

# **Document about the Profession of Conservator-Restorer**

*Compiled by a working group called Committee of Conservator-Restorers of the Association of Museums and Galleries of the Czech Republic*

*The structure and the main idea of this Document about the Profession of Conservator-Restorer (hereinafter "Document") were approved by the members of the Committee of Conservator-Restorers of the Association of Museums and Galleries of the Czech Republic (hereinafter "Committee") at its plenary session on 4 September 2007 in Znojmo. The text of the Document went through a partial correction at the beginning of 2010, when its main structure was changed. For that reason, the updated Document was submitted for approval at the plenary session of the Committee held on 7 September 2010 in Uherské Hradiště where the Document was approved.*

## **Justification Report**

The aim of this Document is to define basic goals, principles and requirements concerning the profession of the *Conservator-Restorer* and define the role of *Conservator-Restorers* in the cultural heritage preservation in *museums* and *galleries* of the Czech Republic. This Document is a recommendation for all members of the Association of Museums and Galleries of the Czech Republic (hereinafter "AMG").

*Museums* are obliged to preserve cultural heritage for the society, with an emphasis on preserving a maximum capability of each museum object to reflect real life, i.e. nature or society at present and in the future (see "*overall value*" in the Glossary).

This Document was compiled with a goal to define and endorse a specific museal approach to the preservation of *cultural heritage objects*. This approach relies mainly on the employment of *preventive conservation* which allows a continual and effective protection of *the overall value of cultural heritage objects*, especially movable items or sets of items, as witnesses of past effects and events, which become parts of *museum* collections and gain a status of "museum object" (hereinafter, only the legislative short term "object" is used instead of a *cultural heritage object* or a *museum object*, see Glossary). If the state of the *object* requires so, the methods of *remedial conservation* or *restoration* are employed. Qualified *Conservator-Restorers*, whose primary duty is protection of collections, are a vital part of this system. The *Conservator-Restorer* has a right to conduct his/her activity without a limitation to his/her professional freedom and independence, within the legal code of the Czech Republic and the European Union.

In the Czech Republic, the profession of *Conservator-Restorer* working with museum collections has not been clearly defined yet. Therefore, for the benefit of the profession, it is necessary to determine precisely the scope of authority of the *Conservator-Restorer* and to define its boundaries in relation to other fields. It is

also necessary to set the requirements for the content and scope of the *Conservator-Restorer's* education.

This Document is a declaration of professional principles of the Committee for domestic and foreign partners. Neglecting the principles in this Document is incompatible with a professional approach to the field and harms it.

This Document came into existence based on the following:

Professional Code of Ethics of Conservator-Restorers ICOM-CC (1986); ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (2004); The Document of Vantaa (2000); Victoria & Albert Museum Conservation Department Ethics Checklist (1994, 2004); E.C.C.O. Professional Guidelines I-III (2002-2004); AIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice (1994); ICOM-CC Resolution on Terminology for Conservation (2008); Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications; Competences for Access to the Conservation-Restoration Profession; European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations<sup>1</sup>.

Prior to the formation of the Document an extensive discussion took place between the members of the working group for the formation of the Document<sup>2</sup> and the Committee members, experts in the field of historic preservation or special education, and members of the Executive Body and the Museological Committee of the AMG. An output of this process has been terminology defining the following activities: *preventive conservation, remedial conservation and restoration*. These activities are covered with the single term *conservation-restoration*. To simplify communication, equivalents of *conservation* and *Conservator-Restorer* for the person practising this profession are used. This terminology fully conforms to the internationally approved terminology in the preceding materials and is accepted by renowned institutions (American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (AIC), The Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), International Council of Museums Committee for Conservation (ICOM-CC), International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC), Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI), and the Committee for Standardization - European Technical Committee 346 /Conservation of cultural property/ (CEN T/C 346). The respective terminology was also confirmed at the 22<sup>nd</sup> general conference of ICOM 2010 in Shanghai.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> The working group for the Document formation was established by the Committee at its meeting on 22 October 2005 in Prague.

## **Preamble**

*The Association of Museums and Galleries of the Czech Republic,  
aware of the necessity to provide effective safeguarding of the overall  
value of museum collections and individual objects and aware of the  
significance of an independent, qualified and personally responsible  
practice of the Conservator-Restorer<sup>3</sup> profession,*

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### **DOCUMENT ABOUT THE PROFESSION OF CONSERVATOR-RESTORER**

## **1. Definition of the Conservator-Restorer Profession**

### **Conservator-Restorer Activities**

1.1 The *Conservator-Restorer* participates in all activities of the *museum* that involve preservation of movable items and sets of items prior to their inclusion in a collection, and protection of *museum objects* from harmful environmental effects and from the consequences of working with them. S/he participates in the decision-making about the conditions under which collections will be deposited, presented, transported or studied because preserving good physical condition of objects in all these activities is essential.

1.2 The *Conservator-Restorer* follows standard scientific procedures when carrying out his/her work, i.e. source research, analysis, interpretation and synthesis. This approach enables the most effective identification of the *overall value of cultural heritage objects*, both prospective and approved *museum objects* (hereinafter “objects”), to gain new scientific knowledge and retain it for the future.

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<sup>3</sup> This document is a recommendation for all members of the AMG.

1.3 The *Conservator-Restorer* activities include *preventive conservation*, *remedial conservation*, and *restoration of objects*, which is generally called *conservation-restoration* or just *conservation* (see Justification report). *Investigation* is an integral part of the *Conservator-Restorer* profession.

1.4 *Investigation* represents a preliminary step that helps gain available information about the *object* employing methods from humanities and natural sciences. During *investigation*, information concerning the origins, usage and current condition of the *object* is sought. *Investigation* gathers information about the structure, material and formation of the *object*, the scope and causes of deterioration, alterations, sediments and losses. *Investigation* is carried out on the basis of an interdisciplinary approach which is dependent on collaboration with other colleagues. *Investigation* remarkably contributes to clarification and determination of the *overall value of the object*.

1.5 The above stated procedure must be documented by written and pictorial records and reports that will be permanently stored, along with drawn samples, for both the need of future *conservation* and as a base for continual revision of all interventions carried out.

1.6 The *Conservator-Restorer* must be able to analyse the results of the *investigation* and propose an appropriate method of *conservation* based on these.

1.7 *Preventive conservation* is a set of precautionary measures leading to the protection of the *object* through systematic check-ups and possible adjustment of the environment where the object is/will be stored so that such objects remain unaltered. For these reasons, *preventive conservation* should have a priority. However, if the condition of the object requires so, methods of *remedial conservation* or *restoration*<sup>4</sup> can be applied.

1.8 *Remedial conservation* is the protection of the *object* through a system of direct *interventions* aimed at stabilization of its current physical state by making maximum effort to retain the *overall value of the object*.

1.9 *Restoration* is a procedure that interprets the *integrity of the object* at a specific, well-known stage of its historical development. The main purpose is to achieve intelligibility of the *object*. To a certain extent, aesthetic, technical, musical and other functionalities and the power of the *object* are renewed. *Restoration* involves both completion of the missing or significantly damaged parts and removal of those parts that limit the intelligibility or functionality and the power of the *object*. In this case, an intervention in the authenticity of the *object* is inevitable but it should be as limited as possible.

## **Distinction from Other Related Fields**

1.10 The main criterion for the distinction of *conservation* from other scientific or artistic fields or crafts is the fact that the *Conservator-*

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<sup>4</sup> See Glossary

*Restorer* does not devote most of his/her attention to broad understanding of nature or society or create new *objects* through his/her activity.

1.11 Although it is the sole right of the *Conservator-Restorer* to carry out *remedial conservation or restoration*, there are also other fields that make an intellectual contribution to the preservation of *cultural heritage objects*.

## 2. Education of the Conservator-Restorer

2.1 A qualified *Conservator-Restorer* should hold a respective master's degree from a university/college or a recognized equivalent according to the current Czech legislation and the Directive of the European Union on the recognition of professional qualifications<sup>5</sup>.

2.2 Theoretical education, practical training and professional practice are integral parts of this educational programme.

2.3 Both theoretical and practical education must feature scientific methodology leading to the development of the ability to solve problems of *conservation* by a systematic approach, by examination and research, and by critical interpretation of results.

2.4 The practical part of the education should involve activities taking into account all theoretical, methodological and aesthetic aspects of *conservation*.

2.5 From the beginning of the training, students must be taught to understand that each *object* is unique.

2.6 The study and scientific preparation of the *Conservator-Restorer* should include the following topic areas:

- ethical principles of *conservation*
- history of *conservation* and *restoration*
- social sciences (museology, historic sciences, history of material culture, history of art, archaeology, ethnology, philosophy etc. and their application)
- natural sciences (chemistry, physics, biology etc. and their application)
- history of materials and techniques, technologies and production processes including the artistic ones
- identification and study of degrading processes
- methods of documentation
- methods of scientific research
- *investigation* and its interpretation
- theory, methods, techniques and materials for *preventive conservation, remedial conservation and restoration*

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<sup>5</sup> Act No. 18/2004 Coll. and its amendment No. 189 of 2008 on the recognition of professional qualifications and other qualifications of the European Union Member State citizens and on changes in some laws (the act on the recognition of professional qualifications), as subsequently amended, and other relating acts; Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications – uok.msmt.cz/uok.doc/; Competences for Access to the Conservation-Restoration. Profession. European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (E.C.C.O.) A.I.S.B.L. 2011, 48 p. ISBN 978 - 92 - 990010 - 6 - 6;

- reproduction techniques and the production of copies
- legal issues (professional regulations, legislation concerning cultural heritage, insurance, etc.)
- management
- Health and Safety at work, environmental protection
- communication and information technologies

### **3. The Code of Ethics**

3.1 The *Conservator-Restorer* handles each *object* in compliance with the principles of this Code of Ethics.

3.2 The *Conservator-Restorer* respects the *overall value of the object* entrusted in his/her hands.

3.3 The *Conservator-Restorer* has a right to carry out his/her profession according to this Document without hindrance to his/her liberty and independence. The *Conservator-Restorer* has a right to reject any requested intervention that s/he believes is contrary to this Code.

3.4 The *Conservator-Restorer* must strive to enrich his/her knowledge and skills in order to improve the quality of his/her work.

3.5 The *Conservator-Restorer* works directly with *cultural heritage objects* and is responsible to their owner/ custodian and the whole society.

3.6 The *Conservator-Restorer* has a right to all important information that could help him/her in *conservation* itself and can be provided by the owner or custodian of the *object*.

3.7 The *Conservator-Restorer* is obliged to provide the owner/custodian of the *object* with all the *conservation* options available and justify the selected method.

3.8 The *Conservator-Restorer* must not conceal information on the method and scope of *conservation*.

3.9 Within the decision-making process, when proposing the method of *conservation*, the *Conservator-Restorer* must not exclude any means or tools of *preventive conservation*.

3.10 Should the *conservation intervention* harm the *authenticity of the object* to such an extent that a devaluation of its *overall value* is imminent, the *Conservator-Restorer* is obliged to avoid such *intervention* and recommend another method to the owner or custodian, e.g. making a copy.

3.11 The *Conservator-Restorer* uses methods, appliances, and materials that, according to the current state of knowledge, harm and affect the *object* as little as possible. The materials employed in *conservation* should be easily and completely reversible.

3.12 The *Conservator-Restorer* may remove a part of the *object's* material only to improve its intelligibility or to protect the *object*. Removed parts must be documented and, if their state requires so, they should be *conserved* and stored along with the *object*.

3.13 The *Conservator-Restorer* strives to reach maximal comprehension and durability of the documentation that remains his/her intellectual property as authorial and employee work. The documentation must

include names of all persons taking part in the conservation process itself. The documentation must be provided to the owner/custodian of the object.

3.14 The *Conservator-Restorer* is bound by professional confidentiality only if the information may be harmful to the security of the *object* or museum collection. Under no circumstances must s/he conceal an irrefutably evident misconduct of his/her own or of other persons taking part in the *conservation* process.

3.15 The *Conservator-Restorer* is obliged to provide any possible assistance to save the *object* in critical situations.

3.16 *Conservation* is an interdisciplinary field and that is why the collaboration with experts from other fields or other *Conservator-Restorers* is vital and it is inseparable from the whole process of *conservation*.

3.17 The *Conservator-Restorer* contributes to the development of the profession by sharing his/her experience and obtained knowledge, preferably by publishing the achieved results and providing education for students and interns.

## 4. The Principles of the Conservation Process

4.1 The *Conservator-Restorer* must be able to answer competently the following questions as well as proceed in compliance with the gathered information, based on the obtained education and experience:<sup>6</sup>

a) *Why is intervention needed?*

b) *Has all applicable information been gathered and analysed?*

c) *Have I consulted the intervention with other colleagues?*

d) *Have all the factors contributing to the overall value of the object been analysed and taken into account?*

e) *What are my options for conservation which will produce a satisfactory result with minimum intervention in the object?*

f) *What effect will the intervention have on maintaining the overall value of the object?*

g) *Is there enough information and skill to propose and carry out the intervention?*

h) *What are the benefits and risks of each course of action and how will they be assessed throughout the intervention?*

i) *Can the mode of use or the environment be adjusted instead of intervening in the object?*

j) *Does my intended intervention make the best use of resources (time, human resources, equipment, finance, and materials) and is it legitimate?*

k) *Do established methods of conservation need to be adapted or new ones developed?*

l) *How will the intervention affect possible future conservation?*

m) *Have the future use and location of the object been taken into account and have recommendations been made accordingly?*

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<sup>6</sup> The list of questions is loosely based on the document of *Victoria & Albert Museum, Conservation Department Ethics Checklist* (1994, 2004).

- n) *Will all interventions be fully documented in compliance with well-known and accepted standards?*
- o) *Will the information resulting from the documentation be accessible and understandable for other people?*
- p) *How will the success of the intervention be assessed and how will feedback be obtained?*

4.2 The list of questions above does not say what to do; it only helps to guide the *Conservator-Restorer* through the whole decision-making process. The *Conservator-Restorer* is expected to adopt the principles of professional ethics and continue their development throughout his/her own education and professional practice.

4.3 The *Conservator-Restorer* recommends external specialists to the best of his/her knowledge and coordinates the possible collective or externally commissioned *conservation* courses of action. All *conservation work* with museum collection objects carried out by external workers should comply with the principles defined in this Document.

## **Glossary**

**authenticity** (in the Central-European context) one of the fundamental qualities of the *complex value of a cultural heritage object* reflecting through its substance. *Authenticity* lies in the scale of surviving original features of the *object* that document the *object's* real function in the past. The perception of *authenticity* can differ significantly in different cultural environments.

**integrity** (of the *object*) a set of material, technical and aesthetic values relating to each other historically. It concerns the state of the *cultural heritage object* at the time when it started to be used or have some effect. Marks relating to *object's* use or degradation and subsequent treatment, which is important historically and with respect to human society also form a part of the *object's integrity*.

**overall value**<sup>7</sup> of a *cultural heritage object* expresses its quality as a bearer of a set of all authentic information - emotional and rational - that can be identified now or in the future. As such, it is the main subject to protection in the category of *museum collection objects*. The *significance of the object* is part of its *overall value*.

**conservator-restorer** an educated, qualified and experienced professional who is able to carry out complex *interventions* in *cultural heritage objects* following the principles stated in this Document about the Profession of Conservator-Restorer.

**conservation** an umbrella term for *preventive conservation*, *remedial conservation* and *restoration*. It involves any care for *cultural heritage objects* aiming at the preservation of their *cultural significance*. *Investigation* is an integral part of *conservation*.

**museum object**<sup>8</sup> according to the valid legislation of the Czech Republic, a movable or immovable object, a product of nature or a human creation forming a part of a museum-type collection registered in the Central Registry of Museum-type Collections of the Czech Republic (CES) of Czech Ministry of Culture. Museum objects are part of the natural and cultural heritage of the Czech Republic.

**museum** (for the purposes of this Document) every organization that manages one or more museum-type collections registered in the Central Registry of Museum-type Collections of Czech Ministry of Culture and at the same time is an institutional member of the AMG.<sup>9</sup>

**preventive conservation** a set of measures that aim to slow down deterioration and reduce possible risks for *cultural heritage objects* through a system of regular check-ups and indirect *interventions*, i.e. especially through optimizing the conditions for storage, their presentation and manipulation. *Preventive conservation* reduces the above mentioned risks for whole collections; therefore it is an economical and effective tool for preservation of collections. During the decision-making process, the *Conservator-Restorer* must not exclude any of the tools for *preventive conservation* when s/he proposes the *conservation* procedures.

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<sup>7</sup> Translator's note: Czech museology and conservator-restorer community distinguish an "overall" value of cultural heritage objects (defined below) and their "current or existing value". The "overall" value is defined as a set of all authentic information - emotional and rational - that can be identified now or in the future including both the identified and (yet) unidentified values of cultural heritage objects, according to Šimčík A.: Teoretická východiska konzervování a restaurování kovů (Theoretical Basis for Conservation and Restoration of Metals), In: Konzervování a restaurování kovů - Ochrana předmětů kulturního dědictví z kovů a jejich slitin (Conservation and Restoration of Metals - Preservation of Cultural Heritage Objects from Metals and their Alloys), Technical Museum in Brno, 2011, pp. 24 - 25. The "current or existing value" has been identified by currently available methods, or more precisely, it is identifiable at present. I truly believe that the correct expression for the latter is the *significance* of a cultural heritage object. Significance is a combination of all values assigned to an object and these can be of different types - artistic, symbolic, historical, social, etc. (Czech version of European Standard EN 15898, Prague: National Technical Museum, August 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Translator's note: A literal translation would be "collection object" but this collocation does not occur worldwide.

<sup>9</sup> An institutional member of the AMG may also be a museum that does not have its museum objects registered in the CES.

*Preventive conservation* is implemented by all museum workers with some help from colleagues from other scientific fields and the public. The *Conservator-Restorer* proposes *preventive conservation* measures and supervises their correct application.

**investigation**<sup>10</sup> an integral part of *conservation*. The aim of investigation is to identify the respective *cultural heritage object* including its environment and to gather all available information about it, incl. identification of its condition (e.g. identifying its chemical composition, the technology of its production, dating, the scope and causes of deterioration, and previous *interventions*). Based on an evaluation of the *investigation* results, appropriate procedures and measures for further intervention are established.

**cultural heritage object** (for the purposes of this Document) a movable or immovable item, product of nature or human creation which is important for understanding the evolution of nature or the development of human society and memorialising it. Therefore, it is intended for permanent preservation for future generations in observance of the laws protecting the cultural heritage of the Czech Republic<sup>11</sup>. To simplify the terminology of this Document, *museum objects* preserved in our natural history museum collections are also classified as *cultural heritage objects* because they became part of the collections by human intervention. However, in another context, these *objects* can be viewed as part of natural heritage. In this text, the term has been replaced by a legislative abbreviation “object”.

**restoration** a procedure that interprets the *integrity of a cultural heritage object* at a specific, well-known stage of its historical development. The main purpose is to achieve intelligibility of the *object*. To a certain extent, aesthetic, technical, musical and other functionalities and the power of the *object* are renewed. *Restoration* involves both completion of the missing or significantly damaged parts and removal of those parts that limit the intelligibility or functionality and the power of the *object*. In this case, an intervention in the authenticity of the *object* is inevitable but it should be as small as possible.

**remedial conservation** preservation of the substance and structure of a *cultural heritage object* through a system of direct interventions to stabilize its physical state. When carrying this out, technologies that minimally disturb the *overall value of the object* must be preferred.

**significance** part of the *overall value of the cultural heritage object* which is identifiable at present.

**intervention** a term that can encompass all measures implemented to *conserve cultural heritage objects*. It includes *preventive conservation, remedial conservation and restoration, sampling prior to investigation,*

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<sup>10</sup> Translator’s note: There are also other terms used worldwide such as simply *diagnostic examination* (E.C.C.O. Professional Guidelines) or a more precise *examination and scientific investigation* (American Institute for Conservation Code of Ethics).

<sup>11</sup> Act No. 20/1987 Coll. on State monument care, as subsequently amended; Act No. 122/2000 Coll. on the preservation of museum-type collections and alterations of some other acts, as subsequently amended; Act No. 499/2004 Coll., on Record Keeping and Record Service, as amended; Act No. 71/1994 Coll., on the Sale and Export of Objects of Cultural Value, as amended.

*etc.* A legitimate intervention includes also a decision to abandon any type of activity concerning the object assuming that such an *intervention* will not be beneficial.

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Word from the translator: As there is no dictionary of Museology terms in the Czech Republic, translating such texts is particularly difficult. Despite my effort I was not able to find precise equivalents to some specifically Czech expressions through the respective literature or the internet so I chose the closest equivalents adding the translator's notes. Therefore, this translation can be considered a working translation and I am open to discussion and possible comments.

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