

Preventive Conservation Study Tour

a report on my learnings for the Jaycee Travelling Fellowship Trust.



Prepared by Juliet Thomas.

Italy has always held an allure for me. As a child I was fascinated by Ancient Rome and the Roman Empire, and as an adult I have been working towards developing a career in the Museum, Arts and Heritage field. So when I had the opportunity to join Carolina Izzo on her Preventive Conservation Study Tour through Italy visiting churches, art galleries, universities, conservation labs, museums and heritage sites I couldn't resist the opportunity. It is a chance to see significant history, objects, art and places and to learn about the care and preservation of these objects from world leading conservators in situ.

I had the opportunity to apply for funding from Palmerston North City Council through the Jaycee Trust Travelling Fellowship, which assists with travelling costs for Palmerston North residents to undertake intensive study overseas that will benefit their profession and community. I am immensely grateful to the Trust for their support for me to undertake this course of study, which contributes to my post-graduate diploma in Museum & Heritage Studies with Victoria University. I am pleased to report that I passed the paper (MHST524) with an A.

What follows in this report is a day-by-day description of my Italian adventure and lesson over three weeks travelling through Rome, Nepi, Naples and Florence.

27 August pre-departure workshop

I had the opportunity to meet my fellow travelers and learn more about the details of the tour today. I am very excited to see where we will be visiting, and to learn more about the trip itself. Things are starting to feel very real now. One aspect that really struck me was the difference in approaches to conservation around the world: in Japan 'conservation' applies to human skill, whereas in England (and much of the Western World) it applies more so to the protection of historic products produced by human skill. Conservation should be approached as an overarching, integrative and collaborative approach with many of professions. There is a need for balance in a conservator's approach, asking oneself (and others involved):

- What should be done?
- What shouldn't be done?
- The question of conservation or restoration – to maintain value or to restore it through direct intervention.

6 October

I have arrived in Rome, got through customs, collected by bag, bought a sim card and caught the bus to Termini Station. I planned to catch the Metro to Spagna, a short walk from our accommodation, the *Instituto Immaculota Concesione di Nostra Signora di Lourdes* ('the convent'). I was welcomed by a Sister of the convent, who spoke little English. What followed was a charming charade of miming and Google Translate to figure out where I should leave my bag, and that I had an hour to fill before I could access my room.

I had a simple lunch of a tramezzino (a triangular sandwich commonly available in Italian cafes) and did some people-watching over a gelato after. I am struck by the buildings here. Everything is of stone, and I couldn't help but wonder about Italy's approach to earthquake strengthening and policy. As a seismically affected country, I wonder how they approach earthquake risk, and what they classify as a heritage building worthy of protection. It is an interesting question and I hope to find out more about the Italian approach during my trip. I followed this with a much-wanted shower and a nap.

In the evening I met with two of my touring companions; the other Juliet (Juliet H) and Tomo, and we went out for dinner. We had a lovely chat and it felt much better wandering the cobbled streets of Rome with some friends. The moon is beautiful tonight and I imagined I could feel the age of the city as I wandered through. I am still slightly amazed that I am here, and excited to get going. We meet everyone tomorrow at 4pm to get started, and I am looking forward to the tour.

7 October

I slept well and woke to a cool, wet morning. Juliet H and I had breakfast in the convent before heading back to our rooms, where I studied. At 10:30 Juliet H, Tomo and I ventured out to visit the Museo Storico Nazionale dell'Arte Sanitaria – a medical museum at the Holy Spirit Hospital. As Juliet H is curator of the Ernest & Marion David Trust Medical History Library Museum, she was particularly keen to see another medical museum. I found this museum incredibly sobering and a little challenging, albeit fascinating. The first proper 'gallery' - Sala Flajani - is full of skeletons and specimens of medical anomalies – infants with congenital deformities, stripped to the bone or preserved for posterity in formaldehyde. There were siamese twins, mutations and skulls eroded by syphilis. As a 'medically complicated' individual, it was a stark reminder of the history of medicine, and how clueless we were and are. I was particularly fascinated by the dissected and preserved map of the central nervous system in the Sala Carobonelli gallery. Other galleries were full of exquisitely made but gruesome tools, and a 'unicorn horn' - a narwhal's tusk – that purportedly had magical healing powers.

We spent a good deal of time exploring before departing into the sunshine, where I promptly cleansed myself with water. I found in my trip to England last year that the British had a very different attitude to human remains, and it seems that it is similar in Italy. There is little forewarning or shielding for the visitor (but such content is to be expected in a medical museum). These human remains are treated as an object of curiosity – something stale and removed from its human origin, and I am conflicted by the need for using these people and their bodies for learning; especially for doctors, and the practice of turning them into a spectacle.

However, the museum offered an excellent insight into how not to do preventive conservation: a flickering/ flashing fluorescent light was present in one case, and natural light streamed in. Many of the cases had water staining visible in the cabinets, and the galleries were dusty and dirty.

We spent the afternoon wandering the alleyways of Rome, had some lunch, and explored. Rome is crawling with tourists, but off the main roads you can get a taste of Roman life. I ate Penne Arrabiatta, petted an Italian greyhound, and we wandered past the pantheon – which we will visit tomorrow. We met Carolina at 4pm and the rest of our companions for the tour. As well We went for dinner at a fabulous restaurant – where I lived out an *Asterix* fantasy of feasting on suckling pig – and took an evening stroll back to our rooms.



Natural light streaming onto a fully dissected Central Nervous System (note the fingernails). Natural light is exceptionally good at degrading objects and I am surprised this was allowed.

8 October

What a day! I am footsore, visually overloaded and exhausted. We walked all over the city, and had an early start and late finish, walking some 23,000-odd steps.

Damien has a few connections with the Catholic Church and has travelled to Italy with Father Chris Friel. Father very kindly offered to take us behind the scenes, of which I'll write about in due course. We met at 6:30am and after some panic about a missing Damien (he slept through his alarm), left Carolina at the Convent to watch for Damien, and caught a taxi to The Vatican. We arrived as the sun was rising over St Peter's Basilica, bathing it in golden light. The Basilica opened at 7am, so we went for a cornetto (croissant, but better as it's glazed in sugar) and cappuccino for breakfast. I don't really drink coffee but wanted to 'do as the Romans do'! Coffee here seems much less strong and bitter, so I might acquire a taste for it.

We were among the first into St Peter's, and it was jaw dropping. The marble floors and columns, the ceilings, the sculpture and atmosphere was astonishing. It is an incredible testament to the ancient power of the Catholic Church, and to men's egos, as succeeding Popes strove to outshine their predecessors and create a grander memorial to their reign. I could spend my life in the Basilica and never notice every detail. I heard distant signing which added to the magic, watched a Mass delivered in Spanish and wandered about, agog at the grandeur. Melanie pointed out some beautiful walnut confessionals with little lights above that indicate if someone is inside to take your confession. I was more interested in the proliferation of borer holes in them – even the Vatican isn't immune to pests damaging your objects! We were admiring some marble columns when Carolina joined us and pointed out some restoration work on them, where straight lines had been cut across them to insert new marble, but of a different colour and grain. We then went into the crypts, where Popes, kings and Queens rested.

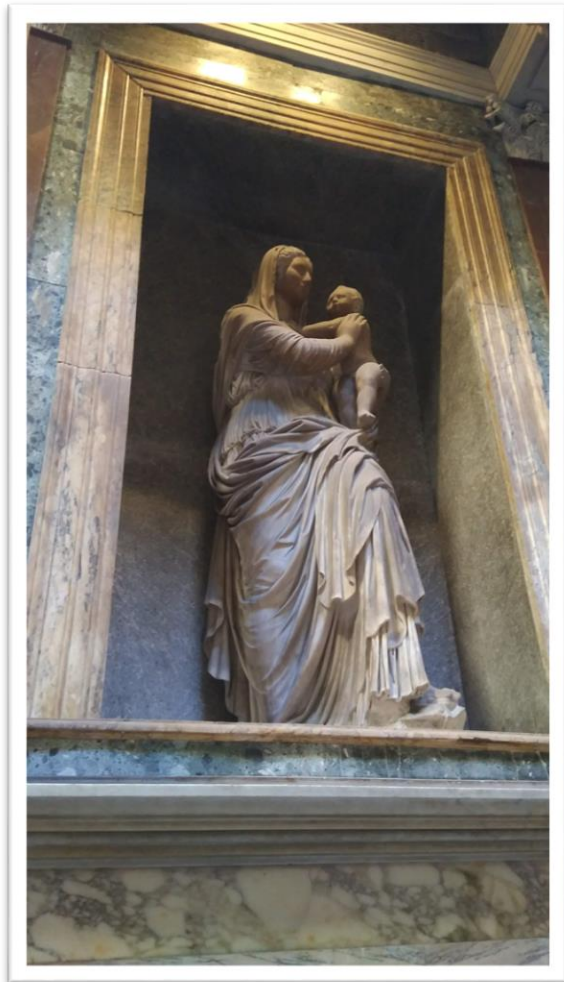


Confessional at St Peter's, full of borer holes.

We were all separated and eventually managed to regroup. Damien then took us to meet Father Chris, who took us to the seminary, built in 1627, where he trained to be a priest for seven years from 1988. He took us around the grounds, which were quiet and with lovely views, but he had something better in store for us. He took us to the rooftop of the seminary, with an incredible view of the Roman skyline and St Peter's. He was extremely knowledgeable of Rome, and told us of the old St. Peter's, the moving of the obelisk in the courtyard, the discovery of St Peter's bones in some long-forgotten crypts buried when the hilltop was flattened off to build the current St Peter's, and pointed out significant sites. It was the highest privilege and we were incredibly lucky. The views were astounding, and I am sure we were the luckiest tourists in Rome.

We took our leave from Father Chris and headed into the city, stopping for lunch on the way to the Pantheon. The ristorante we visited had no English translations (in my mind, a good thing) and I took a gamble and ordered tonarelli alici e percorino, and won with a delicious dish of thick strands of pasta, fresh anchovies and percorino cheese. We continued to the Pantheon, where we met our guides for the

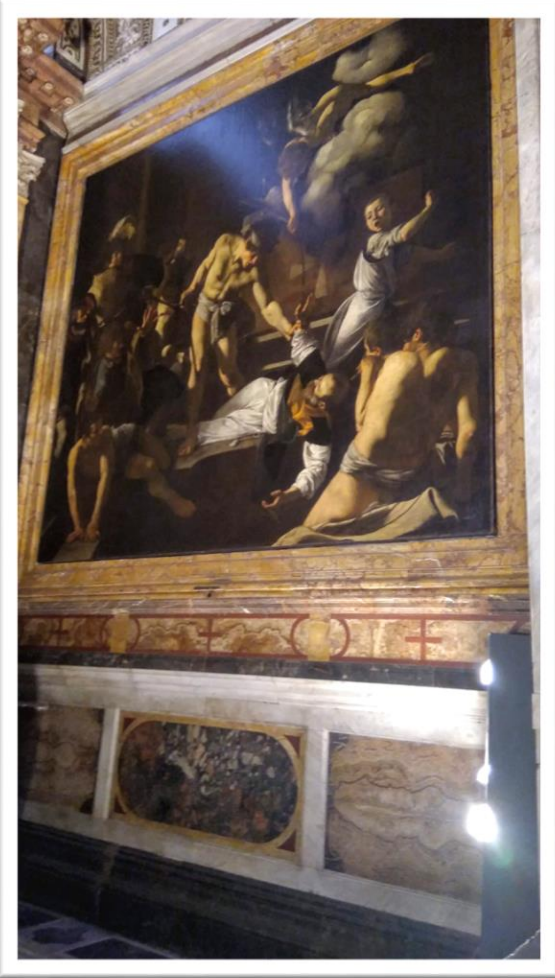
afternoon – Alessia Baglieri, a student of architecture, and Elisa Rasetti, a Museum Studies student. They told us of the history of the Pantheon and took us inside. I saw the tomb of Raphael, marvelled at the sculpture and the perfect dome, which allows in a circle of sunshine that you can apparently use to tell the time with. My favourite was an ancient fresco, faded but still recognisable. In the chapel of St Joseph Carolina pointed out a sculpture that was too big for its alcove, out of proportion (with particularly large hands), which indicates it is likely it came from another site and was inserted into the Pantheon. Unfortunately there was little information available about the sculpture, but I was told to look out for such details on the tour.



Tomb of Raphael, with a sculpture carved by his apprentice Lorenzo Lotti

We then turned our feet to a tour of Caravaggio’s paintings, walking to the Piazza Navona, Church of St Louis of the French (apparently rarely open, so another stroke of luck), the Basilica di S. Agostino, the Museo dell’ara Pacis, Piazza del Popolo and Basilica di S. Maria del Popolo – a former church. St. Louis, Agostino and S. Maria del Popolo all held works by Caravaggio in private chapels, and each had a different approach to conservation of these famous works. St. Louis had their works on a timed lighting system, which caused much consternation among visitors when the lights went off. Agostino had their

lighting for the worked on a paid timer – for 2 Euro you could light the artworks, which raised funds but gave the works fewer regular periods in darkness to preserve the richness of the colour. At S. Maria there was no lighting control at all. Caravaggio was the star of the show at each of the three sites, but I quite enjoyed looking at the other chapels and décor as well.



Timed lighting system (bottom left corner) at the Church of St Louis of the French. This painting is part of a famous triptych by Caravaggio, composed of The Martyrdom of St Matthew, the Calling of St Matthew and St Matthew and the Angel. Pictured is The Martyrdom of St Matthew.

We headed home in the early evening, up the Spanish Steps, which Carolina called “the most important piece of art in Rome”, and it certainly attracts a large crowd. I had a quiet evening and was in bed by 8:30pm, exhausted and in awe of such an amazing day.

9 October

Today is our last full day in Rome and has been much quieter than yesterday. We visited conservator Matteo Rossi Doria at Consorzio Conservazione Beni Culturali, a prestigious conservation lab employing 22 conservators.

We talked at length about conservation work, particularly Matteo’s personal specialties: structural restoration of artwork, historic carriages, and preventive conservation. We talked about the new and old approaches, and Matteo’s preference for the traditional Italian approach, taking a holistic approach to analysing, planning and carrying out conservation work. I was

strongly reminded of Conal McCarthy’s inaugural Professorial lecture, which focused on modern heritage practice, but tied in cultural aspects of practice into our work: talking with objects, or of taking consideration of an object’s personal history to provide conservation work, which is a sensitive, respectful and considered approach. His perspective is that the modern, science-heavy approach is not the best, as it often incorporates synthetic materials that may not be able to be undone in the future if further work is necessary.

We saw the conservation lab and watched some of Matteo’s colleagues at work, who were applying silk organza coated in a natural adhesive to holes on the back of various paintings with a tiny iron. The work was careful, considered and conducted with great care and patience. The iron was set between 60 and 70 degrees Celsius, so that the heat would not damage the painting on the reverse side. The edges of the painting, which were curled over from being nailed into the canvas frame, were reinforced with silk and then gently weighted down so the entire work was flat again. We looked at one painting, from the

modern era, whose paint had cracked heavily and would be restored on another day. From the back, it looked like veins through skin.

We also saw a huge sketch, which had been coated in a synthetic varnish and was thus un-restorable. The varnish is like an early epoxy, called nitro-soluble varnish, and was used on WWI era planes to strengthen and stiffen the canvas shells. It is characteristic for its staining quality, yellowing the surface and making it very brittle⁸. The varnish chemically bonds with what it coats, so it is impossible to remove it without severe damage. Matteo had to convince his client to leave the work as it was, as it was irreparable.

It was fascinating to be in an operational conservation lab, and to see many of the tools of the trade⁹, as well as hear of the careful, considered and empathetic approach conservators take to their work and subjects. Matteo was knowledgeable, obliging and fascinating, and we were lucky to hear from him.



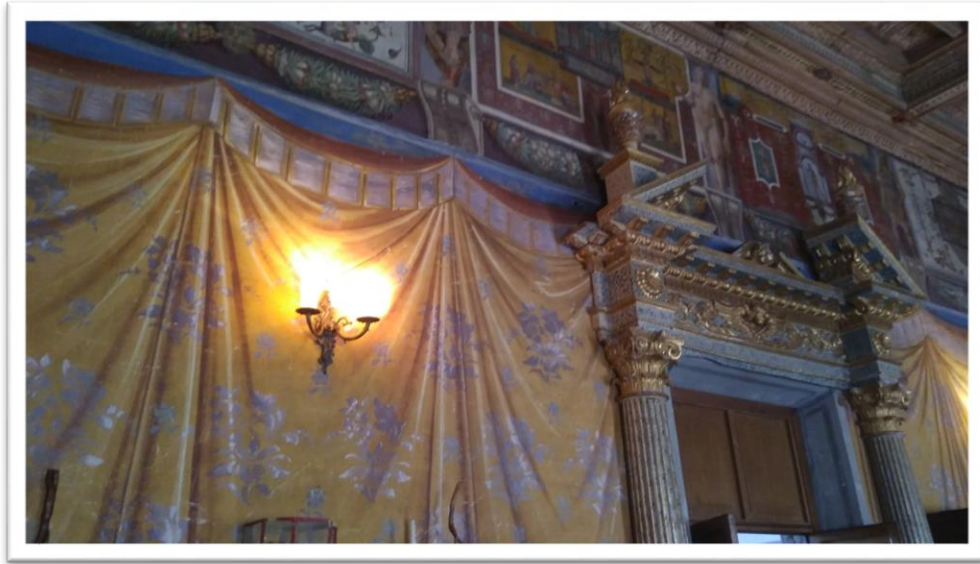
Applying silk organza to reinforce weakened canvases at Consorzio Conservazione Beni Culturali

10 October

We have left Rome and travelled to Nepi, a quaint town of about 9500 people an hour's drive north of Rome. We must be the only tourists in town, which is a refreshing change.

We are staying at Il Convento di San Tolomeo di Nepi, which is located near the end of the town perched on a hill bordered by two valleys. It is a bucolic scene to find ourselves in, and today we have been exploring. After a long lunch of pizza in the sunshine, we paid a visit to Palazzo Celsi, a beautiful 'palace' just down the road from our convent. It is a grand old residence, its website says that it was built in the second half of the 16th century. Its crowning glory is the dining room (known as the "fireplace room") where we met architect Fabio Pugliesi, who has been working on preserving Nepi's architectural heritage. Fabio gave us an introduction to Nepi, its history, geography and some of his work. The Palazzo is an example of the rich heritage Nepi has but few know about, and the fireplace room is usually leased out for wedding photography (or a small reception). Sadly much of the rest of the building is in poorer

condition, but after Lizzie and I expressed our curiosity Fabio was kind enough to show us a few more rooms. The frescoes are splendid, and the gold leaf detailing is glitteringly overwhelming. The Palazzo has so much potential, but Fabio has a big job ahead of him as it's not the only building in need of attention. We meet Fabio again tomorrow for our first practical exercise at the Saint Giovanni Decollato Church.



Fresco decoration (not curtains!) in the Fireplace Room at Palazzo Celsi

11 October.

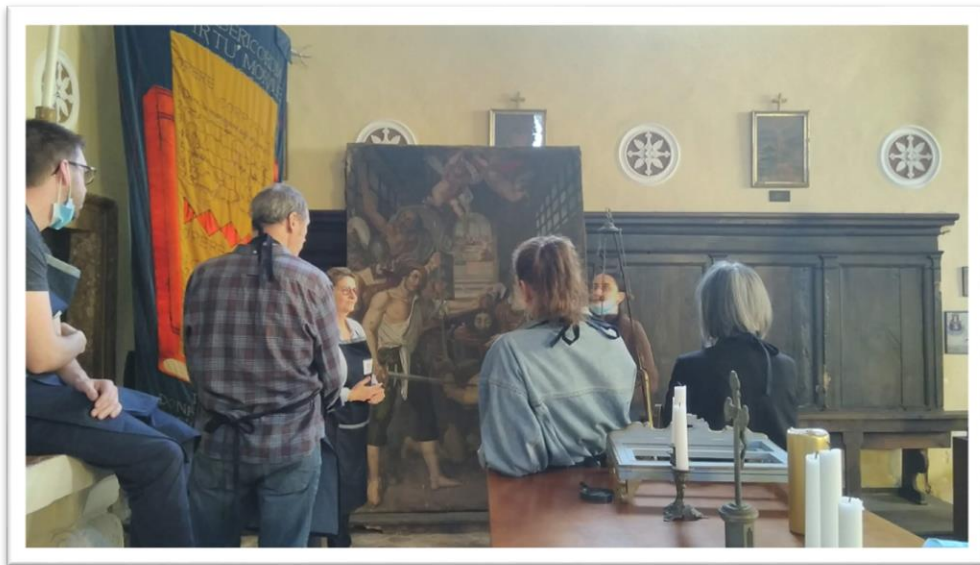
I am perched up on an altar with apron, nitrile gloves and surgical mask on, painstakingly brushing thick dust from a flaking gilded frame at the Saint Giovanni Decollato Church. Colloquially nicknamed 'la Madonna die matti' - the virgin of the crazy people - this church is about as opposite to St Peter's (or any of the other churches we have visited) as they get. Years of neglect has damaged the wood, artwork, books and other objects as bugs, dirt, dramatic temperature fluctuations and time have been allowed to leave its mark on just about every surface you see.

It is not a rich church, and I don't think the congregation is particularly well off. But it has a beautiful simplicity to its structure: one chapel, with three altars at the front, left and right walls. They were once magnificently gilded, and the paintings that crown them of beautiful quality and skill.

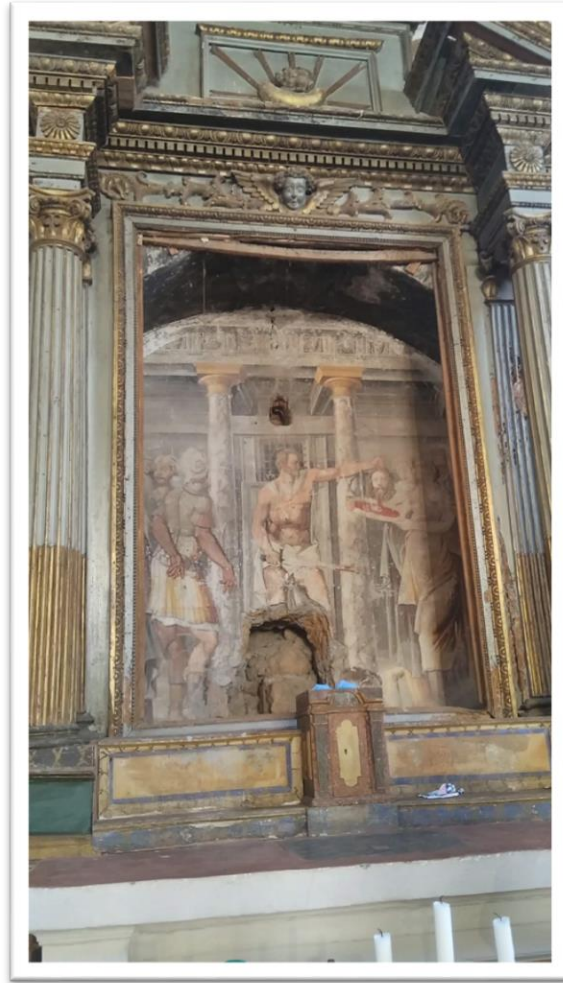
Sadly, the wooden frames of paintings and shelving on the altars is in some places well eaten away, and dust is everywhere. We spent the morning examining the congregation's collection, before casually splitting up to address the dust and bugs. Autumn is a good time to fumigate for bugs, as they burrow away to spend the winter, becoming sitting ducks and are easier to rove. Carolina explained that you can gently vacuum to rove them, or place something malodorous to chase them away. We used some nasty white pellets that smelt of menthol or eucalyptus (they're probably made of worse stuff, as they are banned in New Zealand), and popped them into hard to reach corners, down holes, and in spots that

people couldn't reach but bugs could. Carolina says you can use something less toxic, like lavender, for a similar effect. Funnily enough I use spices to deter bugs in my home: a line of ground pepper chases ants away for good. The concept reminds me of the old practice of storing your wool in a cedar chest: bugs hate the strong scent of cedar and so left your textiles alone. The holistic, old-school approach vouched for by Matteo has good, sensible roots. Caple states that "museums are turning to methods that are non-toxic to humans and non-damaging to objects" (P. 448) and lists such options as enclosing objects in plastic bags as a barrier, freezing, carbon-dioxide (all difficult in our situation, and are stipulated as inappropriate for sacred objects). He goes on to detail research into indigenous cultural knowledge as a source for natural and appropriate pest control solutions (ibid). I believe that this approach is a sensitive one, both for the good of an object's presentation without the use of noxious chemicals that can endanger people (staff or visitors) and the environment.

The thrill of the day was when we removed the large painting of John the Baptist's beheading (artist and date unknown but is believed to be from circa 1630-40 based on the clothing and a judgement from a fashion historian) from the front altar, revealing a magnificent fresco behind of the same subject. Parts of the wall had been damaged, but the colours were still bright and crisp. It was a huge privilege to see it, and I never would have thought that it was there. It seems that conservation work is full of surprises: some wonderful, and others alarming.



Discussing the removed painting of St John the Baptist and (below) the fresco hidden behind this painting in the main altar



12 October

For our last full day in Nepi, we explored the significant archaeological remains of Nepi and learned how to cook proper pasta carbonara at the home of the Dominici Family, who are Carolina's friends.

I struggle to comprehend living in a country where the ruins of castles are such a normal thing in your landscape, and we had a great time taking photos and exploring the ruins. Nepi has a long history, with Wikipedia quoting the local legend that it was founded 458 years before Rome, although archaeological finds indicate that "These valleys were inhabited since the earliest prehistory. There have been numerous archaeological finds of chipped stone tools and fragments of pots with cooking marks". It was fascinating to learn about the rise and decline of the area through the past 2,000 years, which was cemented while we were exploring the remains of Borgia Castle and the Archaeological Museum, which displayed the finds from local tombs and necropoli. I particularly loved the find of roasting skewers with the remains of centuries-old meat still attached from a funerary feast. The exhibition is part of Nepi's attempt to draw more tourism to the town, and while fascinating, the approach was strongly influenced by the old museological style. I feel it could have been much more imaginatively presented (perhaps by recreating excavated tombs and displaying objects that were found in that specific tomb) to be

immersive and draw visitors into the experience of archaeological discovery. We followed this with a guided tour of Borgia Castle, where we climbed the turret to see magnificent views of the town and countryside.

At midday we visited the casa of Donatella and Bruno Dominici, who welcomed us into their home and taught us how to cook proper carbonara. It was a wonderful insight into the Italian lifestyle, with shared meals and much laughter. I was pleased to see that I make carbonara *almost* right and am looking forward to getting into my own kitchen to give this new way an attempt or three. It was a beautifully warm day, and it was such an honour to be welcomed in like old friends and share a Saturday afternoon with them. After lunch we took a long walk through the countryside back to Nepi for a good rest to digest our lunch.

13 October

Bidding farewell to Nepi, we travelled by minivan to Rome and caught the train to Naples. I didn't see much of the countryside because my seat did not have a window, but hope to see it on the way to Florence. Instead I used the time to try recharge. The tour is very intense (and I cannot complain), but after just a week I feel as though my head is going to burst with wonder.

On arriving in Naples we checked in to our accommodation, Casa Tolentino, and after a quick rest went to the beach for a bit of reconnecting with nature with a swim and sunbathing. Napoli beaches seem much more commercial and privatised than Kiwi beaches, which is a concept I struggle with. We had a stunning walk along the promenade after sunset, watching the city's pulse change and the gloom to cause the bay to be lit up with lights of people's homes and businesses. We had a beautiful dinner at Pupella, a ristorante on the beach, where I polished off yet another whole pizza, and I enjoyed every bite. We caught the very last cable car up the hill to our accommodation after a quick walk through Napoli, where Carolina pointed out *Gran Caffè Gambrinus*, a historical coffee shop that opened in 1860 and followed the culture of coffee shops throughout Europe as a source of intellectual debate, discussion and networking. It was - and still is - an elite space, hugely popular and glitteringly bourgeois.

14 October

The Capodimonte Museum is an historic royal palace and summer residence to the 'Kings of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies'. According to Wikipedia, it took more than a century to build and complete, with construction beginning under Charles VII (King of Naples and Sicily - later Charles III, king of Spain). Situated upon a hill - where it would have been cooler in the summer - the palace was built with the intention of housing Charles III's the Farnese art collection that he had inherited from his mother, the last descendant of the sovereign ducal family of Parma. Today the palace continues as a home to art as a museum, and it was eye-opening.

The museum boasts well planned and executed exhibitions and I was fascinated by the creative presentation of their objects and works of art. It was particularly interesting to see artworks that were

500 years old (or more), and the varying states of preservation they were in. Some were immaculate, others were a little eaten up, or had tissue repairs applied and some had gaps filled in. I find it an interesting juxtaposition towards object condition in New Zealand. Italians seem much more comfortable with having objects on display with different states of conservation, and of publicly acknowledging when an object is being conserved. It may be a difference in the actual age of our heritage, or a greater awareness of care and age in objects, but we saw statues with Japanese Tissue – a short term action to preserve an object before proper conservation can take place – displayed with no explanation or apology, which I never saw in New Zealand.



Statue with Japanese Tissue applied to the skirt (white rectangles).

We were incredibly fortunate in Carolina's connection with Antonio Tosini, Head of Object Conservation, who kindly took us behind the scenes to see the conservation lab and to talk about some of their work. We saw a bronze figure being removed of salts that cause bronze to discolour and go green and an incredibly precious glass bottle from 300BC that is as iridescent as paua shell. This and other precious bottles are held as part of the Capodimonte collection and defy anyone's expectation that historic

peoples had little technological sophistication. Italy has constant reminders and testaments to the skill and intimate understanding of their art and the ability to execute it.

15 October

I have been fascinated by Pompeii since I discovered Roman culture, so was incredibly excited to visit today. We were up early to take a taxi there, stopping for a flying breakfast on the outskirts before meeting Monica Martelli Castaldi, who has a long professional history with Pompeii and now works as a freelance conservator. Monica took us on a long, busy and full tour through Pompeii. We visited sites that are not open to the public to see conservation work in action and to talk about the unique conditions that conservators at Pompeii must work with. I particularly enjoyed learning about the frescoes and mosaics, which are complex creations of many layers several inches thick. Throughout the day Monica and staff at Pompeii emphasised again (and independently of Matteo Rossi Doria at Consorzio Conservazione Beni Culturali who we met on 9 October) to use natural materials in your intervention, and to do as little visible work as possible in order to respect the integrity of an object and its history. There was a particularly beautiful mosaic that Carolina and I were admiring, and which Monique used as an opportunity to describe the complex task of removing these from the walls. At times it is better to remove them and reinforce both the back of the work and hang it independently; which involves applying a canvas to the surface, attaching a frame and cutting around and behind, before placing the work on a table upside-down. The back can then be reinforced with a limestone-based base to reinforce it. Modern materials such as concrete, acrylic and epoxy should be avoided as they are difficult to reverse.



Cross-section of a fresco in Pompeii.

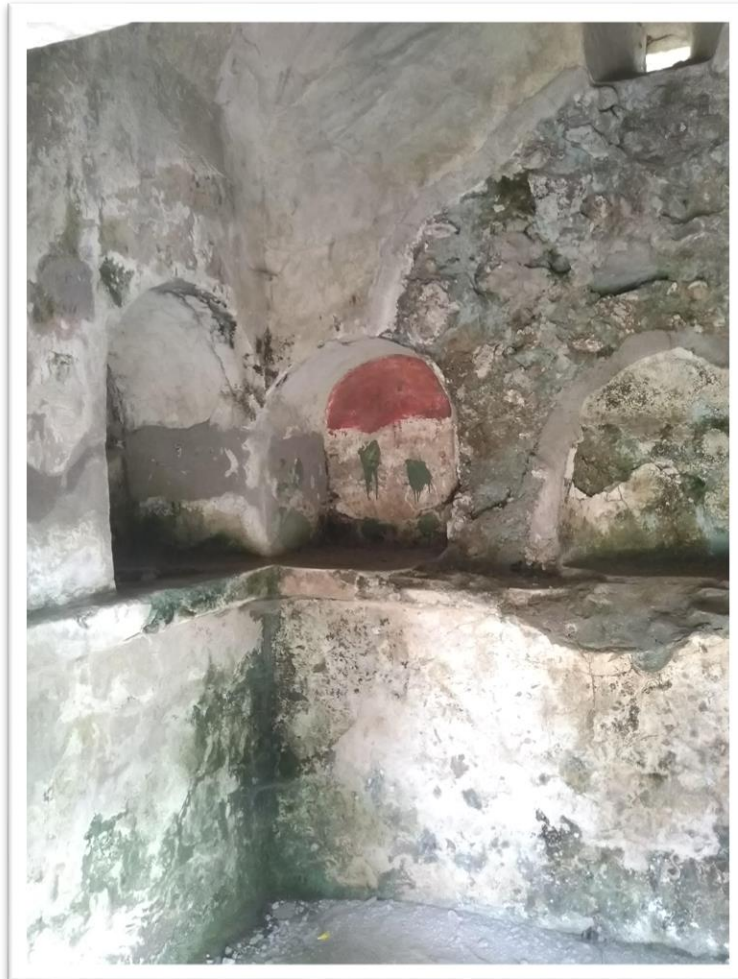
We were again incredibly lucky with Carolina's connections, which allowed us to see parts of Pompeii few others do. We visited the conservation lab, where they were working on objects for a new exhibition. I was particularly amazed by the work to restore some iron window bars, which were terribly rusted. This was an opportunity to discuss a recurring theme for the day: that restoration is not only on the surface of an object, but for reinforcing the structural integrity of the whole object. You should know your object intimately before commencing work, and any broken pieces need to be carefully noted and stored according to where they fell off from, which preserves the lifetime of an object. Iron is prone to rusting, but in situations where the conditions are not stable – such as being outdoors, in all weather, day and night – speed up the rate of deterioration. Good preventive conservation is striving to maintain a stable environment that will cause less continued damage.

We visited a domus that was closed to the public to view some restoration work being undertaken by a Japanese conservator, on a four-year intermittent internship, who was restoring some frescoes in one of the rooms. The space was incredibly well preserved and sumptuous, and the frescoes were being carefully cleaned of their ancient paraffin wax coat and adhered volcanic sediment and dirt. Ammonia

was being used to assist with removing the debris, and it was amazing to see his work yielding such fantastic results. It was stressed the importance of testing your technique before approaching conservation work.

Monique then set us a task of looking for agents of deterioration at Pompeii. People seemed to be the biggest: I witnessed a child hurling large rocks, and we worried about people ignoring barriers for bravado/ selfies. We made close observations of cracked plaster walls, and the unique 'nails' used to secure the pieces in place. Columns had steel braces, weakened doorways were supported, and rooves erected for buildings housing important works of art.

We visited a laundry, a tavern, a clothing shop, numerous houses, and one of the Necropoli²¹. Here Monica gave us a choice: try 'mapping' the area according to a range of perspectives: construction, alterations (particularly graffiti and past restoration), identifying weaknesses, water channels original and added as part of restoration, and much more – or take some free time to explore. The others chose free time, but I decided to try the mapping. Carolina joined me halfway through where she pressed my observations and prompted me with questions. It was challenging and satisfying to look so closely at the funerary monuments, enclosures and wider site to become more intimately acquainted with it.

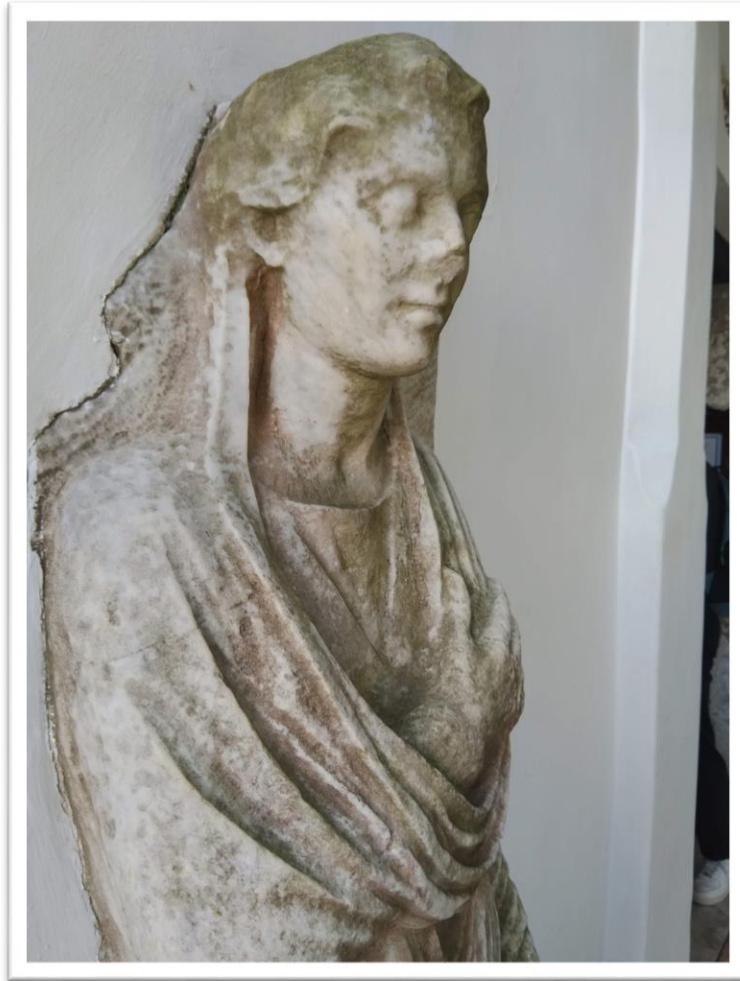


Graffiti inside one of the tombs of Pompeii.

Today was monumental, eye opening and inspiring. I continue to be reminded of the complexity of human history and our privilege to look after it. My feet are killing me and I am exhausted, but it is worth it.

16 October

We were up bright and early for a dash to the waterfront to catch the ferry to Capri, a beautiful island 40 minutes from Naples. The island sings of the Mediterranean: sheer, white cliffs rise steeply from the turquoise waters, clothed in the lush plants and pretty candy-coloured buildings. We caught the cable car up to the village of Capri, where we spent some time wandering around before the others departed to walk to see a local Villa that Carolina loves. Lizzie and I stayed behind as I was feeling a little unwell from the trip over and I didn't feel up for a hike over unknown terrain. Instead we all met up later at Villa San Michelle, former residence of the Swedish Doctor Axel Munthe, to see some objects that Carolina had worked on and the effects of a hot, humid climate on collections. This was especially apparent in the gardens, where two beautiful marble topped tables showed entirely different conditions, and a beautiful Roman bust that is covered in a light dusting of green moss/ mould. There was a curious dichotomy at Villa San Michelle, as some objects were very well maintained as others were not. Carolina said that ongoing care would have protected the table and bust from this level of damage. It has become more and more apparent that 'care' is not an umbrella practice, and that you need to alter how you approach each object, which involves a specialist knowledge of materials and their unique needs. Collections staff and conservators will know this as part of their practice, but it would be useful for laypeople to find the information to aid in the conservation of their collections to prevent serious conservation work being necessary. National Services Te Paerangi does have a guide on preventive conservation, but is aimed at Museum staff, not a private collector who wants to participate in the care of their objects (or students who want to know the best way to manage mould and lichen).



17 October

Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (MANN) is a magnificent museum in Naples who kindly invited us to talk to their staff and interning students about conservation work undertaken on two ancient Egyptian sarcophagi. We saw two sarcophagi, a yellow one that shows signs of ancient reuse (!) and one from the Ptolemaic period. Despite their age and the borer holes, I thought they were magnificent and in very good condition. We were given two very informative and in-depth presentation about the conservation work performed on them, including an incredibly complex diagnostic analysis examining the wood age and type, preparatory layers, and paint. The yellow sarcophagus was treated by:

- Gently brushing and vacuuming
- Fumigation via annoxia with a nitrogen atmosphere so as not to expose the delicate materials to potentially damaging chemicals
- Dry cleaning with a makeup sponge
- Wet cleaning with specific solvents chosen especially to not damage the specific paints

- Thinning of the oxidised varnish
- Preservation of the colours
- Filling a large crack on the lid, and
- 'Toning' parts of the lid

The yellow sarcophagus was particularly curious as it showed signs of being recycled, with symbolic male and female attributes. For instance, the hands presently on the sarcophagus are closed into fit, but analysis revealed that they are of a different wood and paint, so are a later addition. The ears are also hidden by the hair, which is a female attribute. The suspected reasons for the reuse got a little lost in translation for me, but we got to see the mummy that was with the sarcophagus as well, brought back to Naples by a rich Italian woman from a trip to Egypt and sold to MANN.

The Ptolemaic sarcophagus was simpler but featured gold plating. It is the subject of a journal paper, a 'Multidisciplinary approach for the study of the Ptolemaic coffin of Ankh-hapy from the Egyptian collection at MANN in Naples', which following its publication I hope to find and read.

We had the privilege to see two of the Mummies that are part of the collection, including the one found in the yellow sarcophagus, as well as a fake mummy that was purchased as a souvenir. Turns out that mummies have a very distinctive smell, and that you can perform restoration work on them as well. Unfortunately I cannot publicly share pictures of the sarcophagi at MANN's request.

We also had the opportunity to visit the conservation labs at MANN, of which there are four: Marble and Mosaics, Frescoes, Ceramic and Porcelain, and Metal. Each lab had different specialist staff and equipment, and it was fascinating to hear about and see their work: Conservators are like Doctors: they maintain the health of an object, and when required can perform 'surgery' on their objects to extend their life and value. Elizabeth Pye makes the same metaphor where in both practices an object/ patient is examined, and then "both preventive and remedial measures may be used, specialist advice may be sought, and treatments may be reviewed and changed, but the process always includes assessment, diagnosis and documentation" (2007, 25). The issue of documentation is vital: just as a patient needs their medical history to be documented, past conservation actions need to be recorded in case it has some relevance in the future.



Conservators at work at MANN.

18 October

Today was made difficult by my mental exhaustion which has left me with a headache and accident prone – I slipped on the last step on my way to breakfast partially twisting my ankle, and in the afternoon some dumped planks of wood fell directly on my head as I returned to our accommodation. So, I'm afraid that today wasn't the best of days and I wasn't as receptive as I wish I could have been.

We visited the University of Sour Orsola Benincasa, right next to our accommodation. We attended a morning lecture where Carolina talked about the Sibyllam study tour and Tomo, Melanie, Damien Juliet H and I spoke briefly about our experiences on the tour. We visited a series of lab, including the Diagnostic Conservation lab, full of incredibly high-tech equipment that can analyse, scan, detect and report on the chemical and molecular composition of the surface of objects, or from a tiny sample the size of a small grain of rock salt. We heard from three people about their work and study in diagnostic analysis, from the purpose of such work to its practice on a painting and recovered frescoes.

We also visited the conservation labs for wood, metal and paintings, and spoke to students about their work. These are incredibly talented, passionate and intelligent young people who are passionate about preserving our shared human past. One of the most interesting things I saw was in the metal & ceramics lab, where students practiced and learned how to make a similar object before they attempted conservation. This enabled a more informed approach and deeper understanding of an object, so that their work was more accurate and sensitive. Their work was often on objects that were part of the university's collection, which (to me) is a progressive and trusting approach that the school has taken in their student's learning.



In the labs of Università Consorzio Conservazione Beni Culturali

19 October

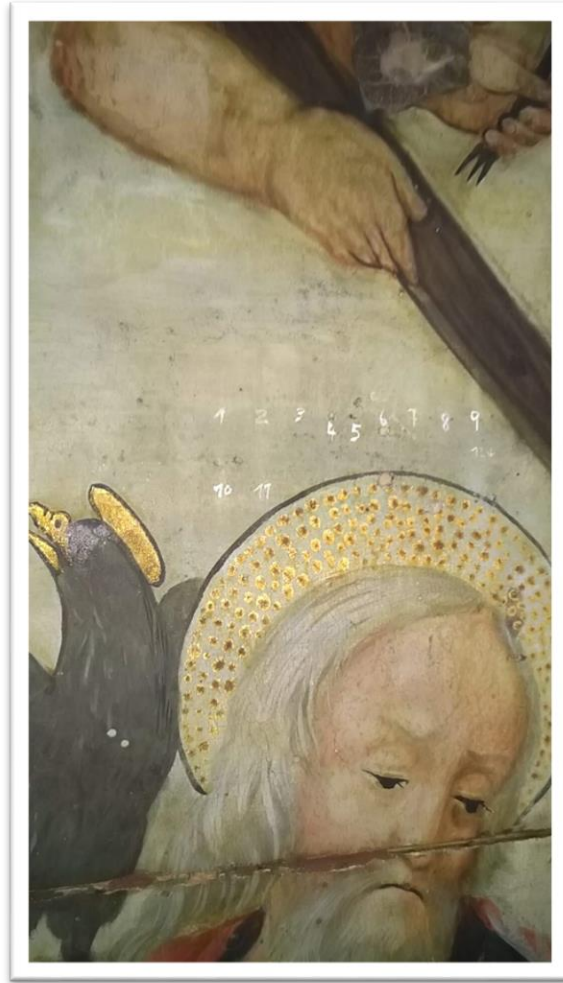
Naples has a long history, which we have discovered is visible in its architecture. We spent the morning exploring the architecture of the city, mainly between Piazza Trinita Maggiore and Piazza S. Domenico Maggiore, looking at everything from historic palaces-come-churches, churches and residences. Our

guide was architect Pasquale Rossi, who pointed out the layers of building that the city has seen. This included 'hatting' where an earlier period building is extended but in a new period's architectural style, rebuilding and repurposing an existing building. It was a fascinating insight into Napoli's history. I had hoped to talk to Pasquale about earthquake strengthening but didn't have the chance to, so hope to try email him to extend the conversation.

21 October

Yesterday we had a 3-hour train trip to Florence, which ate up most of our day and didn't give much to report.

Today, however, was much more interesting. We visited the School of Conservation that Carolina trained at, and that her daughter is now training at as well. The Istituto Palazzo Spinelli is an incredible place: training up-and-coming conservators in the techniques and skills necessary for their career. We were greeted by Martina Previatello and had a long and interesting conversation about the work of the laboratory and school, examining the artworks that they are working on the many issues they need to address in their practice. It was particularly interesting to discuss the approach of solvents in cleaning paintings. They apply it in increasing levels of strength, always stopping before the changes are too dramatic, so that the patina is not destroyed in the process of their work. They choose an unimportant part of a painting to test degrees of solvents and then apply an appropriate level to different part of a painting – an all-over approach would only really be applied with the weakest levels as an initial wash. Differing levels of solvent are then carefully applied; colours such as red are one of the first to fade, and along with dark browns receive less attention than other colours, such as white or blue. The results show the paintings in a light that reveals their original beauty.

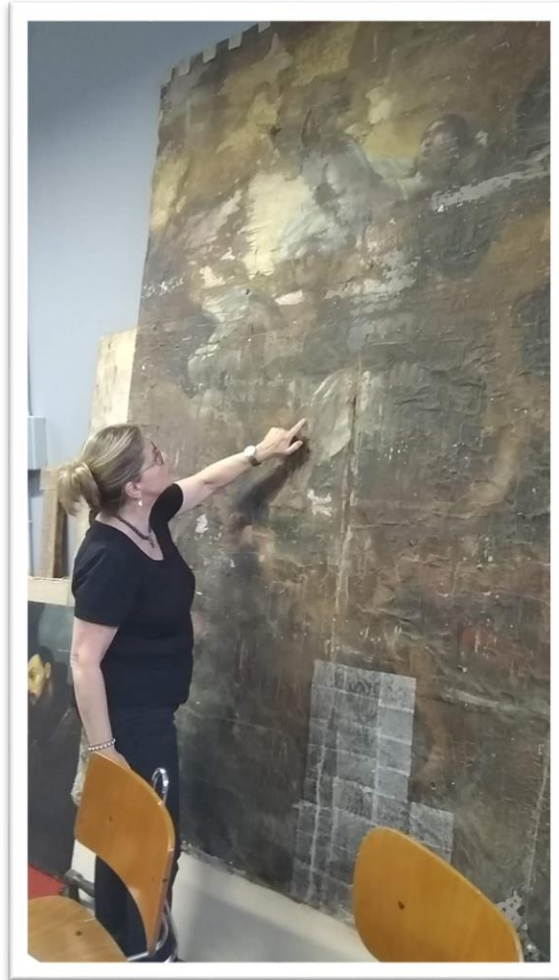


Chalk numbers indicating the location and type of solvents tested on the plain background of a painting.

We had the opportunity to attempt the test conservation students must pass to go on to higher study. The test is to colour match a blank spot between two samples of a painting using fine, light strokes of watercolour paint, so that the image is harmoniously brought back together whilst clearly indicating what is and isn't original. Carolina has said that historically conservators considered themselves artists and at times would even sign a conserved painting as their work (!) but these days their role, as I understand it, is to be a skillful surgeon and to bring the wounds of an object back together in an organic, caring and minimally visible manner that is still recognisable to a trained eye. My attempt was a bit yellow, but for someone with no art training I was pleased with my effort. The student's efforts were much more skilled at filling in missing patches, gaps or holes in a painting (known as 'lacunae'). I am embarrassed to say that I had very little idea of the skill, knowledge and training that goes into conservation work, but I now have a much respect for the profession as I do for doctors and nurses: essentially, that is what they are.

We saw one very powerful example that highlighted why a professionally trained conservator is necessary for protecting your art and collections. The painting below was discovered in a French

marketplace and brought back to Italy in the hope of conservation. Several professionals declined the job due to an undocumented and poorly done attempt at conservation in the past. Japanese tissue had been applied with an unknown glue and was done so badly as to be posing a risk to the painting to be removed.



Carolina examining a very badly damaged and poorly conserved painting. Beneath the murky varnish and tissue is a painting of remarkable beauty and skill.

After lunch we had a fascinating talk and walk with Architect Paulo Pieri Nerli (nephew of Girolamo Nerli, who had an enduring impact on the direction of New Zealand art, according to his biography in Wikipedia). Paulo explained to us the historic growth of the city – from a Villanovain settlement around 10 Centuries BC, to an Etruscan village known as Fiesole around 7 Centuries BC, to a Roman town named Augusta Florentia in 59BC. He showed the boundaries of the growing Roman town into a flourishing city, (and later took us on a walk to see the edge of the Roman town). He talked of John Temple Leader and his Florentine dream, renovating several historic buildings, but we focused on Vincigliata Castle and his work on that site. He then discussed the November 1966 flooding of the river Arno, which saw the river rise to flood the city with up to 3.5m of water, and in its wake left a swathe of destroyed artefacts and

left buildings covered in a sticky oil slick. Among the damaged artefacts was the church Santa Croce's Cimabue Crucifix, which lost 60% of its paint in the flood. Conservation work took 10 years, and immediate concerns for the crucifix included keeping it wet, to avoid further damage from quick drying caused by the wood contracting after being soaked and absorbing the floodwaters (and expanding). The lost paint was carefully restored using an integrated colour selection to fill in the lost patches – acknowledging the loss and incorporating it into the piece's timeline and history. Conservation work did not seek to replace the lost aspects as they once were, so Christ's face and torso are not restored to their previous condition, but instead are treated to make a harmonious whole where 60 years ago parts were lost.

Paulo also focused on the unique Florentine approach to building decoration, including exterior frescoes and deep roof awnings to protect them from the elements. We explored some nearby parts of the city, and I had a chance for a brief discussion about earthquake strengthening. Italians are well aware and practiced with their approach to buildings, and all newer, modern building must comply to set standards. Historic buildings are built to be strong, solid, and to protect and support themselves and other buildings. Carolina and Damien had some particularly interesting insights about the approach in Christchurch of using metal support for buildings – which in later earthquakes smacked against the structure it was meant to be supporting and causing further weakening and damage. I have some more questions and hope to be in touch with Paulo in the future and think that New Zealand ought to look to older, more experienced countries such as Italy for inspiration and advice.



The exterior Frescoes and deep awnings so characteristic of Florentine architecture.

22 October

I am embarrassed to admit that I didn't know anything about the Uffizi Gallery before this trip but having had the opportunity to visit I now understand its international fame. As stated on their website,

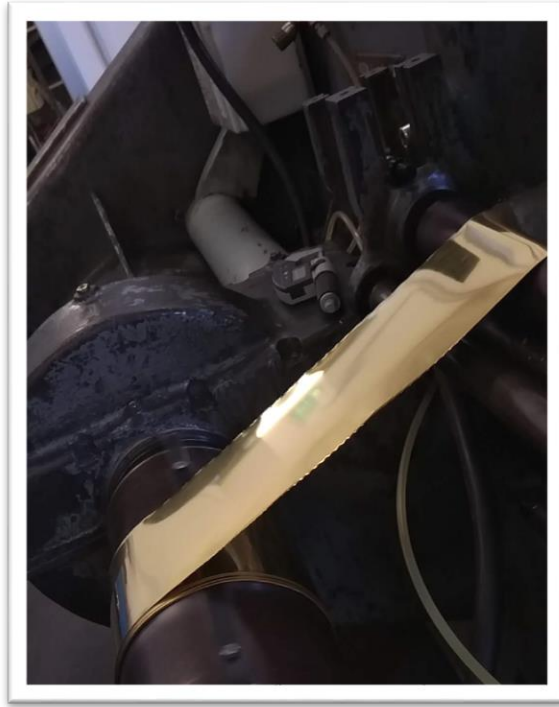
the gallery “entirely occupies the first and second floors of the large building constructed between 1560 and 1580 and designed by Giorgio Vasari. It is famous worldwide for its outstanding collections of ancient sculptures and paintings (from the Middle Ages to the Modern period)”. It was a perfect opportunity for me to immerse myself in Roman objects – getting a selfie with Marcus Aurelius, marvelling the statues and busts, the ceilings and the famous artworks. I particularly enjoyed noticing the skilled conservation work applied to the statues but couldn’t discern any in the artworks – due to both crowds, protective distance, and the likely skill of the staff. I noticed that several objects had been removed from display for conservation/ restoration work, which show the dedication of the staff for the ongoing care of their collection.

One thing I noted (for the first time in Italy) were some accessible approaches to the art for the sight-impaired. A plastic overlay of the floor maps was supplied to orientate those with poor sight, and a 3D copy of the Birth of Venus was supplied as well. This is an aspect of Museum communication that I am particularly interested in and passionate about and is something that I advocate for more of.





Following the Uffizi we met in the piazza behind the gallery, which is filled with replica statues of famous works, including Michaelangelo's David, before walking across the city to catch a bus into the industrial suburbs to visit the Manetti gold leaf factory. Manetti gold leaf can be seen across Italy, gilding everything from statues to paintings and even buildings. We met Edward Marten, Sales Area Manager, who gave us a guided tour through the factory – from ingots melted at 1060 degrees Celsius (taking about 5 minutes to melt, and coming down to a touchable temperature almost instantly when poured into its moulds) to rolled ribbons, into the two beating rooms and finally onto the quality checking, cutting and book making. They even have an entirely separate production line for certified food-safe gold leaf – a concept I see with some hilarity. The gold leaf is incredibly thin and adheres to the oils in your hands very quickly. There were scraps of gold everywhere, but I understand that they do take the gold scraps and reuse it by melting it into new ingots. The Manetti Factory goes back several generations with the family still involved. The value and demand of their product for both conservation and modern use will likely see that tradition continue. As the factory is not open to the public it was an incredible opportunity to see the source of so much of the gold we have encountered on our tour.



Pressed and rolled gold, before a round of mechanical and manual beating.

23 October

Today is our last full, intense day of the tour and I cannot believe how much we have seen and done in three past three weeks. We are so fortunate in Carolina's connections and today was no different.

We visited the National School of Conservation Opificio delle Pietre Dure – one of the most prestigious schools of conservation in Italy, where we focused on the work of the students in learning about the nature and construction of the works they are conserving, particularly in the artworks on wood lab. The space was like a futuristic laboratory, with ventilation tubes over workstations, lighting and materials that underlined just how seriously the study of effective conservation in the Italian style. Before even being able to work on a piece, students recreate miniature versions of the artworks they will work on. They build tiny wood panels, studying how the panel are held together by a wooden support system at the back. This allows students to develop a respect for the way natural material breathe and move, and to find the most effective way to work with it, as opposed to using rigid materials (such as metal) to restrict it. As always, their interventions are intended to be organic, gentle and reversible, in case a new approach or further work is necessary in the coming decades. I was particularly taken by their effort in recreating the base and structure for a wood panel painting – right down to the little wooden nails and struts. It is this approach that mark Italian conservators out from new world conservators – the dedication to a deep understanding of the object in its entirety, not just the pretty bits - to learn how to work with and conserve their objects. We also saw an enormous 5m tall cross from a church, and a much smaller model that students had built to understand it and its structure. It was an intricate piece consisting of interlocking panels and struts and incredibly clever.



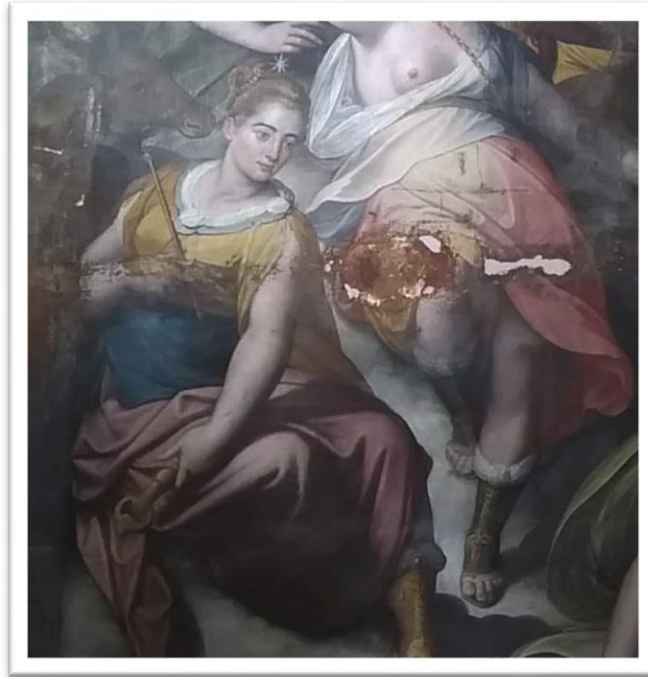
A study in creating the wooden frame for a wood panel painting, necessary for a complete understanding of an object's physical state before conservation on an original can take place.

We examined an x-ray of a painting, which allows conservators to see the history and invisible elements – borer holes filled with plaster by the artist a part of their preparation, the original construction, and later efforts – such as metal crews inserted in an earlier attempt at conservation. The depth that they go through in their year of training and daily work is something to be admired, and Italy have made a great investment into the protection of their heritage.



Following this we met the conservator Luccia Dori at her conservation lab in the outer area of Florence. Carolina translated as she explained to us her work, focusing on a magnificent painting of Diana,

goddess of the hunt that is part of a nine-panel series that were a ceiling decoration at the Uffizi. We discussed the story of the painting, and the damage that a leaking roof wreaked upon the panels – with great patches missing, some tears, and aging of the varnish, dimming the colours. There were some truly ugly attempts to patch some tears with plaster, and Luccia has her work cut out for her to restore the work to its rightful glory.



Water damage to a painting.

She also had a kind of altar in the lab that was in the process of being conserved and regilded. Back in Nepi, Carolina had explained that you cannot apply new gilding to an object to hide damage as the new gold will look completely different to the old gold with its patina. It was in Luccia's lab that I finally saw what Carolina meant. Manetti had donated 60,000 leaves of gold for the altar's restoration and initial patching revealed the patina of the altar and the huge difference between the old and new gold. We left Luccia in the late afternoon, catching the bus back to central Florence.



The difference of old gold leaf, and new gold leaf.

Carolina had one more surprise in store for us, stopping at the shop Cornici Maselli. Gabriele Maselli is an old classmate of hers. Maselli crafts hand carved frames each beautifully elaborate and unique. He has an impressive collection of chisels to carve his work. He also carries out restorations on historic frames for individuals, museums and institutions. It is easy to think of a ‘conservator’ as someone who repairs paintings, but I now understand that the specialisations in the field vary greatly – from art to carriages, frames to sarcophagi. The techniques and approach is always organic, careful and minimal, and the skill is exemplary.

24 October

For our final day of activities, we travelled out into the Tuscan countryside to discover the art of la scagliola with artist Fabiola Lunghetti. Fabiola has been practising the art of scagliola since 1981 and is a graduate of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure (which we visited yesterday) with a thesis on Scagliola. Scagliola is a complex mimicry of the marquetry pieces of marble and hard stone so desirable in the

1600s, and skilled modern artisans are so good that the only way to differentiate piece is by the touch, as marble is cooler than scagliola. It is made by creating a stucco base, into which a design is drawn onto and then etched in, before the etchings are filled with mixtures of coloured stucco, made of ground selenite, animal glues and natural pigments mixed into a fast-drying paste with water.

Fabiola was a wonderful teacher and I thoroughly enjoyed a contemplative morning of working with my hands, filling the etchings, scraping and sanding, and refilling gaps. In fact, I'm tempted to investigate pursuing it as a hobby when I return home, as I enjoyed it so much. We then had a beautiful lunch with Gina, Fabiola's neighbour, who had prepared us crostini with olive oil pressed the night before, pasta with her own olives and tomatoes, and home-canned peaches. We had a long and lively lunch debriefing what we learned on the trip, and where we wanted to use our knowledge to take ourselves. I am honoured again by the hospitality of Italians, inviting eight kiwis who they have never met into their homes. It is a delight to spend time with them and I am so grateful for the opportunity to meet them. After lunch we returned to Fabiola's house for the final sanding and polishing of our scagliola, which had been baked hard in her oven. The goal was to get our pieces as smooth and shiny as marble, but I didn't quite manage to achieve that level of shine. It is amazing to see the brilliancy of people finding ways to achieve a look of something only available to the incredibly rich in society – keeping up with the Joneses has always been a weakness of people.

The Tuscan countryside's famed beauty is well earned and even though today was a cold and wet one (meaning we didn't get the chance to pick olives as hoped), I don't think I could have asked for a more enjoyable final day of study.



Trying our hand at la scagliola

Final thoughts

Whenever I try to find the words to describe this experience, I find myself at a loss (as if the nearly 10,000-odd words here aren't enough). I embarked on the tour with a poor understanding of the

principles, theory, approach and practice of conservation. I knew it required a lot of study, but what a conservator actually does was very vague. I have returned home with an immense respect for the profession and a refreshed passion for the protection of our heritage for the benefit of future generations. How else can we marvel at the skill and brilliance of our ancestors (and continue to think of only our living generations as the sophisticated ones) without tangible proof of the giant's shoulders on which we stand?

Everything that we saw and everyone that we spoke to emphasised the same message: treat your objects gently, treat them organically, do no more than what is needed. A conservator should not be vain and seek for their work mask the original: they are the invisible guardians who connect an object's lifetime to the present and safeguard it for the future. Our learning built a web between the set and suggested readings for the course: from Caple's old-school and rather dry approach to Sully and Simmons' more empathetic consideration of the cultural history of an object. Sully's concept of values- and peoples- based conservation practice is an innate aspect of Italian conservation: "a change from the *materials* of heritage objects to the *values* that cultural heritage hold for people" (2015, 293). Damage to an object is undesirable, but ultimately become part of the objects story and a conservator needs to be mindful and not deny this.

Unfortunately, I do not have the scientific, artistic or linguistic skills to become an (Italian-trained) conservator. I believe that my skills lie elsewhere: I would like to explore the path of a collection manager, or perhaps look to define a new role: collection communicator. Curators are highly trained in a specific area and I believe are not always ideally positioned to tell the stories of a collection: in some areas they can't see the wood for the trees, while other areas are a blind spot. I am a writer. I am a people-person who also happens to be a structured organiser. My travel in Italy has given me a respect and enthusiasm for the stories objects tell and for the damage that museums and galleries would likely rather ignore and not tell – but to the detriment of our visitors. I hope to find a role that could see me using my skills in categorising and organising but also in connecting and interpreting.

I am immensely grateful to Carolina for organising this incredible experience. I am also incredibly thankful for the financial assistance from the Jaycee Trust Travelling Fellowship for their generous support, without whom I would have struggled to financially cover this opportunity in professional and personal discovery. I also wish to thank my deceased grandparents, who left me some money which I used to finance my academic credits for the tour as part of my post-graduate diploma in Museum & Heritage Studies for which my work earned me an A in the paper. My final, but not least, thanks go to my husband and family for their support. I come home enthused and talkative, and I will carry these lessons and experiences with me for the rest of my life.