



american
institute for
conservation

**Preserving Cultural
Heritage**

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Information Sheet for Journalists

Baseline Definitions

See the webpages [What is Conservation](#) and [Conservation Terminology](#) for terms commonly used by conservation and preservation professionals.

What is the American Institute for Conservation?

The American Institute for Conservation (AIC) is the leading membership association in the U.S. for current and aspiring conservators as well as allied professionals who preserve cultural heritage. AIC represents about 3,500 individuals in more than 40 countries around the world working in the fields of science, art, and history through treatment, research, collections care, education, and more. All of them have the same goal: preserve our cultural heritage—our personal and collective memories—so we can learn from it today and provide a legacy for generations to come.

What is conservation?

Conservation encompasses all those actions taken toward the long-term preservation of [cultural heritage](#). Activities include examination, documentation, treatment (including restoration), and preventive care, supported by research and education.

What is a conservator?

Conservators are professionals who work to preserve cultural property from the ravages of time, the threats of pollution, and the devastation brought by natural disasters. Working in museums, other cultural institutions, research labs, and/or in private practice, conservators combine unique skills gained through ongoing study and advanced training in art history, science, art and craft techniques, and related disciplines to care for and preserve our tangible history.

Because of the increasingly technical nature of modern conservation, conservators usually specialize in a particular type of object, such as: paintings, works of art on paper, rare books, photographs, electronic media, textiles, furniture and wooden artifacts, archaeological and cultural materials from indigenous communities, sculpture, architectural elements, or decorative arts.

How does conservation differ from restoration?

Sometimes confusion arises about the terms “restoration” and “conservation.”

- Conservation is the overarching term that includes all aspects of examining, documenting, restoring, treating, and preserving cultural heritage.
- Restoration is a type of conservation treatment. It specifically refers to an attempt to bring cultural property closer to its original appearance. The other type of conservation treatment is stabilization, which refers to an attempt to maintain the integrity of cultural property and to only minimize deterioration.

What is the correct name for people who practice conservation?

In the United States, people whose primary occupation is the practice of conservation are called “conservators.” The term “restorer” is limited as it does not encompass all aspects of the profession. In Europe, some countries use the term “conservator-restorer.” “Conservationists” are typically professionals who focus on environmental conservation. Scientists who perform research, including analysis of materials, to support conservation practice are called “conservation scientists.”

What kind of training does a conservator have?

Conservators undergo specialized education and training that commonly includes graduate degrees in conservation and several years of internship and hands-on skill development. Education can also take the form of apprentice training for multiple years under supervision of a trained conservator. Conservators formulate and implement all the activities of conservation in accordance with an ethical code like our [Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice](#). Information about individual North American graduate programs can be found [on our website](#). The American Institute for Conservation offers [professional membership designations](#).

What kind of skills does a conservator have?

Along with hand skills, conservators have a strong emphasis on research and collaboration. Conservators work with architects, engineers, art historians, cultural communities, scientists, fabricators, curators, and creators as well as caretakers to determine the best way to care for and preserve items and collections.

Why can conservation treatment take so long?

Conservators start by examining the object or collection, researching materials and methods, and planning for the best course of action. This might include

extensive research into materials, artist history, techniques, and past conservation treatments and includes many unknowns. Although there are established treatment protocols, these often must be adapted to each case and adjusted as treatment progresses. Timelines for treatment can be impacted by budget, staffing, additional consultation, exhibit scheduling, and many other factors.

Why can conservation treatment be so expensive?

The fees charged by conservators vary greatly depending on location, experience of the conservator, and the complexity of the project. Rates must be established on an individual basis and following an initial examination and evaluation. Conservators do not assess the value of objects.

Following professional codes of ethics, conservators must thoroughly document their work before, during, and after treatment. They must also research original materials and the best treatment approaches and use high quality treatment materials that have been tested for compatibility with the original material and are reversible or retractable. All these aspects affect the financial cost of the conservation treatment.

Who can I contact for comments on a story connected to conservation?

For feedback, questions, or more information about conservation, please contact the AIC and FAIC Executive Director as noted on our [Press page](#).

We also offer a [free professional services search tool](#), which you can use to search by specialty or location.

Additional Information

You can learn more about the **American Institute for Conservation** and get in touch:

Website: www.culturalheritage.org

Address: 727 15th Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005

Telephone: +1 202.452.9545

General Inquiries: info@culturalheritage.org

Press Inquiries: www.culturalheritage.org/press

There are several organizations that represent conservation professionals across the world. We can connect you to various [regional, national, and international organizations](#).