
EDITORIAL



At first glance, the preservation of artworks and of cultural heritage in general may appear as a fairly exotic discipline, a possibly dispensable luxury entailing a lot of effort. Conservation is sometimes seen as a direct antagonist with respect to the highly prestigious creative processes and the development of new value and knowledge.

In contrast to this, I would describe the resources invested into the preservation of cultural heritage as a remunerating investment into our future.

Having been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2008, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio stated: "We are all the echo of older stories". Referring to Marcel Proust he added: "There is no invention, there is only remembrance".

One has not to go as far as Le Clézio to recognize that evolution and sustainable development has to be based on an exhaustive knowledge of the past.

Beside historiography, the examination of our past with humanistic and scientific methods depends on well-preserved, unadulterated, materialised historic evidence. Examination of the artefact may reveal important facts, allowing us to check theories about the past and to develop new ones. Much can be learned from historic artefacts: not only about their genesis but also about their uses and their travel through time.

For this reason the preservation of cultural heritage is among the more important social responsibilities. All measures adopted in the framework of conservation-restoration therefore have to guard the aged original substance. Any intervention has to be clearly recognizable, reversible and thoroughly documented.

The discipline of conservation-restoration is an empirical science, devoted to the prevention and treatment of the decay of objects of cultural heritage. It has – however – nothing to do with erratic actions that attempt to give an apparently more convenient, more beautiful look to historic objects. Preservation has to be founded on comprehensible concepts, not on individualistic preferences.

Natural sciences play an important role in conservation-restoration. In 2001 CHIMIA dedicated a special issue to 'Art and Chemical Sciences'. It is a great pleasure to link to this issue and to add articles referring to current developments in the field.

The characterization of historic materials used in the creation of cultural objects is one of the classical fields involving chemical sciences. The articles by Christoph Herm and by Grundmann and Richter may be seen in this context. Wörle and coworkers describe the adaptation of a well-established analytical method to the special needs of conservation studies while the article by Anna Comiotto documents the miniaturisation of a plasma source for restoration treatment purposes. A thorough understanding of the chemistry of degradation is a central step towards successful preservation of the objects. The contributions by Andreas Buder, René Larsen and by Käser and Roduit exemplify this latest tendency in conservation science.

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