



FACTVM
FOVNDATION
FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
IN CONSERVATION



Now you see it!

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When we visit places and things that we think of as beautiful or important we think less about how they may have looked in the past - or may look in the future - but of what we see now. What we see is an object solidly in front of us. Well, if we look a little harder we will realise that it's not just an object, it's a subject - it is susceptible to forces and influences and changes just as we are.

Of course, we know that many artefacts from our cultural heritage are damaged by some intervention, some accident, some change in the environment, some act of desecration, some seemingly benign restoration. Standing in front of our solid and recognisable object we probably don't think of that panel in Torbryan Church in Devon (UK) which was ripped out of an incredibly rare and lovely rood screen this Summer, we don't think of the Bamiyan Buddahs or the thousands of books in Mali or even Ecce Homo in enthusiastic Cecilia Gimenez's hands. And we certainly know that there are also many objects that we cannot see simply because they are so vulnerable that they must be hidden away in environmentally controlled spaces to preserve them (humans, sadly, are not part of that permitted environment).

When I write about things hidden away you may perhaps conjure images of the caves, now closed, at Lascaux? Or you might more romantically think of statues shrouded in our cold winters to protect from frost? Or you may think of now barred Tombs in the Valley of the Kings.

They are hidden because exposure is a danger to the thing itself. They are artefacts we want to preserve because they are part of our heritage - part of us. When we look at something of beauty or importance we must remember it is changing, perhaps not as dramatically as the examples I have used, but changing nonetheless. What we see in an instant is unique. It is not the same in the next instant or as the one before. Objects don't exist in a stable state - they are constantly changing - even if we do all we can to stop the process and, of course, when we do that, we influence how they look and the conditions in which we can look at them.

That fleeting and unique view we have can be preserved so that others who come after us can have it too - it can be done as technology has given us the ability to make the tools - that's what Factum Foundation does. We can record in three dimensions and in colour at extraordinarily high resolutions and then we can store the data in raw form so that in future it can be viewed - exactly as we saw it in that instant, a permanent, invisible 'snapshot' - a point cloud and colour matches that create a perfect and permanent record as a dematerialised object and that can be used to re-materialise it digitally or, where appropriate, as a facsimile. Then the vulnerable original can be placed in its controlled environment or can be left on display in the best conditions possible - in the knowledge that we have a permanent and precise record that also allows us to monitor changes - allowing us to protect what we have while we preserve the data.

On this site there are many descriptions of technology and of projects where that technology has been or is being used to conserve cultural objects - in all these cases we are conserving something wonderful as we are lucky enough to live in an age when technology has allowed us to do it. Our problem is, things are constantly changing and we need to move fast.