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On the lives and futures of contemporary art at the museum

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Contemporary art challenges the traditional idea of a museum as well as institutional procedures related to collection care and preservation. Conventionally, visual artworks have been perceived as fixed, unique, material entities created and finished at a particular time, and museum approaches to collecting and preserving them were established accordingly. Nevertheless, contemporary art often resists this definition and undermines dogmas of material authenticity and artist's intent, as well as the conviction that an object's integrity resides in its physical features. Taking as its focus the triangle of relationships between an artist, a museum and a contemporary artwork as collectible, this study investigates how contemporary artworks by Mirosław Bałka, Danh Vo and Barbara Kruger are collected, documented and conserved in today's institutions. It looks at how (and whether) new methods developed in the field of contemporary art conservation, such as the artist's interview, are adopted by museums, and attempts to identify factors undermining their effectiveness. By looking at contemporary art as a new paradigm of artistic practice and building on notions such as musealisation, art project as art form and art object as document, this study works towards a theoretical model that address the incompatibility between a traditional museum approach to collecting and preserving and the features of contemporary art. By employing and extending concepts introduced by conservation theorist Hanna Hölling and the notion of 'anarchives' by media theorist Siegfried Zielinski, this study adopts the model of the 'artwork-as-(an)archive'. Starting from the premise that our future understanding of contemporary artworks can only be constructed through traces of documentation, this model grants documents a status equal to that of art objects and obliges institutions to care for them on a similar basis. Besides its capacity to facilitate conservation, the artwork-as-(an)archive model is here considered as a space for collaboration between artists and museums, a space to be collectively shaped, filled and nourished that fosters transparency and inclusiveness.

Collecting Archives of Objects and Stories



Collecting Archives of Objects and Stories: On the lives and futures of contemporary art at the museum

Agnieszka B. Wielocha

Collecting Archives of Objects and Stories:
On the lives and futures
of contemporary art at the museum

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

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aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
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