

“Saving the Now: Crossing Boundaries to Conserve Contemporary Works”

A student experience

On 12th - 16th September 2016, the biennial Congress of the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC) took place in Los Angeles, inside the elegant Millennium Biltmore Hotel. The conference “Saving the Now: Crossing Boundaries to Conserve Contemporary Works” was held in collaboration with the International Network for Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) and the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI).

A huge number of speeches animated five days dedicated to the international debate on contemporary art conservation, disclosing case studies and theoretical researches.

Beyond the technical program, a scheduled series of social events allowed an exclusive access to some of the city museums (MOCA, LACMA, The BROAD). Organized tours gave the participants the opportunity to explore the streets of LA, its architecture and street art, or to discover the “behind the scenes” of the main museums and their conservation labs.



Opening event at MOCA



During the tour at Getty Museum Conservation Lab

The attendance was strong: participants came from all over the World.

Students and professional grants increased the accessibility to the event. I was able to attend my first IIC Congress thanks to one of these grants. It was also my first time in the United States, and that was great too!

During the days of the conference many themes were discussed: artist's materials; theory and decision-making; archives and documentation; the role of the artist in the conservation decisions; acquisitions and commissions; new needs in conservation; issues involving replicas; specific issues in protest art, street art, time-based media and outdoor sculptures conservation, just to name a few of them.



The Congress

Ihor Poshyvailo's speech, invited as a guest to speak about the artistic expression of the Ukraine Revolution and its preservation, was very touching. He described the recent Ukrainian uprising and the major role that artists had in it, as well as the constant attempt to promote protest art. In order to give value to the creativity of peace, a museum of the revolution was also founded.

The mutual influence of the social context in conservation decision-making and the social impact of the conservation by itself was underlined in many occasions. These implications entail a great responsibility and confer an extreme relevance to the evaluation phase of the conservation process.

Many examples showed how conservative solutions may successfully take into account the whole complexity of technical, aesthetic, historical and social values linked to the artworks.

In many cases, theoretical studies on the decision-making processes proved that contemporary art conservation and traditional art conservation have more things in common than one would expect. Ethical and philosophical studies, as well as decision-making models are tools valid for both.

To understand the peculiarities of single cases, an interdisciplinary approach may virtuously employ, in a methodic and focused way, information coming from science, history of art, archival documentation and interviews. Especially in street art conservation, useful information may also come from journalism and social media. In order to translate these heterogeneous data into guidelines and practically applicable methods, the role of the conservator is fundamental.

I am glad to have had the opportunity to attend this important event while beginning to work on my final project of my Master Degree course.

I met students and experts: they gave me useful advices, sharing studies and information, helping my current researches and giving me strength for the ones to come.

Today, more than ever, a dialogue between different traditions is possible. A wide discussion may help all of us to act in the best possible way, using all of the available theoretical and technical tools. The attention given to contemporary art in these years is maybe providing, consciously or not, a great opportunity of development. The challenge represented by contemporary art materials, with their specific degradation and conservative issues, can't be faced only by single professionals or institutions. Plastics are a good example of this, but not the only one. The number of topics we have to study and analyze is so vast that sharing information and researches has become an unavoidable necessity. This is even more relevant in order to keep the positive aspects that every tradition carries, overcoming its limits. Many speeches underlined that this dialogue is a necessity that goes above duty.

Events such as the IIC Congress are essential to create the indispensable connections and conditions for making this happen.

A [blog](#) on the IIC website was created to allow even people who wasn't physically attending the conference to be aware of the main topics of it, of the participants' opinions and to take part in the discussion from everywhere, anytime.

The increasing number of networking platforms makes it easier to be constantly updated and interconnected.

When I entered the Biltmore Hotel, on the first day of the congress, I didn't know what to expect from it. Seeing so many of the experts who wrote the books and the articles which I had studied over the years was extremely thrilling. Little by little I understood I wasn't there just to attend passively to a conference. I was in the middle of an international community of which I was also a part of and with which I could create connections for real and active collaborations.

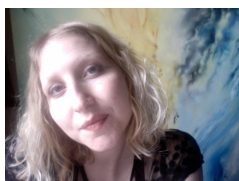
I believe this is a precious experience, especially for students like me that are just beginning to meet the conservation world and its challenges.



Student lunch



Closing party



Maria Laura Petruzzellis is now starting her final year of the Master Degree in Art Conservation at the "Opificio delle Pietre Dure" in Florence, specializing in conservation of easel paintings, polychrome wood sculptures and syntethic materials of contemporary art. For her final project she is studying a reverse painting on glass realized by Kurt Seligmann in 1939.