Modern Materials - Contemporary Art

Triennium 2014 - 2017 / Newsletter 2

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

June 2016
Welcome to the 2016 Newsletter from the Modern Materials and Contemporary Art (MMCA) working group of ICOM-CC. As usual, you will find in this issue a wealth of project updates, conference reviews, conferences and publications announcements; as well as conversations with Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Melva Bucksbaum Associate Director for Conservation and Research at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and Humberto Farias de Carvalho, Professor in Contemporary Art Conservation at the Federal University from Rio de Janeiro. Without your contributions, there would be no newsletter, so I’d like to thank all of you who contributed to this issue, especially Julia Langenbacher for beautifully designing and coordinating this issue, and Gary Mattison for transcribing Carol Mancusi-Ungaro’s interview, proofreading and additional designing.

We are now in the second year of this triennial, and it has been a year of quite intense activity: preparations for our interim meeting Keep it Moving? Conserving Kinetic Art are in full swing (see p. 9 for details and program); we have received all abstract submissions for the 18th ICOM-CC triennial meeting, to be held in September 2017; and our membership has grown to a whopping 264 members. It is very exciting that we are now part of the larger working groups: the interest in and need for conserving Modern Materials and Contemporary Art are clearly stronger than ever, as is the need for networking with other professionals in the field. Your help in spreading the word and encouraging colleagues to join the working group is, as usual, much appreciated!

It is also exciting that we are already gearing up towards the 18th ICOM-CC triennial meeting, which will be held in Copenhagen in September 2017. We have received a large number of submissions, so thank you to all of you who submitted — I have no doubt that we will have some fantastic sessions packed with content.

Now, with the help of the assistant coordinators, begins the difficult task of grading all the abstracts, which are also being graded by an anonymous peer reviewer. The grades are then reviewed by the Selection Committee (composed of current and past Directory Board members plus the Managing Editor). Authors will be notified if their abstracts have been provisionally accepted by early August, with the final papers due on November 18th, 2016. A call for posters will also be issued early August. The full papers and poster abstracts undergo the same review process and the Selection Committee also makes the final choice of contributions. Paper and poster authors will be informed of the final results in April 2017.

Do not hesitate contact me or any of the assistant coordinators with any queries, comments or suggestions you might have, or feedback on the newsletter. And if there is anything that you would like to hear about that is not in here (suggestions of new features etc.) please do get in touch! Our team remains as follows:

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I’d like to thank all my fantastic assistant coordinators for their hard work and contributions to the activities of the working group, and especially Barbara Ferriani for her splendid work preparing the Keep It Moving? Conserving Kinetic Art conference in Milan. I hope I see many of you there, and of course, in Copenhagen in 2017.

Rachel

SPark: Conservation of Sculpture Parks
September 14-16, 2015
Sisak, Croatia

The international interdisciplinary conference “SPark: Conservation of Sculpture Parks” was held in Sisak on 14 – 16 September 2015. The opening of the conference marked the beginning of the 3rd “Days of Industrial Heritage” of the City of Sisak, a manifestation that aims to present and revitalize the rich industrial heritage of the city.

“SPark” was jointly organized by the Arts Academy of the University of Split (Conservation-Restoration Department), the Zagreb Museum of Contemporary Art and the Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences. The organization of the conference was supported by the Sisak Municipal Museum, the Striegl Municipal Gallery, the Sisak Office for the Care of Monuments of the Croatian Ministry of Culture and the Faculty of Metallurgy of the University of Zagreb. The conference was held under the patronage of the Croatian president, the Croatian minister of culture and the mayor of Sisak.

The idea of organizing a conference was born during a project that aimed to protect and conserve the sculpture park in Sisak, which was initiated in 2012. The park comprises 38 sculptures created by the sculptors who participated in the Sisak Steelworks Artists Colony. This was an artist-in-residence programme for academically trained artists – painters, sculptors and photographers – organized by the Sisak Steelworks between 1971 and 1990. The Colony was open to artists from the whole territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Sculptors worked at the Steelworks, using the materials that the factory produced as well as its labour force. After the termination of the Colony and the collapse of the Sisak Steelworks, the sculptures that were displayed outdoors were labelled as part of the socialist heritage and allowed to deteriorate. Some were thrown away, others were stolen and sold as scrap metal, and those that remained became a target for vandals.

The conference that was organized in Sisak last year gathered over 50 participants from 18 countries. Through 14 talks and six poster presentations, various aspects related to the conservation of outdoor sculpture collections were explored; from technical aspects of conservation treatments to how to manage outdoor collections, sometimes spread over vast expanses of land. The aim of the conference was to provide solutions and set guidelines for the protection, preservation and conservation of outdoor sculpture collections, including the Sisak Sculpture Park.

The renowned Croatian artist and designer Ante Rašić, one of the participants of the Artists Colony at Sisak Steelworks, took part in a roundtable discussion, offering his views on how to properly present and (make) use (of) outdoor sculpture collections.

The final day of the conference was dedicated to a visit to the former Institute of Metallurgy of the Sisak Ironworks, a walking tour of the Sisak Sculpture Park, a visit to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, and a tour of the Vjenceslav Richter and Nada Kareš-Richter Collection, also in Zagreb.

Overall the conference benefitted not only from the excellent quality of the papers but also from a warm and friendly atmosphere which encouraged creative dialogues. The “SPark” book of abstracts is available on the conference website: https://spark2015sisak.wordpress.com and an edited volume of the conference proceedings will be published by Archetype Publications Ltd. in 2016.

Sagita Mirjam Sunara
Revisions: Object - Event - Performance since the 1960s
September 21, 2015
Bard Graduate Center, New York

A group of international scholars presented papers at Bard Graduate Center’s symposium, “Revisions: Object—Event—Performance since the 1960s,” following the opening of the Focus Gallery exhibition, Revisions — Zen for Film, featuring Korean-American artist Nam June Paik’s early 1960s work Zen for Film, also known as Fluxfilm No.1. More information can be found here: http://www bgc bard.edu/news/events/revisions-symposium.html

TechFocus III: Caring for Software-based Art
September 25-26, 2016
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

TechFocus III: Caring for Software-based Art was held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, on September 25-26, 2016 and was organized by the Electronic Media Group of the AIC, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation (FAIC).

Software-based artworks have been gradually entering collections over the past three decades. However, their preservation has proven to be very challenging for collection caretakers. This two-day workshop and symposium was designed to educate collection professionals representing different disciplines and was attended by 180 participants from seven different countries. 21 speakers presented some of the challenges, risks, and the state of current practice in the care of software-based artworks with contributions from conservators, curators, art historians, archivists, artists, and computer scientists.

Topics included the history of software-based art and its underlying technology, code analysis, documentation methods, risk assessment, storage and access, and strategies for long-term preservation. Four practical exercises introduced participants to the concepts of coding, version control as a preservation tool, disk imaging, and emulation.

The program raised awareness and advanced the development of standards and best practice in the care and conservation of this new genre of contemporary art.

The workshop also provided a forum for professionals and students to gather and debate these emerging preservation strategies on an international level.

For further details about the TechFocus workshop series and video documentation please visit: http://resources conservation-us.org/techfocus/techfocus-iii-caring-for-computer-based-art-software-tw/

The workshop was made possible by the generous support of the Foundation of the American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (FAIC), the National Endowment of the Arts, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

TechFocus III: Caring for Software-based Art Planning Committee: Helen Bailey, Christine Frohnert, Agathe Jarczyk, Mona Jimenez, Kate Lewis, Joanna Phillips, Eric Pourchot, and Martha Singer.


Christine Frohnert

FAR-SITED: Creating and Conserving Art in Public Places
October 16-18, 2015
University Art Museum at California State University, Long Beach

In October 2015, the Getty Conservation Institute partnered with the University Art Museum at California State University, Long Beach and the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach to present FAR-SITED: Creating and Conserving Art in Public Places, a three-day conference examining the creation and conservation of public art.

Using the 50th anniversary of the historic 1965 California International Sculpture Symposium as the catalyst, the symposium explored the possibilities and the challenges of creating and presenting public art for the 21st Century.
The program included a key-note lecture by artist William Pope.L, and was followed by panel discussions dealing with site-specificity, new technologies and materials, conservation issues, and alternative practices.

All lectures and panels will be viewable online soon. Please visit: [http://web.csulb.edu/org/uam/EVENTSfarsited.html](http://web.csulb.edu/org/uam/EVENTSfarsited.html)

_FUTURE TALKS 015_

October 28-30, 2015
Die Neue Sammlung, Munich, Germany

FUTURE TALKS 015, the fourth installment of the biennial conference series, took place on October 28-30, 2015 at Die Neue Sammlung - The Design Museum in Munich, Germany, and was attended by 220 participants.

A total of 26 presentations included case studies of innovative or challenging treatments, research into modern materials and treatment techniques, technical studies of design objects, and conservation approaches for entire collections.

Conservator Steve Pine elaborated on various 3D printing techniques used in design applications, while industrial design expert Axel Thallemer demonstrated convincingly the limitations of current 3D printing technology for the design and manufacture of functional objects.

Tim Bechthold and Nahema Borrel’s talk on the treatment of an expanded polystyrene foam lamp followed Caroline Dupré and Francesca Secchi’s presentation about a polystyrene foam artwork.

Papers by Anne Biber and Suzan de Groot / Henk van Keulen presented different approaches to identifying colorants in plastics and understanding their aging properties. Biber focused on archival research, while de Groot and van Keulen discussed a range of analytical techniques including Py-GCMS, Raman, XRF, and SEM-EDX.

The final afternoon was devoted to the latest research on the treatment and examination of plastics in presentations by Anna L. Fricker, Chiara Russo, Mark Kearney, and Alexander M. Dittus. Fricker and Kearney analyzed the effects of conventional surface cleaning on plastics while Russo experimented with laser cleaning of plastic surfaces. Dittus explored reflectance transformation imaging (RTI) to reveal hidden morphological features of transparent plastics.

For practicing conservators, the treatment case studies by Evelyne Snijders, Katja Van De Braak, Katharina Haider, and Suzanna Yasemin Etyemez were certainly a highlight. They demonstrated that the problem-solving skills and practical experimentation needed to find workable treatment solutions for non-traditional materials such as synthetic upholstery, fake fur, and plasticine.

The technical studies on the complex history of a Charles and Ray Eames prototype by Ellen Moody, and the presentation by Mareike Stober on the use of vulcanized fiber by Gerrit Rietveld in an early steel-tube chair, were fascinating for any lover of design and demonstrated the exciting possibilities for research of this type.

In alignment with the 2015 theme “Processes. The Making of Design and Modern Art”, the organizers also included presentations by designers and fabricators who delved into their contemporary creative processes. Attendees were treated to a very special final presentation, an on-stage interview with Karim Habib, the chief designer for BMW. Habib described BMW’s design process in detail and shared images of the various resulting artifacts, from spontaneous sketches to highly refined full-scale clay models.

The conference proceedings will be published in the FUTURE TALKS series in 2017 – The third book “FUTURE TALKS 013. Lectures and Workshops on Technology and Conservation of Modern Materials in Design” is now available via Die Neue Sammlung - The Design Museum. Please contact conservation@die-neue-sammlung.de

Kate Moomaw
Abstract Expressionism:  
Time, Intention, Conservation, and Meaning

November 12, 2015  
Getty Center, Los Angeles

As part of the Getty Conservation Institute’s Modern and Contemporary Art Research Initiative, the GCI co-organized a one-day symposium Abstract Expressionism: Time, Intention, Conservation, and Meaning, held at the Getty Center, in collaboration with the Clyfford Still Museum in Denver in November 2015.


This one-day symposium brought together conservators, conservation scientists, scholars, and others interested in Abstract Expressionism to discuss what should be considered acceptable change for these artworks, and what should not, in view of their makers intent and meaning. Presentations were given on Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Joan Mitchell, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still.

Individual lectures are now viewable at https://vimeo.com/album/3773755

7th International Congress “Color & Conservation”

13-14 November 2015  
Politecnico di Milano, Italy

In November 2015, the seventh edition of the International Congress “Colore e Conservazione” organized by CESMAR7 (Centro per lo Studio dei Materiali per il Restauro) was held at the Politecnico di Milano in Italy. The two-day symposium “From oil paintings to acrylics, from Impressionism to Contemporary Art” was dedicated to modern and contemporary art.

The first session focused on the material characterization of 19th and 20th century artworks: among the interventions, the art historians Aurora Scotti, Simona Rinaldi, Paolo Bensi and Antonella Gioli talked about painting techniques in the last decades of the 19th century, highlighting their experimental nature and the use of different binder mixtures. Mattia Patti presented historical research related to the Muzii tempera by Lefranc, very popular at the beginning of the 20th century.

Morning session dedicated to 19th and 20th century artworks.

The second session was dedicated to the studies on commercial artists paints: conservators and scientists addressed this topic from different points of view. A major portion of the session was dedicated to modern oil characterization and conservation, with lectures by Jacopo La Nasa, Aviva Burnstock, Klaas Jan van Den Berg and Laura Fuster-Lopez. Cleaning of acrylic paints was the subject of presentations by Anthony Lagalante and Bronwyn Ormsby.

The third session included presentations on outdoor polychrome sculptures, plastics and design objects by Anna Laganà (polyester), Thea van Oosten (nylon), Lydia Beerkens (outdoor painted surfaces) and Yvonne Shashoua, who reported on research project on the fiberglass windows of the All Saints Church in Bristol. Emma Zanella presented a work by Giuliano Mauri, a bridge built using natural materials and destined to destroy itself through slow and steady deterioration, and discussed issues related to its conservation.
Giuliano Mauri, Gelsomini walkway on the lost river, 2004 - MAGA Museum, Gallarate (Varese, Italy).

To conclude, the fourth session was dedicated to conservators’ practical experience and case-studies. Among the themes: cleaning acrylics with conductivity-adjusted aqueous solution (Louise Maria Tiedemann), the use of silicone-based solvents (Chris Stavroudis), consolidating powdery paints (Julia Mauny-Van den Burg) and the use of cyclohexadecane in paintings on canvas (Giulia Papini).

The conference postprints can be purchased on the editor’s website: [http://www.ilprato.com](http://www.ilprato.com)

Serena Francone

Media in Transition
November 18-20, 2015
Tate Modern, London, UK

Also in November 2015, the GCI partnered with Tate, London and the Getty Research Institute to organize Media in Transition at Tate Modern, to explore conservation implications for collecting and conserving time-based media works of art, although many of the ideas explored also resonated for a broader group of contemporary artworks and for the practice of different disciplines.

Following the format of the Getty’s conference Object in Transition in 2008 this event explored – through papers, discussions, demonstrations and dialogues – how the field is adapting and responding to forms of artistic practice; many of which have their roots in the 1960s and 1970s. The conference also showcased emerging modes of collaboration between artists, conservators, art historians, technical experts and curators and considers how these can help advance the field.

The conference was launched with keynotes by three artists, Susan Hiller, Runa Islam, and Hito Steyeri, and this was followed by a number of case studies involving in-depth and inter-disciplinary discussions about specific works of art by Joseph Beuys, David Lamelas, Gustav Metzger, Bruce Nauman, Nam June Paik, Julia Scher, and Bill Viola.

All video recordings of the conference are available here: [http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/conference/media-transition](http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/conference/media-transition)

Glenn Phillips (Getty Research Institute), Solange Farkas (Associação Cultural Videobrasil), Lori Zipay (Electronic Arts Intermix), and Jane DeBevoise (Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong & New York). Photo: Patricia Smithen.

Site Specificity of Outdoor Sculptures
27 February 2016
Situation Kunst, Bochum, Germany

With the title Revisited: Site Specificity in Recent Outdoor Sculptures an international symposium took place on 26-27 February 2016, hosted by the foundation Situation Kunst in Bochum, Germany in cooperation with the Art Historical Institute of the University of Münster (Prof. Dr. Ursula Frohne) and the Department of Literature & Art of the Maastricht University (Prof. Dr. Renée van de Vall). The venue at Situation Kunst with the sculpture park, including pavilions for Minimal Art and Zero, African and Asian ancient art, sculptures by Richard Serra and the recently opened Museum Unter Tage (MuT) provided a beautiful setting for this meeting.

The various aspects of site-specificity as a theoretical and art-historical concept, developed from the 1970s onwards, were addressed with a focus on philosophical themes, museum practice and on political and public discussions. Such discussions are especially critical for outdoor sculptures, which are under the constant pressure of changes induced by time, urban transformation, and shifting appreciation.
The program included an introduction by professor Ursula Frohne (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster); a keynote lecture on the topic of juridical issues in ‘the Language of Site Specificity’ by professor Martha Buskirk (Montserrat College of Art, Beverly, USA); and Tatja Scholte’s investigation on spatiality in the context of a descriptive model for site-specific Installation Art (Cultural Heritage Agency, Amsterdam).

Multimedia installation on Serra’s Waxing Arcs (1980) at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen (2014-2015) examining the work’s history and how works of art change over time. Stills from the movie In Constant Motion, on Art Tube.

The opening evening was dedicated to several large sculptures by Richard Serra, which over the years have been transformed, relocated or re-installed in different environments, both in Bochum and in various Dutch museums. Under the title Serra on the Move referring to a project organized by the Dutch Foundation for Conservation of Modern Art (SBMK) in 2014, case studies were presented by Saskia van Kampen (Museum Boijmans van Beuningen Rotterdam), Suzanne Kensche (Kröller-Müller Museum) and Ingrid Kentgens (Bonnefantenmuseum).


Lydia Beerkens,
SBMK – platform Conservation Issues (www.sbmknl)

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**Plastics Associated with Photographic Materials**

March 14-18, 2016

Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ

From March 14 to 18, 2016 the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation (FAIC), in collaboration with the Center for Creative Photography (CCP) in Tucson, Arizona presented the symposium, ‘Plastics Associated with Photographic Materials’ as part of the FAIC series Collaborative Workshops in Photograph Conservation.

The first day focused on the history, identification, material characterization, and preservation of transparent film supports. Especially noteworthy was Meghan Chandler’s (University of California, Irvine) discussion of the rebirth of cellulose acetate, describing how the process of acetate decay informs the work of materialist filmmakers, from an aesthetic point of view. Jean-Louis Bigourdan (Image Permanence Institute, Rochester Institute of Technology) presented https://filmcare.org/, a central resource for best practices in film preservation that provides guidelines for dealing with the preservation of all types and formats of film materials. A highlight of the first day was the awarding of Dr. Peter Adelstein with the ‘Photographic Materials Group Achievement Award’ for his diligent work and contributions to the field of photograph preservation.

Degraded film negatives forming buckled channel areas due to layer separation and shrinkage of the cellulose acetate support. Photo: K. Hoeyng.

The second day covered a variety of issues related to plastics associated with photographic prints and contemporary photographs. The topics covered ranged from hinge-adhesives for display of resin coated materials, to cleaning of face mounted photographs, to fill materials for scratch repair on PMMA. Other talks discussed the light stability of photo-plastic and thermo-plastic inject inks, light stability of face-mounted photographs, and the transportation of these large-format photographs. As a highlight of the second day, Alex Clarke (Studio Manager, Jeff Wall Studio London) gave insight into the process of production and installation of Jeff Wall’s work.
Two workshops were offered during the conference. One, led by Fernanda Valverde (Amon Carter Museum of American Art), was dedicated to photographic negatives and focused on the history, deterioration, identification, and storage of plastic supports. The other workshop, led by Alex Clarke and Jennifer Jae Gutierrez (CCP), addressed treatment challenges associated with face-mounted photographs.

All conference abstracts can be found at http://www.conservation-us.org/docs/default-source/education/plastics-symposium-abstracts.pdf?sfvrsn=2

Lectures will be available on the AIC YouTube channel at the end of summer.

Katharina Hoeyng

Keep it Moving? Conserving Kinetic Art
June 30 - July 1, 2016
Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy

Keep it Moving? Conserving Kinetic Art is a three-day conference dedicated to exploring the challenges associated with the preservation of kinetic art. It is the interim meeting of the Modern Materials and Contemporary Art (MMCA) working group of ICOM-CC, organized in partnership with the Getty Conservation Institute, the Museo del Novecento, and INCCA.

Kinetic art is art that not only includes movement but often depends on it to produce the desired effect and fully realize its nature as work of art. Kinetic art emerged throughout the 20th century, and had its major developments in the 1950s and 60s. In addition, in the 1960s, a branch of op art or optical art, i.e. abstract art based on optical illusion, also started to incorporate actual movement. Kinetic works of art include a wide range of motion, from motorized and electrically driven movement to motion as the result of wind, light, or other sources of energy.

Many current thought is currently given in the field of contemporary art conservation to re-thinking the concept of authenticity and to solving the dichotomy often felt between original materials and functionality of the work of art. The dichotomy is especially acute with kinetic art where a compromise between the two seems impossible: when engine parts stop working, when light bulbs go out, the work will stop functioning if replacement is not performed. Issues of technological obsolescence, as well as the strong sociological and historical information or meanings often embedded in a given technology and its use by an artist, further complicate matters.

The conference will include invited keynotes, submitted papers, round tables and panel discussions and aims at discussing the ethical and practical challenges associated with the collection, display, and conservation of kinetic art. Tours of the rich kinetic art collection of the Museo del Novecento will be provided as well as additional tours of the Prada Foundation and Carsten Holler show at HangarBicocca.

Program:

Thursday, June 30
Morning - Chair: Rachel Rivenc

9:30-9:40am Opening Remarks
9:40-10:15 Keynote Address: A Question of Kinetics Reinhard Bek, Bek & Frohner, LLC, NYC
10:15-10:40 Fast and Furious: Operation, Maintenance and Repair of Chris Burden’s Metropolis II at
Friday, July 1
Morning - Chair: Tom Learner

9:30-9:35am Opening Remarks
9:35-10:10 Keynote Address: The Fluid Boundaries Between Interpretation and Over-Interpretation: Collecting, Conserving and Staging Kinetic Art Installations
Tiziana Caianiello, ZERO Foundation, Düsseldorf, Germany

Federica Bessan and Marc Leman, University of Padova
Tim Vets, Ghent University

10:35-11:00 Moving With the Times: The Restoration of Max Dean’s As Yet Untitled
Sherry Phillips, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada
Marcel Verner, PV Labs, Burlington, Canada
Max Dean, Toronto, Canada

11:00-11:30 Coffee and Tea Break

11:30-12:30 Poster Session

12:30-2:00 Lunch

Afternoon - Chair: Marina Pugliese

2:00-2:25 The Hype about ZERO and its Influence on the Conservation and Presentation of Early Kinetic Works
Gunnar Heydenreich and Julia Giebeler, Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences

2:25-2:50 Kinetic Multiples: Between Industrial Vocation and Handcraft Solutions
Isabel Plante, Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, Instituto de Altos Estudios Sociales, Universidad Nacional de San Martín

2:50-3:15 Nicolas Schöffer’s Collection: from the Artist’s Studio to the Museum
Manon D’haenens, Université de Liège

3:15-3:40 ‘Pretty Good for the 21st Century’: Restoration, Reconstruction and Realisation of Len Lye’s Tangible Motion Sculpture
Paul Brobbel and Simon Rees, Len Lye Center, New Plymouth

3:40-4:00 Afternoon Break

4:00-5:00 Round Table Discussion with Reinhard Bek, Tiziana Caianiello, Gunnar Heydenreich, Simon Rees and Isabel Plante

7:00-10:00 Reception in Fontana Hall, sponsored by AXA ART Versicherung AG
Saturday, July 2

10:00-12:00 Guided Tour of the Collection of Kinetic Artworks in the Museo del Novocento

12:00-1:00 Panel Discussion with Iolanda Ratti, Roberto DiPasquale, Laura Calvi and Grazia Varisco

1:00-2:30 Lunch

3:00-5:00 Guided Tour of Prada Collection or HangarBiCoccca

Registration:

Registration is €115 for ICOM-CC members and €165 for non-members. It includes coffee, tea and lunch on June 30th and July 1st, as well as a reception on the Fontana Hall of the Museo del Novecento on July 1st, and free access to the Museum’s galleries for the duration of the conference.

To register, visit: https://www.incca.org/events/keep-it-moving-conserving-kinetic-art

Collecting and Conserving Performance Art

June 9-11, 2016
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany

The German Association of Conservator-Restorers (VDR) is delighted to announce the major international symposium “Collecting and Conserving Performance Art,” to be hosted by the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg in Germany on June 9-11, 2016.

Verband der Restauratoren

The two-and-a-half day event approaches issues surrounding the acquisition of performance art by bringing together conservators, curators, art historians, artists, collectors, researchers, art educators and other professionals, who are involved in the production, distribution, collection, documentation and conservation of performance art.

Perspectives on heritage development and documentation in adjacent disciplines, such as theater and dance, are invited to inform the discussion. Under investigation will be a variety of existing practices for bringing an artist’s live performance into a collection, including the license to re-perform the work based on an artist-provided score; film and video recordings of historic or recent performance iterations; autonomous art installations; documentation created by former audiences, participants and producers; and performance props and other objects that represent the live event.

For detailed program and registration visit http://www.restauratoren.de/termine-details/2021-collecting-and-conserving-performance-art.html

Please note registration closes 04 June 2016

Workshop: Modern Resins for Varnishing and Retouching

14-17 June 2016
Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg, Maastricht, The Netherlands

The workshop will focus on synthetic low molecular weight resins and how they differ from polymers and dammar. Participants will use practical sessions to evaluate the properties of resins used as varnishes in terms of their application and appearance.

Through these practical sessions and demonstrations, participants will establish how the choice of resin, solvent or stabilizer will affect the properties of the varnish not only on application but subsequently upon ageing.

Lecturers: René de la Rie, Jill Whitten and Robert Proctor

Lectures will cover:

- Function of varnishes
- Chemical properties of resins and their degradation
- Factors affecting optical characteristics of varnishes
- Effects of stabilizers
- Retouching media
- Criteria for choosing appropriate varnishes
- Varnish application techniques
- Solvent selection: polarity, solvent strength and evaporation rates

Registration forms are available at info@sral.nl

Numbers are limited to 20 participants and are allocated on a first come basis.

IIC 2016 Los Angeles Congress - Saving the Now: Crossing Boundaries to Conserve Contemporary Works
12-16 September 2016
Millennium Biltmore Hotel Los Angeles, CA

The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC) and the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) are coming together in September 2016 in Los Angeles to offer opportunities for conservators of contemporary culture to cross such boundaries and engage with diverse approaches to ethics, values and conservation approaches from a variety of cultures, disciplines and geographical regions.

Registration for this event is now open! Register [https://www.iiconservation.org/congress/2016losangeles/registration](https://www.iiconservation.org/congress/2016losangeles/registration)

IIC members qualify for a discounted rate. All registrations up to 14th June qualify for the discounted early bird rate.

See preliminary program of speakers and posters at: [https://www.iiconservation.org/congress/2016losangeles](https://www.iiconservation.org/congress/2016losangeles)

Plastics Heritage / Forum Kunststoffgeschichte
27-29 October 2016
HTW, University of Applied Sciences, Berlin, Germany

The symposium on “Plastics Heritage” provides an interdisciplinary forum for all aspects of plastics history. The aim is to bring together people from different areas of plastics heritage in order to deliver and to obtain new insights in and from the different topics and to elucidate their significance also for possible modern developments.

Programme Topics:
- Plastics history (polymers, plastics, processing, applications, companies)
- Plastics heritage (in art, design, everyday’s and technical objects, architecture)
- Collecting plastics objects
- Conservation of plastics heritage (artefacts, technical heritage, material characterisation)
- Conservation with polymers (adhesives, coatings etc.)
- Documentation, reproduction (archives, data bases, digital scanning, 3D-printing etc.)

Invited Speakers:
Silvia Garcia Fernandez-Villa, Madrid
Virginie Kollmann-Caillet, Oyonnax
Susan Mossman, London
Thea Van Oosten, Amsterdam

Special Session on Saturday morning:
Synthetic Lacquers and other Coatings

The Special Session will enable oral and poster presenters to report and discuss on the use, ageing and conservation of and with synthetic lacquers and other coatings, with a focus on modern material systems.

To register, please visit: [http://www.forum-kunststoffgeschichte.de/](http://www.forum-kunststoffgeschichte.de/)

Save the date!

Expression and Sensibility.
Art Technological Sources at the Rise of Modernity
10-11 November 2016
State Academy of Fine Art and Design in Stuttgart, Germany

Interim meeting of the ICOM-CC working group Art Technological Source Research

The 7th symposium of the ICOM-CC working group Art Technological Source Research will be held at the State Academy of Fine Art and Design in Stuttgart. The focus of this meeting will be to reflect on the artistic process as manifested in visual and written sources between 1850 and 1940, the time of early Modern Art. This period is characterized by completely new artistic ideas and conceptions as well as the introduction of plenty of new products such as tube paints, synthetic organic pigments etc. Artists and art academies reacted to these developments by designing innovative artistic techniques as well as by re-introducing technical concepts, being considered obsolete by established institutions or coming from non – European civilizations. The reflection on medieval and antique art technological sources and the introduction of technical departments at the academies are typical implications of this development.

More information coming soon. Visit: [https://www.icom-cc.org/21/working-groups/art-technological-source-research/](https://www.icom-cc.org/21/working-groups/art-technological-source-research/) Or contact: atsr7@abk-stuttgart.de

Call for Papers ending soon!
One-day symposium organised by Tate and The Clothworkers’ Foundation to mark the end of the Clothworkers’ Fellowship 2014-16.

The Picasso Picabia Ernst Symposium aims to bring together conservators, conservation scientists, curators, art historians, professionals, and students to discuss the work of these three key artists from the early-twentieth century. Annette King will present some of the outcomes of her two-year Clothworkers’ Fellowship examining selected paintings by Pablo Picasso, Francis Picabia and Max Ernst in the Tate collection.

Submissions are invited from interested professionals to present 20-minute papers on this fascinating area of research. Abstracts should be a maximum of 500 words and in English only. The submissions should show the title, author(s) and contact details for the corresponding author. Abstracts will be selected by the Symposium Advisory Committee. There will also be the opportunity to display posters. Authors may subsequently be invited to produce a written paper for postprints.

To submit an abstract for a paper or poster please send a Word or PDF file by 31 May 2016 to annette.king@tate.org.uk

Authors will be notified of acceptance by 30 June 2016.

Save the date

Approaches to the Conservation of Contemporary Murals

May 28-29, 2017
Chicago, IL

Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (FAIC) Professional Development Course.

Description and registration information will be available soon at: http://www.conservation-us.org/courses/professional-development-courses/current-courses

Call for Papers

Gels in Conservation

16-18 October 2017
Tate Modern, London, UK

Gels in Conservation - A 3-day conference organised by International Academic Projects in association with Tate.

This conference aims to bring together conservators, conservation and other scientists, students of conservation and their teachers, to discuss the use of gels across all conservation disciplines (paintings, paper, wall paintings, textiles, museum objects, mixed media works etc.).

Presentations should focus on gel materials, application...
techniques, and particularly on case studies involving the use of gels in conservation treatments, and evaluations of their outcomes.

Submissions in English only are invited in the form of abstracts of ~500 words. These submissions should show the proposed title, author(s), and contact details for the corresponding author. Abstracts will be selected by the conference advisory committee and external peer reviewers.

The conference proceedings will be published as printed preprints available on the day of the conference, and it is planned that the papers will be available online shortly after the conference.

Topics suggested are shown below (but are not limited to):
The theory of gels
Recent developments in gel technologies
Clearance and residues
Systematic evaluation of gel properties and effects
Preparation and practical issues
Case studies on the practice of using gels on:
• Wall paintings
• Easel paintings
• Contemporary art
• Textiles
• Archaeological objects
• Paper
• Sculpture
• Mixed media
• Traditional materials

To submit an abstract for a paper or short paper (please indicate which) please send a WORD or PDF file to info@academicprojects.co.uk with a summary (500 word maximum) including the provisional title and the name of the principal and other authors. Abstracts must be submitted by June 15th, 2016.

Posters
In addition to the written submission (subject to peer review, image permissions and timely submission), there will be an opportunity to have a limited number of physical posters on display for those authors presenting short papers.

For more details visit: http://www.academicprojects.co.uk/gels.php

If you have any questions at this stage, please contact: info@academicprojects.co.uk

New INCCA website

In December 2015, the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) launched its new and improved website https://www.incca.org/

Here you will find news, events, projects, opinions and all kinds of resources on the conservation of modern and contemporary art.

Your feedback is welcome!

General feedback about the site is welcome! Send an email to info@incca.org or post your ideas in the INCCA Forum under the forum topic What do you think about the INCCA website?

Subscribe to the INCCA Updates mailing list
In order to continue receiving INCCA Updates by email, please subscribe to the newsletter by filling in your email on the homepage. INCCA members also need to sign up!

Enjoy and keep sharing!

Karen te Brake-Baldock, INCCA Coordinator

New research project ‘Conserving large-scale works made of polyurethane foam in Danish art and design from the 1960’s to today’

The Center for Art Technological Studies (CATS) is heading up a collaborative research project aiming to develop sustainable and environmentally friendly preservation methods to ensure the future of large-scale works made of polyurethane foam (PUR). Scientists and conservators will focus on fabrication techniques, material components and degradation phenomena that are relevant to the conservation of PUR. The research project has attracted a major grant from the Danish Agency for Culture.

Focus on sustainability

There are a few established methods for the treatment of degraded PUR. Most treatments involve toxic chemicals which cannot be used in an open workshop. These health and safety issues are difficult to comply with when working with large-scale PUR works of art or design pieces; works, which can only be treated in a closed environment with extraction. The current project will focus on developing sustainable, innovative conservation methods to treat large-scale PUR works in art and design.
“We are extremely pleased that the Danish Agency for Culture has decided to support us. Research in PUR is necessary if we are to secure the future of Danish art made of PUR. The results we are going to deliver, will offer new ways of preserving PUR and help to increase the quality of conservation practice both in Danish museums and abroad” says CATS Center Director and Director of Conservation at SMK, Jørgen Wadum.

The PUR project runs from October 2015 to March 2017 and will end with a workshop to facilitate results for conservation professionals.

CATS is a collaborate research venture between Statens Museum for Kunst, the National Museum of Denmark and the School of Conservation at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation.

For further information:

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The Fashion Plastic Phenomena: Measuring the Significance of Plastics in Modern and Contemporary Dress Collections, Past, Now and in the Future

As a one-year research fellow at the Costume Institute, the Metropolitan Museum of Art since September 2015 I have been investigating and analyzing the plastics present in the Brooklyn Costume collection owned by the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Amongst the collection is a diverse range of dress representing the upsurge in the use of newly manufactured synthetics and plastics to create high fashions during the twentieth century. Many of the plastics present in the collection date from the early to mid-twentieth century and I have been assessing and analyzing these pieces in collaboration with the Department of Scientific Research at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The aim of the project is to create a better understanding of the characteristics, patterns of deterioration and design processes of fashion designers during the twentieth century.

I surveyed over 4300 costume pieces using the collections management system and key areas were identified for analysis. One of those areas includes artworks designed by Elsa Schiaparelli (Italian, 1890-1973), an innovative designer based in Paris during the 1930s who is recognized for her dynamic use of semi-synthetic plastics and implementation of surrealist art within her designs.

Another area of interest is footwear, looking at unconventional designers such as Beth Levine, an American shoe designer, who took advantage of newly developed plastics, such as flexible Poly (vinyl chloride) to formulate her visions.

Analytical results concentrate on works by Schiaparelli, revealing the designer’s preferred use of cellulose nitrate and cellulose acetate to create plastic embellishments and accessories. Surprisingly, many pieces remain in good condition despite their eighty years of existence. For instance, figure 1 shows a clear plastic necklace ornamented with metal insects, identified as cellulose acetate using Fourier Transformed Infrared Spectroscopy.

Other pieces have not had such fortune and have deteriorated significantly despite being kept in seemingly stable environments. Further analysis using Pyrolysis Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (Py GC-MS) and Evolved Gas Analysis (EGA) prove useful in terms of determining and comparing deterioration patterns. The results will be published in the future to allow a wider understanding of plastics in contemporary costume collections.
Another aspect of my research involves investigating new plastics used by innovative designers like Iris van Herpen, a young Dutch designer. Van Herpen, and other contemporary designers like her, find themselves compelled towards new types of synthetic resins and new technologies such as 3D printing and the subtle differences this type of production offer to create their designs; characterize their collections and propel their unique methodologies within the fashion arena (Fig. 2.). This aspect requires a preventive conservation approach in trying to understand the materials to provide appropriate environments in order to try and slow down the degradation process.

Fig. 2. Three-dimensional printed (SLS) top, white polyamide. Ensemble, Iris van Herpen, spring/summer 2010 haute couture; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2015 (2016.16a, b). Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo © Nicholas Alan Cope.

A newly extended phase of my research project will continue until September 2017 and will concentrate on cold storage and its relevance to multi-component materials found in contemporary and modern costume.

Leanne Tonkin, Costume Institute Fellow, the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The conservation of painted plastic works by Moholy-Nagy

A comprehensive retrospective on the work of Hungarian-born artist László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) opened at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum on May 27, 2016, and subsequently will travel to the Art Institute of Chicago and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The exhibition, entitled Maholy-Nagy: Future Present, will present collages, drawings, ephemera, films, paintings, photograms, photographs, photomontage and sculptures, showcasing the artist’s radical experimentation across a broad range of mediums.

László Moholy-Nagy, B-10 Space Modulator, 1942; oil and incised lines on Plexiglas®, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (47.1063).

Consistently attracted to industrial materials that furthered his explorations of light, transparency and reflection, Moholy-Nagy was one of the first artists to use plastics as an artistic medium for sculpture and painted works. He painted and incised on polymethylmethacrylate (PMMA) as well as on other early plastics such as cellulose nitrate (CN), cellulose acetate and casein formaldehyde.

In preparation for this exhibition, Guggenheim Senior Conservator Julie Barten collaborated with independent plastics conservator Anna Laganà and conservation scientist Thea van Oosten in assessing condition and devising and carrying out treatments for a group of important painted plastic works owned by the Guggenheim and several private collectors.

Extensive research and testing on mock-ups was completed to devise treatments for the consolidation of flaking paint on some of the earliest known examples of Plexiglas® (PMMA) produced by Rohm and Haas. As these works are painted on recto and verso, consolidants had to perfectly match the transparency of the PMMA, while also accommodating water and/or solvent sensitivities of both paint and substrate. Effective, safe and visually satisfactory consolidants (both water- and solvent-based) have been identified.

Anna Laganà examining László Moholy-Nagy, Tp2, 1930; oil and incised lines on Trolit (CN), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (37.357).
In addition, based on previous research and further tests, cleaning methods for PMMA and cellulose nitrate were established and techniques for safe and reversible localized retouching on these unforgiving surfaces were developed and implemented.

Julie Barten  
(Senior Conservator, Collections and Exhibitions, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum)

Anna Laganà  
(Independent Conservator/Researcher of modern materials)

Visit:  https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/moholy-nagy-future-present

The Hamburger Kunsthalle Conservation Department has embarked on a project that aims at preserving the ten slide-based artworks in the collection, with a total of about 1700 slides. The project runs from 2015 to 2018 and is funded by the Schoof’sche Stiftung with additional support of the Wüstenrot Stiftung.

Analogue slide equipment and consumables, such as duplicating film or certain mounts, are no longer produced. Whenever slide-based artworks are on display, the images will fade due to exposure to the projector lamp. Hence, sets of slide duplicates have to be made for display while the Archive-Master and Duplication-Master are kept in cold storage as a preservation measure.

Projectors require maintenance and replacement of spare parts, for which the knowledge and sources are becoming increasingly rare. This, coupled with the finite quantity of duplicating film, requires that we consider how and when the existence of an analogue artwork might be terminated.

In parallel, digitization is promoted as a preventive conservation measure for analogue slides in preparation for future digital projection methods. However, when analogue works are being digitized or projected digitally, the results vary greatly. Some are more authentic than others, depending on the visual quality of the digitized image as well as the suitability of the new equipment. The resulting projection should be in compliance with the original analogue version.

The project at the Hamburger Kunsthalle was established based on knowledge about slide conservation that was collected over the past years by colleagues at Tate’s Time Based Media Conservation Department. It responds to the increasing time pressure caused by the near extinction of analogue slide technology.

The task at hand, to examine and preserve the ten slide-based artworks, is driven by the need to explore ways in which these works can continue to be displayed. This is new terrain for conservators of modern and contemporary art with no background in time-based media conservation, whose responsibility is dedicated to a broad ranging collection of mostly tangible artworks - like painting and sculpture. Therefore, this project requires collaborations between several disciplines, such as conservation specialists, photographers, curators and technicians; a substantial dialogue with the artist is also needed.

Our main focus is the assessment of current display possibilities and the establishment of best working practice for future alternative display modes.
Some of the key questions are: How do we decide whether slide-based artworks can be shown digitally? Do we know what we lose if we go digital? How important is the sound produced by the analogue slide projector for the artwork? To what extent are the visual aesthetics of the equipment valued by the artist and other stakeholders?

The project results will be disseminated through written publications, and through workshops on the conservation of slide-based artworks and the preservation and maintenance of projection equipment aiming at sharing experiences with other professionals. We thereby hope to foster collaboration between the disciplines, inside and outside the museum, to promote the conservation, preservation and display strategies that respect the requirements of these very delicate artworks.

If you are dealing with slide conservation or would like to share information about your experiences, please contact:

Barbara Sommermeyer (barbara.sommermeyer@hamburger-kunsthalle.de)

or Claartje van Haaften (claartje.vanhaaften@hamburger-kunsthalle.de).

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A colourful collection of plastic artifacts at the Vienna Technical Museum

Juvelith, Turbonit, Vulkanit and Astralon: these are just some of the many trade names for materials that can be found in a collection of plastics technology at the Vienna Technical Museum. The collection contains around 1,800 plastic objects that currently ‘slumber’ in the museum’s storage facilities. The collection will now be studied systematically as a three-year PhD project supervised by Gerda Kaltenbruner (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna) and co-supervised by Friederike Waentig (Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences).

The objects were collected with the aim to illustrate the variety of new plastic materials, their production techniques, and their applications in industry and everyday life. As such, they contain invaluable information for the study and understanding plastics from the 20th century. Up until now, the objects have been inventoried, but in most cases only the date of acquisition and the trade names have been documented. The project aims to determine the age of these plastics, identify their composition as well as their production technologies and correlate this information to their aging behavior, deterioration patterns and conservation.

Special attention will be given to the examination of the colour sample assortments (fig. 2), as the question of how colouring compounds influence the ageing of plastics and the methods to conserve them has not yet been examined comprehensively. The large number of different colour samples at the Vienna Technical Museum will allow to perform a systematic survey of properties and deterioration phenomena of differently coloured plastics as well as extensive archival research on manufacturing techniques.

Contact with institutions that hold comparable collections to network and to share knowledge would be greatly appreciated. For further information or general interest contact anne.biber@tmw.at.

Anne Biber
Preserving the Material Culture of Consumer Electronics: Hardware Issues

A research project initiated by the Deutsches Museum (Marisa Pamplona and Ulf Hashagen), The Design Museum Munich (Tim Bechthold), the Department for Restoration, Art Technology and Conservation Science, TUM (Erwin Emmerling) and the Department for Macromolecular Chemistry, TUM (Bernhard Rieger) was recently submitted to the Leibniz Research Foundation. It aims at deepening our historical understanding and developing strategies for the preservation of Consumer Electronics Artefacts (CEA).

Study set of personal computers (PCs) discussed at Future Talks 015.

To begin with, historians, curators, conservators, and chemists will collaborate closely in order to increase our understanding of the interplay between materials and design, use and function as well as path dependencies and technological innovations in the development of CEA. A specific focus is to study which resources and technologies were available during a certain period and how the costs and numbers of production influenced the resulting artefacts, particularly its design. The project also aims to examine the inextricably interwoven technological, historical, and cultural contexts of the production and consumption of CEA, based on the in-depth examination of 300 historically remarkable artefacts from 1945 to present day. This will ultimately help curators to better understand and promote values from CEA.

In addition, strategies for the preservation of CEA shall be developed after surveying deteriorated objects in ten international leading museums: the Computer History Museum, the National Museum of American History - Smithsonian Institution, the Science Museum London, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, the Technisches Museum Wien, the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology, the Radio Museum Fürth, The Design Museum Munich and the Deutsches Museum. From 1945 till present day a large variety of modern materials were used for the construction of CEA. Which periods of construction, production technology, or constructing elements (e.g. housings, power cables, packaging) are more prone to deterioration? Which material/combination of materials is deteriorating faster? Which degradation mechanisms are affecting more strongly specific material properties? Which treatment, packaging, and conditioning environment can prolong the life-time of CEA in a sustainable way? Which general guidelines can be suggested for the preservation of CEA, and which specific ones have to be developed that consider certain materials or combination of materials? Treatments will be tested on selected case studies, and best practices will be suggested. Finally, results from interdisciplinary research and guidelines for the preservation of CEA will be accessible via an online portal providing best practice solutions to other museums.

Preliminary research to date:
1700 objects from the Deutsches Museum Computer Sciences Collection were surveyed by Angela Meincke and Anja Kuhlmann: 248 objects exhibit yellowing, 118 show cracks, 52 are naturally aged, 30 exhibit material disintegration, 22 have stains, 15 have an acrid smell and 14 exhibit migrating plasticizers. The most frequent deterioration type in PCs is yellowing, of which several are made of ABS (using various analyses). Luísa Sampaio is characterising the effectiveness and durability of two oxidising treatments to remove yellowed layers and provide a protective treatment to avoid yellowing in ABS.

Radios being investigated by Christina Elsässer.

Christina Elsässer is developing a classification scheme to distinguish synthetic polymers used in radios housings and cables using non-analytical methods. Production features of objects, their time of production, archival research and specific deterioration forms are being combined to indicate the synthetic polymers most likely to be present. The classification scheme is being applied to 50 radios and results are being verified by ATR-FTIR analysis, in order to recognize limitations of the scheme and seek ways to improve it.
From research to practice: the restoration of di Suvero’s K-piece

Mark di Suvero’s outdoor painted sculpture K-piece (1972) in the collection of the Kröller-Müller Museum (Otterlo, NL) has been repainted several times. Outdoor sculptures like K-piece are constantly exposed to severe weather conditions, and the interaction of moisture, sunlight and temperature fluctuations are the main causes for paint layer deterioration which eventually results in gloss variation, color fading and the detachment of paint layers. The coating of an outdoor metal sculpture does not only determine its appearance but also protects the substrate against corrosion. Therefore regular maintenance and conservation treatments, ranging from local treatments to the complete renewal of the coating system, are frequently necessary.

In 2014, the red topcoat on K-piece showed considerable signs of deterioration such as blanching, uneven discoloration, paint losses and corrosion of the exposed metal (Fig. 1). After weighing different options, the museum decided to repaint the sculpture entirely and initiated a project to identify the optimal approach, taking into consideration both practical and ethical aspects. Early on in the investigation, an unexposed area with residues of the original topcoat was discovered on the sculpture, exhibiting a different red hue than the subsequent paint layers. Further research was undertaken to determine as precisely as possible the appearance of the original paint (gloss, color and texture).

In 2015, the possibility of identifying and replicating the appearance of K-piece’s original paint was investigated by Nikki van Basten during her post-master’s program at the University of Amsterdam under the supervision of Lydia Beerkens and Susanne Kensche. The research, which included archival studies as well as color measurements and analyses of several paint samples, was carried out in collaboration with the Getty Conservation Institute, the artist’s studio, AkzoNobel, and Dutch paint shops. Eventually, paint coupons provided by the artist’s studio allowed to determine the original appearance of K-piece.

Different high performance paint systems by AkzoNobel were selected as candidates to replicate K-piece’s early appearance. The selected paints were then subjected to artificial ageing to evaluate their durability outdoors, and the one that showed the highest color and gloss retention was chosen to repaint the sculpture.

The treatment of K-piece started in October 2015 and was led by Susanne Kensche and Nikki van Basten. K-piece was dismantled and transported to the paint shop Spuiterij Boterenbrood, Nijkerk (Netherlands), where the deteriorated paint layers were shot blasted (Fig. 2); however, to preserve the different paints on the sculpture as a historical document, two small areas were left untreated.

After shot blasting, the bare metal was repainted with an automotive coatings system consisting of a zinc-based primer, an epoxy primer, a polyurethane paint and a transparent polyurethane topcoat. All layers were applied with a spray gun in a dustproof and climate-controlled environment.

After a few days of drying, the treated parts were transported back to the museum and the sculpture was carefully re-assembled onsite. K-piece was brought back to the original appearance intended by the artist as precisely as possible: uniform in color, bright red and glossy (Fig 3). Future maintenance strategies will include surface cleaning, the application of wax protection and regular visual inspection of the paint coats. Drawdowns of the new paint system are stored at the museum and will be used as references if repainting is needed again in the future.
Fig. 3: K-piece after treatment. Photo: Sylvia Gentenaar, November 2015.

See the blog of the museum for more details on the practical treatment (http://krollermuller.nl/en/news-and-blog). Contact Nikki van Basten (nikkivanbasten@gmail.com) for more detailed information on this restoration project.

Nikki van Basten
(conservator Modern and Contemporary Art)

Susanne Kensche
(head of sculpture conservation at the Kröller-Müller Museum)

Publications

We are pleased to announce the launch of VoCA Journal, a digital information-sharing platform for artists and their collaborators, published by Voices in Contemporary Art (VoCA). The contributors – including fabricators, curators, conservators, registrars, art handlers, collectors, gallerists, and those responsible for artist estates and foundations – will be invited to discuss innovative, cross-disciplinary approaches to the research, display, and conservation of contemporary art. Published three times yearly (fall, winter, and spring) VoCA Journal will highlight and archive progressive artist-centered projects, thereby creating a dynamic repository for these initiatives while also connecting members of the network both locally and across the globe.

Here is the website: http://journal.voca.network

Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art
Lúcia Almeida Matos, Rita Macedo, Gunnar Heydenreich (eds.)

Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art is the title of the international conference held in Lisbon, in June, 2013. This issue of Revista de História da Arte offers updated and expanded versions of a selection of the papers presented in the conference, and a few additional contributions. The aim is to provide access to current research by exploring the many aspects associated with documenting contemporary art and focusing on problematic issues identified and discussed by researchers from major institutions in Europe and the USA whose mission is to collect, exhibit and disseminate knowledge about contemporary art.

Erma Hermens, Frances Robertson (eds.)

This volume contains papers from the NeCCAR 2014 conference “Authenticity in Transition”. The papers debate the various ways that changing artistic practices affect our interpretation, conservation, and curation of contemporary art, with a special reference to the shifting concepts of authenticity and artistic intent. The papers examine the topic through many mediums including artists’ viewpoints, the ephemeral nature of materials, historical perspective. The volume especially focuses on the problems caused by a shifting concept of authenticity to the conservation of artworks and conservation ethics.

Available at: http://www.archetype.co.uk/
The variety of topics and issues addressed shows how vast, complex and diversified the fields of theory and practice of documentation as a strategy for preserving contemporary art are. It underlines the continuing need for museums, collectors and universities to join resources to make sure that future generations may experience and understand our contemporary artistic expressions and that what is documented and preserved is the “real thing”, while making allowances for change, opening space for reinterpretation, ensuring the possibility of presentation in different contexts, providing access and promoting public participation in the process.

See this link for the clickable PDF publication: http://revistaharte.fcsh.unl.pt/rhaw4/RHAw4.pdf

Les cahiers d’INCCA-F, vol. 1: Documentation technique, techniques de documentation

The first volume of « Les cahiers d’INCCA-F » was published in December 2015 following a group discussion organised by the French branch of INCCA on the theme of technical documentation and documentation techniques in February 2014.

The authors of the five papers express their different points of view regarding documentation issues related to heritage works of the twentieth century through their experience as conservators, archivists or engineers. In the foreword, Cecile Dazord, contemporary art curator at the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France (C2RMF) in Paris, presents the ethical issues relating to functional objects which have been integrated into heritage collections. She further explains that the notions of material and original integrity as defined by conservation theorists do not apply to these mass-produced objects and that a place needs to be determined for the sharing and preservation of technical knowledge itself.

In their article, Ryma Hatahet and Lucille Royan describe and compare their experiences treating an assembled work of art by Ben Vautier and a cultural patrimony, a film projector by the company Gaumont.

Gaelle Mignot talks about the different ways of keeping records of electronic documents from an archival point of view.
Bruno Bachimont comments on the necessity to preserve technical documentation as an integral part of contemporary works of art.
Finally, Alain Bernard illustrates how some models developed for industrial engineering can be applied to document objects in heritage collections.

Translated from https://techniquesmixtes.hypotheses.org/ by Alexia Soldano.

For more details please visit: https://techniquesmixtes.hypotheses.org/705

Made in Los Angeles: Materials, Processes, and the Birth of West Coast Minimalism
Rachel Rivenc

In the 1960s, a group of Los Angeles artists fashioned a body of work that has come to be known as the “LA Look” or West Coast Minimalism. Its distinct aesthetic is characterized by clean lines, simple shapes, and pristine reflective or translucent surfaces, and often by the use of bright, seductive colors. While the role of materials and processes in the advent of these truly indigenous Los Angeles art forms has often been commented on, it has never been studied in depth — until now.

Made in Los Angeles focuses on four pioneers of West Coast Minimalism — Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, Craig Kauffman, and John McCracken — whose working methods, often borrowed from other industries, featured the use of synthetic paints and resins as well as industrial processes to create objects that are both painting and sculpture.

Initially undertaken as part of the Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A.1945–1980 initiative, this volume combines technical art history and scientific analysis to investigate conservation issues associated with the work of these
artists, which are often emblematic of issues in the conservation of contemporary art in general.

Available at: http://shop.getty.edu/

Made in Los Angeles

Open positions

Research Lab Associate, Getty Conservation Institute

The GCI’s Science Department is seeking an individual to fill the position of Research Lab Associate, a three-year, limited-term position within the Modern and Contemporary Art Research Initiative. This research focuses on the characterization of paints used on contemporary outdoor painted sculpture, the degradation of plastics used in cultural heritage, and the effects of cleaning treatments on modern paints. Please see: http://www.getty.edu/conservation/our_projects/science/modcon/

Responsibilities: Reporting to the Associate Scientist, Modern and Contemporary Art research, the Research Lab Associate will perform a range of activities in support of scientific analysis on this project, including: performing sample preparation, run routine analysis on samples, compile and interpret analytical data collected, organize reports and data files; and perform literature searches and gather background information on a variety of projects. Successful candidates will be expected to conduct scientific analyses and research on works of art using the wide range of chemical and instrumental techniques available at the GCI.

Qualifications: The Research Lab Associate must have a Bachelor’s degree in chemistry, physics or other natural science; 3-5 years of scientific laboratory research experience. Experience with analytical instrumentation, ideally FTIR, SEM-EDS and PyGCMS, and knowledge of scientific research and the conservation issues of contemporary paintings and sculpture strongly preferred. The successful candidate must be adaptable, analytical, and a creative problem-solver and thinker; able to work effectively in a highly collaborative and variable environment, conservation training or experience working with conservators in a conservation science laboratory strongly preferred; and possess excellent organization, data management, communication, and writing skills.

An excellent benefits package and salary commensurate with experience will be provided. This position is limited-term (three years).

To apply, please see: https://jobs-getty.icims.com/. All applicants should be prepared to upload a cover letter and curriculum vitae as a single file (either a PDF or a Word document) when prompted to upload a Resume online. Candidates who successfully complete the online application process will receive an automated message from “autoreply@icims.com”.

If you have specific questions about the Research Lab Associate position, please email gcistaffing@getty.edu.

Deadline for applications is June 13, 2016.

Looking back (20 years of plastics workshops)

Blood, Sweat, Tears at Kiasma, Helsinki in 1997 and Plastik Fantosstik at Moesgaard, Århus in 2003 were the first meetings where various conservators and scientists got together and presented their knowledge about plastics in modern and contemporary art; they were more seminars than workshops. These first workshops were spin-offs from the conference Modern Art, Who Cares?, a conference devoted to the problems with modern and contemporary art, held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands in 1997. One of the issues identified at the conference was the lack of education in the conservation of plastics.

As a follow-up, a five day plastics workshop was planned and implemented at the Netherlands Institute of Cultural Heritage (ICN) in Amsterdam, the Netherlands in 2003. The workshop (in Dutch) aimed to increase the knowledge of conservators by introducing the history, manufacturing, and degradation phenomena of plastics as well as the chemical and physical aspects of polymers. In addition, the workshop included a visit to a plastics factory and to the collection of the Stedelijk Museum, where problems with works of art made of plastics were discussed. The participants learned to identify plastics using the hot needle test as well as analytical techniques such as FTIR analysis. Creating oxygen free storage for rubber objects (encapsulation with barrier film and Ageless®) was also part of the workshop.

The first international workshop in English was held at West Dean College, Chichester, England in 2005; since then, several workshops have been organized in Australia, America, England, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the Czech Republic.
Since 2008, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE, formerly ICN) has continued to hold workshops, but the content evolved from a more theoretical oriented workshop (given by a conservation scientist) to a more practical approach including cleaning, adhering and consolidation of plastics taught by Anna Laganà, a modern materials conservator and researcher. This approach of combining the teachings of a scientist and a conservator worked very well, and having the theoretical part followed by a practical application is usually highly appreciated by the attendants. The practical work nowadays takes more than half of the workshop time. More and more case studies have been included over the years, reflecting the fact that research into the conservation of plastics in modern and contemporary art and design has increased substantially.

Education into synthetic polymers is nowadays common practice in training programs in the conservation of contemporary art. However, in my opinion, basic plastics knowledge should be part of all conservation programs regardless of the discipline because plastics are abundantly everywhere in our cultural heritage and as far as I can see, plastics production will only keep growing.

Thea van Oosten
(independent senior conservation scientist / adviser on plastics conservation)

Identification of plastics using the portable FTIR. Photo: Anna Laganà.

Since 2012, the now-called Masterclass Plastics has been hosted by the University of Amsterdam (UVA) every year in autumn and is open for conservators from all over the world. This masterclass aims to acquaint conservators, restorers and conservation scientists with the current state of knowledge regarding the identification, degradation and preventive conservation of plastics in cultural heritage. Meanwhile, other institutes around the world (in Denmark, Germany, and Canada) are holding workshops dedicated to the conservation of plastics.

After having personally given 35 workshops/masterclasses and having had more than 400 students attending, I can conclude that the state of the art of teaching plastics conservation has evolved from a more theoretical content (history and manufacturing of plastics) to a more practical composed workshop, due to the increase in practical knowledge on conservation of plastics acquired in the last ten years. However, not everything is solved - the need for knowledge on plastics and its conservation is still there, and ever growing since more and more objects are produced with plastics and new manufacturing technologies are introduced.

Workshop participants cleaning plastic objects. Photo: Anna Laganà.

Practical work on the consolidation of PUR foams. Photo: Thea van Oosten.
Humberto Farias de Carvalho is Professor in Contemporary Art Conservation at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro / School of Fine Arts (UFRJ / EBA), Brazil.

Julia Langenbacher (JL): Hi Humberto, can you introduce yourself and tell us about your activities at the School of Fine Arts (EBA) in Rio de Janeiro?

Humberto Farias (HF): Hi! How are you? I am a professor in Contemporary Art Conservation at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro/School of Fine Arts (UFRJ/EBA). Currently, I represent the Preservation and Conservation Committee of the National Association of Plastic Arts Researchers (ANPAP). I am also a council member of the Rubens Gerchman Institute and I assist in research projects at the Contemporary Art Conservation at Centro de Conservação de Bens Culturais (CCBC), focusing on Critical History in Contemporary Art conservation.

Rachel Rivenc (RR): How did you become interested in the conservation of contemporary art? Can you tell us about your background and training?

HF: In 2004, I was working as a freelance conservator at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro. The lab director asked me to propose a conservation treatment for a 1980’s painting by the artist Eduardo Sued. At that moment, I realized that my knowledge of painting conservation would not be enough to meet the needs. So I started in-depth research about the artist’s intentions, his artistic procedures, and I finally invited him to an interview. After that experience, I enrolled in a History and Art Critics postgraduate program. Throughout my career, I have been dedicating myself to research and residency programs at learning institutions and museums both in Brazil and abroad.

JL: Is there a strong demand for conservators specializing in contemporary art in Brazil, either in private practice or in institutions?

HF: Yes! In the two main cities in which there is an art circuit, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, we have hundreds of art galleries and offices, as well as museums with vast collections of contemporary art, which means that we have an enormous demand for conservators. We also have a large art collector base in the private sector. Although the demand is big, the number of professionals is still relatively small, especially in the area of contemporary art conservation. In fact, in Brazil we do not have any conservators who are specialized in technology based works of art.

RR: Can you speak a little bit about the course in contemporary art conservation at EBA, its history, the kind of training students receive there?

HF: Conservation courses in Brazil, I mean undergraduate courses that are offered by universities and that give professional degrees have not been around for very long, we can trace their origins back to 2008. At EBA, the course offers training on traditional materials, such as paper, sculpture and painting. Three years ago, I joined the university to give lectures in Contemporary Art Conservation. Since I started teaching this course, I have tried to improve my knowledge of the subject and sought out other universities that offer Contemporary Art Conservation courses as part of their curriculums. We are still building our faculty and everything is really new to us.

JL: Does the EBA collaborate with local or national museums and institutions for the students training?

HF: Yes, we have a few partners that offer internship and research opportunities to our students in both public and private institutions with art collections, such as Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa, Instituto Moreira Salles, and the National Museum of Fine Arts. However, in regards to Contemporary Art Conservation, we do not have any agreements in place yet.

RR: Do you think that there are conservation challenges specific to Brazil, or Latin America in general, especially with contemporary art?

HF: Yes, huge ones in fact! As I mentioned before, it is a field that we are still studying, learning and trying to produce professionals and researchers. We face many economic challenges to create courses and fund research projects. However, we are slowly establishing study groups and organizing small meetings with courses and lectures. It is true that, if compared to the size of Latin America, we are still few and have not reached critical mass yet.
JL: Are there collaborations or networks between institutions dealing with conservation of contemporary art in Brazil and its neighboring countries?

HF: There are, but to a very limited extent. Our colleagues at the Pinacoteca of the State of São Paulo are members of the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) and they are also the most active group in the Brazilian conservation scene. Together with two other friends from the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Giulia Giovani and Magali Sehn, I am constantly working to organize events for researchers of contemporary art conservation.

Last year, after I had finished planning an extension program with professor Lino Garcia from the Technical University of Madrid, I was invited by professor and curator Cristina Freire to organize an international seminar called Contemporary Art: What to preserve?. It was an opportunity to bring together colleagues all over from Brazil with Spanish and Portuguese professionals. Thanks to Professor Freire’s efforts, it was possible to create a publication that has significantly contributed to contemporary art conservation courses taught in Brazilian universities.

Another important initiative that promoted the meeting of leading Latin America researchers was an experts meeting organized by the Getty Conservation Institute and entitled CIMCA (Conservation Issues in Modern and Contemporary Art), to which the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) also contributed. If my memory does not fail me, approximately, twenty researchers from Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Cuba and Mexico participated in the event.

RR: In your master’s thesis you discussed the work of Cildo Meireles, a Brazilian artist who has worked under the military dictatorship in the 1960s and 70s. Can you tell us about Cildo’s work and the challenges it presents for conservators?

HF: This piece I worked on is called Espaços virtuais: Canto 4. (Virtual spaces: Corner 4). According to the artist, it can be classified as a “sculptural object”. It is the representation of a corner in a home in which the walls are painted canvas and the floor is made of wood.

In my opinion, the piece represents the artist’s reflection on the pressure exerted by the army during the Brazilian military government. A corner is the end of every road, the individual finds himself cornered and there is no escape!


However, Cildo portrays the corner of a home that actually has an exit, some kind of a “virtual portal” to escape from being chased. Under the rule of a military government, the work encourages the viewer to think that not everything that is said on the television or the radio is an absolute truth and that it is possible to fight against dictatorship, even when victory seems impossible, or only virtual.

The piece belongs to the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro (MAM). In 2008, the people in charge of conservation at MAM invited me to propose a conservation treatment for the artwork since it had been selected for a Cildo Meireles exhibition at Tate Modern. The exhibition’s curator, Guy Brett, approved my treatment proposal and, in collaboration with the artist and his assistant, we completed it.

The most controversial point at the time was the reconstruction of a part of the artwork: the canvas that represented the wall of one of the houses had to be replaced. To Cildo, the canvases were a re-imagination of Vermeer’s corners. According to him, the frame that held the canvas was a connection between a real corner and the corners painted by Vermeer.

For many years, the artist went back to the Museum of Modern Art and repainted the work, approximately 18 times. This constant intervention caused the canvas to lose its texture and large cracked areas appeared, disturbing the aesthetical experimentation and further distancing the work from the original idea of the artist that was to have a wall supported by an easel.
In an interview that was conducted during the treatment process, Cildo told me that the most important thing to him was the strategy that he defined as “Instructions”. According to him, it is an assembly plan that would allow anyone to recreate the work at any time. So, the artist, the curator of MAM, the curator at Tate Modern and I decided to replace and reconstruct this part of the artwork for the purpose of recreating the conceptual idea imagined by the artist and supported by his “Instructions” strategy.

JL: You are now involved in an international research project on Modern Abstract Art in Latin America. Can you describe the project a little bit and the specific involvement of your institution?

HF: The project is called Concrete Art in Brazil – The Material of Form: Industrialism and the Latin American Avant-Garde. The main idea behind this project is to study the concrete art movement in Latin America, through historical research of its techniques and resources used. I was invited by the coordinator of the Brazilian group, Dr. Luiz Souza from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFGM), to contribute as a research associate. Initially, I was supposed to act as a consultant to the Brazilian group, but then I was asked to present the collection Tuiuiu from Luis Antonio de Almeida Braga in a seminar that took place in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

I also conducted an interview with the artist Judith Lauand. Recently, I presented two other collections of Brazilian concrete art from Luiz Chrysostomo e Ricardo Rego to our colleagues from the Getty Conservation and Research Institutes and UFMG who were visiting Rio de Janeiro.

RR: This year you were a visiting scholar at the New York University (NYU) Tisch School of the Arts. What was your main project during your time in New York?

HF: In the spring of 2016, I was a visiting scholar at NYU Tisch School of the Arts’ in the Department of Cinema Studies, where I enrolled in the Handling Complex Media course of their Moving Image Archive & Preservation master’s program. The main goal was to learn about conservation techniques for artworks that have electronic and technological components to them, such as computers, video tapes, slide projectors, among others. My newfound knowledge gained at NYU was extremely beneficial for my professional and academic development, and will surely contribute to improve my classes at EBA, since there are no other professionals teaching this in Brazil.

At the end of the course, I took advantage of the opportunity to present a case study. Actually, I suggested a case study to my classmates and our professor Mona Jimenez to develop a conservation treatment for Hélio Oiticica’s work Cosmococa, which currently belongs to the INHOTIM Institute. Originally, this piece had slide projectors that were replaced by digital projectors, approximately six to seven years ago, and, today, these digital projectors are becoming obsolete.

Interview translated to English by Luiza Cabreira.

Interview translated to English by Luiza Cabreira.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Melva Bucksbaum Associate Director for Conservation and Research at the Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC, USA

RR: Carol, please tell us first a little bit about yourself and how you became involved with the conservation of contemporary art?

CM-U: I actually started by studying art history. I have a master’s degree in art history from the Institute of Fine Arts and was on the Ph.D. track studying Donatello, but then I became interested in conservation. I was trained in Old Master painting conservation at Yale University. Afterwards I worked at the Getty Museum, and then I went to the ICA, the Inter-Museum Conservation Association in Oberlin. In both positions I focused on easel size Old Master paintings. I was changing positions regularly because I was following my husband’s career development; he was a medical student. After the Midwest, we moved to Galveston, Texas, where he started a residency in plastic surgery and we started our family. It was also at that time that I was invited to meet Dominique de Menil, an art collector in Houston, in order to discuss the conservation of her collection. We got along very well right from the beginning and soon I started treating her collection. At one point she took me to the Rothko Chapel and showed me a massive problem of an inexplicable white film that was developing on the black-form paintings. My relationship with modern art started with my work at The Menil Collection, and I haven’t worked on an Old Master painting since.
Carol Mancusi-Ungaro (photo by Scott Rudd)

JL: About 14 years ago when you started at the Whitney Museum of American Art, there was no conservation department. Now, you have beautiful state-of-the-art laboratories, several staff members, and in 2015 your position as the Melva Bucksbaum Associate Director for Conservation and Research at the Whitney Museum of American Art was endowed. Can you describe the journey in between?

CM-U: Yes, I was brought to the Whitney to start a department of conservation; the museum had never seen the need for one. So the challenge to incorporate a department into an institution that was taking care of conservation, primarily or exclusively by sending work to conservators in New York, was enormous. When the museum finally decided that it did need a department, the biggest challenge was to weave our activity into the fabric of the institution.

One of the approaches I chose was to treat works of art that I called “skeletons in the closet.” These were works that had been damaged for one reason or another and were therefore not exhibitable. It occurred to me that if we could complete a major treatment on one of them every year or every two years and then in effect bring them back into the exhibitable portion of the collection, that we could demonstrate not only what conservation could do but also indicate our commitment to the collection. We followed that course in order to raise awareness and generate respect for our endeavor.

When I came to the Whitney it was clear from the start that I would report directly to the director; I think that was an important step in my ability to establish the department. As head of conservation, I became a voting member of the curatorial team and also a part of the Strategic Planning Group which discussed the long term a development of the institution. My sitting on the curatorial committee has enriched my understanding of what curators have to deal with - what they think about, the way they conceive issues, the problems they have to face. My presence on that committee also worked the other way around. They heard about the kind of concerns that a conservator has and what we think is important. That exchange did as much to establish the stature of the department at the Whitney as anything else. A bi-weekly presence with the curators and the fact that there’s always a conservation voice at the table have enriched our collective experience.

RR: Do you think your art historical background has helped you being at ease working with curatorial departments and having an equal voice?

CM-U: Yes, I think it’s very important. I will undoubtedly be talking about this in my Forbes Prize Lecture at the 2016 IIC Los Angeles Congress. I believe every conservator should strive to develop his/ her voice in order to express clearly one’s approach to the work or an idea. In my case I was fortunate because I worked on the Barnett Newman catalogue raisonné with Yve-Alain Bois who is an articulate and committed art historian. Often I had to defend my observations against him on every technical aspect of Newman’s work. For years we worked together. It took us about an hour and a half in front of each work because we had decided at the beginning that we would argue until we agreed. It took that long no matter how big or small the object was. It was a formative experience for me because I was forced to have a voice, a strong voice, against a strong art history voice.

My background has a lot to do with art history and curatorial issues. Why is that important for a conservator? I think it’s important because it forces us to think more broadly. We’re trained to be very careful about our conclusions. By nature we’re cautious people. That’s just the way we are and that’s a good thing. However, we can get lost in the trees and miss the forest with that kind of approach. We can uncover a lot of information but only reluctantly be willing to take the next step of making an informed conclusion. I think it’s really important for us to feel more comfortable making those broader statements. It comes from experience, but it also comes from the acceptance that we’re all trying to understand a bigger picture here.

When I first started in conservation, rarely did conservators write in journals and catalogues. Then there was a period when conservators did contribute to catalogs but they were invariably asked to provide technical addenda that were wedged in at the back of a publication. Now I see that conservators are writing a lot more essays in catalogs. I’m pleased that the profession is progressing in that way, in a good way.
**JL: Can you tell us a little bit of the planning process for the new conservation laboratories?**

**CM-U:** Sure. I did not attend all the meetings that addressed where the conservation studios would be. So I can’t take credit for the beautiful view and terrace, but I was instrumental in determining the adjacencies and the nature of the lab. There were two important requests. One that the studios would be directly off the galleries to enable conservators to engage regularly with the works of art on view. Again, this adjacency supported the idea of being interwoven into the fabric of the institution. The other important adjacency was a Works of Art on Paper Study Center which we never had in the Breuer Building uptown because of a lack of space. The Works of Art on Paper Study Center would be a place for objects-based teaching, studying, and research focused on style, concept, and precedent. It seemed important that you could then simply go through a glass door into the conservation studios where you could ask technical questions about how the work was made, how it looked then, how it has aged, and so on – all critical criteria for any young art scholar to consider. So that was the reasoning behind suggesting that particular adjacency which I think has worked out extremely well. It’s not only a physical reality; it’s also a conceptual one.

Matthew Skopek in our Conservation Department oversaw the thinking behind and design of the labs themselves. I had already designed one at the Menil Collection, and Matt was willing to assume the mantle at the Whitney. Therefore, much of the credit goes to him. The practicality and beautiful solutions have very much to do with Matt conferring with the other conservators and working with our local architects. It was very nice to be back [after the Menil] in conversation with an architect [Renzo Piano] who held beauty as a primary directive.

**RR: In the 1990s you founded the Artist Documentation Program at the Menil Collection. How was the idea born?**

**CM-U:** When I was initially asked to treat the Rothko Chapel paintings, I had many questions about how Rothko painted the murals, but there was absolutely no technical information available. This was before the Mark Rothko Foundation had been established and before Dana Cramner was hired to conserve their collection. I had the name of one of the assistants working with Rothko on the project, and Mary Jane Victor (Menil curator) and I found him in New York. His name was Ray Kelly and I called every R. Kelly in the New York City phone book (in those days we only had phone books) until I found him. He was a Texan. He was willing to fly down to Texas and together we painted out simulations of the murals. That was the first time I began to understand how the paintings had been created. I regretted, of course, not being able to talk to Rothko who had died years before. It was that lost opportunity that made me think we should really be speaking with artists about how their works of art are made while they are still able to tell us. Later when the Menil Collection opened, it was heralded as an important building, and artists came to visit. When the artists visited, Dominique asked me to have their work brought into the conservation studio. We would greet him or her at the door and then go into Conservation where I would jump in with questions that I had wanted to ask.

They were of a technical nature, basically, how does this work look to you now after “x” number of years, what are the materials, how was it made, etc. I was astounded at first by how comfortable the artists were to speak about these issues, but clearly this is what they knew better than anyone else. Soon I began to realize that I was garnering valuable information that needed to be shared with my colleagues. That intention is what gave birth to the Artist’s Documentation Program (ADP). It was both the inability to ask Rothko technical questions coupled with the experience of engaging artists in conversation that provided the impetus.

![Carol examines a painting by Mark Rothko titled, Untitled (Blue, Yellow, Green on Red) 1954, owned by the Whitney.](Image)

**JL: Was it difficult at the time to get funding for such a program?**

**CM-U:** A member of the board of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation visited the Menil and became interested in what I was trying to do in Conservation. He suggested that I meet with the new head of the humanities program at the Mellon, Neil Rudenstine, who was interested in my ideas about conservation and the ways I wanted to build the department. Subsequently, the Foundation funded a visiting sculpture conservator program, a two-year pilot
program for a Mellon Fellow, and a pilot project of filming artist interviews. The Mellon Foundation has continued to be a supporter of this entire project. Initially, the ADP was what I did in my spare time. Naturally, I was focused on building the department in a new museum, being involved with loans, exhibitions, and all the activities that engage conservators, as well as addressing the issues of the Rothko Chapel murals. So the ADP was really an aside. Eventually, I came to realize that sometimes in your career, you’re focused on one thing and have no idea that something you are doing peripherally may end up being more important than what you thought was your main endeavor.

RR: You are also a member of the replication committee at the Whitney. What are the activities of the committee? How accepted is the approach of creating and showing replicas in your museum?

CM-U: There’s a backstory to it that I think is helpful in explaining how the committee came about. Angelica Rudenstine at the Mellon Foundation supported an international group of art scholars to study the notion of replicas in sculpture which was then discussed during a symposium called Inherent Vice: The Replica and its Implications in Modern Sculpture at the Tate Modern in 2007.

The committee divided the broad territory of replication into various components and then assigned them to different members to discuss. I was given the question of authority and ethics in these decisions. It was a complex topic to address because at base it impacted every decision. After returning to New York, a colleague said, “Why don’t you continue the discussion here at the Whitney?” So we started a Replication Committee, and I was appointed chairman. It was decided that every voice that would have a bearing on whether or not something should be replicated should be represented on the committee. So the membership included the three curators of multiples (photography, prints and film/video), the curator of the collection, conservators, registrar, museum cataloguer, archivist, and legal counsel.

I initially thought this group would meet maybe once or twice a year. We ended up meeting almost every other month. It was surprising how many questions arose or how many requests were made that bordered on replication. As it became easier to make good quality replications, the number of the requests seemed to increase. Meanwhile, the whole idea of replication steadily seeped into our cultural psyche at large. For example, the type of issue that the committee addressed ranged from use of a replica in a movie to a damaged part of a work of art that could not be restored, to working closely with an artist where something has to be redone for some reason. We take it very seriously and debate the issues at length. It has ended up being a very intellectually engaging committee.

RR: Most recently you co-curated an exhibition of Michael Heizer’s art that was installed in a large exhibition space in the new Whitney building. Can you tell us about the project?

CM-U: The Michael Heizer project involved a work of art that had been given to the Whitney in 1996. However, we were never able to exhibit it because we didn’t have enough space in the building uptown. Since I had worked with Michael Heizer for years, starting at the Menil, I certainly knew him and had a sense of his priorities. Unfortunately, the work was not in exhibitable condition. So, we began to address its condition before knowing when or where it could be shown.

As it turned out, we did have enough space in one gallery of the new Piano building once the interior walls were dismantled. That prospect became a curatorial decision, of course, and here it was very helpful to be sitting at the table. Ultimately, the team I had assembled and I worked closely with Heizer for many years to determine what he wanted, what he saw as the completion of the piece while at the same time navigating within the confines of the Museum’s protocol in order to bring the work to fruition.

For me, it was a new experience to be a co-curator. I had to deal with parts of the operation that I had never known anything about. In the end, I was gratified to be a conservator and not a curator. In turn, I think the curator was relieved to witness how closely the conservator works with the artist. Conservators and artists often speak the same language and understand each other’s intentions. It was difficult to be the person between the artist and the institution, but it was also extremely rewarding. Conversations with Michael all those years definitely shaped the way I think not only about conserving art but also what I think about an artist’s approach to his or her work over time. It was a formative experience. I’m surprised at this stage of my career I’m still having these formative experiences, but I am. The work is endlessly engaging and exciting, to say the least.
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