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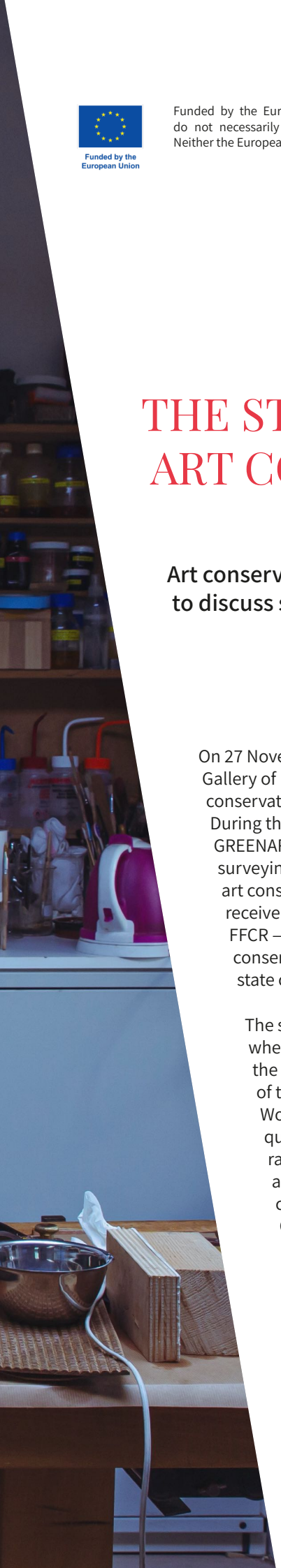

THE STATE OF GREEN ART CONSERVATION

Art conservation professionals recently met in Slovenia to discuss sustainable practices within their field.

On 27 November, a public event was held at Ljubijana's Gallery of Modern Art, Cankarjeva, to discuss green conservation practices in museums, libraries and archives. During the event, Antonio Mirabile, a valued partner of the GREENART Project, shared the results of a questionnaire surveying hundreds of professionals within the French art conservation field. The results included 193 responses received from individuals represented by AFROA, APrévU and FFCR — three professional associations in the collections conservation area — and offered insights into the current state of ecologically sustainable practices within the sector.

The survey emerged out of a moment at the end of 2023 when members of AFROA, APrévU and FFCR questioned the adequacy of their professional practices in the face of the challenges posed by the climate emergency. Working in partnership, they established the questionnaire in order to take stock of the entire range of professional practices in which they are involved, including packaging, transport, conservation and climate and waste management. Of the 193 respondents, 48 percent were conservators; 36 percent were registrars; 15 percent were preventers; and one percent worked in other areas. Fifty-six percent were employees of an institution involved in art conservation; 46 percent were freelance.

The first round of questions measured the current level of commitment to sustainable practices within the industry. When asked about their personal level of action in their daily professional life, 1.6% responded that it was non-existent, 35.8% said it was weak, 53.4% said it was average and 9.3% said it was excellent. Similar levels were reported when asked how committed the respondents' workplaces are to responsible ecology, with 6.2% responding not at all, 34.7% saying their workplaces do almost nothing, 47.7% saying they do a little and 11.4% saying their workplaces are very committed to sustainable practices.

Respondents were asked what they believe the obstacles to change are. The most significant obstacles listed were doctrine or the weight of habit, lack of time, lack of proper equipment, difficulties related to administrative functioning, lack of financial means; and realities associated with their current building or facilities. Other answers included a general lack of competencies and difficulties related to hierarchical management structures.

The survey measured the number of loans made by museums and institutions each year and whether the institutions assessed the

— Phillip Barcio

environmental impact of those loans. Of the 93 respondents to these questions, more than half made between zero and 50 loans per year, with 14.6% making more than 500. Ninety-two percent of respondents reported that they were not currently working on reducing loans and 90% responded that they did not currently do anything to assess the environmental impact of their loan process. About half of the respondents said that they take environmental issues into account when engaging in the public procurement process.

In two thirds of cases, respondents reported that the institutions they work with send people to personally accompany loaned objects either "often", "very often", or "systematically". The measures currently being taken by those institutions to limit the carbon footprint of such convoys include transportation sharing, traveling by train, virtual accompaniment, utilising hybrid vehicles and limiting the use of air conditioning in the vehicles.

In general, travel of service providers is considered an area of potential ecological reform in the sector. When asked if they knew the environmental impact of their business and professional travels, 70% of 193 respondents said no. When asked how they felt they could reduce the environmental impact of their travel, the most common responses were utilising low carbon transport, limiting travel, carpooling and choosing methods of mobility that do not consume fossil fuels.

The use of packaging crates is another area identified for potential ecological consideration. These crates are predominantly used for the internal movement of objects and for loans. Of 77 respondents to a question about acclimatisation of insulated crates: 18% said they acclimatise empty crates, 46% said they employ acclimatisation of 24h, 20% said they employ acclimatisation of 48h and 16% said they employ no acclimatisation. Eighty-eight percent of respondents said they do not get their crates painted. More than half of respondents reported that their institution does not maintain an internal storage area for packaging crates. Of those who do maintain an internal crate storage area, 44.2% say that storage area is smaller than 10 m^2 and 38.5% say it is smaller than 50 m^2. In 62% of the cases, there is an individual who has a dedicated responsibility to these storage areas. In most cases that person's job title is registrar.

The next round of questions related to energy consumption within cultural heritage institutions. The first question addressed the imposition of energy restrictions. Although about a third of respondents reported that their institution is not subject to any energy restrictions following the increase in energy prices, two thirds reported that they are subject to restrictions when the temperature drops and nearly half are subject to restrictions in the summer. Of 113 respondents, 84% responded that they do not currently know how much energy their institution consumes, although 39.4% actively carry out assessments to obtain data about energy consumption and 15.2% delegate such assessments to a service provider.

Eight out of 106 respondents reported that a climate control specialist was in charge of prescribing climate guidelines within their institutions. That responsibility mostly falls on registrars, conservators, curators and preventers. Around two-thirds of respondents reported that their institution does not propose microclimate management systems. Nearly 70% of respondents said that they do not have enough information to support more sustainable climate prescriptions, while 73% said they do not currently seek advice from a national institution to validate their prescriptions. Asked if they would be willing to give up control over their own climate systems in order to achieve different results, an equal number (16%) said either yes or no unconditionally; one third said yes, conditionally, such as when the institution is closed; another third said they do not know.

The next round of questions assessed the concerns and actions of freelancers within the field. Of the freelancers who responded, the majority reported that their interest in ecological sustainability began after 2016. Their current efforts included conducting survey analyses, going on consultancy missions, site monitoring, supplying equipment, observation, diagnosis, health assessment after leaks and ensuring the proper management of collections according to the climate recorded.

The freelancers reported that in most cases they had to do their own

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climate measurements, without the help of institutional surveys. In two-thirds of the cases, they reported that their efforts to convince the institutions they do work for to adopt ecologically responsible practices in terms of climate management have failed. Similarly to individuals employed by institutions, the vast majority, 88%, of freelancers reported that they did not consider their knowledge of sustainable development regarding climate to be sufficient. When faced with questions, 61% of freelancers report that they consult experts in the field, including experts from national institutions and climatic specialists.

Waste management was a major area of concern for many respondents. Many reported that they have reduced the use of certain materials due to their environmental impact. The top materials listed as having been reduced were plastic materials and solvents. Other materials listed were synthetic paints, adhesives, resins, cotton, fillers and biocide. However, 77% of respondents reported that they do not know how much waste they produce.

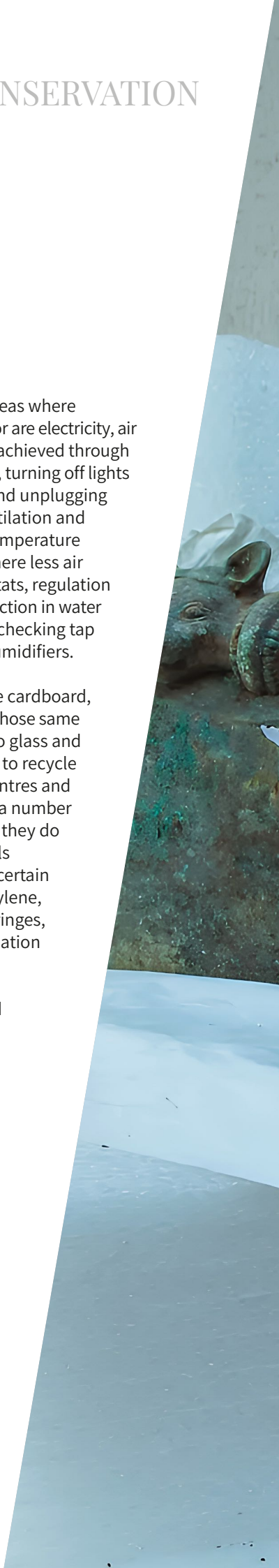
When asked whether they would be prepared not to carry out certain interventions because of their environmental impact, 74% of respondents said yes, but 63% said they have never actually defended that position with a client or partnering institution. When asked if they would be willing to increase their fee in order to be able to implement eco-responsible approaches that generate an additional cost, 79% said yes.

In terms of energy consumption, the most common areas where consumption reduction currently takes place in the sector are electricity, air conditioning and water. Electricity reduction is mostly achieved through low-energy light bulbs, replacing neon lights with LEDs, turning off lights when not needed, installing motion-detecting lights and unplugging unused appliances. Reduction in air conditioning, ventilation and heating is mostly achieved by lowering the ambient temperature (heating), conducting administrative work at home where less air conditioning is needed, using programmable thermostats, regulation of relative humidity and management of sunlight. Reduction in water use is mostly achieved through recycling wastewater, checking tap leaks, using rainwater and recovering water from dehumidifiers.

The top materials respondents reported recycling were cardboard, paper, plastic, wood, metal, solvents, PPE and cotton. Those same materials were reported as being reused, in addition to glass and water. The systems most often reported as being used to recycle waste were municipal sorting bins, waste collection centres and external service providers. Respondents also reported a number of materials that they use in large quantities for which they do not currently have a recycling solution. Those materials include pallets, wooden crates, impregnated cottons, certain plastics such as bubble, film, polystyrene and polyethylene, mylar and tyvek, film and anoxic absorbers, plastic syringes, nitrile or latex pants, contaminated water from stabilisation treatment, oxygen absorbers, canvas scraps, adhesive leftovers, epoxy resin residue, solvent and resin-soiled hand towels, acids and bases, solvents, lime grout and screed, certain PPE, damaged art frames and lighting.

Most respondents replied that they have changed their purchase habits in response to concerns about eco sensibility. The most popular changes include making purchases from local suppliers, purchasing more sustainable materials even if the cost is higher, making group orders, requesting delivery to a relay point if possible and purchasing materials in bulk.

In conclusion, respondents were asked the overarching question of whether they considered their own professional practices to be in line with their personal commitment. Of 193 respondents, 13% said “not at all”, 33.7% said an unqualified “yes” and 50.8% said “a little.” All respondents felt that they could use more training, especially in the areas of climate management and eco-responsibility, waste management, carbon footprint and green solvents.



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