

# Coming In June...

## Reconstituting the MRS Leadership

Proposed revisions to MRS Constitution require approval of entire membership via paper ballot.

*"We believe that, among all the other changes, the proposed Constitution is clearer and simpler than its predecessor, so it should be easier to read and understand. It is intended to ensure that MRS will continue to be strategic, responsive, and world-leading in all of its ventures, even as it grows and as its environment changes."*

Alex King  
2002 MRS President

**Ballots will be mailed in early June.**

**Voting deadline is July 12.**

*For details, see Letter from the President, page 347.*

## POSTERMINARIES

### Kettle Repair, Egyptian Faience, and Serendipity

I was thumbing through my weekly subscription to *Science News* (January 19, 2002, issue) when the subtitle "Imitating Ancient Materials Reveals Lost Manufacturing Secrets" drew me in. The first paragraph referenced Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the second both the Getty Museum in Los Angeles and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The third paragraph referenced the MRS meeting in Boston and I realized I was three paragraphs into a two-and-a-half-page feature article on highlights from the Materials Issues in Art and Archaeology Symposium. Two-and-a-half pages of coverage in *Science News*! I smiled to myself because I knew serendipity had come full circle.

In 1987, David Clark, C.T. Liu, and I had the pleasure of being invited to be the spring meeting chairs for the 1988 meeting to be held in Reno, Nevada—before the spring meeting was moved to San Francisco. MRS meeting chairs are given great latitude in organizing meetings. They generally "inherit" a subset of symposia that may change titles or emphasis, but more or less are variations on a continuing theme from the year before. Meeting chairs get "advice" from numerous sources. Of these, the Program Committee and Vice-President have both an official capacity and responsibility to offer suggestions. Our "marching orders" in 1987 were to try and bring into the Reno meeting some truly new symposia. I've sat through many Program Committee meetings over the years and remember long evenings of lively debates about symposia topics that had been MRS "staples, but wasn't it about time they

were retired?" Another frequent conversation focuses on whether or not certain topics are the purview of other societies.

Having never been active in the upper echelons of traditional discipline-oriented societies, I never gave these protracted discussions much heed. Only later at my pick-up basketball club did I start to appreciate with just how much freedom MRS meeting chairs were being empowered. One of the guys I play basketball with regularly in Princeton is Roque (Rocky) Calvo, executive director of The Electrochemical Society. He and I had many conversations about MRS during the 1980s as "we" grew from a fledgling society to an organization breaking all previous scientific society growth records. To make a long story short, big societies with large subdiscipline mini-societies within them have a much more difficult time throwing out the old to make room for the new. Returning to our marching orders, we were not given any topical guidance or constraints. It was more like a *carte blanche* to look outside the long list of previous topics and bring in some really new symposia.

As serendipity would have it, I was thumbing through a 1987 issue of *Science News*, not searching for topics but still thinking about the challenge. I ran across a short item on how kettle repair metallurgy was being examined in order to help understand how the apprenticeship process in pre-industrial revolution England might have worked. The article got me thinking, *I wonder if the scientists of the art and archaeology world have a home, or if they would find the interdisciplinary MRS approach attractive?* I invited the Princeton

University museum director and one faculty member to lunch. They told me I needed to make at least two phone calls: one to the Smithsonian and one to the Getty Institute. By the end of the next day I had spoken with both Pamela Vandiver and James Druzik. Materials Issues in Art and Archaeology as a continuing symposium in the MRS family of meetings basically happened because of a several-paragraph article about repairing copper kettles in *Science News*. Now 15 years later, topics not unlike that are worth a feature article. It is worth a smile and acknowledgment of how serendipity so often produces outcomes we all too often think we "made happen."

I must clearly state that the longtime success of the Materials Issues in Art and Archaeology Symposium has almost nothing to do with anything the meeting chairs (myself included) actually did beyond our keen interest in meeting the challenge of "something new." The success of this particular symposium within the MRS family owes everything (in my opinion) to the symposium organizers, the quality of the symposium they organize, and solid funding in 1988 from the Getty Institute. The preface to the 1996 symposium proceedings (volume 462) includes a retrospective look back written by the symposium organizers, including both Pamela and James. Serendipity isn't part of that perspective.

The fact remains, though, that MRS was and is the right place for people who care about demystifying Egyptian faience as well as how and who repaired English copper pots hundreds of years ago.

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