AIC CODE OF ETHICS AND GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE

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HISTORY

The first formulation of standards of practice and professional relations by any group of art conservators was produced by the IIC-American Group (now AIC) Committee on Professional Standards and Procedures. Formed at the second regular meeting of the IIC-AG, in Detroit, May 23, 1961, the committee worked under the direction of Murray Pease, conservator, Metropolitan Museum of Art; other members of the committee were Henri H. Courtais, Dudley T. Easby, Rutherford J. Gettens, and Sheldon Keck. The Report of the Murray Pease Committee: IIC American Group Standards of Practice and Professional Relations for Conservators was adopted by the IIC-AG at the fourth annual meeting in New York on June 8, 1963. It was published in Studies in Conservation in August 1964, 9(3):116-21. The primary purpose of this document was: to provide accepted criteria against which a specific procedure or operation can be measured when a question as to its adequacy has been raised.

The first formulation of a code of ethics for art conservators was adopted by the members of IIC-American Group at the annual meeting in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, on May 27, 1967. It was produced by the Committee on Professional Relations: Sheldon Keck, chair; Richard D. Buck; Dudley T.

Easby; Rutherford J. Gettens; Caroline Keck; Peter Michael s, and Louis Pomerantz. The primary purpose of this document was: to express those principles and practices which will guide the art conservator in the ethical practice of his profession.

These two documents, The Murray Pease Report: Standards of Practice and Professional Relationships for Conservators and the Code of Ethics for Art Conservators were published in booklet form by the IIC-AG in May 1968 together with the Articles of Association of IIC and Bylaws of the American Group.

In 1977, the Ethics and Standards Committee (Elisabeth C. G. Packard, chair; Barbara H. Beardsley; Perry C. Huston; Kate C. Lefferts; Robert M. Organ; and Clements L. Robertson) was charged with updating the two documents to reflect changes in the profession. The 1968 format was retained, except that the more general Code of Ethics was placed first as Part One, followed by the Standards of Practice as Part Two. These revised versions of the code and standards were approved by the Fellows of AIC on May 31, 1979, at the annual meeting in Toronto. This document was amended on May 24, 1985, at the annual meeting in Washington, D.C., to reflect the addition to the AIC Bylaws of procedures for the reporting, investigation, and review of alleged violations of the code and standards and of mechanisms for appealing such allegations. Between 1984 and 1990 the Ethics and Standards Committee, responding to further growth and change in the profession, and following on several years of AIC discussion on the issue of certification, was char ged by the AIC Board to work on more substantial revisions of the document. This was done by soliciting commentary from the specialty groups and also from the membership via issues sessions at the annual meetings in Chicago (1986) and Cincinnati (1989). Following this, a document consisting of a new simplified Code, prepared by the committee, a nd a revised Standards, prepared primarily by the board was presented to the membership for discussion at the 1990 annual meeting in Richmond. The consensus of the membership at the meeting was to continue the revision process. During these important years, the members of the committee were, Elisabeth Batchelor, chair; Robert Futernick; Meg Loew Craft (until 1989); Elizabeth Lunning (from 1987); Carol C. Mancusi-Ungaro; and Philip Vance (until 1986). In 1989, the committee added corresponding members Barbara Appelbaum, Paul N. Banks, Steven Prins, and Elisabeth West FitzHugh.

In 1990, the AIC Board charged a newly appointed committee to assess the role and use of the code and standards and as well to analyze specific difficulties within the documents themselves. The committee first undertook an in-depth comparative analysis of the documents organizing them topically and relating them to other codes of ethics both in conservation and in other

professions. Between September 1991 and May 1992, the committee produced five lengthy discussion papers on basic issue s as supplements to the AIC News (prior to November 1991, the AIC Newsletter). From these papers, the committee compiled an extensive body of membership and specialty group commentary, supplementing that obtained previously. It then began the creation of a new revision, the first draft of which was published in the September 1993 AIC News follow ing a discussion session at the 1993 annual meeting in Denver. A revised draft was published in the May 1994 AIC News and discussed at the 1994 annual meeting in Nashville. A final version of the revised document was prepared and was approved by AIC Fellows and Professional Associates through a mail vote in August 1994.

Besides a new simplified Code of Ethics and the creation of Guidelines for Practice to replace the Standards of Practice, the new document will be supplemented by commentaries, a detailed description of which was published in the November 1993 AIC News. The goals and purposes of the committee and the problematic issues it sought to address in c reating the revision are described in the committee's columns in the September 1991 AIC Newsletter and September 1993 AIC News.

Ethics and Standards Committee members during these years and involved in the creation of the revised code and guidelines were: Debbie Hess Norris (chair, resigned 1993); Donna K. Strahan (co-chair 1993-94, chair 1994); Carol Aiken (co-chair from 1993, resigned 1994); Nancy Ash; Dan Kushel; and Robert Espinosa (from 1993).

Elisabeth C. G. Packard, Chair, Ethics and Standards Committee 1977-79

Amended May 24, 1985

Revised August 1994, Dan Kushel, Member, Ethics and Standards Committee

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CODE OF ETHICS of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works

PREAMBLE

The primary goal of conservation professionals, individuals with extensive training and special expertise, is the preservation of cultural property. Cultural property consists of individual objects, structures, or aggregate collections. It is material which has significance that may be artistic,

historical, scientific, religious, or social, an d it is an invaluable and irreplaceable legacy that must be preserved for future generations.

In striving to achieve this goal, conservation professionals assume certain obligations to the cultural property, to its owners and custodians, to the conservation profession, and to society as a whole. This document, the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC), sets forth the principles that guide conservation professionals and others who are involved in the care of cultural property.

I. The conservation professional shall strive to attain the highest possible standards in all aspects of conservation, including, but not limited to, preventive conservation, examination, documentation, treatment, research, and education.

II. All actions of the conservation professional must be governed by an informed respect for the cultural property, its unique character and significance, and the people or person who created it.

III. While recognizing the right of society to make appropriate and respectful use of cultural property, the conservation professional shall serve as an advocate for the preservation of cultural property.

IV. The conservation professional shall practice within the limits of personal competence and education as well as within the limits of the available facilities.

V. While circumstances may limit the resources allocated to a particular situation, the quality of work that the conservation professional performs shall not be compromised.

VI. The conservation professional must strive to select methods and materials that, to the best of current knowledge, do not adversely affect cultural property or its future examination, scientific investigation, treatment, or function.

VII. The conservation professional shall document examination, scientific investigation, and treatment by creating permanent records and reports.

VIII. The conservation professional shall recognize a responsibility for preventive conservation by endeavoring to limit damage or deterioration to cultural property, providing guidelines for continuing use and care, recommending appropriate environmental conditions for storage and

exhibition, and encouraging proper procedures for handling, packing, and transport.

IX. The conservation professional shall act with honesty and respect in all professional relationships, seek to ensure the rights and opportunities of all individuals in the profession, and recognize the specialized knowledge of others.

X. The conservation professional shall contribute to the evolution and growth of the profession, a field of study that encompasses the liberal arts and the natural sciences. This contribution may be made by such means as continuing development of personal skills and knowledge, sharing of information and experience with colleagues, addi ng to the profession's written body of knowledge, and providing and promoting educational opportunities in the field.

XI. The conservation professional shall promote an awareness and understanding of conservation through open communication with allied professionals and the public.

XII. The conservation professional shall practice in a manner that minimizes personal risks and hazards to co-workers, the public, and the environment. XIII. Each conservation professional has an obligation to promote understanding of and adherence to this Code of Ethics.

GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works

The conservation professional should use the following guidelines and supplemental commentaries together with the AIC Code of Ethics in the pursuit of ethical practice. The commentaries are separate documents, created by the AIC membership, that are intended to amplify this document and to accommodate growth and change in the field.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

1. Conduct: Adherence to the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice is a matter of personal responsibility. The conservation professional should always be guided by the intent of this document, recognizing that specific circumstances may legitimately affect professional decisions.

2. Disclosure: In professional relationships, the conservation professional

should share complete and accurate information relating to the efficacy and value of materials and procedures. In seeking and disclosing such information, and that relating to analysis and research, the conservation professional should recognize the importance of published information that has undergone formal peer review.

3. Laws and Regulations: The conservation professional should be cognizant of laws and regulations that may have a bearing on professional activity. Among these laws and regulations are those concerning the rights of artists and their estates, occupational health and safety, sacred and religious material, excavated objects, endangered species, human remains, and stolen property.

4. Practice: Regardless of the nature of employment, the conservation professional should follow appropriate standards for safety, security, contracts, fees, and advertising.

> **4a. Health and Safety:** The conservation professional should be aware of issues concerning the safety of materials and procedures and should make this information available to others, as appropriate.
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> **4b. Security:** The conservation professional should provide working and storage conditions designed to protect cultural property.
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> **4c. Contracts:** The conservation professional may enter into contractual agreements with individuals, institutions, businesses, or government agencies provided that such agreements do not conflict with principles of the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice.
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> **4d. Fees:** Fees charged by the conservation professional should be commensurate with services rendered. The division of a fee is acceptable only when based on the division of service or responsibility.
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> **4e. Advertising:** Advertising and other representations by the conservation professional should present an accurate description of credentials and services. Limitations concerning the use of the AIC name or membership status should be followed as stated in the AIC Bylaws, section II, 13.

5. Communication: Communication between the conservation professional and the owner, custodian, or authorized agent of the cultural property is essential to ensure an agreement that reflects shared decisions and realistic expectations.

6. Consent: The conservation professional should act only with the consent of the owner, custodian, or authorized agent. The owner, custodian, or agent should be informed of any circumstances that necessitate significant deviations from the agreement. When possible, notification should be made before such changes are made.

7. Confidentiality: Except as provided in the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice, the conservation professional should consider relationships with an owner, custodian, or authorized agent as confidential. Information derived from examination, scientific investigation, or treatment of the cultural property should not be publish ed or otherwise made public without written permission.

8. Supervision: The conservation professional is responsible for work delegated to other professionals, students, interns, volunteers, subordinates, or agents and assignees. Work should not be delegated or subcontracted unless the conservation professional can supervise the work directly, can ensure proper supervision, or has sufficie nt knowledge of the practitioner to be confident of the quality of the work. When appropriate, the owner, custodian, or agent should be informed if such delegation is to occur.

9. Education: Within the limits of knowledge, ability, time, and facilities, the conservation professional is encouraged to become involved in the education of conservation personnel. The objectives and obligations of the parties shall be agreed upon mutually.

10. Consultation: Since no individual can be expert in every aspect of conservation, it may be appropriate to consult with colleagues or, in some instances, to refer the owner, custodian, or authorized agent to a professional who is more experienced or better equipped to accomplish the required work. If the owner requests a second op inion, this request must be respected.

11. Recommendations and References: The conservation professional should not provide recommendations without direct knowledge of a colleague's competence and experience. Any reference to the work of others must be based on facts and personal knowledge rather than on hearsay.

12. Adverse Commentary: A conservation professional may be required to testify in legal, regulatory, or administrative proceedings concerning allegations of unethical conduct. Testimony concerning such matters should be given at these proceedings or in connection with paragraph 13 of these Guidelines.

13. Misconduct: Allegations of unethical conduct should be reported in

writing to the AIC president as described in the AIC Bylaws, section II, 12. As stated in the bylaws, all correspondence regarding alleged unethical conduct shall be held in the strictest confidence. Violations of the Code and Guidelines that constitute unethical conduct may result in disciplinary action.

14. Conflict of Interest: The conservation professional should avoid situations in which there is a potential for a conflict of interest that may affect the quality of work, lead to the dissemination of false information, or give the appearance of impropriety.

15. Related Professional Activities: The conservation professional should be especially mindful of the considerable potential for conflict of interest in activities such as authentication, appraisal, or art dealing.

EXAMINATION AND SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION

16. Justification: Careful examination of cultural property forms the basis for all future action by the conservation professional. Before undertaking any examination or tests that may cause change to cultural property, the conservation professional should establish the necessity for such procedures.

17. Sampling and Testing: Prior consent must be obtained from the owner, custodian, or agent before any material is removed from a cultural property. Only the minimum required should be removed, and a record of removal must be made. When appropriate, the material removed should be retained.

18. Interpretation: Declarations of age, origin, or authenticity should be made only when based on sound evidence.

19. Scientific Investigation: The conservation professional should follow accepted scientific standards and research protocols.

PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION

20. Preventive Conservation: The conservation professional should recognize the critical importance of preventive conservation as the most effective means of promoting the long-term preservation of cultural property. The conservation professional should provide guidelines for continuing use and care, recommend appropriate environmental conditions for storage and exhibition, and encourage proper procedures for handling, packing, and transport.

TREATMENT

21. Suitability: The conservation professional performs within a continuum of care and will rarely be the last entrusted with the conservation of a cultural property. The conservation professional should only recommend or undertake treatment that is judged suitable to the preservation of the aesthetic, conceptual, and physical charact eristics of the cultural property. When nonintervention best serves to promote the preservation of the cultural property, it may be appropriate to recommend that no treatment be performed.

22. Materials and Methods: The conservation professional is responsible for choosing materials and methods appropriate to the objectives of each specific treatment and consistent with currently accepted practice. The advantages of the materials and methods chosen must be balanced against their potential adverse effects on future examination, scientific investigation, treatment, and function.

23. Compensation for Loss: Any intervention to compensate for loss should be documented in treatment records and reports and should be detectable by common examination methods. Such compensation should be reversible and should not falsely modify the known aesthetic, conceptual, and physical characteristics of the cultural property, especially by removing or obscuring original material.

DOCUMENTATION

24. Documentation: The conservation professional has an obligation to produce and maintain accurate, complete, and permanent records of examination, sampling, scientific investigation, and treatment. When appropriate, the records should be both written and pictorial. The kind and extent of documentation may vary according to the circumstances, the nature of the object, or whether an individual object or a collection is to be documented. The purposes of such documentation are:

- to establish the condition of cultural property;
- to aid in the care of cultural property by providing information helpful to future treatment and by adding to the profession's body of knowledge;
- to aid the owner, custodian, or authorized agent and society as a whole in the appreciation and use of cultural property by increasing understanding of an object's aesthetic, conceptual, and physical characteristics; and to aid the conservation professional by providing a reference that can assist in the continued development of knowledge and by supplying records that can help avoid misunderstanding and

unnecessary litigation.

25. Documentation of Examination: Before any intervention, the conservation professional should make a thorough examination of the cultural property and create appropriate records. These records and the reports derived from them must identify the cultural property and include the date of examination and the name of the examiner. They also should include, as appropriate, a description of structure, materials, condition, and pertinent history.

26. Treatment Plan: Following examination and before treatment, the conservation professional should prepare a plan describing the course of treatment. This plan should also include the justification for and the objectives of treatment, alternative approaches, if feasible, and the potential risks. When appropriate, this plan should be submitted as a proposal to the owner, custodian, or authorized agent.

27. Documentation of Treatment: During treatment, the conservation professional should maintain dated documentation that includes a record or description of techniques or procedures involved, materials used and their composition, the nature and extent of all alterations, and any additional information revealed or otherwise ascertained . A report prepared from these records should summarize this information and provide, as necessary, recommendations for subsequent care.

28. Preservation of Documentation: Documentation is an invaluable part of the history of cultural property and should be produced and maintained in as permanent a manner as practicable. Copies of reports of examination and treatment must be given to the owner, custodian, or authorized agent, who should be advised of the importance of maintaining these materials with the cultural property. Documentation is also an important part of the profession's body of knowledge. The conservation professional should strive to preserve these records and give other professionals appropriate access to them, when access does not contravene agreements regarding confidentiality.

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

29. Emergency Situations: Emergency situations can pose serious risks of damage to or loss of cultural property that may warrant immediate intervention on the part of the conservation professional. In an emergency that threatens cultural property, the conservation professional should take all reasonable action to preserve the cultural property, recognizing that strict adherence to the Guidelines for Practice may not be possible.

AMENDMENTS

30. Amendments: Proposed amendments to the Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice must be initiated by petition to the AIC Board of Directors from at least five members who are Fellows or Professional Associates of AIC. The board will direct the appropriate committee to prepare the amendments for vote in accordance with procedures described in Section VII of the Bylaws. Acceptance of amendments or changes must be affirmed by at least two-thirds of all AIC Fellows and Professional Associates voting.

COMMENTARIES

31. Commentaries: Commentaries are prepared or amended by specialty groups, task forces, and appropriate committees of AIC. A review process shall be undergone before final approval by the AIC Board of Directors.

(Individual Commentaries are accessed by clicking on the icons above, or see the Commentaries Index. The entire text of the Commentaries is also available here as one large (106K) file for convenience in printing.)

*Revised August 1994