Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice

American Institute for Conservation (AIC)

Toronto, 31 May 1979

The first formulation of a code of ethics for art conservators, adopted by the members of IIC-American on May 27, 1967, was produced by the Committee on Professional Relations: Sheldon Keck, chairman, Richard D. Buck, Dudley T Easby Rutherford J. Gettens, Caroline Keck, Peter Michaels and Louis Pomerantz.

The first formulation of standards of practice and professional relationships by any group of art conservators was produced by the IIC-American Group (now AIC) Committee on Professional Standards and Procedures under the direction of Murray Pease, conservator, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Other members of the committee were Henri G. Courtais, Dudley T Easby Rutherford J. Gettens and Sheldon Keck. The report was adopted by the IIC-AG at its annual meeting in New York on June 8, 1963. It was published in Studies in Conservation, August 1964. The primary purpose of this document, which is often referred to as the Murray Pease Report, 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 responsibility of revising and updating the original code of ethics and standards of practice and professional relationships was assigned to the AIC Committee on Ethics and Standards: Elisabeth C. G. Packard, chairman, Barbara H. Beardsley Perry C. Huston, Kate C. Lefferts, Robert M. Organ and Clements L. Robertson.

The original format has been retained except that the more general Code of Ethics has been placed first as part one, followed by Standards of Practice as part two.

The revised versions were adopted by the Fellows of AIC at the annual meeting in Toronto, Canada on May 31, 1979.

PART ONE - CODE OF ETHICS

I. Preamble

Conservation of historic and artistic works is a pursuit requiring extensive training and special aptitudes. It places in the hands of the conservator* cultural holdings which are of great value and historical significance. To be worthy of this special trust requires a high sense of moral responsibility Whether in private practice or on the staff of an institution or regional center, the conservator has obligations not only to the historic and artistic works with which he* * is entrusted, but also to their owners or custodians, to his colleagues and trainees, to his profession, to the public and to posterity The following code expresses principles and practices which will guide the conservator in the ethical practice of his profession.
*Hereafter in the text the word "conservator" also denotes "conservation scientist" when applicable.

**In this text "he" and related pronouns are used in the classical sense to denote the person, male or female.

II. Obligations to Historic and Artistic Works

A. Respect for Integrity of Object All Professional actions of the conservator are governed by unswerving respect for the esthetic, historic and physical integrity of the object.

B. Competence and Facilities it is the conservator’s responsibility to undertake the investigation or treatment of a historic or artistic work only within the limits of his professional competence and facilities.

C. Single Standard With every historic or artistic work he undertakes to conserve, regardless of his opinion of its value or quality, the conservator should adhere to the highest and most exacting standard of treatment. Although circumstances may limit the extent of treatment, the quality of the treatment should never be governed by the quality or value of the object. While special techniques may be required during treatment of large groups of objects, such as archival and natural history material, these procedures should be consistent with the conservator's respect for the integrity of the objects.

D. Suitability of Treatment The conservator should not perform or recommend any treatment which is not appropriate to the preservation or best interests of the historic or artistic work. The necessity and quality of the treatment should be more important to the professional than his remuneration.

E. Principle of Reversibility The conservator is guided by and endeavors to apply the "principle of reversibility" in his treatments. He should avoid the use of materials which may become so intractable that their future removal could endanger the physical safety of the object. He also should avoid the use of techniques the results of which cannot be undone if they should become desirable.

F. Limitations on Esthetic Reintegration In compensating for damage or loss, a conservator may supply little or much restoration, according to a firm previous understanding with the owner or custodian and the artist, if living. It is equally clear that he cannot ethically carry compensation to a point of modifying the known character of the original.

G. Continued Self-Education It is the responsibility of every conservator to remain abreast of current knowledge in his field and to continue to develop his skills so that he may give the best treatment circumstances permit.

H. Auxiliary Personnel The conservator has an obligation to protect and preserve the historic and artistic works under his care at all times by supervising and regulating the work of all auxiliary personnel, trainees and volunteers under his professional direction. A conservator should not contract or engage himself to clients as a supervisor of insufficiently trained auxiliary personnel unless he can arrange to be present to direct the work.

III. Responsibilities to the Owner or Custodian

A. Contracts Contract practice may permit a conservator to enter into an agreement with individuals, institutions, corporations or governmental agencies to provide conservation services, provided that the contract or agreement does not contravene the principles of ethics as laid down or implied in this code.

B. Changes in Treatment or Fee Any changes on the part of the conservator in the contracted planned procedure in treating historic and artistic works, or changes in the
fee which has previously been estimated should, unless circumstances intervene, be made known to the owner or custodian and be approved in writing before the changes are effected.

C. Abrogation of Contract The conservator should understand that an owner or custodian is free to select, without persuasion or admonition, the services of any conservator of his choice or of more than one conservator simultaneously, and is also at liberty to change from one conservator to another at his own discretion. However, after a contract, oral or written, has been made for the treatment of a specific object, neither the conservator nor the owner may ethically withdraw from it except by mutual agreement.

D. Proper Course of Treatment Inasmuch as an owner may not be competent to judge the conservation requirements of his historic and artistic possessions, the conservator should honestly and sincerely advise what he considers the proper course of treatment.

E. Report of Examination Before performing any treatment on an object, the conservator should first make an adequate examination and record of condition.* The conservator is obliged to report his findings and recommendations to the owner or custodian or their delegate and await instructions before proceeding.

F. Record of Treatment A record of treatment* should also be made by the conservator. He has the obligation to record and report in detail to the owner or custodian the materials and methods of procedure employed in treating the object.

G. Punctuality and Expedition It is the obligation of the conservator to estimate the length of time it will take to complete the treatment and to abide by his contract with reasonable punctuality.

H. Fees Fees for conservation service should be commensurate with the service rendered, with due regard for fairness to the owner or custodian and to the conservator and for respect for the profession.

*Standard procedures for engaging in and reporting of examination and treatment of historic and artistic works are described in Part Two, Sections IV and V.

In determining the amount of the fee, it is proper to consider (1) time and labor required, (2) cost of materials and insurance, (3) novelty and difficulty of the treatment, (4) customary charges of others for like services, (5) the problems involved in treating a work of high value, (6) character of the employment casual or constant client.

An owner's ability to pay cannot justify a charge in excess of the value of the service.

Conservators should avoid charges that overestimate the worth of their services, as well as those that undervalue them.

Because of variations in the treatment of similar conditions, it is impossible to establish with mathematical accuracy a set fee for a particular type of service.

1. Warranty or Guarantee

Although the conservator at all times should follow the highest standards and, to the best of his knowledge, the most acceptable procedures, to warrant or guarantee the results of a treatment is unprofessional. This is not to be construed to mean that he should not willingly and freely correct defects or unforeseen alterations which, in his opinion, have occurred prematurely following his treatment.
IV. Relations with Colleagues, Trainees and the Profession

A. Contribution to Profession

A conservator has an obligation to share his knowledge and experience with his colleagues and with serious students. He should show his appreciation and respect to those from whom he has learned and to those who have contributed in the past to the knowledge and art of the profession by presenting without thought of personal gain such advancements in his techniques of examination and treatment which may be of benefit to the profession. The originator of a novel method of treatment or a new material should make full disclosure of the composition and properties of all materials and techniques employed. The originator is expected to cooperate with other conservators and conservation scientists employing or evaluating the proposed methods or materials. None of the above is intended to infringe upon the proprietary rights of the originator.

B. Trainees and Interns

The conservator, private or institutional, has a responsibility to undertake the training and instruction of apprentices, trainees and interns, but only within the limits of his expert knowledge and the technical facilities available. The rights and objectives of both the trainer and the apprentice should be clearly stated and mutually agreed upon in writing, and should include such items as anticipated length of apprenticeship, areas of competence to be taught and payments.

C. References

A conservator should not recommend or provide a reference for a person applying for a position as a professional conservator unless the conservator has personal knowledge that the applicant's training, experience and performance qualify him for the position.

D. Intermediaries

The professional services of a conservator should not be controlled or exploited by any agency, personal or corporate, that intervenes between client and practitioner; the conservator's responsibilities and qualifications are individual and personal. He should avoid all relationships that direct the performance of his duties by or in the interest of such intermediary. This does not preclude his working under the direction of another qualified conservator, whether in private practice or within an institutional system.

E. Request for Consultation

If, for any reason, before or during treatment the owner or custodian desires another opinion on procedure through consultation with another conservator, this should not be regarded as evidence of lack of confidence and should be welcomed by the conservator.

F. Consultation
No person engaged in the profession of conservation can expect to be expertly informed on all phases of examination analysis and treatment. In instances of doubt there should be no hesitation in seeking the advice of other professionals, or in referring the owner to a conservator more experienced in the particular special problems.

G. Misuse of Referral in Client-Conservator Relationships

Where clients have been referred for consultation or treatment, the conservator to whom they have been referred should, unless it was obviously otherwise intended, return the client to the original conservator as soon as possible. Efforts, direct or indirect, in any way to encroach upon the professional employment of another conservator are considered unprofessional.

H. Fee

Splitting the payment of a commission or fee to another conservator or any other person for the reference of a client is to be condemned as unprofessional. Division of a fee is only acceptable where it is based on a division of service or responsibility.

I. Comment on Qualifications of Another Conservator

It is unethical for a conservator to volunteer adverse judgment on the qualifications of and procedures rendered by another conservator except as such comment shall be to the mutual benefit of all concerned. In expressing an opinion about another practitioner, either voluntarily or at the request of someone outside the profession, the conservator must always conscientiously consider the iniquity of slander and must scrupulously base his statement on facts of which he has personal knowledge. If his opinion is uncertain or dependent on hearsay, it is more constructive to withhold comment and to recommend instead someone of whom he has no doubt.

V. Obligations to the Public

A. Education of the Public

In his relations with the public, every conservator should accept such opportunities as may be presented to educate the public in the aims, desires and purposes of his profession in order that a better popular understanding of conservation may be established. Such presentations should be in accordance with accepted principles of the time.

B. Safeguarding the Public Interests

In the interests of the public as well as their own profession, conservators should observe accepted standards and laws, uphold the dignity and honor of the profession and accept its self-imposed disciplines. They should do their part to safeguard the public against illegal or unethical conduct by referring the facts of such delinquency to the appropriate professional committee. Further, it is the right of any conservator to give proper advice when it's requested by those seeking relief against negligent or unethical practices.
C Expertise

Although the results of his examination and treatment of historic and artistic works may make it possible for him to contribute knowledge to the history of art and to the verification of the authorship or authenticity of an object, the issuing of paid expertises or authentications may involve conflict of interest and is not an appropriate- or ethical activity for a conservator.

D. Appraisals

Because of his intimate contact with and knowledge of techniques of fabrication and the physical condition of historic and artistic works, a conservator is often asked to appraise for a fee the monetary value of an object. Since this activity may involve conflicts of interest inconsistent with the profession of conservation and since appraising requires other specialized knowledge of market values and connoisseurship, appraisal for a fee is not recommended unless the individual is a professional member of a recognized professional society of appraisers.

E. Art Dealing

Engaging in the business of selling or purchasing for personal profit or acting as a paid or commissioned agent in the sale of historic and artistic works are activities considered to be inconsistent with the professional integrity of conservators.

F. Advertising

It is an accepted principle that the foundation of effective advertising is the establishment of a well-merited reputation for professional ability and integrity Thus it is recommended that conservators limit all forms of notices and communications which may be construed as advertising to the following:

1. Use of such sign or signs which in size, character, working and position reasonably may be required to indicate the entrance of the premises in which the practice is performed;
2. Use of professional cards and letterheads on stationery, bill and receipt forms, indicating only the name, academic degree, Fellowship in AIC, conservation specialty, office address and telephone number. Only Fellows may use the name of AIC;
3. Use of announcements of commencement of practice, change of location or restriction of practice;
4. Use of advertisements in newspapers, magazines and telephone directories, provided that their form and content do not detract from the high professional standards reflected elsewhere in this code of ethics and do not contain comparisons of ability and cost.

G. Solicitation of Clients

1. It is recommended that solicitations be confined to discreet announcements in newspapers and magazines inviting clients. Direct mailing to individuals, museums and institutions may be construed as an attempt to solicit clients unethically.

2. The judicious distribution of reprints and communications to colleagues is acceptable and an author may honor requests for his articles. Indiscriminate mailing without
sufficient reason is, construed as an attempt to solicit clients unethically or an attempt to bring undue attention to the author.

H. Statements in the Name of AIC

Individual members of AIC should not present opinions in the name of AIC to outside organizations or individuals.

PART TWO -STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

1. Preamble

The following standards and procedures are approved by AIC as detailed guidelines to professional practice by conservators* in the examination and treatment of his historic and artistic works. Such practice is considered to comprise three categories:

· Examination, treatment and systematic maintenance of historic and artistic works, whether by private or institutional conservators;
· Scientific analytical study of art objects for such purposes as identifying materials, method of construction, modifications by age or other agents, comparison with comparable material;
· Supplying previously developed reference data which may bear on condition, authenticity, authorship or age of specific objects. This can be either by formal publication or private communication.

*"Conservators" in the text also denotes "conservation scientists" when applicable

II. General Considerations of Policy

These are broadly applicable to all categories:

A. Professional Attitude It must be axiomatic that all professional actions of a conservator be governed by unswerving respect for the integrity of historic and artistic works. Such respect is manifest not only in policies of restoration, but in selection of courses of treatment, in safeguarding against accident, protection against loss and strict avoidance of misinterpreting technical evidence.

B. Contractual Relationships A contract should include the need for a clear written statement of the following: the exact work to be done, the basis for charges, if any, the extent and substance of reports, including photographs as appropriate, responsibility for insurance coverage deemed adequate for operator, owner and object, provisions for safeguarding objects, method of delivery and any subcontracting or reassignment of work.

C. Assumption of Responsibility It is a conservator's responsibility to contract for investigation or treatment only to the limits of his professional competence and facilities. Should he not be trained or equipped for a full scientific study by generally accepted current technical means, any specific limitations must be stated and accepted by both parties from the beginning. Wherever further opinion seems to be required, such further opinion or opinions are a necessary part of a comprehensive report. In the same manner,
a conservator will be held irresponsible if he undertakes to carry out a course of
treatment for which he is in adequately trained or equipped.

D. Interpretation of Evidence An investigator has the obligation to present all the
evidence he has developed about an object commissioned to him for study, favorable or
otherwise, and also to supply from his professional knowledge a clear exposition of the
significance of each part of the evidence. It will be held improper for him to make outright
formal declarations as to age, authenticity and the like (which subsequently might form
the basis of a claim or legal action) when each declaration exceeds the logical
development of the specific evidence.

E. Limitations on Esthetic Reintegration In compensating for losses or damage, a
conservator can be expected to carry out little or much according to a firm previous
restoration understanding with the owner or custodian and the artist if living. However,
he cannot ethically carry to a point of modifying the compensation known character of
the original.

F. Outside Activities It shall be considered inconsistent with the professional integrity of
conservators in any of the three categories of procedure engage in the to following
outside activities:

1. Issuing paid "expertises" or authentication;

2. Acting as paid or commissioned agent in the selling or purchasing of historic and
artistic works;

3. Engaging in such selling or purchasing for personal profit;

4. Appraising for a fee the monetary value of historic and artistic works unless the
conservator is a professional member of a recognized society of appraisers.

**It is recommended that a lawyer be consulted in the preparation of such contract.

III. Procedure for Initiating, Conducting and Reporting in Scientific Analytical
Studies of Historic and Artistic Works Whenever it becomes necessary for owners of
historic and artistic works to request institutional or commercial analytical laboratories or
private consultants to engage in scientific study of objects for the purpose of developing
data which may bear on condition, authenticity authorship or age of a specific object, the
following procedure shall be followed by all parties concerned. A. Initiating the Study The
owner of the object, or his qualified agent or a qualified officer of an institution, shall
send to the examining agency a written request with statements covering the following
points as required:

1. The purpose of the study, listing any specific questions to be answered.

2. Whether (a) the whole object or (b) samples from the object are to be made available
for study If samples only are to be sent to the laboratory, the exact location of the
samples on the object and the name of the person who took the samples and the date
taken are to be given.

3. If the whole object is to be sent to the analyst, (a) the legal owner, (b) its value, (c) to
what extent it is covered by insurance, (d) by what carrier it is to be sent to the laboratory
and returned to the owner and (e) that the object is to be sent to the investigating
laboratory at the owner ls risk and expense.

4. Explicit permission to take samples from the object during examination, defining any
limitations.
5. Whether the investigator (a) is merely to report facts and Observations or (b) is expected to draw conclusions from the facts.
6. Whether the laboratory findings (a) are to be kept in strict confidence or (b) can be used regardless of their nature, by the investigator in formal publications and in oral declarations.
7. Whether any of the evidence to be produced is intended for use in legal proceedings.

B. Conducting the Study

The analyst or laboratory official on receiving the object shall:

1. Supply a written receipt to the owner verifying its condition and inform the owner how the object will be stored and guarded.

2. Inform the owner what fees, if any, are to be charged for the analytical services. If there is to be no charge, state that fact explicitly. State also what other charges may be made for photography, radiography and for other analytical services.

3. Make a photographic record of the condition of the object and of any subsequent alteration that may occur in the course of the study.

4. Keep a careful and detailed written record of all observations and findings, giving dates.

C. Preparing and Submitting the Report

On completion of the investigation, the investigator shall:

1. Render to the owner a typewritten report of his finding with conclusions, if conclusions have been requested. The report shall cover methods of testing, kind and type of instruments and equipment used and analytical procedures employed in sufficient detail so that, if the owner wishes, the tests can be repeated and checked on the same object by an independent investigator in another laboratory. If it has been necessary, with the owner's permission, to take samples from the object, give location and amount of each sample. Give location and dosage of irradiations (e.g., exposure to X rays, gamma rays, iridium or other forms of radiant energy).

2. List all other persons who assisted or cooperated in the scientific investigation. List what published works or authorities he has consulted in the course of the study. State what limitations, if any, he may wish to place on the use of the findings. That is, whether or not the findings may be used voluntarily in legal proceedings; whether or not they may be quoted in formal publications or in oral declarations.

IV. Procedure for Engaging in and Reporting of Examination and Treatment of Historic and Artistic Works by Professional Conservators in Institutions and Regional Centers

A. Report of Examination
Such reports shall include in writing the following information where applicable:

1. Date of examination and name of examiner.

2. Identification of object with the one referred to in the report by means of photographs, verbal descriptions, measurements and identification numbers.


4. Record of alteration and deterioration. Locations and extent of physical defects, chemical alteration and its products, previous repairs and compensation. Statement of method of determination sufficiently detailed to permit duplication by another examiner.

5. Deductions or interpretations of observations and analyses. Comments relative to the degree of alteration.

6. Where evidence indicates forgery, tests which can supply the necessary information on materials and structure shall be employed. After thoroughly checking his results, the examiner shall recommend consultation with one or two disinterested individuals qualified by scientific or art historical training to review the evidence.

B. Proposal for Treatment

Before any treatment is undertaken, a summary or copy of the examination record shall be supplied to the responsible custodian of the object. This shall be accompanied by:

1. A statement of exactly what conditions it is proposed to correct.


3. An estimate of the probable time required for the treatment.

The official custodian's written approval shall be secured before treatment is begun.

C. Report of Treatment

Such report shall include where applicable:

1. A statement of the procedures followed in the current treatment with exact descriptions of materials and methods, including:

(a) The method by which accretion or deterioration products were removed.

(b) Method and materials used in correcting distortion in form and shape and in reinforcing, consolidating, stabilizing and protecting structure and surface.

(c) Kind, extent, anti location of compensation employed.
2. Photographs, as follows:

(a) Condition before treatment, with date.

(b) Photograph in "actual state" after accretion and deterioration products have been removed, but before compensation has begun.

(c) Photograph, after treatment, with date.

(d) Photographs as required to supply data about structure, method of fabrication and state of object as revealed during process of treatment. Photographs or diagrams which clarify method of reconstruction or compensation.

V. Contractual Procedures Applying to Examination and Treatment of Historic and Artistic Works by Private Professional Conservators

These do not differ from those applying to institutional conservators except in the fields of contractual relations* and assumption of responsibility

Procedures in these fields shall include:

A. Written proposals stating

1. Work to be done, estimated charges and estimated date of completion.

2. Arrangements for insurance and its specific coverage, method of delivery and provisions for safe guarding objects. (See VI. B.)

3. Any subcontract or reassignment of work proposed.

B. A signed contract by the owner or his authorized agent, which may be a signed copy of the letter of proposal.

C. Agreement to give due notice to owner or custodial institution and to receive authorization before objects are removed from operating or storage building to a new location, unless such action is required for emergency safety reasons.

VI. Operating Safety Procedures for Conservators

A. Safety of Personnel

All practitioners must follow the latest codes of the appropriate government regulations regarding occupational safety and health.*

1. Radiation. X-ray installation and operation procedures and use of radioactive sources should conform to approved specifications. Most state health or labor departments will supply an inspection service to determine the operating safety of radiographic installations.

2. Toxic Vapors. Adequate exhaust and ventilation must be a part of all laboratory installations where volatile toxic materials are habitually used. Appropriate vapor respirators should be available at all times.
3. **Mechanical Equipment.** Power tools of all kinds should be provided with adequate light, operating space and safety guards. Their use should be restricted to properly qualified and authorized persons. Cleanliness should be rigidly enforced. Instruments producing dust, abrasive powders and the like should be equipped with positive exhaust systems and operators should be provided with appropriate respirators.

4. **Corrosive Liquids.** Standard laboratory requirements for quantity storage and operating containers of acids, alkalis and other reagents as well as solvents should be rigidly followed. Only authorized personnel should have access to them. Disposal of chemicals should follow approved procedures.

*It is recommended that a lawyer be consulted as to the adequacy of the contract until such time as a standard form is adopted. *Up-to-date information may be obtained regionally through the U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration area office listed in the telephone directory.

B. **Safety of Historic and Artistic Works**

Works in the laboratory is of paramount importance.

1. **Protection Against Environmental Hazards** such as unsuitable levels of relative humidity, temperature, light and atmospheric pollution (including solvent vapors) should be provided.

2. **Protection Against Theft.** Working and storage areas should be of adequate construction and capable of a systematic locking routine. Only authorized personnel should have access.

3. **Protection Against Accidental Damage** (a) Working and storage areas should be adequate for safe handling and storage of objects. Individual storage racks for paintings and shelves for three-dimensional objects should be available. Working equipment should include sturdy, well-designed furniture such as tables, easels and horses. (b) Objects should be moved or handled only by experienced persons. Auxiliary personnel should not be permitted to handle objects without adequate training and supervision. They should not engage in activities for which they have inadequate professional training. (c) Objects should not be removed from the operating or storage building except on due notice and with authorization by the owner or custodial institution, except when required for safety reasons. (d) Transportation and packing of objects should be by approved agencies and according to established methods.

4. **Protection Against Fire.** Adequate precautions should be taken to meet the requirements of the particular insurance underwriter used. Working and storage areas should be equipped with alarm, smoke detection and extinguishing apparatus. Other parts of the building housing the studio or laboratory may not be used for purposes of a hazardous nature.

**PART THREE - ENFORCEMENT**

Violation of the AIC **Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice** can lead to revocation of a member's Fellowship. Upon receipt of substantial evidence of repeated violations in the face of notice and objection thereto from the Board of Directors of AIC, the board may
take any action deemed necessary to protect the integrity of the institute. Such action shall be subject to appeal, review and final decision by the Grievances Committee described in the AIC Bylaws.

PART FOUR - AMENDMENTS

Amendments or changes in the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice must be initiated by petition from at least five Fellows of AIC to the Board of Directors, who will direct the appropriate committee to prepare the amendments for vote. Acceptance into the code of amendments or changes must be affirmed by at least two-thirds of all AIC Fellows voting.