

# NEWSLETTER

## MARCH 2025 | ISSUE #3

### EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

Welcome back to the [RITHMS](#) project updates.

Since our latest Newsletter, partners have made significant progress in the technical development. A first prototype of the RITHMS SNA-based Platform has been installed in Rome at the premises of the Carabinieri for the Protection of



Cultural Heritage, where initial technical tests have been successfully conducted. Additionally, these past few months have been marked by several key communication and dissemination events.

Sincerely yours,  
The RITHMS Dissemination team

## INSIGHTS FROM *BEYOND RESTORATION* EVENT – BRUSSELS

### The key role of conservators and restorers in tackling illicit trafficking of cultural goods

As part of the RITHMS project's ongoing efforts to understand and combat illicit trafficking in cultural goods, the *Beyond Restoration* event, held in Brussels on December 4th, 2024, spotlighted an often overlooked yet essential group of professionals: **conservators and restorers**.

While their primary mission is to preserve cultural heritage, they also play a crucial role in preventing the circulation of illicit artefacts. However, they may sometimes find themselves

— whether knowingly or unknowingly — entangled in the dynamics of illicit trade. (p.2)



Threads of Heritage  
(p.2)



EMERITUS and RITHMS  
Joint Webinar (p.4)

## INSIGHTS FROM *BEYOND RESTORATION* EVENT – BRUSSELS



The event provided a platform to explore both the risks and responsibilities faced by these professionals. It delved into how restorers might inadvertently contribute to the legitimisation of looted or forged artworks, while also highlighting how their expertise in authentication and provenance analysis positions them as valuable allies in the fight against illicit trafficking.



Expert panel discussions explored these issues, with a morning session dedicated to the role of conservators and an afternoon session focusing on current and potential collaboration between LEAs and heritage professionals. A hands-on

workshop and interactive discussions further highlighted the need for ethical guidelines, targeted training, and stronger cooperation between conservators, cultural institutions, and LEAs.

A key takeaway from the event was the necessity for structured support, including clear policies and accreditation mechanisms at the European level, to help conservator-restorers navigate legal and ethical challenges. Strengthening their role in identifying suspicious artefacts and improving cooperation with investigative authorities were identified as critical steps toward safeguarding cultural heritage from criminal networks.



The discussions also revealed diverging views within the profession. While some conservator-restorers feel that verifying provenance is beyond their role, others advocate for greater responsibility and institutional backing. This underscores the importance of developing shared standards and fostering awareness to ensure conservator-restorers can contribute effectively to the fight against illicit trafficking.



## THREADS OF HERITAGE



Within the framework of RITHMS, with the technical support of No Panic Agency and the collaboration of several partners of the Consortium, the Italian Institute of Technology has also produced the documentary *Threads of Heritage. Down the Rabbit Hole of Art Crime*.



The movie offers an unprecedented look at the **illicit trafficking of cultural heritage** — a critical phenomenon that threatens historical treasures worldwide. Through compelling storytelling and firsthand accounts, the film explores the irreversible damage caused by **clandestine excavations** and the **illicit art market**, exposing the intricate network of interests that often involves traffickers, auction houses, and major international museums.

A journey through **Rome, Cerveteri** and **Madrid** takes the audience to the heart of these crimes, from looted archaeological sites to museum storage facilities inaccessible to the public, where hundreds of artefacts await reassignment. For the first time, these objects take centre stage in a narrative that restores their intrinsic historical and cultural value.

With the support of experts and industry professionals, the documentary features **Vincenzo**



**Bellelli**, Director of the Cerveteri Archaeological Park; **Luana Toniolo**, Director of the National Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia; and **Arianna Traviglia**, Director of the Centre for Cultural Heritage Technology (Italian Institute of Technology). Crucial contributions also come from law enforcement agencies dedicated to protecting cultural heritage: the **Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage** and the **Brigada de Patrimonio Histórico** of the Spanish National Police take the audience into the core of their operations, conducted in collaboration with other European police forces, to combat an illicit market worth millions of euros.

The documentary was selected for the International Archaeofilm Festival, held in March in Florence, Italy, where it achieved an impressive second place out of 88 entries: an outstanding accomplishment for this opera prima.



**RITHMS News**



**Watch the trailer**

## Environmental and Cultural Heritage offences EMERITUS & RITHMS Joint webinar

On October 28th, the RITHMS project co-organized a [webinar](#) in collaboration with the Sister Project [EMERITUS](#). The event focused on addressing the increasing necessity of equipping law enforcement with advanced skills to combat niche and emerging criminal practices like environmental and cultural heritage crime.



During the webinar, the speakers discussed the main challenges in addressing such niche crimes. The first issue to face is the

fact that specific expertise in areas like ecology, biology, archaeology and art history, often missing in traditional LEA skillsets, are instead relevant to developing effective strategies against those crimes. Limited funding and low prioritisation of these crimes compound this problem, making it hard for LEAs to obtain essential resources and training. Cross-border collaboration is key, yet difficult to implement due to varying jurisdictional rules, data-sharing restrictions, and procedural differences. LEAs struggle with both the legal and logistical aspects of collaboration across borders. Additionally, LEAs often lack fa-

miliarity with the technological and legal tools necessary for investigating niche crimes. Training needs assessments show gaps in areas like data analysis, ecosystem assessment, and legal processes, which are crucial for combating environmental and cultural crimes.

## RITHMS at CEPOL Research & Science Conference 2024/2025

On March 26-27th, both RITHMS Coordinator, Dr Arianna Traviglia (CCHT-IIT), and Prof. Patricia Faraldo Cabana (UDC) successfully attended CEPOL [international conference](#) as an opportunity to present the project's advancement and illustrate first-hand results stemming from criminological research carried out within RITHMS.



Congratulations to Patricia and her Team whose paper, exploring the organised nature of cultural heritage crime, won the prestigious CEPOL Research & Science Conference Award!

## PAST EVENTS

- ⇒ RITHMS at the Conference on Computational Social Science (CS2Italy 2025)
- ⇒ RITHMS at Archaeological Film Festival in Florence with "Threads of Heritage"

## UPCOMING EVENTS

RITHMS has now entered its final semester, marking a crucial phase in the project. As we move forward, we are preparing to launch a series of activities to assist law enforcement agencies in effectively using the RITHMS platform.

These initiatives will focus on providing tailored training sessions, starting with an introductory Training Workshop in Rome, on April 7-8, dedicated to the partner LEAs of the Consortium, which will be followed by another Training Workshop for the LEAs beyond the Consortium to be held in Munich in June.

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