required to restore works for a specific exhibition, rather than as a routine way of ensuring the lasting value of whole collections.

Recently, there has been a marked change in the initial training of conservators which now includes courses on the material conservation of cultural property. In the past, however, educational emphasis was put on research into art history, the presentation and display and subsequent enhancement of collections. It is therefore in the professional context when, more or less abruptly depending on the given situation, the conservators are brought face to face with the collections, that they become fully aware of the extreme fragility of the objects which, as genuine artefacts and not as intangible icons, form the actual bases of their scientific work. Conservators can then begin preventive conservation work and become an integral part of it.

Thus, French museums have systematically integrated into their staffs only one socio-professional and decision-making category which can set up long-term preventive conservation programmes. Restorers, who by the very nature of their work are the occasional guarantors of the continued existence of collections are, with but rare exceptions, left out. Today, however, they are sometimes received in museums as outsiders who have come to conduct specific evaluation and consultancy work, a ‘cultural audit’ as it were which puts one in mind of financial audits, given their character of being both efficient and aggressive vis-à-vis the enterprise concerned.

In this type of work, the restorer evaluates various aspects of the museum and its functioning, always in relation to the preservation of collections: the state of conservation and the presentation and display of objects as well as staff training and budget management. It has to be said that this activity occurs in a grey area in which the fields of competence of conservators and restorers overlap. This situation — brought to light during consultancy missions even when both parties agree that the restorer’s proposals will not necessarily be endorsed by a decision of the conservator who has sole legal responsibility for the collections — might result in a conflict which could have devastating repercussions on our common professional world. What is to be done?

To what is no doubt a complex question, I would unequivocally answer that, given a context in which museum collections have increased constantly over the centuries without a like increase in budgets and often with a steadily shrinking staff, we must go for wealth rather than destitution. Using this guiding principle, three major stages of co-operation can be envisaged: to begin with, preservation work should not be seen in terms of power but of complementarity, its sole purpose being to safeguard cultural property. All the museum’s partners should also be made aware of the value of preventive conservation by means of adapted training.

Another example of how inappropriate storage can create conservation problems: although a number of small wooden objects were carefully placed together on shelves during the refitting of a reserve facility, other kinds were later stored among them or stacked on the floor since suitable storage fittings had not yet been created.
which, if possible, is to be given in the museum itself jointly by the restorer and conservator. The final goal should be to integrate the professionals of each type of activity (conservators, restorers specialized in preventive conservation and/or working on individual objects, producers, frame-makers and plinth workers, etc.) into museum structures in order to make them function more dynamically. It can reasonably be hoped that the emergence of new occupations in the museum will help its administrative structures to adapt to the requirements of preservation by granting allocations to preventive conservation, authorizing programmes for the collective purchasing of conservation-restoration supplies for museums with low budgets, making emergency funds available in case of damage, and creating consultancy posts at the national and regional levels.

The restorer: a professional profile

But while waiting for this ideal evolution of cultural institutions, what are the strengths — and weaknesses — of restorers with respect to preventive conservation? First of all, they derive unquestionable benefit from their constant contact with the works and their great sensitivity to their materiality. Their initial training and professional practice give restorers a particular capacity for viewing the object from all angles (and not merely going round it in circles). In this way, they can appreciate both its state of conservation and potential for deterioration, see the improvements which could be made by modifying its environment, and establish the procedures required to lessen the risks of deterioration, both static (climate, inadapted furniture or packaging) and dynamic (types of transport and exhibition, risky consultation work, etc.).

At the same time, restorers can also be inhibited in the work of preventing deterioration by their familiarity with the object. Their closeness to the material object together with their frequent ignorance of the workings of government and institutional ‘corporate culture’ can lead restorers to overlook the practical difficulties that museum personnel can encounter in trying to implement their recommendations. For example, following an evaluation of conservation conditions, the restorer decides that each object in the collection should be placed individually in a protective container. First, will the financial sponsor accept that the supplies for packaging be included in the budget under investments and not operations, provisions for the latter having already been exhausted by the needs of the administration? Second, what action should be taken if the personnel concerned believe that this type of task does not form part of their duties? Recruit a student on short-term contract who will come during the holidays? Well and good, but who is going to train the student and make half an office available to him or her to work? Buying cardboard and foam rubber to make one’s own low-price containers is certainly a great idea, but where are the supplies going to be kept during the academic year when the student will be absent? This shows that if restorers are not to lose all professional credibility, the projects they make in the context of a consultancy mission should be firmly based on the spatial, administrative and financial realities of the museum concerned. Moreover, they should be careful not to ruffle the feathers of the museum’s staff, which is not always easy when one’s stay is short and little time is available to convince people of the need for the changes one is proposing.

On the other hand, restorers sometimes suffer as a result of their attachment to the...
objects, and can be accused of frowning each time that the subject of an exhibition or loan is raised. But the rationale of the museum’s conservator calls for the presentation and display of collections, and it would be inept to think that the purpose of preventive conservation is to keep the objects out of public view because of their fragility! So, there should be co-operation from all sides.

Restorers specialized in preventive conservation can offer their services as consultants in two types of situation: individual studies and long-term engagements. Individual studies are requested by conservators either for the establishment of a global evaluation, or for the provision of answers to specific questions. When making a global evaluation, consultants analyse the functioning of the museum as a whole: the state of collections; conservation conditions; protection against accidents and human malice; the reproduction and/or conservation-restoration work carried out; the ways in which the works are presented and displayed; the activities of the staff as a whole and the role they play in the protection of collections; budgetary provisions for preservation, etc. A comprehensive file resulting from this study is submitted which includes an analytical section as well as the restorer’s recommendations. These primarily concern main lines of action spread out over time, budgeted and authorized for payment on the basis of the priorities identified by the restorer. But where to begin and in what order should preservation activities be programmed, given budgetary limitations? Is it more useful for the protection of collections to buy climate-measuring equipment or mobile humidifiers? Would it be better to begin by a campaign of dust removal or by repackaging? If the collections suffer from deterioration in the reserves, is it preferable to have a structural analysis done of the building in which they are housed or to make a fresh start by looking for reserve facilities outside the museum?

When a conservator is faced with a technical problem such as the physical monitoring of collections when a removal takes place or when reserve facilities are being outfitted, a restorer can be engaged to address a specific issue. When this happens, the consultant examines the parameters of the problem and finds the most suitable solutions, and puts them forward together with financial estimates which are often much more precise than the orders of magnitude indicated in a global evaluation.

Very often, it is in the context of global evaluations that conflicts occur between restorers and museum personnel, and inevitably so, to go by financial auditors who are in the habit of saying that ‘any imposed change will be a rejected
change'. The often very short stay in situ of consultants, and the access they must have to documents such as the administrative chart and the budget, sometimes make them seem like a threat in the eyes of staff, who may well ask, ‘What right has an intruder to come here to teach us how to do our work, we who have been coming here every day for the last ten years? And what can he possibly see that the chief conservator has not already seen?’

In practice, it would seem that the coming of an outsider can reveal, if not unsuspected problems, at least viable solutions to situations which seemed to be deadlocked. A museum’s past must never be overlooked because it throws light on the existence of situations which are sometimes absurd although none the less historical. Dust does not protect (yes, we might, in passing, explode one of the most widespread myths in the world of conservation) and, in the same way, the fact that a particular situation developed and stabilized over time in a given establishment does not necessarily imply that it is advantageous and should therefore be maintained. Without wishing to offend or upset long-standing professionals, it is important that museum personnel understand that the consultant restorer has been brought in to foster the creation of new habits which will lead to the enhanced protection of cultural heritage, given the principle that any situation can be improved if good will and financial resources, of whatever magnitude, are mobilized to this end. It might be pointed out that harmony and openness between consultants and personnel can be greatly facilitated by the head of the establishment, for example, by convening a meeting of the entire staff in order to introduce the newcomer and to set out the purpose of the project for which the consultant has been engaged. Lastly, it should be noted that these problems of professional relationships are less common when restorers are engaged in order to solve a specific problem. They are then perceived as experts on the matter (in the strict sense of the term), and their coming does not usually lead to questions being asked by staff.

Long-term missions are ongoing experimental projects about which conclusions cannot yet be drawn. They are based on a system whereby self-employed restorers are attached to an institution and work not on a full-time basis but for a number of hours per month or year during a fairly long period of, for example, two to three years. This system has been used for a long time in conservation-restoration work, with some restorers being employed each year to work, in their private workshops, on a fraction of a museum’s collection. But it is innovative with respect to preventive conservation, and requires the making of specific working-time arrangements whose modalities still have

These large-sized textiles, carefully rolled and protected against dust in linen coverings, are nevertheless at risk on the floor of a room with no air-conditioning and where direct sunlight streams through a window. The conservator-restorer has directed that the facility be isolated and supplied with proper fittings for this type of material.
to be examined, especially as it implies the frequent presence of the restorer in the museum. It would be interesting to follow the evolution – in terms of the efficacy of the work done and the professional recognition given to the consultant restorer – of this possibility of having preventive conservation activities supervised by an outsider for whom the museum has opened an ‘hours account’.

From conservation to preservation

The term ‘preservation’ which has already been employed several times in this article, covers all the activities carried out on and around collections with the aim of ensuring their continued material and/or documentary existence. This discipline covers a vast area whose ramifications include management, logistics, statistics, informatics and – why not? – human psychology.

The evaluation of the state of collections, recommendation of actions to limit the scale of deterioration, establishment of budgets with provisions for conservation-restoration – these tasks are all within the scope of restorers when they are integrated into preventive conservation projects. When restorers are part and parcel of a truly dynamic policy of preservation, they could also alert the personnel of cultural institutions and the public to the unquestionable fragility of the objects, pool energies in order to protect collections from deterioration agents, encourage the authorities or private bodies to invest in this backroom but indispensable, work – in short, fully play their role, at last, in a cultural landscape in which all are able to do their utmost in the collective task of ensuring that the cultural heritage is here to stay.

Acknowledgements. I should like to thank Ms Frédérique Orvas, conservator-restorer of easel paintings, who read the manuscript with a degree of wisdom and precision which bears full testimony to our friendship.

Notes


2. The official term for professionals working directly on cultural property is ‘conservator-restorer’. It means simply that these professionals take both preventive or curative conservation steps and also carry out restoration work. It in no way implies that the professionals in question want to encroach on the field of competence of conservators. The term ‘conservator-restorer’ has been endorsed by the document La profession de restaurateur – Code d’éthique et formation (The Profession of Restorer – Code of Ethics and Training), adopted by the General Assembly of the European Confederation of Conservators-Restorers’ Organizations (ECCO) on 11 June 1993.
The professional guide: building bridges between conservation and tourism

*Felicitas Wressnig*

The tour guide is the vital link between a country’s heritage and the visitors who come to explore it. More than a mere purveyor of information, the guide can play a significant role in sensitizing the public to conservation questions and in influencing policy with regard to the complex issues raised by mass tourism. Felicitas Wressnig is a Viennese tour guide who obtained her licence in four languages while studying art history and journalism in 1969. She holds the training pass issued by the World Federation for Tourist Guides and is in charge of updating guide training in the Viennese Chamber of Commerce. As representative of Austria within the European Federation of Tour Guides, she works on special topics and on comparative training in member countries.

As a licensed tourist guide I belong to a group of 800 certified guides in Austria who act as ‘translators’ of the national heritage to an estimated 5 million visitors each year. Although we form but a particle of our 8 million citizens we are in charge of 10 per cent of the tourists in our country. Our profession covers natural resources, all national collections, most of the regional displays and includes temporary exhibits as well. We have been a licensed profession in Austria since the late nineteenth century and our compulsory training has expanded from several weeks in the early days to 980 hours in Vienna today. These lectures cover geography and natural resources, the history of Austria and its neighbours, art in general and specific collections, presentation skills, speaking and breathing, group psychology and behaviour – to name but a few of the subjects covered. Most important is learning how to convey as much information as possible to visitors and not bore or overwhelm them. Anything that visitors find ‘too much’ is a boomerang: if they are part of a large group, they will assert their individuality; if they feel alone, they will start to look for people with similar interests; if they are kept from some sight, they will stress the importance of seeing this particular item; if you simply ask them not to touch objects without further explanation, they will almost certainly find a moment to see what happens if they do. Simply transmitting data to the traveller is not enough: anybody handling tourists must always remember that they have paid for their visit and that this payment virtually makes the collection a showcase, take photographs with or without flash, or none at all – countless possibilities that change certainly with every country and also with every site. These explanations must be made understandable to visitors who, by paying the single person to visit castles and collections as a ‘well-informed sightseer’, while blaming group tourists for wasting cultural heritage and viewing them as the unwanted ‘destroyers’ of beautiful objects.

Anyone visiting natural sites or museum collections contributes to their upkeep. It is therefore the obligation of the country’s preservation trust to offer the best conditions for the survival of the heritage rather than the visitor’s elementary duty; it is up to us, the local responsible people, to decide how to present our heritage to tourists – they will follow suit if we are able to accept their role as a sponsor and encourage their interest and responsibility. Although it is clear that protective showcases, low-lux light bulbs, video surveillance and security employees can save any collection from rough handling, it is also possible to engage the co-operation of trained guides who have an enormous interest in explaining their national heritage to their customers and – as their livelihood depends on these exhibits – to protect it as well. The guide is thus the bridge between the collection and the visitor.

The work of the guide begins even before the collection is explained to the tourist by giving friendly instructions on general behaviour: whether the visitor should walk slowly or rapidly (think of the Tower of London), remain standing (not too close in galleries of paintings), not touch the exhibit (fingers always leave stains on any material), remove hats (in a Christian church), cover bare shoulders or heads (in religious centres), store the bulky bag in a cloakroom (to prevent it from banging into a showcase), take photographs with or without flash, or none at all – countless possibilities that change certainly with every country and also with every site. These explanations must be made understandable to visitors who, by paying the
entrance fee, have become the patrons of all those objects that seem to be held at arm's length. They will only enjoy what they see if they can appreciate its singularity, beauty and value. If the local guide or mentor can explain to travellers their own importance in the process, they will be proud of their contribution and from then on will feel personally involved and will be able to remember what was actually experienced. No book can replace this singular bridge that a well-trained guide can build for the visitor.

On the other side is the curator who receives the necessary funding to preserve, restore and present artefacts. And after all, for whom but the user and the wayfarer have artists made their creations? Hidden treasure seems to become valueless and only the eye of the beholder can bring it to life again, since practical use is obviously out of question for many pieces. And what a life it is: often reserved for centuries for only a selected group of people and hidden from ‘ignorant’ eyes, it is now presented to anyone and everyone, with or without interest or knowledge, with or without feeling for the grandeur of the work.

'We cut the ground from under our feet', as one Vienna guide stated so truly when discussing the opening of Schönbrunn Palace (the former summer residence of the Habsburgs) seven days a week and during longer visiting hours, for queuing up with our customers for almost two hours before entering the palace seemed wrong – after such a long wait one cannot enjoy what one sees, one is simply exhausted or furious. So the Vienna Guides took part in establishing the criteria for the competitive bidding for the revitalization of the palace grounds: thus, the reservation of an exact entrance time for groups was created in 1989, the plans for vitrifying the centre of the Gloriette (a triumphal arch overlooking the park) as in the eighteenth century, and the opening for summer concerts of the Orangerie (the greenhouse which had been for winter use only) were part of the presentation by the Guides to five ministries which had been jointly in charge of the upkeep of the palace. Many such ideas could be realized by the winning bidder and they contributed to the restoration of the site and the appropriate infrastructure measures to open it for the public longer and under better conditions.

But the 1998 exhibit on the Empress Elizabeth will probably double the number of visitors. The passage in some
rooms has been cut down to only 1.5 m due to the showcases installed, the waiting line at the entrance is back to a minimum of thirty minutes even before the tourist season starts, and already the crowd in the apartments is a frightening muddle, alarming many people concerned with this important cultural heritage. To add another exhibit to the regular attraction seems inadvisable, to bring twice as many tourists seems dangerous. Restore, adapt, enlarge showrooms ± yes; crowd them with objects and customers ± to what end?

Striking a balance

Of course it was, and still is, an elementary question for any profession connected with tourism: Should we bring more visitors to this – or any – palace knowing that condensation runs down the windows on certain winter days (the air being too humid for the paintings and panels), the inlaid floor is mouldering away, the Chinese lacquer panels are cracking from the constant change in climate – an unending list of vanishing beauty and value? But then how would you define culture if you leave out the passive observer? Does the closure of a palace help the artefacts to survive? What other possibilities does a heritage have to endure and what aspects are relevant? Many people owe their living to a certain extent to mass tourism and consequently have to acknowledge their dependence on the role of the citizen as host to all visitors and as taxpayer and thus main sponsor of all national heritage; on the need to ensure the best condition – and not only the survival – of the national legacy; and on the obligation to ensure the joy and contentment of the guest.

The experienced guide will be able to position his/her group correctly in relation to the object, provide explanations according to the intellectual background and interest of the group and not overload the visitor with boring facts, include relevant information concerning the visitors’ country where appropriate. All this means that local guides must include pertinent background from other places in their preparatory studies and need constant updating to reflect changes in the tourist industry and learn new presentation skills. They need regular information lectures on new techniques in restoration and the actual cost of conservation; current projects (national and international), ecological and preservation problems should also be discussed. The more information they have, the more support they will give and the better travellers they themselves will become.
In Austria the regular presentation and discussion of cultural heritage placed the tourist guide eventually in the role of fund-raiser: the Vienna Federation of Licensed Guides (230 members) took up collections for several projects, such as the restoration of St Stephen's Cathedral, the renovation of the Hofburg assembly halls after the fire in 1992, and the Imperial Crypt, raising altogether some $10,000. The Salzburg colleagues started their fund-raising for the Nonntal Convent and donated some $4,000 in 1997 for illuminating its medieval frescoes. The occasion to showcase these achievements is Tourist Guide Day, celebrated annually on 21 February, which allows each country to contribute to the image of guide-work by presenting various projects.

In 1997, the Vienna Federation offered a programme for sight-impaired visitors by preparing special conditions for them with the help of the curator of the Museum of Crime; they were allowed to touch and feel chosen objects and integrate the explanations. Another Vienna Guide group explained the new excavation on Judenplatz whose findings had been a major topic in the press, including information on the newly planned Holocaust Monument to be created there. The third group of Guides showed an endangered cultural heritage: the Imperial Crypt in the Capucine Church. Visitors were made aware of the damage caused by dampness in the basement and that on the pewter coffins by stannic oxide; they learned why support was lacking and were asked to donate money for restoration. Another team took members of the municipality on a discussion tour to demonstrate the effects of heavy bus tourism in a central area. Although it may sound like fun to invite your city administration onto a bus and drive them to sightsee downtown, it is when the tour gets blocked by traffic and parked cars in a steaming bus that the traffic board will see the need either to close small roads or to create a lane wide enough for buses to pass. It was only by counting the number of buses turning round the Opera House and the neighbouring Albertina (the graphic arts collection) on a Whit Sunday morning – 350 buses in 3 hours! – that we could obtain a special permit for buses to unload tourists only on certain spots downtown; the number of buses dropped dramatically to 150 within a year, which certainly helped the graphic arts collection to survive, not to speak of the local residents living alongside. They had found the noise and smell of so many buses unnerving and reacted aggressively towards bus tourism. To respect the wishes and needs of locals is yet another task which Austrian Guides try to cope with, because we know we need their friendly reception for our tourists to have them enjoy their stay. Fifteen years ago the programme began as ‘Viennese Get to Know their Own City’; since then these walks have developed into quite an attraction for local and foreign guests. Yes, it brought new customers, but more importantly it created an awareness of the surroundings for all visitors. Those who have accompanied tourist guides on numerous city walks now tend to look around themselves, take details as ravishing discoveries and find many spots that need care. And the Guides have opened new horizons for themselves – they look for unusual sights and trace their background history. To a certain extent it may be said that by presenting their country’s heritage to the visitor, Guides have contributed to major cultural changes throughout the world.
Going public: a new approach to conservation education

Roberto Nardi

Bringing conservation projects out into the open under the eye of public scrutiny is a recent phenomenon that has been taken up by a growing number of museums and heritage sites. The programme described by the archaeologist Roberto Nardi is one of the most ambitious to date and makes clear why such an approach goes well beyond the simple explanation of technical interventions to have a resounding impact on public perception and appreciation of the broader heritage questions. Since 1982, the author has been director of the Centro di Conservazione Archeologica (CCA) in Rome, a private company undertaking public orders for the conservation of ancient monuments and archaeological sites, and has supervised conservation projects and training courses in Italy and abroad. Under his leadership information for the public and the media has become a crucial activity in all the CCA conservation programmes, and work sites under treatment have been opened to visitors whenever circumstances permit. He is an associate professor at ICCROM and is currently involved in the opening of a new training centre set up by the CCA in a recently restored sixteenth-century convent near Rome.

For some years now, the CCA (Centre for Archaeological Conservation) in Rome has been opening its own conservation sites to the general public on an experimental basis. This choice stemmed from the idea that the purpose of our actions as curators and restorers is that of preserving the cultural heritage and facilitating the transmission of its inherent historical message. At the same time, our position as ‘actors in the field’ gives us a privileged status to achieve these goals for a number of reasons.

The first is that we are in the ‘front line’, i.e. in direct contact with the people who enjoy the cultural heritage and who are willing and able to receive this message. That is why we are working in the museums, on sites and on monuments. The second resides in the vantage point in which we find ourselves: the public is normally accustomed to associate the words ‘restoration’ and ‘conservation’ with rooms and monuments that are closed to outsiders, so making it impossible for them to visit things that they would like to see. If, on the other hand, we do offer that possibility by admitting the public to our sites, the effect of surprise generated in this way helps to create a positive attitude to our profession, to the site and to the initiatives organized for the benefit of the public. The third reason is a straightforward question of image and impact: our work may look delicate and difficult to the public. How often have we heard people say: ‘You must be so patient!’ This is undoubtedly because our work is unfamiliar and new to the observer, while the tasks involved may be particularly impressive because of the results obtained or the dust, colours and lighting, etc, involved. These and other reasons may be used to put at least three different messages across to the public: the fragility of that heritage, and, lastly, the difficulty of maintaining its integrity and keeping it in good condition.

With the initiatives organized in favour of information for the public, we are able to work towards two different types of objective: one for the short term and a second for the more distant future. The short-term goal involves direct intervention on monuments and is achieved by preserving the heritage and ensuring that it is intelligently managed, for example, by promoting a special cultural event such as a conservation project open to the public on an outdoor site or in a museum. We must also seek long-term results to facilitate the transmission and understanding of the historical message. Through educating future generations, we can hope to limit potential aggressions by preventing vandalism and abuse of the cultural heritage or simply by encouraging public participation through the creation of a consensus.

To whom should our action be addressed? It will concern persons who already take an interest in the cultural heritage, for instance visitors and colleagues. However, we must also try to involve people who have not previously been attracted by the subject: we must appeal to the media, invest in activities for young people, create an awareness on the part of civil servants, administrators and politicians. How can all this be achieved? By opening conservation projects to the public, allowing physical access and developing planned and carefully managed initiatives to supplement visits and prevent them from becoming invasions.

Technically, this means preparing the site to attract the curiosity of the public by organizing intelligent routes for visits with suitable facilities and protection so that
they are safe to the public, the monument and the curators. Systems of communication may be provided between the public and the curator, lectures and conducted visits organized. Continuous contact may be maintained with the media and tourist guides, teachers and local authority staff kept informed. These initiatives have a cost in terms of time, planning and implementation of the programmes, but many positive results can be achieved. For example, the curator’s commitment to the project will remain high, daily routine will be broken and the site will necessarily be kept in perfect order at all times.

Opening a site to the general public was first tried out in the mid-1980s with the arch of Septimus Severus in the Roman Forum. It was repeated between 1990 and 1993 during conservation work on the Atrium of the Capitoline Museum, again in Rome; at the Thermæ of the Caesars in Ostia Antica; in Israel at Zippori, the city of the Nile Mosaics; and at Masada, with its great Thermæ. The last of these experimental sites alone is estimated to have been visited by nearly half a million persons.

However, this is not the subject of our article. All of these experiments have already been described elsewhere. We shall be looking instead at a proposed new project for the conservation of the Colosseum in Rome, scheduled for the second half of 1998. This is a proposal and not a definitive project. We therefore do not know at this stage whether it will be implemented. Nevertheless, a description seemed appropriate here in that it brings together and summarizes all our ideas and experience in the area of public information. Alongside the more technical and organizational components, the programme proposed for the conservation of the Colosseum includes a series of initiatives or sub-programmes designed to create an interaction with the members of the public (both local and visiting tourists) who will experience this event.

The cultural project: Colosseo Mio
(My Colosseum)

The Colosseum is a good example of a condition that afflicts much of our heritage: for years, it was home to cats and clandestine 'visitors'; it became a blackened mass of unrecognizable materials, a backdrop to city traffic and a matter of complete indifference to passers-by. The proposed cultural project has been called 'Colosseo Mio' out of a desire to bring the meaning and dignity of this monument home again to the citizens of Rome and, more generally, to an audience of real or virtual visitors. This in turn will create a heightened public sensitivity to the need to protect and safeguard the heritage by making people aware of their own roots as members of a community, a culture and history.

The Colosseo Mio project breaks down into six different cultural programmes, corresponding to six levels and stages towards a deeper awareness of the monument and of the conservation action taken. Visually, the various levels are represented by a pyramid at whose apex we find the most complete presentation of information, proximity to the monument...
and explanation of meanings. The six programmes differ in terms of the audience for whom they are intended and the time which this audience is prepared to dedicate to the physical site and the methods of implementation of the project.

The first programme, ‘How Beautiful Was My Colosseum’, is intended for the widest possible audience, i.e. everyone who comes into contact with the monument from some distance. It is designed for local citizens and people who pass by the base of the monument but know nothing about it and have shown no interest in finding out more, together with everyone who is interested in the project but is physically remote and does not have the opportunity of more direct contact for the time being. The title is intended to underline the loss of historical memory of the monument and to call the attention of the public to the monument as it once was and to its state today.

The programme will be entirely designed and put together away from the monument and will try to stimulate interest. On the site, it will be implemented by placing a tarpaulin over the scaffolding with a graphic illustration of the monument in its original state; also, a network of museums and foreign institutes will be set up and connected to a Web site dedicated to the monument and project.

The tarpaulin, measuring \(40 \times 20\) m, will present a life-size graphic and coloured view of the amphitheatre in its original phase, complete with the decorative elements reconstituted by the grant-holders of the French School of Rome in the 1800s. The tarpaulin will be a standard module so that it can be re-used when the scaffolding is transferred to other parts of the monument. It will become an element of interest and will have the technical function of protecting the working areas while also providing information and attracting the public.

Another component is based on the creation of a network of museums of Roman art, cultural institutes, university departments and professional training establishments willing to set space aside for the Colosseum in a direct Web link to the Roman site. The creation of a room dedicated to the Colosseum will be facilitated by arranging a temporary exhibition with information material or original materials obtained from the museum itself. In the centre of this room will be a terminal linked by the Internet to the supervisory office and the conservation site itself. The Web page will be updated weekly or may be linked directly to the archaeological site and open access to the page will of course be possible on the entire Internet network. The Web site will be established in all the languages of the foreign institutes directly involved in the project and will include Arabic, English, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Spanish and Turkish, thus underlining the international European and Mediterranean character of the Colosseum and the relevance of this cultural operation to the Roman world.

Through the Web site, users will be able to access all the information supplied on the teaching and informative displays set up inside the monument. Historical, archaeological and technical details of the conservation project will enrich the
The first programme, ‘My Colosseum, We Are Making You.’, will be updated on a daily basis and may be viewed on the Web page. The programme will consist of live images relayed by the television cameras installed on the scaffolding and provide the public with up-to-date information on the work in progress. The second programme, ‘My Colosseum, How Low You Have Fallen’, is dedicated to persons who come near the monument without actually entering and are able to devote a few minutes to it. An information pavilion will be set up at the base of the site on the first ambulatorium level. The stand will face away from the monument and will be open day and night. It will give general information on the history of the monument and on the construction techniques and the materials used. General data will be provided on the intervention and live information on the state of progress of the work. The pavilion will be equipped with two teaching panels, a distribution point for brochures in several languages and three monitor screens.

The first monitor will be connected to a fixed television camera, mounted inside the site with a video recorder, which will take pictures of the site and may be moved weekly to follow the advancement of the work. On this monitor, interested persons will be able to follow images of the work in progress. The same images will be transmitted on the Web page and may be edited to produce a video of the restoration work. The second monitor will be connected to a PC and will transmit non-stop information on the history of the monument and its successive transformations, through animated pictures and written texts. The basic idea is to show the dimension of time as the determining factor in the transformation of materials and as the key to change. An animated film will illustrate the collapse and

Colosseo Mio, che ti stiamo facendo (My Colosseum, We Are Making You.) Programme 3 is organized in five languages along five galleries. Monitors will be connected to movable video cameras placed in the working area. (Drawing by Andreina Costanzi Cobau.)
dismantling of the Colosseum with a historical calendar and a plan of the city showing the monuments which were built by reusing materials taken from the amphitheatre. A third monitor will give up-to-date information on the progress of the works, statistics and information on the operation, such as the planned times and performance dates, the costs, etc.

The third programme, entitled ‘My Colosseum, We Are Making You’, is intended for people who visit the monument and buy an entrance ticket. It will be designed primarily for groups of tourists who are willing to spend five minutes of their time to learn about the restoration work through the information initiative taken for their benefit and will be organized in various languages along five twin galleries with accompanying displays. Each of the galleries, in the second row of the ambulatory, will be equipped with two information panels and three monitor screens.

The first screen will be connected to the fixed television camera installed on the site. The second monitor will be connected to a PC and will give information on the reasons for the project, the procedure adopted for its implementation and the state of progress of the work. The third monitor will be connected to a mobile television camera installed on the site and equipped with a remote-control system; this will enable guided visitors’ groups to use the live images of the works as the opportunity for a personalized visit depending on their particular interests and focus of attention. The television camera will be mounted on a mobile support in a position enabling it to cover much of the restoration site and will have a zoom lens and a pan and tilt mounting, a system which enables the camera to be raised, lowered and focused on any area within a 150° vertical range and 360° in the horizontal plane. A variable-focus lens will enable detailed features of the images captured by the television camera to be highlighted, and the actuating control will be located on a panel with handles like those used for many video games. The tourist guides will be able to illustrate details of the restoration programme and parts of the monument which are not accessible during the visit.

For each gallery, a colour monitor linked to a television camera focusing on the interior of the site will be needed, making a total of five television cameras and the same number of colour monitors, plus a total of five monitors connected to the single fixed television camera installed on the site and five monitors connected to a single PC.

**Different needs, different services**

The fourth programme, ‘My Colosseum, Getting to Know You’, will be dedicated to small groups and individual tourists who are willing to devote fifteen minutes to the information provided for their benefit. The purpose of the programme is to give visitors a more detailed knowledge of the monument and help them to understand the events and mechanisms which led to its gradual deterioration and its present aspect. Through an itinerary that will traverse the interior of the monument with six observation stations, the visitor will be able to ‘read’ *in situ* historical events, the phases of the deterioration, the present state of conservation of the materials and also be able to observe the progress of the project work.

Each observation station will be dedicated to a specific theme and will be equipped with a console/desk with a written text and a button to activate a low-energy, high-speed laser pointer enabling visitors
to identify on the surface of the monument the events described in the text. The persistence of images on the retina of the human eye will be exploited to generate an impression of stability in the zone that is marked out. For example, the visitor will be able to highlight the area from which blocks and metal parts have been stolen, collapses which occurred in the past and restoration work performed in the eighteenth century, etc.

To supplement this programme, visitors may be handed portable audio players with flash memories to describe the itinerary. On these recorders, a didactic text can be loaded in any language in a matter of moments, thus eliminating the need for a link between the number of visitors present and the languages spoken by them. One way of involving international bodies and foreign cultural institutes more directly might consist in entrusting to each of them the task of developing the text in their own language; they would then be allowed to record a brief informative closing message about the centre which would be described as a partner of the project and the originator of the audio recording.

At the end of the itinerary, a photographic platform will be set up, arranged to provide a privileged vantage point for tourists to document the monument and the current restoration work on still photos and video tape. The platform will be equipped with a balcony for filming and a monitor linked to a mobile television camera installed inside the restoration site and a PC of the kind described in the third programme above. Linked to the television camera will be a video cassette recorder. A virtual visit to the site will be possible by manoeuvring the television camera from the platform. Operations of interest to particular visitors can then be documented by recording images on the video cassette. Visitors will have the impression of enjoying free access to the area of the works. Finally, they will be able to print titles as they wish using a PC keyboard and will then be able to take home personally taped images of the restoration of the Colosseum.

The fifth programme, ‘My Colosseum, We Wish You Well’, is intended for visits by schools and groups by prior appointment, and other persons who are prepared to devote thirty minutes of their time to our project. The purpose will be to illustrate and explain through practical demonstrations the methodological basis and the technical operations involved in the action.

Visitors will have access to a pavilion equipped as a mini-laboratory in which a number of operators will perform demonstrations of the restoration techniques in use on the site. They will also have an opportunity to experience some of the restoration operations directly on a model and to observe at close quarters prototypes illustrating the commonest types of damage to stone produced artificially. At the end of the visit little cubes of travertine marble will be handed out as mementos of the visit.

In the pavilion, an area will be set aside for children and known as ‘My Colosseum, Let Me Play with You’. The space will be delimited by a scale model of the Colosseum made of soft material in which parents will have access to kindergarten services and children will
be able to play or pursue activities specially organized for them. Theme games will be distributed, such as a two-dimensional puzzle depicting the Colosseum, half as it was originally and the other half as it is today, and a building kit to put the monument together in three dimensions, complete with the decorative elements that have been lost. The purpose of this programme is to interest children in the theme of protection of the cultural heritage through games.

The sixth programme is the apex of the pyramid of our project and is called ‘Colosseum Be Mine’. It provides access to the restoration site while work is in full progress with guided visits in various languages. For obvious logistic and security reasons, this programme will be exclusively reserved for prominent personalities and students to whom the management considers it appropriate to grant access to the site in the form of conducted tours, during which an operator will show the technical work in progress and explain the methodological basis of the action and the choices made. The purpose of this final programme is to permit a real contact with the work being done by the site management through conservation action destined to safeguard and protect the Colosseum.

In conclusion it may be said that the project work provides a privileged opportunity to rediscover the monument and ‘bring it to the forefront of public awareness as a monument created by the combination of shape, materials, space and historical events’. These words by Cesare Brandi summarize the reasons underlying the proposed cultural project and its goals and, more generally, the idea of involving the public in conservation programmes. Setting out from this theoretical basis, we consider that the technical conservation action must become an event to valorize the monument and an opportunity to put across knowledge and familiarity with its cultural, historical and spiritual symbolism. At the same time, the opening up to the outside world, the transmission of information and the involvement of the public will be an opportunity for creating greater awareness of the need for protection of our monumental heritage. The public will also be able to establish a closer relationship with cultural assets whose existence they may have forgotten. For many years, tourism has in fact overlooked the aspect of the durability of monuments and the need for their conservation and indulged instead in a dangerous process of mass consumption of cultural artefacts. Through initiatives such as those proposed and others already under way, we will be able gradually to increase the level of awareness on the part of these ‘consumers’ by turning them for a day into conscious and mature ‘beneficiaries’ of our shared heritage.

Note
The globe-straddler of the art world: the Guggenheim’s Thomas Krens
Michael Kimmelman

Though often attacked and disdained, Thomas Krens of the Guggenheim has recast the role of the art museum for the twenty-first century, according to Michael Kimmelman, an American journalist who is a regular contributor to the New York Times.¹

The other day Thomas Krens, the Guggenheim Museum’s director, heading east on 89th Street towards Madison Avenue, pointed at an apartment building behind the museum. At the nadir of the New York City real estate market in 1974, long before he arrived, the museum sold the building for $1.8 million.

Sometimes, Mr Krens said, he wonders how things might have unfolded if that hadn’t happened – if say, the building had been sold at a better time, or if the site had been available when the museum expanded. He smiled thinly and walked on.

Perhaps there wouldn’t be a SoHo Guggenheim or, for that matter, a Guggenheim Bilbao or a Berlin Guggenheim today. Maybe, the course of things having changed, the museum wouldn’t now be undertaking big surveys like the China show, which (who knows?) some day may pave the way for yet another Guggenheim outpost.

1 July 1998 marks Mr Krens’s tenth anniversary heading what, depending on whom you ask, has become the most novel or the most insidious or simply the most baffling museum around. It is now an empire, with colonies in Spain, Germany and Italy (the Peggy Guggenheim in Venice was the original, preceding Mr Krens’s).

The colonial metaphor is something you hear often. I was recently on a panel in Vienna with a German museum director who complained bitterly about the Deutsche Bank’s sponsorship of the new pocket-size Guggenheim in Berlin. The Guggenheim is organizing the shows there, mostly of new commissions that the bank and the museum acquire jointly. Essentially, the works become part of the Guggenheim’s collection and may be shown, at one time or another, in Bilbao or New York instead of in Berlin. Some of the several thousand drawings that the bank bought previously may also come the museum’s way eventually. In other words, for its curatorial services and the occasional loan of works, the Guggenheim acquires art and a new site.

The deal infuriated the German director, who said that German museums need corporate help. I asked him if he had also lobbied the bank. No, he said; the notion seemed tawdry (read: American) to a European accustomed to subsidies. Imperialist? Opportunist? Megalomaniac? Mr Krens describes himself as a pragmatist, naturally, but whatever he may be, he’s stretching the rules by which museums from now on may have to operate in a competitive global marketplace. Put differently, having rudely introduced American-style private enterprise to Europe, where museums are truly public institutions, he is also forcing everyone to ask tough questions about the business of world culture today:

To whom, in the end, do museums and their collections belong? To a city, a country? To everyone? To anyone? Is bigger always better for museums? And which matters more, protecting the art or showing it: specifically, is it preferable that the Guggenheim’s pictures sit safely in storage in New York or that they be sent to Spain or Germany, at the usual peril when art travels anywhere?

Clearly no one since Tom Hoving, thirty years ago, has done more to shake up the museum world than Mr Krens, who in conversation is the antithesis of the Met’s voluble and theatrical former director. With some reason it’s said that Mr Krens is his own worst enemy: though he can be
charming, he’s prone to corporate-speak and often tone-deaf to the subtly shifting pitch of social interaction. He told me once that like some other very tall people, he has felt since childhood a little uncomfortable, physically, in public. Shyness, perhaps, compounds the impression of arrogance.

I wonder whether people would think of the Guggenheim differently, less warily, if Mr Krens were more affable. It sounds like a frivolous question, but the art world is cliquish and defensive, like any group, and Mr Krens is, by choice or temperament or both, an odd man out. (It’s telling that people think of him as an outsider in New York City, though he was born there.)

Since he won kudos for the success of Frank Gehry’s architecture in Bilbao, his colleagues have softened their criticisms a little. But it’s still hard to find many of them who will speak in his behalf.

So let me. New York and the Guggenheim have profited under him; as for Berlin and Bilbao, we shall see.

People forget that Mr Krens inherited a museum with a modest endowment, a quixotic exhibition history, a famous landmark in need of repair and not enough room for art. Besides the apartment building behind it, the museum sold off numerous Kandinskys (Kandinsky was a keystone of the collection from the start) and other pictures. No one complained.

Then Mr Krens arrived. Three paintings by Chagall, Kandinsky and Modigliani were sold for $47 million, fuelling fears that the new director regarded the museum as a commodity for sale. The sale seemed reckless then and still does, but, dire predictions aside, he hasn’t sold any more art.

Meanwhile, the Wright building has been refurbished. The expansion to it is serviceable, which is probably as much as could be expected considering the restrictions placed on its design by the city’s planning commission. The SoHo Guggenheim is a murky venture thus far (it is still unfinished) and entering it through a gift shop has always been a
minor annoyance that sends a bad signal. But with two Guggenheims in town, the city gets a new range of exhibitions.

Mr Krens paid for the renovations and expansion partly through a $54 million public bond issue that seemed at the time even more dubious than the sale of paintings because it was widely believed that the collection (though Mr Krens denies this) was floated as collateral. Like other people, I wondered whether the Guggenheim was a fiscal house of cards. But for eight years now the museum has been paying its bills. And recently it announced that it had received a gift from Peter Lewis, a trustee, of $60 million for the endowment, more than doubling it.

I stress the particular value of the Guggenheim enterprise to New Yorkers because people often say that Mr Krens has been mortgaging the city’s art to further his goals abroad — offering to lend parts of the collection to Bilbao, for example, in the deal for a museum there.

The truth is that while other museums claim that they don’t lend art without good scholarly reasons to do so, they do it all the time. One difference between the Museum of Modern Art’s renting shows of its Picassos and Matisse, as the Modern has done lately, and the Guggenheim’s showing its collection in Bilbao is that Mr Krens talks frankly about the wear and tear on the art, which he argues is justified under certain circumstances. And in the case of Bilbao, besides showing art that’s mostly in storage, the Guggenheim in New York clearly gains.

How? Because the arrangement is that the Basque authorities have put up $150 million ($100 million for the new building, $50 million to buy art); the Guggenheim also gets money from them each year towards its cost (in staff, overheads, and so on). In other words, the financial risk is on the Basques.

The art that is acquired, as at Berlin, joins the general Guggenheim pool: Rauschenberg’s Barge for instance, is a joint purchase by New York and Bilbao. It was in the Rauschenberg retrospective in Manhattan this fall, then in the opening show at Bilbao. In the same way, the
Rosenquists lately commissioned for Berlin will come to New York. And the present Delaunay show at the SoHo Guggenheim, which includes works from the museum’s collection, started in Berlin and is paid for by the Deutsche Bank. All of Mr Kren’s foreign arrangements involve money for the Guggenheim but no expense. So the basic idea is that whatever benefits Bilbao or Berlin – or even the Peggy Guggenheim, which Mr Krens cites as a precedent for his global purview – benefits New York.

As for the reverse, at the moment the Basques have a major new attraction, tourists, the promise of shows and an institution that if nothing else is making foreigners think of the region in terms of something besides terrorism. Maybe they’ve already got their money’s worth. Whether, when the buzz dies, the Guggenheim will come to seem like a boondoggle to the Basques won’t be clear for a while.

Should New Yorkers care? Americans are hypocrites on this matter, proclaiming that culture is an international bond but then insisting that our cultural institutions be run like private businesses. It’s not just that our museums exist on the booty principle, taking treasures from abroad. American museums, unlike most European ones, also have their roots in a strain of nineteenth-century political philosophy that specifically sought to marry commerce with spectacle to achieve a form of social engineering (improving the middle class). They have always existed in a capitalist environment of winners and losers.

Thus when the Guggenheim exploited the Chinese Government’s discontent with the Met for having done the big show of art from Taiwan by organizing its own exhibition from Chinese museums, some Met officials grumbled that the Guggenheim was poaching. I can understand why the Met, with its long-standing involvement in the field, would be upset by this upstart intrusion. But really Mr Krens was just taking advantage of an opportunity, which is the way of the open marketplace. It may be that he makes people uncomfortable precisely because he is pursuing the American cultural system to its inevitable conclusion.

Like many other institutions, museums are moral relativists in the end, and in this
respect Mr Krens may be pretty much like other directors, only more so. What finally matters to museum-goers is the art and its setting, not museum politics: the bottom line is what’s on view. Should the public care that Mr Krens may occasionally be aloof with curators or colleagues? No. Is it all-important that a show may have been organized to please a sponsor or court a government? Not if the results are worth while. Whatever the motives behind the China exhibition, it has turned out to be a revelation in Wright’s Guggenheim, where the architecture and the ancient sculptures engage in an amazing, mutually revealing dialogue.

At the moment, in fact, Mr Krens may be best regarded as a connoisseur of architecture. He obviously has a sculptural feel for space that also explains his taste for the work of artists like Richard Serra. Not only is Bilbao a venturesome monument to have endorsed but Mr Krens has increasingly found creative ways to exploit Wright’s difficult building.

If some of the exhibitions in it have, early on, been disasters, like the German art survey, afterward came Kelly, Lichtenstein and Rauschenberg and ‘Picasso and the Age of Iron.’ Mr Krens thinks big, clearly; at the same time in the SoHo Guggenheim I recall a small Chagall show, an early Rauschenberg show, a tightly conceived Beckmann exhibition, ‘Mediascape’ and so on.

The record is ultimately mixed, as at every big museum. The criticism that Mr Krens sometimes places spectacle before substance or cares most of all about accumulating art isn’t easily dismissed: the collection is his capital, it’s what the museum has to offer; and he seems fixated on the size of the new works in the collection (he wrongly claims that art today is bigger than in the past), as if size justified the need for expansion. Size, of course, is not the same thing as quality. But it’s unfair simply to label him a deal-maker or technocrat without a taste for art because he likes what he likes, even if his taste is for Jim Dine’s recent sculptures.

A decade has now passed since Mr Krens arrived. Unlike anyone else, he has articulated a vision of the art museum in the twenty-first century that transcends the old parochial model and suits a world of shrinking distances. Other museums collaborate on travelling exhibitions. Mr Krens envisions a multinational Guggenheim that is its own global network – a museum counterpart, perhaps to the World Wide Web – circulating shows among its outposts, all of which benefit from one another.

And to the surprise (disappointment?) of many doomsayers, he’s actually bringing it about. Does the notion of self-reliance reflect a certain misanthropy on Mr Krens’s part? Maybe, but all that really counts is the result, which may be to extend the reach of the art museum in ways that other museums today don’t imagine and for which, at the moment, only the Guggenheim is prepared.

Note

1. This article first appeared in the New York Times on Sunday, 19 April 1998. – Ed.
In the town of Fontaine de Vaucluse, near Avignon, stands a small museum which is unique in all of France: the Museum of Justice and Punishment. Approximately 500 items – documents and instruments of justice – are on display in a space of 400 m². They were collected from all over Europe by the museum’s founder Fernand Meyssonnier who, with the aid of Jean-Louis Bessette, author and criminologist, created this collection for educational purposes and the study of history. The museum is open to all, but the warning ‘not for the sensitive’ has never been more appropriate. Jacques Lucchesi is a freelance journalist living in Marseilles, France. He has contributed to various local and national publications and is also pursuing a literary career, having published poetry, short stories and essays. For many people museum visits are still associated with pleasure. While they obviously satisfy cultural needs, the underlying motivation is, generally speaking, aesthetic, dominated by a certain idea of beauty.

The desire to build a collection, of whatever kind, outside of the traditional institutional circuits, is never entirely unaffected by this criterion. It may also have an educational and historical dimension which relegates the strictly aesthetic interest to the background. This is obviously true of the many science museums and museums of ethnology that have been springing up practically everywhere for the past few decades. Visitors to such museums are seeking information – about our natural, technological or sociological environment, about vanished customs or those that seem ‘exotic’ when compared with our own modern standards.

The Museum of Justice and Punishment certainly belongs in this second category. Most of the items in the collection are reliable markers of changes in Western customs and in methods of punishment. There is no lack of emotion here: it comes not from a sense of enchantment but, on the contrary, from the experience of catharsis – the purging of passion that Aristotle attributed to the theatre. At the risk of experiencing moral trauma, we should visit this museum if only to see more clearly – and reject – the pain that we have inflicted on one another in the past, and still do in other regions of the world.

Bordered by mountains and irrigated by the Sorgue river, the charming community of Fontaine de Vaucluse has museums and tourist sites in abundance. But the most unusual of them all is the museum opened in 1994 by Fernand Meyssonnier, state executioner in French Algeria from 1949 to 1962. Obliged by historic circumstances to take early retirement, Mr Meyssonnier turned his informed attention to gathering objects and documents related to crime and punishment. The museum’s permanent collection is the accumulation of thirty years of collecting in different countries. To put the finishing touches to his project,

Interrogation chair with nail-studded seat (sixteenth/seventeenth century) used by the Inquisition. In the display-case to the right is another instrument of this period – the hand-crusher with moulded hands to show how it worked.
he called on Jean-Louis Bessette, criminologist and professor of sociology at the University of Besançon. Bessette, in collaboration with the historian Jacques Miquel, carefully prepared the itinerary museum visitors would follow, adding the commentary needed to transform the collection into a source of cultural enlightenment and not – as some expected – an outlet for every kind of sadistic fantasy. No one could regard it in this way after walking the length of this 400 m² area and reading the signs created by Jean-Louis Bessette, especially: ‘The objects, instruments and documents displayed in this museum are veritable keys to the doors of memory, inspiring us to reflect on justice and punishment through the ages.’

Although free of all ambiguity, this angle on our own civilization can still send shivers down the spine. There are photographs and objects in the museum’s collection – like the minuscule Chinese shoe – that remind us that the practice of constraining and marking the human body has often been dictated by ritual or aesthetic considerations. Everyone has seen pictures of scarified skin or of African women who deliberately insert a series of rings to stretch out their necks or lips. But a body that has been tortured does not come into the same category at all. It bears deadly and irremediable witness, exposed for all to see, of the crime committed. Marking a social outcast, it represents expiation and not initiation, through the slow ‘art’ of suffering. Because, as Michel Foucault wrote: ‘Torture is a technique and cannot be put in the same category as the extreme of lawless rage.’

Housed in a display-case just inside the museum’s entrance, the Nuremberg Virgin (iron maiden, thirteenth century) is emblematic of eras when justice dramatized the violence of power. The iron maiden’s interior is studded with sharp points. It is easy to imagine the horrible death of the victim enclosed in the belly of the terrifying machine as its arms were brought together. In comparison, the chastity belt (purchased from the writer Roger Peyrefitte) and the trap for thieves, displayed a little further on, might seem trivial or ridiculous. But their purpose is also to constrain the flesh with iron.

The Inquisition and the ancien régime

The Inquisition emerged within the Catholic Church in the thirteenth century. Its purpose was to combat heresy, and its method was torture, to force suspects, most of whom had no idea of what crime they were accused, to confess. The Inquisition surpassed itself in Spain, where it continued until the nineteenth century.

On display here is an instrument known as the ‘brace’ (Spain, sixteenth century). About 60 cm long, the hollowed-out oblong is divided into three circular openings, each of a different diameter, in which were placed the victim’s neck, wrists and ankles. The person was thus forced into a
position of prayer for an indefinite period of time, which is what made the torture so unbearable. Here we see two interrogation chairs. On one the seat bristles with enormous nails. On the other, the seat is replaced by a crossbar and the armrests and backrest are studded with nails. How could anyone possibly sit in a chair like this? Among the pincers, pliers and whips of metal is an iron for branding the condemned, bearing at its end the three letters ‘IHS’, which stands for the Latin Jesus Homini Salvatori or ‘Jesus the Saviour of Man’. Further on, there are two hand-crushers, composed of weights and vices which were gradually applied to the thumb and fingers. The last word in torture was no doubt a procedure invented by an Italian shoemaker and called ‘cross-examination by Venetian mirrors’. A pyramid of stone was mounted on top of a tripod. The unhappy victim, with weights of approximately 20 kg attached both to his wrists and ankles, was raised to the uppermost point of the stone pile and as he was gradually impaled he was able to watch his own image in a set of mirrors. What value could be attached to any confession extorted in this way?

An enlarged reproduction of an engraving by Jacques Callot illustrates the various types of execution under the ancien régime. The form of execution reflected the gravity of the crime and the social class of the perpetrator: those guilty of regicide were drawn and quartered (Ravaillac, Damiens); those guilty of parricide or sacrilege were burned at the stake; common criminals were hanged; forgers were boiled alive; nobles had their heads chopped off by axe or sword. Crowds thronged around those bloody altars whose purpose was to inculcate submission to common values. But there were times when the spirit of rebellion took over.

Besides an axe, six executioner’s swords (of German origin) are displayed in a case. Warnings are engraved on the steel, for example, ‘Do no evil and you will not come before the court.’ One of the swords is ornamented with an allegory: a nude virgin, blindfolded, holds a double-edged sword in her right hand and a set of scales in her left hand; further up on the blade a knife emerges from a well. Justice and Truth, of course. These weapons rarely killed at the first stroke. An executioner’s hood, roughly woven canvas with an iron mask with simplified features, completes the display. Below is a sabre from the Indies, used for the same purpose, and an instrument to cut off the hands of thieves, appalling witness to an era which is not entirely over.

In the infernal drama played out by the authorities in the administration of justice, punishment by exposure to ridicule played an important role. The condemned person was held up as a negative example for other members of society. That was the purpose of the iron collar, whether single, double or in the form of a violin. The neck and hands of the prisoner were placed in the circular apertures and immobilized – he or she was left in the public square exposed to the judgement and ridicule of all. Masks were sometimes placed over the victim’s face to indicate the crime committed: a tongue sticking out represented calumny; a pig’s head drunkenness; a cock’s head pride. Every mask had tiny bells attached which drew attention to the parade of the victim through the streets.
The pillory was another form of public exposure: two stoneware models, each with collar and chains, are shown here. The skull-shaped wooden mask identified criminals whose death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment. Wearing the mask, they were paraded through the town before their final incarceration.

**The prisons and the camps**

One aspect of the administration of justice by the royal court – and not its worst – was a system of prisons which, like the various forms of torture, were adapted to the age, sex and status of the individual to be incarcerated. The Conciergerie was reserved for ordinary criminals. Debtors were sent to La Force, journalists to Sainte Pélagie, actors to Fort l’Évêque, women to the Petite Roquette and children to Saint Lazare. The Bastille – of which we see here a detailed model – was ‘host’ to political prisoners and nobles. And then there are the sinister *lettres de cachet*, the most arbitrary of punishments. Signed directly by the king, the letter was applicable without trial and for an indefinite period to an individual (often at the request of his or her own family) whose actions or behaviour had caused displeasure. More than 100,000 *lettres de cachet* were issued; an enlarged model of one of them, signed by Louis XV, is on display.

Henri de Maser (1725–1805), a military doctor known as ‘Latude’ who was famous for his escapes from prison, became sadly familiar with the system of *lettres de cachet*. He was imprisoned for the first time for trying, through trickery, to get into the good graces of the Marquise de Pompadour. He was imprisoned in the gaols of Vincennes, the Bastille and Charenton in turn, and between arrests and escapes he spent a total of thirty-five years behind bars. After his release in 1784 he became one of the leading figures in the struggle against despotism. His story is presented here with several of his letters and a first edition of his memoirs.

It was during this same period that the Italian jurist Cesare Beccaria produced (in 1764) his major work *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments* in which he proposed a more humanistic approach to justice. An example of the first French edition (1766) is displayed here.

The deportation of criminals to the *bagnes* (labour camp) represented the ultimate in social exclusion. It was reserved, as Bessette points out, for those who were considered incapable of living in society and had to be relegated to another place. Although it abolished slavery in 1848, the French Republic continued for another century to maintain these anti-Utopias inherited from the *ancien régime*, where living and working conditions were extremely harsh. The delicacy and beauty of the boxes sculpted by *bagnards* from coconut wood or *corozo* (vegetal ivory) which are on display are truly astonishing. In this hell on earth, these social outcasts managed to sustain the energy and the desire to create, and thus affirm their humanity.

The *bagnes* were not all outside metropolitan France, like Cayenne and Algiers. Many, including Toulon, Brest, Rochefort and Lorient, were on French territory. A display of old press clippings presenting the history of well-known *bagnards*, notably ‘Papillon’ and Seznec, is housed next to a display on *bagnes* for children. In one photograph, the children seem to be dancing around or playing a children’s game, but they have chains on their ankles. On display also are several types of restraint: just by looking at them we can imagine the suffering caused to those
forced to wear them for months or even years, night and day. In fact, many weigh between 4 and 6.5 kg apiece. The same display-case holds a scarificator, a device used between 1790 and 1804 to imprint the letter ‘T’ on the shoulder of prisoners condemned to forced labour (travaux forçés).

Kafka and his celebrated work The Penal Colony immediately come to mind. Reality had preceded fiction. The law was already being written in letters of blood.

The guillotine or the ‘egalitarian’ machine

Although there is no strict transition, the museum’s second room brings the visitor to justice in the modern era. Capital punishment in this period – at least in France – was dominated by a machine which left an enduring mark on the collective memory: the guillotine. Its principle of operation was, it should be recalled, initially dictated by humanitarian considerations. On the eve of the French Revolution, the ‘good doctor Guillotin’, at that time a deputy for Paris, introduced a method of execution that would spare the victim excessive suffering. A simple mechanism releases a sloping blade which, unlike the axe or the sword, severs the head instantly.

There had been precedents. By around 200 B.C. the Romans had already designed a decapitation system using a stone and an axe mounted on a wooden structure (we see a model of it here in the museum). The Italian mandralla, the German Diele and the Scottish ‘maiden’, all used as far back as the fifteenth century, may be regarded as the precursors of the guillotine. But none of them were the sole means of execution used.

Louis XVI was influenced by these humanitarian considerations, and on 25 March 1792 authorized, ironically, the serial manufacturing of Dr Guillotin’s machine: the legislative act, duly enlarged, occupies several panels here. With one per department, the whole of France was ‘equipped’. A certain Pelletier (sentenced to death for theft with violence) was the first to be inscribed, on 25 April 1792, on a long and bloody list. Between 21 August 1792 and 28 July 1794, no less than 18,000 people were decapitated, 2,795 of them in Paris alone. During the Revolution, grandiose plans were even made to create four-bladed and nine-bladed guillotines, but they were never actually carried out. Three times more sans-culottes ‘married the widow’ – one of the many nicknames given to the guillotine – than did the
nobles and members of the church hierarchy who were its primary targets.

The walls of this room are hung with portraits of famous victims of the guillotine: Louis XVI, naturally, but also Marie-Antoinette, Charlotte Corday, Danton, Lavoisier, Saint-Just and Robespierre (his portrait is accompanied by an autobiographical text). A sad ransom for glory. And what of all the others – anonymous victims whose main mistake was to live in troubled times?

An 1868 model of a guillotine is on display for all to see. This is clearly the cornerstone of the Meyssonnier collection. The guillotine, given pride of place under a vertical source of natural lighting, is gigantic (4.5 m high), massive (580 kg) and equipped with all its accessories: the wicker chest for the victim's body; the iron basket to catch the decapitated head; and, above all, the fixed blade weighing 40 kg. The blade fell from a height of 2.25 m at a speed of 6.5 m per second and cut off the head in two-hundredths of a second, an undeniable improvement on previous methods of execution and perfectly egalitarian too. From that moment on, there were no more sentences based on status or the type of crime committed. Article 3 of the Penal Code of 1791 was unequivocal: 'Every person sentenced to death shall have their head chopped off.'

One cannot suppress the odd shudder when contemplating that appalling machine, or prevent oneself from imagining for an instant what it must have felt like to be bound hand and foot, with one's head resting on the stand. Then one really does see the guillotine as the 'malevolent altar' of which Robert Badinter spoke. Although it has been completely transformed into a symbol, the past to which the guillotine belongs is still recent. The guillotine was used for the last time in France in Marseilles on 10 September 1977 for the execution of Djandoubi Hamida. One year before, the execution of Christian Ranucci had revived public controversy: was he really the killer? Does the modern state always have to respond to the illegitimate violence of individuals with legitimate violence? That question is now being asked more and more often.

In addition to the many documents, including some about the unusual profession of executioner, other surprises await the visitor in this section of the museum. This trip to the landscape of torture – of our torture – will no doubt help visitors to assess the changes in our attitudes to suffering and punishment. And also to ask themselves what era of justice we are in now. Among the reflections of Pascal that punctuate the visit, this one is particularly noteworthy: 'Nothing, by reason alone, is just in itself; everything changes with time. Any custom is equitable simply because it is accepted. Anyone going back to its first principle will destroy it.'

Notes


2. Michel Foucault, Surveiller et punir [Guard and Punish], (see especially the chapter: 'L'éclat des supplices'), Paris, Gallimard, 1975.

Forum

Museum International continues its forum for current thinking on important museum questions in a slightly modified format. Readers are invited to reply to the questions at the end of the article so that we may publish their views on the most significant and perhaps controversial topics of the day. Kenneth Hudson, Director of the European Museum Forum, which includes the European Museum of the Year Award, and author of fifty-three books on museums, social and industrial history and social linguistics, including the well-known Museums of Influence, will continue to act as our agent provocateur. He will set out the issues as he sees them, so as to elicit discussion and comment, which we hope will provide a rich source of new ideas for the international museum community. Do join in the debate!

Is the creation of museum education departments misguided?

This is an age in which people who catch rats and mice are called rodent elimination officers and personnel managers have become directors of human resources. It is therefore hardly surprising that those who look after parties of schoolchildren visiting museums should be dignified by the title of education officers. No great harm is done and if this form of re-baptism produces an increase in morale one is bound to wish it well, however much one may privately ridicule it.

But in the case of what are now becoming almost universally known as museum education officers there are certain real dangers involved, especially when an office grows into a department. To start with, the word ‘education’ itself is far from being a precise term. Children are not necessarily being ‘educated’ when they attend school, and a great many students, alas, do not emerge from universities as educated people. ‘Education’, if it means anything at all, implies a gradual widening of intellectual and emotional horizons, a progressive increase in curiosity and tolerance, and a never-ending eagerness to add to one’s stock of knowledge. To say that any process of formal education achieves or furthers these ends is often to indulge in gross flattery. An objective observer of the educational scene has all-too-often to comment: ‘Would only that it were so.’

True education is essentially a highly personal and largely accidental affair. It can be fostered just as easily and surely by unaided wandering around museums, discovering items of interest and stimulus, as by what is in effect the classroom transferred to the museum. Just as compulsory religious instruction in schools does not necessarily lead to religious conviction and practice in adult life, so compulsory attendance at museums cannot be guaranteed to produce new generations of young adults anxious to visit museums. Any attempt to conscript human beings is very likely to produce an eventual hostile reaction.

Why then have museums been so eager to set up education departments? One may suggest that there are three main reasons. The first is that museums feel under pressure to justify their existence and to say that their chief purpose is ‘educational’ sounds impressive, even if one does not ask them to define ‘educational’. The second is that increasingly museums are in the numbers game, wishing or compelled to expand their visitor numbers at all costs. Adult visitors are volunteers, willing to come to museums or stay away from them as they please, but schoolchildren are conscripts, forced to come to museums whether they want to or not – mostly they are happy not to be in school for a few hours – and their predictable, guaranteed attendance provides a most welcome addition to the visitor figures. And the third, but not completely unworthy reason, is that an ‘education department’ often, probably usually, provides a museum with greatly appreciated extra funds from official sources. Money for a museum is one thing, but money for ‘education’ is quite another.

The truth is surely that either the museum as a whole is ‘educational’ or it is not. For those with eyes to see and ears attuned to listening, anything is ‘educational’. A visit to a doctor’s waiting-room, a supermarket, or a
football match can be highly ‘educational’, even if their publicized aim is not educational at all. If, therefore, a museum hives off its educational function to an education department, it is abdicating its main responsibility, which is that of using its collections and displays to change human attitudes and increase sensitivity and awareness. To declare that this is the business of the ‘education department’ is like a school saying that improvements in spelling and grammar are the concern of the staff of the English department and of nobody else.

It is only fair to point out that many ‘education departments’ pay attention to opportunities with adults as well as with children. They organize lectures, guided tours, discussions and concerts, which succeed or fail by their merits and by effective publicity. Some are excellent, and, to a lesser extent, adults are being catered for but those in between are being discreetly abandoned.

Kenneth Hudson

Questions for readers: please send your replies bearing the reference ‘Forum – Education Departments’ to The Editor, Museum International, UNESCO, 7 place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP (France).

1. Does your museum have an ‘education department’, under whatever name, and if so, what does it do?
2. Assuming that you have one, when was it set up? Why?
3. What kind of person is in charge of the ‘education department’? What is this person’s background and experience?
4. How should one judge whether an ‘education department’ is being successful or not?
5. Do you consider the main purpose of your museum to be ‘educational’?