

**NKF-N (Nordisk Konservatorforbund – Norge  
The Norwegian section of the Nordic Conservator Association)  
annual report 2017**

**Finances**

NKF/N is in good financial order and has no debt.

**Scientific analysis in conservation**

A survey of the availability of analytical services within the conservation field was conducted in 2016. The purpose was to identify types of equipment and scientific staff that institutions might have and whether conservators might have access to analytical services in conservation outside of their particular institution. The survey showed that overall the situation in conservation science is improving. More institutions have invested significant resources in equipment and in staff for scientific research within conservation. One institution, the Munch Museum, has hired a head of conservation who is a conservation scientist. However, the services of these institutions with scientific facilities are mostly designated for internal use. There is no national or central organization that can coordinate research within conservation in Norway.

A separate survey of NKF-N members showed that 66% of respondents have a need for analytical services. 51% answered that they undertake scientific work as part of their daily work. Among needed equipment that is most often mentioned were: stereo and polarized microscopes, XRF, FTIR, X-ray, and to a lesser extent pigment and binder analytical equipment, scanning electron microscopes, and gas chromatography-mass spectroscopy. Only 1 respondent out of 130 said that they do not need anything in addition and can buy all the services they require.

**Government Proposition regarding Humanities.**

The Norwegian government Ministry of Education and Research has recently published a document called “**Proposition regarding Humanities**” which points to the fact that the humanities were overlooked for a long time compared to hard sciences and they need to be uplifted. This includes research within the museum, library and archive sector. They stress the need for work across the disciplines and state that the humanities should cooperate with hard sciences and businesses, becoming more relevant to society. NKF-N sent its suggestions to the Ministry of Education and Research a year ago stressing the need for analytical services in Norway. There are already PhD students within the University of Oslo specializing in paintings and polychrome sculpture. In Norway there is a national database called *Cristin* to which all the scientific publications, including those in conservation, are submitted. Mostly the conservation research included in this database is performed by the National Museum, university museums and libraries, and by the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research. More research needs to be encouraged in smaller municipal museums, libraries and archives.

### **NKF-N membership survey**

NKF-N has conducted a survey of its members. More than half of the members answered (130 out of 243 total number of members as per 6.03.2017).

Conservators in Norway are a relatively young group: 39% are in their thirties and 29% in their forties. However there is a gender discrepancy typical for the conservation profession: 84% are women.

There is a strong international component in conservation. 35% of conservators are foreigners and 55% of conservators were educated outside Norway.

Most work is concentrated around Oslo: 57% of conservators work in the capital. There are very few conservators in the provinces. Five provinces in the west and north of Norway have no conservators at all.

Many have to work in areas outside of direct conservation, such as in collection management, as registrars, as archivists, as curators or historians, as advisors, as building renovators, as photographers or as conservation scientists.

Regarding education, 77% of conservators have a Master degree, 2% recognized Master level of qualification on the basis of training and experience, 5% PhD degree and 16% have a Bachelor degree. Norwegian conservators are in a better position regarding employment than the rest of Europe: 70% are employed within an institution, 11% work on contract, 12% have their own private firm, 3% of the respondents are students, retired people and those who do not work in the field, and only 4% are actively looking for work. It would be important to repeat this survey in a couple of years to see if that pattern continues.

There are many projects in the country, and many conservators are employed on contract; in the average, about 4 conservators per institution work on contract. 35% of these contracts are shorter than 1 year, 45% are up to 3 years and 20% longer than 3 years.

The majority (75%) of employed conservators work for museums; only 9% work for conservation services, and a small percentage for libraries (5%) and archives (4%).

There is significant discrepancy regarding placement in the salary category, as a special salary framework for conservators does not exist. Some are defined as consultants, senior or heritage consultants; other as advisors or professional advisors; still others as departmental or chief engineers; and only a small group of conservators, as for example in the National Museum, are placed in the same salary category as the curators, i.e. as research staff or amanuensis. The salary placement defines the attitude towards conservation as a profession. Usually, as an engineer one is treated as technical staff; as a consultant or advisor one is given a bit more of an intellectual role; and only as amanuensis is one regarded as equal to curators as a researcher.

One question addressed the issue of leadership, since the more conservators there are in leadership positions, the more influence it might have in the world of

heritage preservation. It was found that 8% are employed in conservation leadership positions, and 6% in other leading roles. 86% of conservators are not in management positions. The question remains whether these are good numbers or if there should be more effort made for conservators to reach up to management.

Regarding private work, a rather small proportion of conservators in Norway work in the private sector. 17% of respondents work in private practice; 89% of these prefer to continue to work in the private sector, and only 11% of those working privately would like to have a full time employment

Outwardly, the situation seems positive. Norwegian conservators are a relatively young and vigorous group from varied backgrounds, and with education from all over the world. This creates an enriching professional environment. Most are employed within institutions and those few who work privately do so because of personal choice. However, there are some worrying tendencies, such as the growing proportion of contract work, and the rise of so called "hybrid" museum organizations (about 38% of all organizations fall in this category now), that are run primarily by public funding, either government or municipal, but are officially organised as private foundations. This creates flexibility for the management but insecurity for the staff. One conservation department was closed in 2015, which was possible for the management because the institution had changed its status a few years earlier from a municipal museum to a private foundation.

There is a strong professional conservation presence in the Oslo area, particularly in large state museums. However, in the provinces, particularly in the library and archive sector there are very few conservators on staff. There are also relatively few centralised conservation services in the country. There is a need for further cooperation between various institutions in relation to collection management, conservation research and conservation in general.

Suggestions given by the conservators at the end of the survey were most revealing of the general feelings and needs of the profession. The majority would like to secure the title of 'Conservator,' to make the conservation profession more clearly defined in the eyes of other professional groups. In Norway, a conservator has been traditionally called *Teknisk Konservator* or *Technical Conservator* while a curator who has received official accreditation from the Norwegian museum association is called *Konservator* or *Conservator*. The other most common request is the need for making the profession more visible to society, to increase our presence via media. Especially in the provinces and smaller museums, in libraries and archives, there are very few conservators on staff. There is often little understanding what conservation is about. This needs to be addressed.

The last, largest group expressed a desire to increase the presence of conservation within the provinces, strengthening the profession and promoting better cooperation with management, having a voice and doing our best to make management understand the ethical principles that stand behind conservation.

Only one respondent said that we need to have a higher salary. Conservators are generally perceived as reserved and conscientious, more concerned with the common good and the well-being of the collection than with personal needs. However, the institutional system operates in such a way that the higher the salary, the higher the status. To improve the status of a conservator, there should also be work done towards higher salaries.

### **Cooperation with Museum Association**

There is better cooperation with the Museum Association, collection management section. Together a seminar on *Plastic materials in collections* was organized (25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2016, Tøyen og Norwegian Technical museum, Oslo) with 60 participants.

Another seminar on *Poisonous substances in collections* was organised in Bergen 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017. There were 80 participants.

### **50th anniversary of Florentine flood**

As part of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Florentine flood on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1966, Centro Nordico has published a book describing a large aid project organized by the Nordic Centre for Restoration with 103 participants from Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway in cooperation with the Florentine authorities. That project lasted from 1967 until 1970.

### **Debates regarding the conservation title**

There are ongoing discussions about the conservation title between NKF-N and the Norwegian museum association (NMF).

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2016, NKF-N sent a request to NMF to reconsider the title of conservator, asking to reserve it only for those practicing conservation and not for those that have backgrounds in art history, cultural history, archeology, ethnography and other fields. Museums advertise positions of *Konservator* (Conservator) although they do not expect our professional group to be amongst their applicants.

NKF-N believes that the separation of our professions will strengthen the identity of our own professional group and others. This should improve awareness of our specialities within society, and contribute to a greater respect for the different professions connected with museums and heritage.

Historically, the title '*konservator*,' in the meaning of a professional with a historical background that is hired within the museum sector, was borrowed from German or French. '*Restaurator*' was not applicable for conservators in the English sense of the word, as it had similar associations with restaurant business as it does in French. Therefore, museums came up with the term of *technical conservator* or *teknisk konservator* to describe the conservation profession, but that is not at all satisfactory as it denigrates conservators, reducing them to the level of a technician.

NKF-N waited for a year for an answer from the Museum Association. The Conservation journal *Norske Konserver* then published an answer from the Museum Association (NK, 2017 No 1, p. 19 <http://www.nkf-n.no/12-nyheter/146-norske-konserver-2017-1>). The General Secretary of the Norwegian Museum Association (NMF) Liv Ramskjær clarified that it had been historically established since the 1990's that a committee with special competence in the Norwegian Museum Association studies the application of a curator, and upon validation of his or her credentials, gives an authorization of scientific competence which is called either konservator NMF or førstekonservator NMF. Kurator (curator) is preferably given to free lance curators who organize special exhibits and do not work as regular staff. To clarify the difference between the two professions, curators use the title konservator-NMF, and conservators - konservator-NKF-N. She points out that NMF is not a trade union and thus cannot influence the title description tied to the salary level. Besides this, the salary table does not adequately cover museum needs. Various museums use different practices. In order to improve the situation, various partners will have to be involved and it will take time.

On 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2017 Liv Ramskjær visited NKF-N where the issue was discussed further. After pressing for the need to make a change and get areas of specialization clarified, it was agreed that NKF-N will send a proposal to NMF that can be addressed at their annual meeting next year. Presently leader of NKF-N Vigdis Vingelsgaard has sent an appeal to Norwegian Museum Association to reconsider title Konservator in their next annual meeting.

There is definitely a change occurring regarding the title of a conservator in the country. Only 5 people in the membership survey said that they are officially titled *technical conservator and 1 a material conservator*; the rest are either called simply *Conservator* or with the addition of their specialty, such as *Paintings Conservator, Archeological Conservator, Paper Conservator*, and so on.

### **The Museum section in Norwegian Art Council.**

Museum section in Norwegian Art Council has played an important role in raising museum standards. It has introduced the Norwegian version of *Spectrum*, the British standards for the museum sector. In the *Spectrum* publication, the conservator is officially recognized as a professional who works directly with the conservation of cultural objects. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2017 the government decided as part of its decentralization policy to send the museum sector of the Norwegian Art Council to Bodø, far in the north of the country. NKF-N have reacted in media to this decision, expressing its opinion in various newspapers as well as in the *Museum News* published by the Norwegian Museum Association. The Museum Section is a small and vulnerable professional group of just 10 people. It is hardly probable that those who are working for the Museum section will move to Bodø and thus the professional competence that many of them have developed will be lost. This decision will marginalise museums, and there will be a danger of worsening collaboration between the Cultural Department, the Directorate for Cultural Heritage and the Norwegian Museum Association.

### **Letter to the Directorate for Cultural Heritage**

NKF-N sent a letter to the Directorate for Cultural Heritage because of the concern raised by some of our private conservators. Conservation projects that are financed through the grant of Directorate for Cultural Heritage or through other authorities are rarely publicly announced and sent for tender. That is a problem for many private conservators. The answer from the Directorate for Cultural Heritage was that they need to support the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) and that is why they send the jobs directly to that institution without public announcement. However this institute (NIKU) is officially a private foundation and should be treated on equal terms with other private contractors. Therefore this answer was met with criticism from conservators. Further dialogue is likely to continue.