

The axiological and teleological dimensions of fine art heritage protection in conservation- restoration theory

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1. INTRODUCTION

It has been almost 60 years since the first publication of Cesaro Brandi's *Teoria del Restauro* (1963). The book was a milestone in the conservation-restoration profession, being ultimately the work that definitively established the theory of restoration. The bulk of the book consists of lectures that Brandi had held at the ICR (*Istituto centrale per il restauro*) in Rome since its founding in 1939. He was also the first director of this core Italian conservation-restoration institution. Three decades prior, at the International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments in Athens in 1931, the first international Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments (called the *Carta del restauro*, or Athens Charter (Doktrina 1, 2003, 17-21)) was adopted, marking the end of the era in which the practice of restoration essentially amounted to

arbitrary reconstructions.¹ The Charter emphasises among other things the ethical principles of respect for each historical and artistic work and treating conservation-restoration interventions on a case-by-case basis. The Athens Charter marked the first time that the fundamental principles of cultural heritage protection were formulated at an international level.

Among the more important topics addressed by Brandi (Brandi, 2005) are the recognition of the physical, historical and aesthetical nature of a work of art and of the necessity of conserving the artwork as a whole; the ethical principles of visibility and reversibility of the additions of material in restoration; the treatment of lacunae (gaps in the artwork due to damage) as disturbances and the search, informed by Gestalt psychology, for aesthetically pleasing ways of neutralising them using methods such as hatching and neutral tint; the issue of treating patinas and additions; the issue of falsifications and conservation of badly damaged works of art (ruins); preventive restoration.

Soon after the publication of Brandi's book, the Venice Charter (1964) was adopted, being the second international charter in the field of conservation and renovation of monuments and heritage sites. It brought the Athens Charter up to date and supplemented it with additional clarifications regarding certain principles of heritage conservation. With respect to conservation and restoration interventions, the Charter puts an even clearer emphasis on the aesthetical² and historical values of a monument, which should be conserved and made visible. Within these basic ethical principles the Charter puts additional emphasis on respect for the original material and authentic documents. If a work of fine art is composed of multiple historical layers, the contribution of each individual period must be respected. Uncovering and additions are only acceptable to a limited extent, and all additions must be both harmonious with the whole and clearly distinguishable from the original parts. The moment any assumptions come into play, the restoration must stop. (Doktrina 1, 2003, 25–28) That same year, the American Group of the IIC (International Institute for Conservation) published the first recommendations for professional standards and procedures, first in the article *The Murray Pease Report* (Anon., 1964) and afterwards, in an expanded form, in a book containing, among other additions, an ethical codex for conservators-restorers of artworks. (Anon., 1968)

In 1972, the Italian *Carta del restauro* was composed, which was based on the principles outlined in the Venice Charter and the ideas developed in Brandi's book. (Anon., 1972) This latest charter defines

1 Source: *Carta del Restauro*, 1972, 1.

2 The Athens Charter uses the term *artistic* value instead of *aesthetic* value.

restoration as any intervention into the material of an artwork executed with the aim of preserving its material integrity and fully facilitating both its perusal and its transmission into the future. The charter also sets out in more detail the ethical principles and guidelines pertaining to the various genres of art heritage, fine art or other, although these are already outdated in some places. Inspired by the Roman conservation-restoration school represented by Cesare Brandi, the Florentine school soon followed with its own take on conservation-restoration theory, set out in works by Umberto Baldini and Ornelle Casazza.³ Their key contributions were novel solutions for in-painting of gaps in works of fine art in aesthetically pleasing ways using techniques they referred to as chromatic abstraction, colour selection and golden selection.

There have been noticeable shifts in the development of conservation-restoration theory, especially since the 1980s, and Brandi's thought has increasingly faced criticism. We have on the one hand the problem of his writing style, frequently unclear and allowing very different interpretations (Muñoz Viñas, 2016); on the other hand, some of the concepts are already becoming outdated, and the restoration of modern artworks raises questions and issues that Brandi had not (yet) addressed. One of the foremost critics is Salvador Muñoz Viñas, whose work *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (2005) seeks to establish a new, more modern conservation-restoration theory that extends Brandi's—now classical—thought. Muñoz Viñas rejects the notion of objectivity, of seeking some original truth, as well as the excessive influence of scientific conservation-restoration approaches in the classical theories. He proposes among other things a shift from objectivism to subjectivism, meaning a more creative and communicative approach to work, a shift from the preservation of truths to the preservation of meanings, to a more sustainable orientation and a more flexible ethics.

Many other authors have importantly contributed to the development of the modern school of thought regarding restoration, including Paul Philippot, Andrzej Tomaszewski, Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro, Terry and Chandra Reedy, Giovanni Carbonara, Barbara Appelbaum, Richard Smith, Stefan Michalski, Elizabeth Mary Pye, Jonathan Ashley-Smith, Isabelle Brajer, María José Martínez Justicia, and Denis Vokić. Dr. Denis Vokić is a conservator-restorer and an alumnus of UL ALUO whose focus includes restoration history, terminology and epistemology. Another important contribution to conservation-restoration theory and practice has been rendered by international institutions such as the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of

3 The two major works: Baldini, 2003; Casazza, 2007.

Cultural Property (ICCROM), Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC), Institute of Conservation (ICON), International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA), International Council on Monuments and Sites; International Committee on Theory and Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration (ICOMOS TheoPhilos), International Council of Museums; Committee for Conservation (ICOM-CC), European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (ECCO), and the European Network for Conservation-Restoration Education (ENCoRE).

Although an extensive corpus of theoretical texts in the field of conservation-restoration already exists, we have neither any translations into Slovene of even the fundamental works, nor researchers focusing on this field specifically. As a result, there is insufficient familiarity with conservation-restoration theory—contemporary in particular—not just among professionals in the wider field of cultural heritage protection, but also within the conservation-restoration profession itself. This lack of familiarity with contemporary theory and practice engenders a conviction—still ingrained in many places—that conservation-restoration cannot be an object of scientific research; that scientific questions are not something that conservators-restorers concern themselves with. The first item on our agenda is therefore to clarify what contemporary conservation-restoration is, and to answer, at least in basic terms, what the theoretical—especially teleological and axiological—issues and themes in contemporary conservation-restoration theory are, with an emphasis on the conservation of fine art heritage.

2. WHAT ARE THE SCOPE AND THE OBJECTIVES OF CONSERVATION-RESTORATION OF (FINE) ART HERITAGE?

Conservation-restoration is one of the activities under the umbrella of cultural heritage protection and differs in many ways from conservation and custodianship. The website of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia defines conservation as “an interdisciplinary discipline [combining] all types of policies, strategies, legal, administrative and technical measures as well as assignments in connection with cultural heritage and its preservation.” Conservation-restoration, by contrast, “comprises a variety of activities that are directly carried out on the heritage building or object with the purpose of facilitating its enjoyment, understanding and use.”⁴

4 Available at the website of the ZVKDS: www.zvkds.si/sl/podrocja/nase-delo (9 March 2021).

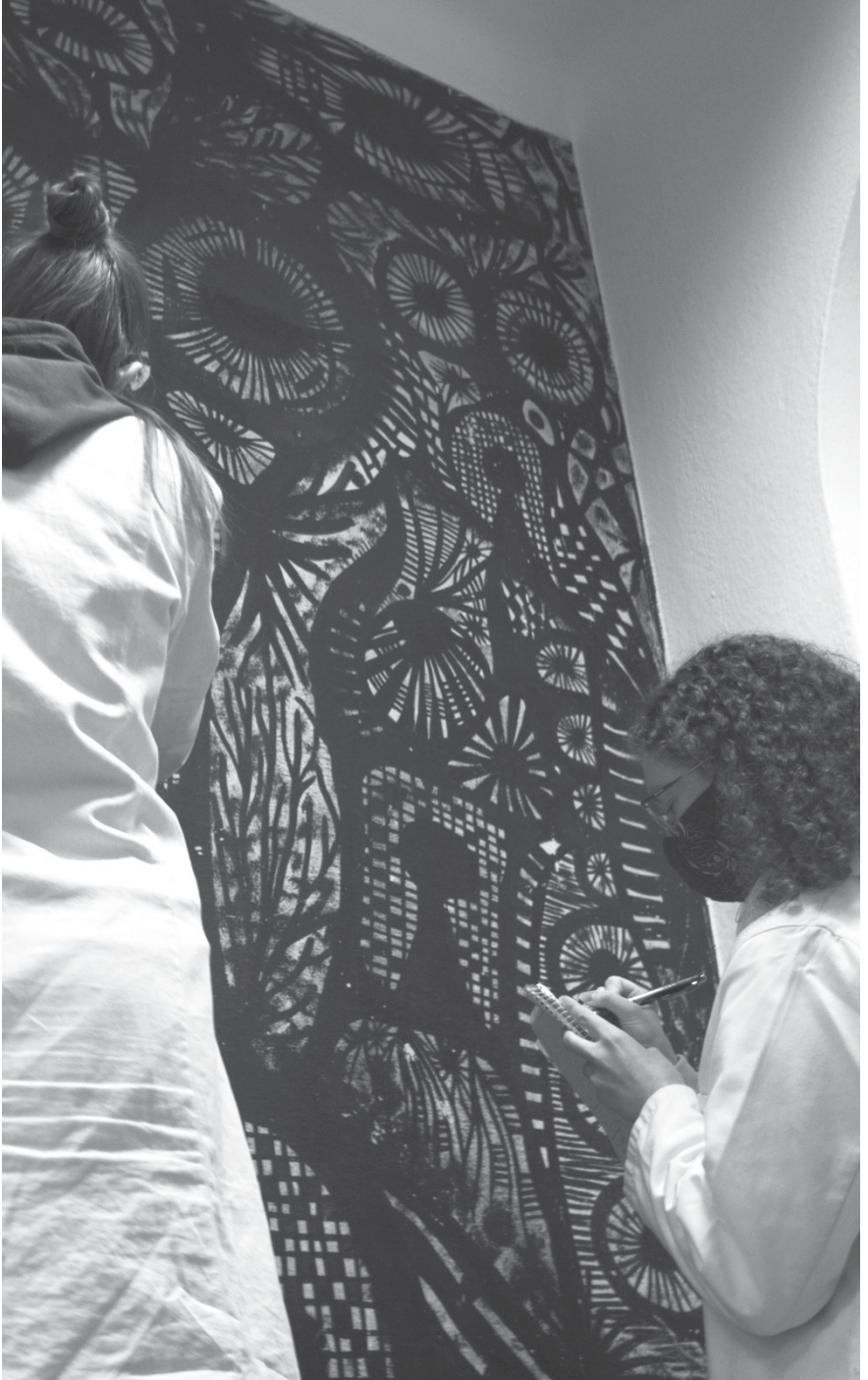


FIGURE 1: Students of conservation-restoration at the Department of Restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design of the University of Ljubljana examining a painting by Vasko Pregelj at the Jože Plečnik High School in Ljubljana (photo: Blaž Šeme, February 2020).



FIGURE 2: Painting on the north-facing side of the shrine in Notranje Gorice before (left) and after (right) the unprofessional restoration (source of photo: documentation of the ZVKDS, OE Ljubljana, March 2008)

This direct physical contact with objects of cultural heritage that characterises the conservation-restoration profession is what distinguishes the discipline from other professions such as conservation architect, landscape architect, historian, art historian, or ethnologist. In this sense, there is at least a partial similarity to the archaeological profession, as well as to professions such as nursing, general practitioner, specialist physician and surgeon. As in archaeology and medicine, there are certain physical operations in conservation-restoration that can be performed by staff of lesser qualifications, typically technicians. When dealing with fine art, however, operations including condition assessment, expert planning, intervention management and documentation and creating the final report with intervention analysis need to be carried out in accordance with ECCO⁵ guidelines by a highly qualified professional, a university-educated (at Master's degree) conservator-restorer (Figure 1).

The concept of physical conservation in the conservation-restoration field encompasses both direct conservation interventions (physical protection, cleaning, consolidation, etc.) and indirect interventions that contribute to better physical preservation: regular monitoring, documenting the condition and procedures, study/analysis of past conservation-restoration interventions, research and development of new

5 Source: E.C.C.O. Professional Guidelines (III). Available at: http://www.ecco-eu.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ECCO_professional_guidelines_III.pdf (9 March 2021).

materials and procedures for use in conservation-restoration, development of standards and a code of ethics, raising awareness, education, and presentation. The bungled restoration of the painting adorning the shrine at the crossroads in Notranje Gorice is representative of detrimental attempts at restoration performed by unqualified craftsmen-renovators (Figure 2). This particular example not only reflects the lack of artistic skill on the part of the “restorer”, but also unprofessionalism in the sense of a conspicuous lack of interdisciplinarity (no cooperation with conservators), prior analyses and studies and materials documenting the artwork’s condition before, during and after the interventions, respect for the original artwork, and other examples of disregard for the contemporary conservation-restoration ethics.

In Slovenian, as in most other European languages, the term restoration was used in lieu of conservation-restoration to refer to the craft and restorer instead of conservator-restorer for the profession until the final decades of the 20th century. In the Anglo-Saxon languages, by contrast, the terms conservation and conservator began displacing restoration and restorer as early as the 19th century. Even a cursory analysis of the evolution in the use of individual English words through time using the BNV⁶ web tool reveals that, since the beginning of the 20th century in particular, the word conservation (not always exclusively in the context of heritage conservation) was increasing in frequency. (Figure 3) This period coincides with the rise of a more scientific approach towards conservation-restoration and a more pronounced development of the profession, although the changes in the nomenclature are thought to have occurred earlier, in the 19th century, under the influence of the anti-restoration movement. (Vokić, 2012, 23) The first to begin implementing these changes is held to be Manfred Holyoake with the publication of *The Conservation of Pictures* in 1870. (Holyoake, 1870)

This change in nomenclature distinguished the old guard—the restorers—from the conservators-restorers in the modern sense. In Central Europe, at least, such an approach was impossible: since the end of 19th century, the word conservator had come to refer to experts (at first mainly architects and art historians) entrusted with the conservation of immovable cultural heritage, similar to how curators take care of the moveable cultural heritage in museums. The differences in nomenclature across different countries led to the adoption of the compromise term *conservator-restorer* at the 1984 ICOM-CC conference in Copenhagen.⁷

6 Available at: Google Books Ngram Viewer: <https://books.google.com/ngrams> (9 March 2021).

7 Quote: “(1) This term is used throughout this text, as a compromise, since the same professional is called, ‘conservator’ in the English speaking countries, and ‘restorer’ in those where Romance and Germanic languages are spoken”. In: *The Conservator-Restorer: a Definition*

The slow adoption of the new term is, at least to some extent, apparent from the chronological view comparing usage of the various names for the profession—conservation-restoration, painting conservation and painting restoration—as offered by the BNV tool. (Figure 4)

This admittedly awkward and long new term, conservation-restoration, has become established in our country, at least in professional publications, since it makes clear that the profession combines two basic activities that are closely related, yet also different: conservation, meaning physical preservation of existing objects, and restoration, as a kind of partial re-creation. Conservation in this sense is an intervention aiming to arrest or at least slow down the deterioration of an artwork, thereby physically conserving its existing qualities and significance. Restoration, by contrast, is an intervention through which we attempt to physically restore or highlight certain qualities (primarily aesthetic) of an artwork that had been diminished or lost through time. An alternative approach (Caple, 2000) breaks conservation-restoration down into three basic processes: investigation, revelation and preservation. Using a medical analogy, these processes represent anamnesis and diagnosis (investigation and revelation) and then preventive and curative care (direct revelation and preservation). All of these processes are documented, or informationally preserved.

3. INFORMATIONAL PRESERVATION AS ONE OF THE TASKS OF CONSERVATION-RESTORATION

One aspect of conservation-restoration—overlooked entirely by the classical restoration theory and not comprehensively addressed by the contemporary thought—is documentation, or, in a broader sense, *informational preservation*, a term coined by Muñoz Viñas (Muñoz Viñas, 2005, 23–25). It makes sense to place informational preservation into the context of the different levels, or the multi-layered nature, of (fine) art heritage preservation, in which it represents a method of indirect preservation through various approaches. The most indirect levels of preservation include oral tradition (intangible) and written sources (indirect, tangible). Next there are drawings or copies, a traditional means of indirect and tangible preservation that retains more of the information about the items of art heritage. An even more detailed, or comprehensive, way of preserving an image of an artwork is via high-quality photographs, 3D-scans or other modern optical methods. That said, this is still

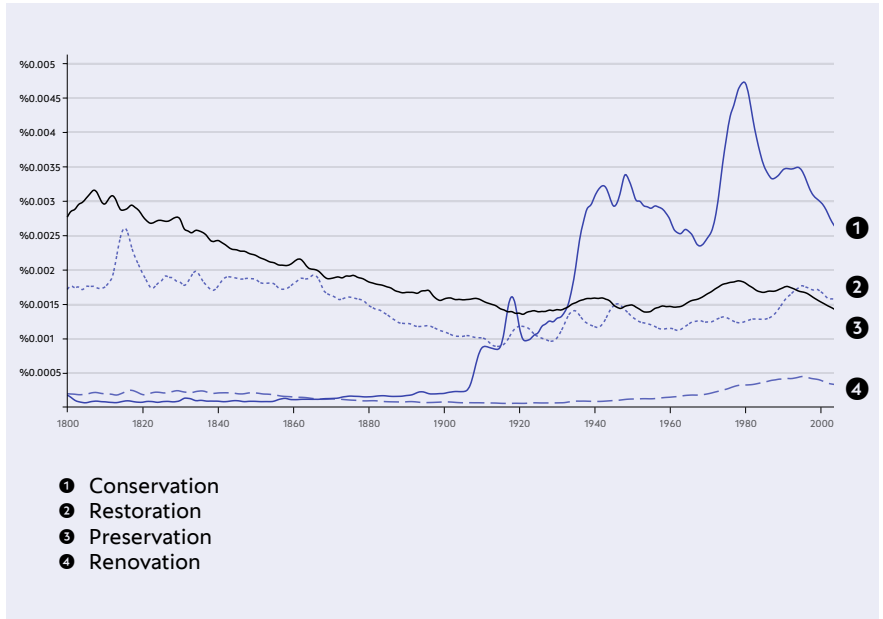


FIGURE 3: A chart comparing the use frequency of the words “conservation”, “restoration”, “preservation” and “renovation” in the Google Books online library collection, obtained using the Books Ngram Viewer. Viewing the 1800 to 2010 period (March 2021); available at: <https://books.google.com/ngrams>.

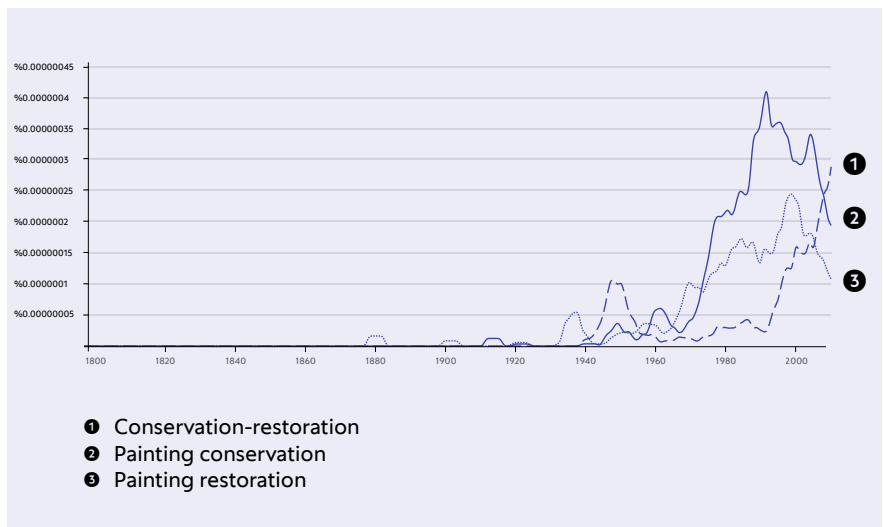


FIGURE 4: A chart comparing the use frequency of the terms “painting conservation”, “painting restoration” and “conservation-restoration” over a 100-year period (1910–2010) in the Google Books online library collection, obtained using the Books Ngram Viewer. (March 2021); available at: <https://books.google.com/ngrams>.

an example of indirect, informational preservation, which can be analogue or digital. In all these cases, it is only the visual aspect of the heritage that is preserved, a snapshot, in a sense, of the artwork. Even though direct preservation of fine art heritage in a maximally authentic tangible form represents the most important level of conservation, these lower levels of indirect preservation possess a significance of their own, particularly in the area of heritage documentation and promotion, as well as its protection.

Of the aforementioned approaches to preservation, oral tradition offers the least amount of reliability and completeness. We have an interesting example in the area of carnival mask preservation. Ethnologist Pavel Medvešček was seeking to reconstruct two old types of carnival masks, the *kotunik* and the *bobunik*, part of the Old Faith tradition of Posočje, based on the accounts given by two men. Something the two men could not agree on was what the headdresses of the two masks looked like; it took a third witness to satisfactorily resolve the disagreement. (Medvešček, 2015, 140–143) Now that the author—and probably the witnesses—are deceased, the author’s drawings of the carnival masks remain the only surviving indirect visual source of information about the appearance of the masks. This is an example of indirect visual-tangible preservation.

Heritage-related information in even purely textual sources, especially in the case of fine art heritage, is always incomplete.

In *Catechismus* (1550), Primož Trubar gives a picturesque description of how a Croatian painter created the wall paintings in the church of Trubar’s native village, Rašica: “He gave the saints, especially the apostles, large beards and moustaches in the Turkish and Croatian style.” (Stele, 1942, 167)

These paintings, sadly, no longer exist, with the same source reporting that they were destroyed by the Turks in 1528, together with the rest of the church furnishings. Taking this record and comparing it to surviving paintings of the “Croatian painters” in other locations, we get only an approximate idea of how the painting looked.⁸ When paintings are described in a more detailed and professional manner, we get a better, but still only partial, impression. Art historian France Stele gives in his field notes the following description of frescoes by “Croatian painters” in a filial church of Sts Phillip and James in Višnje in Suha Krajina, which no longer exist:⁹ “Frescoes were discovered on the walls of the nave, painted on a rather rough, uneven plaster. On the south wall next to the arch, part of the fresco depicting the Three Wise Men is preserved.

8 These particular issues were examined in detail by France Stele (Stele, 1942).

9 The old church burned down in 1943.



FIGURE 5: A watercolour painting by Franjo Golob depicting the wall painting from the church of Sts Phillip and James in Višnje, 1934 (source: Ministry of Culture; Cultural Heritage Directorate; INDOK center).

From left to right: Landscape with stylised flowers and orange trees /?/. Behind the beardless king riding a white horse is a page holding a gift, which is in the shape of a Gothic ciborium. In front of the king are two pages, the left one only partially preserved; the right one, wearing a cap in the Italian style, is drinking from a small cask. Next is a horse with a reddish mottled coat carrying a king; only the left half is preserved, with the head missing; wide-sleeved arms are extended backwards, holding

a gift in the shape of a Gothic ciborium. Marking the upper edge of the image is a decorative border: on a white background, flanked by red stripes, is a green vine with red flowers. The clothing depicted in the fresco shows Italian influence; the crude technique and white background recall similar paintings seen in Istria. The frescoes can be definitively dated to the 15th century, likely the second half.” (SI MK MKS-001-00916) Reading these lines, can we form an impression of the wall paintings described? Certainly, every reader will have formed a slightly different impression, and every artist a mental image of their own, since words cannot convey a picture in all its aspects. Each contemporary instance of conservation-restoration documentation (consisting of a work programme and a report) needs to include at least a brief description of the artwork as part of its general identifying information. The conservator-restorer needs to be able to identify and have solid understanding of the narrative-substantive (semantic) meaning of the artwork in question in the context of related artworks. This is also because such understanding can help and guide the intervention, especially in the stages of uncovering and cleaning of the artwork, and reconstructing the missing parts. A better way of preserving, in an indirect tangible way, the visual aspect of a particular work of art is by means of a drawing or watercolour. A portion of the fresco of the Three Wise Men from the Višnje church thus survives at least in the form of a watercolour sketch by the painter and restorer Franjo Golob. (Figure 5) This surviving rendition gives a better impression of the lost original than what we can glean from the description. At the same time, the art-historical description positions the painting more explicitly within the broader context.

Dating all the way back to the end of the 19th century, a precious legacy consisting of a number of drawings of Slovenian wall paintings was left by Ladislav Beneš and later several other artists. (Mohorčič, 2018) The professional documentation of conservators-restorers often includes drawings, particularly as part of graphical documentation showing the various technological characteristics of an artwork, the extent of damage and degree of preservation, and the interventions carried out on the artwork. Fine art heritage can be preserved in an indirect tangible or digital way by means of an image or a copy and a photograph. We now have more sophisticated digital techniques available, for example photographs in different regions of the electromagnetic spectrum, as well as 3D-scanning and printing, which can record and preserve even more information about an artwork. Matej Langus’s copies of Quaglio’s paintings of the old dome of the Ljubljana Cathedral are the oldest known copies of wall paintings in Slovenia. (Sitar, 2012, 54) The first decades after the Second World War were particularly prolific

in terms of copies of medieval wall paintings, some of which are now part of museum exhibitions, most of them in the permanent collection of the National Gallery. Nowadays, many copies of works of fine art are produced by conservators-restorers, in most cases to serve as a substitute for a vulnerable original in an outdoor location. In recent times, digital prints pasted onto facades have begun to complement painted copies. A copy may be a more or less accurate reproduction of the original, depending on the degree of preservation of the original or the archival sources and the skill of the copyist. They may approach the original not only in appearance, but also in terms of the technique.

4. THE AXIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF CONSERVATION-RESTORATION

A substantial part of conservation-restoration theory, both classical and contemporary, deals with issues regarding the axiological aspects of conservation-restoration. It examines which works of art are worth preserving, how to assess their value, how to preserve them appropriately, and how best to present and document the conserved-restored artworks and the interventions themselves. Some of these questions also extend into the fields of ethics and aesthetics.

Why the desire to preserve some works of fine art and not others? A reasonable answer would be that we choose to preserve because of some significance or value that the artwork holds for us. Preservation suggests a level of reverence towards the artwork. Whereas contemporary conservation-restoration places the highest value on the material preservation of the original artwork, this was rarely so in the past, especially if the work was in poor condition. The old approach to restoration was mainly about refurbishing and painting over the old, as well as creating it anew. France Kokalj explains this well in his article *From the documentation regarding the history of restoration in Slovenia* (Kokalj, 1972, 33):

“From the medieval period and all the way up to the present, wall paintings, for example, would be plastered over and repainted multiple times with the same or different motifs, usually according to the client’s wishes. This was done for varying reasons, most often the deterioration of wall paintings due to moisture etc., or a change in the artistic taste, emergence of a new style. These were interior renovations (or renovations of facades) and not renovations or restorations of wall paintings in particular. In the case of paintings on wood or canvas, the practice was the same. An artist taking an old picture, applying a new underpaint and painting the picture anew is effectively just reuse of the canvas (albeit



FIGURE 6: Traces of multiple depictions of St Christopher on the south-facing exterior wall of St John's church on Lake Bohinj (photo: Blaž Šeme, October 2016).

a previously painted one); this is not a restoration of the old painting.”

Restoring works of art used to be primarily the work of artists and craftsmen. An artwork would usually be restored by an artist of sufficient skill and with good command of the appropriate technique. Kokalj further explains that if a medieval painting workshop renovated a church with motifs different from the original ones, we cannot call this a restoration of the wall paintings; it is instead merely an artistic renovation of the church. It was not uncommon, however, for a client to want the painting renovated with the same motif, in which case the painting would be restored or renovated by overpainting the same motif over the original. This way, the church's paintings were retained

while maintaining the message (motif) of the originals. It would appear that the typical medieval or baroque client commissioning a restoration of wall paintings found physical preservation of the old, damaged (or merely outdated) artworks unnecessary; the important thing was to preserve a motif or even just the decorative function of a painting. The intervention was in most cases only an indirect and partial informational preservation of sorts.

Depictions of St Christopher on church exteriors represent a typical example of such an approach to restoration or renovation of wall paintings in Slovenia. The facade of St John's church in Ribčev Laz in Bohinj features no less than three layers of Gothic-period depictions of St Christopher. The saint looks different in each one, painted in the style that was typical for the time and the workshop of that particular painter. Per clients' request, the painters preserved the motif, the message represented by the saint, over the centuries. They were not asked to make any effort to preserve the previous painting. The only reason that the older paintings were preserved at all was that it was more economical to simply roughen the surface of the previous painted plaster and cover it with a layer of painting plaster—*intonaco*—than to re-do the base layer (*arriccio*). It is interesting to note that the newest—fourth—St Christopher, which dates to the 19th century, was not painted over the previous ones but next to them. (Figure 6) This could indicate that a shift towards a more respectful attitude regarding the preservation of old artworks was already underway at that time. Traces of past renovations of paintings are also found in the interior of the church. The lower part of the presbytery walls, in particular, was completely repainted by the painter and "restorer" Jernej from Loka, most likely due to damage. Another interesting example is what is possibly the earliest dated renovation of wall paintings in our country, carried out in 1539 in the church of St Paul in Podpeč in Dolenjska.¹⁰ Here, the client wished to preserve the depiction of two important donors to the church from the end of the 14th century: "the honourable Lord Henrik Gall and his wife Lady Elizabeth" reads the inscription on the fresco. (Höfler, 2001, 152-153) The original 14th-century costumes from the old fresco had been carried over, but other than that, the new painting is entirely in the style typical of the first half of the 16th century.

That said, it would probably be premature to conclude with a generalisation that there was less respect for old and damaged works of art in the past. One reason for the lack of preservation might be that the artisans of old did not have the knowledge, resources and

10 Next to the figures is an inscription in distinctive gothic lettering: *Renouacio picture 1539*.



FIGURE 7: The social-realist wall painting by Slavko Pengov in Vila Bled; on display (←) and covered up during the visit by the US Secretary of State (→) (photo: Petja Grafenauer).

experience regarding conservation and restoration that we have today. There were other reasons why a particular work of art might diminish in value through time—religious, ideological, economic and others. Some works of art can induce feelings of discomfort, embarrassment or even loathing, which can lead to the artwork being covered up, neglected or even destroyed. A telling example of the former is the large-scale wall painting by Slavko Pengov in Villa Bled, dating from the Socialist Realist period, which was covered up with curtains on the occasion of the recent visit of the US Secretary of State. (Pirc, 2020) (Figure 7)¹¹

Pengov was a master of the fresco technique; from an artistic-technical point of view, he was undoubtedly one of the best fresco artists of the 20th century in Slovenia. His wall paintings can be found in a number of places, including the parish church in Bled and the Carpentry Workshops building in the Žale cemetery (sacral motifs), and the National Assembly Building in Ljubljana and the former Palace of the CCCP in Belgrade (social-realist style). This example demonstrates how the evaluation of a work of (fine) art changes through time according to individual and societal perception and environment.

As early as the turn of the 19th century, Austrian art historian Alois Riegel explored in his book *Der moderne Denkmalkultus* (Riegel, 1903) the value,

11 Vanja Pircs, Prekrita umetnina. Zakaj Vila Bled fresko Slavka Pengova skriva za zaveso? [A work of art covered up: Why is Vila Bled hiding a fresco by Slavko Pengov behind a curtain?] *Mladina*, 21 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.mladina.si/200729/prekrita-umetnina/> (9 March 2021).

or values, of monuments, which to him were either commemorative or contemporary. He saw the historical value, the *age-value* and the intentional commemorative value as commemorative values and the practical and the *art-value* as contemporary values. In the context of fine arts heritage, Brandi's classical restoration theory figures prominently, since it emphasises the aesthetic (analogous to Riegl's *contemporary*) and historical (analogous to Riegl's *commemorative*) value of a work of fine art. A work of fine art may be assigned other values, such as spiritual-religious, cultural-symbolic, societal, economic, etc., but the aesthetic nature of the object remains crucial for its recognition as a work of art.

Comparing a Gothic wall painting to an archaeological artifact of practical value, we find that the fresco has an aesthetic value that exceeds its historical value; conversely, the archaeological artifact's historical value overshadows its aesthetic value. (Figure 8) In contemporary conservation-restoration theory, there are various authors paying perhaps too much attention to the evaluation of objects of cultural heritage, this being more the domain of conservation theory or the broader theory of cultural heritage protection. Evaluating and registering heritage is mostly done by conservators.

In the conservation-restoration field, the important thing is for the experts to recognise and take into account the different values and, where possible, emphasise them further through interventions. Perhaps the most important role of conservators-restorers is in the artistic and technological evaluation of fine art. Some examples of fine art are worth preserving specifically because of material or technological peculiarities, which conservators-restorers are best equipped to recognise. An important factor in the evaluation of objects of cultural heritage—fine arts heritage in particular—is the state of preservation. The value—especially aesthetic, but potentially historical as well—of an artwork that is faded or preserved only in fragments, is certainly much diminished. (Figure 9) Evaluating the condition of works of fine art, their state of preservation and level of vulnerability is one of the principal duties of conservators-restorers. Although they collaborate with experts—primarily from applied-scientific fields—when performing the anamnesis and diagnosis of an object's condition (just as doctors work together with technicians in medicine), the conservators-restorers are the ones responsible for giving the definite diagnosis. Muñoz Viñas oddly does not address this subject in his contemporary conservation-restoration theory. Brandi deals with this topic mainly in the context of preservation of so-called *ruins* (of works of fine art), that is, very poorly preserved works of fine art. He emphasises that an artwork in a particularly poor state of (aesthetic) preservation loses its status as a work of art,



FIGURE 8: A comparison of the aesthetic value of items of cultural heritage: the aesthetic value of the medieval fresco of St Christopher ← is higher than that of the archaeological artifact → (photo: B. Šeme).



FIGURE 9: A comparison of the aesthetic value of items of cultural heritage in different states of preservation: the better preserved medieval fresco of St Christopher ← has a higher aesthetic value than a less well preserved medieval fresco → (photo: B. Šeme).

and ponders where the point is that this happens. He also urges that the conservation-restoration of ruins be limited to the preservation of the status quo (Brandi, 2005, 66), that is, preventive conservation.

The central professional and scientific research questions in conservation-restoration are how to physically reveal, preserve, present and document the objects of cultural heritage in the most appropriate way. The requirement of physical preservation of a maximum level of authenticity

of fine art leads to the development of ethical and aesthetic principles guiding us towards the correct action. These principles are part of an independent conservation-restoration theory, which simultaneously combines and integrates with theories from various other fields, such as medical and therapeutic ethics, Gestalt-psychology, art theory, philosophy of art, language theory, chemical and physical theory, etc.

A conservation-restoration intervention must be carried out in such a way as to respect the significance, or value—historical, aesthetic, etc.—and the physical integrity of the work of art.¹² This fundamental ethical principle is enshrined in conservation-restoration charters and professional codes of ethics. Conservation means the preservation of value and significance, in every sense, of an artwork; restoration, on the other hand, seeks to increase or accentuate them. Muñoz Viñas warns that any attempt to increase a particular value (e.g. aesthetic) inevitably diminishes the others (e.g. historical). (Muñoz Viñas, 2005). Since at least the 19th century there have been lively debates about the appropriateness of aesthetic interventions in works of art. A prominent example of the above in regards to failed aesthetic interventions are the criticisms of Goldenstein's restoration in the Church of St Primus above Kamnik and Goldstein's criticisms of Langus's restoration of Quaglia's paintings in Ljubljana cathedral. (Sitar, 2012, 50-98) As already mentioned, aesthetic issues in theory received considerable attention by Brandi, Baldini and Casazza. Isabelle Brajer provides some more modern, fresh perspectives on image retouching (Brajer, 2015), but a more detailed treatment of this important and interesting topic would, unfortunately, significantly exceed the scope of this article. While expert critiques of instances of conservation-restoration interventions can also contribute to the development of the conservation-restoration profession, this practice has not taken root in Slovenia.

Modern and contemporary fine art brings new challenges for the field of conservation-restoration. It is not only the use of new (often less lasting) materials, electronics, moving elements, etc., which requires a degree of specialisation on the part of conservator-restorers (Hermens, E. & F. Robertson (eds.), 2016) that is the issue, but also the emergence of new forms of artistic expression, such as temporary (to a varying degree) installations, events, or actions. The problem of the accumulation and consequently storage of artefacts is also a growing issue. It is in this context that the internationally renowned visual artist Tobias Putrih, an alumnus of the UL ALUO, ponders the justifiability of having his own sculpture studio, the use of less challenging materials for his sculptures

12 Loosely quoting the Code of Ethics of the Conservator-Restorers' Society of Slovenia. Available at: <http://www.slodrs.si/definicija-stroke-in-kodeks-etike/> (9 March 2020).



FIGURE 10: How (if at all) to preserve, restore and exhibit old performance art?
 Photomontage: A framed still from the ALU Akcija video (V. Bernik, B. Mesarec,
 A. Pregl, B. Šeme, 1997) (photo: Blaž Šeme).

and the problem of having to discard many of his works after exhibitions.¹³ A likely possibility in terms of preservation of this type of work in the future will be the continuous preservation of digital information. In case it is later desired to once again physically exhibit such a work, it will be possible, for instance, to print 3D copies (provided that a 3D-scan of a sculpture exists) or have a performance repeated by professional actors (if a video is available of the performance or action). (Figure 10) The topic of sustainable conservation is also increasing in importance—using conservation-restoration materials that are as durable as possible, with the least amount of harmful impact to users and the environment, as well as involving society in the conservation of art and other heritage in the broadest sense possible.

5. CONCLUSION

¹³ Tobias Putrih: Perceptron, an online lecture, part of the ALUO Ear events, 3 March 2021. Available at: www.aluo.uni-lj.si/novica/aluo-uh0-tobias-putrih-perceptron/ (9 March 2020).

Conservation-restoration theory is a logically organised aggregation of principles and insights that sets out the laws of conservation-restoration. It helps us develop an organised, systematic and effective approach to the investigation of conservation-restoration work. From the classical conservation-restoration theory of Cesare Brandi and his contemporaries, developed in mid-20th century, to the contemporary theory of Salvador Muñoz Viñas and many other authors, conservation-restoration thought has gone through several decades of development. The theory is still evolving intensely and facing new challenges, such as the conservation-restoration of modern and contemporary art and other forms of artistic expression, sustainable and environment-oriented action, good communication, and the development of scientific and artistic research, among others. What all conservation-restoration theories share is that they mainly deal with teleological (pertaining to intention) and axiological (pertaining to value) aspects of conservation-restoration. The classical theory already identified the aesthetic and historical nature of an artwork as its two crucial values we should be aiming to preserve. In conservation-restoration practice we also need to take into account various ethical and aesthetic guidelines, some of which are still developing and changing. It is abundantly clear that contemporary conservation-restoration of fine arts heritage, performed by highly educated conservators-restorers, is a fundamentally different and incomparably more challenging and complex task than the renovation of artworks performed, with varying levels of skill, by the artists-craftsmen of old.

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