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**Royal BC Museum wins prestigious award for conservation work  
on the Chinese Freemason's Lantern**

**Victoria, BC** – Just as every great concert pianist relies on the behind-the-scenes talents of a tuner to create beautiful music, every great museum relies on the largely invisible skills of conservators to feature exhibition artifacts at their best. But now, the Royal BC Museum has ample reason to sing the praises of its conservators, who have won the prestigious Keck Award for the **conservation of the Chinese Freemason's Lantern** in 2013.

The Keck Award is an international conservation award given out every two years by the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC), to the individual or **group who has "contributed most towards promoting public understanding and appreciation of the accomplishments of the conservation profession"**. This year's award was recently [presented at the 2014 IIC Congress](#) in Hong Kong.

"Care of our collections **is an essential part of our work,"** said Prof. Jack Lohman, Royal BC Museum CEO. **"This is a profession in urgent need of recognition,** as the values of conservation lie at the heart of what we do."

In spring 2013, the Royal BC Museum began the labour-intensive process of conserving the lantern in front of the public, in a modified lab within the temporary exhibition Tradition in Felicities: Celebrating 155 Years of Victoria's Chinatown. Exhibition visitors were able to witness Project Conservator Lisa Bengston, along with a crew of six conservators, student and volunteer conservators, cleaning and stabilizing the lantern, and were encouraged to ask questions about the process involved. The public conservation project took nine months.

The transparent approach sparked a number of spontaneous conversations between museum staff and visitors. Some visitors recalled as small children seeing the lantern hanging in the Chinese **Freemason's tong hall in Victoria's Chinatown**, illuminated by the original lights, paper horsemen in animated gallop. This kind of community engagement and education was an unintended but welcome consequence of opening up the process of conservation.

Even so, most museum visitors only have a vague sense of what conservators do. Museums are guardians of material culture, collecting, preserving and exhibiting artifacts so that we can learn from their histories. Conservators work behind the scenes to ensure that material culture survives.

"Occasionally this process involves glamorous restorations, but more often it is a simple chemical or physical stabilization of the materials," said Kasey Lee, Royal BC Museum Conservation Manager. "In this project, we produced a video, showing a marvellous reproduction of the lantern as it would have once looked, with colourful lights and dancing figures, allowing visitors to see a virtual restoration of the lantern. What a treat."

This year, the Royal BC Museum has selected conservation as the focus for its annual fundraising campaign. **There are a number of fascinating and valuable objects in the museum and archive's** collection that require significant support to conserve to a state worthy of public display, including the Col. Richard Moody album, containing the first photographs of First Nations in BC. More information can be found at [royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/support-us/](http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/support-us/).

The Keck Award brings welcome public attention to the work of Royal BC Museum conservators, in addition to the recognition of its peers in the international museum world and a monetary award of £1,000.

### **About the Royal BC Museum**

**The Royal BC Museum explores the province's human history and natural history, advances new** knowledge and understanding of BC, and provides a dynamic forum for discussion and a place for reflection. The museum and archives celebrate culture and history, telling the stories of BC in ways that enlighten, stimulate and inspire. Looking to the future, by 2017 the Royal BC Museum will be a refreshed, modern museum, extending its reach far beyond Victoria as a world-class cultural venue and repository of digital treasures.


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