

Crossing borders: Building conservation capacity through collaboration among Latin-American professionals

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The richness and diversity of Brazilian cultural heritage is undeniable as it includes, but is not limited to, a wide range of archaeological, ethnographic, and historical artifacts as well as contemporary art. However, conservation training is still very scarce given the size of the country and the demand for qualifications in the field. This evident gap highlights the need for a greater provision of conservation courses in Brazil, especially so that professionals can expand their expertise beyond the more traditional fields of paper, painting, and three-dimensional sculpture conservation. Although current undergraduate courses offer specific subjects, one of the concerns of trained professionals in Brazil is the lack of practical experience and interdisciplinary work. Very often, the “preventive conservation approach” is prioritized, but Brazil’s tropical climate and a long history of low budgets and minimal collection management in understaffed cultural institutions demonstrates in practice that preventive conservation alone is not enough. Conservators are often faced with situations in which remedial conservation and specialized knowledge are required. This poses difficult challenges for professionals working in contexts where this type of training is not widely available. These constraints were discussed in 2019, when the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (MAE) at the University of São Paulo and the Ivani and Jorge Yunes Collection—an important private collection in São Paulo—joined forces and started organizing training courses in conservation. This poster discusses the first of these efforts in 2019, which focused on the conservation and restoration of metal objects. The program included metallurgical manufacturing processes, deterioration mechanisms, archaeometric and instrumental analyses, and preventive and remedial conservation techniques and methods, and was based on the established principles and rationale that underpin heritage conservation. Over 40 intense hours of work, students performed remedial work on objects from the Ivani and Jorge Yunes Collection. They were also offered technical visits to MAE, where they had the opportunity to perform preventive conservation diagnostics. The course generated huge interest and demand, and it was necessary to organize three more groups, totaling almost 90 participants, which reinforced the belief that the project should be continued and expanded. After discussion with participants, it was decided that the next courses should focus on preventive conservation, ceramics, textiles, stone materials, and glass, among other areas. This partnership between a private collection and a university museum has been particularly enriching because it has enabled students to experience interdisciplinary conservation and learn that decision-making processes must take into account multiple factors. In addition, because the main instructor of the metals conservation course was from Peru, it was possible to promote a more in-depth reflection on professional practice in both countries and broaden our understanding of its historical trajectory. This initiative showed that such a partnership can be fruitful, as it not only fulfilled the initial objective of providing an opportunity for professional development, thus drawing attention to the need for specialized training in this area, but also made it possible to expand borders and integrate professionals from Latin America. The network of contacts built over this period continues to work and support its members continuously as preparations are being made for the next courses to strengthen conservation training in Brazil.