

Hero Lotti

The Foundation of IIC and the Fight for Scientific Conservation

The International Institute for the Conservation of Museum Objects (IIC) was founded in 1950 to promote a scientific approach to conservation and to raise the proficiency and professional status of conservators. These aims corresponded to the original intention when the idea for international collaboration in conservation was first raised in correspondence of 1945 between George L. Stout, Head of the Department for Conservation and Technical Research at the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and F.I.G. Rawlins, Scientific Adviser at the National Gallery, London, and represented the continuation of developments that had begun before the Second World War. What changed during the five years it took to found IIC was that the desire to make conservation more scientific encountered significant opposition. The paper discusses the emergence and nature of this opposition at the First Biennial Conference of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in June 1948, where Philip Hendy met with a hostile reaction to his treatment of the paintings as Director of the National Gallery, London. It describes the effect of this opposition on the progress towards the foundation of IIC, which was such that by the time IIC was incorporated the scientific approach that IIC had always sought to promote was defined against an aesthetic approach, a dichotomy upon which the subsequent term 'scientific conservation' was to depend.