

Bridging the Gap

Theory and Practice in the Conservation of Contemporary Art

Maastricht 24-27 March 2019

(NACCA, MACCH, Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht)

call for papers



For several decades already, the conservation of contemporary art constitutes a dynamic field of research and reflection. At first, this research was primarily instigated by conservation professionals working in or with museums and other heritage organisations, but increasingly academic researchers and universities have been involved as well. This is visible for instance in the growing number of PhD dissertations devoted to challenges in the conservation of contemporary art and of research collaborations between academic and professional institutions. Although such research is often conducted by researchers with a conservation background, it still remains to be seen whether and how their findings and insights are translated into the daily work practices of conservators in the field – or, vice versa, whether and how the problems and dilemmas encountered in conservation practice find their way into broader research questions and projects.

Convened towards the end of The European Fine Art Fair in Maastricht, this symposium aims to strengthen the exchange between theory and practice in the conservation of contemporary art by exploring promising practices (and failures) and by critically questioning its conditions and drawbacks. It is a collaboration between the EU funded Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Network *New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art* (NACCA, the Maastricht Centre for Arts and Culture, Conservation and Heritage (MACCH) and the Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht. Next to the presentation of the 15 NACCA PhD projects, it will host several keynote lectures, panels and round tables.

For the panels we welcome papers addressing one of the following themes:

1. Theoretical attempts to rethink the artwork and artist intent and their implications for conservation ethics and decision-making.

The problems of contemporary art conservation have generated various attempts to develop alternative notions of the identity and authenticity of the work of art and of the intentions of the artist. What characterizes these notions and what do they imply for conservation ethics and decision-making? How do they work in conservation practice – to what extent are they helpful and what are their limits?

2. New materials and materialities

On the one hand, new materials (plastics, organic materials, digital media) require new forms of scientific expertise to secure their conservation; on the other, materials and materiality play a different role in contemporary artworks than before. To what extent do insights from more anthropologically and philosophically oriented understandings of materiality like material culture studies and new materialism help in addressing these issues? What are the benefits and limits of these understandings seen from a practice point of view? But also, how can (the study of) conservation practices open up new research avenues?

3. New modes of production, new modes of collecting

Production processes in contemporary art have become increasingly complex. The range of materials used by artists is endless, as is the urge to experiment outside of the traditional art production processes and materials. Artist's studios have become complex hubs. Some delegate routinely and delegate to a variety of fabricators or industries while others develop highly specialized in-house skills. The re-appropriation of found materials and off-the shelves/mass produced objects, and the use of delegation, have strong implications for the conservation of contemporary art. Modes of collecting and displaying contemporary art are also extremely diverse with many non-collecting institutions displaying art and institutions commissioning of ephemeral pieces that might get acquired later but were not meant to be permanent. How can research and theory in conservation help in mapping these complex processes?

4. New approaches to documentation and archiving

In contemporary art, the idea that an artwork is a finished and self-sustaining end product made by the artist alone has given way to a more open-ended and dynamic conception of the work's modes of existence. This is especially true for allographic and performative artworks and puts a lot of emphasis on the gathering, documentation and archiving of information about the processes constituting these works. What are promising approaches and models to present, display, or reproduce such complex, extensive and dynamic bodies of information? What can be learnt from other disciplines in this respect?

5. Challenging professional and institutional roles and responsibilities; expanded networks: collaborations and controversies

There is an increasing awareness that traditional role definitions and distinctions (as between conservators and curators) are changing, that museums need to adapt their infrastructures and go outside their institutions to collaborate with stakeholders such as artists and their estates, technicians or programmers or the public, and with external experts in order to care for works of art. What does this mean in practice? What are best practices and what are bottlenecks? What is required for collaborations to be successful and what problems may arise?

6. Art, law and the market

To what extent and in what way are conservation strategies in contemporary art influenced by legal constraints and by the art market? What happens for instance when artists pass away and their work is taken care of by other stakeholders like artist estates, gallerists or private collectors? What is the role of commercial enterprises (like insurance companies) in conservation? What kind of research and theory is needed to account for these influences?

Maximum length of the papers will be 15 minutes.

Please send an abstract (max. 200 words) with a short bio (100 words max) to Yleen Simonis, email: nacca-fasos@maastrichtuniversity.nl

Deadline: November 10, 2018.

Conference fees will amount to 150 € (including lunches and a conference dinner).

Links:

<http://nacca.eu>

<https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/macch>

<https://www.bonnefanten.nl/>