

Sadly, this indoctrination, combined with a uninformed rejection of Viollet-le-Duc's respect of 'stylistic unity'; a total ignorance of the writings of Boito and Riegl; and an awareness of Brandi limited to his criticism of the National Gallery's cleaning policy forms the basis of the average UK conservator's theoretical awareness. By refusing to engage with the history of conservation theory, British conservators are placed in the position of criticizing 'restoration', while at the same time actively carrying out the process. They continue to defend the three myths of 'minimal intervention', the idea of the 'equality of treatment for all objects', and the lie of 'irreversibility'. UK conservators are unwitting champions of object positivism, when everyone else is accepting relativism and the subjectivity of all conservation decisions. I am depressed to hear newly qualified conservation students declare that they "had no time to study theory", that they had been expressly forbidden "to make value judgements", or have their tutors complain, "there was too much talk about theory", and their students "just got on with conservation work". This is not to say that the UK is lacking in inspiring conservation theorists, but most of the relevant papers in the conservation literature were generally written in complex post-modern jargon. Fortunately, more accessible publications written in accessible plain English, such as, *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas, and Uncomfortable Truths* are now addressing this problem and encouraging debate (Richmond and Bracker, 2009).

### Using the ICCROM toolkit

The SCD 2006 course participants left Rome charged with a mission. We were tasked to use the ICCROM toolkit – the experiences and case studies to which we had been exposed, the notes, handouts and contacts we had been given – to help conservators in our own countries become active participants in the decision-making process. I suggested the possibility of creating a SCD-UK course, but how was I to shorten an intensive four-week course into an affordable option for UK conservators and not frighten them off by the word 'theory'? In December 2007 I was invited to ICCROM's planning meeting for SCD 2008, held at La Venaria in Turin from 12–13 December 2007. The session began with a review of the previous course. Marie Berducou (*Maître de Conservation-Restauration*, Université de Paris) produced a wonderfully concise 'road map' which summed up the essence and aims of the SCD programme, succinctly identifying the three core elements of the course: the physical material; context and values; and the decision-making process – and their relationship. This 'road map' sparked the idea for a three-day course specifically designed for UK conservators. Travelling would not be an option and so I would have to find one UK location which would offer a wealth of case studies.

Fortunately, West Dean College – the Edward James Foundation – agreed to host the proposed course as part of their "Professional Conservators in Practice" programme. West Dean is a large,