

Obituary: Professor Sharon Cather (1947-2019)

Submitted by campbell on 15 Jul 2019

Image



Image: Sharon Cather at St Gabriel's Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral, 1990. Image courtesy of David Park. © Courtauld Institute of Art.

The IIC is saddened by the death, on 6th June, of IIC Fellow and former Vice President Sharon Cather after a brief illness. The Shelby White and Leon Levy Professor of Conservation Studies at the Courtauld Institute of Art (retired 2018), Sharon served on IIC Council for six years, as Vice President from 2010-2014, and as Chair of the Technical Committee for both the 2010 IIC Istanbul Congress and the 2012 Vienna Congress.

She was a true champion for IIC and the environment, and she was a highly respected figure in the conservation of historic buildings and wall paintings in particular. Sharon dedicated her life to improving the world-wide standards of wall painting conservation, and this she did not only through teaching and research, but also through seeking to embed best practice into the core infrastructure for cultural heritage conservation and training. With her formidable intelligence and tireless dedication, she inspired a broad and diverse body of conservators, many in specialisms

outside wall paintings.

Sharon trained at the University of California, Santa Barbara and then studied art history at Princeton University where she focused on the drawings of Gianlorenzo Bernini. She was a scholar at the American Academy in Rome and taught at Cambridge University before joining forces with Professor David Park in 1985 to found the Courtauld Institute of Art Conservation of Wall Painting Department. As technical lead, Sharon pioneered preventive conservation, moving the focus of research and practice away from risks of treatment towards the benefits of understanding and addressing causes of deterioration. During her 32 years at The Courtauld, Sharon—and David—worked closely with other national and international conservation organisations including the Getty Conservation Institute, English Heritage, The National Trust, Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence, the Fachhochschule in Cologne and the Dunhuang Academy in China. Sharon was directly responsible for major conservation projects in many countries including the UK, Bhutan, China, Cyprus, Georgia, India, Jordan, Malta and Spain, and she helped develop other wall-painting teaching programmes in Israel, Malta, Qatar, Georgia and China.

Sharon supervised fifty-eight MA dissertations as well as other research at the PhD level. She organised and oversaw conservation, research and teaching projects in China, Georgia, India and Malta, and she was the Project Director of the Leon Levy Foundation Centre for Conservation Studies at Nagaur (Rajasthan). She played a central role in the implementation of the MA-level teaching in conservation undertaken at Dunhuang in collaboration with the Dunhuang Academy and Getty Conservation Institute. In 2014 Sharon was awarded The People's Republic of China Friendship Award, China's highest award for foreign experts who have made outstanding contributions to China's economic and social progress. In 2017 Sharon was awarded the Plowden Medal from the Royal Warrant Holders Association which cited "her commitment and leadership in research, innovation and education in wall painting conservation" towards "a more holistic, methodical and scientific approach to conserving wall painting across the world—whether in an English cathedral or an Indian palace".

Sharon not only contributed towards numerous publications, but she also served on the editorial board of *Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung* and on other bodies including the Paintings Committee of the Church Buildings Council and the International Scientific Committee for the Conservation of the Marble Floor of St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta, Malta. She was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and of the American Academy in Rome.

A two-day conference to celebrate Sharon's life and achievements will be held in London towards the end of this year; for further information please contact David Park at david.park@courtauld.ac.uk.

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