The Getty Foundation issued 255 grants this year that benefited individuals from thirty different countries, including 111 visiting scholars who received support to complete research at the Getty, Foundation training grants as part of MOSAIKON, a joint initiative with the GCI and external partners ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) and ICCM (International Committee for the Conservation of Mosaics), provided training to mosaics conservation professionals from the Middle East and North Africa, giving them the skills to care for this heritage in their home countries. And culminating the year was the launch of the Foundation’s Keeping It Modern initiative announcing the first ten grants for the conservation of significant twentieth-century architecture around the world, including projects in Australia, Finland, France, Israel, Poland, Taiwan, and the United States. More on this program to come in upcoming issues of this magazine.

The GCI conducted projects and workshops in a number of countries this past year. For example, GCI MOSAIKON activities in 2014 included further work on a model field project at the archaeological site of Bulla Regia in Tunisia; a regional training course on the conservation and management of archaeological sites with mosaics, held at the World Heritage Site of Paphos, Cyprus; and regional training to mosaics conservation professionals from Europe, Asia, South America, and the United States.

Colleagues from the GRI traveled to Manila in the Philippines this year in conjunction with the exhibition Connecting Seas: A Visual History of Discoveries and Encounters. In partnership with the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz and the Ayala Foundation, the GRI organized an international art-historical symposium titled “Transpacific Engagements: Visual Culture of Global Exchange (1781–1869)” and included scholars from Europe, Asia, South America, and the United States. Manila was an ideal location for the conference, not only as the capital of the Philippine archipelago, but because the city has served as the global center for commerce between the East and West for 250 years (1565–1815).

The Museum worked with the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid, the co-organizer of the exhibition Spectacular Rubens: Triumph of the Eucharist, to feature six spirited painted modelli from their collection along with four of the original monumental tapestries—among the most celebrated treasures of the nearby Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales—in a rare loan from the Patrimonio Nacional. The Madrid modelli had recently been conserved at the Getty Foundation through its Panel Paintings Initiative. In another exhibition at the Getty Villa, Ancient Luxury and the Roman Silver Treasure from Bethvouille (on view through August 17, 2015), the Museum worked with the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris to display an opulent cache of ancient Roman silver discovered in 1830. In December 2010 the entire treasure arrived at the Getty Villa for a comprehensive conservation treatment. This four-year project has revealed much of the original gilt, additional inscriptions, and valuable evidence for ancient production techniques as well as nineteenth-century methods of restoration.
With them began the symbiotic relationship that exists today between the scientific researcher and the practicing conservator. Today more than ever, the conservation field looks to the sciences to provide understanding of materials, their deterioration, and their longer-term preservation. In addition to preserving the materials of the more distant past, conservators now are increasingly encountering new materials and media used in the products of modern culture which often pose unprecedented conservation challenges. Continued collaboration and dialogue between scientists and conservators are essential to the investigation and development of appropriate conservation solutions to meet these new challenges.

As a private research institute dedicated to advancing conservation practice, the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) focuses its work on professional and organizations responsible for the conservation of the world’s cultural heritage. An important aspect of the Institute’s mission is the creation and dissemination of knowledge that will benefit these professionals.

With its large staff of scientists with expertise in cultural heritage, the GCI is uniquely positioned to conduct long-term and in-depth research on materials composition, deterioration mechanisms, and effective conservation approaches as related to art objects, architecture, archaeological sites, and monuments. The dissemination of the results of this research is among the GCI’s highest priorities. While contributions to publications and professional meetings facilitate distribution of information to the field, the GCI recognizes that education and training often provide a better way to integrate emerging scientific knowledge into professional practice.

For this reason, the GCI’s Education department created the Mixed Into Practice Initiative—ongoing training workshops, colloquia, and similar events—to communicate important scientific advances resulting from research undertaken by the GCI and its partners. Activities that are part of the Research Into Practice Initiative draw upon the perspectives of both scientists and conservators and emphasize adapting research results to address practical conservation problems through improved materials and practice.

Cleaning Acrylic Painted Surfaces

The inaugural event of this initiative was the Cleaning of Acrylic Painted Surfaces (CAPS) colloquium, held at the Getty Center in 2009. During the colloquium, participants tested newly developed materials for cleaning acrylic paint surfaces, and reflected upon the specific learning needs of paintings conservators dealing with contemporary acrylic painted surfaces.

For both conservators and scientists, there are a number of areas of uncertainty related to the efficacy and appropriateness of cleaning treatments for acrylic paints and, until recently, there have been few well defined treatment options. The GCI through the Modern Paints project—together with other research leaders in this field such as Tate, the Dow Chemical Company, and the University of Delaware—has harnessed extensive scientific expertise and equipment to address issues of materials characterization and cleaning of acrylic paints.

As a result, the GCI developed a series of CAPS workshops that integrate this emerging scientific research with the latest perspectives on cleaning technology within art conservation. CAPS workshops also provide opportunities to test and evaluate new treatments, as well as guide the direction of future research. The most recent workshop, the sixth in this series, took place at the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa, Canada.

One participant in the Ottawa workshop expressed their appreciation for the new information and skills they were able to practice: “Just a superb workshop and one of the best I have attended,” said the workshop attendee. “This will impact the work in our conservation lab and we now feel much more comfortable with approaching the cleaning of acrylic paintings.”

Additional CAPS workshops are planned to meet the growing demand of the field.

Characterizing Asian Lacquer

Another workshop series, launched in 2012, focuses on analytical procedures that have the potential to uncover new and more detailed information about lacquers. These procedures were developed in collaboration with conservators at the J. Paul Getty Museum as part of the GCI’s Characterization of Asian and European Lacquers project, which aims to develop a comprehensive analytical method to identify organic materials present in Asian and European lacquers.

Lacquer has a history of production that stretches back as far as 5000 B.C. in Asia, and a more recent history of trade, collection, and imitation in Europe, where lacquer arrived in the sixteenth century. While the traditions surrounding the production of lacquer are generally well appreciated, it is now understood that constituent materials and particular techniques of lacquer production in Asia vary enormously depending on geography, available raw materials, and historical context. European lacquered objects and imitations introduce yet another layer of complexity, as do issues related to the use and aging of lacquer objects. Without thorough characterization, it can be difficult to identify different types of lacquers and to understand the implications for preservation.

Recent Advances in the Characterization of Lacquers workshops provide instruction in new sophisticated analytical and sampling procedures. They also present a unique opportunity for scientists and conservators to work together in close collaboration on lacquer objects from their own collections and to dialogue on important topics such as compositional variation in lacquered objects, implications of analytical research to the conservation of lacquered objects, and research priorities and opportunities for future collaboration. The most recent workshop was hosted by the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France in Paris in July 2014. “It's brilliant to be able to be trained in groundbreaking sampling and analytical techniques and be able to contribute to a lacquer–world–view changing database,” stated one of the participants in the Paris workshop.

Future workshops are planned for venues in Asia.

XRF Boot Camp

Most recently, the GCI in partnership with the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage at Yale University has introduced the XRF Boot Camp for Conservators. This new workshop series offers training on the fundamentals of X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF), a portable, noninvasive, and nondestructive analytical tool that can yield a better understanding of the materials that comprise cultural objects. The ability to employ analytical methods that can be used in situ without physical sampling is essential in the study of works of art and other cultural heritage materials, as the removal of samples for analysis is generally severely limited—or, in many cases, forbidden.

XRF has become the most widely employed analytical tool in the scientific examination of works of art. The recent proliferation of relatively inexpensive and easy-to-use handheld spectrometers has resulted in this technique being adopted by an increasingly large number of institutions. However, in many cases the responsibility for operating the instrument—and interpreting the data—falls to conservation professionals, who often do not have sufficient scientific background or access to training to enable them to correctly apply the technique or accurately interpret the results.

XRF Boot Camp is designed to provide the training and resources that will improve the collection and interpretation of data acquired with this analytical tool. Each of these four-day workshops is dedicated to the analysis of specific types of materials; during the first workshop, which took place at Yale in 2013, the focus was on the analysis of painted surfaces. The second workshop, recently held at the Getty Villa, was dedicated to the challenges commonly encountered in the study of archaeological and ethnographic objects—such as analysis of corrosion products on metal alloys, heavy metal elements, and glass.

Through these workshops and others still in development, the GCI seeks to reinforce and strengthen the connection between scientific research and its application in the field, and has reached over one hundred fifty conservation professionals in the USA as a result of the initiative. By extensively sharing research results from the laboratory with practicing professionals, and by translating those results into practical conservation approaches, the GCI serves the conservation field, whose mission is to preserve our cultural heritage—a heritage that enriches us all.