

MCI Weekly Highlight 25 June 2010

Valuing World Cultures

The French Connection. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Smithsonian Institution and Synchrotron SOLEIL, held at the Ministry of Higher Education and Research on June 10, 2010, highlighted the growing relationship between French conservation scientists and synchrotron researchers, and the Smithsonian's Museum Conservation Institute (MCI).



- MCI Director **Robert J. Koestler** has just returned from the second meeting of the **Scientific Council of Lascaux** that included a visit to the Paleolithic painted cave in the south of France, one of the greatest cultural treasures of the western world. The Council was convened by the French Ministry of Culture to investigate anthropogenic-induced changes over the past decade. The almost 2,000 animal paintings made using luminous iron and manganese oxide paints, approximately 16,000 years old, were threatened by the rapid growth of garden-variety soil molds in the early 2000s. Some experts proposed that the mold damage was a consequence of global environmental change, although this is still unproven. The fungal contamination has been controlled in the past five years, but the Council is working to ensure that the cave is protected from damage in the future.
- MCI will host a tour on July 13 of a bilateral science and technology meeting with French representatives, called the Joint Committee Meeting or "JCM," organized by the **U.S. Department of State's Office of Science and Technology Cooperation**. Co-chairs of the US-French Archaeology Working Group -- John Yellen, NSF's Program Director for Archaeology and Archaeometry, and the Director of the Louvre's Conservation Laboratory -- will lead a discussion on cooperation in archaeology and museum practices. **Robert J. Koestler** has been invited to participate in the JCM.
- Over the past six years MCI has hosted a number of impressive French postdoctoral fellows. **Laure Dussubieux** used her fellowship to develop ICP-MS methods to determine the provenience of glass beads-she is now a researcher at the Field Museum in Chicago. **Amandine Pequignot** researched the preservation of natural history collections, including the detection of toxic inorganic residues and the effects of fixation and long-term fluid preservation; she is now a researcher and lecturer at the Centre de recherche sur la conservation des collections (CRCC), Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris. **Caroline Solazzo** pioneered the application of proteomics in the study of archaeological materials; she now has a **Marie Curie International Outgoing Fellowship** for work with MCI and NMAI on identifying types of domesticated sheep and goat fibers in ancient, historical, and ethnographic textiles. **Claire Gervais** continues as a Research Fellow at MCI and SOLEIL/IPANEMA, leading the first Smithsonian-SOLEIL synchrotron project on the fading of Prussian blue.