

## **International Museum Day 2020**

### **Towards a new paradigm of cultural heritage preservation**

The 2020 International Museum Day is dedicated to the theme "Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion". It is stated in ICOM's communication, that museums play a central role in the process of creating social value, by their ability to produce experiences between different cultures, to foster mutual understanding, as well as cooperation and peace between peoples. At a time when the world is still dealing with the consequences of COVID-19, museums relevance is reinforced (as well as that of all cultural institutions), not only because of the important role they have played in these days, but also by what we can learn from much of the heritage in their custody, about crises of the past and how societies have dealt with those challenges

Taking advantage of this celebration date, and because this is a unique moment for a paradigm shift in the way society has been relating with cultural heritage, how it assesses its relevance and its institutions, and what role it can take fighting against fear, nationalism, xenophobia, and the risks that emerge from the current crisis, the Professional Association of Conservators-restorers of Portugal- ARP, have reflected upon the role of the Conservator-restorer in this new conjuncture and, in particular, within museums.

Conservators-restorers are not yet fully recognized as a crucial piece in the day-to-day management of museum preservation. mostly due to lack of real recognition of the profession and its relevance in the preservation of cultural heritage, also pointing out the need to clarify the professional profile of the Conservator-restorer in museums, both from the point of view of training requirements as well the necessary professional skills and competences.

The skills and competences required to access the profession, and in accordance with the "professional Guidelines I" of the European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (E.C.C.O) and proposed by the European Network for Conservation-Restoration Education (ENCoRE), a Conservator-restorer is a professional with an education in conservation restoration corresponding to two university education cycles, namely, 3 years of a graduate's degree and 2 years of a master's degree, or equivalent education.

Conservation restoration is a discipline of scientific and humanistic basis, which by its epistemological scope gives these professionals an unique capacity to dialogue and establish bridges with many others professionals that intervene in study and management of cultural heritage.

Due to developments in conservation and restoration in recent decades, to the profound changes imposed by society on cultural institutions (subduing them to market led strategies, adiction to quantitative indicators, and focused on mass industries), and to the challenges posed today by COVID-19, ARP considers that Conservators-restorers should play a more important and relevant role in museums where they should be

rendered equal to other museum professionals, and conservation and restoration should be regarded in fact as crucial to the fulfilment of a museum's purpose

A paradigm shift that refocuses museums in their role as a cultural mediator, a source of knowledge and an essential resource in research and education, means a completely different relationship with cultural heritage and society, and in this context the Conservator-restorer, due to its close professional relationship with cultural heritage whilst managing cultural values, assumes himself as insurmountable.

The Conservator-restorer is no longer just a mere performer, as portrayed in the European Framework for The Museal Professions, published in 2008 by the International Committee for the Training of Personal (ICTOP/ ICOM), but a professional with wide extended technical and scientific skills and competences from preventive conservation to conservation restoration,, as also many others related to museum collection management, where its contribution has been so far neglected or undervalued.

By its multidisciplinary education and training and as a result of their professional exercise, Conservators-restorers can contribute to greater knowledge on cultural heritage, strengthen its narrative capacity and thus expanding its engagement and communicational capability.

Therefore, ARP considers fundamental museums comprise permanently in their staff, Conservators-restorers, and in addition to the functions defined in the European Framework for The Museal Professions, the following should be further considered:

- Responsible in drafting and implementation of preventive conservation plans in museums, in conjunction with all stakeholders in the process;
- Responsible for evaluation, coordination and/or execution of all conservation restoration interventions in the museum collection either permanently or in deposit;
- That conservation restoration through its professionals be an active part in the accession process caring for all issues related with heritage conservation;
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- That Conservators-restorers be an integral part in planning and coordination of storage facilities and and its collections;
- That Conservators-restorers actively and critically contribute in loan processes, exhibitions planning and execution;
- That Conservators-restorers also contribute to the production of contents, which fosters awareness of the cultural and educational value of museums and their collections.

It is imperative to review the competences defined for the Conservator-restorer in the European Framework for Museal Professions and by the International Committee for the Training of Personal (ICTOP/ ICOM), guaranteed their scientific autonomy, alongside what is hereby proposed in order it can be reflected in national legislations and/or inform museum institutions guidelines.

As proposed in ICOM's document it intended to establish guidance to prompt a deeper discussion, encouraging countries to set up and draft their own guidelines. ARP has embraced the challenge and put forward this recommendation.

Thus, on this day when museums and their heritage are celebrated as a source of social and individual well-being, of communities resilience and cohesion, and social development, a new role for Conservators-restorers is necessary, which reflects the profession's evolution, embodying the new paradigm for cultural heritage, and that addresses the challenges endured today by cultural institutions and their professionals.

Lisbon, 18 May 2020