

The Importance of Knowledge-Sharing Tools

Interview with Dr Muriel Verbeeck,
École Supérieure des Arts Saint-Luc de Liège, University of Liège, Belgium

ICCROM: Thank you for this interview. Could you please describe your background and your various roles?

Muriel Verbeeck: I am a historian and philosopher by training and currently a full professor of history, theory, and ethics of conservation and restoration at the École Supérieure des Arts Saint-Luc in Liège. I am also a researcher in the Art, Archaeology and Heritage Research Unit at University of Liège, as well as the scientific editor of CeROArt, an open access journal. CeROArt is devoted to a multidisciplinary approach to the conservation, restoration and display of works of art and offers a space for exchanges among historians, art historians, philosophers, heritage scientists, conservators and restorers, as well as representatives from the wider world of museums. For some years now, CeROArt has been publishing articles from first-time authors while supporting their studies. These include young conservator-restorers who have recently graduated from master's degree programmes or doctoral students preparing their theses.

What is your relationship with ICCROM?

I have known ICCROM for a long time now, but specifically in 2017 I arrived to carry out research into the history of conservation theories. During a stay as an ICCROM Fellow, I worked on what distinguishes the founding texts, what links them, and sometimes what sets them apart – less often than you might think. For me, examining the history of conservation theories, by highlighting contextual characteristics, is a way of putting so-called 'absolute truths' into perspective, while encouraging reflections in terms of continuity and evolution, rather than rupture. The project, initiated at ICCROM, has had a certain impact, because in 2018 I was able to take advantage of a research grant from the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles to continue the work. It also has become an important line of research for the ConnecTheo research group, created recently with the backing of the Périer-D'Ieteren Foundation.

During my stay at ICCROM, I came to appreciate the richness of its Library and Archives. It's a truly remarkable and complete collection that has benefited over many decades from an intelligent acquisitions policy with a perceptible scientific and humanistic approach. More specifically, in restoration history and theory the study resources are unrivalled anywhere. I should also like to highlight the expertise and friendly helpfulness of the librarians and archivist, whose advice was particularly useful for me. The fruitfulness of research also depends on the climate, and ICCROM's is unmatched. Coming here is always a pleasure, and I return as often as I can.

How has this collaboration progressed in 2018?

It has moved to a new stage. At the suggestion of the librarians, we came up with the idea of creating an automatic upload of articles appearing in CeROArt directly in the ICCROM Library catalogue. There they will have a far greater visibility and will be of greater use to the research community. This has been achieved over 2018 by means of data files processed by CerROArt which were transferred through MarcEdit software and integrated into the ICCROM catalogue. This makes the articles visible and available to a much wider audience – not just at ICCROM but to all those who connect to it through various information-sharing networks. These include the URBIS network, which brings together the libraries of all the foreign academies in Rome; the BCIN network, which contains records from five major conservation institutions (ICOMOS, CCI, Getty Research Institute, Smithsonian Institution and ICCROM); and the Electronic Journals Library or EZB, managed by the University of Regensburg in Germany. This last portal assembles in an online format nearly 100 000 journals coming from some 600 libraries.

For you, what is the value of ICCROM and its Library?

ICCROM's reputation is already well established, but it takes a period of living and working there to appreciate why its reputation is so well founded. Discovering how alive the institution is, the role of different players, its most recent achievements, its engaged and devoted staff, and their sheer delight in sharing knowledge and expertise – all this is an experience with no substitute.

At a time when many institutions are facing draconian budget cuts in access to knowledge, ICCROM is a beacon of hope – its Internet presence is a real plus, and the catalogue is quite remarkable. Let's hope that skilled staff remain available for acquisitions and cataloguing, useful for researchers and essential for students writing their theses. Conservation researchers cannot really survive without the resources and opportunities that the Library offers.

Let's keep the flame alive!



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