Women Conservators between Europe and Italy, 1750–1970 (Rome, 14-15 May 26)

Sapienza University of Rome, May 14–15, 2026
Deadline: Feb 15, 2026

Eliana Billi

In recent years, gender studies have profoundly reshaped the historiography of art and heritage preservation, bringing renewed attention to the role of women as key protagonists in the culture of heritage and expanding scholarly perspectives beyond the limits imposed by traditional narratives. The contribution of women to the history of conservation and restoration, however, remains largely
understudied and only fragmentarily documented. The earliest women active in collecting, museum, and private contexts can be traced back to the eighteenth century in Italy and across Europe. Figures now better known, such as Margherita Bernini, documented in Rome in the service of major aristocratic families, or Marie-Éléonore Godefroid, involved in the restoration of paintings for the collections of the Musée du Louvre and other Parisian institutions, stand alongside many other professionals whose work is only now being brought to light by recent research. In many cases, their activity emerges in connection with that of their husbands, whom they often succeeded in the management of workshops and restoration sites, assuming significant technical and administrative responsibilities that nevertheless remained largely invisible in historical sources.
During the twentieth century, women's presence became increasingly established within public institutions responsible for heritage protection, contributing substantially to the definition of the professional identity of the conservator at a time of profound transformation in the discipline. In this period, restoration gradually developed into a critically structured practice, grounded in technical, methodological, and historical expertise and embedded within an increasingly complex institutional framework, in which women played a far from marginal role.

Conference Aims
The conference aims to offer a first systematic survey of women active in the field of heritage conservation and restoration between the mid-eighteenth century and the second half of the twentieth century, not only from the perspective of gender studies, but more broadly within the history of preservation and conservation in Italy and Europe.
The conference will explore the relationships between:
• restoration practices and techniques in different European contexts;
• institutional transformations (museums, heritage authorities, conservation bodies);
• individual and collective careers, professional networks, and regional contexts;
• diverse geographies and chronologies of restoration;
• relationships between theory, practice, and training;
• phenomena of family continuity and "professional inheritance";

• material, documentary, and photographic sources relevant to reconstructing women's professional profiles.

Call for Papers
We invite proposals addressing, but not limited to, the following topics:
• studies on women conservators active in Italy or Europe between 1750 and 1970;
• workshops, laboratories, restoration sites, and museum or archival institutions in which women conservators worked;
• restoration of paintings, works on paper, textiles, decorative arts, frescoes, sculpture, and architectural heritage;
• patronage networks, professional collaborations, and working relationships with senior figures within state heritage institutions;
• conservation methodologies, diagnostic practices, and operational protocols;
• family-based transmission of skills and professional knowledge, continuity of practice, and workshop inheritance;
• comparative and transnational perspectives.

Submission Guidelines
• Abstract: max. 300 words
• Short bio: max. 150 words
• Languages: Italian, English
• Submission address: convegnorestauratrici@gmail.com
• Deadline: 15 February 2026
• Notification of acceptance: 10 March 2026
• Conference dates: 14–15 May 2026
• Venue: Sapienza University of Rome

Publication of the proceedings
• Conference papers will be published. Further information regarding editorial arrangements and publication timelines will be provided in due course.

Scientific Committee
• Eliana Billi (Sapienza University of Rome)
• Giuseppina Perusini (formerly University of Udine)
• Simona Rinaldi (University of Tuscia)
• Martina Visentin (University of Udine)

Organising Secretariat
Laura D'Angelo (University of Arkansas, Rome Center)
Logistical information: Speakers selected through the call are kindly asked to note that the conference organization will not be able to cover travel and accommodation expenses.

Reference:
CFP: Women Conservators between Europe and Italy, 1750–1970 (Rome, 14-15 May 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 23, 2026 (accessed Nov 3, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51554>.