

THE INCCA MENTORING PROGRAMME: CONNECTING, SHARING AND GROWING TOGETHER

By Karen te Brake-Baldock and Dr Rachel Rivenc

Many of us in the conservation world have had the good fortune of finding professional mentors and experiencing the benefits of mentorship.



INCCA logo. Courtesy of Karen te Brake-Baldock

Mentoring takes on a variety of forms and can require many different levels of involvement and commitment, but all variations tend to entail the mentee receiving advice and guidance on professional choices, career paths and work matters, help in making connections with colleagues, and career advancement in general. Successful mentoring, of course, relies on individual relationships. But finding a mentor does not always happen effortlessly, and many established conservators have very justified concerns about the time commitment of long-term mentoring schemes.

It should also be stressed that, if successful, a mentoring scheme should not only benefit the mentee but should benefit the mentor as well. Through mentoring, mentors gain direct exposure to the emerging talent pool and to a diverse range of thought, styles, personalities, and cultures, all of which can be very energizing. Thus mentoring also enriches the mentor's own career development, strengthening their coaching, mentoring, leadership, and management skills. They get satisfaction from imparting wisdom and experience to others in the profession without a huge time commitment—a sustainable way of giving back to the field.

INCCA (the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art) recently decided to spearhead its own mentoring programme that aims to connect emerging conservators (and those new to the conservation of contemporary art) with recognized and established conservation professionals without it being a burden on either party. The programme is focused on crafting effective one-on-one mentoring experiences around specific short-term activities; any longer-term professional relationships that might result would be seen as an added bonus rather than the main goal of these activities.

As the largest and most active network for professionals associated with the conservation of contemporary art, INCCA is uniquely placed to explore and initiate mentoring opportunities that are well-structured and will improve the networking benefits for its members and the field. Initially, the INCCA mentoring programme will consist of two schemes:

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

This scheme pairs the mentee with a mentor in the lead-up to, and during, a major conference at which the mentee is presenting a paper or poster:



INCCA Speed mentoring session during the SBMK Summit, 15 November 2018, RCE, Amersfoort, The Netherlands. Photo: Karen te Brake-Baldock



Left and right Images: INCCA Speed mentoring session during the SBMK Summit, 15 November 2018, RCE, Amersfoort, The Netherlands. Photo: Karen te Braak

- In the lead-up to the conference, the mentor gives direct advice to the mentee on her/his/their presentation or poster, giving useful feedback on the content, format, and delivery. This interaction largely takes place via email, phone calls, or video conferencing.
- During the conference, the mentor agrees to take the mentee under her/his/their wing and makes introductions to other established professionals in the field, drawing attention to the work of the mentee.
- After the conference there is no further required commitment by the mentor, although it is hoped that a long-term relationship might develop between the pairing.

SPEED MENTORING

Inspired by and modelled after speed dating, this scheme creates the chance to have short periods of one-on-one time with established professionals in the field without all the normal distractions associated with conferences:

- A list of established mentors is circulated in the lead-up to a conference, and potential mentees can book a short individual session (currently set at 10 minutes) with one of the listed participants.
- The topic of the conversation is left entirely up to the mentee. He/she/they can ask questions and talk about the mentor, themselves, or about the field in general.
- During this time, the pair may not be interrupted, and at the end of the allocated time period, the mentee must leave punctually to allow the next mentee to sit down with the mentor.

Both schemes were first implemented at the joint conference of the 2018 SBMK Summit and SBMK Day on Plastics in November. After a call to all conference participants, seven emerging professionals (three of which gave full papers, and the other four presented posters) requested to take part in the conference presentation scheme. The three papers were:



e-Baldock

mentoring session, conducted during the lunch break on the first day of the Summit (held at the RCE building in Amersfoort).

The following 10 mentors agreed to participate: Tim Bechthold (Head of Conservation, Die Neue Sammlung, Munich), Lydia Beerkens (senior conservator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Art Conservation and Research Institute (SRAL), Maastricht), Pip Laurenson, Tom Learner (head of science, Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles), Klaas Jan van den Berg (senior conservation scientist, RCE, Amsterdam), Thea van Oosten (an independent conservation scientist and advisor, Amsterdam), Vivian van Saaze, Muriel Verbeeck, Sandra Weerdenbeg (head of conservation, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), and Glenn Wharton (clinical associate professor in museum studies, New York University). Each mentor saw three or four mentees during the session; in total, close to 40 mentees were spoken to.

The general feedback from both mentors and mentees was extremely positive. For the presentation scheme, mentees found the mentors to be approachable, easy to talk to, and gave excellent advice and encouragement throughout the time period. There was some ambiguity, however, in how effective and willing the mentors had been to help extend the mentees' professional networks by introducing them to peers and experts; the reported responses ranged from total agreement to total disagreement. This part of the scheme is undoubtedly the most intrusive for the mentor, where they/she/he has committed to allocating time at the conference for this activity to benefit the mentee instead of participating in other activities or catching up with colleagues in their/his/her usual manner. It is likely that this aspect of the scheme will need to be emphasised for future events so that all expectations are managed more effectively.

The speed mentoring scheme received an 87% positive response rate through the evaluation form and was scored at over 80% as being "very useful". Some of the comments given include:

"very interesting to be able to chat with people I wouldn't have spoken to!"

"This is an amazing exercise I encourage to do it again. Thank you!"

"What a great idea! It is much easier to approach someone [in this way]."

- "Stewarding voices: negotiating the '(re-)interview'," given by Rebecca Gordon, a private conservator in the UK, who recently completed her PhD at the University of Glasgow (mentored by Pip Laurenson, head of Collection Care Research, Tate, London)
- "How actions come to matter. Decision-making in the conservation of performance art," given by Hélia Marcal, a PhD student at the New University of Lisbon (mentored by Vivian van Saaze, assistant professor, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Maastricht University and managing director of Maastricht Centre for Arts and Culture, Conservation and Heritage (MACCH))
- "From artist intention to public perception: conserving and displaying three interactive artworks of Piero Gilardi," given by Flavia Parisi, a PhD student from the Polytechnic of Valencia (mentored by Rachel Rivenc, project specialist at the Getty Conservation Institute).

The posters were given by:

- Tjerk Busstra, an A/V art handler, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (mentored by Stephanie de Roemer, Glasgow Museums)
- Valeria de Angelis, a private painting conservator in Italy (mentored by Barbara Oetl, University of Regensburg, Germany)
- Gaia Fagiolo, a private conservator in Italy (mentored by Karen te Brake-Baldock, Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE) and INCCA coordinator)
- Sofia Gomes, PhD student at the New University of Lisbon (mentored by Muriel Verbeeck, professor at Ecole Supérieure des Arts Saint-Luc de Liège).

But the more visible aspect of the scheme was the speed

The main criticism received was in relation to the time allotted for each speed mentoring slot. For some 10 minutes was the perfect length, but for others it felt far too short. Of course, the shortness of the time slot is what defines this scheme; it is the only way that a relatively large number of people can meet each other without impinging too greatly on the mentors' time. It really should only be viewed as a way to initiate a discussion or relationship.

INCCA is currently making preparations to run both schemes at two more international conferences; one in Mexico City and one in Maastricht. Keep your eyes open for more announcements, or sign up to receive INCCA's newsletter which can be done on the [INCCA.org](https://www.incca.org) homepage. Scroll down and look for the large orange "Subscribe" button on the right hand side of the page to sign up. You can also find more information here: <https://www.incca.org/incca-mentoring-programme>



Karen te Brake-Baldock obtained a BA in Arts & Media Management followed by an MA in European Arts Management in 2002 from the Utrecht School of the Arts. She works at the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE) in the Cultural Heritage Laboratory where she is responsible for the coordination of INCCA and is caretaker of the material reference and sample collections of the lab.



Dr Rachel Rivenc is head of conservation and preservation at the Getty Research Institute (GRI). She is a member of the steering committee of INCCA, and the coordinator of the Modern Materials and Contemporary Art (MMCA) Working group of ICOM-CC. Prior to that Rachel was part of the Modern and Contemporary Art Research Initiative at the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI).