

Matters of Knowledge. Paradigms and Practices of Conservation through the Centuries

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Université de Neuchâtel Institut d'histoire de l'art et de muséologie

Conference organized by SNSF PRIMA [*Bibliothèques et musées en Suisse entre 18e et 19e siècle : une histoire parallèle*](#) (Prof. Dr. Valérie Kobi, Catarina Cabral, Séverine Cattin, Natania Girardin, Clara Gregori, Dr. Chonja Lee, Elise Scheurer, Remo Stämpfli)

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Abstracts

Thursday, June 5, 2025

Exposer les coulisses du musée : dévoilements et mises en abyme

Dr. Isabelle Le Pape

Depuis quelques décennies, des musées se sont engagés dans des projets visant à mettre en lumière les questions liées à la collecte, à la conservation et au statut de leurs collections. Face aux débats liés à la provenance et à la matérialité des œuvres, il devient nécessaire de mieux communiquer au public autour des dispositifs de patrimonialisation mais aussi de normes relatives à la conservation.

En ouvrant leurs réserves au public, en présentant des œuvres en cours de restauration ou en proposant des dispositifs de médiation permettant d'interroger le rôle du musée, des responsables de collection inaugurent de nouvelles postures concernant leurs pratiques professionnelles. Notre propos mettra en perspective ces « moments coulisses » proposés dans quelques institutions muséales et les enjeux qui se posent dans la monstration des conditions d'existence des collections et de ceux qui s'en occupent. Cette contribution analysera les enjeux posés par ces dévoilements en regard des normes de conservation et des impératifs scientifiques. Nous nous intéresserons à des parcours permanents et à de récentes expositions qui mettent en lumière les métiers de la conservation comme *Memoria. Voyage au cœur des collections* (29 octobre 2022-26 février 2023) qui proposait, au musée des Beaux-Arts de Chartres, une nouvelle approche des collections à travers un abécédaire dédié aux pratiques de la conservation et aux missions du musée ou *En coulisses, la vie secrète des collections*, qui avait lieu en 2024 au musée d'art et d'histoire de Cholet. Nous évoquerons également le cas de musées ouvrant leurs réserves au public comme le MAS d'Anvers, la Kunsthalle de Mannheim et le futur centre de conservation du V&A East Storehouse à Londres, qui visent à rendre visibles les opérations de conservation liées à des œuvres et à des objets ethnographiques. À travers l'examen de ces exemples, il s'agira non seulement de comprendre comment les professionnels du patrimoine renouvèlent le rôle du musée défini dès la fin du XVIII^e siècle mais aussi de comprendre comment ces moments d'ouverture et de transparence modifient les conditions de monstration et de conservation des collections.

Notice biographique : Conservatrice en chef du patrimoine, Isabelle Le Pape est conseillère pour les musées à la DRAC (Direction régionale des affaires culturelles) de Normandie. Ayant dirigé le service Art à la Bibliothèque nationale de France, elle a contribué à la politique de conservation et de numérisation des collections en art. Docteure en Esthétique, Sciences et technologie des arts (Université de Paris 8), elle poursuit des recherches en art contemporain et muséologie. Membre du Comité français d'histoire de l'art et de l'AGCCPF (Association nationale des conservateurs du patrimoine et des professionnels des musées), elle participe régulièrement à des colloques et journées d'étude. Elle a animé en novembre 2024 une journée d'étude sur les recherches de provenance au musée des beaux-arts de Rouen (*L'Argument de Rouen*) et intervient au Festival d'histoire de l'art en juin 2025 : "*Musées et recherche : partage d'expériences en Normandie et Centre-Val de Loire*".

Transforming the Museum into Heritage: Photographs of Exhibition Spaces in the Louvre Museum

Julie Hochenedel

Nowadays, each of the Louvre Museum's departments holds collections of old photographs of exhibition spaces, which have been built up as a result of various voluntary and unintentional politics. By concentrating on photographs taken from the end of the 19th century to the interwar period, it is possible to analyse the evolution of museum practices through the way in which art collections are displayed and the way in which photography is used. However, it is important not to study photography as a simple source, but rather to integrate the analysis of the constitution of photographic collections in the museum into a more global reflection on museum practices of conservation and exhibition. In this way, these photographs could be interpreted as an attempt to build the image of the museum and to transform the exhibition space into heritage.

First, I will outline the history of this photographic ecosystem in the collections of the Louvre Museum. Secondly, the photographs of exhibition spaces will be analysed from a dual perspective: that of a past activity to make the inventory of the museum activities through photography, and that of a current process of heritage conservation of photographic collections through digitization campaigns and research projects.

Short biography: Julie Hochenedel graduated from the École du Louvre in 2024. During her studies, she took part in university exchanges with the Institut d'histoire de l'art et de muséologie in Neuchâtel (Switzerland) and the Département d'histoire de l'art at the University of Montreal (Canada). She is currently preparing a PhD on photographs of exhibition spaces in the Louvre Museum. As part of this research, she is taking part in the doctoral workshop entitled "Musée et Photographie : pratiques, objets et récits" organised by the Centre Dominique-Vivant Denon and the École du Louvre.

Paper Gardens: Cataloguing Change in Early Modern Botanical Thinking

Dr. Lauren R. Cannady

Early modern European botanic gardens were museums of living curiosities, repositories for non-endemic plants reaped through colonial bioprospecting and global trade. Among the earliest academic gardens established north of the Alps for medical and botanical instruction were those in Paris, Leiden, and Oxford. Given the dynamic and ephemeral nature of gardens, catalogues have proven the most reliable records of the flora cultivated in seventeenth-century Europe. These catalogues, or “paper gardens” as they were sometimes called by authors, were often simple lists of plants identified by irregular composite names and only occasionally accompanied by sparse descriptions. Because they were rarely illustrated, catalogues were relatively inexpensive and expeditious to produce. And they were doubly specific—to a singular place and time. From the moment they were printed, botanic garden catalogues were outdated, rendering them historical artifacts of what was already a previous iteration of the garden they purported to inventory.

This paper will address European attempts to taxonomize North American plants as read through the botanic garden catalogues that documented the introduction of new specimens in as close to real time as we have from our historical distance. Produced by gardener-artisans, who served as both conduits through which flora from North America arrived in and circulated through Europe and caretakers of plants, catalogues differed in scale and ambition from contemporary publications by botanical taxonomists, including the Basel botanist and physician Caspar Bauhin. Comparison between these different types of publications will show the extent to which academic botany relied on the local networks and vernacular knowledge of artisans.

Short biography: Lauren R. Cannady, Assistant Professor of Art History and Humanities at the University of Houston-Clear Lake, is a scholar working at the intersections of art history, intellectual history, and the environmental humanities. She holds a PhD in Art History from New York University. Through her research and teaching, she explores artistic production and taxonomies of knowledge within interrelated histories of science, religion, technology, and labor in early modern Europe and colonial North America. Her research has been supported by fellowships at the Huntington Library, Oak Spring Garden Foundation, Lloyd Library, and the Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte. Her most recent article, “On the Persistence of the Organic: The Material Lives of the *Robinia pseudoacacia*” traces the environmental and social history of European botanical colonialism and Cherokee craft practices through a single North American tree species. She is completing a book on early modern patterned gardens as sites of knowledge production and transmission and is co-editor of *Crafting Enlightenment: Artisanal Histories and Transnational Networks*, which appeared in the *Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment* series in 2021.

The Race for the Mounted Specimen: The Art of Taxidermy in the Museum Context of the 19th Century

Marie-Charlotte Lamy

This communication explores how taxidermy, as a practice used to preserve knowledge, became a tool of nationalism in the 19th century. In recent years, growing interest in non-human subjects has led to several studies on stuffed or mounted animals. However, while scholars have largely examined taxidermy from a theoretical perspective — viewing it as a material witness to interspecies relationships — its practical aspects, particularly from a historical angle, remain less studied. Yet, with the rise of zoology, the expansion of natural history museums, and the intensification of voyages of discovery, the techniques for preserving dead animals became a major concern.

Reflections about the art of taxidermy emerged in the mid-18th century and developed considerably throughout the 19th century. France initially led the field of natural sciences, thanks to the National Museum established in Paris in 1793. However, by the 1820s, it faced increasing competition. Natural history museums, often with their own taxidermy workshops, emerged across Europe, North America, and colonial territories. The challenge was not only to preserve mounted animals but also the zoological knowledge they embodied, particularly in museum contexts. This presentation will examine the specific criteria that taxidermy specimens had to meet in institutions, as they served both scientific research and public education. It will be demonstrated that the preparation directives surrounding taxidermy — found in manuals and instructions given to explorers — were shaped by a nationalist discourse. This study will highlight how technical innovations in preserving animal specimens played a key role in asserting a country's scientific and imperial dominance. It will trace how the race for the mounted specimens was deeply connected to the detention of knowledge and the showcase of imperial conquests.

Short biography: Marie-Charlotte Lamy is a PhD student and a Research Fellow at the University of Neuchâtel. Her thesis, under the supervision of Prof. Valérie Kobi and Prof. Ersy Contogouris (University of Montreal), focuses on the menagerie of Empress Joséphine and zoological painting in post-revolutionary France. She received a 4-year doctoral scholarship from the SNSF (2019-2023) and was a fellow at DFK Paris (2024). In Spring 2025, she will occupy a research position at the University of Basel in the project *Killing to Keep - Violent Field Practices and Natural History in the Age of Empire* led by Prof. Marie Muschalek. She has had the opportunity to teach in Lausanne, Montreal, Geneva and Neuchâtel. With a strong interest in animal studies, she has written an article on Joséphine's birds (in *Encager le ciel : histoire, anthropologie et esthétique des volières*, 2024). At the moment, she is working on a collective book project (*De A(rt) à Z(oo) : Penser l'animal en histoire de l'art*).

Two Conservator-Restorers in Nineteenth-Century Americas: Carlos Luiz Do Nascimento (1812–1876) and Vicente Huitrado (?–1890)

Karolyna de Paula Koppke

A comparison of the histories of two fine arts academies in the Americas – the Academia de San Carlos in Mexico and the Academia Imperial de Belas Artes in Brazil – reveals that both institutions renovated their art galleries in the mid-19th century. These renovations were initial efforts to preserve works of art on the continent, as academics began organizing the first public spaces to exhibit paintings in their respective countries. This situation required the implementation of technical, albeit empirical, measures to safeguard the artworks, leading to the emergence of the first professionals in conservation and restoration practices. As it is known, the historiography surrounding the development of the restoration field in the nineteenth century primarily focuses on ideas and productions from France, England, and Italy. However, it is crucial to recognize that across the Western or the Westernized world, wherever nationalist movements sparked by liberal revolutions emerged and wherever the effects of the second wave of the Industrial Revolution were felt, the establishment of national historical monuments became a significant issue.

Consequently, it is becoming increasingly evident that a “modern” view of the past was not constructed solely from Europe to America, as has traditionally been claimed, but rather developed through interactions between Europe and America. Therefore, reviewing historiography from a global and interdisciplinary perspective is crucial. In line with this effort, this paper addresses the theme of Individuals and Institutions, as proposed by the conference organizers, focusing on the development and professionalization of the restoration discipline within public service. It will discuss and compare the careers of Carlos Luiz do Nascimento (1812-1876) and Vicente Huitrado (?-1890), who are recognized as the first individuals to officially practice as conservator-restorers in Brazil and Mexico, respectively.

Short biography: Karolyna de Paula Koppke is an architect and urban planner from the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (2011), a specialist in History of Art and Architecture in Brazil from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (2014), a master in Built Environment and Sustainable Heritage from the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (2017). Currently, she is a PhD candidate in Architecture at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro and works as an assistant professor in the Architecture and Urban Planning program at Centro Universitário Ibmec RJ. Her research focuses on comparative history, global history, and connected histories, with an emphasis on the training of architects and the writing of the history of art and architecture in 19th-century Latin America.

Friday, June 6, 2025

Unchanging materials? Preserving stones in early modern European collections

Alexandre Claude

Penser la conservation de ce qui dure: les pierres dans les cabinets de curiosités (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)

[Please note this paper will be held in English.]

Cette intervention se concentrera sur les collections de pierres et expliquera pourquoi les musées d'histoire naturelle ne conservent presque aucune pierre collectionnée avant le XIXe siècle. Le monde minéral semble pourtant plus facile à conserver que les plantes ou les animaux. Cette absence révèle en réalité les pratiques de conservation et de sélection des *naturalia* à l'époque moderne, mais aussi la critiquable division actuelle entre les musées d'art et d'histoire naturelle.

Ma courte présentation s'articulera autour de trois temps. Le premier montrera que toutes les collections de pierres à partir du XVIe siècle étaient hétérogènes ; c'est-à-dire que les pierres étaient conservées sous diverses formes : objets montés, sculptures, camées, bijoux, échantillons polis ou non, dessins, et même grands décors. Ensuite, pour préciser les conditions de conservation et d'exposition des pierres, je présenterai mes recherches sur l'une des toutes premières collections lithiques, celle du médecin bâlois Felix Platter (1536-1614), dont il reste à la fois les dessins, les minéraux et leurs contenants. C'est un cas exceptionnel qui nous permettra de comprendre comment un cabinet était organisé, classé et utilisé à l'époque moderne. Enfin, le dernier moment soulignera combien le critère esthétique était essentiel dans le parcours de préservation des matériaux. Toutes les pierres étaient un objet de savoir, mais seules les belles pierres étaient un objet à conserver. C'est ce que je montrerai avec les tables en marqueterie italienne pour le XVIe siècle et les « marmothèques » du Grand Tour pour le XVIIIe siècle.

Cet exposé parcourra donc l'époque moderne pour retracer une typologie de collection oubliée et souligner toute la valeur esthétique des premières collections lithiques pour dépasser la division contemporaine entre art et science.

Short biography: Alexandre Claude is a second-year PhD researcher in history at the European University Institute (Florence). The aim of his dissertation is to grasp how and why the perception of stones changed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By fostering interdisciplinary perspectives and material studies, he aims to reassess the roles of observing, crafting, displaying, and classifying the lithic world. Prof. Lauren Kassell has supervised his PhD research since he started at the EUI in 2023. His previous training included art history at the École du Louvre, mineralogy at the Sorbonne University and history of knowledge at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) and at the Universität Wien in Vienna. Alexandre has completed many internships in French institutions (Palace of Versailles; Mobilier national; Musée des arts décoratifs; Musée Condé). He is currently co-organiser of the *EUI Material and Visual History Working Group*.

Library or Print Room? New insights into the collecting and care of graphic materials at the British Museum

Felicity Myrone and Ce Stevenson

This paper shares the historiographical basis and initial findings of a new Collaborative Doctoral Project, supported by a partnership between the British Library and Birkbeck, University of London. The project addresses the entangled collecting histories and classificatory systems of the British Library and its parent organisation the British Museum in new ways, and occupies an intersection between institutional history, library studies, history of art, and museology.

The focus of this project is on identifying and researching the provenance, visibility, and the plural identities and status of about 500 books of prints held by the British Library. These were listed in an 1812 shelf list written by then Keeper of Prints, William Alexander, when housed in the Print Room at the British Museum. The list was later marked up by his successor, J. T. Smith, when about 90% of the books were returned to the department of Printed Books, where they remain, largely unrecognised. The recent discovery and sharing of this document have led to a rethinking of the history of the collection, overturning the previous broad assumption that all the prints considered of the greater 'artistic' merit were transferred permanently to the new British Museum Print Room in 1808, while more 'mundane' or less valuable prints were retained by the Library.

The project will investigate the implications of these works' categorisation, cataloguing and placing at the Museum, at the Library – and beyond. While based around a quantitative methodology involving a deep dive into the collection, the project also explores larger questions around the role of visual materials in collecting history and scholarship, the emergence of expertise, disciplinary norms and museological frameworks in the nineteenth century, and the relative status of visual and textual knowledge.

Short biography: Felicity Myrone is an art historian and curator of works on paper. She worked as a Curatorial Assistant at the British Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings before joining the British Library as Curator of Topography in 2006. In 2015 she became Lead Curator, Western Prints and Drawings, with responsibility for prints and drawings in the Library's printed books, manuscripts, maps and music collections. Felicity's current projects include writing the first handbook to the Library's prints and drawings collections.

Short biography: Ce Stevenson is researching the history of a collection of books of prints held by the British Library and British Museum as part of a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership PhD studentship with Birkbeck, University of London. They completed an MA in Classics before training as a librarian while working at the Warburg Institute and the Courtauld Institute of Art.

Des paradigmes et des pratiques à faire évoluer : le cas du fonds graphique Picot-Brocard conservé au musée du Louvre

Federica Mancini

Terminer le catalogage d'un fonds graphique n'est jamais une tâche facile. Dans le cas de celui qui m'a été confié en 2018, une collection de dessins de broderie du XIXe siècle, conservée au Louvre depuis 1997, la mission s'annonçait moins enthousiasmante que complexe. Pourtant, elle s'est révélée une opportunité formidable : d'une part, pour rapprocher des domaines encore trop éloignés – celui du dessin et du textile – ; de l'autre, pour explorer des nombreuses pistes de recherche et mettre en valeur cette collection laissée de côté.

Cette contribution souhaite approfondir deux aspects essentiels de ce travail : d'une part, les problématiques sur la gestion pratique du fonds en termes de localisation, conservation, conditionnement et préconisations de restauration. D'autre part, elle va expliquer les motivations qui nous ont poussés à écarter les formats de publication privilégiés d'habitude, du type inventaire général et/ou catalogue raisonné. En effet, tant les pratiques que la typologie des ouvrages normalement adoptées dans le domaine du dessin ancien se sont révélées inaptées à saisir l'importance et la particularité de ce fonds graphique protoindustriel. De même, elles ne répondaient non plus aux questionnements soulevés par l'ampleur de l'ensemble et par les domaines concernés, de l'histoire du costume et de la mode aux sciences sociales, en passant par la culture matérielle, par l'histoire de l'industrie, en France et à l'étranger entre le Premier Empire et les premières décennies de la Troisième République.

Nous avons réfléchi à une démarche méthodologique différente de celle traditionnellement adoptée dans le dessin ancien pour faire face tant aux défis concrets de traitement de la collection que pour approfondir les recherches en choisissant de rédiger une thèse de doctorat par le projet.

Notice biographique : Après une maîtrise en Lettres modernes à l'Università Cattolica de Milan en 1998, deux masters en Histoire de l'art, à l'Université Paris I-La Sorbonne et à l'École du Louvre, en 2003, Federica Mancini prépare un doctorat par le projet à CY – Cergy-Paris Université, sur le costume civil officiel au XIXe siècle et ses enjeux, dont la soutenance est prévue en juin 2025.

Entrée au département des Arts graphiques du musée du Louvre pour un stage en 2001, elle est nommée chargée d'expositions à partir de 2004, puis chargée de collection, depuis 2017. Collaborant et assurant le commissariat de nombreuses expositions, notamment sur l'école génoise et sur les dessins de Quadratura, elle publie régulièrement ses recherches et les présente à des colloques. Les sujets auxquels elle s'intéresse sont différents et variés, comme les provenances, la collection Baldinucci, les saisies napoléoniennes en Italie, entre autres. Depuis des années, elle intervient dans plusieurs universités étrangères et françaises par des cours et des séminaires et assure les travaux pratiques en Histoire du dessin de l'École du Louvre.

From Shrine to Museum. Demonumentalising Persian Architectural Heritage

Dr. Yuka Kadoi

Despite a renewed interest in the historiography of non-European arts, the methodological reach and limits of conservation have so far been rarely integrated into the study of objects which originally came from Asia but found their way to Euro-American museums during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By overviewing current critiques concerning the heritage preservation of the Persian cultural world in West Asia and Central Asia as a case study, my paper revisits the question of “conservation” in both locally-developed and western-defined contexts, while overviewing the decontextualising process of architectural fragments taken from pre-modern funerary architecture, such as tiles and stuccoes. I will argue that this process exerted far-reaching consequences on the shaping of connoisseurial and scholarly grounding for what were then vaguely categorised as “Persian” art and later collectively “Islamic” art. Such a decontextualised view to cultural heritage continues to influence our understanding of material culture from the Persian world, despite the rise of decolonisation debates in the field of art history and museology.

Short biography: Yuka Kadoi (PhD in History of Art, Edinburgh) is an art historian and art historiographer, currently holding an Elise Richter position and directing an FWF (Austrian Science Fund) sponsored research project, *Persica Centropa: Cosmopolitan Artefacts and Artifices in the Age of Crises (1900-1950)*, at the Faculty of Historical and Cultural Studies, Department of Art History, University of Vienna. Her research interests lie in the mobility of artefacts, history of collecting and critical museology, with the geographical focus on pre-modern Eurasia. She is the author or editor/co-editor of seven books and three special issues of peer-reviewed journals, including her award-winning *Islamic Chinoiserie: The Art of Mongol Iran* (EUP, 2009/2018), as well as the author of more than sixty articles in scholarly journals and edited volumes. She is currently finalising the manuscript of her second monograph, *The History and Historiography of Persian Art, 1900-1935* (under contract with EUP).

The Making of a “Musée Belge” Abroad? Private and State Art Collections on Display in Diplomatic Interiors (1900–1940)

Dr. Charlotte Rottiers

Diplomats have been acknowledged as collectors and brokers of art, but their residences abroad remain understudied as a place of art exhibiting. Using the case of Belgian embassies mediated in the 1930s in the newspaper *Le Soir Illustré*, two concurrent readings of diplomatic interiors as art spaces are discernible as (a) cabinets of curiosity attesting to the career, intellect and standing of their host, the Ambassador; and (b) a “Belgian museum,” as framed by the journalists, to express national identity and underpin ongoing constructions of a national canon of art history. This paper investigates the shifting status and incorporation of art inside diplomatic interiors: while traditionally the interior was ephemeral and ever-changing, as diplomats furnished them with their private art collections; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Royal Museum of Fine Arts had a growing interest in acquiring art and curating diplomatic interiors abroad. This prompted the start of an art collection administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This paper will use the lens of the “national museum” to question how shifting attitudes towards material representation impacted the display, acquisition and conservation of art in diplomatic interiors. Specifically, it will question how art objects were integrated into these semi-public domestic spaces; how they functioned as decoration, markers of prestige or conversation pieces; the impact of national canons of art history and national identity; acquisition and provenance; and the financial and administrative framework underpinning this national art collection on display abroad.

This paper draws on visual sources and administrative documents (inventories, acquisition files) from the Belgian Diplomatic Archive and the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Brussels. While dispersed, these state documents reveal the agency of non-artistic actors including government bureaucrats and diplomatic wives.

Short biography: Charlotte Rottiers is an architectural historian investigating identity formation and cultural and political representation through art and architecture. She is affiliated with the ETH Zürich, Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta), Professorship for the History and Theory of Architecture of Prof. Dr. Maarten Delbeke; and with KU Leuven, Faculty of Architecture, A2I research group. In June 2024, she successfully defended her PhD manuscript *Housing the Nation Abroad: The Material Representation of Belgian Diplomacy, 1831-1914* at the KU Leuven, Faculty of Architecture. Next to her training in art history (MA 2018), she holds a BA in East European Languages and Cultures (2021) and an MA in Urban Planning and Spatial Development (2022) from Ghent University. She continues her research at the ETH on material representation and diplomatic culture by investigating the staging and mediation of diplomatic architecture and interiors in print media in the 1930s.