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**REVIEW ARTICLE**

**A STUDY ON VARIOUS PROBLEMS,  
ACHIEVEMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF  
CONSERVING CONTEMPORARY ART**

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# A Study on Various Problems, Achievements and Opportunities of Conserving Contemporary Art

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary art has never been as prevalent or as high-profile as it is today in England. Real venues and celebrations everywhere throughout the nation have converted the area in the previous two decades, and some visual arts ecologies have risen in spots outside London. Developing guest numbers reflect an expanding voracity for the visual arts, much appreciated in part to expanded and better-educated media coverage. In 2005–6, 62 for every penny of the English mature person populace went to or participated in visual arts and artworks exercises, 43 for every penny went to storehouses and galleries and 22 for every penny went by provisional presentations. The voluntary and dilettante area was as of late assessed to incorporate 1,810 visual arts assemblies and around 265,000 participants.

The visual arts help £1.9 billion horrible worth added to the UK economy every year, and utilize more than 37,000 individuals. The segment has solid connections with other imaginative businesses, for example, structural engineering, outline, promoting and the PC recreations business. The yearly art market in Britain has been assessed at £8.5 billion – second just to New York. New art fairs in London, for example, Frieze and Zoo, have gotten the general population creative energy. Expanding amounts of individuals are purchasing art to many people's surprise, a large portion of them aided by our Own Art plan. The associations between the subsidised and business area are intricate and differed, with open and private gurus frequently consolidating to store new meets expectations, displays and training programmes.

We are one player around numerous supporting the visual arts, with key partners in neighborhood powers, national and local galleries and different funders. Our speculation keeps tabs on the handling, showcase and translation of contemporary art, with much of our subsidizing going towards a system of galleries, spaces and celebrations, for example, the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, the Whitechapel Gallery and the Liverpool Biennial. We additionally finance an exhibit of help and

advancement agencies and put resources into tours of superb shows and activities by artists and organizations of all sizes, incorporating devoted touring figures, for example, Hayward Touring. We put resources into organizations that requisition art, while additionally supporting the Southbank Centre to improve, show and save the Arts Council Collection for the country.

Different chances are offered by the comprehensive and trial nature of the structure. Visual arts practice keeps on growing, and it is characterized by development and danger taking – qualities that are popular over the imaginative businesses. Improvements in moving image and new media work, particularly, have generated unique structures and substance, with outcomes for rights, permitting and conveyance that are prone to have an effect past the visual arts. The presentation of art, too, has been characterized by change. Contemporary art has gotten to be part of the fabric of open places everywhere on England, and amazing new venues of global standard now exist the nation over – incorporating Nottingham Contemporary, QUAD in Derby, Towner Art Gallery in Eastbourne, mima in Middlesbrough and Wysing Arts Centre in country Cambridgeshire. Galleries have pioneered new, creative methodologies to achieve groups of onlookers of all ages, with such victory that England is presently an affirmed planet guide in exhibition instruction.

Contemporary art challenges the underlying qualities of protection. Focused on delaying the physical life of articles despite inexorable change, conservators are particularly vexed by Conceptual and other art that inquiries ideas of lastingness and deliberately utilizes transient media.

Clad in white scientist's jackets and equipped with instruments of material dissection in gallery research centers, conservators seek after their mission of comprehension the physical components of progress. They strive to restrain concoction and physical corruption with stabilized historical center situations and specialized mediations, for example, union and

repair. Yet conservators are not simply materials scientists and involved specialists. They work with custodians and others to recognize typical significance put resources into storehouse accumulations. Their mission is to conserve the item as well as its social importance for present and future generations. The social centrality of fine arts most commonly dwells in the reasonable aim of the artist. Subsequently a point of fine arts preservation is to protect the artist's expectation by hindering physical change.

Clashes emerge when the artist's purpose is in opposition to the protection doctrine. This pressure makes preserving contemporary art a particularly exuberant terrain. Wrangle over significance turns to activity when conservators settle on choices and mediate in the physical lives of artworks—incorporating applied pieces whose essential worth lies in the nonmaterial domain of experience and interaction. The point of this article is to analyze the clashes and pressures that emerge in preserving contemporary art and to think about later inclines that address the tests of moderating nontraditional contemporary meets expectations.

In June 2008, the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) composed a gathering of worldwide specialists to examine the huge and regularly greatly intricate issues confronted by experts in the preservation of modern and contemporary art. The gathering, entitled Conservation Issues of Modern and Contemporary Art (CIMCA), was facilitated by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and underpinned by Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro. Went to by twenty-six welcomed participants from Europe and the Americas, the aggregation incorporated conservators from various key foundations and in private practice, and researchers, accumulation managers, and those included in preservation preparing projects and expert systems for contemporary art. (A full rundown of actively present people is given at the closure of this record.)

The gathering's actively present people were asked to ponder three questions:

- what are the key needs or issues in modern and contemporary art presently confronted by the protection calling?
- how may the protection calling best set about reacting to these issues?
- what progressions might the calling need to see in the following five years that might accelerate a noteworthy change in the circumstances?

Issues emerge when a distinctive activities a right that either clashes with the activity of rights by an alternate or with a obligation owed to the next. A standout amongst the most imperative cases of this is the present practice of image appointment: The examples of this, utilize the images of works by prior artists and

quote them (off and on again verbatim), the contrast being, maybe not in the visual structure but instead the learned purpose of the aforementioned images. Copyright does not recognize such subtleties of artistic expectation. The court won't take a gander at the subjective aim of the artist yet rather at the target similitude of the new work with the more advanced in years work, the apparent degree of the apportionment, the importance of the appropriated parcel to the prior work, its criticalness to the later work and the level of ability and labor connected by the second artist in the production of the second work.

This makes a pragmatic challenge for artists in that it is not their estimation which matters yet rather that of the court. The court's perspective may well contrast from that of the artist regarding the matter of mediating if the ability connected by the second artist is sufficiently free of that connected by the first.

The issue is high-lighted by the later Kitaj presentation at the Australian National Gallery. This is a choice of screen prints entitled "In our time: Covers for a little library after the life generally (1969-1970)". Known for his allotment of images from famous society, Kitaj connected this practice to book blankets and made 50 screen prints which are developed yet dedicated propagations of the first ever bookjackets. Some of these sum to a by all appearances break of the copyright in the artistic works that are emphasized on those spreads.

Maybe it is consoling to realize that by and large it is not set to matter in the scarcest if the appointment measures to a rupture of copyright for one must dependably ask, "What damage has been endured?" If it is slight, none however the wealthiest and most dead set copyright holder might initiate an activity for break of copyright. Such movements are generally extremely unmanageable and might be offended parties must equalize the damage brought about by such a rupture with the expense of implementing their rights. Nonetheless, a few offended parties, particularly vast enterprises, won't waver to initiate incidents when they surmise that their corporate image may be influenced by the unauthorized utilization of their logo or name. In such cases the artist ought to be conscious that clash is quite likely.

## INTEGRITY, VALUES, AND ETHICAL RIGHTS

Conservators work within ethical and professional standards developed by their professional bodies. As conservation increasingly professionalized during the twentieth century, membership organizations formed, with ratified codes of ethics and standards for practice. These guidelines, along with conferences and a growing body of literature, shape the philosophy and practices of the field. They also articulate the underlying values that drive conservation. Two such values that come into conflict with the aims of contemporary art are the

"preservation ethic" and respect for the "true nature" of the object.

The preservation ethic is central to the mission of most museums: "Preservation is the most fundamental of [a museum's] responsibilities, since without it research and presentation are impossible and collection is pointless." Museums assume that collected artworks have something to offer future generations, as testaments to our time or as expressions of individual genius. As defined by the American Institute for Conservation (AIC), conservation is the "profession devoted to the preservation of cultural property for the future." According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1984, the task of conservator-restorers "is to comprehend the material aspect of objects of historic and artistic significance in order to prevent their decay." This zeal to preserve conflicts with artists who want their work to deteriorate or who assign greater value to a concept than its material manifestation.

The second conservation value that conflicts with much of the art produced today is respect for the integrity of the object. Conservation literature and guidelines for practice remind practitioners of the importance of the object as an authentic document that represents a culture or an aesthetic expression. Objects are thought to have a "true nature," an essential value that can be identified and preserved: "At the foundation of the conservation ethic lies the precept 'thou shalt not change the nature of the object.'" A 1983 definition of conservation offered by the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (UKIC) defines conservation as "the means by which the true nature of an object is preserved. The true nature of an object includes evidence of its origins, its original construction, the materials of which it is composed and information as to the technology used in its manufacture."

In fine arts conservation, the integrity or true nature of the object is linked to both the "artist's intent" and the original (authentic) appearance of the work. Conservation research focuses on artistic intentions and the materials and methods used to achieve them. In his influential "Theory of Restoration," Cesare Brandi emphasizes the uniqueness and specificity of artworks, and argues that the material form, and its image, can be restored only through an aesthetic approach. He further describes a defining principle of restoration as "reestablishing the potential unity of the work of art."

Once art is purchased and enters the domain of a collection, other stakeholders come to the table with their own concerns regarding longevity, integrity, and monetary value. Artists give up certain rights once they sell their work, but retain others that are dictated by copyright legislation or written contracts from the sale.

The legal rights relevant to conservation are artists' "moral rights," as defined in national and international copyright legislation. The European Berne Convention, originally signed in Switzerland in 1886, specifically protects artists' rights of "integrity" from any "distortion, mutilation, or other modification" of their work (article 6 bis (1)). Conservation intervention, whether through cleaning, repair, or replacing missing elements, falls into the category of "other modification." The United States belatedly adopted the Berne Convention in 1989, then established its own Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) in 1990. Through these laws, artists' moral rights are protected for fifty years after their death in the U.S., seventy years in most of Europe, and "forever" in France."

United States law is less protective of artists' rights than European law. VARA specifically recognizes the rights of conservators: "The modification of a work of visual art which is the result of conservation ... of the work is not a destruction, distortion, mutilation, or other modification . . . unless the modification is caused by gross negligence" (paragraph io6A(c)(2)). This places the burden on the artist to prove reckless activity on the part of the conservator. The statute similarly states: "The modification of a work of visual art which is the result of the passage of time or the inherent nature of the materials is not a distortion, mutilation or other modification... ." (paragraph io6A(c)(i)). A critical difference between U.S. and European legislation is that in Europe moral rights legislation protects the artist, whereas in the U.S. it protects the object.

Moral rights legislation is frequently invoked in the removal or destruction of site-specific works. The legislation is rarely invoked in conservation conflicts, however, even in Europe. Perhaps this is because the legal category of "distortion, mutilation, or other modification" is more difficult to prove when it comes to good-faith efforts to clean and repair works of art. Conflicts do occur, however, and the legislation will no doubt be fully tested in the courts. The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam came into conflict with Barnett Newman's recommended conservator after the artist's death, when the conservator used a paint roller during the repair of a vandalized work." In another situation, a conservator replaced a section of fat in a Joseph Beuys sculpture after it melted in an overheated exhibit case in 1977." Unfortunately, the artist was not consulted in this process. Since Beuys incorporated the process of degeneration into much of his work, he might have accepted the melted fat as part of the sculpture's "biography."

## **AVAILABILITY, TRANSFORM, AND ARTISTS' MOTIVE**

Some contemporary art is bound to break down due to poor media selection or material incongruently.



Conservators call this "inborn bad habit." Self-pulverization can originate from under-designing or material cooperation, as when one metal consumes in contact with an alternate through galvanic oxidation. Widening the extent of art media in the twentieth century accelerated material examinations that some of the time fizzled. In securing works with shaky "discovered" items, synthesized modern polymers, and other new innovations, gallery accumulations moved from the foreseeable to the obscure.

Plastics are a case in point. Synthetic polymers vary enormously in their inherent stability. Many early plastics, such as cellulose nitrate, are now known to decompose both chemically and physically.<sup>15</sup> Plastics yellow, craze, and become brittle as additives migrate within their structure and their long molecular chains break down and cross-link. They react to acidic and alkaline environments, heat, ultraviolet light, and extremes of moisture. Whereas some plastics are notoriously unstable, others (such as many polyethylenes and polystyrenes) are relatively inert and even used for archival museum storage containers. Conservators and conservation scientists devote time and effort to identify plastics in art and their mechanisms of deterioration. They create micro-environments in exhibitions and in storage facilities to lengthen the lives of fragile plastics, and they research synthetic polymers for use in conservation interventions.

Just as some contemporary artists unknowingly threaten longevity by their selection of media, others make deliberate compromises. Ephemeral materials and unstable juxtapositions may convey symbolic meaning that expresses the artist's intent but also knowingly leads to self-destruction. Unstable works can accumulate monetary or social value, leading to conservation interventions that challenge ethical practice but are sometimes justifiable. In certain circumstances, substitutions may be made for original materials that have degenerated and no longer represent the artist's intent. However, material replacement is in direct conflict with the conservation ethic of respecting the integrity of the authentic object. In such cases of conflict, codes of ethics and legal restrictions provide a theoretical framework for decision-making, but they inevitably fail to give clear direction for practice. Decisions about deteriorated elements take place in collaboration with artists, artists' representatives, owners, art historians, conservators, conservation scientists, and technical consultants.

## PROBLEMS

The primary problems identified by the meeting participants were grouped into six broad categories:

- research into modern materials;
- research into conservation treatments;

- ethical/theoretical issues;
- documentation;
- dissemination and information sharing;
- education and training.

**Research into Modern Materials :** Despite recent and significant advances in the conservation profession's knowledge of some of the materials used in modern and contemporary art—in particular, modern paints—there remains a severe lack of information regarding the vast majority of modern/contemporary materials, in terms of understanding how they behave (either alone or in combination with other materials), and how they might alter with age, in storage, with treatment, and/or in transit, etc.

**Research into Conservation Treatments :** Conservators often have to carry out treatments on modern and contemporary art works with a limited range of appropriate materials and treatment options, and without the desired level of understanding of the materials/process themselves and/or the long-term consequences of their use.

**Ethical/Theoretical Issues :** Many of the difficult decisions faced by conservators for modern and contemporary art pose highly complex, ethical dilemmas, and in numerous instances there are clear disagreements within the conservation profession—as well as among other parts of the art world—on how to resolve conflicting values. Art history and conservation have traditionally relied on the authority that each field brings to an artwork's meaning and understanding. This is now under some re-evaluation when it comes to contemporary works.

**Documentation :** Considerable amounts of time and resources are currently placed on gathering information on modern and contemporary art for documentation purposes, especially—but not exclusively—for museum collections. However, this creates its own set of issues, in particular the need to consider several new aspects in works of contemporary art that should be documented beyond the physical object—such as the significance, value, and meaning of materials, sound, motion, and even smell—and to develop strategies and methodologies for documenting them. It is also imperative that a more standardized terminology is developed within the profession to ensure that this documentation is easily shared and understood.

**Dissemination and Information Sharing :** Communication and information exchange within and beyond the profession is inadequate. Despite the existence of professional networks—for example, INCCA (The International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art), ICOM-CC: MMCA (the Modern Materials and Contemporary Art

working group of the International Council of Museums–Conservation Committee), and AMIEN (Art Materials Information and Education Network)—these are still under-utilized; they remain, however, the logical vehicles for creating far more dynamic forms of networking and dissemination.

**Education and Training :** It was recognized that the training and education of more conservators in modern and contemporary art is key to progress in the field, and that the majority of conservation training programs are already attempting to respond to this need. There remains, however, a significant amount of disagreement on how best to achieve the most appropriate training for such conservators, and on how to get around the limitations of existing educational models. Other levels of education and training possibilities are also lacking—for example, pre-program and mid-career opportunities.

## **LATEST IMPROVEMENTS IN CONSERVATION**

Conservators and conservation scientists address the needs of contemporary art on many fronts. Researching the behavior of new art materials and technologies can involve a number of institutions as well as artists and their foundations. For instance, six different institutions joined forces to investigate patterns of surface irregularities on highly polished metal sculptures of artists such as Donald Judd.<sup>30</sup> A growing body of literature chronicles this genre of technical research on modern materials. In 2001 Harvard University created a Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art.<sup>31</sup> The Center will assemble an archive of art and conservation materials together with information received from artists.

Conservators must rethink their standard methodology in the face of new materials, new technologies, and conceptually driven art. New models for conservation include active participation by artists and other stakeholders and are not necessarily motivated by the ethic of preserving the "authentic" object. One model with a high tolerance for incorporating change according to artists' intentions comes from the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art in Amsterdam.<sup>32</sup> As described by the authors, this model follows standard conservation methodology in its emphasis on documentation, material-condition research, and identifying the meaning, or artist's intent. The model forces a discussion of two types of discrepancy. The first is whether the current condition of a work conflicts with its intended meaning—does the aging, damage, or decay warrant conservation intervention? As the authors suggest, a scratch in a floor plate by Carl Andre confirms the artist's meaning, whereas a similar scratch on a pristine Donald Judd negates the artist's intent.<sup>33</sup> Similar scratches may lead to very different conservation decisions, based on artists' expressed goals for their work. The second

point for discussion of discrepancy is in considering options for conservation. The conservator gathers relevant information from a range of sources, such as material analysis, industrial literature, and documented artist's intent. She then formulates passive and active options for

conservation. Stakeholders discuss these options, as well as others they bring to the table. A central question is whether conservation intervention helps unite the object with its intended meaning. Polishing or refinishing a scratched Donald Judd may do just that, whereas similar treatment of a Carl Andre floor plate would contradict his objectives.

Museums work collaboratively to share their archived data on artists' materials and intentions. Two recent initiatives illustrate this trend in information sharing. The first is the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA),<sup>37</sup> funded by the European Commission and organized by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage with the Tate Gallery. INCCA's mission is to establish a virtual archive of information on artists' intent. The primary tool is a meta-database of references to unpublished documents held by member institutions, such as video interviews, notes from conversations, and analysis of materials used by individual artists. Because of restrictions on copyright and confidentiality, the documents themselves are not posted online. Once an authorized researcher locates a document from an online search, she contacts

the owning institution for permission to view or obtain a copy of the document. An additional project of INCCA is an online literature database for publications on contemporary art conservation, along with conference postings, guidelines for conducting artist interviews, models for conservation decision-making, a conservation vocabulary list, and links to related websites. Fortunately, this aspect of their work is accessible online to non-members.

The models suggested in this study for conserving contemporary art challenge standard beliefs in preserving the authentic object. They also point to greater collaboration and sharing of conservation authority. The multidisciplinary nature of creating contemporary art leads to a conservation that is more diffuse at its borders. Not only do traditional divisions of conservation (e.g., paintings, sculpture, and paper) break down, but conservation research and decision-making also reach into new technical and social arenas. While striving to hold onto a strong sense of professional ethics, conservation is forced outside of museum walls to become a more participatory practice that is shaped by new technologies and new currents in contemporary culture.

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