



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for
Cultural Materials
Conservation



INTRODUCTION TO CONSERVATION

Conservation is a professional discipline that focuses on the care and preservation of cultural material.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

WHAT IS CONSERVATION?

Cultural material conservation is the care and preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and material.

Conservation activities may include:

- Preservation – activities that slow down or minimise deterioration of materials and heritage.
- Restoration – treatment of artefacts to re-establish meaning and value.
- Examination, documentation, and research.
- Advice – relating to aspects such as collection storage, display, transport, and treatment.
- Training and education.

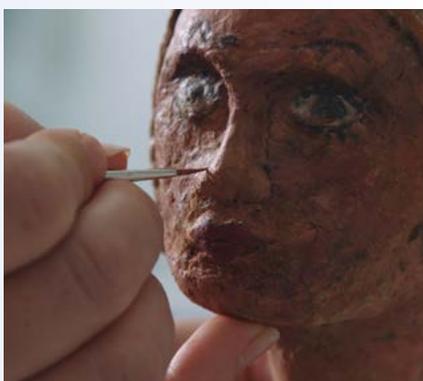
Conservators are trained to understand, through thorough assessment and research, how objects and artworks are made, and to manage changes in materials that occur over time. They are also trained in specialised techniques to slow and even reverse damage or deterioration.



Examination and documentation of artworks



Environmental monitoring



Conservation treatment of artefacts

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To preserve objects into the future, conservators focus on two main streams of activity:

- Preventive care
- Conservation treatment

Both activities work together to slow the deterioration of cultural material.

Preventive care aims to manage the environment. Deterioration, such as fading, shrinking, staining, and embrittlement of materials, can be reduced by sustaining stable conditions. Stable conditions are maintained by controlling:

- Temperature/humidity
- Light
- Mould
- Pests
- Dust and Pollutants
- Use of appropriate storage, packing and display materials

Conservation treatment is performed when an item is damaged and requires repair to restore it, stabilise it or extend its life. For example:

- Pages of a fragile book may require treatment to stabilise tears and stop them from extending.
- The varnish on a painting may have discoloured over time and require removal to restore the work back to its original colour.
- A broken ceramic work can be repaired with specialist adhesives and returned to its former shape.

Conservation treatment involves the careful documentation of the object before treatment, documentation of the treatment undertaken – including the materials and processes used, and finally recommendations for care after treatment. At times, detailed scientific analysis of materials is required. Typically, artist and/or community research or consultation is undertaken.

Conservators don't necessarily return an object to an 'as new' state. When appropriate, there is an acknowledgement of the history of the object. Important, historical features are often retained rather than removed or restored (more typical of archival, archaeological, or ethnographic items).

ETHICS

Conservators adhere to strong ethical guidelines to ensure their work delivers minimal intervention, which means to approach cautiously and do only what is necessary. When undertaking an intervention treatment, all materials used for conservation treatment should be easily reversible.

Conservators maintain their professional skills through continued professional development, education programs, research and engagement.

RESOURCES



Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) – Code of Ethics, Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Materials, available online: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/d2wi>



1999 The Decision Making Model for the Conservation and Restoration of Modern and Contemporary Art, Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art/ Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, available online: <https://sbmk.nl/source/documents/decision-making-model.pdf>



T. Malkogeorgou, "The Ethics of Conservation Practice: A Look From Within." V&A Conservation Journal no. 52 (Spring 2006): 10-12, available online: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/t2wi>



F. Matero, "Ethics and policy in Conservation." Getty Newsletter 15, no.1 (2000): 5-9, available online: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/m2wi>