

# CONSERVATION GILDING: HERITAGE SKILL DEFICIENCIES



## **Robert Zilli**

The Pratt Foundation/ISS Institute Overseas Fellowship

Fellowship supported by The Pratt Foundation



**ISS Institute**

Suite 101  
685 Burke Road  
Camberwell Vic  
AUSTRALIA 3124

**Telephone**

03 9882 0055

**Facsimile**

03 9882 9866

**Email**

[issi.ceo@pacific.net.au](mailto:issi.ceo@pacific.net.au)

**Web**

[www.issinstitute.org.au](http://www.issinstitute.org.au)

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ISS Institute  
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AUSTRALIA

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# Executive Summary

In 2006, the Collections Council of Australia conducted the *Conservation Survey 2006*, a survey of current and projected human and financial resources in Australian conservation and preservation between 2003 and 2008. The report identified an increasing demand by employers for suitably trained conservation and preservation workers in all traditional and emerging conservation specialisation and skill areas. The report confirms that historic frame conservation and restoration is an area in which there is current and projected demand for suitably trained workers.

The *Conservation Survey 2006* report recommends developing a nation-wide strategy for educating and training people in the specialised skills to adequately care for Australia's moveable cultural heritage. Until this strategy is developed and implemented, it is necessary for motivated students and workers in highly specialised areas, such as historic frame conservation and restoration, to seek training overseas. The Collections Council supports the concept of Continuing Professional Development, and sees it as part of the nation-wide education and training solution in this field (Collections Council of Australia, 2007).

The aim of this Fellowship was to undertake a study tour to Illinois, USA. This included attending a two week gilding conservation workshop at the Campbell Center for Historic Preservation Studies, Mount Carroll, Illinois. It also included one week in Chicago visiting conservation laboratories and art museums, which assisted in developing a comprehensive understanding of conservation and restoration gilding and historic picture frame documentation for the making of reproduction picture frames.

A specific benefit to Australia of training in the area of frame conservation is that the methods, techniques and skills will now be passed on to others, thus increasing the local and national pool of knowledgeable practitioners.

Of particular benefit will be the broader appreciation of conservation philosophies and practices and the incorporation of these values into the work being undertaken by framer and furniture restorers.

Further benefits will be seen in the improved care and better-informed treatment of gilded frames and objects in private and public collections.

Well researched and executed reproduction frames and the skilled conservation of original frames are seen to be a crucial contemporary aspect in the display of works of art. A direct benefit to Australia is the improved and refined techniques employed within the Fellow's daily work on the conservation of the frame collection at QAG|GoMA where the visiting public enjoys exhibitions of works of art that have been framed to reflect, as closely as possible, the original historical context or the artist's intent.

The transfer of knowledge obtained from the study tour in Illinois is being passed on via lectures, seminars and workshops, through organisations such as Commonwealth, State and Regional Art Galleries, Museums and Libraries, picture framing and arts related industries, the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM), the Gilded Objects Conservation Special Interest Group (GOCSIG), the Collections Council of Australia (CCA), the National Trust of Australia (NTA), the International Council on Monuments and Sites Australia (ICOMOS) and other conservation heritage related bodies.