

Acropolis Museum and CSI Sittingbourne joint winners of the 2012 IIC Keck Award



© Acropolis Museum. Photo
Giorgos Vitsaropoulos

Conservation works on the Caryatids - the Kore from the south porch of the Erechtheion temple

LONDON – The 2012 IIC Keck Award was awarded jointly to the Acropolis Museum in Athens, Greece, in collaboration with the Institute of Electronic Structure & Laser at the Foundation for Research and Technology in Crete (IESL-FORTH) and to Anglo-Saxon CSI: Sittingbourne in Kent in the United Kingdom. IIC's Council recognised that both institutions had, from their respective situations, made a positive contribution to public awareness of the practice and beneficial results of heritage conservation.

The Acropolis Museum won the award for the conservation and restoration of the Caryatids with the use of laser technology, in collaboration with the **Institute of Electronic Structure & Laser at the Foundation for Research and Technology in Crete (IESL-FORTH)**. The award recognised the Acropolis Museum's successful approach in providing visitors with the opportunity to observe procedures that until recently were undertaken in the conservation laboratories, away from the public view.

From Students to Emerging Professionals –

The winners of the Student Poster Award at the 2012 IIC Vienna Congress talk of their experience

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Textile Conservation –

Jonathan Tetley discusses conductivity for the treatment of carpets from historic houses

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IIC Members Reviews – New Zealand

IIC member's reviews of international periodicals on conservation and preservation

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The 'Viral' Effect –

Antonino Cosentino on blogging and the social media revolution

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Views+Opinions

Eventually, I got Viral!

by Antonino Cosentino

Some time ago IIC asked its social media followers to give feedback on open source tools available for conservators on the web. The feedback was immediate, informative and surprising. We were amazed at the amount of useful tools and references available and have decided to focus on some of the most commented upon by our followers.

Antonino Cosentino is a conservation scientist turned blogger who uses his platform to provide tutorials on methods for art examination and documentation, focussing specifically on innovative low-budget scientific solutions; this is his account of how and why he went “viral”.

Although I was among the first to sign up after reading about it on a computer magazine, I'm totally new to Facebook, I actually just kept my account following my girlfriend's advice. As I do with any other social network, I like to see how it works. Unfortunately I lost interest pretty soon and got bored, leaving the account dormant for years. Why I'm talking about Facebook? I'm a blogger, pretty new to this world; I've always liked to have my own website, so I was researching available platforms including *HTML*, *Dreamweaver* and *CSS* but as an amateur I find it all very confusing so I turned to *Wordpress*, one of the many open-source, easy to use platforms for blogging. Their service made online publishing a very smooth operation. Initially I wasn't interested in blogs either - never having followed a particular one except occasionally when searching for “geeky” computer articles. But I was immediately attracted to the unfiltered way people interact on the platform and decided to give it a go.

In September 2012 I concluded my teaching in New York (scientific art examination), and I returned back home to Italy to start up my own private practice in art diagnostics. Friends, colleagues and former students kept asking me for advice on technical issues such as buying new equipment, fixing old ones, finding educational resources. I was eager to help but realised that I had to be organised. I figured that the best way to avoid repetition and provide the help requested was to write down my answers and have a ‘repository’ to keep everything. Its title? *Cultural Heritage Science Open Source*.

The Internet has made our world so different from the past especially in respect to knowledge. Does that sound like a trite sentence? Consider how in the 1980s knowledge could be kept jealously by those who had it; for some it could be a source of income. Nowadays, knowledge is everywhere and slips through the hands of those who want to keep it for themselves. Perhaps I am over-dramatizing but I am sure many people will agree, mostly. Today, being a jealous custodian of one's knowledge is not enough to gain a competitive edge. You have to be creative, innovative and mingle with your colleagues to find competitive solutions. What is new and fancy today becomes, too soon, out-dated.

This is the scenario where blogging fits in. A good blogger is supposed to select and deliver valid and really useful content to his audience. Side effects of blogging are self-education and networking - you learn from anybody commenting on your posts! Blogging facilitates the connection between like-minded professionals and could lead to fruitful collaborations with people you really “click” with.

Cultural Heritage Open Source is a little experiment. Although I had completed my teaching appointment I wanted to keep discussing methods for art examination and documentation. The topic of this blog was inspired by talks with Yngve Magnusson, Head of Conservation at The Bergen Museum of Art, Norway. Yngve is an esteemed conservator with a huge international experience and a love for science. He showed me the necessities and the workflow of medium-small

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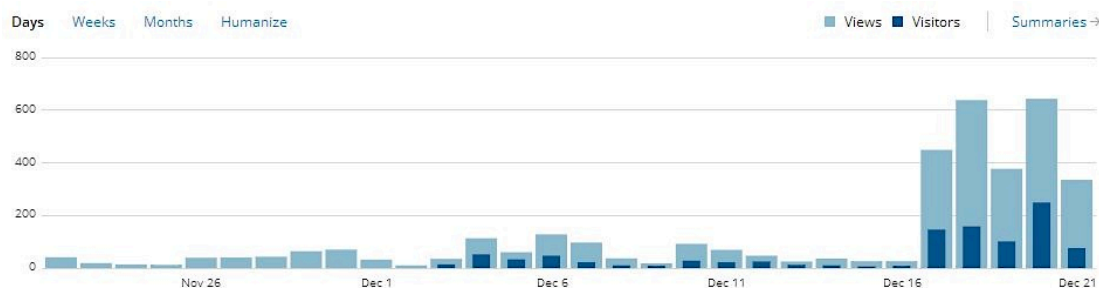
museums such as his institution.

Coming from an academic environment, I didn't have any insight into this world. My terms of reference were large institutions that I had been working with; these tended to have scientific departments and large budgets for cutting-edge technologies. But, aside from the Getty in Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the National Gallery in London and other similar institutions, what access do other museums have to scientific and technological innovation? It turned out that access is very limited. Our discussions inspired me to focus my efforts into innovative yet budget-friendly solutions in order to have a REAL impact in art conservation and examination practices in smaller institutions. I need to thank the museum's Director, Erlend Høyersten and the curator, Line Daatland, for believing in my projects and finding the money to enable me to work on their amazing collection of Edvard Munch and J.C Dahl.

This blog was targeted at medium-small museums when couldn't afford a full time scientist on their payroll; this often left science out of reach or pursued by dedicated conservators trying to do their best to update their knowledge of new technology.

There is another issue - publications dealing with cultural heritage science are almost exclusively targeted at scientists. While in other popular disciplines - such as astronomy - there are plenty of websites, blogs, and online resources for both professionals and amateurs, this is not the case for cultural heritage science. There is a strong need for scientific publication to target a wider audience as demonstrated by the questions I keep receiving from conservators, art historians and curators about technical instruments and their applications. Moreover, smaller institutions strongly believe that scientific insight into their collections will benefit the overall appreciation by the communities they serve.

Let's see have a look at some data; these are stats from my blog.



Before December 17th 2012, the number of visits to the blog was consistently stagnant. I was contacted by professionals who were already interested in multispectral imaging and were browsing the web with related keywords. On Dec 17th, the blog was publicised on the ever-popular *Conservation DistList* and the number of visits took off. At this point the blog was still mainly visited by colleagues reading the *Conservation DistList*. The Blog became "viral" when people started to *LIKE It* on Facebook thus generating a 'word-of-mouth effect' giving access to a much greater number of networks. The statistical data on December 20th shows that even on the day the Maya famously predicted the end of the world, people were sharing their knowledge making a science blog one of the most popular out there.

My role is essentially limited to editing papers written in the '80s and '90s using a modern and accessible language, adding links and many, many videos. I refer for example to the posts on microscopy. I read the decades-old McCrone's papers on microscopy for art and gave them a 'new dress'.

There aren't many opportunities to stimulate interaction between conservation science research centres and conservators from medium-small institutions, in order to improve everyday practices with scientific innovation. There seems to be reluctance from traditional peer-reviewed journals to focus on innovation obtained from modestly priced technology. Indeed I have yet to come across a paper on the examination and documentation of a work of art using a USB microscope (priced at US\$100/£62 on *ebay* at the time of writing). But when I posted on the blog on the use of such USB microscope the message got viral and I was excited to receive such positive feedback from readers. In the past I wrote papers on complex technologies and impressive science but I cannot help wondering what is ultimately having more impact on understanding and conserving cultural heritage. Blogging about a mere \$100 USB microscope made me realise that I made a great number of professionals happy, right away!

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Referrers		—
Today	Yesterday	Summaries →
Referrer		Views
Facebook		180
linkedin.com		19
Search Engines		7
Twitter		4
antoninocosentino.it		4
mail.yahoo.com		4
incca.org/news/228-latestnews/1210-new-...		2
mail.live.com		2
translate.google.com.tw/translate_p?sl=ru...		2
tumblr.com/dashboard		1
cool.conservation-us.org/byform/mailing-li...		1
Total views referred by links to your blog		226

Blogging is cost-effective. I made more valuable connections in the past two months writing online than I have by going to a number of congresses while a PhD student. I connected with proactive professionals working in the field across the world and we figured out collaboration projects, all through the Internet. Cost-effectiveness in time of economic restraint is a must; it is important to improve productivity, especially in our industry, which is perennially underfunded. Money, time and productivity matter now more than ever.

Don't get me wrong, I strongly believe in the need for public funds for research, but that money should be spent wisely. New communication technologies allowing for information-sharing should become the norm and affordable budget technical solutions should be encouraged.

I am acutely aware that part of the success of this blog relies on the fascinating mix of art and science. Most of the inspiration to create and maintain this platform came from my students at the Pratt Institute in New York. Reading some of the student's evaluations of the course, from the most detailed ones to the simple "the use of equipment is cool" proved very inspiring.

<http://www.iiconservation.org/node/3515>



Antonino Cosentino is a PhD Physicist specialising in Cultural Heritage Science. His goal is to promote innovative and affordable solutions for Scientific Documentation and Examination of Art. He is currently working at his private practice providing scientific support as well as training and consultancy to public and private institutions as well as collectors and other interested parties. Dr. Cosentino taught "Scientific Methods for Art Investigation" both in Italy and recently at the Pratt Institute in New York, USA. He has carried out scientific examinations of important works by artists ranging from Caravaggio to Andy Warhol and Edvard Munch both privately and on behalf of a variety of museums including the European MOBILE LABORATORY for Art investigation (MOLAB) and as A.W. Mellon Fellow in Conservation Science at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. For the University of California San Diego, USA he served as an expert on neutron and spectroscopic techniques, and in particular Raman spectroscopy, for the project "Searching Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari."