



Smithsonian  
*Museum Conservation Institute*

# *Our Next 10 Years*



MCI Strategic Plan 2007-2017

January 2007

# As the Director Sees It...

Our world's cultural legacy, like its environment, is precious and fragile, and both require responsible stewardship. But unlike the environment, art and cultural objects are in no way self-renewing, which makes their timely conservation particularly crucial. Meeting this challenge is the work of the Smithsonian's Museum Conservation Institute.

It's been very gratifying to be part of this work, especially since MCI's multidisciplinary and creative staff is uniquely well equipped to tackle it. In 2006, they've certainly been busy, as MCI initiated, continued, or completed 109 projects in collaboration with the Smithsonian's art, science, and history museums and collections. Accomplishments included making advances in detecting and quantifying heavy-metal pesticides on museum collections,



initiating a collaborative project with NASA to examine moon dust and deterioration of spacesuits at the National Air and Space Museum, joining international initiatives to study deterioration of 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial and artistic materials, and updating preservation guidelines and standards for the Smithsonian's diverse collections. In addition, MCI developed its research capacity in inorganic analysis and revitalized its major instrumentation. Our new environmental scanning

electron microscope with micro x-ray fluorescence capability will allow rapid mapping of moon dust on space gloves from the first man on the moon, and provide a cutting-edge assay for a new generation of spacesuit materials.

What lies ahead in the next 10 years? While stagnant federal budgets and inability to bring staff levels back to those of the 1990's have been part of MCI's recent past, we still have a core of experts in the sciences and museum conservation who work together with all of the 19 Smithsonian museums



and the three other research centers. Their enthusiasm as we forge ahead into such new conservation frontiers as biomolecular analysis, biodeterioration, and modern material studies makes me optimistic about the future. In fact, I believe MCI is now beginning a renaissance in mission, vision, and goals.

This strategic plan outlines our perspective at the start of 2007. It is an exciting time to be at the helm and help the staff continue MCI's 40-year tradition of excellence in cultural conservation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert J. Koestler". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Robert J. Koestler



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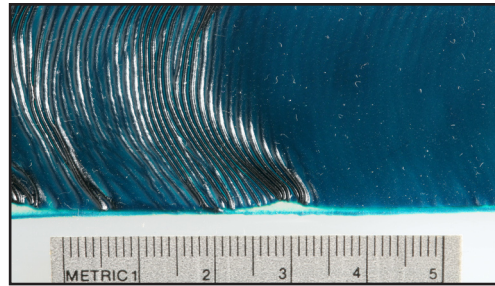
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# Why MCI?

The Museum Conservation Institute (MCI), located just outside of Washington, D.C., in Suitland, Maryland, is the Smithsonian Institution's center for advanced scientific study and care of museum collections. As a Pan-Institutional unit, MCI serves as a resource for the wide range of Smithsonian museums, research centers, and offices, which regularly turn to it for assistance in researching, caring for, safely displaying, and preserving the Institution's collections.

MCI's work is interdisciplinary—uniting the arts and humanities with physical and natural sciences. Its highly skilled team of conservators and scientists, its state-of-the-art instrumentation, and its long history of accomplishments all play a part in its standing as a major contributor to the preservation of cultural heritage worldwide.



For more than 40 years, MCI, under several names, has been the central Smithsonian materials research laboratory, as well as a leader in the museum conservation field. For its first 25 years it was the Conservation Analytical Laboratory (CAL). In 1998, an expanding scope led to a name change to the Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education (SCMRE). In



2006, the center adopted its present name to reflect a renewed focus on: (1) the conservation and preservation of materials in the museum environment, and (2) the application of scientific methodology to collections-related questions in archeology, anthropology, history, and art history.

Over the next decade MCI will build on its established strengths in preventive conservation and museum environments: it will also apply its expertise to new areas of collections care



and conservation, with an emphasis on such multidisciplinary studies as biomolecular analysis, biodeterioration, and the study of modern materials. There will be a continued focus on practical applications such as risk assessment and environmental

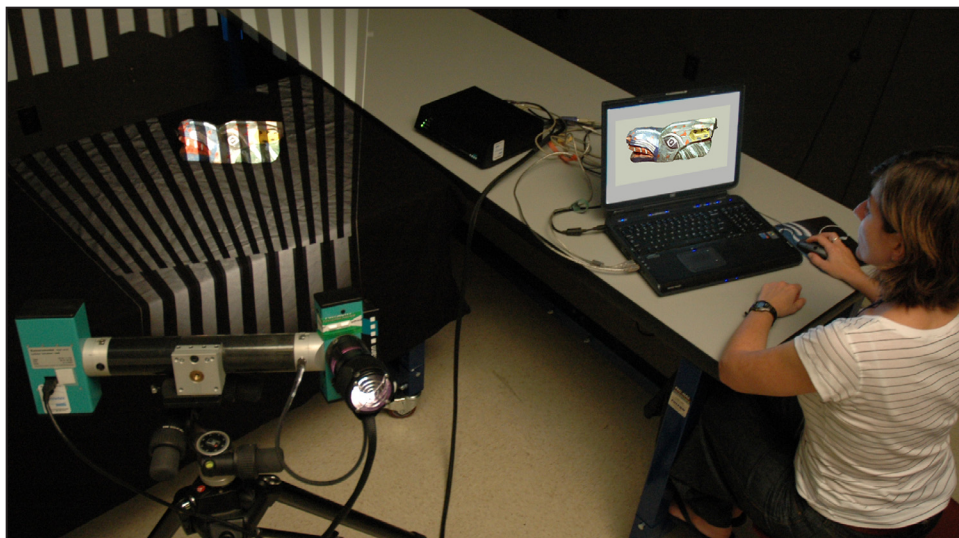
recommendations for collections care.

All of MCI's staff—scientific, conservation, administrative, and management—collectively formulated the goals that this plan sets forth for the next 10 years, as well as the strategies to achieve them. A visiting committee of leaders in the field reviewed and contributed to the plan. MCI's unique ability to work across individual museum collections and professional interests for a truly interdisciplinary and team-oriented approach to the study and preservation of cultural heritage will be the hallmark of the organization's next 10 years.



# Mission

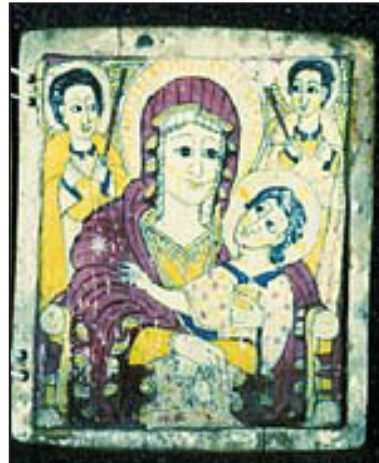
Through advanced scientific study, technology development, and dissemination of knowledge, the Smithsonian's Museum Conservation Institute works to enhance the understanding and preservation of cultural heritage collections at the Smithsonian and museums worldwide, for the benefit of present and future generations.





# Vision

MCI is already a model for exploration, understanding, and preservation of diverse collections, having made many contributions to the longevity of cultural heritage that can be seen throughout the world. In the next decade we will build on this legacy and shift some of our focus to new and less understood areas, such as biomolecular analysis, biodeterioration, and modern materials.



# Values

**Integrity.** MCI is committed to the highest level of excellence in research and to the dissemination of information of unquestioned credibility.

**Scientific method.** MCI applies scientific method in all of its research.

**Innovation.** MCI focuses the resourcefulness and creativity of its staff on the development of solutions to complex materials preservation needs and the improvement of traditional approaches.



**Accountability.** MCI believes that its colleagues in the Smithsonian and in the international conservation community should hold it accountable for the integrity, applicability, and value of its work.

**Collaboration.** In both its internal operations and its dealings with Smithsonian units and external organizations, MCI embraces a policy of mutual respect, sharing of knowledge, and cooperation.



# Goal

# 1

To continue to  
be a national  
and world leader  
in conservation  
science



## *Strategies*

- Develop a comprehensive research agenda that expands MCI's involvement in cutting-edge fields, such as 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial materials, nondestructive analysis of collection materials, biomolecular analysis, and biodeterioration
- Continue to catalyze collaborative research in areas of specialization



# Goal

# 2

## To better serve the Smithsonian



## Strategies

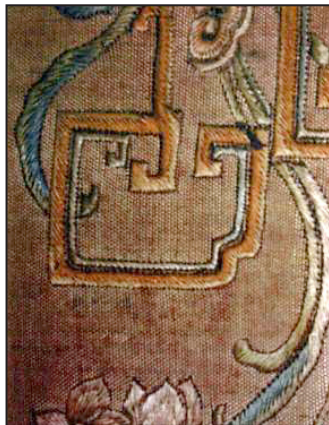
- Continue to promptly respond to units' requests for consultation and services, while incorporating new quality control systems
- Develop research foci that speak to the needs of the Smithsonian (e.g., developing analytical protocols for portable x-ray fluorescence spectrometers)
- Conduct periodic assessments of current and future collections preservation needs at the Smithsonian
- Establish formal liaisons between MCI and Smithsonian units and develop blueprints for regular contact
- Educate new audiences within SI—registrars, collections specialists, exhibition fabricators, and facilities personnel—about MCI's capabilities and services
- Identify and pursue opportunities for collaborative projects with Smithsonian units, such as prototyping solutions and partnering on grant proposals



# Goal

# 3

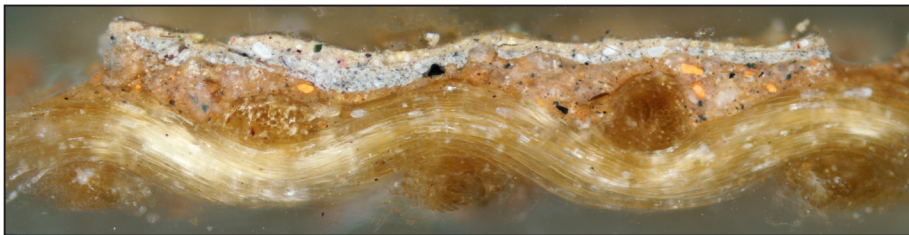
To  
communicate,  
inform, and  
educate





## Strategies

- Offer Smithsonian-wide colloquia, courses, and presentations about MCI's research agenda and collaborations with Smithsonian units
- Play a leadership role in coordinating conservation research and problem-solving at the Smithsonian, e.g., through reinstatement of the Smithsonian Conservation Council/Forum
- Identify guidelines and standards for different types of collections (e.g., temperature, humidity, handling, light levels, pollution, case design and display of materials, security, risk assessment, and transport)
- Connect with professionals outside the museum field with an eye toward enlisting potential collaborators, advisors, and sponsors for MCI work
- Enhance access to MCI scholarship and conservation work through means that include the MCI website, articles in Smithsonian publications and scholarly and popular media, presentations at scholarly and popular forums, a booklet summarizing MCI projects, an annual compendium of staff publications, and scanning of hard-copy documents
- Provide on-site services/demonstrations, such as a "Mobile Conservation Lab"



Goal

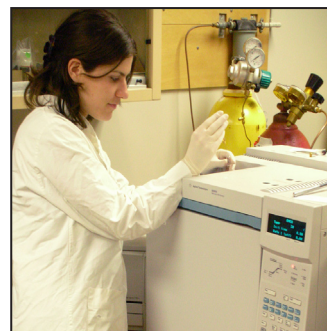
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To enhance our work...



## Strategies

- Continue to foster a culture of cooperation among staff by encouraging interdisciplinary approaches to research, and assembling temporary teams for specific projects and research programs
- Maintain an environment that empowers staff and encourages them to generate new research ideas and become project leaders; this entails strengthening professional development opportunities, and helping staff develop and prioritize goals
- Augment staff with a new generation of conservators and conservation scientists through:
  - » New hires in inorganic analysis (technology and analysis), organic analysis (conservation scientists), equipment operations, and information dissemination (writing/editing and web design)
  - » Fellowship, internship, and visiting scientist programs, including a “Scholar in Residence” program for Smithsonian and external professionals
  - » Partnerships with conservation organizations
  - » Contracting



# Goal

# 5

...and ensure  
our legacy



## Strategies

- Establish MCI as a model employer able to attract the best people in the conservation world
- Establish a fundraising capacity, and formulate a development plan
- Increase the number of proposals to foundations and other funders
- Develop a business case for MCI that makes clear its value to the conservation world
- Establish a market capability, and develop a marketing plan, to include patent and licensing agreements
- Reach out to external audiences
- Leverage MCI resources through cooperative ventures and partnerships with Smithsonian units and other organizations
- Maintain a state-of-the-art research facility by:
  - » Routinely updating analytical equipment
  - » Soliciting donations of equipment
  - » Evaluating facilities and developing, as appropriate, new scientific and conservation laboratories





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