

## ARTLAB AUSTRALIA

**P** *Faded photos, peeling paintings, tattered tapestries, battered books or fractured figurines!* Do any of these sound familiar? Artlab Australia brings damaged and decaying treasures back to life!

**r** Located on the North Terrace precinct between the Art Gallery of South Australia and the Migration Museum, Artlab Australia specialises in the scientific conservation and preservation of works of art and items of historical, cultural and personal value. Established in 1985 as the State Conservation Centre of South Australia, Artlab now has a staff of twenty-five, most of them graduates of the Conservation of Cultural Materials program, University of Canberra.

**e** Artlab has laboratories specialising in the treatment and care of a wide range of material including books, works on paper, photographs, paintings, textiles, outdoor sculpture and decorative features in heritage buildings. Artlab's team of specialists are happy to answer questions and suggest options for treatment, display and storage of cultural heritage materials to ensure their longevity. Our conservators also provide innovative solutions for building climate control and environmental monitoring, as well as preventive conservation services and disaster response training.

**s** Artlab's clients include libraries, galleries, museums, regional cultural centres, churches, Aboriginal art and craft centres, offices, schools and private homes both locally and nationally. Notable projects include the cleaning of the reredos for St Peter's Cathedral in Adelaide, and the restoration of painted murals and decorative finishes in the Chapels at the New Norcia Benedictine Monastery in Western Australia.

**r** Ian Cook, Director of Artlab Australia, says "preserving and restoring artefacts so that they can be appreciated now and in the future is terribly important. This is because books, photographs, prints, drawings, paintings and sculptures have great significance for individuals, as well as forming part of a community's broader heritage."

**v** Artlab's services have particular value for those working in libraries and archives. Anthony Zammit, a paper conservator specialising in books, says that:

Artlab receives a significant amount of rare books and historically important manuscripts for conservation due to the fact that there are few institutions which provide book conservation services in Australia. As books are complex objects, being three dimensional and mechanical, extensive experience is required in conserving them. Books are not like paintings which are fixed and hang on walls - books are physically handled and because of this usually wear



and break down. Conservation services to libraries and archives are therefore important, not just to treat items, but to offer advice to prevent deterioration.



Artlab's expertise and services are now available internationally. A few of Artlab's international projects include work in a Buddhist temple in Taipei and the treatment of artifacts for the O'hele Synagogue in Hong Kong

Artlab (in conjunction with SAGRIC International, Danvers Architects and the South Australian Heritage Unit of the Department of Administrative and Information Services) is currently involved in a prestigious project with the Republic of Indonesia to develop a management plan for preserving and conserving the cultural heritage of Bali. This project is World Bank funded.

Artlab also provides international training services and has conducted courses in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. From August to December 1999 Artlab is undertaking a training and development project involving two Indonesian fine arts graduates. The purpose of the project is to explore topics such as principles, practice and ethics of conservation, with a strong focus on preventive conservation. At the end of the program, the interns will be able to recognise and undertake procedures and processes to ensure the stability of art works - especially with regard to the difficult humid conditions in a tropical climate like Indonesia.

Many of Artlab's conservators have had experience working and training in libraries, galleries and museums around the world. Artlab objects conservator, Joanna Barr, who specialises in the conservation of large, three dimensional objects, particularly sculpture, recently won a Queens Trust award to undertake the *Conservation of Outdoor Bronze Sculpture* course in New York during July this year. Alice Cannon, paper conservator, spent two years in New York at the Pierpont Morgan Library before joining the staff at Artlab.

Libraries, museums and galleries can gain a greater understanding of conservation skills and practices via the recently published national conservation skills development and training package - *reCollections*. Artlab, in conjunction with the Heritage Collections Council (HCC), developed *reCollections* and has in recent months been busy launching the package across the country. For further information call Artlab on (08) 8207-7520, and we will advise on how to obtain a copy.



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Cultural heritage materials require great care if they are to survive the test of time. We suggest that if you are uncertain about how to look after an item or collection, you contact Artlab.

- Illustrations:
1. Gillian Leahy, Paintings Conservator, stabilising paint on the walls of St Gertrude's Chapel, Benedictine Community of New Norcia, Western Australia.
  2. Eugene Taddeo, Paintings Conservator, treating oil painting on canvas *The Sacred Heart*.
  3. Oil painting on canvas *The Sacred Heart*, after treatment.

Article prepared by Ian Cook,  
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In our last issue (#39, August 1999), we published papers from the Adelaide conference on **preservation issues**. Readers may be interested to further their reading on this topic. An article appeared in the latest issue of *Australian Library Journal* (November 1999) : Mitchell Parkes, "A review of the preservation issues associated with digital documents." In the abstract preceding the article, Parkes wrote:

In 1995, in what was to become one of the seminal pieces in the field of digital preservation, Rothenberg made the crucial observation that:

Information technology is revolutionising our concept of record keeping in an upheaval as great as the introduction of printing, if not writing itself. The current generation of digital records has unique historical significance. Yet these documents are far more fragile than paper, placing the chronicle of our entire period in jeopardy. (Rothenberg, J. "Ensuring the longevity of digital documents." *Scientific American* 272, 1995. p24.)

Since this article appeared, many other commentators have voiced their concerns over the long term viability of digital documents and problems in their preservation. As a consequence, many believe that there is a real possibility that the cultural memory of the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond may be lost. The purpose of this review is to examine the literature and assess the extent to which the concerns of Rothenberg and others are justified.

Editor

