

Session 2 (Part 2)

Submitted by sharragrow on 07 Sep 2022

Image



Wed, 07/09/2022 - 11:03

Roos van der Helm and Alexandra Taylor

Tuesday, Session 2: Repatriation and Decolonisation

Collaborating with a Source Community to Conserve two Sámi Coffee Bags by Combining Established Conservation Treatments and Traditional Preservation Methods - Kuukua Anna Buduson



Presentation overview

Kuukua Anna Buduson explored, in detail, a thorough conservation examination of the material constituents in two Sámi Coffee Bags. She began with a close visual examination, and progressed into the analytical realm of FTIR Spectroscopy. Technical investigations are shaping a future in which artificial intelligence has its say in the treatment of a work of art, but this case study depended on one core factor: collaboration with the source community.

Buduson's master dissertation project addressed the following research question: "How can collaboration help a conservator to uncover hidden traditional knowledge and to decide on a more suitable conservation treatment?" The project focused on two coffee bags of the Sámi indigenous people in Norway. Taken into consideration were the preservation of the objects based on ethical standards, the traditional knowledge of the objects and how to decide on a suitable conservation treatment.

For this project Buduson conducted a two-step research process. Firstly, she conducted a technical examination of the objects to identify all the materials and techniques used in the manufacturing process. After that she consulted three female duoját (Sámi artisans) on their knowledge of the objects. During the technical examination Buduson experienced difficulty in identifying the weaving pattern of the bags because of how worn the textile was. Examining the fibre of the threads also gave some challenges. An FTIR spectroscopic study of the material showed fats and oils present in both bags.

Scientific progress continues to expand our knowledge of the materials making up the pictorial layers of a work of art. But it also provides intel on how those products age, where they were

manufactured and when they came to be. However, when presenting the FTIR results to the duoját, the duojár were able to give Buduson the exact information she was looking for: the presence of oils were most likely remnants of ostu (willowbark with oils used to clean objects) - and the fibre was most likely animal sinew, commonly used by duoját when sewing leather objects.

The benefits of collaboration

When collecting information on their traditional preservation methods, Buduson discovered that the practice and knowledge of craftsmanship greatly benefitted the conservator. She used the knowledge acquired to assist her in the treatment process. For example, after surface cleaning and hydrating the objects she reshaped them using the techniques she learned from the women. And instead of using acid free paper she used blister sedge, which is a Sámi traditional method of preservation.



Buduson concluded that, instead of first doing the technical examination, she should have included the duoját from the beginning because they gave her a greater understanding of the objects and the way they should be preserved in a Sámi context:

“And these were one of the highlights that really made me realise that collaboration is not a challenge, but it benefits the museum, and it is something I really recommend other museums to do”.

We really enjoyed hearing about Buduson’s collaboration with the Sámi people. It shows how much there is to learn from other people and cultures. I think it's always a good idea to consult

an original source when working with cultural objects, not only out of respect but also to broaden our knowledge. Buduson's example is one of many great initiatives that have been presented during this Congress so far, and I'm looking forward to more to come.

Changing trends

The results from a three-step process verified why the conjunction of laboratory investigations with qualitative research was important to conduct before deciding on a conservation treatment. The reports that accompany objects in a conservation-restoration studio will vary in their level of detail and in their utility when addressing salient questions about a work of art. But Buduson touched base with the uncomfortable knowledge that more can be done to treat objects ethically.

She highlighted the interaction between art and its people, exemplifying the standard for growing respect, understanding and valuation of cultural heritage today. A more refined and more nuanced interpretation of the analysis of results is building, based on the understanding that the definition of cultural heritage—what it means to individuals and communities—is changing. This knowledge is leading current practice in conservation.

Conservation-restoration is a field that we see transitioning, in real time, into something crucially multidisciplinary. This master's dissertation project captured that changing trend.

Authors

Roos van der Helm

Alexandra Taylor

Images:

Figure 1: lecture theatre during presentation. Image captured by one of our incredible in-person DEVs.

Figure 2: screenshot of presentation depicting results of treatment of gáfeseahkkat.