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## **Church art affected by natural disasters in the Philippines: an account of conservation in the field.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Heritage workers demonstrate creativity and pragmatism to develop solutions reflecting differing priorities and constraints. Each is a response to specific circumstances and not necessarily analogous, nevertheless reporting is important within professional circles and the community to allow for discussion and critique. This paper is one such account, examining approaches to the conservation of movable Church heritage in Bohol, Philippines.

In October 2013, a 7.3 magnitude earthquake devastated the island, closely followed by Super Typhoon Haiyan. A large number of coral stone churches -- many nationally heritage listed -- were partially or totally ruined. In the months following, teams were sent from national cultural institutions to collaborate with local communities for the salvage and relocation of collections to adapted storage areas, where they have since been maintained by parishioners. Four years later, in April 2017, the 5th Asia Pacific Tropical Climate Conservation Art Research Network (APTCCARN) meeting, themed around cultural heritage recovery and disaster management, focused on these collections. The delegates -- heritage workers from local parishes, institutions across the Philippines, and the wider Asia-Pacific -- undertook site visits to assess agents of deterioration and make recommendations to further improve storage and maintenance.

Four recent graduates of the Masters of Cultural Materials Conservation at the University of Melbourne were supported by Australian Government funding to continue working in Bohol, collaborating with local knowledge holders to understand how these recommendations might be enacted. Strategies were developed to address conservation problems, acknowledging the privilege and challenges of working with living heritage items **in regular use** within the community. This paper explores issues and learnings from the perspective of the recent graduates, such as contending with mould and pests in tropical climates, developing flexible **and sustainable** solutions that could easily be **implemented** by parishioners, the importance of building strong and lasting relationships, and methods of communicating and reporting to a wide range of audiences. Acknowledging the paper primarily focuses on the recent field work, it will also reflect on third party mediation and

conservation collaborations in this space.

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

Rosie Cook, recipient of the 2016 Alexander Copland Award for best conservation thesis, and 2017 Asialink Arts Resident, has over 15 years of involvement in projects across Asia Pacific. Her conservation practice focuses on world cultures, performance and community engagement, with current projects in Indonesia, the Philippines and Taiwan.

Sabine Cotte is a French-Australian conservator, based in Melbourne (Australia) since 2001. She holds conservation degrees from Institut National du Patrimoine (Paris), ICCROM (Rome) and a Masters of Arts from the University of Melbourne on the topic, and recently submitted her PhD on the artist Mirka Mora. She has led several workshops in the Himalayan region for UNESCO, ICCROM and private NGOs, focusing on training local people in conservation and in disaster recovery.

Amy Heffernan is a recent graduate of the Master of Cultural Materials Conservation at the University of Melbourne, specialising in objects conservation. She is currently working with the Grimwade Centre to establish conservation programs for council and community collections in Bathurst, NSW.

Elizabeth Long is a conservator that is currently working in Film preservation at the ABC film archives at Ultimo in Sydney. Her previous roles include working as Assistant Time-Based Media Conservator [Loans] at Tate Gallery and Conservator at the Adelaide City Archives. She has an ongoing interest in practical approaches to preventive conservation and the unique challenges involved in the preservation of Time-Based Media.

Nicole Tse is a Senior Lecturer and Academic Co-ordinator from the Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, the University of Melbourne, and a founding member of APTCCARN.

Karen Wilcox is a Conservation Assistant at the Australian War Memorial and recent graduate in Objects Conservation from the University of Melbourne, with a particular interest in how collections can be maintained in communities outside of conventional museum envelopes.