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TOWARDS AN INNOVATIVE AND GREEN CONSERVATION-RESTORATION

Under the leadership of the Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS), all the collaborators of the GREen ENdeavour in Art ResToration (GREENART) project gathered in Athens on 5 and 6 October. An opportunity for everyone to get to know each other and discuss their missions.

Scientists and professionals from the world of conservation-restoration are working hand in hand under the aegis of the European Commission, in order to set up greener and more sustainable cleaning, consolidation and protection systems. The 27 partners join their forces to tackle an unprecedented ecological crisis and reduce the environmental impact of their field.

CORDIS is “the European Commission’s main source for projects funded by the European Union’s Framework Programmes for reflection and innovation, from FP1 to Horizon Europe”. It shares the results of cutting-edge surveys with professionals in the field, thus fostering open research and the creation of innovative products and activities. GREENART was born within this initiative, sponsored by Athanasios Gerakis who opened the kick-off meeting on 5 and 6 October in Athens. Under the umbrella name, several programmes get funded by the European Union to develop new, greener tools to restore works of art. The three projects aim to test active principles in their development or industrialisation phase, so they can be adapted to more sustainable conservation and restoration practices for works of art.

Collective efficiency

Orchestrated by the project coordinator Piero Baglioni, these two days of discussions and presentations enabled research laboratories to share their latest advances with the main users of their products such as museums, with Tate or the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for instance, attending the event. Each partner-participant was divided into seven working groups. Before launching

the presentations of each branch of GREENART and developing each work package, Athanasios Gerakis presented the general context, emphasising the importance of dissemination and communication of scientific research results. The three projects led by his unit (REA Unit C1) revolve around heritage and its conservation, adapting to the current issues of sustainability and ecology. It is part of a programme whose vocation is to work on culture, creativity and climate — among others — for a more inclusive society. Engineering and technology are put at the service of the planet: GREENART is based on the observation that heritage conservation preserves monuments and works of art while, paradoxically, using toxic and unsustainable materials that degrade the environment. Museums, too, are highly energy-consuming because of their thermal regulation systems... Yet the climate crisis is impacting material cultural heritage. Hence the project, determined to fighting against its harmful effects through new propositions and adequate alternatives.

Innovate

One of the three projects, GoGreen, promotes preventive and curative conservation practices based on ecological principles, spearheading a green revolution in heritage preservation. How so? By developing, among other things, innovative tools inspired by nature and historical conservation treatments for curative conservation — with a particular focus on innovative cleaning solutions, especially for paints and metals. Another key point lies in the testing and evaluation of materials and formulas using advanced analytical techniques and reference processes.

The second project, MOXY, aims to redefine the paradigm of cleaning methodology through an eco-conscious approach by creating a green, contactless, transformative technology based on atomic oxygen. This technology allows for selective, non-mechanical and liquid-free cleaning, with no health or environmental risks, and no residues or waste.

The third project, GREENART, proposes new solutions based on ecological and sustainable materials and techniques to preserve, conserve and restore: protective coatings from industrial waste materials or plant proteins; foams and packaging equipment or consolidants made with biodegradable or compostable polymers from renewable sources. A toolkit for conservation specialists who want to embrace a more environmentally friendly practice.

Each of these programmes takes a holistic approach and is based on multidisciplinary partnerships, bringing together hard sciences, soft

sciences and engineering. Academic centres, innovative industries and SMEs, institutions and professionals in conservation, museums, public bodies and policy-makers, they all work together. The final link, not to be overlooked, resides in the actors who promote training, knowledge sharing and circulation to familiarise potential users with these cutting-edge methods.

A human and scientific adventure

In order to carry out each of these missions, the GREENART global project is organised into work groups, seven in total. Each one focuses on a research, application or expertise area. From scientific and financial management to circulation through effective communication and training, ecological cleaning systems, protective coatings, consolidants and packaging materials, technologies for heritage monitoring; each WP is united under the “green” banner as well as the supervision of the safety of these new materials and their sustainability. Following the introduction by Athanasios Gerakis, the presentations were organised according to the working groups, each one presented by one of its participants, tackling approaches, goals, etc., then developed collectively.

The kick-off meeting brought together different types of partners: Europeans — funded by the European Commission, but also external participants. For the latter, the project stands as a privileged platform for the sharing of technological advances. At the same time, GREENART allows them to have access to and learn about the innovations implemented within the framework of the programme. Thus,

a European project, but with a much broader scope. These presentations were an opportunity for everyone to meet each other. It was also the occasion to get introduced to the structure better and to go into more detail on specific technical points, such as the construction of reports or the conditions attached to funding. A launch day that gave its partners the keys to successful missions; the tools to understand the involvement of each instance in the realisation of this innovative and ambitious project.

GREENART encompasses all actors, academic and socio-economic, covering the whole chain to ensure a clear impact on conservation-restoration. The project’s unique composition, combined with the integration of professionals’ apprenticeship through modules and courses for conservation training, ensures that the next generation of conservators and conservators is fully prepared to embrace the Green Deal.

This kick-off meeting felt like a convivial gathering. It was an informative and studious reunion in the heart of the Conference Centre of the Egaleo Park campus of the University of West Attica University in Athens. The day provided an opportunity to better understand the roles of each partner and the ecosystem in which everyone has a responsibility to move towards greater sustainability and ecology in conservation-restoration practices. And with the emphasis put in the opening speech on communication, the importance of shared knowledge, GREENART shows its willingness to exchange with citizens, so that they, too, can act and choose to commit, for a greener heritage preservation.



La Tierra de Algallù (House, 2019), Sandra Vázquez de la Horra

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Kick-off meeting of the GREEART project

Courtesy University of West Attica



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