

EMERGENCY!

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**CAC
ACCR**

Canadian Association for
Conservation of Cultural Property

AIC

American Institute for Conservation
of Historic and Artistic Works

Natural disasters and cultural heritage: the Italian case

In the last 20 years Italy, as much as other countries, has witnessed serious climatic changes affecting not only people's life, but also its environment and cultural heritage. The recent study *WorldRiskReport 2012*, presented in Brussels by the United Nations University within Alliance Development Works and The Nature Conservancy took into consideration the risk factor of each country of being affected by a natural disaster. Among the 173 countries in the world considered, Italy occupies the 116th place and only the 5th in Europe. Among the most recent natural disasters that took place in Italy we can distinguish earthquakes in Aquila and Emilia-Romagna (2009 and 2012), floods in Liguria (2014), Veneto (2010 and 2014) and Sardinia (2008, 2013 and 2015). After these disasters, I have witnessed the serious loss of important buildings and monuments and the irreparable damages of the artefacts stored in unsuitable warehouses. However, not only these major disasters affect the nation but also an increasing number of events related to climatic changes need to be taken into account. Italy lacks a safety plan and infrastructure to prevent extreme natural disasters and environmental degradation. So far the government has been concentrated on repairing the damages more than elaborating a prevention plan.

The scope of this research is to evaluate natural disaster damages, their effects on art objects and/or artefacts stored in museums. The main focus is on museum storage solutions and conditions, often ignored or inadequately preserved, and research on the connection between storages and works of art. In Italy it is common to exhibit and store art collections in listed buildings. Usually we find a deposit of a museum, located in an antique palace, in the underground level, often without any concerns about climate system controls. Thus when a collection cannot be exposed it stays most of its time stored in the deposit without proper conservation care.

This problem must be addressed; in fact museums should be equipped with an adequate storage system capable of dealing with different types of artefacts according to their nature, and also should be prepared to confront the problems caused by natural disasters.