The use of photogrammetry in the conservation of painted outdoor sculpture

Addressing Jean Dubuffet’s Jardin d’Email

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DIE NEUE SAMMLUNG
THE DESIGN MUSEUM
THEY’VE GOT PLASTIC CHRISTMAS TREES NOW. THEY’RE HARD TO TELL FROM THE REAL ALUMINUM ONES.

MILTON BERLE
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IMPRINT
Together with the last five editions, this book provides a perfect insight into important research projects and relevant topics on the conservation of the modern over the last 10 years.

Die Neue Sammlung as a museum is happy and very grateful for this FUTURE TALKS format. Here the scientific research of our house meets for an international exchange with experts and personalities of conservation and design and finds succumbingrobust communication. The questions about material and technologies in design and art of the 20th and 21st centuries are as important for our museum as the presentation of objects.

The idea, concept and realisation of the FUTURE TALKS lies in the hands of Tim Bechthold, Head of our Conservation Department. To him and his team Julia Demeter, Helena Ernst and Christian Huber great thanks to their profound commitment and perfect execution this conference series came to life and ever-lasting youth. It is moving and quite motivating that after ten years the idea and the format of this event is not just alive but still growing. We are very grateful for this! This conference / publication wouldn’t have been possible without the support of the following people and institutions. Therefore we would like to thank:

The editorial board which invested a lot of spare time and enthusiasm to contribute considerably to the quality of this book.

All authors for providing their interesting contributions and the patience to keep the ball, even if it took sometimes longer than expected.

Felix Kempf. His visual design of the FUTURE TALKS has created a strong and memorable corporative identity, that this publication is not just another collection of scientific papers.

Last but not least to our sponsors and their generous support: Wuestenrot Stiftung, Schoolofche Stiftung, Definer und Johann, Kremer Pigmente, Quittenbaum and Plank.

By the time this publication appears, the seventh conference – FUTURE TALKS 021: Smart Solutions in the Conservation of the Modern – will already be underway. In view of the Corona pandemic, this time in a digital format. It is helpful to have this alternative but we are all looking forward to welcoming you back in real life next time at the FUTURE TALKS 023!

ANGELIKA NOLLERT
DIRECTOR GENERAL, DIE NEUE SAMMLUNG
THE DESIGN MUSEUM
ABSTRACT
This research evaluates the use of innovative imaging technologies to aid the conservation of large-scale contemporary painted outdoor sculpture. It explores photogrammetry and image-based 3D modelling as tools during the conservation of Jardin d’émail (1974) by Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985), owned by the Kröller-Müller Museum.

In partnership with the 4D Research Lab at the University of Amsterdam, 3D digital models of the sculpture and two scale-models were created. This research assesses the effectiveness of using 3D digital models to inform the repainting of the sculpture’s black lines on white background as part of the treatment process. The use of photogrammetry to document the patterns and forms of the sculpture and scale-models is also evaluated. The creation of 3D digital models from the photogrammetric data allows for deviation analysis to be carried out, highlighting where areas of the scale-model and sculpture deviate significantly. The 3D models were uploaded on an app for use on tablets to enable responsive access during treatment. This research showed that photogrammetry is not only useful for large scale sculpture documentation, but can also aid the treatment of outdoor sculpture by producing geometrically accurate representations of the scale-model to be used as a reference during repainting.

KEYWORDS
Photogrammetry, image-based modelling, structure-from-motion, painted outdoor sculpture, Jean Dubuffet

INTRODUCTION
Painted outdoor sculpture is under constant threat by the outdoor environment, meaning that repainting is often a necessary part of conservation maintenance (Beerkens and Learner 2014). Before carrying out such a treatment, documentation of the original state is highly important to act as a reference for repainting. However, the documentation of outdoor sculptures can be a challenging task, especially when the sculpture is extremely large, has a textured surface, or has harder-to-reach areas. A sculpture which displays these issues is Jardin d’e-mail (1974) by Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985). The sculpture is painted white with hand-painted black markings based on the design of a 1:10 scale-model made by the artist. At 600 m² it is one of the largest hand-painted sculptures in Europe which visitors can enter and walk on. Due to this interactive feature and exposure to the outdoor environment, it has a known history of overpainting. The conservation treatment in 2019 stripped back years of overpaint, revealing original hand-painted markings. It is intended that the sculpture is repainted based on the design of the scale-model. Documenting the found markings and scale-model is crucial for ensuring repainting is as accurate as possible to Dubuffet’s intended design. Similarly, the documentation should function as a practical tool when it comes to repainting.

A solution to the issue of documenting outdoor sculpture for repainting can be met with innovative technologies such as photogrammetry, which uses photographs to create 3D models. This technique is being used more frequently in the heritage sector as the main piece of hardware (a reliable digital camera) is becoming more affordable. The objective of this research is to see how photogrammetry can aid treatment decision-making of repainting Jardin d’e-mail.

JARDIN D’ÉMAIL
Jean Dubuffet’s Jardin d’émail (Figure 1) is an interactive outdoor sculpture that was first envisioned by the artist in a scale-model made of glass-fibre reinforced polyester in 1968. The scale-model depicts an elevated white terrain covered by a network of black lines (Figure 2). In 1969, plans were made for a 1:10 enlargement of the scale-model to a sculpture at the Kröller-Müller Museum. For the enlargement, Dubuffet worked with architect Joël Polpère to ensure that the idea and design copied the scale-model from 1968 as close as possible. An architectural model was made, depicting the necessary elevations for the sculpture (Figure 2). The main structure of the sculpture...
is made with concrete and cement, which is coated in white paint. To paint the black lines, the scale-model was placed in the centre of the sculpture as a reference. Dubuffet’s assistants Richard Dhödt and Ali Boukhalfa first traced the position of the lines thinly with chalk and then a brush, before painting over them again (Breder 2006) (Figure 3). Dhödt stated in an interview ‘the lines may not be too tight but should be visible with the brush in a picturesque but accurate manner. The lines must support the shapes of the sculpture.’ (Stigter 2006: 43).

*Jardin d’Emaill* requires regular care and has been repainted three times in the 44 years since its creation. During these repaints, the black lines shifted or in some areas were missing entirely. When the sculpture was repainted in 1999 masking tape was used as a guide for the black lines, and so the impression that they were made using a paintbrush and free hand was lost (Breder 2006). In 2019, the Kröller-Müller Museum undertook a new restoration project in which all the paint was removed, revealing original hand-painted markings (Figure 4).

**CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH CONSERVATION PRACTICE OF PAINTED OUTDOOR SCULPTURE**

Frederike Breder’s thesis ‘Aufenskulpturen mit Farbfassung’ (Breder 2006) focuses on the restorative treatment of contemporary painted outdoor sculpture, of which Dubuffet’s *Jardin d’Emaill* is a case-study. In it, Breder references the issues that can come from repainting when the artist’s wishes have faded from memory, and the shifted black lines of the sculpture. Breder’s research highlights the problems that can occur without access to good documentation and states the need for conservation to repaint the sculpture using the scale-model and archival photographs. Breder also found that the original 1974 lines match the scale-model very accurately.

Derek Pullen and Jackie Heuman give a comprehensive outline of developments in modern outdoor sculpture conservation in ‘Modern and Contemporary Outdoor Sculpture Conservation: Challenges and Advances’ (Pullen and Heuman, 2007: 9).

Major issues facing outdoor sculpture and what is required for their conservation has been outlined in ‘Contemporary Outdoor Sculpture: Challenges and Advances,’ (Beerkens and Learner 2014) stating that maintenance and repainting is often necessary. Gwynne Ryan of the Hirshhorn Museum discusses how the repainting cycles of outdoor painted sculpture allow for reevaluation of past treatments to occur. (Ryan 2014: 10). The importance of documentation is also stressed. Julia Lütolf and Peter von Bartheld call for a form of documentation that describes the process of producing an artwork as precisely as possible (Lütolf and von Bartheld 2014: 81).

Issues specific to painted outdoor sculpture have been broadly examined in ‘Conserving Outdoor Sculpture’ (Considine, 2010). The challenges involved with conserving painted outdoor sculpture are listed within to include: determining original appearance, understanding the artist’s intent and communicating colour (Considine, 2010: 125). Within all the case studies, a collaborative approach to repainting is stressed which involves conservators, curators, the artist estate and paint manufacturers. Although most case studies focus on choosing the correct colour than recreating hand-painted patterns, questions about original appearance and artist’s intent are relevant. These issues surrounding the conservation of painted outdoor sculpture are widely acknowledged, however the use of photogrammetry to help with treatment options has so far not been discussed in detail.

**PHOTOGRAMMETRY AND IMAGE-BASED MODELLING**

To create a 3D model using photogrammetry, a series of overlapping images of the subject is taken. These images are then uploaded into software that uses advanced image analysis algorithms to reconstruct camera angle and position (Waagen and Lanjouw 2018). Whilst this technique has not been commonly used for contemporary outdoor sculpture, it is increasingly being used as a method of documentation in other heritage sectors such as archaeology and historical interiors.
Kensche, to ensure that this research produces a useful tool for the museum. From these interviews it was found that photogrammetry could benefit the 2019 treatment of Jardin d'émail. The use of a portable, 3D digital model could be used during the repainting treatment. Dubuffet’s assistant Dhoedt explained that during the painting of the lines in 1974 it was a struggle that they only had one model acting as a reference. He explained that it was difficult to have to keep going back and forth to the model. (3) This further clarified to Susanne Kensche that photogrammetry will help the museum effectively work on the sculpture and not miss out any lines, as was done previously. (4)

THE PROCESS OF CREATING A PHOTOGRAHMETRIC MODEL

The practical application of photogrammetry and image-based modelling is conducted in partnership with the 4D Research Lab of the University of Amsterdam. The following section outlines the aim, method and results of the experimental process.

To begin, aerial images were taken of Jardin d’émail with a drone by Jitte Waagen. The scale-model and architectural model were photographed with an SLR camera by Tijm Lanjouw. This is the first step in creating a scanned photogrammetric model of both the outdoor sculpture and scale-models.

In preparation for the photogrammetric scan, printable target sheets were placed on the sculpture, scale-model and architectural model and around their perimeters. For Jardin d’émail, a DJI Phantom 3 drone was used which has a camera attached to its base, controlled by a tablet attached to a control pad. Using the tablet, the ISO and shutter speed of the camera were set to automatic. A test flight was carried out to ensure the images captured were of good quality and that there was no distortion. The drone was flown at two altitudes above the sculpture, detailed shots were taken at 2.80 m, whilst an overview shot was taken at 8.25 m. The drone stopped to take a photograph every meter. Oblique and angled photographs were also taken to capture the surface structure and the perimeter of the sculpture. For the scale-model and architectural model, a Nikon D5300 was attached to a stabilisation pole. After ensuring that the white background was sufficiently clear, figures were photographed in succession. Historic England’s ‘Photogrammetric Applications for Cultural Heritage’ gives an explanation into the general workflow that must be taken in order to achieve a 3D model, explaining the main concepts, skills, issues and challenges that a heritage professional will encounter by using photogrammetry (Historic England 2017). This publication is useful for this research in proving that there are both benefits and drawbacks to using this technique for conservation. The level of detail needed to capture the faint black lines of Jardin d’émail may be higher than some other heritage needs, and so it will be beneficial to see how this technique can be useful for the conservation of contemporary hand-painted sculpture.

OBJECTIVE AND QUESTIONS

The objective of this research is to assess the use of photogrammetry for the treatment of painted outdoor sculpture in two phases. First, in exploring its capabilities for advanced documentation. Second, to see how the photogrammetric data can then be used practically for treatment. The following questions will be answered: How can photogrammetry be used to inform conservation practice of painted outdoor sculptures?

- Can photogrammetry accurately capture the original pattern?
- How can it inform treatment decision-making?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of using photogrammetry in conservation practice?

EXPERIMENTAL METHODS AND RESULTS

To assess the utility of photogrammetry for the treatment of large outdoor sculpture, a multi-disciplinary methodological approach was undertaken. Literature and archival research investigated photogrammetry and image-based modelling, painted outdoor sculpture and Dubuffet’s oeuvre. To understand the art-making process, interviews were carried out between the head conservator of sculpture and modern art at the Kröller-Müller Museum, Susanne Kensche and Dubuffet’s assistant, Richard Dhoedt, for which the author was present. An interview was also conducted between the author and Susanne Kensche, to ensure that this research produces a useful tool for the museum. From these interviews it was found that photogrammetry could benefit the 2019 treatment of Jardin d’émail. The use of a portable, 3D digital model could be used during the repainting treatment. Dubuffet’s assistant Dhoedt explained that during the painting of the lines in 1974 it was a struggle that they only had one model acting as a reference. He explained that it was difficult to have to keep going back and forth to the model. (3) This further clarified to Susanne Kensche that photogrammetry will help the museum effectively work on the sculpture and not miss out any lines, as was done previously. (4)

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To begin, aerial images were taken of Jardin d’émail with a
balance and shutter speed were appropriately set and the model was in focus, a series of overlapping photographs were taken in aerial and oblique view, at a distance of 1 m (~10 cm).

**POST-PROCESSING RESULTS USING AGisoft METASHAPE**

3D models of *Jardin d’émail*, the scale-model and the architectural model were made by Jitte Waagen and Tijm Lanjouw. Analysis of these 3D models can help the treatment process, as any deviation in the surface structure between the scale-model and outdoor sculpture can be highlighted.

The photographs taken of the sculpture, scale-model and architectural model were first checked to ensure all images were in focus with appropriate lighting. The images were then imported into Agisoft Metashape which makes an estimation of image quality. To begin, alignment optimisation is carried out to detect the markers (targets) and correct their position. The software then optimises the camera location and identifies the tie-points.18 A sparse point cloud is generated. The cameras are then optimised, and the reprojection error is calculated. 18 A dense point cloud can then be calculated, followed by a mesh, onto which the texture can be applied. At this point the 3D model has been made and can be exported for further analysis.

The results of the modelling process proved photogrammetry can capture the original pattern of the uncovered black lines. This is possible because of the 0.2 cm resolution that photogrammetry offers (every pixel is covering 2 mm of the object) which gives a high accuracy of the captured geometry. The reprojection error is the average error between a measured point in a 3D model and the projected point on an image. The error was computed to be only 1.2 pixel when expressed in image distance, which indicates that the 3D model is a very close representation of the artwork. The resulting 3D models are highly accurate and detailed (Figure 5). Agisoft Metashape allows for 3D models to be exported in various formats that are accessible on a range of devices and platforms. As such, this enables the museums to have a clear and detailed view of the scale-model to help with the repainting process, therefore informing treatment decision-making.

**DEVIATION ANALYSIS WITH CLOUDCOMPARE**

Once a 3D model is made it can undergo further analysis. As the scale-model is intended to be used for the repainting of the black lines it is important to know if there were any deviations between it and the sculpture, which would influence treatment decision-making.

CloudCompare is an open-source software that enables the point clouds of two different 3D models to be analysed for deviation and similarities (CloudCompare, n.d.). Deviation analysis between the 3D models was carried out by Tijn Lanjouw, in the following sequences; (FIRST) the scale-model and architectural model, (SECOND) the scale-model and outdoor sculpture and (THIRD) the architectural model and the outdoor sculpture.

To compare the point clouds, they are first aligned. This means manually moving the second model onto the same position as the first model. For the comparison between the scale-model, architectural model and the outdoor sculpture, the two models were scaled up to match the size of the sculpture. CloudCompare then automatically aligns the two point clouds to find a best fit.

CloudCompare then calculates the distance between the two point clouds. The result shows any deviation between two aligned models. The software finally generates a heat-map indicating the areas of similarity and deviation.

This detailed deviation analysis allows for more information about the making-process, the sculpture’s material history and any deviation of the visual inspection between the scale-model and architectural model shows the two models to be made from the same mould, or the same cast. This sheds light on how far the model used for painting the lines is based on the model used for painting the lines. Deviation analysis between the sculpture and the two models showed that in general, the sculpture closely follows the shape of both models, with over half of the models only deviating between 0-3 cm from the sculpture (Figure 6a). However, a large difference between the scale-model and the sculpture can be observed in the centre-north region. Here the scale-model deviates by an elevation upwards of 30cm from the sculpture (Figure 6b). This result will certainly inform treatment decision-making, as problem areas such as this can be noted before repainting begins.

**TESTING 3D MODEL ON SCULPTURE WITH THE APP ‘EMB3D’**

Uploading the 3D scale-model onto the open source app Emb3d provides a practical and portable reference tool for the repainting process. Emb3d is accessible on both mobile and tablet. The physical scale-model is used for repainting the black lines on *Jardin d’émail*, so access to a digital version should make the process more efficient.

The 3D reconstruction of the scale model was uploaded to Emb3d, which equates to the offline viewing of 3D models on a tablet or phone (Emb3d, n.d.). The digital model was taken to the sculpture, so its use in the repainting process could be evaluated. To test the tool, lines were drawn onto the sculpture with Emb3d on the tablet on the tablet as a reference. The technique was evaluated on accuracy, how long it took, and whether it was possible to estimate line thickness, angle and position. General strengths and weaknesses of the approach were also noted. The drawing of the test lines was carried out by the artist assistant and the original scale-model.

Testing the 3D model on the sculpture allowed for a practical assessment of the technique. It was found that treatment decision-making is improved, as the conservator can make a decision based on the digitised scale-model to their hand. Therefore, they are able to immediately correct mistakes from deviating from the course of the scale-model. Equally, more points of view are possible than with the original scale-model. For instance, the conservator can stand on an area of the sculpture they are aiming to paint on, and at the same time view a zoomed-in birds-eye-view of this area.

However, it was found that it is possible to look at the tablet too much, meaning that the painted line can risk not flowing as Dubuffet would have wanted. Similary, it can be difficult to judge the edges of the model, particularly how far the line overlaps a corner. As the scale-model was found to be not the same as the sculpture it can also be difficult to see where the lines should go, and as a result accuracy is not improved. A suggested improvement for the 3D model which could increase accuracy is to include a scale-bar that can indicate how thick the lines should be.

It was noted that different people work in different ways, and that one conservator may prefer to use the original scale-model over the 3D model on the tablet. New digital tools and approaches can enhance treatments, but the ‘affordability’ of digital equipment is an issue to keep in mind (Morgan & Wright 2018). Overall, having the 3D model on the tablet has its benefits and will increase the speed at which inaccuracies are identified, but it should be used alongside the knowledge of the artist assistant and the original scale-model.

**DISCUSSION**

In evaluating the utility of photogrammetry it is important to assess its strengths and weaknesses with the conservator in mind. From the results it is clear that for a conservator, photogrammetry offers the ability to create incredibly precise documentation that gives a clear representation of the artwork they are treating. It is also clear that the creation of a 3D model allows the conservator to conduct detailed analysis into the artwork, perhaps one of the biggest strengths of photogrammetry is that it is available to all who are willing to try. All conservators will have a good digital camera within their kit, the main piece of hardware needed for photogrammetry. The software used for this research, Agisoft Metashape, has a simple interface and a conservator would be able to work it if they spent the time
learning how to. Margins of error can come from the photogra-
phs that are taken, and whether the targets are placed accurately,
which is something the conservator should keep in mind.

However, the technique can become expensive. Whilst
an educational licence of Agisoft Metashape is 300 Euro, the
professional licence is between 1,500 and 2,000 Euro. To run
the software, a computer or laptop with a good processor and
graphics card is needed. Although this particular software
option can be expensive, there are plenty of open-source alternatives
which enable the creation of 3D models such as Meshroom and
Visual SfM. Yet, these open-source programmes typically require
more than one piece of software to complete the entire process.

Another point to keep in mind is the modelling process
can be time consuming, with a higher-end 3D model taking an
average between 3-9 hours to make from start to finish. The
exact time depends on the size of the model being made and the
specifications of the graphics card within the computer. To be specific, when creating the 3D model of the scale-
model, manually editing the target points took 1 hour,
converting the sparse point cloud into a dense point cloud
took 2 hours, building the mesh took 3 hours and blending the
textures took 0.5 hour. A large sculpture, such as *Jardin d’email*
captured according to the resolution and accuracy requirements
of this research, will take a few days to process on a computer
with two processors. However, it is possible to run the modelling
software and carry out other tasks whilst the model loads. It is
also possible to stagger tasks and let the programme run over-
night. Alternatively, it is possible to sacrifice the accuracy of the
end result for processing speed. It is therefore important for the
conservator to determine what level of accuracy is needed for
the documentation or treatment being carried out.

As the technique could likely be outsourced to a company
or professional specialising in photogrammetry, it is important
to ask the following questions: do we value every aspect of the
process the same? Is it difficult to communicate your wishes?
Are they understood the point? By posing these questions, both
parties can ensure that the modelling process is run in a manner
that is both cost-effective and time-efficient.

As this research shows, photogrammetry can be a useful tool when repainting outdoor sculpture. The
3D model of the scale-model was used to carry out
the repainting of *Jardin d’email* between February – May 2020.

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**ENDNOTES**

1. The conservation treatment of repainting the lines on
the sculpture was completed in May 2020.
2. The architectural model was also referred to as a ‘working model’.
3. Interview between Kröller-Müller Museum and
Fondation Dubuffet. Participants: Richard Hooldt, Sophie
Weber, Susanne Kensing, Marcel van de Sande,
Tanja de Boer, Marjou Gijmeneke, Alice Watkins.

5. Interview between Susanne Kensing and Alice Watkins,
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo; 24 October 2018.
6. A tie-point is a feature that you can clearly identify in two
or more images.
7. Camera optimisation is when the camera’s orientation is
calibrated to improve accuracy and reduce the
reprojection error.
Fig. 6a. Deviation analysis between Jardin d’émail and the architectural model using CloudCompare.
Credit: Tijm Lanjouw, November 2018.

Fig. 6b. Deviation analysis between Jardin d’émail and the scale-model using CloudCompare.
Credit: Tijm Lanjouw, November 2018.


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