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### Research in New Strategies in Conservation of Contemporary Art

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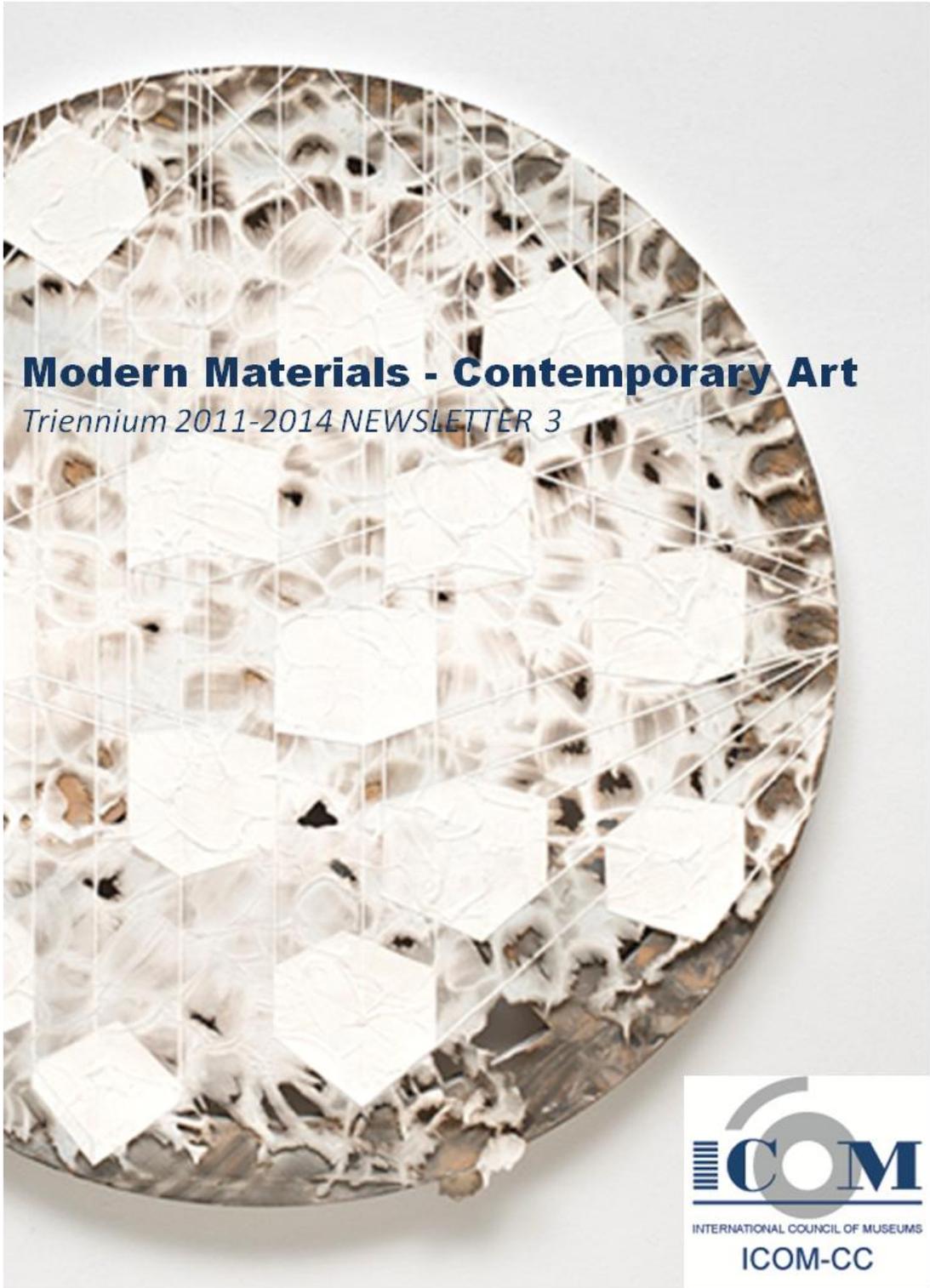
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# Modern Materials - Contemporary Art

Triennium 2011-2014 NEWSLETTER 3



*Detail of Erosion (Geometric Cubes within Circle; Two-Point Perspective with Guidelines) 2012, Analia Saban*  
Laser-sculpted acrylic paint on canvas 40 inches diameter

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Modern Materials - Contemporary Art is the official newsletter of the ICOM-CC Working Group  
Modern Materials and Contemporary Art (MMCA)

May 2013

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### From your Coordinator

Welcome to the 2013 Newsletter from the Modern Materials and Contemporary Art (MMCA) working group of ICOM-CC. It's a great issue – packed with a wide range of entries, on meetings and workshops, project updates from our members, a significant number of new books and publications, and topped off with our very popular 'In Conversation with:' section - this time we talked to Eleonora Nagy and Tim Bechthold. And all beautifully organized and designed by Rachel Rivenc.

This past year has been a period of high activity for MMCA, and we are well on our way to accomplishing all our "organizational goals". We have grown our membership to almost 270, and have planned a great Interim meeting on "Conserving Outdoor Painted Sculpture", to be held at the Kröller Müller Museum in June – more on that later.

We have received a very encouraging number of abstracts for the 2014 ICOM-CC Triennial conference in Melbourne, so thanks to all of you who submitted. It will be a great MMCA session, for sure, but now starts the difficult task of grading them all and trying to get as many accepted as possible. We are also already in discussions about the possibility of a joint session with the Paintings Group. We got great feedback from the joint session at the last Triennial in Lisbon, and there is clearly a lot of fascinating work going on with the conservation of 20th/21st century paintings.

Just a reminder that a number of functions are open to you on the MMCA website, which is easily found from [www.icom-cc.org](http://www.icom-cc.org) homepage or through this direct link, <http://www.icom-cc.org/32/modern-materials-and-contemporary-art/> including on-line forums, latest news, a whole string of downloads, back copies of our

wonderful MMCA Newsletter, the ICOM-CC calendar of events, and all the contact information you would need to contact us.

And please do feel free to contact us about any issue to do with MMCA, including feedback from the information contained in this Newsletter. As you probably know, your MMCA team for this triennial period (2011-2014) remains:

- Tom Learner: coordinator, [tlearner@getty.edu](mailto:tlearner@getty.edu)
- Rachel Rivenc: assistant coordinator, [rivenc@getty.edu](mailto:rivenc@getty.edu)
- Lydia Beerkens, assistant coördinator [lydia.beerkens@planet.nl](mailto:lydia.beerkens@planet.nl)
- Gunnar Heydenreich, assistant coördinator [gunnar.heydenreich@fh-koeln.de](mailto:gunnar.heydenreich@fh-koeln.de)
- Louise Cone, assistant coordinator [Louise.Cone@smk.dk](mailto:Louise.Cone@smk.dk)

And as always, your help in encouraging other colleagues to join the MMCA working group will be much appreciated. We are still hopeful of making our target of 300 by the time we get to Melbourne next September...

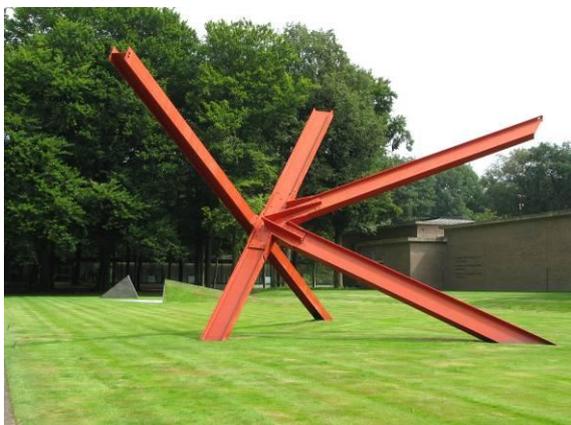
I look forward to seeing many of you at the Kröller-Müller in June, and utilizing as many of your papers as we can to develop our sessions at the 2014 Triennial conference. And – last but not least - I wish to extend my thanks to all the hard work being carried out by my wonderful assistant coordinators; Rachel, Lydia, Gunnar, and Louise.

Tom Learner  
MMCA coordinator

**Conserving Outdoor Painted Sculpture Meeting 2013**

MMCA is holding its Interim meeting for this Triennial at the Kröller-Müller Museum, on June 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The meeting is being organized in collaboration with the Kröller-Müller Museum, the Getty Conservation Institute and the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA)

Outdoor Painted Sculpture (OPS) presents some highly complex conservation challenges. Works are exposed to uncontrolled environments, including intense light/UV radiation and adverse weather conditions, as well as vandalism or accidental damage, and yet it is typically expected/ required for the painted surface to remain in near-pristine condition. This is usually guided by the wish to preserve the original aesthetic qualities of the sculpture and to provide optimal protection to the substrate, in particular when it is metal that has to be protected from corrosion. As such, conservation treatments on outdoor painted sculpture often involve the full repainting of the sculpture, which is often preceded by the removal of all earlier coats of paint.



Mark di Suvero, *K-Piece* (1972), The Kröller-Müller Museum

The aim of this meeting is to discuss the current issues, approaches and methods used for conserving OPS. It is hoped that the meeting will provide an opportunity for dialogue both within the conservation community, and with others, such as the paint industry, fabricators, curators and artists' estate, foundations and studios. The Kröller-Müller Museum has a large collection of outdoor sculptures with more than 150 works exhibited in its sculpture garden, and as such will provide the perfect setting for the meeting. There will be an opportunity to view the collection, including works under discussion at the meeting.

Our programme is:

**Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> June**

Conserving outdoor painted sculpture at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC.

*Gwynne Ryan*

Issues of (and responses to) conserving outdoor painted sculpture: outcomes from a focus meeting.

*Tom Learner*

As good as new: on the recoating of Tajiri's *Square Knot* (1974) in Venlo.

*Lydia Beerkens*

The conservation of Nam June Paik's *32 Cars for the 20<sup>th</sup> C: Play Mozart's Requiem Quietly* (1997).

*Zeeyoung Chin*

*Three Brushstrokes*: recreating Roy Lichtenstein's early techniques for painted outdoor sculpture.

*Julie Wolfe*

The Köller-Müller Museum Sculpture Garden – History, facts and figures

*Liz Kreijn*

The decision-making process for the treatment of Christo's *56 Barrels* (1968 / 1977).

*Susanne Kensche*

On the (im)possibilities of local repair and inpainting in the long term conservation of outdoor painted sculptures. The case study of *Trowel* by Claes Oldenburg.

*Nikki van Basten*

Maintenance of hand-painted outdoor sculptures by Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Dubuffet.

*Frederike Breder*

**Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June**

A memory of materials. From production to documentation of painted outdoor sculptures today.

*Peter von Bartheld*

Some considerations in determining new paint systems for use in the treatment of painted steel, fiberglass, and wooden outdoor sculptures.

*Paul Benson*

Technological changes due to wear and tear in outdoor paint coatings.

*Hans Springvloet Dubbeld*

High end coatings: research for a perfect surface for an outdoor sculpture by Anselm Reyle.

*Thomas Dempwolf*

Paint and outdoor weathering steel sculpture.

*John Scott*

A kind of blue: The re-finishing of a painted steel sculpture by John Hoskin.

*Calvin Winner*

Not for eternity maybe: the conservation of '*Flause*' (1998), an outdoor painted sculpture by Franz West.

*Florian Szibor*

Museum procedure for dealing with large metal objects – case study of Calder's *The Halberd Bearer*.

*Angelika Gervais*

Preventive conservation of outdoor painted sculpture in Quebec: When the quantity is beyond the understanding.

*Stephanie Gagné*

### There is still time to register!

Full meeting fee: € 175; Reduced meeting fee: € 115 (ICOM-CC members, speakers and students). The registration fee is all inclusive. It includes: coffee, tea, and lunch on both days, a buffet-dinner on June 4th in the sculpture park after the afternoon programme, and a closing wine reception on June 5th. The fee *also* includes the entrance to both the National Park De Hoge Veluwe and the Kröller-Müller Museum for the two days of the meeting.

For enquiries, please email:  
[opsmeeting2013@gmail.com](mailto:opsmeeting2013@gmail.com)

For more details please see the meeting website:  
<http://www.incca.nl/opsmeeting2013>

## Conference Reports

### ***The Meaning of Materials in Modern and Contemporary Art***

Queensland Art Gallery|Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), Brisbane, Australia 10-11 December 2012

With a focus on Australia and its region's diverse history and climate, *The Meaning of Materials in Modern and Contemporary Art* explored questions related to artists' intentions towards the materials they use and subsequent effect on conservation decisions. The Symposium was co-organised by the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (CCMC) at the University of Melbourne under the auspices of an ARC Linkage grant 'The Twentieth Century in Paint,' QAGOMA, and the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM) Paintings Special Interest Group.

Attracting over eighty five participants from materials conservation, fine arts, contemporary arts, curatorship and scientific domains, the symposium provided an interdisciplinary forum for themes to be explored and communicated. The Symposium was timed to coincide with the 7<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art exhibition at QAGOMA and the weekend of opening events. Presentations and discussions explored parallel issues highlighted in the exhibition and enabled participants to fully engage with the diverse materiality of contemporary works of art and the new challenges they pose. This had a very strong and significant impact on the event and the dialogues that took place. For example, influences on Australian Aboriginal Art, activated along early trade routes between Sulawesi and northern coastlines of Arnhem Land, were described. Papers discussed the QAGOMA commission of Papua New Guinea artists to create

spirit house exhibits for the 7th Asia Pacific Triennial, with consideration for future conservation needs. The significant creation stories these artworks carry into a contemporary art context were particularly impressive.

Speakers from the National Museum of the Philippines introduced the context of their collections and their involvement in the consolidation of ancient and modern dialogues. Papers that discussed Australian Modernist painters and parallel studies from New Zealand, explored issues of 20<sup>th</sup> C materials - particularly modified oil paints, synthetic polymers and colourants from the mid twentieth century. Other papers explored how both the historical and more recent trade in materials influenced usage in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, Malaysia, Tibet and Vietnam. Materials choices of contemporary international artists such as Gongkar Gyatso, Jasper Johns, Brice Marden, Paul Thek, Nam Jun Paik, Manuel Ocampo and De Wain Valentine were discussed in relation to artist's intent and ongoing conservation care decisions.



7<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art , Installation views. Photography by N.Harth, QAGOMA 2012

Also of prime importance is the chemistry responsible for the deterioration of modern and contemporary works of art, specifically the effect of the diverse climates in Australia and Southeast Asia. Papers explored current research into the cleaning of acrylic paint films, prevention of biodeterioration, the application of Synchrotron FTIR microscopy to 20th century paints as well as research into Information Technology options for capturing and sharing research data.

The theme of this Symposium was ambitious but also demonstrates how conservators can contribute to theoretical and scientific discussions beyond conservation's core directive. Materials characterisation and the understanding of associated degradation has long been part of a conservator's job description. This was the 13<sup>th</sup> AICCM Paintings Group symposium, which generally provides communication and capacity building amongst the relatively small number of Australian Paintings Conservators and their colleagues. By working in strong collaborative teams - many of the papers presented were a result of the three year ARC project - this symposium broadened contributions and discussions to areas outside traditional domains of paintings conservation.

*The Meaning of Materials in Modern and Contemporary Art* post prints will be published in a Special Edition of The AICCM Bulletin in Volume 34 due for publication in mid 2013.

Anne Carter

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### **Issues in Contemporary Oil Paint Symposium**

The *Issues in Contemporary Oil Paint (ICOP)* Symposium was held on 28 and 29 March 2013 in the headquarters of the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE) in Amersfoort. The symposium was the first international conference devoted to modern oil paints (and the first on modern paint since the *Modern Paint Uncovered* Conference held at Tate in 2006). It marked the end of an international research project carried out within the RCE for more than five years, together with its partners from the Courtauld Institute of Art, the Stedelijk Museum, and the Getty Conservation Institute. The project investigated some of the conservation issues surrounding modern oil paints.

The symposium was sold out - attracting 140 delegates from 20 countries - and comprised 21 lectures and 26 posters. For a full listing of these, please see <http://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/en/icop> where an overview, symposium programme, the cover and list of contents of the Book of Abstracts, as well as plenty of photographs of the event, can all be found.

Talks were grouped into broad themes. The first involved the issues of surface appearance of modern oils, in particular how it can be compromised by surface degradation and/or dirt accretion, and the problems posed by unvarnished works. Modern oil paints are also different from those formulated a century ago, with manufacturers using a whole range of newly discovered and produced materials.

Presentations were also given by two experienced paint manufacturers, as well as an overview in the

developments in pigment manufacture, water miscible paints, and paint additives. These developments, in combination with certain modification and application methods by artists and environmental factors have lead to a number of degradation problems, which were discussed in great detail. Problems include degradation of pigments and efflorescence of fatty acids, their soaps, and salts, with associated colour and surface changes. Furthermore, explanations for the phenomena of water sensitivity of the paint surface and paint deliquescence or paint dripping were presented. Conservation approaches to water sensitive paint surfaces and dripping paints were discussed in a final session.



Jenny Schultz speaking at ICOP

With the final discussion, it was stressed how much the field had moved on since *Modern Paints Uncovered*, when there was limited overlap between the ongoing scientific research and the practical experience of conservators. One of the conclusions from that symposium was that the input of empirical observations from conservators was just as vital to the field as scientific research, with the best possible scenario being effective collaborations between the two. So many papers presented at ICOP seemed to adopt this approach, and the benefits were obvious to all. It was also great to see the active engagement of three of the most important artists' oil paint manufacturers, in the sharing of information and in the general brain-storming as to why certain phenomena might be occurring. That said, there is still much more work to do!

I would like to thank all speakers for producing such an important and lively programme, and especially the poster presenters who stuck to their 3 minutes time limit! There was overwhelming support to try and produce post prints from the symposium, and I hope to confirm very shortly that we'll be doing that. For any enquiries, please email me at [k.van.den.berg@cultureelerfgoed.nl](mailto:k.van.den.berg@cultureelerfgoed.nl)

Klaas Jan van den Berg

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## Upcoming Conferences, Meetings, and Workshops

### ***Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art***

Lisbon 20-21 June 2013

Contemporary art conservation requires a re-assessment of the distinction between the work and its reconfiguration in documentation. Although documentation is crucial for the survival of many contemporary works of art, it is never neutral: all approaches, formats, media and systems have their own inherent affordances and blind spots and always transform what they document. Furthermore, in process-centered, technology-based or performative artworks in particular, we often can no longer make a sharp distinction between an original work and its subsequent documentation or replication: documentation is part of the work's very core.

On the other hand, even the most meticulously documented works will need to be re-installed or re-performed regularly in order to survive, because otherwise important tacit know-how will get lost. The role of the artist in this process is central, but contested: what if s/he changes her mind, loses interest or is no longer available? And what if the authorship of the work is distributed over several actors? Also, the role of the conservator has taken new dimensions: conservation responsibilities and tasks are now distributed over a diversity of agents.

Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art is jointly organized by the research project Documentation of Contemporary Art and the Network for Conservation of Contemporary Art Research (NeCCAR).

Learn more:

<http://performingdocumentation.fcsh.unl.pt>

Register:

<http://performingdocumentation.fcsh.unl.pt/Site/registration.html>

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### ***FUTURE TALKS 013***

*Lectures and Workshops on Technology and Conservation of Modern Materials in Design*

Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Germany

October 23 to 25, 2013

The Conservation Department, Die Neue Sammlung – The International Design Museum Munich – is pleased to announce its third international FUTURE TALKS conference. After an overwhelming response to the previous two (FUTURE TALKS 009 and FUTURE TALKS

011 [www.die-neue-sammlung.de/event/?lang=en](http://www.die-neue-sammlung.de/event/?lang=en)) we are looking forward to another exciting three-day-congress combining lectures and workshops on international research projects and case studies on active conservation treatments and technology of modern materials in design.



**FUTURE TALKS  
013  
LECTURES AND  
WORKSHOPS ON  
TECHNOLOGY  
AND CONSERVATION  
OF MODERN MATERIALS  
IN DESIGN  
OCTOBER  
23/25 2013  
DIE NEUE SAMMLUNG  
THE INTERNATIONAL  
DESIGN MUSEUM  
MUNICH**

#### **Lectures**

Recent advances in the field, addressing technology, design and production processes of modern materials, new and innovative treatment methods for degrading plastics as well as current research and ongoing projects will be presented. Experts from all over the world will share their experiences and knowledge. Acknowledging that the conservation of modern materials is not only limited to design objects, a part of the programme is dedicated to conservation projects on modern/contemporary works of art.

#### **Workshops**

In addition to the two days of lectures this time one entire day is dedicated to a number of exciting workshops, closely connected to everything you'd always wanted to learn about conservation of modern materials but never dared to ask. The workshop will be given by a number of leading experts in the field, including Prof. Dr.-Ing. Christian Bonten, Prof. Anna Comiotto, Dr. Virginia Costa, Dr. Brenda Keneghan, Anna Lagana, Dr. Thea van Oosten, Dr. Yvonne Shashoua, and Prof. Dr. Phil. Friederike Waentig.

#### **Panel discussion**

In addition, Konstantin Grcic, one of the most famous and innovative German designers will talk about his designs with experts from the plastics industry, plastics engineers and conservators about design and sustainability of plastic furniture.

The conference will take place from October 23 – 25, 2013 at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, Germany. The conference and associated publication will be in English. There will also be social events and opportunities to visit local conservation studios, research labs, plastic producers and design studios on Saturday October 26, 2013. We very much appreciate the participation of students, scientists, conservators and curators. The eagerly awaited publication FT 011 will be available at the conference.

For further information and to register, please e-mail: [conservation@die-neue-sammlung.de](mailto:conservation@die-neue-sammlung.de). Online registration will be open from June 1, 2013. Numbers for the conference and workshops are limited so early registration is advised.

Tim Bechthold

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### **Fail Better**

A Symposium about Conservation Practice and Decision Making in Contemporary Art.  
Save the Date – 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2013



Hamburger Kunsthalle – Gallery of Contemporary Art  
Conference Language: English

The conservation of contemporary art is a field that is always facing new challenges and constantly developing as artist techniques and practices evolve. Over recent years our technical capability has increased and it has become more common practice to replace unstable materials in degrading artworks. However, many questions are still unanswered. For instance, is the complete replacement of degraded art works acceptable? What is the limit of replaceability? How important is the original? Can we develop guidelines for the decision making when we are confronted with the option of a replacement? Due to the complex nature of contemporary art, the standardization for replacements of contemporary art has not been possible. The symposium will provide a platform for international exchange on case studies, create room for discussions on these issues and hopefully indicate possible directions for action or for not taking action.

Internationally recognized senior conservators who are pioneering experts in the conservation of contemporary art are invited to reflect on their view on these issues today. The Hamburger Kunsthalle has a large collection of contemporary artworks and

provides a perfect setting to debate these conservation issues on an international level. There will also be guided tours through the accompanying exhibition of *Eva Hesse* and *Gego* and a publication of the film- and video exhibition *fail better* will be available.

Program and registration will be available in August at [www.restauratoren.de](http://www.restauratoren.de) the website of the VDR, German Conservators Association. For more information, please e-mail Barbara Sommermeyer: [sommermeyer@hamburger-kunsthalle.de](mailto:sommermeyer@hamburger-kunsthalle.de)

Barbara Sommermeyer

## **Project Updates: Research**

### **Heritage Smells!**

Heritage Smells! is a large collaborative research project that explores the use of volatile organic compound (VOC) analysis in conservation. Drawing on the principle that compounds that constitute the smell of an object can tell you a great deal about it, Heritage Smells! aims to understand how an object's VOC emissions can be used to understand and care for heritage.

The emitted VOCs are characteristic of the materials that an object is composed of, including the base polymers and any stabilisers or plasticisers. The volatile products of any ongoing degradation processes are often also detectable. In addition, VOC emissions can provide information relating to previous conservation treatments.



Analysis of plastic objects using NIR spectrometer

Heritage Smells! covers a wide range of heritage including paper and books, objects previously treated with pesticides and modern materials. Analysis of modern materials from our historic plastic reference collection has taken place at both University College London and the University of Strathclyde using spectroscopic and chromatographic technique. Using both SPME-GC/MS and TD-GC/MS analysis, VOC

emissions from objects that have been subjected to accelerated degradation have been analysed. The aims of this part of the research are to understand in more detail the chemical processes that occur as modern materials age in museum environments, to explore the use of VOC analysis to monitor degradation and to identify any useful volatile indicators or predictors of degradation. A wide range of materials is being studied including cellulose acetate, cellulose nitrate, PVC, polyurethanes, polystyrene and rubber.

By analysing a large number of objects we hope to identify characteristic VOC signatures for different material types and to test the possibility of using these characteristic signatures for material identification i.e. can you identify a plastic just by “sniffing” it?

One of the major advantages of concentrating on analysis of VOC emissions is that the technique can potentially be entirely non-contact and non-invasive. It also has the ability to identify specific additives such as plasticisers, making it a useful complementary tool to spectroscopic analysis.

Heritage Smells! (2010-2013) involves researchers from University College London, the University of Strathclyde, the British Library, the British Museum and several other project partners including English Heritage and the National Records of Scotland. It is funded by UK AHRC/EPSRC Science and Heritage Programme

<http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/graduate/csh/research/projects/heritage-smells>).

Katherine Curran and Matija Strlic

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### **Research in New Strategies in Conservation of Contemporary Art**

New Strategies in Conservation of Contemporary Art is a collaborative, interdisciplinary research programme of Maastricht University (UM), the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE). It is partly funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).

The idea that an artwork is an autonomous, unchanging object has been challenged by art forms and movements such as conceptual art, art activism, happenings, performance art, installations and media art. Artworks made of degradable or fragile materials, installations made for specific sites, performances, works involving technologies that rapidly become obsolete all imply that an artwork might be changeable in its very nature. These kinds of works cannot or even should not be preserved in a supposedly ‘authentic’ state and the ‘scientific freeze’

model does not give adequate guidelines for conservation.

To help formulate an alternative theory and ethics for the conservation of contemporary art and to develop guidelines for conservation practice, five research projects set out to compare different conservation strategies and ask how they affect the biographies of the artworks involved. Three of the PhD projects are based at the University of Amsterdam and are supervised by professor Deborah Cherry (University of Amsterdam and University of the Arts London) and professor Glenn Wharton (New York University and Museum of Modern Art). One PhD and a Postdoc will be conducted at Maastricht University, supervised by project coordinator professor Renée van de Vall.



Conservators co-producing a variable conceptual artwork with artist Jan Dibbets, one of Sanneke Stigter's cases studies. Stigter ©.

The research program New Strategies in Conservation of Contemporary Art started in 2009. Within this project we have developed a model of writing ‘cultural biographies’ based on the investigation of material culture and research into the ‘anthropology of things’. In 2011 the outline of the project was presented and illustrated with some of the case studies during the ICOM-CC 16th Triennial Conference in Lisbon in the Working Group Theory and History of Conservation.

The first PhD thesis will be defended in September 2013 and is by Hanna Hölling, conservator and NWO funded research fellow at the University of Amsterdam. She has studied the aspects of time, identity and changeability in multimedia works of art using examples of the work by the Korean artist Nam June Paik. Her thesis *Re:Paik* addresses specific kinds of change in multimedia installations that test the limits of identity and scrutinises the notion of time underpinning conservation. Rethinking time in multimedia art, Hölling explores the archive as a harbour of identity – a destination and a beginning of changeable artworks.

Tatja Scholte, art historian and senior researcher at the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, will

analyse the impact of the conservation of site-specific installation art. It is a reflexive study on what characterisations can be given to 'site', while the broader aim is to gain insight into the effects of relocation and re-contextualisation for the continuation of site-specific works in a museum context. Since there is a field of tension between site-specificity and the physical, social and institutional contingency of place, she will examine the 'locational identity' of the museum and the decision-making in conservation, curatorial practices and administration towards site-specific installation art.

Sanneke Stigter, art historian and conservator of contemporary art, lecturer and researcher at the University of Amsterdam, concentrates on the passages between concept and material on decisive moments in the lives of artworks, with a focus on conceptual and photograph-based art, work that is situated on the crossroads of idea and materiality. Research is conducted from a distinctive viewpoint, namely from the act of conservation or reinstallation of the artwork itself. The focus is on *how* the artworks have been shaped and are re-shaped, and on what grounds, and what the impact is of material changes, of conservation practices, of working with the artist, of performing reinstallation and what this learns us about the changing role of the contemporary art conservator and new strategies and practices in conservation.

Ysbrand Hummelen, fine art conservator and senior researcher at the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, focuses on the role of technological research for restoration and conservation and is supervised by Renée van der Vall at Maastricht University. In this project the technological mediation and materiality in the networks of contemporary art works will be followed during the stage of conservation in the biography of several artworks.

Vivian van Saaze (PhD), author of the book *Installation Art and the Museum. Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks* (Amsterdam University Press 2013) is conducting postdoctoral research at Maastricht University. Her research project explores museum practices of contemporary art conservation by analysing the relationship between knowledge transfer and procedures of documentation in the re-execution of contemporary artworks with a focus on installation and performance based art. The aim of the research is to contribute to the awareness of the affects of documentation practices by closely examining the day-to-day practice of museum documentation procedures. Comparisons are made with knowledge transfer procedures developed in other art forms relying on re-execution practices, notably contemporary dance.

Deborah Cherry is an art historian who has published widely on the histories of modern and contemporary

art. She has lectured on the conservation approaches and treatments of an installation by Zarina Bhimji. Her essay 'Altered States: Mapping the social life of artworks: Zarina Bhimji's *She Loved to Breathe—Pure Silence*, 1987—2012' will be published later this year.

Project coordinator Renée van de Vall, philosopher and professor Art & Media at Maastricht University, will conclude the research project with a book that will be a synthesis of the projects that have been carried out as part of New Strategies in Conservation of Contemporary Art. To build a bridge between the practices and theory it will use the approach of 'moral casuistry' as developed for instance in medical and bio-ethical research to investigate whether this could be fruitful for conservation ethics.

Other researchers have attended meetings of the New Strategies in Conservation of Contemporary Art program, and are worth mentioning. Philosopher Sherri Irvin, from the University of Oklahoma, joined as a visiting scholar to share her work and thoughts on some of our writings. Annet Dekker, an independent curator and writer, is writing her PhD on strategies for documenting Net art at the Centre for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London under supervision of Matthew Fuller. Panda de Haan, MA candidate in studies of Museum curating and Art history at the University of Amsterdam, will present her final thesis on an analyses of the relation between conservation treatments and curatorial practices of works by Louise Bourgeois, Claes Oldenburg and Jan Schoonhoven. Art historian Paolo Martore is currently co-editing a forthcoming book in Italian on the preservation of contemporary artworks, which contains chapters from a number of project participants, in *Memoria del presente*, Castelveccchi, Roma 2013, co-edited with Massimo Carboni. It is hoped that the book will be translated into English in the near future. Furthermore, art historian Angela Matyssek, editor of the German book *Wann stirbt ein Kunstwerk? Konservierungen des Originalen in der Gegenwartskunst*, is working on a project about theories and practices of the original in contemporary art, art history and conservation, as a postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Literature and Art at Maastricht University.

Several research results of the group will be disseminated during the forthcoming conference *Performing Documentation* (outlined above). For more information on New Strategies in Conservation of Contemporary Art and provisional research summaries, please visit the project website: <http://www.newstrategiesinconservation.nl/>

Sanneke Stigter and members of New Strategies in Conservation

### ***The Conservation of Modern Art; a New Specialization within the Field of Art Conservation***

Dissertation by Lydia Beerkens, PhD in Arts, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012

In the last decades 'modern art conservation' has evolved from its early period with *ad hoc* solutions for material problems and mainly focussed on damage-repair, into a full specialization within the field of art conservation with its own specific conservation theory and methodology, weighed decision-making procedures and new treatment techniques.

In my thesis, the history of this development is described, starting in Germany where Heinz Althöfer was the first to publish on the complexity of modern art and techniques applied by the artists, whilst the intent of the artist was a yet undefined factor. In the Netherlands, the dramatic case of Barnett Newman's *Who's afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue, III* (1967-68) triggered the public discussion and a research project was started to develop new guidelines for modern art conservation, resulting in the international symposium *Modern Art: Who Cares?* in Amsterdam in 1997 and its publication in 1999. International networking arose and schools initiated training programmes, specially designed for modern and contemporary art conservation.

This, together with the many conferences taking place and the publications of many case-studies, brought better-defined conservation ethics, specific approaches for the various topics and issues in modern art conservation and a new working practice for conservators. In the second part of my thesis, seven themes are considered, in terms of how and to what extent these differ from the conservation of traditional works of art. The themes are:

- The different *decision-making* process
- The *biography of the artwork* as a decisive aspect
- The *artist interview* as a new tool
- The conservation of *plastics*
- The different concept of *authenticity* in modern art
- New ways of *Retouching*
- *Patina* in modern art

Each theme is explored through case-studies from my fifteen years of working practice for Dutch museum collections, research for SBMK and my work at SRAL, Maastricht. Several of the cases have been previously published as articles on for example the conservation of ZERO artworks, Arte Povera, kinetic art, outdoor art, graffiti art, plastics in art, and on the methodology of interviewing the artist. Inclusive of the analyses of



Congratulations Lydia!

materials and techniques, the interviewing of the artist, the assessment of the meaning of the work, the treatment approach and decision making as well as a critical review of the final result, this represents the today's internationally acknowledged professional standards in modern art conservation.

For further information and the full list of publications included in this thesis, please contact me at:

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Lydia Beerkens

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### ***Art in L.A.***

The Modern and Contemporary Art Research Initiative at the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) has launched a new project, *Art in L.A.* Growing out of the GCI's projects for Pacific Standard Time (previously reported in the MMCA Newsletter), *Art in L.A.* explores the innovative materials and fabrication processes used by Los Angeles-based artists from the 1960s onwards, and the implications these materials and processes have for the conservation of their work. Although focusing on local artists, the concerns and questions that arise from this project are relevant to the conservation of modern and contemporary art in general.

As part of this project, the GCI is producing a series of short videos of some of the artists under study in which they explain and demonstrate their materials and working processes, and discuss their attitudes towards the conservation of their work. Artists are chosen so that a range of materials and opinions towards conservation are included, building up a series of case studies that will contribute to the discussion within the field on how to incorporate an artist's thoughts into a conservation strategy.

The first of these videos, "Seeing Through Glass" (and available for viewing on the GCI YouTube channel at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lh\\_Ia9VCG-0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lh_Ia9VCG-0)), focuses on the art of Larry Bell. Although Bell works in a range of media, he is best known for his use of glass

and an industrial process called vacuum deposition of thin films. The process deposits, under vacuum, a micron-thin layer of metal or other material that modifies the way glass panels absorb, reflect, and transmit light, to stunning effect. Bell was filmed in his studio in Taos, New Mexico, discussing and demonstrating his working process, and sharing his thoughts on the conservation of his work. For Bell, "There is a patina that comes to everything with age. I don't try and fight that patina, I like it."



Helen Pashgian being interviewed by Rachel Rivenc for *Art in LA*

A second video (available in early Summer 2013) will feature Helen Pashgian. Long overlooked, Pashgian is now recognized as an important artist from the 1960s onwards, and a significant contributor to the Light and Space movement. In the 1960s/70s she used cast polyester resin to create translucent sculptures, delicately colored and often intimate in scale. Worried about the toxicity of polyester resin, she later switched to cast epoxy resin and sheet acrylic. The video includes footage of her re-creation of a large, translucent polyester disc stolen from an exhibition in the 1970s. She is firm in her opinions on conservation, with a very low tolerance for any sign of damage: "If there is a scratch on the surface, that's all you see".

The third video underway is dedicated to Peter Alexander, also a sculptor working with polyester resin in the 1960s and 70s, using the specific properties of polyester to manipulate the light and blur the boundaries between the work and its environment. In time, Alexander shifted his main focus from transparency to color and stopped working with polyester, not only because of its toxicity but also for its brittleness and poor handling properties. He is now using a polyurethane polymer to cast brightly colored sculptures and wall pieces. The video will explore his work with both materials and is expected to be available late summer 2013.

In the future, the project will expand to include younger artists and a wider variety of materials.

Rachel Rivenc

### **'Transformator' Transforms: Guiding Changes in an Artwork by Thomas Hirschhorn**

*Transformator* is an installation piece made by Thomas Hirschhorn in 1997. It is part of the collection of the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.) in Ghent. The large scale artwork is mainly made of industrially produced, non-durable materials and used objects. It consists of four piled tables, each covered with blue garbage bags which are fixed with brown tape. On each table lies a rock made of aluminium foil and a drawing or a collage. On the upper table a video shows the text *Etre en haut c'est etre en haut*. Next to the tables four big teardrops hang on the wall. They are made of aluminium foil, spray-painted in red and blue. All components of the artwork are interconnected with strings of squeezed aluminium foil.



Thomas Hirschhorn, *Transformator*, 1997. ca. 3,5 x 3,5 x 1,5 meter. Photo: S.M.A.K

In the first years of its existence *Transformator* has been exhibited frequently until its condition deteriorated. Subsequently the artwork remained in the depot for more than a decade. The aluminium foil has suffered mechanical damage. The paint on top of it is brittle and could not follow the movements of the aluminium foil, resulting in loose paint and paint loss. The teardrops were so fragile they could not be hung on the wall anymore. The garbage bags had tears and scratches. The degraded tape could not fix the bags to the tables anymore which made them hang loosely around the table tops.

During an internship in the conservation studio at S.M.A.K. the condition of *Transformator* was mapped.

The implication of the condition for the meaning of the artwork was considered carefully. A conservation strategy was defined which entails the replacement of some industrially produced parts. Furthermore, consolidation and retouching of paint on aluminium foil as well as paint on polypropylene (PP) tape was needed. Concerning the latter, future adhesion problems are to be expected because the a-polar PP surface is not appropriate for good adhesion. A supporting hanging system for the teardrops was also developed, and – clearly - *Transformer* will benefit greatly from a new storage system.

The long-term preservation of the video-component still poses some questions, mainly because CRT monitors will become obsolete. The exhibition of the artwork programmed in the near future is a good cause for contacting the artist and establishing a long-term preservation plan.

I would like to express my great appreciation to my project supervisor Lydia Beerkens, to my internship supervisor Marieke Verboven and to Steven Saverwyns en Wim Fremout from KIK/IRPA in Brussels for the instrumental analysis.

Karolien Withofs

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### Recovered: Keith Haring's *Channel Surf Club* (1987)

In July 1987 Keith Haring (1958 –1990) painted a large drawing on one of the walls of a sea-container, then used for storage of surf boards and gear for the 'Channel Surf Club' on the beach in Knokke, Belgium. This one day action was filmed: Haring with small jars of black paint and a brush drawing the swimmers and surfers in the 'sea', gulping out of the monstrous mouth, that was completed with dashes of red paint. After many years the container suddenly turned up on the beach for a few weeks in 2011, was then exhibited indoors at the Verbeke Foundation and sold to a private collection.



overview at Verbeke, 2011

The containers' steel frame construction, the wooden floor and steel plate entrance doors were in a reasonably good condition. However, the polyester laminated plywood of the walls and roof was broken and split open. The painting had suffered damage. The collectors wish to cut off the painted wall from the

container so it could be hung in his New York office didn't solve the problem of its 12 meters length. Also the painting would have needed a robust frame to prevent the laminated plywood from warping. Our argument that the container is a key element of Haring's artwork (*and* of importance to a future selling price) convinced the owner to conserve the complete container. Outdoor presentation would represent the artwork in its best way, but the painting would soon age and in particular the red paint would fade in a few years. This encouraged the new owner to find an indoor presentation space and made a lasting repair and retouching of the painting feasible.

The walls were repaired with fiberglass reinforced polyester (GRP), the damaged part of the roof replaced with new polyester-plywood plates and the entire roof strengthened with 'Triplex System', a layering of GRP that stays flexible under changing temperatures. The painting was cleaned, lacunas filled with polyester filler and losses were retouched in enamel paint in matching colors.

The treatment was designed for long term display indoors, presenting the complete painting as an iconic drawing in its original setting on the container. In retrospect the single reason that the painting survived 25 years was its indoor storage. The large scale (over 12 meters wide) of the picture is overwhelming. The robust container, with Keith Haring's typical sparkling figures celebrating leisure and beach life referring to times gone, can last for many decades when protected from direct sun and rain and from extreme climate.



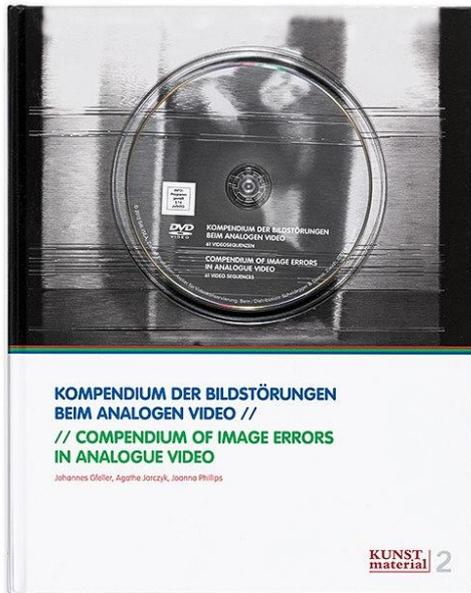
During Cleaning

The conservation of the container was performed by PolyProducts BV ([www.polyproducts.nl](http://www.polyproducts.nl)), under the guidance of their director Jan Schrama, and the treatment of the painting was conducted by Lydia Beerkens, SRAL. For more information email [lydia.beerkens@planet.nl](mailto:lydia.beerkens@planet.nl)

Lydia Beerkens and Jan Schrama

**Compendium of Image Errors in Analogue Video**

Johannes Gfeller, Agathe Jarczyk, and Joanna Phillips, with a contribution by Irene Schubiger. Edited by Swiss Institute for Art Research SIK-ISEA. 1st edition, 2013. Text English and German, Hardcover, 272 pages, 171 color and 34 b/w illustrations, 1 DVD. ISBN 978-3-85881-381-7



Over the past few decades, analogue videotapes have been commonly used as an artistic medium, from single-channel video works to complex installation pieces. However, even though videotapes are now featured in collections all over the world, many collection caretakers are at a loss when first confronted with the complexities of viewing, cataloguing and preserving analogue videotapes.

The aim of this dual-language reference book is to provide conservators, curators, art historians and students with tools and guidelines for the format identification, handling, viewing, cataloguing and comparative condition assessment of analogue video. The proper inspection and assessment of the video content is the only way to prevent unintended image errors – caused by a damaged videotape or video player, or by simple operator error – from being irreversibly merged with the artist’s original image content during the digitization process and thereby permanently compromising the artwork.

Along with an included DVD, the book illustrates in stills and moving images the twenty-eight most common image errors found on analogue video art tapes. In addition, the book provides background information on the historical and technical aspects of analogue video recording, including a chapter on how

artists have purposefully experimented with image distortion and manipulation in their own work. An extensive glossary explains the video technological terms used in the book.

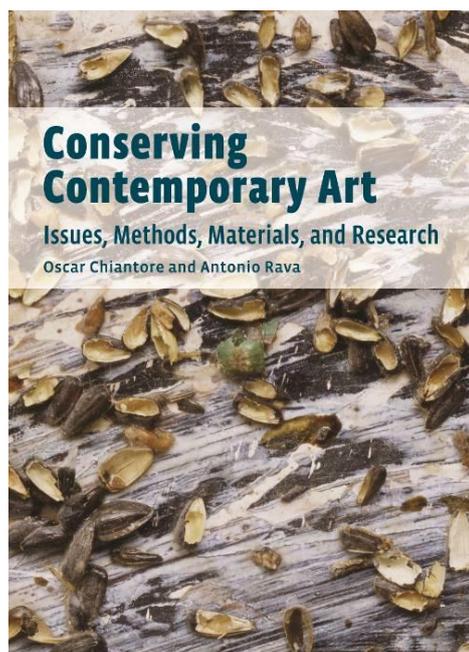
Johannes Gfeller is head of the Masters Program for the Conservation of New Media and Digital Information at Stuttgart State Academy for Art and Design. Agathe Jarczyk is a video conservator and lecturer at the Masters Program for the Conservation of Modern Materials and Media at the University of the Arts in Bern, Switzerland. Joanna Phillips is Associate Conservator of Contemporary Art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and specializes in conserving time-based media art.

European distribution through the publisher Scheidegger & Spiess: [http://www.scheidegger-spiess.ch/index.php?pd=ss&lang=en&page=books&view=co&book=487&booktype=order\\_1\\_releasedate&subject=1&artist=all&author=all](http://www.scheidegger-spiess.ch/index.php?pd=ss&lang=en&page=books&view=co&book=487&booktype=order_1_releasedate&subject=1&artist=all&author=all)

US distribution through Chicago University Press, starting June 2013.

**Conserving Contemporary Art  
Issues, Methods, Materials, and Research**  
Oscar Chiantore and Antonio Rava

Since the advent of the avant-garde in the early 20th century, visual artists have adopted new techniques and materials, some of whose characteristics of aging and wear are still largely unknown today. The conservator's intervention has become increasingly delicate, problematic, and experimental and requires not only technical knowledge of materials,



but also a greater awareness of the artist's intellectual universe. Now translated into English to reach a wider audience, this is one of the first books to give a comprehensive overview of the many considerations faced by the conservator of modern and contemporary art.

It takes into account both the material and ethical aspects of contemporary art - focusing on the enormous variety of techniques and materials used by contemporary artists- and its deterioration. It also emphasizes the need to understand the meaning of these works when devising an appropriate conservation strategy. A number of chapters are dedicated to specific conservation treatments, such as cleaning and reintegration, while the many issues introduced are illustrated with examples from painting, photography, sculpture, installation art, video, and web-based art.

Oscar Chiantore is a professor of chemistry and polymer technology at Turin University and Antonio Rava is a conservator and heads the conservation firm Rava & C. in Turin.

To order, visit:

[http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/books/conserving\\_contemporary\\_art.html](http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/books/conserving_contemporary_art.html)

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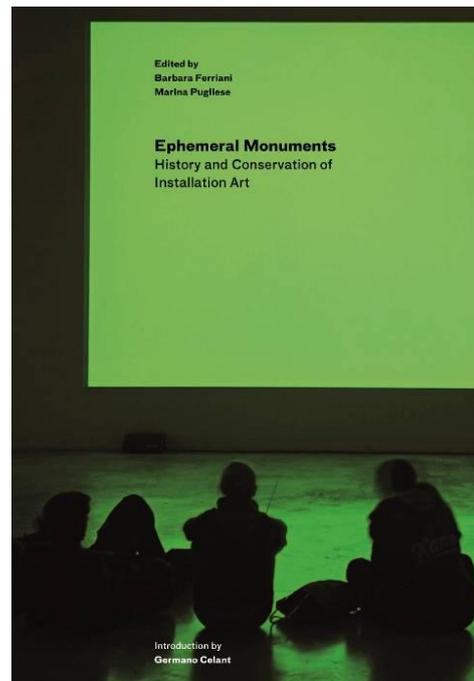
***Ephemeral Monuments: History and Conservation of Installation Art***

Edited by Barbara Ferriani and Marina Pugliese

Installation art is an evolving, often ephemeral medium that defies rigid categorization. It has also radically transformed the concepts of space, time, and the experience of art. The conservation field is faced with unique challenges over how best to manage and preserve the essence of these works. How detailed can documentation get? When does the replacement of original components become acceptable? How does the field cope with the obsolescence of certain technologies? By exploring the questions and dilemmas facing those who care for art installations, this book intends to raise awareness and promote discussion about the various conservation approaches for these works.

This volume is the English edition of the first book published in Italy to address the history and conservation of installation art. With an introduction by noted art historian Germao Celant, it includes essays by museum director and art historian Marina Pugliese – tracing the evolution of this art form, beginning with the experimental exhibitions of the early 20th century – and by contemporary art conservator Barbara Ferriani,

who addresses the problems associated with the assembly and installation of these works as well as their re-presentation and conservation. Other contributors address the specific nature of video installations, the role of interviews with living artists, and tools and techniques for documenting ephemeral works of art. The second part of the book is dedicated to specific installations by artists such as Mario Merz, Anselm Kiefer, and Bill Viola, whose works exemplify this unique art form.



Barbara Ferriani is a conservator and teaches conservation of contemporary art at the University of Ca' Foscari in Venice and at the Università Statale in Milan. Marina Pugliese is an art historian specializing in contemporary art techniques and conservation and the director of the Museo del Novecento (Museum of 20th Century Art) in Milan

To order, visit:

[http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/books/ephemeral\\_monuments.html](http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/books/ephemeral_monuments.html)

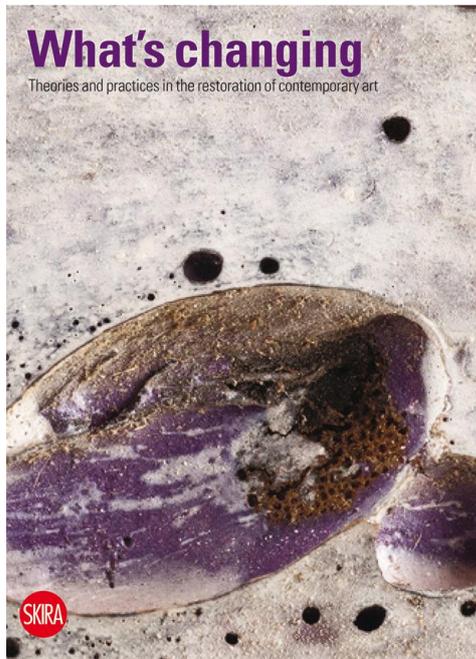
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***What's Changing. Theories and Practices in the Restoration of Contemporary Art.***

Edited by Maria Cristina Mundici and Antonio Rava

This book contains the papers from two significant conferences on the conservation issues of contemporary art, both held at the Contemporary Art Museum Castello di Rivoli, the first museum of contemporary art in Italy, but 25 years apart. The first, in 1987, was emblematic; it was organized by art historian Maria Cristina Mundici and conservator Antonio Rava, and represented the first debate in Italy

in which doubts, problems and approaches concerning the conservation of contemporary art were addressed by artists, conservators, curators and jurists. In 2012, 25 years after that conference, Mundici and Rava together with Beatrice Mertz the (then) Director of Castello di Rivoli, decided to re-open the 1987 debate, and organized the second conference, with the same *What's Changing...* name as the book



The aim of this conference was to track the advances that theory, research and practice in contemporary art conservation have made in a quarter of century in Italy and abroad. More than 20 international experts in the field, including conservators, historians, scientists, museum directors and lawyers were invited to share their knowledge, practical experiences, researches, issues and opinions. The debate focused first on conservation problems related specifically to Arte Povera works of art (of which the Castello di Rivoli has one of the most important collections), and opened up later to discussing more general issues.

Challenging and interesting topics such as the proposal for a theory of the conservation of Contemporary art, the border between restoration and reconstruction, the research and the conservation of modern materials, the relationship between artist and conservator and possible collaborations, the use of new analytical technique to investigate materials and degradation processes, were all discussed in depth

The book can be ordered at the Castello di Rivoli store: <http://www.castellodirivoli.org/shop/whats-changing-theories-and-practices-in-the-restoration-of-contemporary-art/>

Anna Laganà

### ***Installation Art and the Museum: Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks***

Vivian Van Saaze, Maastricht University

Installation art has become mainstream in artistic practice. However, acquiring and displaying such works produces challenges for curators and conservators with obsolete technologies, ephemeral materials and other issues concerning care and management. By analyzing three in-depth case studies, the author sheds new light on the key concepts of traditional conservation while exploring how these concepts apply to contemporary art.



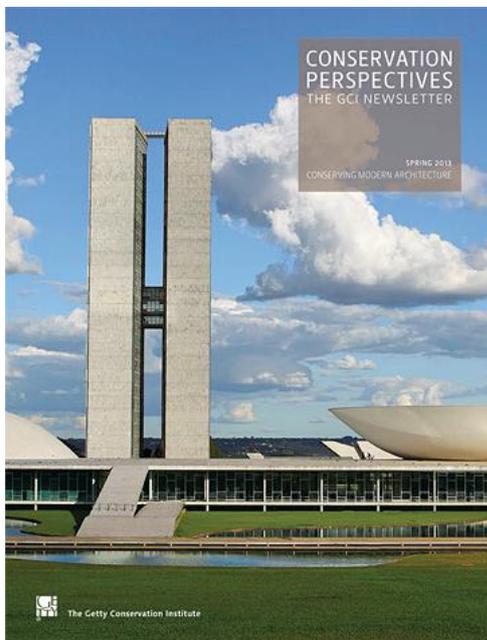
*Installation Art and the Museum* is essential reading for scholars and professionals who work in the art world, along with anyone with serious interest in contemporary art and its display. It is an engaging account of what goes on behind museum doors as staff struggle to maintain a sense of authenticity with variable art. Van Saaze reveals the tensions between artists, curators, and conservators who re-create and alter these works for public display. Video requires reformatting and new exhibition equipment as technologies go obsolescent. Installation works change when re-designed for new gallery spaces. Artists challenge the notion of single authorship by transferring decision-making to museum staff or by distributing their role through collaborative practice. The art examined in this book is inherently unstable, and its care provides a rich context for understanding what happens when agreed-upon social practice in museums is disrupted by external change. To order: <https://www.aup.nl/index.php/catalogsearch/result/?q=Installation+Art+and+the+Museum>

Glenn Wharton

### **Conservation Perspectives: The GCI Newsletter**

The last two issues of the GCI's newsletter may be of interest! The most recent, Spring 2103 Issue, focuses on Conserving Modern Architecture. It contains a lead article 'Modern Matters: Breaking the Barriers to Conserving Modern Heritage, by Susan Macdonald, as well as shorter articles on 'The Eames House: Conserving a California Icon' by Kyle Normandin; 'Brasilia: Preservation of a Modernist City', by Danilo Matoso Macedo and Sylvia Ficher, and 'Managing Change and Modern Landscapes' by Charles A. Birnbaum. It also includes a roundtable – titled: 'Modernity, Temporality, and Materiality: A Discussion about the Conservation of Modern Architecture' with Catherine Croft, Hubert-Jan Henket, and Johannes Widodo, with Susan MacDonald as the moderator. View or download it here:

[http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/newsletters/28\\_1/](http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/newsletters/28_1/)



The Fall 2012 version was on The Conservation of Public Art. This included an overview essay on 'Conservation of Contemporary Public Art' by Rika Smith McNally and Lillian Hsu, and more focused articles on 'The Return of *América Tropical*' by Leslie Rainer; 'Temporary Art? The Production and Conservation of Outdoor Sculptures in Fiberglass-Reinforced Polyester', by Lydia Beerkens and Frederike Breder, and 'Conservation and Care of Sculptural Monuments' by Andrew Naylor. The roundtable discussion – 'Out in the Open: A Discussion about the Conservation of Outdoor Public Art' included Susan Gray, Friederike Waentig and Ruri Yampolsky, and was moderated by Rachel Rivenc. View / download it here: [http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/newsletters/27\\_2/](http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/newsletters/27_2/)



Both issues also contain a page of key resources on each topic, in addition to other GCI news

### **In Conversation with: Eleonora Nagy on the Conservation of Calder's *Circus***

*Rachel Rivenc (RR): Hi Nora - can you briefly introduce yourself and the Whitney Museum?*

Eleonora (Nora) Nagy (EN): The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York was founded by a sculptor, Gertrude Whitney in 1931 to provide America's artists with a prominent public space for their work to be shown, collected and studied for the benefit of the broad public. With its Biennials and exhibitions the museum is still perceived as the artists' museum and interactions with artists are primal part of its functions. As the institution's first Conservator for Three Dimensional Works of Art, I feel fortunate being part of such an organization.

*Tom Learner (TL): You recently undertook a major project on one of the Whitney's most 'beloved' pieces: Alexander Calder's *Circus*. Can you first tell us a little bit about the piece and how it came to the Whitney?*

EN: Calder's *Circus* was created primarily in Paris where the young artist lived, between 1926 and 1931, and during his frequent travels back to New York. It looked like a miniature circus, made of small figures, accessories, tent, trapeze, small mechanisms to set figures in motion, musical instruments, old records to be played on a phonograph, saw dust, peanuts and other non-art materials, amounting to more than 200 items. Calder's *Circus* really is one of America's earliest 20<sup>th</sup> century performance pieces. The *Circus* was the catalyst for Calder's mobiles to follow, and

also the project which earned him international recognition. Calder gave performances in Europe and the US from the late 1920 until the 1960s, carrying his *Circus* in five suitcases, across multiple continents. Calder performed his *Circus* act by act, taking the role of the ringmaster, who introduces acts, animates, and offers witty commentary in English and in French.



Alexander Calder performing Calder's Circus, New Preston, CT, c. 1956 at the home of Dr Bernard Reiss. Photo Bernard Nathanson. Whitney Museum of American Art, NY: Calder's archives.

About two dozen acts may have been performed with a 'beer-and-peanuts' intermission. The audience often responded to the performer's comments, and occasionally helped out by tooting a horn or pulling the string for the charioteers. Calder responded to current daily news in his performance, so the performances always remained fresh. Every performance was different and was immensely popular, entertaining young and old. It was a sensation. Newspapers and professional circus critics wrote enthusiastically about it. One of the performances was even incorporated into Thomas Wolfe's book: *You Can't Go Home Again*, 1940.

In October 1970, Calder placed the *Circus* on long-term loan at the Whitney, but after Calder's death the artist's estate decided to sell the *Circus* to fulfill its tax obligations to France and the US. In April 1982 the Whitney faced an ultimatum; to purchase the *Circus* for \$ 1.25 million within 46 days, or lose it forever to potential foreign museums. At that time the Whitney's entire yearly budget was less than half that amount. A heroic campaign was launched across the country with Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus parading on Madison Avenue in front of the Museum with an elephant (carrying Gertrude Whitney's granddaughter on its back) and school kids contributing their pennies for the cause. Calder's *Circus* formally entered the Whitney's collection in 1983 with a credit line of more than 500 donors.

*RR: When was it last displayed?*

EN: The circus was immediately displayed in the lower gallery in 1970 when it entered the museum on indefinite loan from the artist. It has been on almost

continuous view, partially or fully, since then. Selected figures from Calder's *Circus* are on display in the current exhibition *American Legends* at the museum. People come to the Whitney specifically to see Calder's *Circus*.

*TL: What prompted the project and the conservation treatment?*

EN: Decades of use by Calder, combined with near continuous display, wore heavily on the *Circus* and it was time to address the piece as a whole. Previous treatments addressed individual figures or items that needed repair, but there was no cohesive overall concept. We were also surprised that contrary to its significance, little was known about the *Circus*. We had to gain an overall understanding of what the *Circus* really meant to formulate a long-term conservation plan. In 2008 we received funding from the J. Paul Getty Foundation to complete a comprehensive research and conservation treatment of Calder's *Circus*.

*RR: Can you outline what the main conservation requirements and challenges are with this piece?*

EN: How do you preserve a performance piece that is motionless, both because of its condition and because its only performer passed away? How do you make it come alive? Conservators are trained to treat the physical matter. How do you preserve the most important aspect, the performance aspect?

*TL: Apart from the more traditional collaboration with art historians and curators, you also collaborated with more unusual professions for this project: acrobats for example! Can you talk about that?*

EN: Calder's motions were artistic creations, based on real life. He knew the circus well. He worked as an illustrator for the National Police Gazette sketching the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey circus and his illustrations were published under the title: "Sandy Calder goes a-Sketching at Coney Island". To assess movement we also turned to newsreels, film footage, photographs, moving pictures of the 1925 and 1926 acts at Ringling that Calder observed. We had to understand what the difference was between the real physical performance and artistic creation.

We also discovered still photographs of some unrecorded acts. Professional acrobats studied Calder's performances on films with us, performed acts for us, and then explained all variations of movements we see only in parts in Calder's films. These sessions highlighted which movements (or parts of movements) Calder chose for his acts and at which point he exercised his artistic freedom to change them. As a result, new findings emerged about how Calder conceived and executed movement, including

materials and techniques; a recognition that he remained an accurate commentator of some of the most celebrated circus acts of his age, while transforming a circus performance to art. Such information occasionally changed the course of treatment the characters finally received. We also contacted clowns and museums of circus history in an attempt to understand the difference between American and French clowns and their roles in his circus. We also located and interviewed a handful of individuals who saw Calder performing the circus live, giving us additional perspectives.

*RR: As a conservator, what do you think your responsibility is towards this piece?*

EN: Our main responsibility is to keep the performance nature of the *Circus* alive by means of preservation. The films must be preserved as the primary evidence of what the *Circus* was. Without the films we cannot understand the role and meaning of the figures and various items. Physical remains of the *Circus*, figures, mechanisms, lamp, tent, and accessories must be preserved with the new understanding we gained through our project. This physical evidence is our source for potential new clues in the future. We still have a few characters and items whose purpose remains unknown. We also took great pains to digitize and preserve the original music of the *Circus* that was inaccessible before treatment.

*TL: What conservation interventions did you end up doing on Circus?*

EN: We started with the standard conservation protocol: physical inspection of all items and based on those findings, compiled a proposal for consolidation, replacement, and repair of items. We soon realized that we did not understand the purpose of a significant number of items, so we started to do some deeper research.

The challenge of this unusual work transformed the traditional relationship between conservator, art historian and archivist. Carol Mancusi-Ungaro (Associate director of Conservation and Research), Eleonora Nagy (conservator), Joan Simon (art historian) Anita Duquette (archivist) all worked together in an intense, around the clock, collaboration. For example, the stooped back of the 'Little Clown' and the missing half of the beard of the 'Bearded Lady' could not be assumed to be age related or accidental loss until historical research of the character proved the feature right or wrong.

Alexander Calder (1899-1976) with *Two Acrobats*, 1970. Photograph by Marvin Schwartz. Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Calder Archives, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



This worked the other way as well when conservation clues gave rise to historical findings. Signs of wear and old repairs had to be continuously re-evaluated throughout the research. We ended up leaving a lot of clumsy old repairs; these were Calder's repairs, worn surfaces and seemingly battered items, because Calder used them that way

We arrived at a conservation policy of minimal intervention, directly intervening only if a piece was about to be lost due to extreme material degradation. We preserved the Calder's Circus music, newsreels, films, and physical items, and focused on preservation by indirect means; packing storage and transferring information to more permanent media.

*RR: What prompted you to make a video about this particular project? Is there information that film can convey better than other media?*

EN: In the middle of the project we already knew that a written final report would not do it justice. How can words depict the visual and audio feat of vivacious three-dimensional movement? Verbal description would remain cumbersome and never give you the full experience. So, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro secured funding from The Pierre and Tana Mattisse Foundation and Robert Lehman Foundation to make a film about the conservation of Calder's Circus. We consider this film a faithful final report of our project that successfully conveys the performative quality of Calder's Circus.

*TL: Can you describe the film in a sentence?*

EN: A 12-minute film, a glimpse of what conservators and scholars learned and now think about for the preservation of Calder's Circus as a result of their study.

*RR: The conclusion at the end of the film is somewhat sad. You seem to be saying that the piece is essentially "gone". Can you elaborate on that?*

EN: I do not find it so sad. We did not realize until well into the research how much Calder's acts and comments responded to news of the day and how much information we lose out of context. For example, I never understood why the audience laughs so hard when the two Japanese wrestlers are thrown around instead of wrestling until we learned that they referred to the love triangle of Foujita and Koyanagi, two Japanese artists (and friends of Calder), who lived in Paris and courted the same painter, the beautiful Fernande Barrie. Similarly to narrating this love story, Calder commented on international celebrities and public figures in his circus. His characters were similar to today's Hollywood stars and public figures; his comments were comparable to entertainment news about Lilo, or Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

Calder is not with us anymore. We cannot act out his performances, imitate his comments and opinions or mimic his chunky hands. What this research enables us to do is to make mental and visual connections between the static display of the art work and the animated performance it once was. As a result of our research, the circus is now displayed by act, grouping specific characters, mechanisms and accessories together. The acts are usually shown in conjunction with at least one of the seven historical films that show Calder performing his Circus. We also have photographs and newsreels of the actual circus performers that Calder based his characters. Our research continues today as we continue to locate and interview individuals who saw Calder performing his Circus in person.

*TL: Is there some sense that all that wonderful archival video footage of Calder performing the piece is now becoming the closest thing to the actual work?*

EN: Film footage can never replace the work of art. The Circus is a work of art with or without the film. However, the film is the primary evidence of how it was used and the context it was performed in.



Alexander Calder with Thomas N. Armstrong, III, Director during the Reinstallation of Calder's Circus, 1975, lobby of the Whitney Museum, N.Y.

Whitney Museum of American Art, N.Y.; Calder Archives

Photograph by Pedro E. Guerrero Archive © Pedro E. Guerrero

*RR: How did this project change your understanding of Calder as an artist?*

EN: In some circles Calder is perceived as a child genius who just happened to be in the right place at the right time, whose fame simply fell into his lap. We saw a Calder who conscientiously planned his career and was ambitious advancing it. He wanted to be famous and worked hard for it. Unknown and new in Paris, Calder used his Circus to make contact with artistic

celebrities. He carefully planned his invitations and then used his new contacts' contacts to extend his connections. Calder was conscious about the performance quality of the *Circus* and actively handpicked filmmakers (Jean Painlevé, Carlos Vilardebo, Hand Richter and Herbert Matter) to document his performances. These are the only major films we know of.

Calder was more political than we thought and his political statements can be detected in his *Circus*. Historically the real circus was very segregated. Black minstrel bands were not permitted to play in the show orchestra in the main tent. In 1920-1940s the main tent Circus Band played symphonic, opera melodies and traditional march music. With the exception of a few tunes, Calder threw out the Circus Band's strict and formal music and selected recordings of jazz, fox-trot, samba and ethnic music for his performance. Besides the main show (Big Top), there was a less expensive Side Show in every circus, this is where lower classes and people of color mingled, where spectacles, extreme acts were performed. Calder mixed together both Big Top and Side Show events in his own *Circus*, pointing out the segregation and racism he disagreed with. For example, he mocked the Big Top's patriotic live *Living Sculpture* performances – near nudes painted to imitate marble or bronze sculptures, the 'high art statues' of the *Tableaux Vivants* – by reducing them to white-painted clothes pins in his *Circus* and pairing them directly with Fanni, a hoochie-koochie belly dancer from the Side Show. Seeing his filmed performance, Calder's vote clearly goes for Fanni.



Nora Nagy

*TL: Who is the primary audience for this movie? Where can we see your Conserving Calder's Circus film and how can we access the films of Calder performing his Circus?*

EN: The audience is anyone who is curious about Calder's *Circus*. The 12-minute film *Conserving Calder's Circus* is accessible on the Whitney's website at: [http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/Artists?play\\_id=856](http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/Artists?play_id=856)

The longest film recording of Calder's performance is *Le Grand Cirque 1927*, a 45-minute color film made by Jean Painlevé, and is available on DVD at the Whitney Museum Store. The original Painlevé film is in the archives of Les Documents Cinématographiques in Paris. Short clips from various performances can also be found on YouTube.

#### In Conversation with: Tim Bechthold on FUTURE TALKS

*Tom Learner (TL): Hi Tim, can you introduce yourself and the International Design Museum where you work, in Munich?*

Tim Bechthold (TB): I'm head of conservation of Die Neue Sammlung, The International Design Museum, Munich. I started my education with a three-year training as a cabinetmaker. The following three years I studied conservation of furniture and wooden sculptures at a private academy, called Goering-Institute, and completed successfully as a Statens-approved conservator. During this time I was already working at a studio for paper conservation.

After working as a freelance conservator of furniture for one year I decided to continue my education and signed up at the Technische Universität in Munich at the newly installed chair of Conservation, Arts Technology and Conservation Science. In the course of my studies I focused more and more on the conservation of modern materials and completed with a diploma thesis on polyurethane in furniture design of the late 1960s. The combination of my experiences in furniture and paper conservation, preliminary investigations on the degradation of plastics both at the Museum für angewandte Kunst (MAK), Vienna and the Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein combined with my thesis was the trigger for an interesting challenge.

In spring 2002 the Neue Sammlung, The International Design Museum Munich was busy preparing its relocation from a tiny setting nearby the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum to the newest and biggest museum in Germany at that time, the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich. I was offered the job as the responsible conservator, which didn't exist before. The challenge was to organize the installation of more than 500 objects into a permanent exhibition space of 3.000 m<sup>2</sup> in three month and to install and establish a conservation department. Today, with some 80,000 objects from the fields of industrial design, the applied arts, and graphic design, this state museum boasts, in its permanent collection, the world's largest industrial design collection and is one of the leading design museums dealing with objects from the 20th and 21st century.

Since the foundation of the Conservation Department we have a strong focus on the conservation of degraded modern materials and modern and contemporary design, in a broader sense. Through the research into the deterioration and preservation of the collections, the development of new conservation processes and the investigations of original technology, our department has become an important centre for the conservation of design



The International Design Museum, Munich.

*Rachel Rivenc (RR): You started the FUTURE TALKS conference series in 2009, how was the idea born?*

TB: To be honest I was a bit dissatisfied with conferences mainly discussing ethical questions of conserving modern materials... I think at that time many of my colleagues felt the same. I intended to create something focusing more on practical issues, a conference with inspiring topics and a friendly atmosphere. To launch this baby in 2009 was the result of numerous exciting projects we engineered the years before and which were all somehow related to the degradation of polymers. With these experiences we were able then to define possible needs and to fall back on a broad network of colleagues and experts in this field. A wonderful starting point for a project like this. Now, with the international renowned biennial conference FUTURE TALKS, we have established a ground-breaking, international platform to discuss and exchange experiences on the conservation of design objects made of modern materials. See: <http://die-neue-sammlung.de/event/?lang=en>

*TL: When you did FUTURE TALKS 009, was the idea to organize a single event, or were you already thinking in terms of a recurring conference series?*

TB: Right from the start we thought about organizing a recurring event. The idea was to offer the possibility to follow innovative and actual conservation projects on a regular basis. If you focus on the conservation of modern materials the basic necessity of networking is

particularly evident. It is brilliant to see that with each conference more and more people get to know each other better and better. This is the best starting point for networking, new co-operations and to avoid parallel research projects of the same topics.

The overwhelming success of the last two conferences confirmed our expectations to launch a symposium of this kind regularly. I always wanted to organize a system that brings professionals together to discuss and share knowledge in conservation of modern materials in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

*RR: Have you seen the audience grow or change/diversify?*

TB: At the moment we are busy organizing the third in the FUTURE TALKS series. After only two conferences it is a bit difficult to speak about a change in our audience. I'm really glad that we have an audience which is very open-minded; interested in studying further, making contacts and which meets my boldest dreams, mentioned above. Besides colleagues from the applied arts and design sector an increasing part of our audience are conservators of modern art. We have many students and luckily FUTURE TALKS has not been affected by dogmatisms or individual profiling.

*TL: And have you noticed changes in the content discussed or the directions of the material presented?*

TB: What is interesting is that we can observe a switch from the more 'traditional' plastic materials to the more 'innovative' plastic materials. In the beginning of conferences, related to the conservation of modern materials, most of all cellulose nitrate, cellulose acetate and the very unstable plastics like soft polyurethane foam, rubber and PVC were dominating the discussions. Now the focus is on more stable materials as well as on new innovative materials, like for example Polycaprolactone or Corian®.

Furthermore with FUTURE TALKS we like to offer a platform for technologies in modern materials. It is so important to understand both the material itself and the making / production process of certain objects in order to define the right conservation treatment. Fortunately we have an increasing number of contributions related to technologies and modified analysis techniques, which will improve the decision-making processes in conserving these materials.

We are always looking for voices which are a bit different; maybe not directly relevant to our field at the moment, but which may offer possibilities to rethink your own position, to consider unusual co-operations, new treatments etc. For example, at the last conference we had a lecture about self-healing polymers; a project initiated by the Fraunhofer Institute with a focus on the plastics industry.



Tim Bechthold

*RR: FUTURE TALKS is specifically about design and applied arts – do you feel that these areas tend to be overlooked? Do they have very specific conservation needs compared to other types of cultural heritage?*

TB: FUTURE TALKS is a conference about design and applied art, but if you look at the contributions and topics discussed you will see that there is a broad intersection to the conservation of modern art; most of all when it comes to the degradation of modern materials; the common base for both disciplines. This is why we are glad to integrate contributions from this discipline as well. You could say that approximately a quarter of the lectures are dealing with the issues of the conservation of modern art.

For example think of installations from Thomas Hirschhorn, Pippilotti Rist or Olafur Eliasson and you suddenly have the straight link to our interests and questions. It is obvious that in our business the topic of technology is far more relevant. The objects we have to deal with are products stemming from the interplay of creative people, engineers and the industry. So typically most products follow a very precise manufacturing process. However it is quite challenging when it comes to questions like how to handle surfaces with traces of use, modified elements or degraded material? Most of our collectibles are objects of daily use. When entering the collection they often show traces of use, are damaged or the synthetic material is significantly degraded. This dramatic change in appearance often blurs the original intention of the designer. What is acceptable? For us this is the most important aspect to start our discussions to define a suitable conservation concept.

*TL: Is it possible to generalize about what you feel are the most pressing needs for the conservation of modern applied art and design objects?*

TB: I think we as conservators have to cooperate more with plastic engineers, designers and the plastics producing industry. Conferences like the FUTURE TALKS will help us to sensitize the public to the fact that even if we take serial products we are faced to a gradual degradation process of the material and, in worst case, a loss of cultural identity and history. Nowadays this becomes more difficult when it comes to objects with a designed interface, like for example smart phones. It is not enough to preserve their materiality (casing etc.). Most of the actual design is virtual: The digital users interface. We definitely have to develop conservation strategies for to handle these challenges.

Another exciting aspect is the mass-produced design object. We are all very proud of prototypes and one-off pieces in our collections. Often they are difficult to acquire and rather expensive. We consequently devote a lot of time and research in objects like this. But what I'd like to emphasize is this: Mass-produced objects are often produced using cheap and unstable materials. Furthermore it is more difficult to find material information about mass-produced objects than from one-of-a-kind pieces. These mass-produced goods are available in large numbers for a certain period of time; then there is a change in production and with this, a change in mentality. Very often these goods are thrown away and nobody takes care of them anymore. So we have to be aware of this!

*RR: What is the future of FUTURE TALKS?*

TB: Our nearest future is the long-awaited publication of the post-prints from FUTURE TALKS 011 which will be published at the forthcoming conference; the next FUTURE TALKS 013 (See upcoming conferences). For the further future of the FUTURE TALKS, I would like to link the FUTURE TALKS community to launch an international research project on the investigation of technological details in design. To reassure a distinct allocation of collectibles it is indispensable to collect data on many production details as possible. In most collections of design it is still common to date objects of the year they were designed. But if you take objects which are produced over a period of, let's say, 40 years, materials and technology often are changing. This is why I'm convinced that we have to discuss the conservation of materials, the importance of authenticity and the transfer of information.

Further topics will be related both to the development of new technologies and intelligent materials and to an increasing number of exhibition tours around the world in unusual exhibition spaces.

## Membership of ICOM-CC and MMCA

We now have almost 270 active members in MMCA, but there is still plenty of room for expansion! Many people assume they are MMCA members because they used to be on the group's mailing list. However, it has now been clarified by the Directory Board that *only* ICOM-CC or ICOM members can be *members* of any of its working groups.

For those of you who are already ICOM-CC members, all you need to do is register your ICOM-CC membership on-line at [www.icom-cc.org](http://www.icom-cc.org) and then choose MMCA as one of your working groups. If you are already registered online, then just find the "Join More Working Groups" button when you next log in, and choose MMCA. If you are not yet registered, the best way of doing this now is to email Joan Reifsnyder ([secretariat@icom-cc.org](mailto:secretariat@icom-cc.org)) and request log-in details.

For those of you who are not members of ICOM-CC and wish to join, some of the benefits of joining are:

- The **ICOM card** which grants free (or reduced rate) entry to most museums around the world.
- Reduced registration fees at ICOM-CC Triennial and Interim Meetings
- Priority for paper/poster acceptance at the ICOM-CC Triennial Meetings
- Second level access to the ICOM-CC website, providing all-time access to documents such as newsletters, abstracts etc

Joining is slightly long-winded, but once done, renewal is very straightforward. First, you need to join ICOM itself. The cost of full ICOM membership varies from country to country, but is typically set at around €70 (Euros) / \$100 (USD) per annum. Once an ICOM member, there is no further cost to join ICOM-CC or its working groups. To go via this route, first apply to the National Committee of your country of residence. Details found at: <http://icom.museum/nationals.html>. Once processed, you then join ICOM-CC by choosing Conservation as your International Committee. See [http://icom.museum/join\\_int\\_committee.html](http://icom.museum/join_int_committee.html)

There is a cheaper, temporary alternative – and that is to join ICOM-CC directly as a "Friend of ICOM-CC". This costs €40/year - applications are made directly to ICOM-CC, and you can pay using Paypal. But please note that with this option you do NOT get an ICOM card. It is also only allowed for one year, after which full membership is expected. See: <http://www.icom-cc.org/196/become-a-friend/information/>

To find more about all ICOM-CC membership benefits, working groups and activities, please consult the ICOM-CC website (<http://www.icom-cc.org/>)