

Not all contemporary  
art will survive nor is  
it intended to.

# **MORTALITY IMMORTALITY?**

Is contemporary art only  
**THE LEGACY OF 20TH-CENTURY ART**  
for contemporary times?

No most emphatically not.

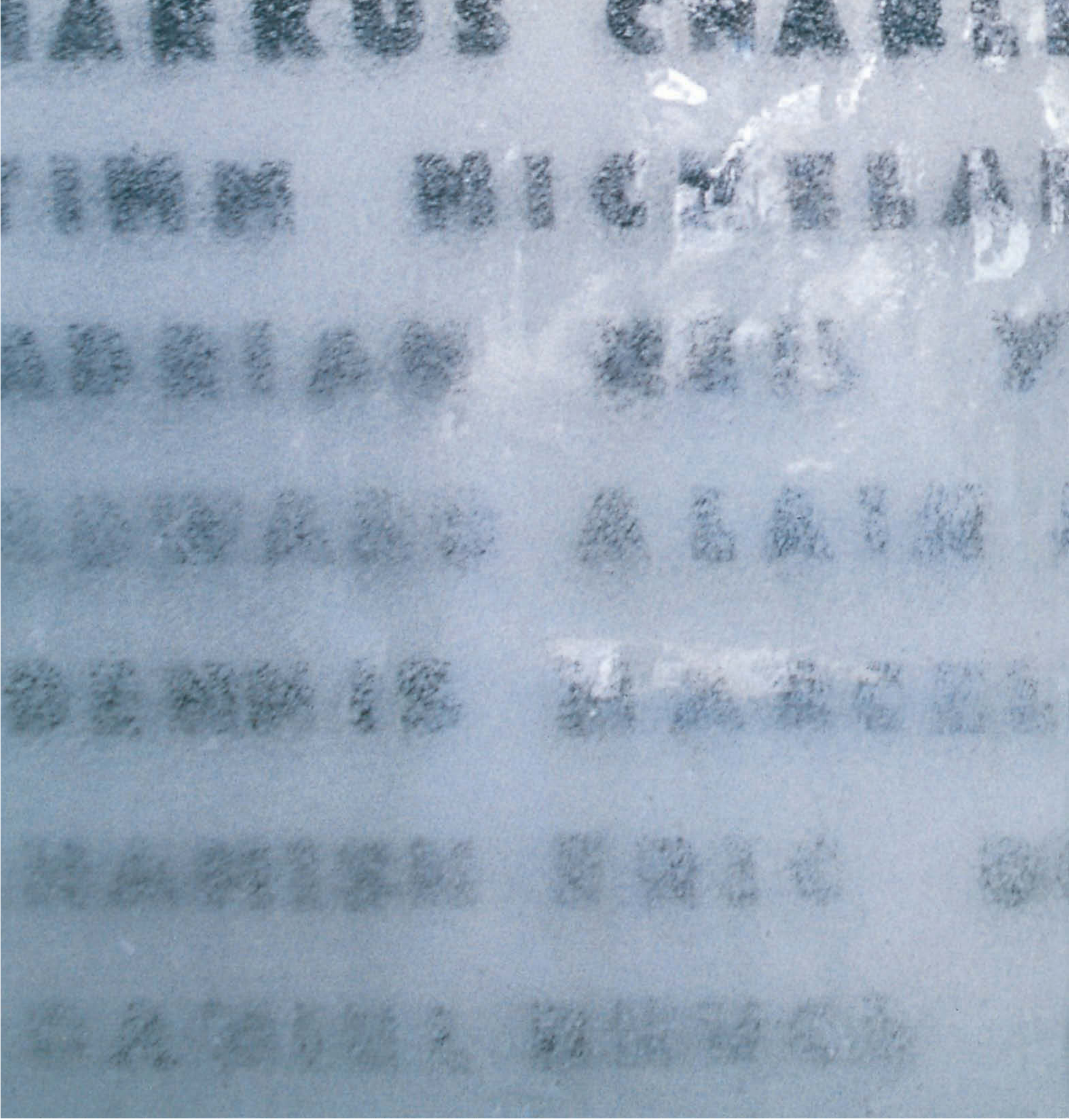
EDITED BY MIGUEL ANGEL CORZO



# **MORTALITY IMMORTALITY?**

**THE LEGACY OF 20TH-CENTURY ART**

---



# **MORTALITY IMMORTALITY?**

**THE LEGACY OF 20TH-CENTURY ART**

---

EDITED BY MIGUEL ANGEL CORZO

THE GETTY CONSERVATION INSTITUTE LOS ANGELES



Dinah Berland, *Managing Editor*  
Shelly Kale, *Manuscript Editor*  
Anita Keys, *Production Coordinator*  
Vickie Sawyer Karten, *Designer*  
Theresa Velázquez, *Typographer*  
Tracy Bartley, *Conference Coordinator*

Printed in Singapore  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

© 1999 by the J. Paul Getty Trust  
All rights reserved.  
Individual texts used by permission of the authors.

The Getty Conservation Institute works internationally to further the appreciation and preservation of the world's cultural heritage for the enrichment and use of present and future generations. The Institute is an operating program of the J. Paul Getty Trust.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mortality immortality? : the legacy of 20th-century art / edited by Miguel Angel Corzo.  
p. cm.  
Based on a conference held at the Getty Center, Los Angeles, Mar. 25-27, 1998.  
Includes index.  
ISBN 0-89236-528-5 (alk. paper)  
I. Art, Modern-20th century--Conservation and restoration--Congresses. II. Corzo, Miguel Angel. III. Getty Conservation Institute.

N6485.M67 1999  
709'.04'00288--dc21

98-38695  
CIP

# CONTENTS

Foreword <i>Barry Munitz</i>	vii	Preserving Now <i>Cliff Einstein</i>	101
Preface <i>Mildred Constantine</i>	ix	Infinite Columns and Finite Solutions <i>David A. Scott, Vladimir Kucera, and Bo Rendahl</i>	107
Michel Delacroix's <i>Melting Plot</i> <i>Julián Zugazagoitia</i>	xiv	<b>Part 4 The Ecosystem</b>	<b>113</b>
Introduction <i>Miguel Angel Corzo</i>	xv	Projectiles <i>Tony Cragg</i>	115
<b>Part 1 Is Contemporary Art Only for Contemporary Times?</b>	<b>1</b>	The Art Ecosystem: Art as It Exists within a Private Collection <i>Agnes Gund</i>	121
Looking at the Future Looking at the Present as Past <i>Arthur C. Danto</i>	3	The Archive of Techniques and Working Materials Used by Contemporary Artists <i>Erich Gantzert-Castrillo</i>	127
"Look at My Picture!" <i>R. B. Kitaj</i>	13	The Survival of Contemporary Art: The Role of the Conservation Professional in This Delicate Ecosystem <i>Debra Hess Norris</i>	131
The Case against Amnesia <i>James Coddington</i>	19	Intentionality and Performance-Based Art <i>Paul Schimmel</i>	135
Andy Goldsworthy's New Ruins <i>Thomas F. Reese</i>	25	Linen Longevity <i>Sheila Hicks</i>	141
"Immortalité Provisoire" <i>Robert Storr</i>	35	<b>Part 5 Who Is Responsible?</b>	<b>145</b>
Present and Future: Caring for Contemporary Art at the Tate Gallery <i>Roy A. Perry</i>	41	Hope Springs Eternal: One Artist's Struggle for Immortality <i>Judy Chicago</i>	147
Strange Fruit <i>Ann Temkin</i>	45	Notes on the Preservation of American Murals <i>Francis V. O'Connor</i>	153
<b>Part 2 Present and Future Perceptions</b>	<b>51</b>	Art Museum Criteria <i>Thomas M. Messer</i>	159
Work as Process or Work as Product: A Conceptual Dilemma <i>Helen Escobedo</i>	53	Preserving Whose Mortality or Immortality? <i>Keith Morrison</i>	161
For Example—Examining Pollock <i>Jürgen Harten</i>	57	A Dealer's Responsibility <i>Donald Young</i>	165
Copyright Aspects of the Preservation of Nonpermanent Works of Modern Art <i>Thomas K. Dreier</i>	63	The Conservation of Contemporary Art: New Methods and Strategies? <i>Ysbrand Hummelen</i>	171
From "'91" to "42": Questions of Conservation for Modern Materials <i>David Grattan and R. Scott Williams</i>	67	A Life in Its Own Times <i>Laurel Reuter</i>	175
Immortality/Immortality <i>Joyce J. Scott</i>	75	About the Authors	183
<b>Part 3 The Challenge of Materials</b>	<b>79</b>	Illustration Credits	187
Conserving Photography and Preserving the Vitality of Our Culture <i>Peter Galassi</i>	81	Index	188
Permanent Impermanence <i>Bill Viola</i>	85		
The Media Arts and the Museum: Reflections on a History, 1963–1973 <i>John G. Hanhardt</i>	95		



**Love will decide what is kept, and  
science will decide how it is kept.**

— David Hockney

## FOREWORD

The creation of a work of art is only the beginning of its life. From then on, it changes. It may pass through different hands: from artist to dealer to collector to curator to conservator. How and why the work is sustained or maintained is up to all who come in contact with it. Those of us living now are responsible not only for caring for works that have been passed to us by previous peoples and generations but also for preserving the legacy of the art of today.

How do we address the issues related to the conservation of contemporary art? In the past, meetings on this topic have typically been limited in focus, spotlighting only one or two topics and dealing with just a few groups of professionals—usually curators, art historians, and/or conservators.

The Getty Conservation Institute's conference "Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art" was exceptional in its scope, both in the diversity of those who participated in the dialogue and in the range of issues explored. The meeting brought together professionals—as speakers and as audience—with different philosophies and from many disciplines. Preservation issues surrounding contemporary art were discussed and debated by artists, architects, museum directors, curators, conservators, art historians, art educators, students, dealers, collectors, archivists, philosophers, lawyers, scientists, and technicians. Philosophical, ethical, art historical and technological questions, and

the overlying economic factors, were confronted and the inherent problems illuminated. The conference fostered discussion on a variety of questions and in a variety of voices.

Through a series of essays, this book echoes that holistic vision by addressing such questions as:

- How do we decide what will define our cultural heritage and should be preserved for posterity?
- Who should make these decisions?
- How should the objects or events be conserved?
- What constitutes preservation?
- Should there be careful documentation or stabilization or restoration of an art object?
- Who is ultimately responsible for a work of art's preservation?

These issues and others are represented here in essays by thirty-six distinguished individuals. The compilation of their writings provides a one-of-a-kind resource of ideas and philosophies on the legacy of twentieth-century art—not only from the viewpoint of those who work to save the art of today, but also of those who create it, study it, analyze it, sell it, buy it, and care for it. For example, the chapters

written by artists document how each one feels about the future of his or her work—an important consideration in its conservation—and serve as an important source of information for future conservators. All those engaged in the dialogue surrounding art and cultural heritage will find this timely volume of critical interest.

With its collection of contemporary art, commissions of contemporary works for the Getty Center site, and acquisition of such pieces as David Hockney's *Pearblossom Hwy.* into the Museum collection, the Getty is confirming its commitment to the visual artists of today and to our own legacy of the twentieth century. By sponsoring an event such as the "Mortality Immortality?" conference and by publishing this book, the Getty is acknowledging its responsibility to engage important voices in dialogue on issues that confront the visual arts and impact future generations' understanding of those who came before.

Barry Munitz  
President and  
Chief Executive Officer  
The J. Paul Getty Trust



*Image Not Available for Publication*

## PREFACE

For three days in March 1998, at the Getty Center in Los Angeles, more than 350 people came together from their various institutions, studios, and studies to participate in a conference that explored a multidimensional, broadly focused topic: “Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art.” The thirty-four invited speakers included artists, conservators, museum directors, curators, art historians, educators, philosophers, collectors, dealers, scientists, and lawyers. Their approaches to the future of twentieth-century art were, in turn, philosophical, ethical, art historical, and technological. While other conferences had been held on this subject, there had not yet been one that included the full spectrum of disciplines and views that this area of interest now seemed to demand. What was the genesis of this important conference, and hence this book that has emerged from it?

As an art historian and a curator, I have had the good fortune to witness a transformation of the concept of what art is and can be. This development has been brought about by the faith, vision, and clarity of contemporary artists who—free of the imposition of rules or commandments that once governed the production of art—have produced an astonishing range of innovations during the last four decades of the twentieth century. Although art in traditional media is still being created, we now also see art made of mixed-media components, art of assemblage, installation, and art that is ephemeral—even disposable—and repeatable. Today’s art no longer consists of single objects only. It is complex, multiple, divisible, separable, made up of its parts. Consequently, the alternative meanings, the vulnerability of materials, the intent of the artists, as well as problems of acquisition, the care of single works, installations and environments, and the methods for dealing with unprecedented manifestations in the production of art, have raised new issues for the curatorial and art historical disciplines.

My academic background and curatorial experience extend across historical periods, geographical boundaries, art categories, and generations of artists. During the

**FIGURE 1**  
Sol LeWitt, Wall Drawing #696, 1992. Color ink wash. Collection Koninklijke Schouwburg, The Hague, the Netherlands.



course of my work, I have encountered art from the medieval period to the contemporary era, including two- and three-dimensional works, major monuments, altarpieces, frescoes, ceramics, painted textiles, gold-encrusted armor, and the single painting or sculpture. The cumulative impact of all these forms has made me aware that art transcends time, along with its myths and immortal presence.

The major exhibitions in which I have been involved explored the legacy of the past: *The Ancient Art of Andes* (1954), *Timeless Aspects of Modern Art* (1949), and *Art Nouveau* (1960) at The Museum of Modern Art in New York; as well as *The Decorative Arts of Latin America in the XVIII Century* (1976) at the Smithsonian National Collection of Fine Arts (now the National Museum of American Art) in Washington, D.C. My engagement with these exhibitions fed my knowledge and exposed me to the longevity of a wide range of cultures. The care of single objects made of materials

and using techniques that had been employed for centuries also presented their conservation challenges.

Of even greater challenge and concern, however, were works in exhibitions of contemporary art. In the exhibition *The Object Transformed* (1966), which I originated at The Museum of Modern Art, were many fascinating and obviously vulnerable works, such as Meret Oppenheim's *Untitled* (1936), a fur-covered cup, plate, and spoon that had been in the museum's collection since 1946 and has been on view in a Plexiglas vitrine; Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed* (1955), a combine with pillow and quilt that I had seen in Rauschenberg's studio shortly after it was completed; and Yayoi Kusama's *Dress* (1964), made of flannel, macaroni, and silver plastic paint. Were these works meant to last? How should they be handled? What were my obligations toward them as curator and art historian?

I had chosen these works for aesthetic reasons, as well as for their suitability to the theme I was exploring. But when I looked at Kusama's *Dress* and considered its multiple meanings, I thought of an Inca cloak that had survived for centuries. Would Kusama's coat survive equally well? What was her intention and my responsibility? Would Rauschenberg's sheets and quilt last until the next century? And what of the artworks from the 1970s that defied all previous

classifications, such as a collection of tesserae held together by time and the endless metamorphosis of creativity?

In 1993, I met with Miguel Angel Corzo, director of the Getty Conservation Institute, and raised the question of the future of contemporary art. I soon learned that we shared similar concerns. "How will the twentieth century be remembered?" he asked. "What will be left of the creative spirit for future generations to ponder?" These issues, he felt, should be explored by the GCI, as they "belong side by side with our more traditional areas of inquiry." We agreed that these issues needed to be brought to the forefront of discussions about the legacy of our times.

Once art leaves the hands of its creator, it enters the art community. It is exhibited, bought, and collected and becomes the possession and responsibility of those persons and institutions in whose care it has been placed, and of art historians as well. Thus, I felt it was important to approach not only artists but also museum directors, curators, art historians, collectors, dealers, scientists, and lawyers—surely a dynamic mix.

With the encouragement of colleagues at the Getty, I explored these ideas over a period of three years in more than sixty interviews conducted in the United States, Europe, Canada, Mexico, and

Brazil. I went in search not of solutions but rather of a broader understanding of the problems and requirements inherent in the wide-ranging practices and disciplines of contemporary art.

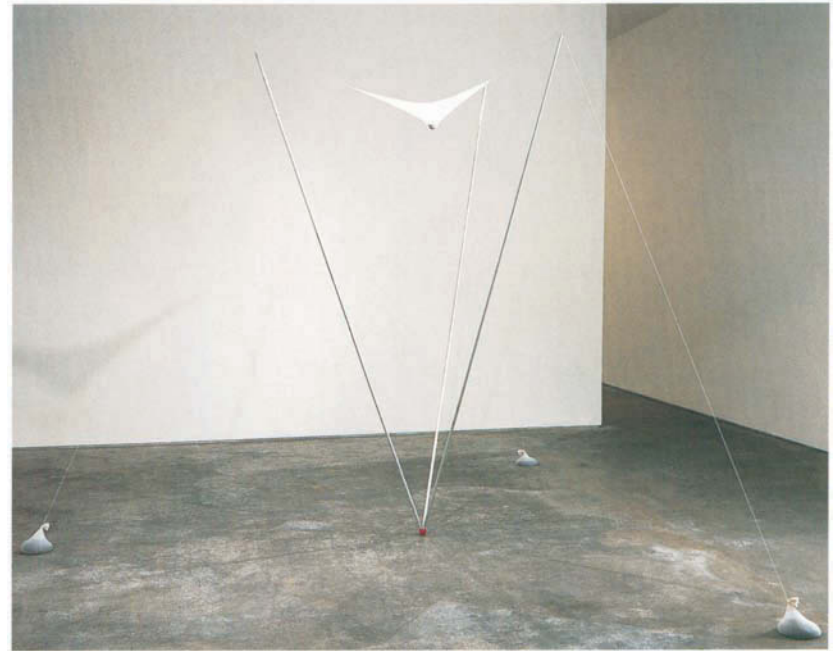
The interviews I conducted offered surprising perspectives. They took on a dynamic and a coherency of their own and led to the idea of hearing some of these voices in concert. Could a conference open to all disciplines in the world of art help to expose and clarify these issues? Could new insights be gained that might expand my own strategies? The plan of action grew like early sketches made in preparation for a larger composition.

The great reward in dealing with contemporary art is that of being in close proximity to working artists: acknowledging the life force within them and understanding their motivations, what their work is about, how meaning is embedded in their work, and their unending desire for experimentation.

Their concerns came to be my own. When I spoke to artists not only about their work but also about the scope and seriousness of the question of legacy, they enthusiastically offered their cooperation.

Sol LeWitt is a seminal artist whose work embodies many of the elements central to the themes presented here. When I interviewed him in 1996, he discussed his methods and philosophy. He calls his works made with ink “wall drawings” (FIG. 1). When paint is used, rather than ink, he calls them “wall paintings.” They all fall under the umbrella of “wall pieces.” He explains, simply, that his works are colors applied to walls. He uses a water-soluble ink—only reds, yellows, and blues, and sometimes grays (diluted black)—with three applications of each color. He then covers all of this with a matte varnish. What he is seeking is a certain translucence, a transparency. He considers each of his works as the possession of the buyer and stipulates ownership by giving the buyer a certificate permitting the work on the wall to be obliterated at any time—and redrawn again—according to the owner’s wishes. LeWitt’s crew is made up mostly of artists who execute the original paint job and perform all repairs and restorations.

Like much installation art, LeWitt’s work is both disposable and repeatable. Although he ac-



**FIGURE 2**  
Ernesto Neto, *Apolo 3*, 1997. Aluminum, polyamide, cotton, rubber, and steel; 335.28 × 335.28 × 274.32 cm (132 × 132 × 108 in.).

cepts the fact that there may be slight variations in the repetition, he uses the analogy of a musical composition, which can be interpreted by many different performers. I asked him how he came to this particular philosophical and aesthetic point of view. He replied that he was working for the architect I. M. Pei in 1952; this experience gave him an understanding of architectural spaces, confirming his use of walls and methods used by architects. In the early 1960s, he felt that he did not want to continue to produce objects—that is to say, paintings on canvas with frames,



**FIGURE 3**  
Ed Rossbach, *Purple Box*, 1985. Ash splints,  
commercial fabric, newspaper, acrylic paint;  
22.86 × 29.21 × 19.05 cm (9 × 11½ × 7½ in.).  
Collection of the artist.

which were produced as commodities. In his youthful ideology, he did not consider the colored walls he was making to be saleable objects. In fact, owning one of these works still takes a special kind of commitment.

I had several memorable conversations with artists in Brazil, including Ernesto Neto, who lives in Rio de Janeiro but whose main gallery is in São Paulo. Neto's work is difficult to categorize, as it consists mostly of unclassifiable three-dimensional installations that change from site to site (FIG. 2). He uses many different kinds of materials: nylon, Styrofoam, wood, powdered lead, paper, string, and others. If a work is damaged, the artist frankly admits to making a replica. We discussed at length replicas versus originals, but this seemed to have no importance for him. As far as longevity was con-

cerned, he expressed disinterest in this, too. I could not be dispassionate about this.

In 1994, I had a conversation with Ed Rossbach, an important contemporary artist who works with fiber and other materials, including trash. I had been following his work since 1964, when I selected four works for the Triennale in Milan. His baskets, made from ash splints, paper, bark, cardboard, or other common materials, such as newsprint, are alluring (FIG. 3). When I asked him about deterioration, he replied, "I can't honestly say that I think much about the condition of my baskets in fifty years. I use whatever material is necessary to my expression, even if it is newspaper that will turn yellow tomorrow. I use the best materials I can, but I do not allow consideration of conservation to determine what I do."

To be grounded in the arts from prehistory to contemporary times, as I have been, is to be aware of the life/death legacy of a culture and of a single work of art that represents that culture. To sustain that legacy through time, I felt it was important to encourage a heritage with modern roots. Never detached from contemporary art—and concerned about the frailty of idea embodied in object—I listened to what the diverse voices of these potential participants in a public dialogue had to say. The idea of a conference soon became a necessary reality.

At the “Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art” conference, the Getty Conservation Institute provided a forum for raising and responding to the many issues involved in the preservation of contemporary art. The meeting was organized around the following topics: “Is Contemporary Art Only for Contemporary Times?” “Present and Future Perceptions,” “The Challenge of Materials,” “The Ecosystem,” and “Who Is Responsible?”

This book reflects the breadth and depth of that three-day conference. Theories and opinions were presented with vigorous rapport as well as divergent arguments. The aggregate is a compelling dialogue that has already aroused international interest and that demonstrates a strong desire and urgency for continuing and expanding such conferences.

There are no boundaries to what is possible in art. The art of our time leaves as its legacy more than durable traditional works. There will be reconstructions, fugitive remnants, and visual and verbal documentations, such as the book you hold in your hands. There will also be myths and fables that enter and will continue to shape the history of twentieth-century art.

I owe special thanks to those colleagues who participated in the conference. I wish to express deep gratitude to Miguel Angel Corzo,

director of the Getty Conservation Institute, for everything: for his wholehearted support; for his immediate recognition of the importance of ideas and concept; for his courage; and for his continued sage and constructive advice, which enabled the conference to be brought to glowing fruition and which provided me with spiritual support and friendship. I commend and thank Tracy Bartley, who met the challenge of working on our team with skill, intelligence, and devotion and whose insight was helpful in the development of the conference. Thanks also to Julián Zugazagoitia for his advice in the early stages of the project. A joyful bonding.

Mildred Constantine  
New York





Michel Delacroix's  
**MELTING PLOT**  
An Ephemeral Installation at  
The Getty Center, Los Angeles  
March 25–27, 1998



To represent the concerns surrounding the conservation of twentieth-century art, the Getty Conservation Institute commissioned a work by contemporary artist Michel Delacroix. Not merely an illustration, *Melting Plot* served as a dynamic metaphor for the issues presented at the "Mortality Immortality?" conference, issues that are now reflected in this book.

In his ephemeral installation, Delacroix presented an allegory about life and death, about permanence and fluidity. *Melting Plot* posed questions that apply today as well as always: how to reconcile Heraclitus with Parmenides—total opposition to change with continuous evolution.

At first sight, the installation of ice, painted wood, travertine, and cast wax appeared as an enigmatic block of ice. Almost two meters tall and less than one meter thick, it was frosty white, with dark letters embedded in its frozen mass. Like an immaculate white page, the pristine block of ice communicated a sense of order and perfection. Gradually, as the ice began to melt, the thick cast-wax letters within it became more visible, disclosing names of contemporary artists. Under the light of day, and over the three-day period of the conference, the ice stele reacted like photographic paper, its latent images rising to the surface. As is his custom, Delacroix did not use surnames, considering them too specific, but chose generic first names instead. The name Joseph, for example, could be applied to Beuys or Cornell or any other Joseph the viewer might think of as a contemporary artist.

As the ice proceeded to melt, the letters—one by one and in clusters—fell into the pool of meltwater that had begun to collect below. Eventually, the ice disappeared completely. The swimming letters that had once spelled the names of artists past and present began to suggest an infinity of other permutations—an invitation to spell out the names of artists yet to come.

In its initial state, the immaculate, frozen-solid plaque might have served as a traditional symbol of conserva-

tion—immortality, a way to embalm for eternity. Ice conveys the impression that anything can be preserved, but at what cost? Is it possible to freeze the *élan vital*, to freeze creativity? Can we conceive of wanting to preserve a work at the cost of its soul?

Inevitably, ice melts, yet life persists; the forces of nature are always there to remind us that everything is transformation. Delacroix's *Melting Plot*, by its elegant economy of means, portrayed the interplay of elements, the alchemy of the nearly nothing, the essence of forces that covertly act on every work of art. Thus, from frozen solid to liquid thaw to total evaporation into air, a cycle of change was enacted: an image of perfect order sliding into dissolution and, finally, into chaos overflowing with new possibilities.

Is there any permanence within continuous evolution? Is time truly a mobile image of immobile eternity? What remains after all? The traces and memory of the oeuvre are its immediate future; what it generates determines its fate. In that sense, the letters found at the end, set in positions that only chance could dictate, evoke the poet Mallarmé's famous "coup de dés" (throw of the dice). The essence of this work extends the long-lasting tradition of vanity paintings. With this contemporary *vanitas*, Michel Delacroix has questioned the efforts to freeze art and bet on the ever-changing, unseizable forces of life.

Julián Zugazagoitia  
Paris

## INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1997, *The New York Times* asked seventeen art-world protagonists and observers the question, “What is art?”<sup>1</sup> All gave the same response: The question had no answer. At around the same time, a conference was held in Amsterdam that sought, by its title, to answer the question, “Modern Art: Who Cares?”

It has been said that art does not move in a linear fashion from one century to the next; creativity ebbs and flows. Still, if we accept the notion that art reflects history, then contemporary art is, in some way, a monument to contemporary civilization. It is the cultural heritage of our time. Thus, as the new millennium approaches, we are right to wonder how we will be remembered through the heritage we have produced. The question is: Who decides what constitutes our cultural heritage? The most borrowed objects from the National Museum of American History to Japan and elsewhere are Dorothy’s ruby slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*; Indiana Jones’s leather jacket from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*; and the robot R2-D2 from *Star Wars*. Will our choices for preservation be based on popularity and the movies? Will the selection be the result of the attrition of time? Art historian Edward B. Garrison has estimated that perhaps 70 to 80 percent “of the paintings originally produced in Italy in such remote periods as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries must be considered lost.”<sup>2</sup> One may well ask: Seven hundred years from now,

# Do we have an obligation to the future to provide a comprehensive record of twentieth-century art? If so, how do we choose what will be saved?

what will be left of twentieth-century art?

For the first time in history, it is possible for us to decide what we want to save for posterity. Do we have an obligation to the future to provide a comprehensive record of twentieth-century art? If so, how do we choose what will be saved? Who makes the choices? And how do we save what we have chosen?

This book—based on the conference “Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art,” sponsored by the Getty Conservation Institute and held at the Getty Center in Los Angeles, March 25–27, 1998—offers the reader the opportunity to consider the range of problems associated with the preservation of contemporary art,

1. Amei Wallach, “Is It Art? Is It Good?” *The New York Times*, 12 October 1997.

2. Edward B. Garrison, “Note on the Survival of Thirteenth-Century Panel Paintings in Italy,” *Bulletin* 54 (1972), 140; quoted in Gary Schwartz, “Ars Moriendi: The Mortality of Art,” *Art in America* 84, no. 11 (1996), 72.

from the treatment and handling of traditional works to the difficulties posed by an aesthetic that is expressed through combinations of new materials and technologies. The discussion and debate—generated at the conference and expressed in a variety of voices throughout the pages of this publication—tackle the difficult, multifaceted question of the immortality of art. By bringing together an extraordinary, multidisciplinary group—including artists, museum professionals, conservators, art historians, educators, dealers, collectors, philosophers, and lawyers—this book attempts to illuminate the philosophical, ethical, art historical, and technological issues we face in the preservation of contemporary art and to establish a dialogue that will enable us to identify—and make—the right choices.

What exactly is immortality? In 1984, two small rectangular clay tablets dating from the fourth millennium before the common era were found in Tell Brak, Syria. According to archaeologists, these simple, unassuming objects inscribed with a few incisions represent the number ten. Here is a pair of objects that has transcended

time, a message from thousands of years ago that has survived—a smidgen of immortality that we are capable of perceiving, from a past that belongs to us. It is our heritage—an essential element in knowing and acting, and in connecting the past with present purposes. As David Lowenthal so poetically puts it:

We mourn worlds known to be irrevocably lost—yet more vividly felt, more lucid, more real than the murky and ambiguous present. We yearn for rooted legacies that enrich the paltry here and now with ancestral echoes, yet also encumber us with outworn relics and obsolete customs. We see what has happened as inalterable (not even God can change the past) and cleave to timeless tradition, yet we ever reshape what we inherit for current needs.<sup>3</sup>

Today's concept of what constitutes heritage, however, has dramatically shifted forward in time; its definition now stretches from prehistory to last night. Heritage encompasses images of Jurassic monsters and Marilyn Monroe, as well as ancient Egyptian and Elvis Presley artifacts. Memorials and monuments multiply, cities and sites are restored, historic events are reenacted in theme parks, and flea-market objects are considered antiques. Retro-fashion rages and video recorders are ever present to memorialize the banality

of yesterday. Ninety-five percent of existing museums postdate the Second World War. We have new visions of tradition, new ways of assimilating the past. An example can be seen in Postmodern architecture, which contains vestiges of both Modern and Neoclassical styles. We quickly assimilate the artistic expressions of other cultures and adapt them as our own; as never before, a multitude of art forms exists simultaneously.

Although the Getty Conservation Institute is a young organization, barely thirteen years old, and is better known for its work with monuments and sites—Roman mosaics in the Mediterranean, Maya sites in Mesoamerica, and Buddhist grottoes in China, for example—we recognize our responsibility to help to protect what will be the legacy of humanity's passage through these extraordinary one hundred years that are about to end. In Los Angeles, and specifically at the Getty Center, we are surrounded by contemporary art and architecture. Extending the J. Paul Getty Museum's primary focus on Classical antiquities and European paintings from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century, the Getty Trust has begun looking to the future, with completed commissions of twentieth-century artists such as Alexis Smith, Ed Ruscha, Andy Goldsworthy, Mary Corse, and Robert Irwin—whose Central Garden is the Getty Center's largest installation piece. In the same spirit, the Getty Conservation Institute has worked at

3. David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past* (New York: Free Press, 1996), xi.

conserving local contemporary artworks: David Alfaro Siqueiros's mural, *América Tropical* (1932), in the historic center of downtown Los Angeles; Edward Kienholz's *Back Seat Dodge '38* (1964) (FIG. 1) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Andy Goldsworthy's untitled clay spiral (1997) at the Getty Research Institute; Robert Graham's *Olympic Gateway* (1984) at the Los Angeles Coliseum; and that well-known symbol of Los Angeles in South-Central L.A.: Simon Rodia's *Watts Towers* (1921–55). With the same level of commitment, we have brought to the forefront—through the “Mortality Immortality?” conference and the publication of this book—the important issues of the survival of contemporary art, its meaning, its role, and its legacy. At the end of the millennium, we are making, head on, an initial foray into the future—recognizing that today's art will represent for many future generations what our societies produced, respected, and felt was important to preserve into the next centuries.

At the close of the previous millennium, in 999 to be exact, the French scholar Gerbert of Aurillac



was elected Pope Sylvester II; he introduced to the West a new counting system he had learned from the Moors of Spain. The ideas of Pythagoras and Euclid, no less elegant for their awkward expressions, were translated into the symbols of Arabia, blossoming and producing newer and richer concepts. It was a fundamental time in the history of the world. Perhaps not as fundamental—but just as momentous—has been, in the last twenty years, the arrival of the digital age, which has transformed our lives. However, our continuing reliance on digitization is also threatening our collective memory.

At the conference “Time & Bits: Managing Digital Continuity,” held at the Getty Center, February 8–10, 1998, an international group of distinguished experts on technology warned that the digital record is rapidly disappearing. For instance, digitized images from the historic 1976 Viking mission to Mars that had been carefully stored and appeared to be in good condition are now degraded and unreadable. Is it possible that the clay tablets of Tell Brak will last longer than our current high-powered, ultra-sophisticated technology? Is, in fact, the immortality of our collective memory threatened?

**FIGURE 1**

Edward Kienholz, *Back Seat Dodge '38*, 1964. Tableau: polyester resin, paint, fiberglass, flock, truncated 1938 Dodge, clothing, chicken wire, beer bottles, artificial grass, and plaster cast; 167.64 × 609.6 × 365.76 cm (66 × 240 × 144 in.). Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky wrote: “If you were to destroy in mankind the belief in immortality, not only love but every living force maintaining the life of the world would at once be dried up.”<sup>4</sup> Is this a grim portrait of the future of the twentieth century? The artists of our time do not labor under the constrictions of their early predecessors. The Seventh Church Council in Nicea, held in 787, declared that an artist was not free to lend his work any private significance and added that a congregation was not free to interpret the pictures shown in its church. The Roman Catholic Church at that time considered that the execution of pictures was not an invention of the painter; it was, rather, a way of ensuring recognition of the proclamation of the Church’s laws and tradition. In essence, this meant that, for the artist, the art belonged to the painter, but the arrangement belonged to the Church.

Much has changed in twelve hundred years. Today, artists are making art in ways never before explored. Contemporary works of art are traditional, ephemeral, repeatable, and disposable. Artists are creating works in two and three dimensions—as well as in “virtual dimensions”—for private and for public spaces. These works may incorporate paint, polyethylene, paper, cloth, photographs, and combinations of media—effectively challenging the boundaries of materials. Indeed, the monumental earthworks of Walter De Maria, Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, or Dennis Oppenheim pose conservation problems beyond any envisaged by members of that distinguished profession only a few decades ago, not to mention the more complex problems created by Damien Hirst’s formaldehyde pieces or Marc Quinn’s *Self* (1991).

Has the use of so many different materials changed our perception of what art is and whether or not we need to preserve it? Will the work produced by contemporary artists be around for future generations to understand and appreciate? If we want to ensure that it will be, we need to ask ourselves some important questions: How and why is a work of art sustained, maintained, or neglected? Who decides what is saved—and on what basis?

“The keenest of our senses is the sense of sight,”<sup>5</sup> wrote Cicero. St. Augustine praised and then—being St. Augustine—condemned the eyes as the world’s point of

entry. St. Thomas Aquinas called sight “the greatest of the senses through which we acquire knowledge.”<sup>6</sup> To any museum visitor, it is obvious that works of art are normally first perceived through the eyes. But by what mechanism do these materials become significant works of art? What takes place inside us when we are face to face with a painting, sculpture, or collage? How do the things we see—the colors, shapes, and textures of objects that arrive through the eyes to the brain—become significant? How do we learn to appreciate what we see?

In medieval Jewish society, as Israel Abrahams describes, the ritual of learning to read was explicitly celebrated:

On the Festival of Shavuot, when Moses received Torah from the hands of God, the boy about to be initiated was wrapped in a prayer shawl and taken by his father to the teacher. The teacher sat the boy on his lap and showed him a slate on which were written the Hebrew alphabet, a passage from the Scriptures and the words “May the Torah be your

4. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Heritage Press, 1949), 50.

5. Cicero, *De oratore*, vol. 1, trans. E. W. Sutton, comp. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1967), II, 87:357.

6. M. D. Chenu, *Grammaire et théologie au XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1935-36); quoted in Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996), 28.

occupation.” The teacher read out every word and the child repeated it. Then the slate was covered with honey and the child licked it, thereby bodily assimilating the holy words. Also, biblical verses were written on peeled hard-boiled eggs and on honey cakes, which the child would eat after reading the verses out loud to the teacher.<sup>7</sup>

What a way to start appreciation of a legacy from the past!

The past, however, does not always meet with such appreciation. In 1792, for example, when the Louvre Palace in Paris was turned into a museum for the people, François-René vicomte de Chateaubriand, voicing a haughty complaint against the notion of a common past, protested that the works of art thus assembled “had no longer anything to say either to the imagination or to the heart.”<sup>8</sup> A few years later, when the artist and antiquarian Alexandre Lenoir founded the Museum of French Monuments to preserve the statuary and masonry of the mansions, monasteries, palaces, and churches plundered in the French Revolution, Chateaubriand dismissed it as “a collection of ruins and tombs from every century, assembled without rhyme or reason in the cloisters of the Petits-Augustins.”<sup>9</sup> In the future, will art of the twentieth century, considered a thing of the past, be similarly dismissed?

An important organizing principle of modern society has been the idea of the future. Each

civilization has a different idea of time. For medieval societies, the important thing was eternity—time outside time—and the past. Medieval men and women did not believe in the future; they knew very well that the world was condemned to extinction. The point was to save one’s soul and not to try to save the world. Is there some lesson to be learned from this? Is contemporary art only for contemporary times? Does it need to exist beyond our time? What is the life of a work of art? Are we ready—as Arthur Danto so provocatively suggests in these pages—to consider how the future will see us through the artworks that we choose, or do not choose, to preserve? Are we prepared to cast off the legacy of the twentieth century like the skin of a snake or the shell of an insect? According to Gertrude Stein, Picasso knew that some of his work would fall apart but did not care. She quotes him as saying: “No one will see the picture, they will see the legend of the picture, the legend that the picture has created. It makes no difference if the picture lasts or doesn’t last.”<sup>10</sup> After seeing the work of Christo, and long after the work itself is dismantled, we are struck by what entered our consciousness. The images of what he and his wife, Jeanne-Claude, created remain in

our minds, available to imaginations, despite the fact that the works themselves—although documented—no longer exist.

This book—and the conference that was its source—would have never seen the light of day were it not for the imagination, reflection, and perseverance of one of the most extraordinary people I know: my friend Mildred Constantine—“Connie,” as she is known. Connie’s determination in recognizing the important issues of contemporary art conservation and in bringing them to a serious discussion was instrumental in framing the conference and, hence, this publication from their earliest stages. Her relentless pursuit of depth and quality, substance and excellence was complemented by the partnership of Tracy Bartley, who came to the Getty Conservation Institute as an intern and rapidly demonstrated a breadth of knowledge, thirst for information, organizational skills, deep thinking, and—despite her very young age—wisdom, along with a keen sense of priorities and organization. Their persistence, motivation, and unbounded enthusiasm were keystones in bringing the conference to light and helping to shape the content of this book. To both of them my deep acknowledgment, recognition, and thanks.

7. Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (London, 1896); cited in Manguel, *A History of Reading*, 71.

8. François-René vicomte de Chateaubriand, *Memoires d’outre tombe* (Paris, 1849-50); quoted (in English translation) in Manguel, *A History of Reading*, 238.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Gertrude Stein, in Doris Athineos, “Eternity Is Delusional,” *Forbes Magazine* (16 June 1997), 288.

I would like to thank all the authors who contributed to this publication. Without them there would have been neither conference nor the spirited debate that followed, as reflected in these pages. I would also like to thank those contributors who graciously permitted us to use edited transcriptions of their conference presentations for inclusion in this book: Tony Cragg; Peter Galassi; Sheila Hicks; R. B. Kitaj; Paul Schimmel; Joyce J. Scott; Robert Storr; and my good friend Clifford Einstein who, with his wife, Mandy, graciously opened their home to me and gave me a first glimpse not only of the art within it but of the heart of the collectors.

I also wish to extend my appreciation to Dinah Berland, publications coordinator at the Getty Conservation Institute and managing editor for this book,

and to the outstanding publications team who worked assiduously with her to produce this publication within a year of the conference: James R. Druzik, senior scientist at the GCI, who acted as science advisor; Keith Eirinberg, rapporteur for the conference, who also transcribed the talks; Shelly Kale, manuscript editor, who shepherded the project from manuscript to production; Scott Patrick Wagner, electronic file manager and reference editor; the research staff of the GCI Information Center; and Anita Keys, production coordinator for Getty Trust Publication Services. My compliments also to Vickie Karten of Getty Trust Publication Services, who created the book's superb design.


"Eternity," says Albert Albano, "is delusional."<sup>11</sup> Herein lies the challenge of our authors: to explore the questions posed and reflect about our century about to end, and to examine our assumptions, our premises, and our thoughts. Henry Beston has written: "For a moment of night we have a glimpse of ourselves and of our world islanded in its stream of stars—

pilgrims of mortality voyaging between horizons across the eternal seas of space and time."<sup>12</sup> The legacy of the twentieth century does not, of course, consist exclusively of contemporary art, but it is one of the century's most significant heritages. I hope our readers gain in these pages an understanding of the issues and concerns, along with the excitement and challenge of ensuring that the significant contributions of twentieth-century artists provide joy, inspiration, amusement, and thoughtful reflection to interested observers in the future.

Miguel Angel Corzo  
Los Angeles

11. Albert Albano, in Doris Athineos, "Eternity Is Delusional," *Forbes Magazine* (16 June 1997), 289.

12. Henry Beston, *The Outermost House* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1929), 176.



Is Contemporary Art Only for Contemporary Times?

**PART 1**



*This page intentionally left blank*

LOOKING AT THE PRESENT AS PAST      LOOKING AT THE FUTURE  
AS PAST

Arthur C. Danto

**To establish something that endures, a fixed base is required. The future torments us, the past holds us fast. That is why the present escapes us.<sup>1</sup>** —Gustave Flaubert

Every culture we can know about has left behind some material remnants of itself when it finally fades into history, if only stones and bones. The remains of these cultures accordingly have an immortality not granted to the cultures themselves, and this is bound to be true of us as well. It is, however, a trait distinctive of our culture that in addition to such inadvertent ruins and remnants as may survive us as a matter of chance, we deliberately endeavor to conserve a certain portion of our culture, specifically in order that the future might see us much as we see ourselves. And this is because it is a further trait of our culture that, since

we see things under a historical perspective, it naturally occurs to us to try to see our own culture from a historical perspective as well—to see ourselves as we will be seen by future generations looking back. We may, of course, hope for more than this. We may hope that more adheres to conserved objects than the fact that they were ours; we may hope that, in fact, they enter the culture of the future as part of its content—the way parts of different pasts, like paintings and sculptures and written texts from earlier cultures, have come to have a meaning for us by entering our own canons and conceptions of life.

This means that we approach the problems of conservation from the perspective of history as the future will see us, and the title of this essay expresses how we are to make our choices. For structural reasons inherent in the asymmetries of history, the future is now as blank a leaf as a past culture would be that left nothing whatever behind. The future casts no shadows over the present. And part of what is hidden from us is precisely what interests the future will have in us, which, we may be quite sure, will differ from the interests we have in ourselves. This means that the present itself is hidden from our knowledge. Countless truths *about the present* will be available to the future, which we have no way of knowing about now, however much we conserve. That is why “the present escapes us,” as Flaubert wisely said. This does not mean that we ought not to conserve whatever is meaningful to us, and to do so as systematically and

1. “Pour établir quelque chose de durable, il faut une base fixe. L’avenir nous tourmente et le passé nous retient. Voilà pourquoi le présent nous échappe.” Translated by the author.

as scientifically as we can. At the very least, this serves the task of bringing to consciousness the question of what we are; a self-conscious image of our culture is a commendable thing to pursue, even if it turns out not to coincide with whatever image of us the future will form. We cannot, however, bring into self-consciousness the truths about the present that only the future will know. The question of what we ought to conserve, if we mean to preempt the consciousness of the future, is therefore inherently unanswerable.

In his preface to *The Aspern Papers*, Henry James wrote: “We are divided of course between liking to feel the past strange and liking to feel it familiar.”<sup>2</sup> In truth, if it does not feel strange, it is not really past; but it has to be the kind of strangeness that belongs to historical change rather than to cultural difference, though this contrast perhaps weakens as we go back in time, say to the medieval period or even the Renaissance, where we lack, as it were, cultural fluency and can take less and less for granted. The likeness in question implies a certain continuity with the present, and the strangeness suggests an unsuspected incongruity where we expect further continuity.

Ironically, the balancing of familiarity and strangeness is invoked by the critic Louis Menand to identify the formula that guided the film version of James’s novel *The Wings of the Dove* (1997): “You need a historical period close enough to make the characters

seem modern but distant enough to make a high style of living—with champagne, fancy dress, servants, and plenty of leisure for love—plausible.”<sup>3</sup> This explains shifting the story from Victorian to Edwardian times, which means that there really is no historically identifiable present represented by the film. This hardly matters to viewers whose idea of the past has been formed by Merchant-Ivory films, or such films as *The English Patient* (1996), with old automobiles, muslin frocks, country homes, and the like. But even when the period of a film is intended to be historically accurate, as when a director undertakes to make a film about the 1920s or the Depression, there are problems. Lately, for example, there has been a revival of interest in the 1970s, the decade bounded by the Pill at one end and the discovery of AIDS at the other, a time of sexual freedom without consequences or the elaborate structures of interdiction that had been generated to protect society. Whether or not the sexual and artistic domains of permissiveness are connected, it was equally a time when, in the arts, everything seemed possible—when life in New York was cheap and the concept of art elastic enough that anyone who wanted to be an artist could be one.

Recently, I saw two directors interviewed on television who made films about the 1970s—*Boogie Nights* (1997) and *The Ice Storm* (1997)—though neither of them had lived the 1970s, even if they were alive in that decade.<sup>4</sup> And they

had to recover, through old television programs, what living the decade was like. In truth, they were unable to do so, in part because a culture is like a language in which those who live the culture are fluent, and unless we can internalize this language, we cannot be certain how they would respond to countless circumstances that cannot be easily anticipated. The people who lived the culture did so without this practical language especially rising to consciousness—they just *knew*, in the same way we know how to move our bodies. To the directors, by contrast, the 1970s was a form of propositional knowledge, in which one thing had to be learned at a time and in which nothing can have been taken for granted.

2. Henry James, preface to *The Aspern Papers* (1908), in *The Art of Criticism: Henry James on the Theory and Practice of Fiction*, ed. William Veeder and Susan M. Griffin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 334.

3. Louis Menand, “Not Getting the Message of the Master,” *New York Review of Books*, 4 December 1997.

4. *The Ice Storm* was set in suburban America of 1973, though director Ang Lee did not emigrate from his native Taiwan until 1978.

Everything had to be learned, as in a dictionary of everyday life. Although their films were addressed to the pornographic film business (*Boogie Nights*) and to adultery and sexual anxiety in the suburbs (*The Ice Storm*)—two foci of the sexual revolution—the directors also needed to show people out of bed (around the table, for instance, or at parties) and hence needed to know what people ate and on what they ate it, and how they talked, and what clothes people wore and how they looked in them. Could they have sent out for fast food? The critic Jesse Karp asserts that “the subtle, squirming discomfort of the look and styles of the 1970s—the plaid suits, the vast lapels, the flaring pants bottoms—are not comical here, but rather a subtext to the misguided mentality of the moment.”<sup>5</sup> The directors may have put the clothes in as a historical subtext, but they were certainly not perceived that way when the 1970s was lived—and they certainly would not have been seen as funny at the time. They were just clothes, just the way one dressed for the various pursuits of life.

One knows that our present decade will, in similar ways, be

strange and our clothes funny to those who want to make films two decades from now that are set in the 1990s, when what is registered on the unforgiving film has to compete with the living memory of those who are, by now, a certain distance into the twenty-first century. I suppose that were I to see the 1990s films that are set in the 1970s, I would find myself seeing the 1970s as at once strange and familiar. It would be as if the once familiar had become strange, simply as a consequence of the relentlessness of historical change. I am not referring to the great background realities of the time—Vietnam, Cambodia, Watergate, and the constant Soviet presence, as well as the sexual revolution itself—but to the ordinary person’s wardrobe, diet, aspirations, and attitudes, which would be familiar to me because I was there but unfamiliar because their counterparts, here and now, are very different, and I would have had no idea that things had changed *that much*. I would not be surprised if I have, now, at the back of my closet, things I wore at that time. Were it not for the kinds of resources available to moviemakers—television clips, movies, picture magazines—past and present would have seemed internally related in a seemingly single exfoliation of time.

What I have just described is one mode of what one might follow the Continental philosophers in calling *historical being*, which Henry James, who quite vividly lived in history, described to a T.

He writes to his brother, William, of what a difference the electric light, under which he writes that letter, makes to his life. And he tells, in another letter, of the typewriter “without which he could no longer live.”<sup>6</sup> This was in the 1890s, and these inventions placed a cognitive barrier—they defined—a distinction between past and present that was historical in the sense that the present was a future the past could scarcely have anticipated, and, from that present, the past was marked by absences no one could have recognized as such when the past was the present. No one in the 1870s knew, or could have known, for example, the truth that the telephone had not yet been invented; if they did, the telephone would have been invented, or at least the concept would have been, which is what they lacked. The typewriter was invented in 1868; Friedrich Nietzsche, whose handwriting had degenerated to the point that he could not read it, was the first philosopher to own one. Pictures of it are familiar and strange, in that we recognize it as

a typewriter without being able to imagine how it could have been used. But, for Nietzsche, it was almost certainly an object that embodied modernity and the mechanical perfection of a railroad engine. The absences I refer to are expressed with sentences such as “The telephone had not been invented” or “Electricity had not as yet been used for domestic lighting.” Here is a marvelous negative inventory of the 1970s by Rick Moody, author of the novel *The Ice Storm*, on which the film was based. It uses sentences we all understand but that could not have been understood in the period of which they are true:

No answering machines. And no call waiting. No Caller I.D. No compact disk recorders or laser disks or holography or cable television or MTV. No multiplex cinemas or word processors or laser printers or modems. No virtual reality. No grand unified theory or Frequent Flyer mileage or fuel injection systems or turbo or

5. Jesse Karp, “At the Movies,” *Review* 3, no. 1 (1997), 42.

6. I. K. Skrupskelis and E. M. Berkeley, eds., *Henry and William James: Selected Letters* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 400, 425.



premenstrual syndrome or rehabilitation centers or Adult Children of Alcoholics. No codependency. No punk rock or postpunk, or hardcore, or grunge. No hip-hop. No Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or Human Immunodeficiency Virus. . . . No cloning or genetic engineering or biospheres or full-color photocopying or desktop copying and especially no facsimile transmission. No perestroika.<sup>7</sup>

I have studied such sentences in my book *Analytical Philosophy of History*, in which I designate them *narrative sentences* and follow out their logic.<sup>8</sup> A narrative sentence describes an event with reference to a later event. It becomes true only when the later event happens, but what it is true of is the earlier event. The assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand in Sarajevo is said to have begun the First World War, in that it began a series of events that led ineluctably to that catastrophe, with consequences the world has had to live with since. But when it happened, in 1914, it was merely front-page news. That the First World War

began with an assassin's bullet in Bosnia is boilerplate historiography; but however commonplace the practice of using it, the sentence is not one that could have been known by anyone who knew, when it happened, that the Archduke Ferdinand had been assassinated. And this is the interesting characteristic of narrative sentences: that commonplace as they are when written by historians about the past, they could not, in general, have been known—would not even have in many cases been understood—by those contemporary with the events of which they are true. Examples such as “The Thirty Years’ War began in 1618” or “Petrarch opened the Renaissance” are staples of historical description, and they make salient the asymmetries of tensed language understood in historical, rather than merely temporal, terms.

The distinction between temporal and historical terms is brought out vividly by Henry James’s point about familiarity and strangeness. Phenomenologists have made a certain point that one could not have a concept of the future without a concept of present and a concept of past. These are coimplicated. But one needs more than these conceptual connections to grasp the idea of the *historical* future, the *historical* past, the *historical* present. Under narrative description, the present does not disclose its structure until it is related to the future—and the future will have been unknowable before it happened, making the

present itself unknowable, filled, as it were, with pockets of ignorance no one living will know are there until the future fills them in, like the nonexistence of typewriters in mid-nineteenth-century London. And when that has happened, there has been not just a change but a historical change.

The questions posed in the book you are now reading are made acute by the historical unknowability of the present. It is an unknowability that can only be removed through the course of history, by which time it is too late to do much good in regard to our conservational ambitions, for we cannot revisit the past to change things and could not have known what the future will wish we had saved. This is the melancholy truth in Georg Hegel’s pronouncement that “the Owl of Minerva takes flight only with the falling of the dusk.”<sup>9</sup> What accounts for the hiddenness of present significance is the interests that future generations will take in our world. The hiddenness is ineradicable because we cannot anticipate interests that belong not at all to our present but to presents now future to us, which are going to redefine, inevitably, in consequence of the historical being of

7. Rick Moody, *The Ice Storm* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994; reprint, New York: Warner Books, 1995), 5–6 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

8. Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). Reprinted in Arthur C. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1–285.

9. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 13.

those who live then, what in our present seems to have been most interesting and important from the backward perspectives of those living after us. Narrative sentences pivot on future interests in such a way that it is palpable that there can be no historical laws, nothing that connects past, present, and future the way values of temporal variables do in differential equations. This is what makes the discipline of history one of the humanities rather than one of the sciences: humanity. The human being as historical defines historiographical procedures entirely. Who knows what the future will find important in the way we are now?

In my book, I cite William Butler Yeats's great poem "Leda and the Swan" in presenting this problem to readers:<sup>10</sup> "A shudder in the loins engenders there / The broken wall, the burning roof and tower / And Agamemnon dead." All that was engendered in the rape of Leda was something to which anyone who saw a woman being molested by a swan had to have been blind. Zeus's other rapes—of Europa, Danaë, and the many like them—have no history similar to the one that would cause Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes, Electra, and Iphigenia to take an extreme interest in that particular rape, which enters into the explanation of what happened to them and made that act retroactively appear to their eyes a destiny. But when it occurred, it would have been merely one of Zeus's picturesque erotic interventions, no more

important in his eyes than they were. The rape of Leda *came* to be important because Helen of Troy was conceived on that occasion, and she became causally implicated in the great event of antiquity, the Trojan War.

René Descartes had a singular contempt for historical knowledge, perhaps for just the reason that little stock could be put in truths indexed to specific moments, in contrast with those universally true, like those of logic or algebra. Historians, he wrote, acquire great learning, including how to read ancient languages, in order that, with immense effort, they might learn about the last year of the Roman Republic, which the illiterate serving girl of Cicero knew as a matter of course. Descartes was thinking of major historical moments that quite ordinary serving girls could know about through eavesdropping in the villa. But what of the truths that came naturally to serving girls, such as what it was like to be one? Descartes would have been contemptuous of attempting to know things about the serving girl herself, which she knew as a matter of course. But who could have imagined in the seventeenth century that the history of daily life should so concern us three centuries later? Who would have imagined that the quest for everydayness should have made the great narratives of Greek history interesting to contemporary readers for the incidental light they shed on how ordinary people lived, what childhood was like, or marriage,

or childbirth, or death? How much did people earn? How did they handle illness?

The ancients erected monuments and memorials to what they felt was important to remember—or not to forget—and such was the intended function of certain texts, like Herodotus's *Histories*, composed, he tells us, "to preserve the memory of the past by putting on record the astonishing achievements both of our own and of other peoples."<sup>11</sup> His book is about "the astonishing"—precisely, the deeds memorialized in monuments. But what does Herodotus tell us about daily life in Athens? We can deduce from what he says about strange cultures what non-strangeness must have been like and pick out, on the basis of such oblique illuminations, features in ordinary life. But the familiar would have been what everybody knew. Imagine writing that down. Imagine someone asking you to say what it is like to live today. How would you begin? Our interest in ordinary life is a determinant of efforts to discover how it was, and

10. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*, 151.

11. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt, rev. A. R. Burn (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1982), 41.

this changes inevitably the meanings the great texts have for us by contrast with what it must have been for Herodotus's original readers, who knew about life as serving girls did. Had the ancients anticipated the interest in common life that is a feature of our culture, they might have made an effort to preserve it. But they did not have the concept of the time capsule, which carries fragments of our identity forward to give our descendants an inkling of who deposited these fragments and what larger purpose the fragments served when those who possessed them were alive.

Andy Warhol threw every scrap of paper he received into large cardboard boxes, which he explicitly called "Time Capsules." He filled six hundred of these, an archive of the ordinary that now belongs to the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh and that will almost certainly get stranger and stranger with time. He saved what everyone would have said was not worth saving. We now know that everything is worth saving, since we do not know what will and what won't interest the future. Warhol left it to the latter to say, and, given our interests, it would have been wonderful if one of

Herodotus's contemporaries had, in this sense, been the Warhol of antiquity. In ancient times, the future must have been imagined as entirely of a piece with the present, since no one was tempted to answer such questions as: What did people eat for breakfast? When did they go to sleep? How often did they have sex? We can hardly fault them, since our conception of the future is very like theirs. The characters in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) are entirely like us, though their technologies are beyond our immediate powers; we know, abstractly, that they will have interests different from our own. What we cannot say is what those interests will be. We cannot see our world the way they would wish to see it.

Consider the history of Modernism in art. As it evolved, it enfranchised, as part of its own history, arts that were at the time not considered especially worthy but were considered as art only in a marginal and degenerate sense. Roughly at the time Modernism began, in the 1860s, an interest in peasant arts began. The very name "folk" in conjunction with this work may have meant that this interest was a consequence less of aesthetics and more of nationalism, and reflected the sentimentalization of the folk that the romanticism of nationalist movements entailed.

Still, to see as art what would at best have been seen as needlework (or craft) implies an encroachment on conceptual boundaries. This is what Édouard Manet him-

self must have sensed, if indeed *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) is the first Modern work, as it is sometimes esteemed to be, through its acknowledgment of flatness. Japanese prints were enfranchised just when the flatness of their forms came to be appreciated relative to the kind of painting advanced artists were determined to do (it is well known that the Japanese, for whom the prints had only the interest a Warhol would have in them—i.e., as having the lowly status of popular art—used them to wrap shipped porcelain). Paul Gauguin enfranchised Oceanic art; Pablo Picasso, African art. Paul Klee enfranchised children's art; Jean Dubuffet, the art of the insane. Folk art as an expression first occurs in print in 1927, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and was enfranchised by members of an artist's colony in Ogunquit, Maine, who began to collect it and

## The concept of art may be universal, but people's grasp of that concept is entirely historical and changes with each enfranchisement.

use it as a critique, in a way, of their own painting and sculpture. A few years ago, there were shows of thrift-shop art (e.g., at Metro Pictures in New York) and articles on the subject in all major art periodicals. Advertising art was enfranchised by such artists as Richard Prince. There may be unenfranchised art somewhere out there, which we do not see as art and will not see it until it is enfranchised by an artist who makes it visible to us, but we already know there will be no conceptual obstacle in the appropriation. The photographer Tina Barney enfranchised the family snapshot, and though there are undoubtedly differences between the two, they are not differences in kind. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art caused a recent stir when its photography department mounted a show of police photographs, many of the kind one sees in post offices throughout the land. These have a precedent in Warhol's *Ten Most Wanted*, which he did for the 1964–65 New York World's Fair. But here we have the real thing, given an improbable dignity through exhibition in a major art venue. The show caused a far greater stir than one might have anticipated, given the history we have gone through.

The history of Modernism is the history of such enfranchisements, but it is important to recognize that things became available as art collaterally along with changes in the concept of art over time, so past and present become internally related. Take any moment in that history, and it would have been impossible to have known what should have been preserved because one would not have been able to anticipate future interests, and that is because one thought in terms of a concept of art that the future was certain to modify. The concept of art may be universal, but people's grasp of that concept is entirely historical and changes with each enfranchisement. We see this when we encounter objects in antique shops that our grandparents possessed but did not have the foresight to keep—or whatever objects, placed at the backs of long-unopened drawers or in barrels or boxes in basements or garages, that hold, like Marcel Proust's madeleine, the historical reality of the 1970s for those who recognize it. There has not been found one single example of the line of urinals from which Marcel Duchamp casually selected *Fountain* (1917), which we know visually only through the great photograph

Alfred Stieglitz took before he closed his gallery in the spring of that year, though it has come to be an object of nearly obsessive artistic interest when eighty years ago it was so much industrial plumbing. With *Fountain*, everything was artistically enfranchised, so thinkers in the 1970s could say that everything was art, or could be. So, what—short of everything—could we justifiably preserve?

We know, barring unforeseen mutations, what future generations' interest will be in clean water and pure air, in keeping warm and having energy enough to produce what they need, and in health and material happiness. Or we believe we have an obligation to so act in the present that, paternalistically, we act on their behalf, giving them the material wherewithal to enjoy their unforeseeable forms of life. Do we have a parallel obligation to their culture, by giving them what we have produced artistically?

Or is this something we, at most, owe to ourselves? So much of what is contemporary art is so internally related to aspects of contemporary culture that the meanings of objects, intended as vehicles of our cultural identity, will be lost if knowledge of their references and allusions are unknown. It is as though we must transmit the whole of our culture if any part of it—any work—is to be more than a pickled object, so to speak. And the future would need to internalize a great deal of the theory that makes these objects art for our consciousness when they look, to all appearances, like mere objects.

Think, after all, about what makes *Fountain* art. It looks, as an object, like its peers from Mott Iron Works, as displayed in plumbing supply stores before the First World War. (Duchamp asked how consistent it was not to exhibit something that was, in fact, exhibited wherever plumbing fixtures were shown.)

The object alone will not tell us what makes the difference between a urinal and a work of art, since they look—because they are—entirely the same. The same is true of Warhol's *Brillo Box* and the boxes in which Brillo was packaged in 1964, when he made this work. The same goes for much of everything made in the spirit of contemporary art. To give Warhol's sculpture its point, it would be important that we preserve Brillo cartons to compare it with, for these have changed since 1964 and may be replaced with some evolution of shrink-wrap packaging, which causes shipping cartons to fall out of the common culture. We have, in brief, to preserve in some way whatever it is in present culture that is needed to make the object artistically intelligible. As a minor example, Brillo was kosher in 1964, as the emblem of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis printed on the sides of Brillo cartons attests and which Warhol took over simply because it was there. But the concept of kosherness has been as much an object of intense inquiry as the concept of art, with the result that Brillo is now *traif* (not sanctioned by Jewish law). The absence of the logo means a Brillo carton was made after 1964, after

which time the kosher symbol could not be used in conjunction with that product.

This iconographic change, recounted to me by a rabbinical student who happened to have read some of my writings, was invisible to me in 1964, as it is to everyone who sees *Brillo Box* in public collections. But then, once more, who knows what future generations will find that we, unless Warhols, would have no reason to pay attention to and that he paid attention to mainly because it was there? The really interesting dimensions of the work may connect with the future's interests in it, which make our interests strange. We cannot anticipate the future's interests. So we present them with what we know and believe about the work and leave it for them to make it their own. The question then is: How important is the actual object?

There are doubtless questions that Stieglitz's photograph cannot answer. But there are lots of questions we can imagine the future will ask that the photograph will answer as adequately, or even more adequately, than the object. Stieglitz was, for example, interested in the interior shadows made by a form like that, and his photograph shows them, however important they may have been to whatever Duchamp was doing. Is anyone interested in the shadows of *Brillo Box*? Most photographs would probably use lighting in such a way as to eliminate shadows entirely, treating the sculpture as if it were a painting.

We are unable, I think—and this is in the nature of historical being—to see the strangeness artworks will have in the eyes of the future when that strangeness, answerable to their interests, is as familiar to us as contemporary art is familiar in the first place. But an example of such strangeness would have been the incapacity of earlier generations to see as art what we accept under that concept, which proved more accommodating than they would have believed credible.

This means, as I see it, that our obligations to the future are best met by preserving what falls under our understanding, preserving what will be meaningful to the future only insofar as the future is like the present—a later part of now. We cannot deal with what they will, to give application to James's formulation, find strange. We can deal with that only to the extent that what is familiar to us is familiar to them, which means everything in which we and they are historically of a piece.

In one sense, this is to give an affirmative answer to the question of whether contemporary art is only for contemporary times: If the future shares our interests and experience, it is merely a protraction of ourselves. But in another sense, the future qualifies the contemporary. It does so in that there is bound to be a difference in the future in what "contemporary art" is *for us*, which may be strange to them, and what it is *for them*. What it is for us is what they would have to archaize, insofar as the "for us"



and the “for them” differ, as with the directors of the films about the 1970s. If we can count on them as enough like us to take an interest in such matters, it would be like our getting to know forms of life long since vanished: What was it like to live in the Ice Age? What went on in Queen Victoria’s mind? So, on the assumption that historical interest remains a constant, our obligation is to recognize that a thing of beauty is rarely a joy forever, but to acknowledge the fact that there once were those who found something beautiful enough to want it to endure—“Lust will Ewigkeit” (Pleasure wills eternity), as Nietzsche said in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*—that works of art are not specimens, like chunks of mineral or pinned butterflies or dried flowers, but have precisely the structure that the expressions “for us” and “for them” imply, and this belongs to the historical identity of art and has then to be accounted for in any discussion of preservation. In any case, what option do we have?

Will contemporary art have a “for them” in future forms of life? I think it will, providing they have an interest in the concept of art, for contemporary art has made explicit what no one even knew was implicit in that concept in earlier moments. There was no way in which earlier generations could have envisioned as art the objects enfranchised under the auspices of contemporary art. We need to hand down enough such objects to give substance to these reflections on the concept; but the objects may

have very little in common, at the level of perception, with objects that for (earlier) others were largely a matter of aesthetic appreciation and hermeneutical understanding. As if what Warhol said about himself, “If you want to know who I am, look at the surface—everything is there,” could be true of so many of the uninflected artworks of our time that we must appreciate that there is little to them except the fact that they are art, which is not something to be read off their bland surfaces. We bequeath to the future very few candidates for the status of joys forever. But, in compensation, we have carried the analysis of the concept further than any generation in history; if they lack this philosophical memory, it will have to be reinvented. They will have to relive the history we have lived through, and though they may not have enough interest in philosophical understanding to recognize that the interest of (our) contemporary art lies here, they will have to discover the philosophy to penetrate the meaning of what they see in the objects left over for them.

In brief, we serve the future best by preserving what connects with our own interests; the question is immediately raised: Who are “we”? Who is to be charged with

the task of conservation? My sense of this is complicated by the extreme pluralism of the contemporary art world, which the constant possibility of enfranchisement underscores. I, as a critic, and far less so as a philosopher, have no special aesthetic agenda, but it is central to the viability of pluralism that artists and those interested in art should often have conflicting agendas. The quality of polemical denunciation—that this or that is not art—has abated. Abstractionists who had once been ideologically opposed to the figure, realists who had once denounced what Jo Hopper called “gobbledygook,” today occupy the same sector of the art world’s margin, simply because they are painters, and painting has been marginalized. The discourse of enfranchisement has become civilized, aside from the ideologizing of the margins. Whatever is in candidacy for art carries an implicit justification of the claim that it is art, and, beyond that, what it means that it should be art. This is what I have termed a “discourse of reasons.”

To be a member of the art world is to participate in that discourse. It is to know the patterns of critical enfranchisement; it is to all intents and purposes to exercise a form of critical practice. Everyone

in the art world, and not just those who specifically write criticism, is a critic. But this pluralism means that people enter the discourse at different points and support different artistic agendas. They constitute aesthetic pressure groups, so to speak. So my view is that the model of decision will not be that of referring everything to a sort of aesthetic authority but to letting decisions be played out the way they are in politics. Thus, I offer a political model for resolving issues of what should be conserved. We are the “who” of “Who is to decide on what means what and why?” But it is a divided and contentious “we,” made of groups opposed to one another, who exert pressure on one another in public debate. And this debate does not simply take place within the institutions of the art world—museums, art

publications, galleries, and art schools. For those institutions are not socially isolated; all kinds of interactions and conflicts arise where the institutions impinge on sectors of society. Think of the controversies over Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981) in the 1980s or what to do about the slashed Barnett Newman *Cathedra* (1951) in the Netherlands today. Or, to cite a less incendiary matter, there is, in my neighborhood in New York, a set of mosaic benches just behind Grant's Tomb, put up in the early 1970s, which I regard as quite miraculous. It is the site to which

I always take visitors to my area, with the sense that I am showing them something easily the peer of Gaudí's Parc Güell in Barcelona and, at the same time, a remarkable exemplar of community art. The benches have been threatened from various bureaucratic directions, though interestingly enough never by the neighborhood that has mingled its own labor with these works, which, in the area in which urban graffiti was invented, have never been vandalized (by contrast with Grant's Tomb itself). In April 1997, when the National Park Service raised the question of the benches' removal, the community rose as one, and for the moment the proposal is shelved. That was something in which I had an interest, and I contributed what I could to the discourse in favor of saving these marvelous objects forever.

That is my sense of a viable model. Let those who have an interest in preserving the work they believe in be the ones to make preservation real—propagandizing, raising funds, and enlisting support. I have grudgingly decided that there should not be a federal agency for

preserving contemporary art because I was greatly disillusioned by the report issued by the National Endowment for the Arts in October 1997 and felt, for the first time, that it would probably not be entirely bad were that body done away with, since it demonstrated such a shallow and uncomprehending view of contemporary art. I emphasize contemporary art because that is the focus of this book. I have no reason to rule out a federal commission to deal with the art of the past—to repair the Capitol dome, if needed, or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial or whatever has stopped being an object of controversy and has passed into the artistic patrimony of the nation—though the structure I have alluded to, mediating between artworks and such a bureau, will perhaps always be necessary.

Against this background, a word or two might be said on ephemerality. Obviously, we cannot coherently preserve what in its definition is unpreservable. The contemporary world has objects it prizes for their ephemerality or where their being ephemeral enters into the relevant discourse, usually because it was intended by the artist—as in Jean Tinguely's self-destructive machines, or Eva Hesse's latex-soaked cheesecloth, the perishability of which she thematized. I do not think interfering with the realization of the work, if that means thwarting its internal dissolution, is an admissible conservationist goal; preservation should

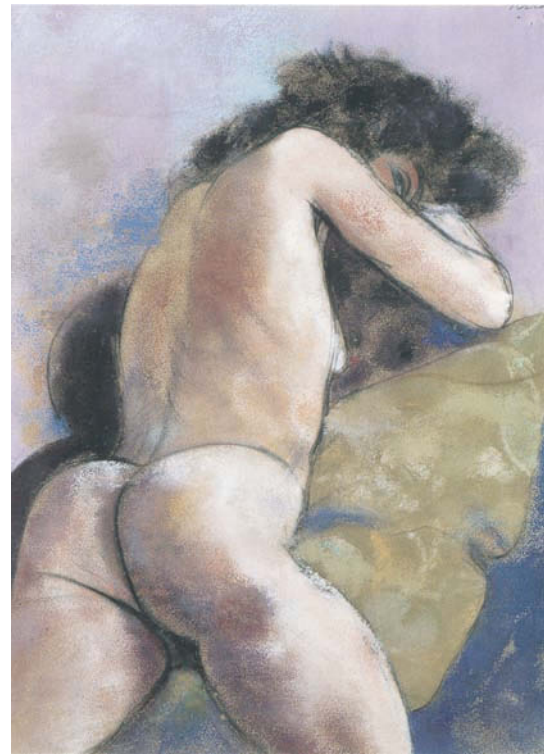
not take unto itself the prerogatives of suicide prevention. And, as we know from Stieglitz's photograph, we have tremendous devices for recording what a work was, often in ways that surpass what anyone could have seen when it was there. Technology, just because it is technology, cannot be predicted any more than the interests it will be enlisted to serve. So we cannot, based on present technology, envisage what the art of the present will be experienced as, as part of the past the present becomes in the future. That, however, is not our problem. It is theirs. ■

## “LOOK AT MY PICTURE!”

R. B. Kitaj

Death has its drawbacks, one is told. To paraphrase Franz Kafka, survival causes less of an interruption to my painting than death. At first, I used to say I did not really care about what would happen to my pictures when I died. That was not the whole truth. One of my two favorite American painters is Albert Pinkham Ryder, the other being Edward Hopper. As everyone knows, Ryder’s pictures are nightmares for the conservator because he did not follow conventional painting rules—and why should he have? He was an urban hermit, a “moonlightist,” living in rooms full of garbage and exquisite nocturnal vision, pleasing himself and very few others.

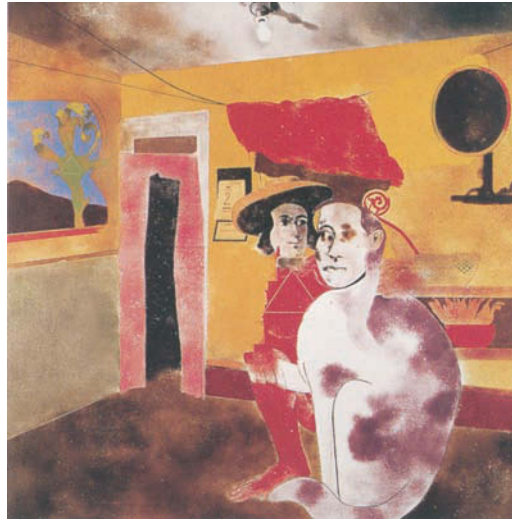
**FIGURE 1**  
R. B. Kitaj, *Ellen’s Back*, 1984. Pastel and charcoal on paper, 78.1 × 56.8 cm (30 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 22 $\frac{1}{4}$  in.).  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



I doubt if my own pictures will corrode or fall apart, because I am just an old-fashioned Modernist easel painter (FIGS. 1–4). My paint is rarely thick, and I follow a few traditional rules of the road. Even so, I have used some fugitive colors, such as Prussian blue, that have cracked interestingly. I am not in love with technology, so I try to speak with pencil and paintbrush and some controversial ideas that get me into a lot of trouble, which is not unheard of in art history. What does interest me, though, are some vagrant moods and ideas that seem to bear on the mortality/immortality equation, the more so as aging becomes relentless in my previously rather youthful life.

Luckily, the strange art instinct itself can also be relentless, and there is strong historical reason to believe that getting old and painting better than ever go hand in hand, at least in many of the most crucial artists: Michelangelo, Titian, Rembrandt, Goya, Turner, Cézanne, and Monet, to name a few.

When my wife died in London a few years ago, London also died for me, and I did not paint for more than a year. One thing that brought me back to life as much as any other single event, aside from raising my ten-year-old boy, was a



**FIGURE 2**  
R. B. Kitaj, *The Man of the Woods and the Cat of the Mountains*, 1973. Oil on canvas, 152.5 × 152.5 cm (approx. 60 × 60 in.). The Tate Gallery, London.

I am not in love with technology, so I try to speak with pencil and paintbrush and some controversial ideas that get me into a lot of trouble, which is not unheard of in art history.

Piet Mondrian show at The Hague, which later went to The Museum of Modern Art in New York. I just stayed and stayed in that beautiful 1930s Dutch museum and tried to rethink my own life among Mondrian's rooms of austere, living, pulsing art. I am not a great judge of abstraction, as some art people seem to be, and no single painting in that show will ever mean to me what many pictures by Giotto or Paul Cézanne or Henri Matisse do. But I was deeply struck by a great and unusual life-in-art when I really needed badly to remember what it could be like. There were plenty of cracks in Mondrian's paint, and I had not forgotten the Mondrian canvases, seemingly held together

by actual tape in the old Museum of Nonobjective Art when I was a kid in Manhattan.

My point is that Mondrian is the event, *his* life-in-art. Like Vincent van Gogh—and unlike T. S. Eliot—I believe in the personality of the artist shining in the art. I do not hold with Mondrian's theosophy, and even less with his utopianism, though I doubt if even this miserable century of utopian dogmas will quiet the beast in men's minds. It was Mondrian's beautiful wish to live life as he pleased, in small rented rooms in great cities, rooms that he furnished with orange crates and colored squares of cardboard, where he could pursue his monastic devotion through earliest Modernism—seemingly resistant to two hellish wars—to a triumph of cosmopolitanism, so deeply hated by Nazism and Communism and others.

As far as I am concerned, museums, bless them—which, unlike Filippo Marinetti and later nihilists, I have always loved since I was a child in the great Cleveland Museum of Art—do beautifully preserving and showing things that have enhanced my life. I am usually bored by critics who say what a lousy installation such and such a show had in a museum. I can look at art in my own way, with my own personality, and the art looks back at me. Remember, *you* are the only person in the world who can be yourself. One does not judge people on their appearances alone, so why judge pictures that way?



In the aftermath of the Mondrian show — with its spirit of life going on *somewhere*—I finally returned home to live in Los Angeles with my boy, among family. I had been deeply pondering, since my wife's death, the not-uninteresting question, Why go on painting? For some years, an earlier question, Why show one's pictures? exercised my imagination, like a casual game. Why does every painter, including me, want constantly to show off his or her pictures?—although, in my own case, I tend to have an exhibition only about once in a decade. I would have thought that for a few, painting would be its own reward (Emily Dickinson comes to mind). I have a funny image in my head of each of the billion artists in the world holding up a painting facing out to the public and saying, Look at my picture! Look at my picture! As for myself, I get into deep trouble whenever I show my pictures anyway because I am so disliked by some art people, so why ask for more trouble?

Most of the answers to why we show our pictures can be easily figured out, and Sigmund Freud's "fame, money, and the love of women" is as good as anything I have ever heard. But would you not

think that, on human odds, there would be at least a *few* really good artists who do *not* show their pictures for some deeply human, profoundly complex, surprising, too-strange-to-imagine reason? I have talked to a few people about this, and the feeling seems to be that there is no secret Henri Matisse in Dallas or Constantin Brancusi in Melbourne. There does not even seem to be a J. D. Salinger among painters. I would have thought, people being as complex as they are, that one or two good artists, maybe with private incomes, would be too embarrassed to show their pictures. I can say that I am sometimes embarrassed when I see something of mine in public. And then I think of Kafka, my favorite artist aside from Cézanne. Some would say that Kafka, along with Marcel Proust and James Joyce, was one of the greatest writers of this century. When he knew he was dying, Kafka told his best friend, Max Brod, to burn all his work. Famously, Brod did not, and W. H. Auden could say that Kafka is to our century what Dante had been to his.

I have been told never to care about embarrassment, and I cannot do my art without heeding that great advice. Otherwise, art could and does lose out; it does not break through limits without being shameless—those limits beyond which many unimaginative art people always refuse to go.

Michelangelo said, "One paints with the brain and not with the hands." The brain of the unusual artist will win out in the end. Trust



**FIGURE 3**  
R. B. Kitaj, *If Not, Not*, 1975–76. Oil on canvas,  
152.4 × 152.4 cm (60 × 60 in.). Scottish National  
Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.





personality. Personality was at work in the caves. I was dumbfounded at Altamira, for example, when I took my children there twenty years ago, expecting to be bored by a tourist site. The handmade image of a human face with eyes, nose, and mouth will *never die* in the work of the race of artists who will represent that face until the end of time—all the while chanting, Look at my picture! Look at my picture! Nor should museums neglect the most unusual personalities in art, often cursed in their own time—as were James Ensor, Cézanne, and van Gogh, those brightest of lights at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Let those brains, using Michelangelo’s term, light your way, even when they mix crazy, volatile ingredients in with their already highly developed craziness, as Ryder did. *Listen up* to the Ryders! Do not elevate the processes or you may miss a van Gogh or a Cézanne, as their contemporaries did. When Cézanne died in 1906, a critic wrote, “Ape-Eye is dead!” There’s immortality for you. Science and technology will love you for helping them look beyond obvious fashion, celebrity, and glamour to discover worlds even more uncertain and opposite

## Art’s destiny is mainly in the hands of those who come later, because so much of the best of art is not in tune with its own time and its discontents.

to theirs in some cracked, moldy little canvas—yes, canvas—by a Ryder or a Mondrian, made in a tiny, seven-dollar-a-week room. These paintings were often by lonely artists who hardly knew what they were doing technically. In one of his very last letters, Cézanne wrote to his son that he wondered if, like the great leader of the Hebrews, he would ever glimpse the Promised Land.

I have recently looked, in Oslo, at the fabulous Edvard Munch pictures he left to his city. Munch was yet another artist whose often desperate and lonely life seemed to overwhelm conventions of what we may call “conservation.” His life was in disarray most of the time, and his death during the German occupation of Norway begins an immortality no painter can be said to know as well as Munch might have been curious enough to know it. I have always believed and lived what our American Henry David Thoreau famously said, that “most men lead lives of quiet desperation.” In fact, a lot of real art gets made in quiet desperation. To achieve what is called art is very

unusual, even though it may be achieved once or twice every day, here and there, when a life of the mind gets odder and odder.

Art’s destiny is mainly in the hands of those who come later, because so much of the best of art is not in tune with its own time and its discontents. I believe this is Kafka’s great message, when he said, “Like a fist he twisted away from the world.” This is to teach us not to be afraid of dying or getting ready to die—one of the great themes in revenge tragedy, from Hamlet to Clint Eastwood, that memorializes death in perpetuation of the self (what I have called “personality” here).

But in the end, who knows? All life is an argument over matters of taste, as Friedrich Nietzsche wrote. But then, he was mad, wasn’t he? ■

**FIGURE 4**

R. B. Kitaj, *The Jewish Rider*, 1984–85. Oil on canvas, 152.4 × 152.4 cm (60 × 60 in.). Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo.

*Image Not Available for Publication*

## THE CASE AGAINST AMNESIA

James Coddington

Is contemporary art only for contemporary times? The answer to this question, one of several about the mortality and immortality of contemporary art addressed in this book, is, in its simplest form, no. However, this answer and the means to get there are arrived at collectively. No one group or person has the unique right or responsibility to answer definitively. Yet, from a conservator's perspective, this answer—while fundamentally sound—is full of qualifiers, nuances, and exceptions. We should not make too much of the exceptions, that is, of the most evanescent works of art; instead, we should make our decisions on an examination of the majority of art now created. It is, however, vexing that this question is posed at all, for it displays a profound uncertainty

about the art of our time. It would be useful, then, to offer some historical perspective, for one thing is absolutely certain: Contemporary art has always been with us and has frequently been questioned on material grounds.

Who better to turn to, then, than Giorgio Vasari? A very quick tour of his book, *The Lives of the Artists*, finds several citations of works restored or of resolving problems of material behavior. In the life of Antonello da Messina, who is generally credited with bringing oil painting, a significant technical innovation, to Italy, Vasari refers to complex problems of preserving and handling works of art. He writes that “a good number of artisans had often discussed these [problems] without ever finding any solutions.”<sup>1</sup> In his life of Pietro Perugino, Vasari notes that the works the artist executed in fresco for the nuns at the monastery of S. Chiara, Naples, were razed and the site's panels, not yet fifty years old, were “full of cracks” due to Perugino's oil-painting technique. However, he “could not have known this since it was only in his own day that they had begun to paint well in oil.”<sup>2</sup> This story has a most contemporary ring to it, describing destroyed site-specific art and the apparent failure of new materials. In the life of Leonardo da Vinci, Vasari cites a Madonna done “with infinite care and skill” that “either because of a mistake made by whoever prepared the panel with gesso or because of his many capricious mixtures of paints

and colors . . . is now in very bad condition.”<sup>3</sup> At no point does Vasari think that this experimentation—the “capricious mixtures”—raises a question of whether the artist's work is simply too ephemeral and not deserving of preservation. This is in contrast to the many arguments made about today's art: that its experimental materials are proof of a lack of interest in preservation.

A few more examples bring us even closer to the present. It is an often-cited fact that Sir Joshua Reynolds was criticized for his experimentation with materials, leading Sir George Beaumont—one of Reynolds's most passionate collectors and defenders—to defend Reynolds to a prospective sitter: “No matter, take the chance; even a faded picture from Reynolds

### FIGURE 1

Jackson Pollock, *Full Fathom Five*, 1947. Oil on canvas with nails, tacks, buttons, key, coins, cigarettes, matches, etc.; 129.2 × 76.5 cm (50¼ × 30¼ in.). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Peggy Guggenheim. Photograph © 1998 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1. Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 185–86.

2. *Ibid.*, 258–59.

3. *Ibid.*, 297.

will be the finest thing you can have.”<sup>4</sup> This is, indeed, a judgment we ought to be prepared to make for the art of our day as well. John Ruskin feared that William Turner’s paintings would not last for any other generation to see. They do, indeed, survive, despite being notoriously fragile and subject to damage by ill-informed and overzealous restoration, a concern we should keep very much in mind when we consider the oftentimes complicated restoration of contemporary art. Thus, our historical situation, in which artists experiment with materials and the rest of us worry about it, is not unique.

What is effectively different, I think, is those works that are explicitly meant to vanish. I will

not address the preservation of these works for the simple reason that they are not meant to survive; this is the artist’s intention. Respect for intention is the goal of our efforts, and if such respect requires that we let the work die, we should. Some works are meant to exist in a particular place and time. Again, a glance inside any museum with Old Masters indicates that many works meant for particular places have been removed from those sites, and so it is that reality, particularly economic reality, may get in the way of respecting the temporal and spatial specificity of some works.

What about works not identified by the artist as expendable? The assumption must be that they are to be preserved as best we can. I do not mean by this that we should tart them all up to look brand new but that the material substance needs to be stabilized. Perhaps the best we can do is to stabilize the environment around the object to simply slow down the deterioration and minimize possible damage. Such a scenario recognizes the ultimate fragility of the work but looks to forestall decay for as long as possible. This assumption—that is, to preserve unless explicitly told not to—is not a bold one based on broad theoretical grounds. Rather, it is simply based on observation. The Museum of Modern Art

receives many phone calls from artists asking whether particular materials or a particular construction of materials will last. In Stephan Götz’s endlessly fascinating book, *American Artists in Their New York Studios*, artist after artist expresses the strong desire that his or her work be preserved for as long as possible.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, a close examination of Jackson Pollock’s paintings offers the happy fact that these works are holding up reasonably well despite many broadsides criticizing them as having been constructed with a callous disregard for posterity (FIG. 1). Pollock’s poured paintings come directly from his experience in David Alfaro Siqueiros’s experimental workshop. José Gutiérrez’s book *From Fresco to Plastics* recalls the practices in the workshop and makes the following observations about the use of pyroxylin (enamel) paints:

Every artist wants his work, his creation, to have durability. To achieve durability he wants to use those materials that will hold up over a period of time. . . . Oil painting must be handled carefully, as even a layman knows. . . . Quite the reverse is true of pictures made with the new materials, plastics. . . . I am confident that pyroxylin with the proper solvents and plasticizers will outlast any oil paint.<sup>6</sup>

It is a desire for permanence, not the lack of it, that to a significant degree motivates the use of

so-called experimental materials. Finally, a check of acquisitions in all of The Museum of Modern Art’s curatorial departments during 1997 finds barely a dozen that are constructed in such a way that, on first look, the methods for preserving them for some reasonable length of time are unclear to a trained eye. The reason for this is not because my colleagues and I warn the curators off. We do not, in fact, routinely examine works prior to acquisition; when we do, it is not to make final judgment, but simply to assess current condition. Thus, I think the artists are giving us overwhelming indications, explicit and implicit, that the assumption to preserve, unless otherwise very explicitly stated, is valid. The greater danger to contemporary art is not the experimental materials but rather embracing too broadly the notion of transience and thereby constructing rationales for assigning to oblivion art that was conceived with the idea that it would, in fact, be preserved.

The actual act of preservation, when it must be undertaken, may be very complicated and almost always results in compromises. Again, we are not treading on new territory. The philosopher Etienne Gilson summed it up quite well when he wrote, “There are two ways for a painting to perish;

4. M. Kirby Talley Jr., “All Good Pictures Crack: Sir Joshua Reynolds’s Practice and Studio,” in *Reynolds*, exhibition catalog (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1986), 69.

5. Stephan Götz, *American Artists in Their New York Studios*, ed. Craigen W. Bowen and Katherine Olivier (Cambridge: Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, Harvard University Art Museums, 1992).

6. José Gutiérrez, *From Fresco to Plastics*, rev. ed. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1959), 58–59.



one is for it to be restored; the other is for it not to be restored.”<sup>7</sup> I think we need to be restrained in our notion of when a work needs restoration. Being obsessive about materials that change in appearance is not the point.

This argument is not an exercise to find any reason to intervene; quite the contrary. In 1960, David Sylvester interviewed Franz Kline for the BBC. In discussing why he used black and white, Kline said that the particular works in question were always black and white, although the black may have a sense of color due to thickness, quality of paint, and other variables of its application (FIG. 2). This, of course, raises the very important issue of surface and the importance of preserving the subtleties and nuances of surface when restoring not just Kline’s works but many others as well. What Kline said next in the interview, when asked about the whites in these paintings, is crucial on so many different levels to a fundamental yet sophisticated understanding of conserving art at any era: “The whites, of course, turned yellow, and many people call your attention to that, you know; they want white to stay white forever. It doesn’t bother me whether it does or not. It’s still white compared to the black.”<sup>8</sup> So we need to stay carefully balanced between intervening because of a local problem and determining whether that problem is actually compromising the overall intent of the work.

## The greater danger to contemporary art is not the experimental materials but rather embracing too broadly the notion of transience and thereby constructing rationales for assigning to oblivion art that was conceived with the idea that it would, in fact, be preserved.

What motivates us to restore a particular work is the result of many factors. Alois Riegl, in his essay “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development,” first published in 1903, defined a number of different values that we assign to a work of art: artistic value, use value, newness value, age value, historical value, commemorative value.<sup>9</sup> Some works have more of one quality than other qualities. The role of restoration in this scheme is to preserve the quality or qualities of the work we, again collectively, assign the highest value to. Obviously, works acquire these values, or, more accurately, we assign these values as time goes by. The assignment of these values for a particular work may change over time as well. The collages of Pablo Picasso (FIG. 3) and Georges Braque do not

have much newness value anymore, and they no longer shock us, but they may have acquired a certain amount of age value, an assignment of aesthetic value to the aged, darkened appearance of the papers. The assignment of age value prevents us from replacing the darkened papers in the Picasso even with authentic, unaged, identical pieces—never mind reproductions of the papers. Yet there are instances in contemporary art in which the primacy of newness value has led to restoration, sometimes even to the extent of completely repainting a work by a hand other than the artist’s, a deplorable approach to an authentic preservation of art.

The primacy of newness value is very often the approach of the marketplace; in many instances the highest dollar value is equated

7. Etienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1955), 99.

8. David Sylvester, “Franz Kline, 1910–1962,” *Living Arts* (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London) 1 (1963), 2–13.

9. Alois Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development,” in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, ed. N. Stanley Price, M. Kirby Talley Jr., and A. Melucco Vaccaro (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1996), 69–83.

*Image Not Available for Publication*

**FIGURE 2**

Franz Kline, *Painting Number 2*, 1954.  
Oil on canvas, 204.3 × 271.6 cm (80½ in. × 105 in.).  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Hazen and  
Mr. and Mrs. Francis F. Rosenbaum Funds.  
Photograph © 1998 The Museum of Modern Art,  
New York.

sad instances of works damaged beyond recognition and declared destroyed by natural disasters of one sort or another. But in the instance of incremental damages or natural aging, it has proved, in practice, difficult to make such declarations. Put another way, if it were determined that there was no chance that the restoration of a painting, in accordance with currently recognized standards, could diminish its damages sufficiently, but there was a restorer who declared he or she could deliver a blemish-free painting by a means outside the commonly accepted conservation standards of practice and documentation, what approach would be taken? Which of the values residing in the work—formal composition, touch of the artist, etc.—would drive the decision? Or could the values outside the work of art determine the course of action? To cite only one example, Robert Hughes, in his article “Art and Money,”<sup>10</sup> writes of a Mark Rothko piece that was completely repainted by a restorer and auctioned for a substantial sum

with a pristine appearance of the work of art. This is well illustrated by paintings in which flat fields of color predominate, such as those of Ad Reinhardt, Ellsworth Kelly, or Barnett Newman, to name just a few—or, indeed, any work that relies on a purity of surface. These surfaces blemish easily; such blemishes can be profoundly disfiguring and, in some instances, impossible to hide except by repainting or re-creating the work. The question, then, is whether we can assign some age value to these works.

If we do not do so and if we cannot obliterate the artist’s original paint with overpaint—and the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) *Code of Ethics* is very clear on this point: we cannot overpaint—then we are confronted with one painful alternative: the possibility of declaring the work finished, dead. It seems incredible to me that any work in private hands is likely to be declared such, at least in the case of the kinds of incremental damages referred to here. There are, of course, many

10. Robert Hughes, “Art and Money,” in *Nothing If Not Critical* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 387–404.

*Image Not Available for Publication*

**FIGURE 3**

Pablo Picasso, *Man with a Hat*, Paris (after December 3, 1912). Pasted paper, charcoal, and ink on paper; 62.2 × 47.3 cm (24½ × 18¾ in.). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. Photograph © 1998 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

a number of years ago. It is thus only practical to observe that the marketplace is a very powerful and decisive engine in the art world's decisions. These are difficult questions because no one has exclusive responsibility here; it is, again, a consensus that must guide our thinking and decisions. Although I have stated earlier that we should be wary of too readily accepting change and decay as inevitable, it is also critical that we recognize, in cases like the Rothko, that over-restoration consigns art, at least authentic art, to oblivion as well. My colleague Albert Albano has presented this argument with particular vigor at a number of symposiums and in several publications.<sup>11</sup> The point I wish to make, again, is that a careful, consensual balance between creator and custodian must be struck.

It is also realistic to observe that the shifting emphasis on what we value in a work of art can be the source of new justifications for restorations. Thus, works that have altered in appearance due to neglect or simple aging may acquire age value, a celebration of patina. Consequently, we will take action to preserve it in its current state.

Again, these are not the arguments of a cynic but those of a realist, one who sees the acute dilemmas these situations raise for all of us and for conservators especially.

And so I would like to turn to some practical suggestions on what to do—a call to action, if you will. Indeed, having titled this essay a case “against,” it is, I believe, only

proper and fair to present also a case “for.” My case is for the art of our time. It is a self-conscious perspective, for I have argued that our historical situation is no different from other times. However, our means are different. My suggestions, therefore, are to embark on a twofold documentation program. Every conversation I have with colleagues around the world entrusted with the care of contemporary art touches upon this idea. Every conference and gathering devoted to this subject has made similar calls for improved documentation, so I think there is good reason to believe the need is real. Neither program I propose is unique, but what is critical is the context of the two together.

First, it is important that we establish programs of artists' interviews, not only to establish their attitudes toward the aging of their own works and the materials used, but also to glean further ideas of how our time views itself in history. Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, conservator at Houston's Menil Collection, has undertaken such

11. Albert Albano, “Art in Transition,” in *AIC Preprints, 16th Annual Meeting, American Institute for Conservation, New Orleans, Louisiana* (Washington, D.C.: American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works [AIC], 1988), 195–204.

## Is contemporary art only for contemporary times? No, most emphatically not.

a project for a number of years now, one of several model initiatives for increasing such communication. She videotapes the artists during the interview, being sure to discuss particular works. The results are deeply informative and profoundly provocative. The Tate Gallery has a similar program underway as well (see Roy A. Perry's essay, "Present and Future," pages 41–44). Such interviews offer better, more sophisticated information than do questionnaires.

At the same time, we should embark on a coordinated technical program to measure works—their color, texture, and so on—all of those formal characteristics that are the essence of the aesthetic experience, the "event," as art critic Bernard Berenson puts it. Technology offers us greatly improved and more precise means to do this, although they are not trivial to adapt and apply. They will cost significant time, effort, and money; however, they are well worth it,

for much effort, explanation, and actual conservation has gone into establishing how a work has changed and toward trying to restore it to a condition or appearance closer to its original condition. We can circumvent this by quantifying change in particular works, which will help clarify how much these and other works have changed. This second program has multiple intentions as well, for it overcomes the endless debates that may arise over what the work once looked like and thus what the restoration goal should be. These two combined initiatives will also afford us the opportunity to address the issue of how we think history will view us.

Exchange of information is not a one-way street; it is not just a matter of conservators interviewing artists. Conservators need to get more information to artists. We thus need to find ways to facilitate dialogue. Again, every forum devoted to the conservation of contemporary art up to now—and there have been many—has pleaded for more information from artists, including information on their materials and intentions, as well as more information from conservators to artists on how particular materials will perform.

The possibility of effective exchange of information about materials and techniques among conservators on the Internet has been proved by the success of Walter Henry's conservation distribution list archives (Cons DistList) and Conservation OnLine (CoOL) at Stanford University.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, anyone who has used one of the many on-line user groups to fix his or her computer, knitting, or almost anything knows that there are a lot of people who both share one's needs and desires and can meet some of them. Thus, it would be helpful to establish an on-line bulletin board for the exchange of questions and answers about materials, techniques, and philosophies of preservation. The difficulty will be twofold here: First, it will cost money to administer such a Web site. It will also be necessary to vet information for accuracy, as misinformation can easily be disseminated. This vetting would also cost money, as it needs to be done rigorously and professionally.

In conclusion, I am fond of saying that conservators operate in the realm of the real rather than the ideal, a statement I think many of the arguments put forward in this essay reflect. As such, there are significant issues to confront.

There is much we need to learn and much of that will be hard won. There is an inherent tension between preservation and presentation of art that is brought into stark relief by contemporary art. This tension should be the catalyst for creative solutions rather than insoluble debate.

It is commonplace to say that contemporary art is necessarily challenging. Preserving it is also a challenge, but our success in meeting that challenge is, in the end, simply a matter of our collective will and belief in that art. Is contemporary art only for contemporary times? No, most emphatically not. ■

12. The Web site address for CoOL (with a link to Cons DistList) is ><http://palimpsest.stanford.edu><.

## ANDY GOLDSWORTHY'S NEW RUINS

Thomas F. Reese

This essay situates the untitled site-specific earthen sculpture by artist Andy Goldsworthy, commissioned by the Getty Research Institute for the opening of the Getty Center in Los Angeles in December 1997, within the larger framework of the issues raised in this book. Some of those issues focus on material objects and questions of what to do when works defined as “authentic” are threatened with loss, ruin, or irrevocable change. In this essay, rather than addressing the question posed by Miguel Angel Corzo of how the use of so many different materials has changed our perception of what art is and whether we need to preserve it (see introduction, page xviii), I wish to focus attention on *how artists and the nature of their work* have changed our perception of what art is and whether we need to preserve it.

Like performance art, which is “directly connected not only to . . . specific surroundings, but to a precise moment in time,”<sup>1</sup> Andy Goldsworthy’s piece for the Getty is given form not only by the performance of making, but also by the performance of becoming, in which the work achieves an autonomous life of its own that unfolds fully, and in potentially unpredictable ways, only following the actual performance of its

# Conservators . . . must enter into the critical spirit of the works themselves if they are to save and transmit not merely decontextualized fragments but their essence to the future.

making. Moreover, his recent “large works”—especially the *Sheepfolds* project, which began in 1993 and involved a proposal to intervene in one hundred sheepfolds, washfolds, and pinfolds throughout Cumbria in northwest England—demand that we focus our attention in new ways on the essential character of his life project.<sup>2</sup> Goldsworthy’s works have always been generated by dialogues with nature, but the *Sheepfolds* project adds to these dialogues negotiations with landowners, town officials, communities, and the generations of “wallers” and shepherders whose tradition and human labor were recorded in the folds. Such works challenge conservators to go beyond defining their role as the “rescuers” of the “material fragments” of activities that they “save” for future generations; instead, they must enter into the critical spirit of the works

themselves if they are to save and transmit not merely decontextualized fragments but their essence to the future. Goldsworthy’s piece for the Getty, I believe, problematizes a number of key issues with which conservators deal on a daily basis, not only in experimental and vernacular artistic productions, but also in contemporary and ancient arenas—notably, the effects of time, change, and destruction when the artist conceives of them as conceptually integral to the work.

Goldsworthy has distinguished on several occasions two different types of production within his oeuvre: (1) “ephemeral explorations,” which he generally documents in photographs, and (2) “larger works,” which he defines as “environmental sculptures,” “temporary installations,” and “permanent monuments,” each

1. Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, “Visitors’ Gallery Artists’ Statement” in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, brochure (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998).

2. On the *Sheepfolds* project, see Andy Goldsworthy, *Andy Goldsworthy, “Jack’s Fold”: An Installation at the Margaret Harvey Gallery, St. Albans, 8 October–7 December 1996* (St. Albans, England: University of Hertfordshire, 1996); especially Steven Adams, “Stonewalling Criticism: The Morphology of Nature and Andy Goldsworthy’s *Sheepfolds*,” 16–22; Steve Chettle, “Andy Goldsworthy: *Sheepfolds*, the Cumbrian Context,” 7–9; and Andy Goldsworthy and Matthew Shaul, “Interview during Installation of *Jack’s Fold* at the Margaret Harvey Gallery,” 10–14.



subcategory having unique durations and conditions of display.<sup>3</sup> The piece that he executed for the Research Institute (FIG. 1) belongs to the subcategory of “permanent monuments.” I will argue that this piece and others in this subcategory are both “new ruins” and “permanent ruins,” because they straddle Goldsworthy’s “temporary installation” and “permanent monument” subcategories but leave the question of permanence to the fate of both sudden acts of nature and the local communities.

Kurt W. Forster, founding director of the Research Institute, speculated that the very idea of “ruin” might be part of the genetic code of certain structures and not others. In other words, some

buildings, like Richard Meier’s Getty Center, he argued, will simply never make “good ruins.”<sup>4</sup> This insight led me, as deputy director of the Getty Research Institute, to reflect on the particular significance of Goldsworthy’s piece in the setting of Meier’s architecture, for it was created with the singular intention that it would *begin* to assume the character of a ruin at the very moment the artist completed his intervention. Goldsworthy’s sculpture, however, is not a monument erected against time, poised to be crushed by time on the battlefield of historical time and natural contretemps. Nor was it conceived to be similar to one of Robert Smithson’s “ruined monuments.” Instead, the piece represents a special class of what Forster, evoking New York architect Peter Eisenman, described as “new ruins.”<sup>5</sup> In this class of work, Goldsworthy explores the causality and determinates of “cracking,” and then uses time and nature’s inherent energy—the memory that resides in materials like clay and porcelain—to contribute to the changing form of the work. Nature, thus, is not external to the object, but resides within the artifact and is essential to its expressive character.<sup>6</sup>

This kind of “new ruin” is the product of a performance that involves many different actors, whose complementarity is established, but not controlled, by the artist: The client performs, the artist performs, the materials perform, the sun performs, the com-



**FIGURE 1**  
Andy Goldsworthy, earthen spiral sculpture, 1997.  
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

3. Such a division is seen in the organization of Andy Goldsworthy and Terry Friedman, eds., *Hand to Earth: Andy Goldsworthy Sculpture, 1976–1990* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993); see especially Andrew Causey, “Environmental Sculptures,” 125.

4. Kurt W. Forster, “Ruins of the New and Monuments of the Past,” lecture sponsored by the Getty Research Institute at the Getty Center, Los Angeles, California, 19 February 1998, typescript.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Lynn MacRitchie, “Residency on Earth,” *Art in America* 83, no. 4 (1995), 91–94.

munity performs, and, finally, the earth performs. What I find significant in this piece, created in the wake of Goldsworthy's ambitious and groundbreaking *Sheepfolds* project, is the conceptual breadth that engages human and communal energies—past and present—in the realization of the work. Goldsworthy, though, is not interested in “heritage,” where the “past is remade as part of the spectacle of the present and stripped of social tensions and conflicts.”<sup>7</sup> Instead, his current work focuses on negotiation and critique.

Goldsworthy's interest in documenting the process of negotiation that led to the creation of the Getty sculpture was manifested in an interview about the commission conducted in October 1997 at the Storm King Art Center in Mountainville, New York. To the question, “What, then, is the work of art for you?” Goldsworthy responded that the making and the cracking are the drama; his performance, the sculpture's performance, and their reception are the work of art:

[T]he most tangible, permanent thing that I will leave there is the story of something that was made in that place and that people saw it being made—knew that the materials came from the site, and . . . the work made in front of everybody's eyes, and the anxieties, the fears and worries along the path of the piece. That's the result of the piece. . . . And the pho-

tographs and the talking now are all part of that story. And I think that's a legitimate form of sculpture. Even when the object's gone.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Goldsworthy urged the Research Institute to consider making an exhibition about the flood of anxious faxes and e-mails sent back and forth in the piece's process of becoming. He did not want us to strip it of those tensions and to see it as some pure entity. The stage for Goldsworthy's participation, which would produce a spiral composition of clay taken from the site, had been prepared well in advance of my knowledge of his work and how it might serve the Research Institute's formal and conceptual needs. The preparation period involved intensive thought about nature, landscape, and the site on the one hand and the architectural *parti* for the Research Institute on the other.

On the subject of nature, Forster wrote a memorandum on the Getty Center gardens and the landscape of the site in March 1992, in which he insisted that the fundamental challenge and the designer's task “was to reveal the inner substance of the site, its elemental composition in terms of earth, water, and stone.”<sup>9</sup> As the architecture of the Research Institute advanced, the appropriateness of Goldsworthy's oeuvre—described by many critics as representing a form of mediation among the artist, the site, the materials, and the community and

as existing in the interfaces among art, nature, countryside, and heritage or among nature, history, tradition, craft, and community—became evident.<sup>10</sup>

Interpenetrating circles and squares were important components of Meier's design for the Getty Center site from the beginning, but they became *fundamental* for the Research Institute after 1987, when we reworked an earlier program document and sent the architects (1) a conceptual diagram in the form of a circle that represented relative scale, adjacencies, and sequencing of spaces on a public-private continuum and (2) a narrative that emphasized our desire for a dynamic path that would lead visiting scholars through the building and encourage them not only to discover the richness of our holdings, but also to experience the unity of purpose that guided our enterprise:

Keeping in mind that we are talking in conceptual terms, one could imagine the path to be a kind of helix—containing all the key information to the Center's holdings and via networks to the vast body of knowledge as a whole—imbedded in the institution as a whole. Circulation then within this whole thus assumes more than purely operational justification; it comes to resemble the “path of knowledge.” . . . A ramp might internally deploy along its sweep the various segments of our core.<sup>11</sup>

7. Adams, “Stonewalling Criticism,” 20.

8. Andy Goldsworthy, “Audio Portion of Interview Video with Andy Goldsworthy, Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York,” interview by Mildred Constantine and Paul Bochner, Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, 28 October 1997, typescript, 11.

9. Forster memorandum of 7 March 1992, cited in Richard Meier, *Building the Getty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 132.

10. See Adams, “Stonewalling Criticism,” for an excellent discussion of critical discourses about Goldsworthy's work; see also Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 77ff.

11. Letter from Kurt Forster to Richard Meier, 8 July 1987.

A diagram of the proposed structure and an accompanying narrative inspired Meier to create a new *parti* with offices, collections, and meeting rooms ratcheting dynamically around a cylindrical core and a helicoidal path. The building resembles, in simple terms, a doughnut with a quarter-sector taken away. The patio rises through four stories, lighting not only a glass-enclosed ramped circulation core, but also—through a central oculus and skylights—a formal circular space beneath the patio. The latter, which supports the patio and defines the axial core of the structure, was, at one stage, the processing core of the library before crystallizing into a telescoping space for open stacks; the memory of the central space of the British Library continually reasserted itself in our imaginations.<sup>12</sup>

We resisted consistently the notion that any person or official function be installed beneath the skylight at the center of this symbolic space. The oculus, however, clearly suggested solar and calendrical rituals—Roman precedents for Forster, Mesoamerican and Andean for me. Meier was quick to embrace the concept of the solar observatory to forge a dramatic union between the very center of the building at its closest point of union with the earth and the sun and celestial spheres on the summer solstice. He proposed that the union be accomplished through a skylight configured like a lens.

But what might be placed at this key location? We spent many months discussing possibilities. Forster favored a symbolic evocation of the richly fragmentary nature of knowledge in the late twentieth century, possibly a sculptural solution—something crystalline, prismatic, and refractive, perhaps with imbedded inscriptions. Basically, Meier said, “I’ll design the lens; you propose the concept for the sculpture,” but before Forster met his part of the bargain in defining the “center of the center,” he resigned his position to return to teach in his native Zurich. As acting director, the baton was in my hand.

On November 22, 1993, the New Zealand-born artist Max Gimblett urged me to attend a lecture by Andy Goldsworthy at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles, where I had the opportunity to see the

artist’s work for the first time. Earlier, in May 1993, the Getty had commissioned three works from artist James Turrell for framing the infinite space of sky (unfortunately never executed), which were firmly in my mind when Goldsworthy projected a series of his photographs of ephemeral works featuring “spirals” and “black holes,” suggesting a complementary symmetry with Turrell’s “skypieces.” We had dinner and talked about a visit to the site. There was no time available then, however, to follow through with the visit.

In January 1995, I arranged to visit Goldsworthy and his representative, Cheryl Haines of Haines Gallery in San Francisco, as he installed an exhibition at the San Jose Museum of Art. We began then to speak about a possible commission. I made several suggestions about “black holes,” “helixes,” and “cosmic observatories,” as I watched Goldsworthy labor to complete a clay spiral, whose horizontal disposition had resulted in repeated collapses. It resembled others he had installed at Greenpeace UK in London in April 1991. He spoke of clay from the Getty Center site and his desire to have the staff participate in the making of the work. I am not sure whether I came there convinced that we had to have a spiral—I think not—but it was hard not to think about

that shape in our building and in that space that ratcheted around the central axis, where we wanted Goldsworthy to create his piece.<sup>13</sup>

Goldsworthy prepared drawings shortly thereafter. He proposed a spiral and also a pyramid with an excavated cavity in one of its four faces. Salvatore Settis, who had come to Los Angeles as the new director of the Research Institute in January 1994, was supportive of the proposals. The question was whether the structure should rise up or go down. Clearly, Goldsworthy wanted presence in the space, while Meier preferred to preserve its architectural purity. Meier designed a simple concave depression that gathered and reflected light from above and could be used when there was no artwork in the center.

Goldsworthy first visited the site on May 14, 1996; he returned again on November 17, 1996. During those visits he was able to visit the unfinished space and gain a greater sense of what seemed most appropriate. But there were constant surprises. In the time between his two visits, the construction firm had poured finished concrete according to Meier’s specifications in the working drawings. Goldsworthy had wanted more circumference and more depth. Could we jackhammer the cavity back to the earth? The answer

12. On Meier’s Getty, see Gloria Gerace, ed., *The Getty Center: Design Process* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 1991); Thomas F. Reese, “The Architectural Politics of the Getty Center for the Arts,” *Lotus International* 85 (1995): 6–43; and Thomas F. Reese and Carol McMichael Reese, “Richard Meier’s New Getty Center,” *A+U, Architecture and Urbanism*, no. 328 (1998), 6–58.

13. On Goldsworthy’s spirals, see Goldsworthy and Friedman, *Hand to Earth*, 102–4.

was “maybe.” More dramatically, however, before his second visit, another fact was discovered. The architects had miscalculated in their specifications about the solar alignment on the summer solstice. In effect, the sun would not strike the center of the cavity, but a point toward its edge. The work would now have to compensate for this miscalculation. Goldsworthy came up with a choice of ingenious solutions. The first, which he favored, was to raise a cone to a height that would permit the sun to strike its center on the summer solstice; the cone itself would be constructed around an embedded spiral descending into the conical mass to gain the depth he had originally hoped for.

As clients, however, we did not want to lose the conceptual relationship between sun and earth—the poetry of that crucial alignment on June 21 in which the sun’s light would penetrate the “black hole” at the base and core of our building. Personally, I worried, too, about renegeing on the negotiations with Meier that secured his cooperation with Goldsworthy’s work; others had doubts about scale (it would be over five feet high), symbolic content (some dismissed the proposal as a “pile of clay”), and the fact that the descending spiral would be visible from only a single restricted point of contemplation and remain otherwise in darkness.

We decided against Goldsworthy’s preferred solution for several of these reasons. His

alternative solution was to mold the coils of the spiral up from the point the sun strikes the base of the hole on the summer solstice, adjusting its alignment to the upper rim of the cavity that was centered in the space. As he said proudly, “I’ve actually realigned the hole of it so it’s like I’ve brought the building back into the center, so to speak, which I really quite like.”<sup>14</sup>

Goldsworthy brought back into the core of the building a symbol of what was there before. His intervention was to recuperate “nature,” “process,” and “work” at the core of the building and at the threshold of its contact with the earth. It was intended to cause reflection on “memory,” “origin,” and the larger issues of the Getty Center’s presence on and transformation of this natural site. In retrospect, however, it is clear that it was neither an expression of function nor the creation of an abstract metaphoric emblem that made me so passionate about this work and site. It was the fact that it was the umbilicus—the place of origin and the symbol of making the building.<sup>15</sup> For me and many others, it represented eleven years of engagement. Goldsworthy’s spiral brought forth strong images of the site’s archaeology during its grading phases and images of the human labor that created the buildings.

In June 1992, the grading of the site was in full swing and the contours of the site were becoming visible, with one excep-

tion: Because no earth could be removed from the site, great masses were excavated from the east ridge and stockpiled on the site of the Research Institute’s future building, which would be the last structure to be built. As the Getty Museum foundations rose in July 1993, we regularly drove up to the six-story mound of excavated earth and searched for signs of the edges of what would be our platform. In April 1995, we saw our building slowly rise. Of the first foundations poured were those for the footings of two great cranes to be utilized at two distinct points in construction. For us, it was the marking that allowed us to visualize the building in real space for the first time.

Meier is an architect who is uneasy when it comes to keeping his autographic drawings; he prefers to sketch over clean bluelines with no traces of what went before. Similarly, he erases almost all signs of work and process in his architecture. In the large, skylighted space that is now the site of Goldsworthy’s spiral, the force of Meier’s powerful abstract geometries and perfection of form are everywhere manifest. Conceived as a “new ruin,” Goldsworthy’s piece serves as a reminder of the presence of the “earth” and the “forces of nature” inside Meier’s perfectly crafted and seamless building.

14. Goldsworthy, “Audio Portion of Interview Video,” 13.

15. In reviewing my own photographic documentation, I find that I repeatedly returned to document that space of origin that determined the order and compass of our radial structure. The place was for me closely associated with earth, work, and genesis — more so than with intellect alone.



Goldsworthy arrived to execute the earthen spiral on May 19, 1997, approximately one month before the summer solstice. Goldsworthy does not document the process of making the “large works,” because, he says, the experience of making them is so totally absorbing. “Making” here involves “work” as opposed to “craft”—and “work involves putting one’s life into making.”<sup>16</sup> That labor was to have been a collective effort, although Goldsworthy was unable to secure the communal participation of staff in preparing and kneading the clay, because Getty Trust attorneys were fearful of liability. In the end, Haines, Goldsworthy’s gallery representative; Kathy Conley, operations manager of the Research Institute; and Elaine Nesbit, former project manager of the Getty Trust Building Program coordinated the process. Dinwiddie Construction Company located, tested, excavated, and bagged the clay; scientist Neville Agnew, group director of Information and Communications at the Getty Conservation Institute, shared his scientific expertise on the specific properties of the clay samples; and Peter Klowe of Haines Gallery separated, selected, and mixed the clay. Finally, Goldsworthy himself created the spiral over a period of six days (FIG. 2). Each day, he put in twelve to fourteen hours of

uninterrupted labor, while entertaining a steady stream of visitors, many of whom came by several times each day to talk, watch, witness, and photograph his execution of the piece.

Goldsworthy completed the installation on May 24, 1997. The Getty hosted a small ceremony to thank all who had participated in its process. Everyone filed through the curved corridors and circled around the beautiful, soft, moist new addition to the space. At that occasion, few speculated on the work’s future; they celebrated its form and its completion. Few seemed cognizant of the fact that the moment that marked the end of Goldsworthy’s execution of the work and the Getty’s acceptance of ownership of its “object” was actually the beginning of the next



16. Goldsworthy and Shaul, “Interview during Installation of *Jack’s Fold*,” 14; see also 10.

FIGURE 2

The performance of making (clockwise from left): Andy Goldsworthy at work at the Getty Research Institute, 19–24 May 1997.



stage in the work's process of becoming. This stage would depend not only on the nature of materials and the techniques of making, but also on the actions of the sun, the community, and unanticipated acts of nature (FIGS. 3–5). As Goldsworthy later noted:

[T]he reason I smoothed up the top, the reason I smoothed up the rings was to quiet down the clay in anticipation of all the . . . activity that was going to happen. . . . You know, when it was first finished it was too smooth, too slick a piece . . . I really didn't quite like it. . . . I like this idea of the work going on its journey and the sense of unpredictability about that.<sup>17</sup>

And the work did go on that journey. As the artist departed, the “new ruin” began to perform. Goldsworthy's knowledge of clay was fundamental, because it allowed him to direct the actions that the making of the piece set in motion, but not to control them. “I wanted real cracks,” Goldsworthy said later, “cracks that are not an aesthetic decoration on the piece, but real cracks. Real cracks are frightening—to the artist, the people who commission it. . . . And what we're going through in our responses to the piece show how successful the piece is.”<sup>18</sup> In the “new ruins,” there was



always a great risk of failure, and if the process he set into motion failed to provide the strong form he demanded, he had but one option—to return and begin again.

Although there was no prior discussion about the precise effects the direct actions of the sun might have on the drying and cracking process—our timetables were determined principally by construction schedules and the artist's availability—Goldsworthy's execution of the spiral precisely one month before the summer solstice directly influenced the expressive form of this “new ruin.” Because of the lenslike effect of the oculus, the sun's light (and heat) moved across the surface of the sculpture in patterns determined

by the movement of the solar system at this particular time of year. Goldsworthy warned us several times about how hot the center of the building was; he worried about the effect that the differences in temperature in the space might have on our books, rather than on his work. But Miguel Angel Corzo, the director of the Getty Conservation Institute, recognized the scientific value of a controlled study of the drying process and authorized time-lapse video monitoring at fifteen-minute intervals that allowed the cracking process to be mapped digitally.<sup>19</sup>

The participants in the process argued, and will argue into the future, about exactly what

**FIGURE 3**  
The performance of becoming; the “finished” work, 3 June 1997.

17. Goldsworthy, “Audio Portion of Interview Video,” 4–5, 20.

18. *Ibid.*, 3.

19. Tracy Bartley, Leslie Rainer, and Eric Doehne at the Getty Conservation Institute mapped the cracking process. The Getty Conservation Institute also performed a mineralogical analysis of samples of the Getty Center clays (see Carlos Rodríguez-Navarro, “Analysis of Getty Center Clays,” August 4, 1997, typescript; and a report by Tracy Bartley, “Monitoring Survey of the Andy Goldsworthy Installation, July–August 1997,” August 1997, typescript).



**FIGURE 4**  
The performance of becoming: the helix dried by the sun, with cracking evident, March 1998.

20. Goldsworthy, "Audio Portion of Interview Video," 21.

21. Goldsworthy's models did not reveal cracking as much as a general disintegration of the surface.

22. One complaint Goldsworthy had was that he did not foresee that the paper would be revealed beneath the piece as the fissures grew in size. He transferred responsibility to the Getty for the paper: "[E]verything was plastered in paper and plastic, you know, as if there was going to be an explosion of clay" (Goldsworthy, "Audio Portion of Interview Video," 5).

23. Goldsworthy, "Audio Portion of Interview Video," 3.

Goldsworthy intended and what he would consider to be a failure, as opposed to an exciting surprise. He predicted many things that did occur (fissures on the ribs and changes in color, luminosity, and patina), but what about the size, extent, and nature of the cracking? His drawings showed modest cracks, more like those from the Greenpeace work of 1991, which was intended not to crack at all. About that work, he said in a 1997 interview, "For three months I kept filling in the cracks, until I realized that the strongest thing about the piece was the cracks!"<sup>20</sup> Similarly, his wall piece installed at the San Jose Museum of Art in 1995 had modest cracks.<sup>21</sup> Agnew, who has extensive experience with adobe conservation, told Goldsworthy how to mitigate the cracking, but Goldsworthy followed his original course of action, which suggests that he did not want to reduce the risk and drama of potentially large fissures. There were, of course, unknowns specific to the Getty sculpture. One of the most significant was the effect of differential drying times between what was above ground and what was below

ground, and the fault lines that might be generated between them.<sup>22</sup>

Goldsworthy has still not seen the piece at the time of this writing except in photographs. In an interview, however, he admitted that he was surprised by how much change had occurred. "I'm shocked . . . slightly shocked—in a very nice way. I like that feeling. . . . [I]t's a feeling that you've released something that you're not really in control of and you don't know where it's going to end."<sup>23</sup>

In late October 1997, Goldsworthy predicted that the Getty helix would be completely dry by March 1998: "I really can't see that there

would be any moisture down there; so, earthquakes apart, what you have then will be what will remain."<sup>24</sup> At the end of its performance in becoming a "new ruin," the helix would achieve a degree of hardness, solidity, and permanence that few viewers will be able to recognize. As Goldsworthy noted, "[T]here won't be a kind of disintegration of returning to dust, which is what people think."<sup>25</sup> Once the piece has staged its performance, it faces only the threat of forces outside itself.

Nevertheless, this work will communicate to most viewers an image of entropy and erasure through decomposition. Few will recognize its stability and permanence. In fact, many of the clay pieces would require jackhammers to break them up before removal. Therefore, the "new ruin" or "permanent ruin" will maintain the aura of a "sacrificial object," whose animation and destruction form the core of a rite of passage—a mediatory object between divinities and humans, which is left to disintegrate in a ritual process that is completed only with the disintegration of the object.<sup>26</sup> The Goldsworthy installation is an inaugural piece for the dedication of the Research Institute's new building, but it was commissioned to symbolize origins and the earth upon which the building rested—not as a *memento mori* to remind visitors of death and mortality.

## What the community thinks and how the community understands Goldsworthy's intervention will profoundly affect how the piece is treated, cared for, and preserved.

The final events in the performance of the object are still unfolding and probably will for some time still to come; what the community thinks and how the community understands Goldsworthy's intervention will profoundly affect how the piece is treated, cared for, and preserved. This final event in the performance is Goldsworthy's test for us. If those who visit the helix think of it as Goldsworthy describes his ephemeral work—as a flower that blooms and then dies—then people will not care for and maintain it. Indeed, those who see it as a "sacrificial object" will sometimes feel, as we have observed on occasion, that it is even appropriate to assist in hastening its disintegration. But those who understand the process of its making and maintenance and its symbolic import for the community will protect and care for it as a "new ruin."

Goldsworthy's oeuvre, then, carries strong messages for us about the nature of conservation as something continuing, living,



**FIGURE 5**  
Detail of cracking, March 1998.

24. Of course, the performance of the earth is something very real to us in California, and Goldsworthy is very aware of it: "I love to make the clay work in California. I mean, that—I think there's a real understanding of the fragility in the sense of the earth moving in California . . . where the earth breathes violently. . . I think it's a wonderful context to make a work like this" (Goldsworthy, "Audio Portion of Interview Video," 5–6).

25. Goldsworthy, "Audio Portion of Interview Video," 7; see also 10.

26. See Susanne Kuchler, "The Sacrificial Economy and Its Objects: Rethinking Colonial Collecting in Oceania," lecture at the Getty Research Institute, Santa Monica, Calif., March 1996, typescript.

and part of a community's shared values. In his recent production, he has expressed his deep appreciation for the expertise of those who reside with the work from day to day and the knowledge gained by those who participate in the process of deciding what to do when the work requires it. I believe that Goldsworthy would say to us that the Getty community should decide what to do when a piece breaks off or dust accumulates on the floor next to the work. It is our decision—our responsibility. Only when we are adrift from these commonsensical values will we call in the “conservation expert,” as though she or he knows an answer we cannot provide:

[W]hen you work with dry stone walls, they continuously need repair. In Britain they're always being repaired. And it's this renewing of the wall that allows me as an artist . . . to rework them. It's not like taking something apart that's been cast in bronze and recasting it; it's something that's always been renourished. And I have to expect that. And there will be a certain element of change within that process. And change is what the work is about.<sup>27</sup>

And how long will the Getty helix last? As long as we protect it and want it. As Goldsworthy noted:

If that was damaged, if some one came and damaged it or it went beyond the point where I felt it was no longer strong as a piece of work, the solution would not be to start fiddling around with it; I'd remake it. It has to start again.<sup>28</sup>

It is hoped, however, that this “new ruin” will evoke a spirit of a community that maintains and cares for it. When that spirit no longer exists, the community will be ready to start again. ■

27. Goldsworthy, “Audio Portion of Interview Video,” 20–21.

28. *Ibid.*, 21.

## “IMMORTALITÉ PROVISOIRE”

Robert Storr

The modern age is really the first in which “newness,” as such, has been celebrated as a primary value in art. For much of history, the alternative was either timelessness or antiquity. These were matters of canonical form. Pictures made in periods when the past was important to artists were not made to look old but rather to resemble models from previous eras. Indeed, the cumulative knowledge about the craft of painting and sculpture, formerly transmitted by the guilds or the academy, has meant that many of these works look newer today than things that are, in fact, much less old—including some that were made “only yesterday.”

The very idea of the “new” in modern terms creates a wholly different set of circumstances and poses wholly different questions. Harold Rosenberg’s notion of “the tradition of the new” supposes that from the dawn of the modern epoch onward, art history, regardless of the various credos of its practitioners, has consisted of a series of leaps from vanguard to vanguard—what the French call *une fuite en avant*, a flight forward, from one stage to the next.

Lest the “new” be taken as an absolute value without qualifications, I should mention that Rosenberg himself offered one. In a well-known collection of essays on the issue of “quality,” compiled by Louis Kronenberger,<sup>1</sup> Harold Rosenberg asserted that what one looked for above all in Modern or contemporary art—its primary indicator of “quality”—was “freshness,” which he associated less with the physical properties of a work than with its conceptual ones. Freshness is not primarily a matter of facture per se but one of themes, approaches, points of departure, and derivations.

The problem we now face, however, concerns the great profusion of artworks that are doomed by their very immediacy or search for immediacy. Freshness of ideas or procedural attitudes often results in the premature physical deterioration of the object that embodies those ideas and attitudes. The creative misuse of traditional materials is an inescapable necessity for many artists, as is the experimentation with novel or untested materials. This goes back

to the beginnings of Modernism. For example, Eugène Delacroix’s decision to use “bitumen” blacks was a disaster for many of his paintings, even though it was motivated by a desire for a greater, more intense sensory impact than was then available with existing materials. Willem de Kooning, to cite another example, was a great contrarian among craftspeople, inasmuch as he could make a picture in the old-fashioned way as well as or better than any of his contemporaries but chose instead to work against the grain not only of his hard-won facility, but also of the studio methods he had so completely mastered—that is to say, traditional oil-painting technique.

1. Harold Rosenberg, “Avant-Garde,” in *Quality: Its Image in the Arts*, ed. Louis Kronenberger (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 418–49.



On the other hand, you have an artist such as Robert Ryman, who is a craftsperson of a special and notably inventive kind, an extremely fastidious and careful maker-of-things in previously little-used materials that he tests in consultation with restorers, as well as with the products' creators. When painting with oil, he scrupulously observes the proven rules and recipes of the medium; when he turns to synthetic paints or aerospace-industry supports, he finds out as much as he can about their composition and durability. But the fact remains that even with this meticulous preparation and execution, the effects he is seeking are so subtle, and the work he consequently makes so inherently fragile, that a painting's actual chances of survival in the state in which he lets it go out into the world are, at best, unknown.

There is a long tradition of people experimenting with materials in the hope of identifying new options or recovering long-lost techniques that will serve their purposes flexibly and, at the same time, prove to be lasting. Jacques Maroger, for one, a former restorer at the Louvre, claimed to

have rediscovered the medium employed by the Old Masters, such as Jan van Eyck, and his concoction was used by artists as different as Salvador Dalí and Fairfield Porter. It turned out, however, that Maroger's mix of Venice turpentine, gum arabic, precipitated lead, and other noxious ingredients was unstable, unreliable, and unhealthy; in fact, it is doubtful that the Old Masters ever used it, and it was of little help to the "new" masters who tried it. The concoction was intended to permit the free and fluid application of all types of oil pigments while guaranteeing a smooth, consistent surface when it dried. The more recent response to this ongoing demand among painters has been Liquin, which seemed to many to be the long-dreamed-of "miracle" medium when it first hit the market, but which looks like it may yet turn into a nightmare.

There are all manner of synthetics about whose life expectancy we can only guess. These innovations—along with the revival of previously abandoned methods and materials—have brought into being a conservation support structure like none that has ever existed before. An entire system of preservation has grown up around this proliferation of techniques and, in some cases, this deliberate aesthetic cultivation of "inherent vice." The dangers facing art are only increased by the fact that pictures and objects that in earlier times would have remained securely in place in churches, official galleries,

or the homes of the rich nowadays move in and about in constant rotation. In principle, this free movement of works of art is something that I heartily support, but the risks entailed when art travels are numerous and considerable, and they sharply escalate as the pace and frequency of the travels accelerate.

In the late 1970s, I watched as The Museum of Modern Art's retrospective of Robert Rauschenberg was unpacked at the Art Institute of Chicago. I remember marveling at the crates, which had been built with such unbelievable precision and sculptural complexity—in order to protect the delicate protrusions stuck to the surfaces of Rauschenberg's pictures—that they almost seemed to be works of art in themselves. Even then, some of these cases were truly vast. I recall years later talking with an artist friend, Don Dudley, who was constructing the crates for Rauschenberg's globe-trotting ROCI (Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange) project, and he remarked that the structures he was working on were better built than the housing in many of the countries they were being sent to. He was right, of course. Meanwhile, the aesthetic irony is that the more art aspires to the ephemeral nature of life, the more elaborate and indestructible its exoskeleton must be.

In the introduction to this book, Miguel Angel Corzo addresses the problems facing new electronic technologies for image and information storage: the grad-

ual degeneration of digital input, the magnetic breakdown of videotape, and so on. Beyond this is the question of the preservation of the technological "object" itself. The day has already come when museums are having to think about stockpiling "vintage" projectors, tape decks, monitors, and minicams to ensure that future presentation of works by Bruce Nauman, Tony Oursler, Dara Birnbaum, and others will be consistent with the way these artists originally conceived the works to be, since the issue is not only the image itself, but also the physical presence, the broadcast system, and the specific quality of image the technology produces. This means that, along with the conservators we now have, we will see the emergence of a whole new group of experts capable of dealing with such matters. Some may resemble the hi-fi fanatics and shortwave aficionados one



finds in the general population, adding not just a new specialty to the technical support professions, but another strange layer to the already bizarre sociological strata of the modern museum—of which, I should in fairness note, curators make up a no-less-peculiar component.

Conservation has become a routine matter in all areas of museum practice, like a built-in health-maintenance system for things instead of people. But they are HMOs of an increasingly specialized kind, since artists are now devising hybrid species that can survive only with the aid of constant medical attention in carefully monitored “ecosystems” designed to nurture them.

These hothouse conditions have profound aesthetic implications. The level of newness that is preserved in a work of art can radically alter our understanding of what we see and what it signifies. Take Russian Constructivist works, for example; or the badly desiccated plastic sculptures of Naum Gabo at the Tate Gallery in London; or the brittle paintings of the de Stijl artists, such as Piet Mondrian; or the similarly aged work of

Bauhaus masters—and consider the current state of these objects against the idea of modernity they contain and the attempt they represent to redesign the world according to fixed aesthetic principles. The poignancy of the ambition embodied in these works is qualified not only by our awareness of the historical outcome of the utopian projects they stand for, but also by the terrible damage so many of these works have sustained. It is like looking into the cracked face of a once-beautiful person, but worse, inasmuch as their beauty was supposed to have been indestructible.

Yet, if the question is one of freshness rather than newness, it is worthwhile considering more recent manifestations of the desire for eternal youth. Ironically, in contrast to much contemporary

art, the works of the 1920s and 1930s come out ahead. Compare a painting by Mondrian, properly cared for, with a vacuum-form sculpture of the 1960s that has yellowed or been dented. In my experience, at any rate, the Mondrian fares better—remains “fresher” as a paradigmatic visual event, whatever its exact physical condition—than much of the new media sculpture of recent decades, which looks “techno-period,” no matter how well maintained, and irredeemably forlorn when neglected.

Changes in the material status of the object can have an enormous effect on our grasp of the work’s meaning—aesthetically, philosophically, and in every other way. Aging and inevitable wear-and-tear dictate that a gradual, if not abrupt, shift will take place from the absolute perceptual

apprehension of the object to an increasingly conceptual one. On the conceptual side of the equation, it is not so much what the object brings to you, the viewer, as what you bring to the object—how it is that you surround the work with information, re-create for it a context that has been lost, and by some method perform a kind of mental alchemy that, in effect, “restores” the work to a visual state that can exist only in the mind’s eye.

One of the paradoxes of Modernism is that in rejecting the notion of timeless values, Modernists nonetheless hoped to make things that were forever new or always available to the viewer with an undiminished immediacy. It is a logical trap from which there is no escape. In the past, of course, people have wanted to preserve

---

**The level of newness that is preserved in a work of art can radically alter our understanding of what we see and what it signifies.**

their present—we have countless examples of Old Master landscape and genre art that attempt to do just that—but the question of how to preserve “presentness” as a quality that transcends the precise moment or situation described in or referred to by the work is a problem peculiar to Modernism. Therein lies the difference, one might say, between Rauschenberg and Canaletto or Chardin.

This said, it would be reckless not to do everything possible to care for the works in our trust. I should underscore the fact that at The Museum of Modern Art, we see contemporary works of the most fragile and ephemeral variety as essential to the collection—not as dispensable sidebars or postscripts to our primary historical concerns, but as an integral part of Modernism. Contemporary art informs and alters our view of Modernism retrospectively. It is not simply that classic Modernism provides it with a pedigree; Marcel Duchamp, for instance, establishes a precedent for Bruce Nauman, but Nauman, in a work made of grease and felt and foil, makes us look anew at Duchamp’s bicycle wheel.

But how do we contend with the built-in weaknesses of so many of these objects? It is intellectually and aesthetically dishonest to pretend that many of them are not, in some measure, beyond caring for—not just in the sense that curators and conservators may declare an object irreparably damaged or “dead,” but in the sense that what remains no longer conveys the meaning of the work in its original form. In some cases, one reaches a point in which the balance of elements is so far out of kilter, or the metamorphosis of its properties so extreme, that all one sees is a cultural relic. Indeed, painting, sculpture, and new media are, in certain incarnations, fast approaching the state of the performing arts and can be preserved, only as the traditional performing arts are, by memory and documentation. In the 1970s, documentation itself became an art form, such that people making earthworks, or creating environments that they knew would not last, or doing actions in “real time,” developed a whole aesthetic based around documentary procedures quite distinct from those used by professional archivists, art historians, critics, and others.

The issue of how such materials are to be dealt with was raised in an interesting way by Paul Schimmel’s exhibition *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979* at The Geffen Contemporary at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, February 8–May 10, 1998. It was an important experiment in many

respects, for in it, cheek by jowl, one found things that *are* unquestionably, albeit unconventionally, works of art; things that closely resemble the first but are, in fact, preparatory drawings and studies for works that no longer exist; photos and texts by the artists that document ephemeral works of art and plainly have an independent aesthetic value of their own; and, finally, museological commentaries or visual supplements that are not works of art at all.

The Museum of Modern Art is engaged in collecting materials of all these kinds, including performance leftovers by Chris Burden and Hermann Nitsch, photos by Gordon Matta-Clark, text and snapshot pieces by Vito Acconci, artists books and manifestos by the Situationists, and so on. Then there are those who made an aesthetic out of the idea of the relic. The archaizing jack-of-all-trades Joseph Beuys is the prime exponent of this tendency, symbolized by the ethnological museum-style vitrines he filled with the mummified stuff of his own invention. But even these strange remnants are in jeopardy; after all, a dried-out sausage in a glass case will continue to wither and may eventually fail even to look like the sorry thing it was when first placed there years before. Beyond that, deliberately making something old-fashioned presupposes a shared sense of the look of things that appear new around it. Thus, the purposeful anachronism of Beuys’s work will change in character and may, at some point, even

vanish as a result of the shifts in taste going on around it. (What would happen, for example, if the retro-chic of David Lynch’s film *Dune* (1984) became the context against which Beuys was seen, as opposed to the 1960s and 1970s sleekness he took for granted?)

Thus, a situation is emerging in which works of art—Beuys at one extreme and 1960s plastic vacuum-form sculpture at the other—will bear a resemblance to their original form that may be uncanny but at the same time lacking in vitality, rather like the naturally pickled Iron-Age bodies that were dug up in the Danish peat bogs, which briefly look lifelike before one comes fully to terms with the fact that they are utterly and completely dead. In such circumstances, we will have to exhibit much of what remains of the modern era as if it were evidence in an anthropological or forensic study of Modernism, rather than the direct presentation or vital incarnation of Modernism and the Modernist spirit. Museums of this sort will, no doubt, be interesting places to visit, providing us with many ways to look back in time and rethink what we have been through, even as we wonder at the ruins they contain.

In line with the Beuysian practice of creating works that incorporate a museological aspect, we now have some new variants on this play upon the mortality of art. In their different ways, Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons have both experimented with making things that are absolutely immutable and all the more morbid for being so. Hirst floats specimens of the already dead in formaldehyde-filled aquariums; Koons seals immaculate machines in seemingly airtight Plexiglas boxes. Yet by denying mortality so insistently, they affirm it; by conjuring with imperishability, they point to the ways that art cannot escape from its own vulnerability.

On the other hand, we have artists who have dealt with the problem of preserving immediacy by radically adjusting their technical approach. I am thinking, for example, of Sol LeWitt, who writes equations for drawings that can be executed by others and will retain their freshness as works of art for as long as one can imagine people making marks on walls. Then there is the case of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who was forced by AIDS to confront his own mortality in the cruelest and most abrupt way. Despite his situation and the economic rules of the art game, Gonzalez-Torres created images that can be reprinted at will and disseminated in the largest possible quantities in a way that defies history, by rendering “presentness” in an infinitely reproducible form.

Such examples do not constitute the norm. Very few artists have addressed these issues so directly. Indeed, much of the art now being made brings to mind the young scientist in the film *Blade Runner* (1982), who, in the course of two hours, visibly ages before our eyes. I do not mean to be too pessimistic, however, and I most certainly do not wish to discourage the building of contemporary collections of Modern art. Nor do I believe in hiding things away in permanent storage, where only specialists can see them, while exhibiting facsimiles to the general public—an option that seems to be gaining increasing currency in some parts of the art world.

The direct encounter with unique works of art in whatever state we find them is something that cannot be replaced by surrogate images that transform dense visual phenomena into high-resolution counterfeits. The loss of “aura,” which Walter Benjamin spoke of as the price of mechanical reproduction, still haunts us; but contrary to Benjamin’s conviction that the modern age signaled the definitive triumph of the mass-produced substitute over the thing itself, this has not happened, or at any rate has not happened yet.

The firsthand discovery of works of art can, in fact, represent a turning point in someone’s life. I remember Eleanor Sayre, former curator of prints and drawings at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, describing to me her childhood visit to the British Museum where,

despite her extreme shyness, she asked a guard to see Albrecht Dürer drawings. Rather than being turned away, as she had expected, she was welcomed and given full access to what the museum had. That moment was the beginning of her lifelong dedication to the field. Some years ago, I had a similar experience in the Louvre. A scruffy art student with no credentials, I asked to see Delacroix drawings; the guard, after looking me over severely, brought out volume upon volume of sketchbooks. You cannot take that opportunity away from people and say that you have done art a service by “protecting” it.

Instead, I think we must face the issues raised here—mortality or immortality—and accept, or better choose, mortality as it has chosen us. The poignancy of all art is, to some degree, vested in its attempt to cheat fate, to leave behind some fixed form of what you cannot take with you. This is true for the collector and the curator and the artist. It is also true for institutions. We are all co-conspirators in an effort to beat the reaper. But that, of course, is impossible and in many ways undesirable, since it falsifies true signs of life.

## I think we must face the issues raised here — mortality or immortality — and accept, or better choose, mortality as it has chosen us.

At best, we can only hope to extend the life of objects a little, while recognizing that the quality of that life is not worth some of the extreme measures taken to prolong it, any more than the “survival” promised would be worth the extreme measures we might be tempted to take to forestall the death of a family member or ourselves.

What we are left with and must deal with in art is much the same as what we must deal with individually—that is, a longing for something we cannot have, within a time frame we cannot know. I am reminded in this regard of a play by the French-Romanian author Eugène Ionesco titled *Le roi se meurt*, (The King Dies). In the course of the play, the king

is presented with the certainty of his own death, and, toward the end, he asks for a reprieve, at which point someone says to him, “But do you want to live forever?” “No,” he replies, “all I want is *immortalité provisoire*”—a temporary or provisional immortality. At this juncture, life and art part company, but not by much; in the final analysis, when it comes to art, *immortalité provisoire* is the best we can hope for and all we should want. ■

## PRESENT AND FUTURE: CARING FOR CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE TATE GALLERY

Roy A. Perry

The Tate Gallery consists of three galleries located in London, Liverpool, and Saint Ives. They display the National Collection of British Art from the sixteenth century to the present day and international Modern art. In London, a new gallery of Modern and contemporary art is being built within the shell of a disused power station on the south bank of the river Thames. This will open in May 2000 as the Tate Gallery of Modern Art, displaying international art of the twentieth century and beyond.

The aims of the gallery are to increase public awareness, understanding, and appreciation of art by making available, conducting research on, caring for, and adding to the collection. The main displays, drawn from the collection, are augmented by loans, special exhibitions, and a wide range of information and activities exploring aspects of the displays.

### **The Acquisition of Contemporary Art**

As the opening of the Tate Gallery of Modern Art approaches, the collection is experiencing a rapid growth in its acquisition of twentieth-century art. The collection is often referred to as "permanent"; although the main objectives when adding to it are to acquire works that enhance the collection and to provide visitors with a high quality of experience, the long-term condition of the works is also an important consideration. A delicate balance between the needs of access to the works and their conservation is required to preserve them for future audiences. The constant transfer of works between Tate sites and an international program of loans reinforce the need for the works to be both durable and transportable.

Acquisitions are made by purchase and bequest. The initial selection is made by the director and curators, who commission a conservation report on the proposed acquisition before presenting it to the board of trustees for a decision. The conservation report provides an assessment of the

work's current condition and future conservation needs. It concentrates on the changes that are likely to occur and the measures needed to maintain its condition as a coherent work of art. This includes any special needs and ongoing costs associated with storage, display, and transport, as well as treatment of the work itself. For example, the cost of installing and dismantling a complex exhibit can well exceed the continuing expenditure for storage and maintenance. Acquiring such works makes a substantial commitment of future resources to preserve them as fully functioning works of art.

Conservation problems or display costs are rarely the reasons for rejecting a work, although they may contribute to the decision when making a choice between works of similar merit. Purchase price and availability are the main constraints on acquisition.

### **The Conservation of Contemporary Art**

Selection of the works is the first act of conservation by the gallery. Their subsequent care is the responsibility of all gallery staff. The conservation department has executive responsibility for their treatment and technical documentation. With contemporary works of art, we have the unique opportunity to conserve them in a state as close to their original condition as their irreversible tendency to decay allows. Changes in condition over the years are recorded for posterity. Although these records will assist in understanding and caring for the works, the cultural rather than physical changes may have the most influence on how the works are perceived in the future.

Underpinning all effective conservation is accurate technical information on the structure and materials of the artwork and the artist's intention in using them. This includes understanding the properties of the materials and their interaction with one another and their environment. Thus, the conservation department's priority on acquiring a contemporary work

is to gather information from the artists or their assistants, as well as to examine and analyze the work itself. Questionnaires are prepared individually to reflect the particular work, its history, and the artist. The majority of artists are very cooperative, especially if we are able to interview them. An hour or two's discussion in front of the works can elicit far more information and insight than written correspondence alone. This information is supplemented by reference to the suppliers and manufacturers for the details of specific products or processes. Manufacturers are also helpful and often curious about the end use of their products. Only occasionally will they insist on confidentiality to protect their commercial interests. The information is kept on databases arranged by artist and supplier, as well as within individual conservation records. It is also used to prepare technique and condition entries for catalogues and public information texts.

Most of the works of art we deal with are made within the long tradition in the visual arts for the production and marketing of

unique, lasting artifacts. Artists choose their media, in part, for their durability, as well as their creative potential. When discussing their work with artists, one of the objectives is to discover their attitudes to the preservation of their works. What do they consider to be acceptable or unacceptable changes, and should these be remedied if possible? The answers range from total rejection of any interference with the work to disinterest in what anyone might want to do to it. Generally, the response is more practical, and we can get a clear idea as to what is acceptable to the artists and balance their views with the requirements of the gallery. Few artists object to the replacement of an inadequate stretcher, invisibly reinforcing the structure of a fragile sculpture, or copying data onto a more durable format. They also

welcome the opportunity to discuss their technical problems, and when we are unable to assist them ourselves, we can usually direct them to someone who can.

Along with examination and documentation, most new works entering the collection require basic conservation measures, such as the specification of environmental conditions and the provision of protective furniture for handling, storage, and display.

Control of the display environment for conservation reasons is a matter of continual debate. The innate desire of the conservator is to provide maximum protection for the work of art on display. This can involve the use of visible measures—such as the control of light levels, barriers, covers, and glazing—which need skillful and sensitive handling if they are not to interfere with the appreciation

---

**With contemporary works of art, we have the unique opportunity to conserve them in a state as close to their original condition as their irreversible tendency to decay allows.**



of the work. Traditional protective measures are often not acceptable for modern art. The risks may also be increased, as the audience can be confused by the different degrees of interaction permitted with works—from viewing them alone to walking on them. As well as defining the needs for each work, a database has been established for the Tate that specifies the range of environmental control available in each gallery. Relating the two sets of data allows realistic decisions to be made on the contents of proposed displays.

Some works will receive more direct treatment to reduce rates of degradation and protect them from damage, such as stretcher-bar lining for stretched canvases or remounting works on paper onto nonacidic mounts. Deciding whether the alteration of the original structure of a work during treatment is justified for its long-term conservation is largely a practical decision. For example, a purely functional stretcher that plays no visible part in a painting but endangers the future condition of the canvas it supports will usually be replaced or substantially reinforced.

Severe damage to modern works can present more complex practical and ethical decisions, as when the lower panel of Richard Hamilton's 1965 reconstruction of Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (*The Large Glass*) (1915–23) self-destructed. The work could have been consigned to the archive as a

relic, the salvageable materials from the damaged panel transferred to a new sheet of glass, or the whole reconstruction remade. After long deliberation and consultation with Hamilton, it was decided to replicate the lower panel so the reconstruction, which fills an important role in many displays, can continue to be exhibited. The practicality of remaking the lower panel within acceptable parameters of accuracy was made possible by using Hamilton's drawings and methods. The damaged panel is now in the archive, and only Duchamp's inscription approving Hamilton's reconstruction was transferred to the new lower panel.

### Conservation of the Ephemeral

Although most of the works of art displayed at the Tate are self-sufficient physical entities, an increasing quantity of contemporary art consists, in part or completely, of the physically ephemeral. Displays and events include ephemeral objects that may exist only for a one-time performance or the duration of an installation.

The 1998 exhibition of works by Per Kirkeby at the gallery included traditional cast sculptures, paintings, and a site-specific installation of brick walls (FIG. 1). The walls were built with soft mortar and separated from the gallery floor with impermeable sheeting to allow them to be dismantled

carefully at the end of the exhibition and the bricks recycled. The conservators' concerns were for protecting the rest of the displays from the dust created, not for preservation of the walls.

Ephemeral works and events are recorded and preserved as part of the gallery's records. The archives and library are invaluable sources of information about the collection, the gallery, and the works' cultural contexts. Providing access to and preserving these growing resources is an important part of the Tate's responsibilities.



**FIGURE 1**

Per Kirkeby, *Brickwork*, 1998, installation at the Tate Gallery, London. Bricks and mortar, 4 × 27.7 × 2.6 m (13 ft., 1½ in. × 90 ft., 10½ in. × 8 ft., 6¼ in.).

## If we do not preserve the art of today for tomorrow's audience, their knowledge and experience of our culture will be, sadly, impoverished.

The collection does include physically ephemeral works—for example, those that are remade for each display. A Sol LeWitt wall drawing is re-created with new material each time it is exhibited. Each version is a unique “performance” of the work that will vary from showing to showing within the parameters set by the artist. The materials may be unique, variable, or replaceable, but in all cases it is the artist’s instructions that are the constant, conservable core of the work.

Video works are also re-created each time they are shown and require complex technology to convert the information on

the videotape into a visible form. The video signals may be created and carried on different formats. In most cases, it is normal practice to make a digital copy on tape of the artist’s master tape; this is the gallery’s archival master that retains the complete information. A digital format is used because it is most likely to be compatible with future developments in electronic media. Copies made from the master may be in different formats, often compressed, to suit the display requirements. Where hardware components—such as projectors, players, and monitors—are an intrinsic part of the display, considerable resources are required to maintain them in working order or to replicate them. Repairing malfunctioning computers or replacing obsolete fluorescent tubes are major challenges for the future. Electronic media, vision, and sound are popular and accessible media that feature regularly among the Tate’s acquisitions and displays. A conservator has been appointed to develop and implement practical policies to meet their acquisition, display, and conservation needs.<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusion

Fortunately, for the comfort of future generations, the vast majority of artifacts we create have a limited life span and are, like us, recycled by natural or other means. However, hoarding artifacts from our past and present for the future has long been a human activity, providing us with concrete connections with past cultures and a sense that we can influence the future as the past influences us. Works of art that survive by chance or intention are particularly valued and cherished by our society. Galleries like the Tate, which were created to nurture that appetite, continue to attract growing audiences. If we do not preserve the art of today for tomorrow’s audience, their knowledge and experience of our culture will be, sadly, impoverished. ■

1. A lecture, “The Conservation and Documentation of Video Art,” was given by Pip Laurenson, conservator of electronic media at the Tate Gallery, at the symposium “Modern Art: Who Cares?” 8–10 September 1997, in Amsterdam, sponsored by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage and the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art.



## STRANGE FRUIT

Ann Temkin

The counterpoint of mortality versus immortality has always provided an essential theme for works of art. The tradition of *vanitas* paintings presented meditations on the transience of life, portraying fruit about to decay, candles soon to melt, flowers ready to fade. These paintings were about death while themselves being durable objects. What has happened to *vanitas* in the late twentieth century? The subject of human mortality certainly has not gone away; in the last fifteen years the AIDS epidemic has brought it closer than ever to the surface. From Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp to Kurt Schwitters and Robert

Rauschenberg, we live in a century that declares that things rather than symbols are the stuff of art. A serious work of art cannot, by current definition, “illustrate” death, but it can embody or imply it. Vulnerability and evanescence have determined the form, not only the content, of much of the most important art of the decade. And this, of course, presents real dilemmas for collectors, curators, and conservators.

A case study is an artwork that the Philadelphia Museum of Art acquired in February 1998. Titled *Strange Fruit (for David)* (FIG. 1), it was made from 1993 to 1998 by a thirty-six-year-old New York

artist named Zoe Leonard. It is composed of about three hundred rinds and skins of avocados, grapefruits, lemons, oranges, and bananas. After the artist ate, or others had eaten, the meat of the fruit, Leonard allowed the skins to dry out and then “repaired” and adorned them—literally sewing up the seams she had opened—with colored thread, shiny wires, and buttons; bananas, for example, are neatly closed up with stitches or zippers that run from top to bottom (FIG. 2).

**FIGURE 1**  
Zoe Leonard, *Strange Fruit (for David)*, 1993–98, installation at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1998. 302 banana, orange, grapefruit, lemon, and avocado peels with buttons, zippers, thread, wire and sinew needles, plastic, wire, stickers, fabric trim, and wax. Dimensions variable (installation shown: 7.32 × 8.38 m [24 ft. × 27 ft., 6 in.]).



**FIGURE 2**  
Zoe Leonard, *Strange Fruit (for David)*, detail of installation shown in Fig. 1.

Leonard has furnished a creation story for the piece, discussing its evolution as a work of mourning after the death of a friend. “It was sort of a way to sew myself back up. I didn’t even realize I was making art when I started doing them. I had just come back from India and was impressed with how each scrap of paper, each bit of wire was used to its maximum, to the very end of its possible useful life. One morning I’d eaten these two oranges, and I just didn’t want to throw the peels away so, absent-mindedly, I sewed them back up.”<sup>1</sup>

Leonard’s claim that she didn’t even realize she was making

art when she began sewing the fruit, in Provincetown, Massachusetts, typifies the rhetoric of the strain of twentieth-century art that has sought to erase boundaries between art and life. But eventually, the work seemed to her to be art, and she continued working on it back in New York and, later, during two years in a remote part of Alaska, where she mainly had to rely on fruit that was mailed to her. She first decided to exhibit the fruit in 1995, sending invitations to view it at her apartment. *Strange Fruit* was shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Miami during the spring of 1997 and at the Kunsthalle Basel that summer.

The quiet, elegiac tone of this piece surprises many people who know Leonard only from her notorious work in the exhibition *Documenta IX* in Kassel in 1992, in which she juxtaposed the portrait paintings of women with nineteen close-up photographs of women’s crotches, à la Gustave Courbet’s *Origin of the World* (1866). The pointedness of the piece bespoke Leonard’s art of the late 1980s, inseparable from her activism on behalf of feminism, gay rights, and AIDS. Artists ranging from Jenny Holzer to David Wojnarowicz created a powerful body of impassioned, polemical, and sometimes crudely made art. “We were all just too busy for beauty,” recalled the artist. “We were too angry for beauty. We were too heartbroken for beauty.”<sup>2</sup>

The experience of making (remaking) the fruit seemed to Leonard to readmit into her work the possibility of beauty and its reconciliation with a stance of political engagement. As she worked, she did not have a sure sense of the ultimate configuration or context for the objects. But sometime in 1997, she “decided to keep this group of sewn fruit together, as one piece, to decompose in its own time.” She told an interviewer that “I would love for this piece to have a room somewhere where I could install them and then leave them be. Just let them decay.”<sup>3</sup>

This conclusion had not come immediately. Early on, her dealer, Paula Cooper, suggested the possibility of preservative intervention

1. Anna Blume, “Zoe Leonard Interviewed by Anna Blume” in *Zoe Leonard* (Vienna: Wiener Secession, 1997), 17.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 18.



for the sculpture. Leonard was amenable and worked for two years with the German conservator Christian Scheidemann to devise a way to arrest the decay of the fruit surfaces. After much testing, Scheidemann developed a solution that consisted of shock-freezing the pieces and then soaking them with the consolidant Paraloid B72 under vacuum. This solution was complicated by the need to protect the wires, threads, and other decorative elements from the Paraloid B72; in other words, the piece presented the intricacies typical of any mixed-media work. But Scheidemann succeeded in this as well, and it seemed that everything was all right; much like seventeenth-century still-life paintings, *Strange Fruit* would talk about ephemerality but would itself endure.

However, Leonard surprised herself and found that she recoiled at Scheidemann's hard-won results. She realized that the appearance of decay was not enough for her, the metaphor of disappearance was insufficient. I would argue that this was a reaction determined by art history—after Joseph Beuys's sausages or Dieter Rot's chocolate, the mere pretense of deterioration was no longer persuasive. Leonard set herself a criterion of honesty and rejected the twenty-five preserved pieces.

I would like to digress briefly to put Leonard's decision in the context of an artistic moment at which it seems that much of the very best new work is explicitly

antiheroic, antimonumental. Disappearance, absence, and the trace or the relic are concepts that wind a path through much current work that may seem very different—from, say, the sculpture of Robert Gober to the photographs of Gabriel Orozco. An example I find particularly relevant to Leonard is that of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Born in Cuba in 1957, Gonzalez-Torres worked in New York from 1979 until his death in 1996. His work formally descends from the minimalism of the 1960s, but unlike the monolithic forms of Richard Serra or Donald Judd, it consists of aggregate elements and is predicated on richly layered metaphors

of human experience and exchange. Consider, for example, the sculptures composed of mounds of candy, spread like a carpet or piled in a corner (FIG. 3). Gonzalez-Torres invites the viewer to take an individual candy from the sparkling mass. Such pieces intensify the viewer's relation to the artwork in an almost shockingly direct fashion: taking from it and consuming it. That intensity is heightened when one knows, for example, that the original weight of the sculpture was determined by the body weight of a dying lover.

So what happens in the encounter between this type of work and the museum? There are

**FIGURE 3**  
Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Portrait of Dad)*, 1991. White candies individually wrapped in cellophane, endless supply. Ideal weight, 79.45 kg (175 lb.); dimensions variable.



## We live in a time when the museum is much more actively engaged with its public, so why not with its artists?

all sorts of different answers that we are in the midst of devising, in the absence of any rules. Even in death, Gonzalez-Torres has bid the museum become his collaborator, asking that we fill a much greater role than that of providing security or cleaning a grimy surface. He has put into motion an active relationship between the artwork and its viewer, but must the museum continue it? The museum might stop allowing people to take the candies (explaining in a label that

they would once have been allowed to do so), rationalizing that a museumgoer makes do without shifting the sand in a Joseph Cornell box. Or should the museum buy a supply of candy—Hershey's Kisses (relatively simple), Baci (expensive), or Astropops (who makes those?), as the case may be—to replace those taken? Who takes on this responsibility? The curator? The registrar? The conservator? These candies won't be made forever. Should the museum purchase what seems like a ten-year supply? Fifty-year supply? Hundred-year supply?

Whereas Gonzalez-Torres's sculptures set up an operation of consumption and replenishment, *Strange Fruit* presents a different challenge. Leonard did not ask the museum to effect a repeating life cycle—to the contrary; and the radicality of that stance gave pause to the artist, as well as to museum officials. When Leonard first heard that the Philadelphia Museum of Art wanted to buy *Strange Fruit*, she was thrilled and grateful. But soon after, she developed concerns about the museum's willingness to show it continuously, to devote a specific space to it, and to show it, still, when it became more evidently a ruin. The museum agreed to try (although not to formally commit) to show the piece for periods of time with a certain calendrical regularity, which seemed in the spirit of the work's sense of marking time. We agreed to photograph, or permit Leonard to photograph, successive installations, perhaps in the interest of an eventual

publication. We agreed to collaborate with her over the years to determine when the piece was no longer presentable and what should be done with it at that time. Admittedly, this allowance for continued communication with the artist is unusual. However, we live in a time when the museum is much more actively engaged with its public, so why not with its artists?

What did my colleagues at the museum think? They felt terrific about exhibiting *Strange Fruit* but, at first, were less sure about acquiring it. This was precisely because of the obligations that were implied, particularly of storage and conservation. Interesting to me was the discomfort some had in assigning it an acquisition number. How can you give a number to something that won't always be there? To me this revealed our collective belief in the sense of permanence bestowed by an inventory. The sense is fictional, of course; an unsettlingly large percentage of



objects that have numbers in our building do not exist as their numbers would indicate: they broke, were sold, are lost, or were designated for practical use and wore out. The assignment of a number does not, in truth, guarantee “forever.”

What did the museum’s conservators think? Indeed, the piece is a bit of an affront to the whole profession. It is like bringing to a surgeon a patient with an inoperable disease; next patient, please. But here, too, I feel that *Strange Fruit* is very much a work of our time. The heroics of the conservation lab are as much in question as those of the hospital. As medical and conservation technology develops and the number of potentially treatable patients grows, the questions raised by *Strange Fruit* become social questions as much as art questions—for example: Is it more graceful and humane to let a person die than to preserve him or her bizarrely and at great expense? Ultimately, the conservators and I shared an understanding of the spirit of the piece. We agreed that the labor-intensive aspect of dealing with it as we normally would, such as thoroughly condition-checking each unit, stretched the bounds of common sense. But we agreed to do certain things, such as devising good storage so its periods of dormancy will impinge as little as possible on its life span.

In discussing *Strange Fruit* with the conservators, the subject of the museum’s two sculptures by Eva Hesse arose. This was no



coincidence, for Hesse is an important inspiration to Leonard. In Hesse’s case, we have a resin sculpture, *Tori* (1969) (FIG. 4), that will inevitably lose its grip on the chicken wire supporting it. In our latex sculpture *Schema* (1967), the individual units have already begun to disintegrate. Our conservation department has given a lot of thought to these pieces and has tested replacement elements for *Schema*. The conservators’ efforts are based in part on the artist’s intentions for the works: Hesse did not intend for them to die. But there is an interesting twist to this, I believe. Despite Hesse’s intention, her work gives license to the whole idea of not lasting forever, as her

resin and latex sculptures have a finite life span. While Hesse’s intent was not at all the pieces’ own disappearance, somehow their ephemeral nature, combined with the drama of Hesse’s own death at age thirty-four, gave a certain permission to the artists of this generation to work in this framework. It was, in some ways, a misreading of Hesse’s intention for her work that led to a fruitful path for the next generation.

When *Strange Fruit* and works of art like it enter into the possession of a museum, certain things are inevitably given up; a uniformed guard does detract from the intimacy of the encounter, the piece will not be on display twelve

**FIGURE 4**  
Eva Hesse, *Tori* (nine units), 1969. Reinforced fiberglass over wire mesh. Each unit: 76.2–118.11 × 34.29–53.34 × 26.67–35.56 cm (30–46 1/2 × 13 1/2–21 × 10 1/2–14 in.). Philadelphia Museum of Art.

months a year, there is a risk of theft. But what is gained? While Leonard initially did not expect that *Strange Fruit* would end up in a museum, I believe its impact there will be more profound than any she could have imagined for it. In a museum, it often seems, we are dedicated to preserving something larger than individual works of art; we are dedicated to preserving the fiction that works of art are fixed and immortal. Our building is the greatest support for this argument: a seemingly imperishable monument of Vermont limestone constructed in the timeless idiom of the classical temple. In recent years, however, it, too, has manifested various signs of serious deterioration.

To me, the provocation offered by Leonard's work sends a message that reverberates throughout our building. Maybe it is not the only thing in the museum that is not forever. Maybe this is not a universe without wounds, reconstructions, scars, or death. Visitors may consciously realize its implications, or they may not. *Strange Fruit* is starting to look less far removed from Leonard's daring intervention at *Documenta IX*: "I was trying to get myself and the audience to be more honest. What are you seeing? What do you really want to look at?"<sup>4</sup>

*Strange Fruit* is a piece that will visibly alter in appearance in the museum. And for that reason,

even though it faces death and portrays death, I believe it may be more alive for today's viewers than many of the objects apparently fixed and never changing. Sometimes it's great to get caught up in the fiction of forever and the fiction of certainty. Sometimes it's great to enjoy a pretty Impressionist landscape. But sometimes we are ready to know that there can be beauty in cracks and in loss. Sometimes it is much more of a help to know that everything is changing, is in some way dying, that we do what we can, and that we go on creating. ■

---

**In a museum, it often seems, we are dedicated to preserving something larger than individual works of art; we are dedicated to preserving the fiction that works of art are fixed and immortal.**

4. Blume, "Zoe Leonard," 18.





Present and Future Perceptions

**PART 2**

*This page intentionally left blank*

## WORK AS PROCESS OR WORK AS PRODUCT: A CONCEPTUAL DILEMMA

Helen Escobedo

Spit, blood, semen, hair, feces, chili powder, fresh meat, garbage, and/or words, ideas, breath, noise, steam, movement, shadows.

Has the use of all this and so much more really changed our perception of what art is about? Surely not, especially if one does not entirely disagree with Marcel Duchamp's detachment from aesthetic preoccupation by claiming that he did not believe in art but in artists. And artists today are alive and well (or alive and sadly not so well) and living all over the planet.

Whether they are making successful, meaningful, or private art; innovative, radical, or revolting art; technological, permanent, or

ephemeral art, they are making art by being creative in the now and the here and are, thus, the actors in the ongoing making of art history. But can one believe in the immortality of the artifacts they produce and their "foreverafter"? I most certainly cannot. Nor would I dare to predict which will live on into the future, nor imagine anyone with the omnipotence, the absolute authority, to approve or disapprove of what will be good, bad, futile, indispensable, or reprehensible and cast it as a solid truth into the annals of art history.

If art is a reflection of humankind's spiritual needs, then it must be so recorded, just as ideas have been preserved throughout history—not only by their physical evidence, but also by virtue of their meaning.

Artists are products of their time and usually take absolute responsibility for what they do and how they do it. What they cannot control is the sanctioning of their creativity by the powers that be; those who can slot them into one of the three containers that will seal their destiny: success, hope, or oblivion. The work, once out of

the studio, follows suit, for if artists are mortal, so are their artworks.

In his excellent article, "Ars Moriendi: The Mortality of Art," Gary Schwartz states that destruction, not survival, is the norm. He refers to a series of calculations made by various historians claiming losses of 99.4 percent of Central European literary manuscripts made during the Middle Ages, 98 percent of German altar carvings and panels, and—by 1800—90 percent of all pre-1700 Dutch paintings. He concludes that all these estimates might prove generally applicable even today.<sup>1</sup> These awesome statistics should be warning enough to historians not to assume that surviving works provide an adequate impression of what there once was.

It would seem unnecessary to list all the natural catastrophes that deprive us of our past were it not for the fact that there are also willful means of despoiling our present, and both will continue to exist as long as human beings do. If earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, fires, mud slides, and hurricanes can obliterate centuries of art, so can wars, plunder, and hatred for

---

**If art is a reflection of humankind's spiritual needs, then it must be so recorded, just as ideas have been preserved throughout history — not only by their physical evidence, but also by virtue of their meaning.**

1. Gary Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi: The Mortality of Art," *Art in America* 84, no. 11 (1996), 72–75.



all things alien, nonconformist, in bad taste, offensive, or sacrilegious.

Add to this the fact that there are masterpieces in great public collections that have turned out to be fakes, that it has taken twenty years of wiping away previous restorations to make Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* (ca. 1495–98) come to light again for the umpteenth time, or that many works have been unwittingly destroyed—as, in 1966, when an Anthony Caro sculpture was demolished by workmen who had mistaken it for scrap. Or take an artist like Gordon Matta-Clark, whose work in buildings about to be demolished by property developers has been preserved only in photos of his deconstructions.

Consider, too, all the “actions” intentionally done in the name of “collaborations,” such as the spraying of the words “kill all lies” on Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), the black dye that was poured into Damien Hirst's *Away from the Flock* (1994), the blue substance that was vomited over a Piet Mondrian artwork, or the recent spray-painting of a green dollar sign on one of Kazimir Malevic's Suprematist paintings. Long before all this occurred was Robert Rauschenberg's far more plausibly wicked rubbing out of a drawing by Willem de Kooning, who, it seems, had previously granted permission to do so, albeit grudgingly.

What about objects never intended to be art that sell at a hundred times their value, like Andy Warhol's cookie jars or the nails with which Chris Burden crucified

himself, sold years later by a dealer? Where does process begin and product end? There is good graffiti art now turned into cheapened logos, like Keith Haring's work, and clever graffiti on inner-city trains, and lousy graffiti on new buildings, historic walls, and public sculpture.

Nothing is sacred, little is safe, and the best way to preserve valuable objects is to bury them underground, the way the pharaohs did, never to see the light again.

So with all this going on, one could say that we have entered the era of the temporary contemporary. Yet we continue to build flamboyant new containers as cemeteries for art-“wasms” that soon find themselves strapped for cash to admit new art-“isms,”

while older institutions scream for storage space or dare to deaccession and get their ears burned in so doing.

Artists today naturally reflect the temporality of all that surrounds them and have been doing so for decades, which is not so surprising, since most of what is built today is temporary, looks temporary, or ages badly. All that is manufactured becomes obsolete the moment it hits the market—a good business ploy, but we now drown in the trash it engenders. So recycling makes sense, and using industrial and organic trash makes for critical and inspirational sense, as does hooking on to new technologies in this age of mechanical reproduction—to the despair of



**FIGURE 1**

Helen Escobedo, *Negro basura, negro mañana*, 1991. Installation in Chapultepec Park, Mexico City, showing (left) 10 tons of collected garbage, length: 100 m (328 ft., 1 in.), width: 3 m (9 ft., 10 in.); and (right) the same piece with 60 m (196 ft., 10 in.) painted black.

Walter Benjamin, who so keenly felt a loss of aura in those works, due to their lack of uniqueness. Final benediction has come again from Duchamp, who said that anything can be art, while Warhol purported that everyone could attract attention, gain visibility, and be famous for fifteen minutes.

But how are we to remember everyone's fifteen minutes when, for so long, impermanence has been a strategy used by artists to avoid the making of precious objects,



rejecting traditional art and making works that either did not exist or were not supposed to last? Well, we really do not have to worry about that at all, since most of it has managed to be assimilated most successfully by the dealers for the ever-hungry art market and has been well covered by writers, critics, and historians for the sake of posterity. Now new technologies can take over from here to ever after. The *musées imaginaires* are at hand and will lie in slide banks, digital libraries, CD-ROM tours, digitized video discs, teletyped diagrams, videos, and on the Internet—and to hell with auras!

The only real problem today is speed and how to catch up with it. Space and time are at a premium and information bits get faster, as do computers, satellites, and optical networks. Globalization is being created through electronic means,

speed is all, depth is relative and so is virtual reality. And artists like me have a problem: To maintain my sense of reality and equilibrium, plus a sense of humor, in this spinning world, I lag behind.

Having worn two hats since the early 1960s, both as an artist and a museum director—a not-uncommon occurrence in Latin America, as another way of earning money rather than teaching—I have found that installing other people's works in museum spaces is a fascinating way of reconceptualizing their effect on the viewer. It is no doubt this aspect that has led me to seek a new meaning in space for my own work by using it as a material in itself, and to installations.

I have, since my museum days, an instinctive horror of all the pre- and post-nightmares of dealing with crating, insurance, transport, breakage, tearing, removal, reship-

ping, and lack of storage space. So it was a natural solution for my peace of mind to shun all this in favor of temporal, ephemeral, site-specific installations (FIGS. 1–3). This is not to say that I have given up making permanent works, such as the many urban sculptures I have done in the past, but as I now look back on them, few have survived in the way they were originally intended. Site specificity changes with time, and the city grows and encrusts upon itself, respecting nothing. Billboards, speedways, malls, and high-rise buildings dwarf the surrounding area, while rust, graffiti, or the

wrong color paint distort and uglify the work itself. Only in places where permanent maintenance and respect is shown to commissioned works does one's heart not flounder.

I am still as happy with a piece I made for the city of Jerusalem as I was when it was first inaugurated; I can say the same for only four others of the twenty-three-odd pieces I have constructed, which does not speak well for the state of permanence, nor for my peace of mind regarding future urban commissions. This in no way applies to civic memorials that are in a different

**Nothing is sacred,  
little is safe, and the best  
way to preserve valuable  
objects is to bury them  
underground, the way  
the pharaohs did, never  
to see the light again.**



**FIGURE 2**  
Helen Escobedo, *Acid Rain*, 1992. Installation in trees surrounding the Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg, Germany. 87 blue umbrellas, heights of 10–30 m (approx. 33–98 ft.).



**FIGURE 3**  
Helen Escobedo, *For the Turtles*, 1993. Installation at Parque de la Paz, San José, Costa Rica; 100 umbrellas, 130 old tires, approx. 300 × 300 m (approx. 984 × 984 ft.).

league altogether when it comes to care, surveillance, and conservation.

If one works freely and independently from the official institutions, routine channels, and established venues of the art world by using alternative spaces and opting for a marginal position, one loses the possibility of being sustained by a buyers' market. Either you accept the identity tag given you by the art circuit, or you lose your freedom to innovate, and thus your independence.

When, into the bargain, the work is intended not to last, the question of any kind of survival is imminent, but this again is not a problem. Tangible traces of what one has done are rich and varied and need not remain only as a memory for those who actually experienced them, as every artist worth his or her salt well knows—for temporality and permanence, and how they are best recorded, is ultimately a question for the artist to resolve. For example, specific objects can be made and shown within the context of an installation and then separately sold, as in the case of Joseph Beuys, Claes Oldenburg, or Louise Bourgeois. The space within a gallery can be emptied of its contents, filled with earth, and declared the object, then the building can be bought to conserve this feature of earthiness,

and the public can pay for the experience, as in the case of Walter De Maria and the Dia Center for the Arts in New York.

Second, we must contend with sites and “non-sites”—“non-sites” being museums and galleries that must reappropriate their spaces for new exhibitions or buy the work outright, plus have the means for storing and setting it up again according to specific instructions given by the artist. Temporary alternative sites are generally loaned or rented for a specific time, after which the works must be dismantled, sold, stored, or scrapped.

Third, in all cases, it is the artist who should clearly define whether the work can be kept, how best to keep it, and for how long, and this he or she must do directly with either the sponsor, the dealer, the institution, or the landowner, as well as the conservator, who needs the data for future reference. A signed and sealed document should be drawn up, much like a will, of what must endure, what must vanish, and who is entitled to maintain, preserve, document, replicate, reinterpret, or effect destruction of the original, and of how copyright will determine financial retribution.

Finally, adequate documentation through the use of photographs, slides, films, and video will at least ensure the survival of these creative processes (Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude, are past masters at this).

I have often thought of making a ritual performance of the

destruction of my installations, but this implies a return trip, though it would ensure that parts of the work would not be preserved, as has happened, much to my disgust, when I have met the unrelated fragments completely de-contextualized at a later date. One of the units of *For the Turtles* (FIG. 3), for example, showed up installed indoors on cement blocks.

And now, “To be or not to be?”—God, what a question!

FOR

The more you work  
The more you have  
The more you have  
The more you keep  
The more you keep  
The less you want  
The less you want  
The more you destroy  
The more you destroy  
The less you have

So why worry? ■

## FOR EXAMPLE — EXAMINING POLLOCK

Jürgen Harten

It is a well-known fact that valuable and correspondingly costly works of art, in particular those works of a fragile condition, have to be specially protected. As a rule, they should never leave their location; every change in climate and every jarring shock could damage them. If, by way of exception, they are loaned once for a traveling exhibition, then they should travel under safety precautions that are otherwise afforded only to VIPs at risk, bodyguards included: At the place of their temporary residence, lighting and air-conditioning need to be provided to order; when required, an emergency doctor in the form of an experienced conservator needs to be on hand; and as soon as danger threatens, an alarm must sound.

Probably every art museum possesses a number of works of art that, despite every conceivable safety measure, are never loaned. They are indispensable for exhibit in the permanent collection not only because they are among the most important pieces and are also particularly appreciated by the general public, but also because they are regarded as unique and irreplaceable—that is, as masterpieces in the original, they are unreproducible and cannot be exchanged for any other. They may be highly insured; in the case of loss, however, they could not be replaced by money, because monetary value corresponds not to the true value of a work of art, but, at best, to a commercial value in which the artistic value is only monetarily conveyed and economically asserted.

At the same time, it should be taken into consideration that a

valuation is based on something that appears to be identical to the material nature of a work of art. No matter if the material itself is regarded as precious (like gold, for example); or if we admire the manner of treatment of the material in the representation of an object of quite another materiality; or if, first and foremost, we consider as valuable the meaning we attach to a material carrier—be it ever so humble. We always materially treat a work of art as an object of value and, at the same time, always regard it as a symbol, an instrument to combine spirit and being, reality and meaning. Therefore, when such an “object-symbol” is damaged or lost, the depreciation corresponds rather precisely to the loss in material evidence.

In my contribution to the subject of the preservation and transmission of works of visual art, I would like to concentrate on the question of what a work of art means to us. For this reason, legally defined notions of ownership, as well as conservation methods backed up by natural science, will remain unheeded. I shall, instead, discuss Jackson Pollock’s painting or, more precisely, the reception of his painting.

Anyone who has ever requested loans for art exhibitions knows that such applications are inevitably rejected when the work of art in question is damaged or clearly at risk. Some time ago,

however, I was denied the loan of a particularly beautiful painting by Pollock on the remarkable ground that the painting, by no means inordinately fragile, was supposedly in excellent condition and had not been previously loaned or restored. Obviously, there was more concealed behind this line of reasoning than the prevailing consensus that works of art must be preserved as authentically as possible, because the assessment of their quality — one could also say their aesthetic credibility — depends on their state of preservation. The Pollock in question was regarded a priori as untouchable. The painting was not only to be protected from every risk of damage to its concrete quality, but also apparently to be preserved in its material substance exactly as it was created and delivered by the painter.

The intactness of the work of art is, so to speak, the seal of its pristine state. Thus, for example, a painting still to a large extent materially identical with the original condition of its making is considered an object of the greatest possible authenticity. It is regarded not only materially but also visually

and semantically as unique and irreplaceable because — and as long as — its authenticity is worth remembering.

With respect to Pollock, it is well known that during his lifetime he had acquired a reputation as a leading artist in the New York School (mid-1940s to mid-1950s). We have long since become used to paying tribute to his painting after 1946–47 as a pioneering contribution to Abstract Expressionism. With that, we may be ignoring the fact that Pollock himself thought little of such terms; but whatever discourse we devise, the original paintings are, indeed, always the deciding factor for the scrutiny of interpretation. We may content ourselves with illustrations when we want to understand how Pollock artistically emancipated himself in the course of a few years, how he digested the models that moved him — the American regionalists, the Mexican muralists, the European surrealists, and the Native Americans. The more an illustration resembles the illustrated original, however, the more we are reminded that, ultimately, only before the originals can one dispute which rank Pollock's painting holds compared with those of his contemporaries and, moreover, what esteem it can claim in the pantheon of The Museum of Modern Art.

But apart from specific correlations with respect to painting history, historical occurrences of the period in general deserve our interest as well. Pollock lived pas-

sionately, and he articulated conflicts with artistic devices and devised strategies of self-assertion that were, in their uncompromising stance, of exemplary signification for the period during and immediately after the Second World War. If the trauma of imperiled existence can be felt in the menacing, dark figuration that was characterized by Clement Greenberg in his time as "gothic," then a gain in freedom — in biographical, as well as in straight artistic terms — can be deciphered in the nonhierarchical, or overall composition, of his abstract painting. Consequently, we can discover figures of the zeitgeist in his paintings and reconnect the threads between history and the present at any time.

From such retrospectively historical occurrences, or comparative art-historical considerations, one can distinguish the so-called history of impact, which is prospectively adjusted. It concentrates on the question of what effects have come directly from the oeuvre.

In Pollock's case, sometimes it seems that his work has been held in esteem for developments

not found in his painting at all. In order to protect the work from art-historical misconceptions, William Rubin warned thirty years ago of a "Pollock myth," in which the artist, as artist, could upstage the paintings themselves. On the other hand, Pollock himself created the condition for this myth by means of radical artistic innovation apart from the myth associated with his person: With his way of painting, he opened up the possibilities from which critics and succeeding artists have deduced unexpected conclusions.

Like David Alfaro Siqueiros, whose art laboratory he had visited in 1936 in New York, Pollock was concerned about materials — materials that are generally common and can therefore be considered "contemporary." He had already linked his message with his choice of medium when he worked with commercial Duco synthetic enamel paints instead of the usual artists'

paints and when he used canvas from the roll. But, above all, he was extremely sensitive to how to conform the characteristics of the material with artistic expression. When Pollock let the paint drip from the can instead of applying it with a brush, this procedure instantly found expression in the appearance of the painting. The streaks and spots of the painterly network resulted from the relationship, controlled by the artist, between the speed of his movement and the consistency of the enamel paint. Bernard Friedman chose for his Pollock treatise, which appeared in 1972, the quite appropriate title *Energy Made Visible*.<sup>1</sup>

As early as the beginning of the 1950s, Harold Rosenberg called the artists of Abstract Expressionism “action painters.” Barbara Rose suspected back then that this term had been actually inspired by Hans Namuth’s photographs of Pollock in the act of painting.<sup>2</sup> Namuth had persuaded Pollock to allow him to photograph and film him while painting—to document the production of his paintings on canvases spread out across the floor of his studio. But, as Barbara Rose observes, Namuth thereby drew attention to Pollock’s process of painting—which was not necessarily what Pollock had in mind—and therefore to the artist himself. Consequently, although still intended as a result of the artist’s actions, the painting itself lost a bit of its claim to authenticity. The photographed medium appeared nearly more authentic.

In fact, the camera allows us to follow the process of a painting’s development in a far more subtly differentiated way than had been possible before—for example, seeing a preparatory sketch made before a painting was executed. Contemporaries may have regarded Namuth’s photographs as an instructive aid to interpretation with, to be sure, a quality of their own; today we understand more about this medium, too.

Only the original sequence of still photographs and the frames of a motion picture, as filmed—unlike common repro photos or, to recall an older manual process of reproduction, copper engraving—can open up the possibility of recording the course of an action and, for the first time, of taking a finished picture back again. Not only do we catch a glimpse of the reproduced painting after it is completed; we are there from the start, and afterward we can reel back the work’s development.

Pollock was decidedly a painter, and each of the paintings from his mature years represents the outcome of a painterly process. Even when he let recollections of early formulations flow in, he transmitted—with all his concentration on the painting in progress—his will of expression to the spontaneity of painterly

action. Thus, paradoxically, he anticipated as a painter what would be reserved in the future for the new media: the simultaneous recording of a fathomable reality in the process of transformation. At the same time, he insisted, in the last resort, on holding his own with painting as a medium of a genuine artistic message. However, when interest in the artistic message reverted to the artist, contrary to the artist’s intent, the uncoupling of the artwork’s production from the will and conception of the artist was certain to follow. Allan Kaprow, father of the Happening, declared two years after Pollock’s death that panel painting was now obsolete. Instead of painting, he

1. B. H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972).

2. Barbara Rose, “Hans Namuth’s Photographs and the Jackson Pollock Myth, Part One: Media Impact and the Failure of Criticism,” *Arts Magazine* 53, no. 7 (1979): 112–16.

restaged reality. Ten years later, the conceptual artist Larry Weiner, who never concealed his deep respect for Pollock, deemed that it should be left to the receiver of a work to decide whether it has to be executed by the artist, by someone else, or not at all.

Pollock's tragedy lies in the fact that his affiliation with the material prevented him from perceiving such possibilities of development himself. His only choice was either to relinquish painting or to fail heroically. Seen in terms of the history of impact, he was nonetheless involved in—among other things—an alteration of aesthetic parameters that was to emerge with logical consistency only at the end of the 1960s. At that time, Lucy Lippard and John Chandler spoke of a “dematerialization of the work of art.” From today's point of view, it is quite clear that the preconditions of this deconstruction of material, the active turning to life, as well as conceptual detachment, were accompanied by the achievements of the media, which have also changed—not least of all—our artistic awareness. We can hardly imagine how the world looked before electronically controlled media eliminated the relevance of the static image.

In Europe, Jean Tinguely, starting out from his kinetic reliefs,

had already taken an alternative position in the mid-1950s. Whether based on Pollock or inspired by Namuth, his drawing and painting machines parody the pathos of Abstract Expressionism with mechanical means. And while Tinguely even took chance into account to pretend that he could save artistic freedom, his sculptural “méta-matics” function like dinosaurs from the prehistoric period of the media age.

I offer one last example. In 1996, an advertisement appeared in a German art magazine announcing an exhibition titled *Jackson Pollock's Late Work 1960–1969*—that is to say, a completely fictitious show of “late works” of the artist, who was killed in a car accident in 1956. The ad alludes to Pollock's “intentions” about works, describing them “in front of/on walls as only airports, banks, insurance companies, and corporations with large factory buildings can provide.”<sup>3</sup> It comes from the Munich-based artist Helmut Porzner, who, under the address of a nonexistent “Museum for Modern Art,” likes to anonymously deconstruct the journalistic self-portrayal of the art trade by, for example, spreading untrue information that could be considered nearly true. In doing so, he plays with our superficial knowledge and with the power of the counterfactual, based, as is well known, on imaginary reality.

Porzner has even succeeded in selling a posthumous “Pollock” to a bank. This “Pollock,” a mural supposedly from 1961, consists of a

technically high-quality enlargement of a genuine, small-format painting that Porzner has imputed to a study sketch. In doing this, he acts as if—as we would say in German—Pollock could have “jumped over his shadow.” But what can no longer be paid with life inevitably results in the loss of artistic authenticity. The posthumous mural is not an “original” but, due to the given data, only an extravagant individual piece that can be duplicated in the same way at any time. Porzner thus confirms the technical superiority of the reproduction over the original, entrapped in its uniqueness, and, what is more, he suggests an authenticity of the inauthentic.

Perhaps it is opportune, at last, to refer to Walter Benjamin's famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”<sup>4</sup> Today, one may connect his often-quoted term “aura,” which still conveys an idea of the ritual origin of the work of art, with the pathos of the cultural critique of the 1920s and early 1930s—and one may consider his, at that time, astute utopian ideas obsolete; nevertheless, his intellectual approach to media theory is of continuous topicality. Benjamin explained why the new recording and reproduction techniques and, above all, film-developed characteristics were superior to the old arts.

3. Quoted from the advertisement for the fictitious exhibition “Das Spätwerk Jackson Pollocks 1960–1969” at the “Museum für Moderne Kunst, München” in *artist Kunstmagazin* 29 (1996).

4. Walter Benjamin, “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 1 (1936).



The traditional work of art could not stand up to the challenge of the new media in mass society, and the historical authenticity of the original—with that, Benjamin linked cultural dignity and profundity—appears objectively to be obsolete.

Returning to the issue of the sense and purpose of conservation efforts, if one starts from the dictate that the intactness of a Pollock painting, preserved in the original state, is not to be put at risk, it becomes clear what authenticity can mean. One could completely generalize this example, although the aesthetics of an artist of the twentieth century so strongly affiliated with material matter, such as Jackson Pollock, would not be transferable either stylistically or technically to the works of art of other cultures and eras. However, the state of preservation of a work of art is, of course, always

primarily conditioned by its material state and, therefore, even with the best care submits to outer as well as inner changes. Besides, our moral concepts and perceptions change, so we do not know whether works of art will be seen in the future in the same way as we imagine today. It is, therefore, never the material alone that we want to preserve but the intrinsic, symbolic quality of the work of art more or less engrained in or bestowed on the material.

If one considers the recent technological developments that have led to a global availability of time and space and to electronic substitutions of objective, sensually tangible reality, then today's works of art, especially those that rely on new media, will no longer be considered quite so unique and irreplaceable. Where the symbol has forfeited its material form, the conventional conception of authenticity seems to be rather irrelevant.

Historical authenticity may be obsolete now; our mortality is not. And, what is more, it is remarkable that today—to paraphrase Benjamin—we can also speak about the work of art in the age of its perfect preservation. We seem to want to save everything—from what lies behind us to what is still savable. Conservation has never been so thoroughly pursued as today. Never before have there been so many museums, and the recognition of buildings and grounds worthy of monument status is following on our heels, as if the present were letting itself be

---

**Our moral concepts and perceptions change, so we do not know whether works of art will be seen in the future in the same way as we imagine today.**

bypassed. Are we afraid of the threatening wear and tear of what is inherited and what is yet to be bequeathed? In view of the transience of the media, do we still believe in the permanence of what is solid? Do we hope to secure our future by protecting the past from being forgotten? But, then, wouldn't the electronic storage of all available data be sufficient?

To answer questions such as these, one has to make clear in one's mind what conservation can achieve and what it cannot. Only objects themselves can be treated and secured by means of restoration; yet, "historical authenticity," as Benjamin had in mind, rests in the past. But one can no more turn back the wheel of history than one can restore our brains. What we achieve when we remember—with the aid of monuments and documents of the past—resembles, rather, a mental reconstruction. Thus, we find ourselves in accord with the spirit of a new, generative, cybernetically conveyed authenticity.

Conservational reconstructions, too, cannot blind human beings to their mortality. And if such an imperfect object, like a work of art, undergoes extraordinary treatment, then it could possibly happen that a roaring digital laughter will burst out somewhere in the world. It is a banal thing to say, but we ourselves, as men and women, are the fragments we are talking about and, at the same time, the reason for the pretentious attempt to overcome our limits. ■

## COPYRIGHT ASPECTS OF THE PRESERVATION OF NONPERMANENT WORKS OF MODERN ART

Thomas K. Dreier

It may seem somewhat surprising to address a legal question in a book devoted to philosophical and social questions regarding the preservation of the artistic legacy of our outgoing twentieth century. Well, in one way it is, and in another way it isn't.

It is, if one still believes in the separation of the universe into two distinct parts—a deeply human, warm, and creative world of the arts on the one hand and an inherently technical, cold, and unimaginative world of the law on the other. It isn't, of course, if one understands law as a social-engineering tool designed—among other things, some of them less, some of them more important—to contribute to the shaping of the multiple and complex social relationships that form the fabric of our societies. Therefore, the law is indeed called upon to assist conservation philosophy and conservation techniques in preserving humanity's artistic past.

Which particular set of laws would be concerned with this topic? The answer, of course,

depends on which question is at issue and which conflicting interests have to be reconciled. Broadly speaking, there is the body of public law (both constitutional and administrative), which governs the relationship between the state and its representative powers and the individual citizen, and there is the body of private law, which regulates matters and conflicts of interests among private parties (including both individuals and private entities). Within each of these two bodies of law, particular fields of law and sometimes particular statutes provide rules for even narrower and more specific activities, defined groups of persons, or policy aims to be achieved.

As regards the protection of the cultural and artistic legacy, the laws dealing with monument protection and the preservation of national heritage seem to be the most pertinent sets of public law rules, whereas in private law, property and copyright laws impose themselves as being most closely related to this question. Of course, in practice, taxation also plays a

major—if not at times the most decisive—role, since it creates incentives to make certain voluntary decisions regarding defined works of art; however, tax law does not prescribe what the owner of an artwork has to do with regard to a particular artwork, but leaves this up to the owner's discretion.

### **The Conflicting Interests to Be Accommodated**

If we examine the at-times conflicting interests involved in preservation of works of art, three main groups may be distinguished: artists (creators of particular works of art), owners (of a particular original or copy thereof), and the general public (which may have an interest in either the preservation of a single work of art or in cultural heritage, as such).

The artist, in general, does not wish to have anyone else, including the rightful owner, interfere with the work in a way that is inconsistent with his or her artistic purpose or intent. After all, due to the philosophical and legal distinctions between the material object

and the immaterial work of art embodied therein, the latter remains the work of the artist even after the artist has parted with legal title to the material object.

The owner of a work of art, in turn, may wish to preserve its material substance in order to enjoy the work for as long as possible and to pass it on to his or her heirs, or to secure a good return on the investment made, as the case may be. But the owner may also wish to alter the work, adjust it to his or her personal taste and surrounding conditions, and, ultimately, destroy it. Likewise, the owner may consider any duty to preserve the work in an unaltered state as the obligation to pay for restoration and any limitation regarding its use, which is imposed on him by public-law considerations as an inequitable burden and undue restriction of his or her constitutionally guaranteed right of property.

The interest of the general public seems to be primarily aimed at preserving the common artistic memory—the legacy of times past or about to pass—and not so much at preserving single works of art, which—with certain exceptions—represent the legacy rather than

## The interest of the general public seems to be primarily aimed at preserving the common artistic memory—the legacy of times past or about to pass—and not so much at preserving single works of art.

being a legacy of their own. Of course, conflicting opinions exist almost invariably regarding the issues of whose cultural heritage we are talking about, which individual works of art are to be considered as representative, which preservation philosophies and techniques shall be applied, and, last but not least, who should pay for what and how much. However, apart from general due diligence standards, by and large the law is disinterested in these latter questions.

In this context, it seems worth noting that the interests of museums are not always as clearly defined as they may seem at first sight. Even when museums are chartered as public entities, thus entrusted with preserving the common heritage within their fields of collecting, they also have owners' interests and may not wish to tie up too much of their budgets in the restoration of certain older works.

How does the law respond to these different interests? The most striking feature of our legal system

is that, at present, no law takes into consideration the interests of all three groups. The laws dealing with monument preservation and the prevention of the export of national cultural property respond to interests of the general public in preserving cultural heritage, as such; these laws place public interests above any ownership interests and do not touch upon the artists' interests. In contrast, copyright law is concerned primarily with artists' interests and, to some extent, balances them against ownership interests, but—apart from the limited duration of the exclusive right and certain other exceptions in the public interest—does not reflect the public interest in preservation. Finally, the law of property generally does not contain rules especially tailored to the needs of artworks.<sup>1</sup>

Before continuing, it should be noted that legal norms are designed purposely in an abstract way so they can serve as binding guidelines in solving individual future conflict. Justice is guaran-

teed—and this is the “trick”—by agreeing upon these rules before the actual conflict arises and by applying these rules in a procedure likewise agreed upon in advance. It follows that any rule has to balance the conflicting interests it intends to accommodate in a rather abstract, typified way. At the same time, a good rule allows for sufficient flexibility in order to render justice to the particular circumstances when it comes to deciding an individual case, thus preventing unjust, unequitable individual results. Of course, any such flexibility impairs the foreseeability of future decisions, and foreseeable future decisions limit the possibility for a just decision in an individual case. Here we are faced with the

1. In practice, however, statutory provisions that allow for bona fide acquisition of title in public auctions often apply to artworks, although their scope is not limited to them.

fundamental dilemma of legal certainty versus justice in each case. In countries that follow case law rather than a statutory tradition, the so-called precedent—that is, the rule defined in a similar prior case—represents the binding guideline for future cases (*stare decisis*), unless the precedent is distinguished on the facts or its legal ruling expressly overruled.

### Copyright and the Interests It Protects

There are several reasons to focus on copyright and, especially, on the artist's moral rights, thus leaving aside other legal issues regarding the preservation of objects belonging to our cultural heritage. First, copyright law is the law that applies to all works of original authorship in which the limited term of protection—fifty years after the death of the author (*post mortem auctoris*, or p.m.a.) in most countries, and seventy years p.m.a. in the European Union—has not yet expired, and most twentieth-century works are still covered by copyright. Thus, in contrast to older works, where only ownership and public preservation interests may clash, the legally protected interest of the artist comes into play as well. Second, as regards those twentieth-century artworks that pose the greatest conservation difficulties, such as *Arte Povera*, the assumptions underlying statutory moral rights granted by copyright seem to have been rebutted.

Before explaining this in further detail, two additional remarks concerning the legal characteristics of copyright are called for. First, it should be noted that there is no worldwide copyright; rather, by the fact of creation, an author obtains a group of national copyrights.<sup>2</sup> Second, at least as regards works of visual arts, the gap that exists between copyright and *droit d'auteur* (author's rights) legislations has been filled, because since the late 1980s, both the United States<sup>3</sup> and the United Kingdom have recognized certain artists' moral rights regarding name attribution and work integrity, in addition to the traditional exclusive exploitation rights of reproduction and communication to the public. It is the very essence of these moral rights to sanction the link between the artwork and the artist's creative personality, a tie that is not severed automatically by the very fact of parting with title to the material object that embodies the immaterial work.

### The Moral Right of the Author and the Preservation of Nonpermanent Works of Modern Art

As formulated by the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, the moral right to the integrity of a work is defined as “[t]he right . . . to object to any distortion, mutilation or other modification of, or other derogatory action in relation to, the said work, which would be prejudicial to [the artist's] honor

or reputation.”<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the integrity right may be infringed by modifications made not only to an original, but also to copies thereof, since modifying a copy encompasses a modification of the immaterial work embodied therein. Furthermore, it is usually said that the integrity right may be infringed by changes made to the work itself or by placing the work in a derogatory context. Of course, in general, infringement may be found only if the modification is brought, or may be brought, to the attention of the public.

Clearly, the definition of the integrity right envisages the standard situation of conflict, namely that someone wishes to modify a protected work and the artist does not. Other scenarios are not, as such, envisaged by the legal rule. Deeply rooted in idealistic philosophy, the artist's moral right to the integrity of his or her work rests on two fundamental assumptions: (1) that the work does not change over time and (2) that the creator wants to see his or her work unchanged.

This, of course, leads to a number of problems regarding the preservation and restoration of some works of contemporary art, where both assumptions seem to be confuted. First, the physical identity of a contemporary work of art made out of nonpermanent materials may change rather quickly, and with it its immaterial character. Second, it may have been the artist's intention to see the work in a decaying progress.

How does the traditional legal rule respond to these scenarios? No problem seems to arise if both artist and owner do not object to the deterioration of the physical substance of a work; copyright does not care about any possible public preservation interest regarding the work in question. But what if the owner—and eventually the public as well—wants to keep unaltered and preserve what the artist intended to change and vanish? Can or do we have to go so far as to say that if change is the artistic intent, then the change forms an integral part of the work and may, therefore, not be stopped, in a case where stopping it would prove to be “prejudicial to the artist's

2. An overview of international copyright law and of a substantive number of national copyright laws is given in M. B. Nimmer and P. E. Geller, *International Copyright Law*, looseleaf (New York: Matthew Bender, 1994).

3. Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990 (VARA), introducing a new Section 17 U.S.C. § 106 (A); for comment, see J. C. Ginsburg, “Copyright in the 101st Congress: Commentary on the Visual Artists Rights Act and the Architectural Works Copyright Protection Act of 1990,” *Columbia/VLA Journal of Law and the Arts* 14, no. 4 (1990), 477–506; for critical analysis, see P. H. Karlen, “What's Wrong with VARA: A Critique of Federal Moral Rights,” *Hastings Comm/Ent. Law Journal* 15 (1993), 905–28.

4. Art. 6<sup>bis</sup> of the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works.

honor”? Most likely, national courts would be inclined to protect the owner’s legitimate interest in preserving the material object of his or her legal right. But where exactly do such ownership interests lie when the purchaser of a work of art knows from the outset that the object acquired was intended not to last? These are, I have to admit, open questions, which at present can be solved—to the detriment of foreseeability and legal certainty—only in individual cases yet to be brought to the courts.<sup>5</sup>

### Copyright and the Digital Format

When it comes to preserving contemporary artworks in digital form, at least two additional copyright problems arise,<sup>6</sup> only one of which seems to be related to the moral rights dilemma just described.

The first problem is that, at present, in legal terms only, the traditional artist’s right to the integrity of a work serves to protect the authenticity of works in digital format, which are vulnerable to unauthorized change by way of “digi”-pulation. Apart from that, no legal rules seem to take into account the public interest in seeing the authenticity of digital works preserved. It is true that the international treaties adopted under the auspices of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in 1996—WIPO Copyright Treaty and WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty—both contain binding

provisions not to tamper with digital information, but the obligation is limited to the protection of the authenticity of so-called rights-management information (names of the work, the author, and the rightholders; licensing terms; and conditions), and does not cover the authenticity of the work itself.<sup>7</sup>

The second problem concerns the aspect of preservation. Apparently, the problem is not so much about the life span of a digital data set recorded on a given carrier, since “fading away” of digital data may be prevented by making timely backup copies. Rather, future access to digital works will depend on the maintenance of otherwise outdated hardware environments and software tools. However, under most—if not all—national copyright laws, any backup copy of a work in digital form will most likely be regarded as a reproduction of the work, which is subject to the authorization of the author or the respective rightholder. The same is true, by the way, regarding works made out of nonpermanent materials that are created anew, such as exchanging 100 percent of the fat in Joseph Beuys’s *Fat Corner* works of the 1960s or repainting airplanes that have been stripped of original Alexander Calder paintings in compliance with public-interest safety regulations.<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, this may give an artist all the legal power to ensure that his or her work of art will disappear, provided no copyright law exception—such as personal, scientific,

or fair use—applies. Finally, in general, the law does not contain any specific obligation to maintain a particular type of hardware and/or software in order to reconvert the digital format of an older work into a perceptible form.

### Conclusion

It follows that we will have to formulate new legal rules that focus on the preservation of nonpermanent works of Modern and contemporary art, provided we do not want to leave these questions undecided until they reach the courts. In my view, such rules need to be coherent and sufficiently flexible, and they should take into consideration all interests concerned—that is, those of the artists and his or her heirs, the owners and/or custodians of originals or copies of such works, and the general public, as such. To start working on such rules seems a worthwhile project within the framework of the much larger project of immortalizing in cultural memory the legacy of twentieth-century art. ■

5. For further discussion, including questions of restoration, destruction, and change of location of artworks, see Thomas Dreier, “The Restoration of Works of Art—Legal and Ethical Aspects,” in *Restoration and Moral Rights of the Artist under Comparative Law*, ed. Q. Byrne-Sutton, M.-A. Renold, and B. Röthely-Mariotti (Zurich: Schulthess, 1995), 105–23.

6. For a comprehensive summary of copyright questions in the face of digital and networking technology, see, for example, Thomas Dreier, “Copyright Law and Digital Exploitation of Works—The Current Copyright Landscape in the Age of the Internet and Multimedia,” expert opinion commissioned by the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Bonn (London: International Publishers’ Copyright Council, 1997); and <http://www.ipa-ue.org/dreier.html>.

7. Art. 12 WIPO Copyright Treaty and Art. 19 WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty.

8. These cases also demonstrate that copyright is concerned with the exploitation interest of the creator or the respective rightholder and not with the question of authenticity of a given work of art, which comes into play when original substance is exchanged and replaced by new material.



## FROM "'91" TO "42": QUESTIONS OF CONSERVATION FOR MODERN MATERIALS

David Grattan and R. Scott Williams

1. David W. Grattan, ed., *Saving the Twentieth Century: The Conservation of Modern Materials, Proceedings of "Symposium '91"* (Ottawa: Canadian Conservation Institute, Department of Communications, 1993).

2. Margot M. Wright and Joyce H. Townsend, eds., *Resins Ancient and Modern: Preprints of the SSCR's Second Resins Conference held at the Department of Zoology, University of Aberdeen, 13-14 September 1995* (Edinburgh: Scottish Society for Conservation and Restoration, 1995).

3. N. S. Allen, M. Edge, and C. V. Horie, eds., *Polymers in Conservation* (Bath: Royal Society for Chemistry, 1992).

4. Ian D. MacLeod, Stéphane L. Pennec, and Luc Robbiola, eds., *Metal 95: Proceedings of the International Conference on Metals Conservation, ICOM Committee for Conservation Working Group on Metals, Semur en Auxois, September 1995* (London: James and James, 1997).

5. Jackie Heuman, ed., *From Marble to Chocolate: The Conservation of Modern Sculpture*, Tate Gallery conference (London: Archetype, 1995).

Modern materials—that is, artifacts or works of art composed of synthetic materials of twentieth-century origin—were a focus of interest at the 1991 Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) symposium “Saving the 20th Century,” subsequently called “Symposium '91.” This symposium stimulated dialogue on this developing area of interest and encouraged interest in modern materials within Canadian museums, leading to revised approaches in analysis, preventive conservation, and conservation treatment.

The following quotation from the introduction to “Symposium '91” summarizes the challenge at that time:

Conservators are having to cope with these objects [i.e., twentieth-century artifacts] using their limited training in materials science and an ethical code conceived with more traditional artifacts in mind. The degradation of

recently acquired artifacts is forcing curators to review collecting policies. Should museums acquire examples of modern artifacts after extensive use has accelerated the aging process? Should more emphasis be placed on documentation in order to preserve information about the artifact if the artifact itself cannot be preserved? How are we to preserve and maintain this rapidly developing material culture?'

Since 1991, the study of modern materials has been increasingly accepted as a serious conservation discipline. A viable working group within the International Council of Museums Committee for Conservation has been formed, and the Historical Plastics Research Scientists Group (associated with the latter) is active. But most important, some museums are now approaching the problem with a better understanding and are developing conservation measures. A few have sought professional advice before collecting obviously unstable items. Underlying these

developments is the fact that there have been several important conferences with associated publications in addition to “Symposium '91”; for example: “Resins Ancient and Modern,”<sup>2</sup> “Polymers in Conservation,”<sup>3</sup> “Metal '95,”<sup>4</sup> and “From Marble to Chocolate.”<sup>5</sup>

At CCI, the interest in this domain has been focused mainly on modern organic materials, especially historic polymers. Hence, this essay is concerned with polymeric materials and includes plastics—such as poly(vinyl chloride) (PVC) or cellulose nitrate—and natural or synthetic rubbers. In the years since “Symposium '91,” there has been more emphasis on the problem of identification of composition. Ideas about treatment also changed as the dangers of solvent use became more evident.

### Degradation

For the purposes of this discussion, the degradation of organic materials is simplified, as the problem is so difficult, it is not feasible to do



**FIGURE 1**  
Deterioration in plastics and rubber (*left to right*): cracking in puppet; loss of flexibility in protective mask; secondary deterioration from cellulose nitrate in dress; and cracking in doll.

otherwise. The two most important chemical degradation mechanisms are acid hydrolysis and oxidation.

In acid hydrolysis, acids are formed and released and material breakdown is further catalyzed by acids as they are released. Examples of materials that are susceptible to this process are cellulose acetate and cellulose nitrate. Because of the volatility of the acids, objects composed of such polymers may threaten sensitive items nearby. Stabilization processes involve isolation of degrading materials coupled with ventilation or absorption of the acids.

Polymers that oxidize react with oxygen by chemical processes called free-radical mechanisms. Oxidation is catalyzed by light, impurities, and pollutants and is accelerated by heat. Polyethylene, polystyrene, and natural rubber are examples of polymers that

deteriorate in this way. One simple way of slowing down the process is to remove oxygen from the environment. Some polymers may degrade by both acid hydrolysis and oxidation simultaneously.

There are many symptoms of degradation, including embrittlement, yellowing, cracking, distortion, surface accretions (liquid or solid), and loss of plasticizer (FIG. 1). These changes are irreversible. To illustrate this important point, it is worth considering one change that is often thought to be potentially reversible: the loss of plasticizer.

Some polymers require plasticizers to impart toughness and flexibility. As polymers age, the plasticizer may escape by evaporation or by oozing out. This is often accompanied by other symptoms of deterioration. But, does plasticizer loss cause degradation, or does degradation result in plasticizer

loss? Plasticizer is expelled as the polymer's chemical properties change with degradation. Thus far, attempts to reintroduce plasticizer in order to attempt to reverse the effects of aging have met with failure.

Physical changes also occur as a plastic ages. These are related to the degree of crystallinity and can affect rubbers or acrylic polymers. Rubbers may stiffen with time. Acrylic polymers may develop unrelieved stresses.

#### Identification

Identification is the first step in any conservation program because with unknown plastics or polymers one cannot recognize danger, judge the importance of taking any conservation measures, or decide whether to take measures such as segregation, refrigeration, or removal of oxygen. The practical challenge resulting from this is to

identify the large number of materials that form museum collections. In 1991, the most common approach for identification of polymeric materials in collections was through a series of chemical spot tests. Though ingenious, they have disadvantages: They require samples and are destructive, time consuming, very unreliable, and unsubtle—that is, they can only give a clue to identifying the major component.

Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR) has been increasingly adopted for polymer identification/analysis because of its rapidity and accuracy. In 1991, the challenge was to bring this technique into the museum, as earlier instruments were not readily portable and required removal of a sample. This meant that objects had to be transported, less could be analyzed with more risk of damage and at considerable cost, and analysis was less easily included as an integral part of surveys. These problems have been solved with the development of a fully portable FT-IR, which uses radiation reflected from surfaces to obtain spectra. CCI has acquired an instrument that can easily be taken anywhere and that analyzes objects in situ—on display in the gallery or in storage on shelves, drawers, or cabinets (FIG. 2). A flexible fiber optic captures the reflected spectrum, and the sampling technique is fully nondestructive.

The CCI instrument uses a MIDAC illuminator FT-IR spectrometer, a REMSPEC mid-infrared

fiber optic immersion probe system coupled to a laptop computer operating GRAMS/386 software.<sup>6</sup> It fits in a suitcase. It employs Kramers-Kronig transformation of specular reflection data and Kubelka-Munk transformation of diffuse reflection data. The device has been used at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the National Museum of Science and Technology, Ottawa, Ontario; the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec; the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; the Provincial Museum of Alberta, Edmonton; and the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta. Many objects have been examined—far more than would have been possible had the instrument remained on the bench in the laboratory. This on-site work has interesting and, to some extent, unforeseen consequences:

#### Interaction with museum staff

An expert on the spot is able to accomplish much besides the primary objective. With the spectrometer readily available, museum staff can learn about and be sensitized to the problems of polymers. They can ask questions and suggest interesting new applications of the technique. Storage or display solutions can be discussed on the spot.

#### Cataloguing collections and determining the nature of conservation problems

By evaluating and analyzing collections in situ as part of a collection survey, a much better understanding of the problems that beset Canadian museums has emerged. In addition, a number of mistaken identifications have been corrected.

6. R. Scott Williams, “On-Site Non-Destructive Mid-IR Spectroscopy of Plastics in Museum Objects Using a Portable FT-IR Spectrometer with Fiber Optic Probe,” in *Materials Research Society Proceedings*, vol. 462 (Pittsburgh: Materials Research Society, 1997), 25–30.



**FIGURE 2**  
Portable infrared spectrometer used in situ in the identification of plastics.

### Limitations

Although the technique can identify about 80 percent of plastics encountered in collections and works well when surfaces reflect in a specular or diffuse manner, there are problems with surfaces of certain structures, such as finely woven textiles. There are also some difficulties with early plastics, in which materials have never been properly characterized—a problem that should gradually be resolved as the data bank increases.

### Anoxic Storage

For polymers that oxidize, storage or display in oxygen-free conditions is a useful option for controlling degradation. Absence of oxygen not only limits deterioration, but may also gradually reduce the concentration of chemical agents or species responsible for degradation in plastic or rubber. At the time of “Symposium ’91,” CCI published the results of an initial study of Ageless oxygen absorber, a commercial system marketed by Mitsubishi Gas Chemicals of Japan, in which sachets of iron powder are used to deoxygenate sealed flexible containers. This technique has proved to be a simple, inexpensive, and effective means of creating oxygen-free storage enclosures.<sup>7</sup> A study of a prototype oxygen-absorbing cell followed the Ageless work.<sup>8</sup> The cell, which is powered by a low DC voltage, is an even more efficient means of deoxygenating a large volume such as an exhibit case. However, it only operates with an airstream at very

high humidity. Our colleagues have engaged in discussions on how to overcome this difficulty, and there are a number of possibilities that could address this problem, but unfortunately no actual work has been done.

### Consolidation with Parylene

The parylene deposition method was initially investigated as a means of consolidating delicate organic fossils. This unique process, which takes place in a vacuum chamber, deposits a conformal layer of transparent polymeric consolidant at a microscopic level. It has the capability of saving delicate deteriorated artifacts and, since no solvent is required, is especially suitable for modern materials. Studies of the stability of parylene have shown that there are real concerns about long-term thermal stability, as well as the stability to light, although there are still some uncertainties that need to be investigated.<sup>9</sup> The advantages of the parylene process are that it consolidates the most fragile items in the most delicate way possible—in a vacuum, one molecule at a time; it does not employ a solvent; and appearance of the object is hardly altered. It has proved useful for deteriorated foams such as polyurethane or latex.

Malcolm Bilz of CCI recently consolidated a latex foam “sculpture” with parylene. Given the title *Prière de Toucher* (Please Touch), the object represented part of a breast and was created by the artist Marcel Duchamp in 1947 for the cover of a book titled *Le Surréalisme*

*en 1947*.<sup>10</sup> One of several surviving editions, the work belongs to the Chapin Library of Rare Books at Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts, and the treatment was conducted at the request of the Williamstown Art Conservation Center. The sculpture formed the center of the rear cover of the book and was adhered firmly to the cardboard end board (FIG. 3).

The portion of the latex foam that lay directly above the adhesive had yellowed, hardened, embrittled, and crumbled. There were losses. By contrast, the foam rubber in the center of the breast form remained flexible and had not discolored. The challenge was to consolidate just the deteriorated area while keeping the cardboard cover flat and untreated in the application of vacuum during the deposition process. Complete dehydration was necessary for the functioning of the process. Areas not intended to receive parylene were masked with flexible plastic kitchen film. While this was straightforward on the cardboard, a special former had to be constructed to hold the film in place in the center of the breast. The deteriorated region received 0.54 micrometers of Parylene N followed by 2.57 micrometers of Parylene C; no parylene was applied to the cardboard.

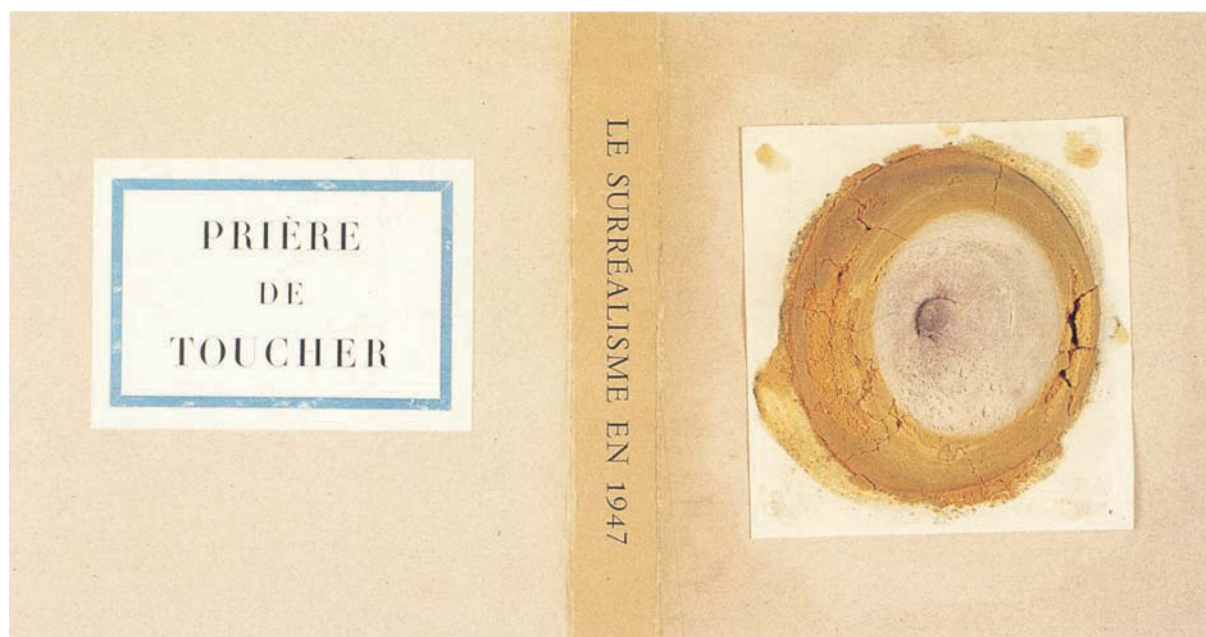
7. David W. Grattan, “Degradation Rates for Some Historic Polymers and the Potential of Various Conservation Measures for Minimizing Oxidative Degradation,” in *Saving the Twentieth Century*, 351–59.

8. M. Gilberg and D. W. Grattan, “A Dynamic System for Removing Oxygen from Air Using an Electrochemical Cell,” *Studies in Conservation* 41 (1996), 183–86.

9. Malcolm Bilz and David W. Grattan, “The Aging of Parylene: Difficulties with the Arrhenius Approach” in *ICOM Committee for Conservation 11th Triennial Meeting, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1–6 September 1996, Preprints*, vol. 2 (London: James and James, 1996), 925–29.

10. Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, *Le Surréalisme en 1947* (Paris: Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, 1947).





**FIGURE 3**  
Marcel Duchamp, *Prière de Toucher*, 1947, on the cover of the book *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Latex foam, foam rubber, and adhesives (probably proteinaceous) on cardboard: (left) before consolidation with parylene and (below) after consolidation with parylene.

The work of art survived the treatment process very well (FIG. 3). The cardboard, held flat by lead weights, did not distort. There was no alteration in the appearance of the piece, yet the deteriorated rubber was greatly strengthened. Although the original flexibility of the foam disappeared as a result of the degradation that had occurred, generally, the conservation of this rather desperately deteriorated piece was a success.

#### Replasticization with Epoxidized Soybean Oil

During "Symposium '91," John Morgan of the Plastics Historical Society advocated the use of epoxidized soybean oil (ESBO) as both a replacement plasticizer and a stabilizer for cellulose nitrate.<sup>11</sup>

Soybean oil is composed mainly of oleic, linoleic, palmitic, and linolenic fatty acids. After epoxidization, the unsaturated linkages in these acids are converted to epoxides, which can react with acids to form alcohols. Morgan seemed to have obtained some interesting results after applying ESBO to a deteriorated cellulose nitrate mirror. ESBO is used commercially as a plasticizer for PVC. It was thought, reasonably, that it might also plasticize embrittled cellulose nitrate and, at the same time, neutralize some of the nitric acid produced. At CCI, a short study was conducted. A deteriorated cellulose nitrate artifact was soaked in ESBO and then sectioned with a microtome. One-hundred-micrometer windows in the sec-



tion were examined by FT-IR microscopy. These studies indicated that ESBO did not penetrate the deteriorated cellulose nitrate—the phenomenon, if there is one, appears to be superficial only.

One piece of anecdotal evidence from Julia Fenn,<sup>12</sup> conservator at the Royal Ontario Museum, suggests that cellulose nitrate

11. John Morgan, "Membership and Aims of the Plastics Historical Society," in *Saving the Twentieth Century*, 43–50.

12. Julia Fenn, telephone conversation with the authors, 1991.



objects treated with parylene seem to deteriorate at a lower rate than untreated equivalent pieces. This almost certainly does not derive from the deposition of parylene but from the removal of volatile acids during the vacuum process. The loss of absorbed acids may well retard further degradation. It would seem that vacuum storage with an acid absorber could be an option for storage of cellulose nitrate artifacts.

#### Problems of Solvent Usage

Since 1991, it has become increasingly clear that solvents of any kind—including plasticizers such as ESBO—can be a threat to the surfaces of deteriorated polymers. For example, certain materials like natural rubber form protective skins that can be quite impermeable and

protect the material within from oxidation. Application of a solvent may swell and disrupt the skin, which may crack, exposing the interior to degradation. At “Symposium ’91,” John Loadman<sup>13</sup> of the Malaysia Rubber Producers Association’s research laboratory recommended dry cleaning for rubber surfaces or using the mildest detergents in water on rubber surfaces.

Internal stress formation is a problem that affects other polymers. The acrylics—e.g., poly(methylmethacrylate)—develop internal stresses through physical aging. A solvent that causes any swelling—even if applied in a very small area such as during application of an accession number—can release the stresses and seed cracks and, in extreme cases, actually cause immediate disintegration. Solvents normally thought of as mild, such as ethanol or methanol, can have this effect. Don Sale<sup>14</sup> has investigated this problem in the context of adhesives and has concluded that certain acrylic adhesives in petroleum solvents or epoxy resins can be used for repair. Polystyrene suffers from similar problems; Julia Fenn<sup>15</sup> has shown that a polystyrene mug formed stress cracks after varnish in mineral spirits solvent had been applied to the accession number. She concluded that there were no solvents that could be safely applied.

For the nonspecialist, the implication is simple: Avoid solvents in contact with all plastics

and rubbers, whatever the application—cleaning, adhesion, or consolidation.

#### Surveys

The increase in the number of systematic surveys of modern materials shows that museums are taking the problem of degradation seriously. For example, the staff of CCI have participated in four surveys of Canadian museums. They have identified plastic artifacts and detected degradation problems. Elsewhere, a number of museum surveys of modern materials have been reported in the literature in North America and Europe.

#### A Brief Survey of Progress in Modern Materials Conservation since 1991

A brief review of the published literature on the conservation of modern organic materials reveals that coverage has been very patchy. Certain plastics—notably cellulose nitrate and cellulose acetate—and, to some extent, rubber have received much attention. Others—including a number of historically important plastics such as polyethylene terephthalate (Mylar-terylene), phenolic resins (Bakelite), and polyolefins (polyethylene, polypropylene)—have been almost ignored.

Biases in the research or study are related to usage, perceived importance (intrinsic or of information contained), and the degree to which the material has obvious stability problems. Papers show a bias toward deterioration and

historical accounts of the development of polymeric plastics. Little attention has been paid to the development of conservation techniques, undoubtedly reflecting a paucity of practical research.

Clearly, there is a great need for more research or analysis of existing scientific literature in order to provide information about the neglected materials. It is also important that conservators continue to be vigilant. While it may appear that materials are stable, they simply may not have reached the point at which problems are evident. Given the tendency for materials to be produced in eras rather than over very long periods of time, it may be that whole groups of objects will begin to display problems concurrently.

#### Observation

Observation and condition reporting are important. Specific changes that occur as a result of degradation are not well understood for many plastics and rubbers. Be on the lookout for any changes and be prepared for surprises. Documentation is vital. It is certain that all organic polymeric materials—unless in anoxic conditions—will continue to deteriorate. However, this may not be evident until the deterioration process is proceeding rapidly and is out of control. Signs to watch for include deformation or shrinkage, cracking, color change, obvious change in mechanical properties (e.g., hardening or softening in rubber), surface deposits (e.g., crystalline, liquids),

13. John Loadman, “Rubber: Its History, Composition, and Prospects for Conservation,” in *Saving the Twentieth Century*, 59–72.

14. D. Sale, “An Evaluation of Eleven Adhesives for Repairing Poly(methylmethacrylate) Objects and Sculpture,” in *Saving the Twentieth Century*, 325–36; and “Evaluating Adhesives for Repairing Poly(methylmethacrylate) Objects and Sculpture: Changes in Tensile Strength and Colour after Accelerated Aging,” in *Resins Ancient and Modern*, 17–32.

15. Julia Fenn, “Labelling Plastic Artefacts,” in *Saving the Twentieth Century*, 341–49.

and effects on associated materials (e.g., color change, corrosion of metals, surface deposits). Smell is an indication of decomposition and should be noted.

### “42”

In Canada, we have approached the conservation of modern materials in a variety of contexts, such as items from the Second World War, scientific and technology collections, costume, modern art, and, increasingly, modern information storage media. The question of modern materials conservation as it relates to art is only one aspect of a broader problem. In summary, we are now in a situation where there are some answers to problems, since we have techniques of analysis, an understanding of deterioration, some effective preventive measures, and some techniques of conservation. However, the nature of the materials composing modern works and their inherent complexity present problems for the conservator because they have no precedent. Older materials of fabrication have been longer lasting and much more sympathetic to intervention.

This leads to the issue of modern art and to the matter of “42.” In Douglas Adams’s well-known novel *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*,<sup>16</sup> a very large computer named Deep Thought is programmed to answer the fundamental question: What is the meaning of life, the universe, and everything? After seven-and-a-half million years of “thinking,” Deep

Thought answers, “42.” Because the significance of this response is not immediately grasped by those present, Deep Thought explains, “Once you know exactly what the question is, you’ll know what the answer means.” For the conservation of modern materials in relation to modern art—and the incredibly broad range of media encountered—we might equally ask, “What is the question?” Here we are on uncertain ground.

Implicit in the title of this book is the notion that works of art have life in that they express ideas, feelings, or emotions. In a recently published text, Albert France-Lanord is quoted as follows: “Whether it is a matter of works of art or simple objects, they are important not only because they are old or composed of matter but also because of all they hold that is still alive in them.”<sup>17</sup> Conservation specialists, including scientists, must transcend the materialist “scientific” outlook and regard works not simply as objects composed of inanimate materials, but as creations that have a relationship with the viewer and the creator.

The idea of inanimate and unchanging materials has never been a useful description for the conservator. All materials are in a perpetual state of change. Organic materials oxidize, metals corrode, rubbery materials harden, dyes fade. In this second sense, materials have another kind of life: They are created, then decay, and eventually change into something else.

Works of art, therefore, have two kinds of life: that of the concept (the meaning) and that of the materials. As an object ages, it changes; ultimately, the disintegration of the materials brings obliteration. But in modern art, ideas are often transient and materials ephemeral. So what, then, is then the question being asked of the conservator? Is it to preserve the material at all costs? To convey the artist’s intent? Or, is it simply to define the nature of the materials and understand the degradation? And is the answer to the question, “42”?

In a practical sense, it might be possible to preserve works in hermetically sealed, oxygen-free display cases, apply coatings, or merely alter the lighting. However, these measures will change the ambience and hence the meaning. The goal of conservation needs to be defined for each piece based on the artist’s intent, the nature of the materials, and many other factors, including budget. It may be that the most important role of the conservator or conservation scientist is to create an awareness of the state of the object and to prevent misguided attempts at preservation that may not only threaten the object but also destroy the intrinsic meaning.

Nevertheless, underlying all such practical advice, as outlined in Table 1, is the need to approach the conservation of plastic and rubber artifacts with caution. Even before an object is accessed by a museum or gallery, curators

would be wise to ask the opinion or advice of conservators and conservation scientists before accession of artifacts or works of art.

### Conclusion

Initially, when we wrote this essay, we felt that there was very little that the conservator could or should do for the preservation of modern art because of the nature of both the degradation and the materials. And it must be said that many artists, including Marcel Duchamp, were—and are—perfectly well aware that their art can be ephemeral; in fact, this is what is often intended. But the ephemerality of art creates massive problems for the conservator. Unfortunately, artists are often more ephemeral than their works; Marcel Duchamp is no longer with us to tell us that we can dispose of or replace *Prière de Toucher*. Without an attempt at preservation, there would be less for the Williams College students to experience, and the understanding of Duchamp and his era would be diminished.

16. Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (London: Pan Books, 1979), 133–38.

17. Albert France-Lanord, “Knowing How to ‘Question’ the Object Before Restoring It,” in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, ed. N. Stanley Price, M. Kirby Talley Jr., and A. Melucco Vaccaro (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1996), 245.

There are more absolute arguments, such as that of John Ruskin, who felt that it was better to destroy old buildings than to restore them. On restoration, he said: "It is a necessity for destruction. Accept it as such, pull the building down, throw its stones into neglected corners, make a ballast of them, or mortar, if you will; but do it honestly, and do not set up a Lie in their place."<sup>18</sup>

One might ask: In consolidating *Prière de Toucher* with parylene, have we set up a lie? This is a good ending line but, to me, an absurdly extremist point of view. As in everything else, the important thing is to understand the material, accept change, and minimize the damage without destroying the quality of experience.

It is clear that artists and conservation specialists share an interest in materials. Although their points of view are different, there is great potential for the sharing of information. Here is an area that could and should be developed. Perhaps the conservator could be involved more in the creative process by advising on materials, helping the artist achieve his or her goals, and, at the same time, serving the interests of conservation. ■

<sup>18</sup> John Ruskin, "The Lamp of Memory, II" in *Historical and Philosophical Issues*, 322–23.

**Table 1** Conservation Strategies: A Brief Summary of Practical Advice<sup>a</sup>

Phase	Activity	Advice
Accession	Labeling	Correct labeling procedures are very important. Avoid solvents/lacquers/solvent-based adhesives in applying labels. Fenn <sup>b</sup> advocates Teflon tie-on tags, or labeling with ink/point combinations. Avoid sensitive plastic areas if possible.
	Cataloguing	Reviews of history of technology are useful in explaining or understanding the significance, appearance, or behavior of the object. Nondestructive analysis by FT-IR is the simplest approach to identification—use chemical spot tests as a last resort.
Storage: Preventative measures	Segregation	Separate or isolate polymers with volatile acidic decomposition products from sensitive materials.
	Refrigeration	Refrigerate in absence of other measures. Retards (but does not stop) the degradation of most plastic and rubbers.
	Absorption (or ventilation)	Removes volatile acids products and is useful for cellulose nitrates, cellulose acetates, PVCs, PVDCs, and ebonites. Such materials should be stored or with absorbers—e.g., molecular sieves or activated charcoal. Fenn has developed a useful visual indicator paper containing cresolsulphonophthalein for detecting low levels of acids in display cases.
	Anoxia	Anoxic conditions produced by Ageless oxygen absorber (or by similar commercial products or by other means) reduces the rate of oxidation for many plastics and rubbers. This technique is appropriate for materials that degrade via oxidation.
	Light levels	UV radiation is particularly damaging, but all light causes deterioration. Light levels should be reduced to prevent photodegradation. In storage, objects should be kept in darkness.
Treatment	Atmosphere	Some polymers are sensitive to RH—particularly the cellulose esters and nylon. Atmospheric pollutants are a concern. Ozone is very harmful—especially to rubbers. Ozone may originate from photocopiers or electronic air cleaners.
	Cleaning	Avoid wet cleaning—distilled water containing nonionic detergents may be used with great discretion.
	Repair	Adhesives containing solvents cause problems with plastics or rubbers that swell or exhibit stress cracking. Weak epoxy resins and acrylics in mineral spirits have been used as adhesives for poly(methylmethacrylate).
	Consolidation	The considerations for adhesives also apply to consolidants. Parylene is a nonsolvent consolidant especially useful for stabilizing deteriorating foams.
	Support	Support is necessary for all fragile pieces—for those that are refrigerated and especially for flexible items—and may harden into an inappropriate shape, e.g., rubber. It is essential to use appropriate or safe materials for this purpose.
	Replastification	Not recommended.
	Antioxidant addition	Though proposed as a means of retarding the rate of oxidative degradation of aged plastics and rubbers, it is not recommended because the introduction of antioxidants involves use of solvents.
Display	Surface treatment	Surfaces of rubbers are sometimes treated with waxes.
	Lighting	Light levels must be controlled, and normal museum standards should be applied to displayed objects where possible.
	Support	See comments under "Treatment." (It is essential to use appropriate or safe materials for this purpose.)
Post-treatment	Atmosphere	No effective economical technique for anoxic display has been developed. It is important to control RH for the cellulosic plastics. Good ventilation is important, and gaseous pollutants (especially ozone) can pose problems. See comments under "Storage."
	Observation and condition reporting	The changes occurring as a result of degradation are not well understood for many plastics and rubbers. Be on the lookout for any changes, and be prepared for surprises. All organic polymeric materials deteriorate continuously, albeit slowly. Changes may not be evident until proceeding rapidly and out of control.
	Documentation Signs	Vital to note any changes in appearance on a regular basis. Deformation or shrinkage, cracking, color change, obvious change in mechanical properties (e.g., hardening or softening in rubber), surface deposits (e.g., crystalline, liquids), effects on associated materials (e.g., color change, corrosion of metals, surface deposits). Smell should be noted, as decomposition products are often gaseous.

<sup>a</sup>From R. Scott Williams, "Concerns about Plastics during Exhibition and Transport of Textile Objects," in *Symposium 97, Fabric of an Exhibition: An Interdisciplinary Approach, Preprints, September 22–25, 1997* (Ottawa: Canadian Conservation Institute, 1997), 91–96.

<sup>b</sup>Fenn, "Labelling Plastic Artefacts," in *Saving the Twentieth Century*, 341–49.

## IMMORTALITY/IMMORALITY

Joyce J. Scott

It has been interesting for me to consider the issue of mortality/immortality in reference to the arts, because, as I thought about it, the words “mortality” and “immortality” began to change to “morality” and “immortality.” No matter how I wrap my brain around the question of morality in the preservation of contemporary art, I cannot see how our approach to the arts will change, or how we will make significant strides beyond technology, unless we ourselves evolve.

Possibly, our tools will allow a higher level of sophistication when it comes to salvaging, storing, and realizing art, regardless of

medium. However, as long as we interact in a patronizing way with those who are different or make art that looks, sounds, or acts differently—or think of these artists or their art as a disease to be inoculated against—the future of preserving freedom of expression and its great riches is in jeopardy. Our accountability for preserving art goes far beyond boxing and labeling objects. Art moves; it mirrors, sometimes by sleight of hand, the grand, even sinister hand marks of the maker and of society.

**No matter how I wrap my brain around the question of morality in the preservation of contemporary art, I cannot see how our approach to the arts will change, or how we will make significant strides beyond technology, unless we ourselves evolve.**

*This essay was written as an introduction to a dramatic performance piece presented at the “Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art” conference, the Getty Center, Los Angeles, 26 March 1998.*

## If art reflects history, and contemporary art is a monument to our society, we had better sleep with our mind's eyes wide open.

How will the future of art unfold? The stale tale of garrets is gone. Maybe a few romantics want canvases conjured with flame-spitting brushes, dueling X-acto knives, and cafés where anise-laced lattés are served while discussions of sex and existentialism hold sway, but artists are now industry. Some support themselves solely through sales of their work, while others are connected to art enterprises like the mega-art shows, museum superstores, or the cinema. The marketplace has expanded our view of what may be art, what art may become, and how the media and consumers maintain it.

Shower curtains of the *Mona Lisa* and Goya key chains demonstrate that art evolves as society evolves, because artists are of the current society. We grow up with plumbers and senators and maids, not on an art planet, but here together, facing the same concerns. Some believe in the dumbing down

of art; however, I am referring to an embrace of art (although Renoir coasters and Dalí G-strings may weaken my argument), which is not always successful, especially in this techno-pop culture. So what? No pain, no gain.

The Internet is fostering mini-galleries and exhibits, where money is made by downloading more than Pamela Sue Anderson. The interactive possibilities will surely extend artists' perceptions of what studios and gallery systems are and what they do. However, this form of viewing and enjoyment is thirdhand. Art is alive; it makes your eyes pop and knees shimmy. New, ultrapowerful digital technologies are not true substitutes; art is messy.

Through nuance or actual experience, art teaches lessons, defines, advances, and sometimes, sadly, basks in the use and abuse of stereotypes. It is this abuse of stereotypes and their never-ending reincarnation, urged on by our collusive, arrogant, even hateful treatment of each other and,

by extension, of art, that worries me. How's that for immorality / immortality?

Why would art—which is a microcosm of the society in which we live—be any different from the big picture? We are the same people with the same roots. It has been said that “creativity ebbs and flows.” Well, maybe it does for individuals, but not for society. We are talking a round-robin: Someone, somewhere, is always passing the staff. If art reflects history, and contemporary art is a monument to our society, we had better sleep with our mind's eyes wide open. A man on an oversized horse surrounded by cherubic women is what I think of when I hear the word “monument.” What fabric of our past and its objects do such statues represent? Maybe monumental means huge. If so, then why aren't the arts better funded? Where is the morality in a Paula Jones or Monica Lewinsky sex case eating up millions of dollars while the National Endowment for the Arts



snoozes and loses after Robert Mapplethorpe? Will these same folks with the same roots be immortal? Why do their stories deserve preservation?

Artists' explorations have leaped from the palace of the mind and the hand's fabrication to the implementation of future-think. Those who believe that art heals, that it was and is an authentic teaching tool—long before *Sesame Street* amalgamated its elements of color, rhythm, and attitude—are able to understand the coming shift. The next millennium will wreak havoc on the arts. The techno-haves will rock, while the have-nots—maybe because their schools are buying metal detectors instead of computers and potter's wheels—slip and lose the advantage of creation. Stay consumers.

Some argue that this situation impels innovation. Maybe—but it may keep folks out of the loop and

assist in keeping our entrenched formulas intact. This reminds me of the Reconstruction era after the emancipation of African-American slaves (yes, I am talking about slavery), when people made great strides in social discourse only to be muscled by guys riding monumental horses and wearing pointy hats. Will techno-think help stylized artists into well-intentioned, but ultimately flawed, ghettos? For example, African-American history month, February, is the shortest and, for some, the darkest month of the year; performances and exhibitions, kente cloth, and jamboramas—let's smash everything into twenty-eight or, if we are leaping, twenty-nine days. I am referring to the misrepresentation that results from centering the aesthetic accomplishments of an ethnic group solely around an event or date. What will *Riverdance* preserve?

Why not debate whether mainstreaming (the desirable, zesty, worth-preserving components) can mean distributing a piece of the pie instead of homogenization? Affirmative action—going back to Reconstruction—means more than educating doctors and lawyers. It means ensuring that those doctors and lawyers support museums, symphonies, and literature and send their children to schools to become artists, arts administrators, and historians who will, in turn, not only support but also establish new, stellar, hopefully more-inclusive institutions. Let them become the social anthropologists of the twenty-third century.

Preservation goes beyond the material forum, giving way to the immaterial, emotional, even metaphysical: hair styles, interior design, love letters, polyester shirts. Art is alive, forthcoming. I contend that virtual reality will rectify the holes in our aesthetic slide-sleeves. Will my images be there (FIGS. 1–4)? Will future generations have the honor I have had—to ride on the shoulders of those who sacrificed for our creative liberty? Should I be frightened to address mammies, interracial anything, power because they lower our comfort zones?

Don't get me wrong, I am an optimist. But I fear that this era

FIGURE 1

Joyce J. Scott, Detail, *Nanny Now, Nigger Later*, 1986. Leather, beads, thread fiber; 17.78 × 15.24 × 15.24 cm (7 × 6 × 6 in.).



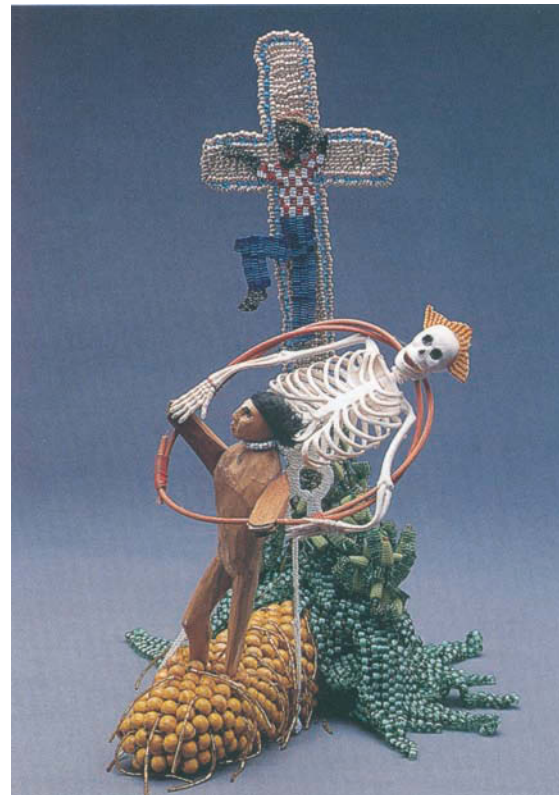
of relative prosperity is lulling some of us into a deep complacency that allows us to be barely distressed about the loss of support for artists and institutions and too obsessed with getting tickets to the "Jerry Springer Show." Will ethics and morality be in true conflict with ethnics and mortality?

Art can help exploit true communication among humanity. If not, maybe technology will help us develop stronger, smarter, better-looking snobs, bigots, and omniphobes. Then immortality would be immoral. ■



**FIGURE 3**  
Joyce J. Scott, *Caffeine*, 1993. Mixed media,  
58.42 × 25.4 × 38.1 cm (23 × 10 × 15 in.).

**FIGURE 2**  
Joyce J. Scott, *Jar Woman #vii*, 1997. Mixed media,  
height: 33.02 cm (13 in.), diameter: 25.4 cm (10 in.).



**FIGURE 4**  
Joyce J. Scott, *The Scarecrow Knows Who Won  
the West*, 1988. Beadwork, 33.02 × 25.4 × 20.32 cm  
(13 × 10 × 8 in.).





The Challenge of Materials

**PART 3**

*This page intentionally left blank*

## CONSERVING PHOTOGRAPHY AND PRESERVING THE VITALITY OF OUR CULTURE

Peter Galassi

As a curator of photography in an art museum—for better or worse, that is what I am—I want to stress that mine is a very narrow and parochial point of view. In the past century and a half, photographs have been made for a truly mind-boggling diversity of functions and have accumulated in truly massive numbers. The ones that end up in museums, especially art museums, are a very tiny sample. The superb photography collection at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, for example, is estimated at around sixty-five thousand pictures. The National Archives in Washington, D.C., holds more than five million photographs, but that collection itself represents a very tiny fraction of what has actually been produced. This highlights the issue of choice, which I will return to later.

A generation ago, there really was no such thing as photography conservation. Now, however, she exists. She has her driver's license, maybe has even graduated from college or is about to. And this is a big change. Thanks to the remarkable efforts of a small number of people, this field is now growing rapidly. Photography conservators and scientists such as Debra Hess Norris at the University of Delaware / Winterthur Program in Art Conservation, James Reilly at the Image Permanence Institute of the Rochester Institute of Technology, and Henry Wilhelm at Wilhelm Imaging Research, Inc., have made great strides in identifying the perils faced by photographs and what to do about them. So, in a simple but important sense, the basic outline of photography conservation is already clear, and I believe it will continue to improve. The Mellon Foundation is now in the process of launching an ambitious program to educate photography conservators. The museum profession has figured out how to store photographs, which for the most part means keeping them cold and dry. In the expansion we are now planning at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, there will be

*Author's note: This text is based on a talk I presented 26 March 1998 at the "Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art" conference, sponsored by the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles. I did not prepare a formal paper for the conference, in part so that I could be free to respond to what others before me had said. With the kind help of Dinah Berland, I have attempted here to clarify the transcript of the audio recording and to restore a few inadvertent omissions without disguising the informality of my remarks.*

three different temperature and humidity conditions for the storage of photographs, going down to  $-4^{\circ}\text{F}$ . To a great degree, especially in contrast with the situation twenty or thirty years ago, we now understand what we need to do—although, of course, it will cost plenty of time and money to do it.

There are two developments within photography conservation that deserve to be mentioned specifically, both of which are very welcome. One is the emergence of the identity of photography conservation as a specialization in its own right, not as a subset of paper conservation. Obviously, there is a close relationship between photography and paper conservation—since most photographs are still on paper—but the emergence of a dis-

tinct photographic specialty has helped to focus attention on the particular problems that photographs face in surviving. The other trend—which, I am told, applies to conservation generally—is that people who care for objects are putting more and more of their energy and effort into managing the collection overall; that is to say, they are focusing on the prevention of potential future damage rather than on the treatment of damage that has already occurred.

In the photography world, this outlook is particularly welcome—even necessary—because many of the kinds of photographic works that are being produced in the age of digital technologies fundamentally cannot be repaired once they are damaged. The digital revolution is, indeed, epochal in terms of human culture. Its effect on photography is huge but still only minor compared to its effect on our culture overall. One thing of which I am certain is that the people who profess to be certain they know where the digital revolution is leading are certain to be wrong. It is very big, it is happening very fast, and we cannot know where it will lead.

From the viewpoint of conservation, the important difference between the advent of digital imagery and prior evolutions of photographic technology (the introduction of color, for example) is that the independent scientists and conservators closely follow the

industry as it issues new products—about every minute and a half. The independent people are in regular dialogue with industry scientists, and they are constantly testing the longevity of objects made with the new products. For instance, Henry Wilhelm can tell the life expectancy of an ink-jet print once he knows just which set of dyes was used to produce the print. This relationship is a new thing, and very positive.

The biggest lesson we have learned since the birth of photography conservation as a professional field is that there is an inherent conflict between the desire to display pictures—to see them—and the desire to preserve them. In Brassai's

recently published book about Marcel Proust and photography, I came across a passage that I think perfectly summarizes our dilemma, and that explains not only why we should not expect to solve it or try to run away from it, but also why this dilemma is fundamental to our most cherished cultural values. Brassai quotes from an early story by Proust, in which a retired captain sits in his room surrounded by his old things that he loves very much, notably a collection of “photographs that were in poor shape despite all of his precautions, like those religious relics that piety itself has damaged, for the devoted kiss them too often.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, we now know precisely how we can save all of

---

**We now know precisely  
how we can save all of  
our photographs forever:  
by sealing and freezing  
them—and never looking  
at them again.**

1. “De temps en temps, il sort d'une grande caisse des lettres, des fleurs fanées, et surtout 'des photographies abîmées malgré les précautions, comme ces reliques qu'à usées las piété même des fidèles: ils les embrassent trop souvent.” Brassai, *Marcel Proust sous l'emprise de la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 23–24.



our photographs forever: by sealing and freezing them—and never looking at them again.

We have no choice but to confront this cruel dilemma: The very pictures we care most about are the ones we will want to see and display most often, and we have to understand that in doing so we may be using part of their lives. But the alternative is even more troubling: If we deny the pictures to their current audience, we risk weakening the ability of our culture to transmit its values to future generations, so the very people for whom we are preserving the pictures may have no interest in them. This conclusion leads me to two thoughts, neither of which I expect to be terribly popular.

The first thought arises from the fact that digital technology has made it possible for us to make facsimiles of photographs—of conventional paper photographs—that can fool even the best experts. I agree with my colleague Robert Storr (see “Immortalité Provisoire,” page 39) that there is something wonderful about knowing that my gaze is falling directly on the same piece of paper that Eugène Delacroix held in his hand. But I do not think that is the most crucial element; I think what the thing looks like is more important than the knowledge that it is a piece of the true cross. And it is now already possible for us to make reproductions at an astonishingly high level of quality. Of course, this may never be possible for a Richard Serra sculpture or a painting by Henri Matisse or many other kinds of works of art. But for conventional paper photographs, it is possible. And it is not only possible; we have already done it. The reproductions in some of our books are now so good that if you cut one out, frame it, and hang it on the wall, it is virtually as good as the original. In a recent installation in the new Howard Gilman Gallery at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, such a reproduction was, in fact, on display—a facsimile of an early photogenic drawing that is so fugitive the original cannot be shown at all.

But once we consider the opportunities offered by facsimiles at this level of quality, it is no longer necessary to maintain the

habit of obliging people to come to museums to look at them. Again, our best books already do an excellent job of making extremely fine reproductions available to a broad audience at a reasonable price. And the owner of the book may return to the pictures over and over again at his or her convenience in the comfort of his or her home. In this way, the reproduction—especially a reproduction that is virtually indistinguishable from the original—expands rather than replaces the function of the museum, which must continue to make the preservation of its works a high priority.

I do not pretend to understand the implications of the digital revolution, but I do think the ability to make and disseminate excellent facsimiles—in all due cooperation with the artist or rightholder, of course—is something we should explore more frankly than we have to date. In my view, our job is not to cultivate the work of art as a fetish but to foster the appreciation and understanding of photography among as broad an audience as possible. If digital technology offers us the opportunity to do this and, at the same time, enhances the longevity of the works in our care, then I think we should pay attention.

My second thought is that some things must perish if others are to be preserved. It has been estimated that we have lost 70 to 80 percent of the panel paintings that were made in Italy during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> I actually find that a very encouraging figure. What it means is that we still have between a quarter and a fifth of everything that was made. That is a lot. If between a quarter and a fifth of the photographic art—I am referring just to *art*, not to all the snapshots and medical pictures and other images that have been created—that has been made over the last twenty years is still around eight hundred years from now, there will be something grievously wrong with human culture.

That may sound like a perverse thing for a curator to say, especially a curator in a museum devoted in significant part to contemporary art. I am passionately interested in current photographic work, and I spend a good deal of my time and energy—and a good deal of other people’s money—collecting and preserving contemporary work. But my conviction that we cannot preserve everything arises directly from my interest in new art. If everything created in the past were still around, it would

2. Edward B. Garrison, “Note on the Survival of Thirteenth-Century Panel Paintings in Italy,” *Bulletin* 54 (1972), 140; quoted in Gary Schwartz, “Ars Moriendi: The Mortality of Art,” *Art in America* 84, no. 11 (1996), 72.

**As for the notion that preservation is always a good thing — that it should always win out over other competing values — I am afraid I believe that such an obsession is as much a threat to the vitality of our culture as is neglect.**

be a monumental burden that would stifle contemporary creativity. In short: If the culture is to live, some works of art must die. In a recent lecture at The Museum of Modern Art, Richard Wollheim expressed what I feel is a parallel thought: that it would be terribly sad if all works of art ended up in museums and so ceased to circulate in private ownership.

My answers to the basic questions posed in regard to the mortality and/or immortality of contemporary art are, first, that I think we are doing just fine. The number of people who care about conservation is an enormously encouraging sign. Second: Who decides? Well, as others have expressed in the essays included in

this book, we all decide together. Or, still better, many different people with different tastes and backgrounds and concerns each decide independently, so that the collective decision represents many competing points of view. Behind a few of the questions that surround this topic, I sense a hope, or even a longing, that some sort of Supreme Being will hand down the right answer so we can all just follow that dictum and avoid worrying about the question. In fact, if that comes to pass, it will signal the death of our culture. The culture *is* the argument, the discussion, the debate over what is good and what is bad, what should be preserved and what should not. The more voices, the better. The culture is not only the broad consensus about great and lasting works, it is also the dissenter from the prevailing wisdom — the independent nut who gets very excited about one particular class of objects and

decides to preserve them, and then, a hundred years later, people realize that what he or she saved was, in fact, the best stuff. In any case, the worst thing for the culture is complete agreement on all points.

As for the notion that preservation is always a good thing — that it should always win out over other competing values — I am afraid I believe that such an obsession is as much a threat to the vitality of our culture as is neglect. ■

## PERMANENT IMPERMANENCE

### Bill Viola

Tzu Ch'i of Nan-Po was travelling on Shang Mountain when he saw a large tree which astonished him very much. A thousand chariot teams could have found shelter under its shade. "What tree is this?" cried Tzu Ch'i. "Surely it must have unusually fine timber." Then looking up, he saw that its branches were too crooked for rafters; while, as to the trunk, he saw that its irregular grain made it valueless for coffins. He tasted a leaf, but it took the skin off his lips, and its odor was so strong that it would as it were give a person a headache for three days. "Ah" said Tzu Ch'i. "This tree is good for nothing — that's how it has attained this size!"

— Chuang Tzu<sup>1</sup>

I am an artist who has been working with video and electronic/digital media for the past twenty-eight years. The work I do falls into two general areas: installations and videotapes.

The installation works are room environments involving architecture, moving images (often projected), and sound. They are typically shown in museums and gallery spaces, although they also have been presented in abandoned factories, warehouses, churches, office lobbies, and empty swimming pools.

The videotapes are cinematic compositions in time that get played back on a single screen. They are presented in museum/gallery environments, but are also shown in theaters, are available in video stores, and can be seen at home — either on a VCR or as a broadcast on public television. Both of these forms are collected by institutions and private individuals.

1. Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu: Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer*, Herbert A. Giles, trans. (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1889); quoted in *Barnett Newman, Joseph Beuys, Cy Twombly, Yves Klein, Jasper Johns, exhibition catalogue* (London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1993).

**FIGURE 1**

Bill Viola, *The Stopping Mind*, 1991. Video/sound installation, 4.72 × 10 × 10 m (15 ft., 6 in. × 32 ft., 10 in. × 32 ft., 10 in.).

I began working with video in 1970. The medium I use today bears only a vague resemblance to the one I started using at that time. Recently, I completed a twenty-five-year survey exhibition of my work consisting of forty works, fifteen installations, and twenty-five videotapes, which was exhibited from February 12 to May 10, 1998, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. In the course of putting together the works for the show, I realized with horror that some of the pieces I produced less than twenty years ago were no longer playable in their original form. The tape on which they were recorded had deteriorated beyond repair. Most were made on formats that are no longer being manufactured.

It soon became apparent that the exhibition project was fast becoming a restoration project. I made it my goal to have all of the master videotapes for the exhibition transferred to state-of-the-art digital video, getting them off the analog format and into the digital domain, which would hopefully extend their life for at least another decade and, presumably, facilitate their continued existence for even longer. I also engaged the services

of the Whitney Museum's architectural consultant to conform and standardize the architectural plans for all the room installations and to create detailed architectural files for each piece. These files would become part of the loaning institution's archive once the show ended and the works were returned to their individual homes. Finally, the services of an acoustic engineering firm were contracted to take precise measurements of the sound levels in each room for future archival reference.

These steps address only some of the problems that arise in maintaining and ensuring the life of multimedia artworks that are themselves audio/visual subjective experiences for the viewer. As a reference point for this discussion, *The Stopping Mind* (1991) (FIG. 1) is a large-scale installation work that was inspired by the writings of the sixteenth-century Japanese Zen master Takuan Soho. In his advice to samurai master swordsmen, Takuan describes the dangers of the stopping mind, the mind that seeks to grasp and hold the moment, taking one out of the continuous flow of the dynamic, living present and into a static, rigid state of ego-driven clinging and delusion, which, in terms of swordsmanship, could mean instant death.<sup>2</sup> The installation is a dark room, 32 feet square, with black walls and a 15-foot-high ceiling. Four large projection screens paralleling the four walls hang suspended from the ceiling. Onto the screens are projected four individ-

ual channels of prerecorded images consisting of wild movements by the camera through various landscapes, both natural and fabricated. Most of the time, the images are motionless, silent, still frames. Without warning, they burst into motion, accompanied by loud roaring sounds that come from four loudspeakers mounted at the corners of the room. Just as suddenly, they freeze and return again to silence and stillness. The only continuous sound in the space is an amplified voice focused into an invisible sound beam in the center of the space. The voice whispers in a continuous chant and describes being in a black space while feeling the gradual loss of all bodily sensation. The piece proceeds in this manner in constant unending variation.

All playback equipment is mounted in a mobile rack cabinet and installed in a separate adjoining space not accessible to the public. The equipment consists of five channels of laser-disc playback (four for video, one for the voice) under computer control for the random starting and stopping, as well as five channels of audio amplification, video monitoring, and an AC power conditioner.

Master videotapes, one set of laser discs, architectural plans, the computer code, and a book of instructions with a certificate make up the archival, permanent components of the piece. They remain in the museum's vault. What viewers encounter when they see this work is not a unique, original object; rather, they experience an exhibition copy. Generally speaking, there can only be exhibition copies of my work. If a disaster occurs and all the physical objects are destroyed, new materials can simply be purchased and the piece reassembled.

These are the basic parameters of *The Stopping Mind* and, by extension, of my installation works in general. So, what do I see in the far future for this particular piece? It's hard to say. Some days, I envision a conscientious curator who ensures that the master tapes and the equipment remain updated to the current format and who diligently reads the archival materials to ensure that the work is installed according to my original intentions. On other days, I see only one of the four channels of video being played alone on a small digital flat panel display with the room lights on, a situation akin to seeing a

2. Takuan Soho, *The Unfettered Mind—Writings of the Zen Master to the Sword Master*, trans. William Scott Wilson (Tokyo, New York, San Francisco: Kodansha International, 1986).



single small painting by a late medieval artist, such as Duccio di Buoninsegna or Giovanni di Paolo, on the illuminated white wall of a museum and learning from the wall label that it was once part of a large multipanel altarpiece in a church somewhere—its other panels being either lost or scattered in various collections.

We simply do not know the fate of all these works we are producing or in what way they will be used in the future. I recall Walter Miller's classic science fiction story from the 1960s, "A Cantic for Leibowitz," in which a man is walking to Leibowitz's delicatessen in New York with a shopping list in hand when the nuclear holocaust hits. Only the shopping list remains, which is rediscovered hundreds of years later by survivors who base a new religion on it, chanting the list but not knowing what the words mean—"one pastrami sandwich on rye, half a pound of coleslaw," etc. What is certain about the future is that (1) it will occur and (2) it will always contain a great degree of creativity, for better or for worse.

So, to return to video, what is this medium, what are its prospects for the future, and how is it different from other media art of

the past? I first became aware that I was dealing with something unusual when, during my first large museum show, I went around at the end of the day turning off the video pieces. This is occurring right now every evening out there somewhere wherever my works are being exhibited. As professionals, my colleagues and I have had the experience of walking through the galleries after hours when the lights are off, a truly magical and privileged moment. The familiar paintings and sculptures are there like silent beings in the night, asleep but physically present. Shut down my video installations for the night, however, and nothing remains. Not only is there no movement or sound, there are also no images on the walls—only empty, cold rooms. No works of art are present, even in trace amounts. These pieces are not sleeping; they are dead. So the question becomes: Where did they go?

To answer this, it is helpful to have a bit of historical background. Something unprecedented happened in the mid- to late nineteenth century: Light was fixed onto a surface, creating images as the eye sees them mechanically, relying on a source other than the artist's hand to produce an image. Soon the intervals between taking these pictures were drastically reduced, allowing sequences of images to be taken within fractions of a second of each other. When these sequences, or filmstrips, were played back in the same order and at the same rate by a second machine, called a projector, which also illuminated them with a beam of light, the moving image was born. For the first time, images were given a life beyond the fixed, static world of material objects. In return for this, they were limited to a temporal, and therefore a temporary, existence, with one foot always in a parallel world, an underside of darkness, stillness, and non-existence (the place those images go to each night in my exhibitions).

Video or, more appropriately, its parent—television—continued this development with one important addition: The image was now

"live," coexisting with the present moment. Thus, the camera's eye, its point of view, could be multiplied and extended infinitely and simultaneously across space—a process called "broadcast," with the shape of its extension in space dubbed a "network" (both terms derive from fishing). This development created another kind of parallel world still in the process of evolving today in the form of the Internet and the World Wide Web. Furthermore, with the concurrent advances in recording technology, moving images could be copied, reproduced, and further distributed, culminating in the current digital formats in which copies are virtually indistinguishable from the original and are therefore potentially infinite, or at least freed from the telltale corrosive marks of time.

From this brief sketch, several observations can be made regarding the nature of video and its application to artistic practice. First is that the essence of the medium is time. The images are moving and are accessible to intervention and modification while in the process. Consequently, they have behavior and are volatile and

interactive—all important aspects unprecedented in the history of visual art. The essential property of the medium is a kind of fluidity of the image. Its basic underlying characteristics are change and transformation.

Second, apart from a stage in the early development of the field, media artists generally do not make the tools they use to create and display their work. Machines are made by commercial manufacturers who control the price, availability, alterations, innovations, and obsolescence of the technology. The notion of the unique object and the hand-rendered form, so fundamental to the history of painting and sculpture, must be radically revised. As tools of artistic craft, the individual components of media technology are more like musical instruments than implements. They are predesigned, with a deliberately defined set of physical characteristics and presumed uses. They must be mastered by the artist, like the piano. And like the piano, they must also be kept in tune.

When working with media in the context of art, parallels to music are inevitable. Exhibition becomes like a performance or re-creation, an enactment. Active components must be assembled into a complex system to function together according to the artist's intentions. In the absence of the artist/creator, a person with previous training or experience with the piece and/or a "score," or set of instructions, is required.

Future curators in the field could take on the function of the interpreter or "conductor" of the work. Variations in equipment, its adjustment and placement, the architecture, lighting, and environmental conditions directly affect the quality and appearance of the final work. The medium is robust but vulnerable. Long-term issues arise when specific pieces of equipment are no longer made, creating a need either to carefully assess and adapt new technologies to the individual requirements of a work or to restore or refabricate old technology, the video version of those antique original-instrument music ensembles.

Sooner or later, any collecting institution will encounter and must deal with these issues. The cathode-ray tube (CRT, the glass picture tube present in all monitors and TV sets) will most likely be the first major element to disappear in the near future as flat panel displays become cheaper, larger in size, and higher in quality—the first large-scale multimedia extinction. I can envision some historical researchers and technicians in the basement

of some museum one hundred years from now relearning the art of blowing glass and circuit wiring to recreate CRTs from scratch so the late-twentieth-century Nam June Paik piece in the collection can be presented as originally seen. Whether it will be the adapted/updated technology approach or the purist, original-technology-at-all-costs approach, preserving the hardware, or at least detailed information about it, will have to be considered an essential element in the preservation of these works.

There is one more important aspect to all this. Unlike music, which is based on a system of notes and scales that dates back to the

ancient Greeks, visual images—and especially their newest manifestations in video and computers—do not have such a precisely defined, consistent tradition. In order to continue any tradition, a conventional system of some sort is necessary, something that everyone can agree on and that can be codified and passed on. Written notation is one such system in music; the agreement that the A note will, in scientific terms, be equal to 440Hz (cycles of vibration per second) is another. Such conventions already exist in video. The Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE) has for years indicated the technical specifications and standards in the field of electronic sound and images. A variety of test patterns exists for adjusting and conforming recording and playback equipment to established standards, the most familiar being the SMPTE color-bar pattern that often appears at the head of videotapes.

Of interest to conservators here is the principle behind the system of test patterns. Individual

pieces of equipment are not precise. They are presumed untrustworthy to reproduce a given signal accurately. The test pattern—color bars, for example—represents the ideal of how this signal, in this case the color reproduction, should appear on any given monitor screen or, after being recorded, in playback. The knowledge of this ideal signal is accurately described in electrical terms in the SMPTE standard reference documents and is readable on special test instruments like waveform monitors, but, practically speaking, it is in the tester's mind, since all equipment lies in one way or another. During playback or display, then, the circuits in

the particular piece of equipment are “bent” or “stretched” electronically with internal adjustment controls so that the acknowledged signal standard is reproduced. The machines are conformed to the ideal, making up for individual inconsistencies. Central to this system are accurate knowledge and experience of the ideal standard on the part of the person making the adjustments.

The transmission of the more subjective elements and artistic nuances of each installation is another story, however, not to mention the unique requirements for the handling, maintenance, and preservation of these technological systems as works of art. This is where we need the help of museums and professional registrars and conservators. There is an urgent need to reconcile all this technical information with the systems already in place for the care of art objects—in other words, to bring the role and practice of the electronic-computer engineer/media designer into the established professional institutions of the fine-art registrar/conservator. This is where there is a huge gap in the field and, therefore, a huge window of opportunity for the young conservators of today.

My experience over the past two decades of mounting shows has demonstrated that museums are lagging behind and are not adequately doing their job when it comes to the exhibition and collection of media artworks. When I present my work in museums,

my assistants and I spend a large amount of time teaching the basics of equipment adjustment and maintenance to the responsible museum staff members, information that already exists, in readily available form, and is regularly being taught by organized professional groups. In all my experience, until just recently, there have only been several occasions where full-time, dedicated, electronic preparators have been present (trained art handlers as opposed to the museum's audio-visual department staff). There was only one instance I can recall in which museum's registrars trained in electronic/digital technology with a standard set of procedures and paperwork were present. In the course of showing my work over the years, and in the absence of any initiative on the part of the museums, my studio staff and I have devised our own registration procedures, specified dedicated staff positions and functions, initiated training and maintenance schedules, and created our own condition and damage reports for electronic equipment.

The following story during the exhibition of my installation *The Sleep of Reason* (1988) (FIG. 2) is typical. This piece consists of some objects in the form of an antique wooden cabinet, a vase with flowers, a digital clock, and a table lamp. It also consists of a special traveling case with laser-disc video players, audio amplifiers, a computer controller, and power conditioner and monitor, in addition to the video projectors and speakers. (The room is constructed on-site.) When the crates arrived, the museum's registrars and art handlers were there to unpack them. Seeing the wooden cabinet, the registrars put on their white gloves and pored over every inch looking for scratches and damage, cleaning and polishing where required. In the meantime, the case with all the audio and video equipment sat ignored a few feet away. No one bothered even so much as to turn it on to see if anything was working. I chuckled to myself, knowing that I had bought the wooden cabinet at an antique flea market for a couple of hundred dollars, while the case and all the state-of-the-art equipment was worth at least \$30,000. Fortunately, today this scenario is becoming more rare. Things *are* changing as video and media works become not only more common in museum collections, but also more ubiquitous in the culture at large and, consequently, more familiar as fixtures in our daily life.

In a world where the conditions are constantly changing as new systems replace the old (the

consumer's nightmare), where material recorded on older formats may not be able to be played or recovered (the conservator's nightmare), the key to survival seems to lie with an endless cycle of reproduction—copying as conservation. The natural world seems to bear this out, where life when viewed from the point of view of the individual is finite and terminal, but when viewed from a social point of view is infinite and eternal. Developing technology also seems to bear out this model of preservation as we begin to call the process of duplicating tapes in the digital format “cloning” and not “copying.”

There are other, older examples, too. One of the most sacred sites in Japan is the Ise Shrine. It has been on a site in the ancient cedar forests of the Ise peninsula for more than one thousand years—yet it is twenty years old. Every twenty years, the Shinto shrine is reconstructed a short distance away from the current one—a pristine, perfect duplicate, true to the original down to the finest detail (if there can even be said to be an original other than a concept or master plan). The final step is to transfer the “kami,” the god, to the new version, activating and empowering it.<sup>3</sup> Then the old deconsecrated building is torn down and construction started anew in a never-ending cycle. In this model, one of the greatest threats to conservation in the future may be gradual mutation rather than discrete physical damage.



**FIGURE 2**

Bill Viola, *The Sleep of Reason*, 1988. Video/sound installation, 4.27 × 8.23 × 9.45 m (14 × 27 × 31 ft.).

Two views. Collection: The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

3. The transfer of the spirits to the new shrine is marked by the “Shikinen Sengu” ritual celebration. The sixty-first “Shikinen Sengu” took place in the fall of 1993.

The Ise Shrine is both new and ancient at the same time, but, most importantly, it maintains its function within the culture. Further, the key to its endurance lies with the people who have a use for it. The method of its preservation is dependent on and bound to a ritual cycle that continues beyond a single human life span. In my experience, it is people and not materials that are the greatest threat to the preservation of an artwork. Human behavior is *the* key element in conservation. By the time I leave a museum after installing my work, I have put procedures in place for the maintenance and upkeep of the individual pieces. Gradually, I became aware that I was creating a ritual—a prescribed, repetitive cycle of activities for people in the space—which ensures that the work, an experience created by changeable, flexible components that shift over time, will be seen in the way it was originally set up. This seems completely appropriate for an art form that exists only as a duration, as a movement in time with no fixed material form.

My first direct encounter with the idea of ritual as preservation came in 1982 when I traveled to the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the isolated Himalayan communities of Ladakh in northern India. There, my wife, Kira, and I visited the monasteries to see the extraordinary artworks and to witness the prayer services and religious rituals with their powerful music and chanting. I was

quite excited to be in the hall of the monastery before dawn as the prayers began, but I was soon disappointed. Watching the monks, I could see that many of them were not really concentrating or involved. They seemed to be just mouthing the words without really feeling them. Knowing a little bit about the nature of the rituals, I sensed a decadence that troubled me. I felt there was a real need for a reformer or an instigator to come in and put the whole thing back on track.

Then I realized that the entire monastic system, with its daily and seasonal repetition of the ancient rituals in the form of chanting, music, and meditational exercises, was like a giant recording device. Whether or not the individuals understood everything in depth and regardless of whether a certain master was inspirational or not, the knowledge was getting physically repeated, memorized, and thus passed on. It was written down in the sutras in the library, but it was also being encoded into individuals through their actions. And reformers do come along regularly in history to revitalize and realize the essence of the original teaching and refresh the system. It seems to me that if conservation of artworks is to be successful and self-maintaining, and particularly if media artworks are to be successfully shown as well as maintained, then this process has to become a part of people's regular activity. It has to be turned into some form of ritual, a pattern of behavior.

Most important, they have to want to do it, even need to do it. People will care only for something that they love and/or respect.

In 1996, I was asked to create a new installation for the main hall of Durham Cathedral, a nine-hundred-year-old church in the north of England and one of the most important cathedrals in the country (FIG. 3). Durham is one of the most imposing and extraordinary architectural and religious landmarks in Europe. I was overwhelmed by the interior with its stark unadorned walls, massive stone columns with unusual patterned carvings, and enormous vaulted ceiling. At first, I spent most of my time grappling with the technical and physical problems of the task ahead, the placement, mounting, light and sound issues, context of the place. It was not until much later, after having spent considerable time in the space and having to constantly turn off the piece to make way for the daily cycle of prayers, that I gradually became aware of a second, immaterial structure in the church. This

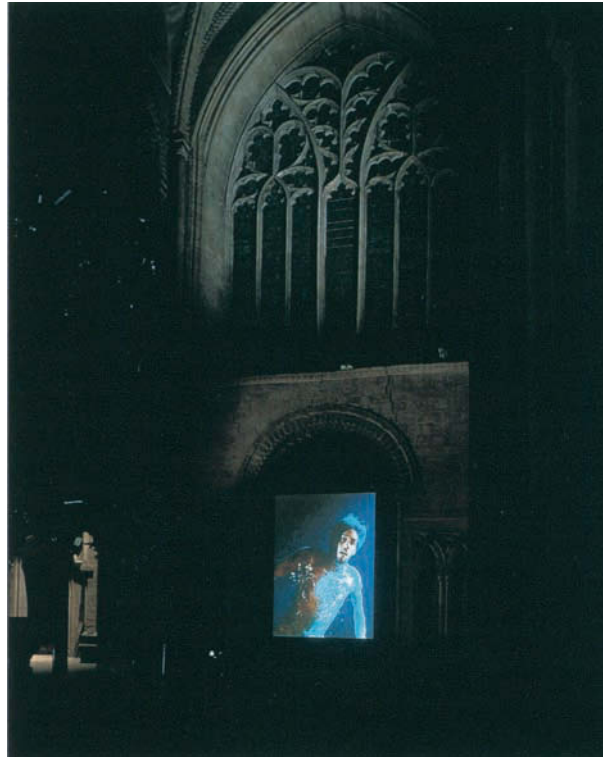
was the invisible edifice of worship and religious ritual, solidified and made real by repetition, a massive form that stretched back in time through the nine hundred years of the existence of the physical building and beyond. It was the unseen body, the reality of the church. Without it, all that remained would be cold stone walls and empty spaces, interesting to admire and appreciate but void of life, as I had experienced many times in deconsecrated or abandoned churches and temples throughout Europe and the Far East.

The history of art is not necessarily the history of objects. As a practicing artist, I look through art history for the living sparks, the inner life of objects. I can see how the priorities of our culture at this particular moment in history have skewed our perceptions. The artists have always known this other dimension, they inhabit it, but their voices are not usually heard. Historians don't usually tell the story from the artist's point of view. Facts are far easier to codify than feelings and revelations. At other



times, in other places, the emphasis was different. In Tibetan culture, for example, master craftsman monks spend seven to ten days in a ritual of focused concentration creating a mandala out of sand by painstakingly pouring individual colored grains into an intricately prescribed pattern, minutely detailed and approximately one meter in diameter. In a culminating ceremony, the completed mandala is scooped up in a pile and cast into the river. Closer to home, the well-known early-sixteenth-century *Isenheim Altarpiece*, by the German artist Matthias Grünewald, was created for a hospital monastery, where it was used primarily as part of a healing ritual. Newly admitted patients began their treatment by sitting in front of the altarpiece for several hours meditating on the specific sequence of images, as the individual panels were opened and unfolded in a prescribed way.

As Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, the great twentieth-century curator of Indian art, has reminded us, despite the term “visual” art, all works of art are modeled on invisible things.<sup>4</sup> They are works of art—that is, made by art. In other words, the material objects are not the art. All too often, as professionals, we approach art history as the study of things. We examine the look of the car, its color, design, materials, mode of manufacture; or the description and function of its mechanical system, the design of the engine, the suspension; or even the cultural context of the car, its history, and social significance.



**FIGURE 3**

Bill Viola, *The Messenger*, 1996. Video/sound installation at Durham Cathedral, Durham City, England, 7.62 × 9.14 × 9.75 m (25 × 30 × 32 ft.). Collection: Edition 1, The Chaplaincy to the Arts and Recreation in North East England; Edition 2, Collection of The Bohen Foundation, promised gift to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Edition 3, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

**The active element latent in all objects —  
their life through use . . . is the most vital  
to preserve.**

4. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 10.

But what about the actual act of driving? What about the feel of moving, of the wind, of traveling down the road? And what about the desire to go somewhere? This is what I sensed in Durham Cathedral and what Coomaraswamy is talking about. It is something altogether different from the way we usually approach things, particularly physical things. It is about the active element latent in all objects—their life through use. It is precisely this that is the most vital to preserve.

From a conservation perspective, the title of this book could be *Permanence/Impermanence*. Looking at these words not as two opposing terms but a single unified whole, we see that nothing could better describe the paradox of a human being—the nature of our institutions, social, political, and

religious—and crystallize the very essence of the human condition. To preserve or not preserve. Here is Takuan's "stopping mind," the need to hold and cling to life's fleeting moments that becomes the cause of much of our suffering, as any conservator knows well. Yet I am happy that Takuan's words are still here on my bookshelf to continue to inspire. And, although it is true that exhibition is a form of erosion, I am happy that Grünewald's altarpiece is still with us in its original form. And I am also happy that more Tibetans have become enlightened after dumping their sand mandalas into the river.

It seems to me that the real question this book poses is this: Do we want to have the pristine, untouched hammer under glass, the original object straight from

the hardware store with no nicks or scratches from use, or do we want the one that lives out of the case, dirty and scarred from pulling out bent nails, with the handle worn down, bearing the material impression of the user's hand? And, most important, do we actually want to make something with that hammer ourselves? Or, put another way, do we want perfect bodies without blemishes or deformities, or lived-in bodies with the marks and scars of experience? Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi, the thirteenth-century Persian poet and mystic, called the wound "the place where the light enters you."<sup>5</sup> Do we want a world without death and decay? I don't think so. In a culture of high technology, increasing mastery of the material world, unique priceless objects, commodities exchanges,

genetic engineering, and the promise of disease-free immortality, it is easy to forget about the true inner life of art objects, the private knowledge that artists have put into these works—like seeds that lie dormant in their casing—and it is easy to forget that this life can become known only through the caring hands of the user. ■

---

**Permanence/impermanence . . . nothing could better describe the paradox of a human being — the nature of our institutions, social, political, and religious — and crystallize the very essence of the human condition.**

5. Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 142.

## THE MEDIA ARTS AND THE MUSEUM: REFLECTIONS ON A HISTORY, 1963–1973

John G. Hanhardt

The inclusion today of video-installation art in major museum exhibitions and collections, international art surveys, galleries, and private collections signals the continuing and further acceptance of film and video as contemporary art forms. A new generation of artists, brought up within an ever-expanding media environment, taught in art schools by a generation of conceptual artists who have worked in video and film, with access to an increasingly flexible technology, is being accepted and celebrated in the art world.

This development reflects the continuing and increased presence of video, film, and multimedia in all areas of our private and public lives. The domestic sphere, as well as the workplace, is changing under the impact of computer-driven digital technologies that are

also transforming our visual culture—a culture in which recorded as well as processed images are subtly affecting all aspects of how we imagine, receive, and create art. Since its inception, art critics, historians, and curators have resisted the moving image as art. However, this resistance is gradually fading as artists increasingly turn to these very means for creating strong and powerful works. Thus, not only is a discourse being fashioned out of the many forms and genres of media-based art, but other disciplines, such as photography, printmaking, and sculpture, are also changing under the influence of video and multimedia technologies. Artists today increasingly work with and respond to a variety of materials, choosing the medium that best works to fulfill their creative goals.

The presence of the moving image—whether projected, seen on a monitor, or constituting part of a CD-ROM or Web site—introduces a complex of interpretive and historical questions. An increased understanding of the history of the moving image can only make more sophisticated our interpretation and understanding of work we are seeing today. The rush to accept the exciting and accomplished body of

work of a new generation occurs too often at the expense of earlier generations of artists working in these same genres and forms. The erasure of this history and the lack of a sophisticated interpretive language that can describe and codify the work leave today's artists in isolation from the other arts and curators without the analytic and critical tools necessary to reflect fully and effectively on the art of the late twentieth century. Artists, collectors, curators, and critics need to know and understand this history in order to make the critical judgments that will shape the representation of the arts in the future and determine acquisition and preservation priorities today. Thus, the material preservation of the media arts and the construction and dissemination of its history must be addressed and attended to hand in hand. This curatorial work will help us to contextualize and understand a constantly shifting new-media culture.

The history of the moving image begins in the late nineteenth century with the invention of cinema. The projected cinematic image is certainly the single most powerful influence on the arts of this century. The complex of forms

## Artists today increasingly work with and respond to a variety of materials, choosing the medium that best works to fulfill their creative goals.

that the cinematic arts have taken serve as the foundation on which video, and later multimedia, has been built. The differences and continuities between these different media also provided the foundation for fundamental changes in film and the media arts—beginning in the early 1960s—that affected the course of these media as art forms over the following decades. In focusing on the period from 1963 to 1973, we can witness the emergence of a range of techniques and aesthetic strategies that would fundamentally define art practices at the close of the millennium.

The material base for film is celluloid, formed into a series of discrete frames. When these frames

are run through a projector at 24 frames per second (fps) for sound film or 16–18 fps for silent, they create the illusion of a continuous moving image. The cognitive transaction between the viewer and the projected film image is the basis of that work's existence, not as a discrete static object but as a text that comes into being when it is projected. A film may exist in one unique print but most often is reprinted through the internegative created from the original. In all cases, the further one is from the original, the more diminished the copy is. The constant playing of the film through the projector causes wear and tear. Proper projection is necessary to maintain the original intention of the artist. Focus, uninterrupted projection, and proper sound levels are all part of the original film experience. Anyone who has had an opportunity to view a 35mm nitrate film from the early part of this century knows the astonishing impact of the luminous image and depth of field of that work. The acetate print cannot capture the full experience of that original; neither can videotape

copies preserve the quality of an acetate original.

Thus, the very medium that exists in copies is predicated on the continued existence of an original to maintain the intention of the artist who created it. The generation of independent filmmakers examined in this essay worked in 16mm, which became available after the Second World War, and later 8mm and Super-8mm film stocks. The smaller film formats did not require the capitalization of the entertainment cinema. The flexibility of small-gauge film, its portability, and the quality of the sound recordings gave artists the opportunity to transform cinematic practice. To independent filmmakers, the very material of film, the discrete frame, was the compositional element and building block of the cinematic experience. The tactile, hands-on approach to film was fundamental to the experience of the independent filmmaker in 1963, a time that saw an extraordinary range of styles, forms, and genres of filmmaking develop, an “avant-garde,” “independent,” “personal” filmmaking based on the model of the visual artist and poet.

One of the most powerful figures in this cinematic avant-garde was Stan Brakhage who, in his seminal writings collected in *Metaphors on Vision*, proclaimed a visionary cinema: “Imagine an eye unruléd by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception.”<sup>1</sup> Brakhage's cinema was fashioned out of camera movements and articulations of single frames, as well as sequences composed of abstract and dissolving cascades of images. Brakhage's recorded footage was made abstract through editing, framing, camera movement, camera speed in recording the action, the use of filters and film stock, focus, and the shaping of point of view. A range of techniques, which included treating the surface of the film and layering and superimposing sequences, made for a rich and dense filmic vocabulary in such films as *Dog Star Man* (1963). We can locate Brakhage and other artists in this period as a vital part of a film culture, developing and seizing on a variety of styles and techniques for transforming and breaking the codes of a traditional, professionalized, and seamless entertainment cinema.

1. Stan Brakhage, “Metaphors on Vision,” *Film Culture* 30 (fall 1963), [25].

The filmmaker-as-artist set terms that challenged and expanded our very definition of art practice. Jack Smith, in the role he played of artist-as-performer, staged a fantastic *mise-en-scène* filmed in improvised sets and landscapes that evoked the lures of popular culture transformed into a sexually ambiguous and highly stylized environment. An influence to numerous artists, Smith established his art as a fluid site for installations, performances, slide presentations, and filmmaking. His evolved and intricate aesthetic was demonstrated in a seminal body of film art that included *Flaming Creatures* (1963), which was to influence such artists as Andy Warhol. In 1963, Warhol himself began work on a powerful body of films that were to fundamentally reexamine the nature of the production and reception of cinematic time. Works such as his film portraits and *EAT* (1963), shot at 24 fps on one-hundred-foot rolls of film edited together and projected at silent speed (16 fps), offered a radical reflection on the nature of the cinema and its relationship to the spectator. Traditionally ignored in art histories, the films are a key part of Warhol's output as an artist and force the reassessment of his career, one that would locate the centrality of these films in Warhol's full artistic practice.

Filmmakers also sought to break out of the theatrical frame and treat the exhibition space as an expanded cinematic environment. Stan VanDerBeek, for example,

constructed viewing space into which films were projected, creating a spectacular visual environment. For his *Movie Drome* (1963) in Stony Point, New York, he removed the projected film from the traditional theatrical environment and created a vast display of overlapping moving images. The joining of films in performance, as in Robert Whitman's *Prune Flats* (1963), introduced the moving image and the projection's shifting points of view as a means to expand the stage and performance space. The use of slides and the layering of the moving image was explored in a variety of new theater and exhibition spaces during this period, including Aldo Tambellini's *Black Gate* (1965) at the artist's Black Gate Electromedia Theatre in New York.

Here was a cinema reinventing itself, expanding the limits of the theatrical cinematic experience, as well as the very construction of the moving image. The reconstruction of both the dimensions of time and the projector's relationship to the content of the projected image evolved a complex and diverse set of styles, genres, and formal invention. At the same time, artists began to turn to the mass medium of television. By the early 1960s, television was increasingly pervasive, directing its programming to the home consumer. Artists, nonetheless, viewed it as an instrument, and, working within the context of avant-garde movements from Happenings to Fluxus, transformed television's capacities and uses. In 1963, at the Galerie

Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany, Nam June Paik's first solo exhibition, *Exposition of Music—Electronic Television*, featured his prepared pianos and televisions scattered about the exhibition space in a variety of positions. In this way, he managed to transform our stance toward television, altering the received broadcast image and further manipulating the inside of the television set itself. As Paik wrote at the time, "13 sets suffered 13 sorts of variation in their VIDEO-HORIZONTAL-VERTICAL units. I am proud to be able to say that all 13 sets actually changed their inner circuits."<sup>2</sup>

At this same time in New York, Wolf Vostell staged a one-artist exhibition titled *TV Dé-coll/age* at the Smolin Gallery. Along with Paik, Vostell was to develop a concept called "dé-collage," a strategy that acknowledged a dynamic process of growth and decay—an "un-gluing"—as opposed to the Modernist strategy of collage, in which the image was constructed from disparate sources. Vostell's disruption of the flow of the broadcast image actively engaged the content and instrumentality of the television set, as his instructions in his performance text for the Smolin Gallery show attest: "Throw a big whipped-cream Cake to the TV . . . smudge it on the surface of the TV . . . while the programme . . . is going on."<sup>3</sup> In a body of work dating from the late 1960s and including such titles as *Videotape Study #3* (1967–69), Paik worked both to develop an image out of the prop-

erties of the cathode ray tube (CRT)—*Magnet TV* (1965)—and to create early image-processing techniques developed, in part, out of the ideas of *dé-collage*.

With the introduction of the Portapak videotape recorder and player into the consumer market in 1965, artists realized another moving-image medium and technology. The video image was recorded not on a strip of celluloid but rather on magnetic tape. One of the defining properties of video was the ability to see in "real" time on the CRT what the camera was recording. Artists brought these media into their studios and began to develop a range of initiatives—from the straight recording of performances and actions to directly reworking and collaborating with engineers to fashion a new means of image making. They fashioned an image-processing technology that invented a new imagery for video and television. Artists around the country developed plans and realized projects that fundamentally altered our notion of the moving image. The exhibition *TV as a Creative Medium* at the Howard Wise

2. Everson Museum of Art, *Nam June Paik: Video 'n' Videology, 1959-1973*, exhibition catalogue (Syracuse, N.Y.: Everson Museum of Art, 1974).

3. Wolf Vostell, *TV Dé-coll/age—Morning Glory*, artist's book (New York: Smolin Gallery, 1963).

on multiple levels of spatial movement and composition.

Artists attempted a variety of ways to bring the viewer directly into the set of video images in their installations. This was achieved by placing closed-circuit cameras alongside live television transmissions and prerecorded videotape sequences. This mix of points of view and temporalities implicated the viewer in television and video time and space. The technology also permitted the artist to retard the recorded image so the spectator's image would appear on the monitor after the person had stood in front of the camera. These displacements were explored by Les Levine in his video sculpture *Iris* (1968) and in the installation *Wipe Cycle* (1969) by Ira Schneider and Frank Gillette, further identifying media culture with other art forms that provide a forum for expression and the exploration of cognitive issues. The complex media culture that developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s was also made up of collectives of artists—such as Raindance, Videofreex, and Guerilla TV—that fashioned a new television and forms of documentary. Their publications identified the medium as potentially liberating and empowering within social and aesthetic dimensions. Dozens of individuals and groups shared their videotapes and plans for image processors and created work for a new public and community television.

Experiments in Art and Technology, founded by Billy Klu-

ver in 1966, established alliances with the corporate and public sector, world's fairs, and museums to create an expanded stage upon which artists could collaborate with scientists. Art and technology links were forged by putting artists together with engineers. Robert Rauschenberg was one of the participants in Kluver's *Nine Evenings: Theatre and Engineering* (1966), with his installation/performance *Open Score* (1966), an elaborate production employing live video and interactive electronic components to replay a virtual tennis match through new media.

Alongside these initiatives, video was also appropriated by a generation of artists identified with such movements as conceptual, body, process, and performance art, bringing the videotape and closed-circuit systems into structures that reexamined conceptual paradigms and space as a perceptual construct. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Bruce Nauman produced such film pieces as *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square* (1967–68), which consisted of performative exercises that explored repetition and the temporality of duration. These films can be seen as precursors to his later work, such as *Corridor* (1969–70), in which two monitors were set on top of each other at the end of a narrow passageway, one displaying a live, closed-circuit image of the end of the corridor, the other a videotape of the same scene shot from the same point of view. Upon entering this narrow passage, the viewer dis-

covered an image of himself or herself on one monitor but not on the other. Thus, the viewer perceived the space through his or her own point of view, as well as that of the camera, creating spatial and temporal disjunctions.

In a similar vein, the Austrian artist Valie Export created *Adjoined Dislocations* (1973), an elaborately choreographed film installation. Here her body became a tripod, with two 8mm cameras strapped to her torso—one on her back and the other on her chest. The entire action was then filmed on another 16mm camera, and the resulting film footage was projected side by side, with the two 8mm and single 16mm films displayed simultaneously. Another related work was Joan Jonas's performance piece *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* (1972), in which she employed video and a closed-circuit video camera within the performance space, further extending the treatment of language and narrative through pre-recorded and live imagery. Thus, the movement of ideas through interactive and intermedia strategies was explored by artists employing film and video in different yet related historical movements and aesthetic discourses.

Gallery in New York in 1969 treated the television monitor as a container of interactive and transformed imagery with which artists created sculptural objects, and a kinetic medium, out of this manufactured technology. Artists in this seminal exhibition included Tabbellini, Paik, and Eric Siegel.

Parallel strategies emerged in the late 1960s as filmmakers explored the single frame of the filmstrip to articulate an optical aesthetic that removed and challenged the photographic authority of the film image. Paul Sharits's *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (1968) was a "flicker" film employing the single frame to score alternating colors and sequences of images into an overall composition. James Whitney's optically constructed abstract images, such as *Lapis* (1966), played out strategies allied to the image-processing explorations of artists working in video. Thus, this cinema explored an expanded abstraction that operated



In an untitled print from 1973, Nam June Paik asked, “How soon [will the] TV chair . . . be available in most museums? How soon [will] artists . . . have their own TV channels? How soon [will] wall-to-wall TV for video art . . . be installed in most homes?” Thus, Paik positioned his treatment of video within a far-reaching strategy of empowerment for artists and a recognition of video’s enormous potential as an artist’s medium. His sculptures transformed video into a plastic artist’s medium in such pieces as *Real Fish / Live Fish* (1974), in which the video camera transmitted the live recording of fish swimming inside a CRT while the other monitors revealed the live video image of those fish. Paik’s *TV Eyepiece* (1974) placed a live video camera inside a television console whose CRT had been removed. The television set was positioned in front of a window so that when the viewer looked through the screen, he or she also looked into

the eyepiece of the video camera that recorded the view outside the window. During this period, Paik’s *Global Groove* (1973) was broadcast on television, a celebration of an artist’s television with infinite channels of programs that also depicted the globally expanding commercialization of television. Paik’s pieces from this period were ironic comments on the roles and functions of mass media, as well as compelling artworks.

In the early 1970s, artists created a new media landscape out of videotapes, films, and film and video installations, which expanded throughout the decade, enabling a new generation of artists to realize the potential of the moving image as an expressive creative medium. Peter Campus, in his installation *mem* (1973), placed a video camera in a darkened room illuminated by a black light for the camera. The viewer’s body was projected at an angle onto the wall from a video projector. The live interaction with the space and the viewer’s own representation explored how we compose and perceive ourselves. In that same year, Campus created his videotape *Three Transitions*. Using chroma-key effects, he “transformed” his own image in psychologically charged self-portraits, appearing to step out of himself, erasing himself; and, in the end, setting fire to his own image—leaving only blackness—in what is, finally, an evocative and poetic statement about the fragility of the media image. In the hands of artists, video gave us a new way to

see ourselves and the world around us. And yet, as pervasive and powerful as film and the media arts were and still are, they are fragile and vulnerable both to the ravages of neglect and to the forces that codify and separate the arts from each other and ignore the complex of our visual culture.

The history of the museum’s role in the presentation and preservation of this history is critical for its survival. The efforts made in the late 1930s by Iris Barry, The Museum of Modern Art’s founding curator of film, were critical to the preservation of films by such key figures in the history of the cinema as D. W. Griffith. The establishment of the International Federation of Film Archives in 1938 was a necessary step to coordinate and share information and resources worldwide. However, the resources for preserving this heritage are primarily directed to the history of the classical cinema. While The Museum of Modern Art and Anthology Film Archives in New York have raised public awareness and devoted considerable resources to independent film history, this art form remains vulnerable and threatened by destruction. The complexity of the situation is marked by the changes in media technology that began in the 1980s and that are accelerating today. The future of 16mm, 8mm, and Super-8mm film stocks is in doubt. Many film projectors, cameras, video players and recorders, and formats of videotape and film stock with which artists originally worked are

no longer manufactured. The laboratories that process film are few, and duplicating these resources is prohibitively expensive. The films and videotapes themselves, the outtakes, installation and performance plans, and related notes and primary source materials lie in boxes waiting for the archivist. But more than likely, as a generation of artists pass away, so too will their work. In fact, virtually all of the work cited in this essay has either been partly preserved or stands at risk of being lost. We urgently need to look at the successes in preservation and strategically align the resources necessary to save this history of the media arts.

I want to cite a project I developed as a means to save the films and videotapes of Andy Warhol. After his films had been withdrawn from distribution in the 1970s, Warhol agreed to allow me to screen and preserve them. I immediately established a collaborative project between the Whitney

---

## We urgently need to look at the successes in preservation and strategically align the resources necessary to save this history of the media arts.

Museum of American Art and The Museum of Modern Art's department of film, in which the Whitney Museum would provide the leadership and establish the scholarly apparatus to catalogue and identify Warhol's films and filmmaking process and The Museum of Modern Art's archive would restore and preserve the films. After Warhol's death, the project continued with the support of the Andy Warhol Foundation and has been a great success. The result is that films that existed largely in people's memories and were seen only, if at all, in scratched and damaged copies or as stills in books can now be experienced in their rich tonalities and recognized for their complex engagement with the visual arts, narrative, and treatments of filmic construction. It is clear that Warhol's films are central both to a complete understanding of his aesthetic and to film and art history.

The example of the Andy Warhol film project demonstrates how strategic partnerships can develop a means to realize an ambitious and complex goal. However, the challenge is enormous, as the preservation of video and film

demands pooling resources to create stockpiles of equipment; sharing knowledge between different areas of conservation and scientific research; establishing guidelines both for maintaining and reinstalling installation and performance work with film and video components, and for maintaining and replacing technology so the original intention of the artist can be followed; ensuring proper storage conditions and facilities for media; and establishing priorities and standard procedures for transferring original media to digital formats. The efforts of the International Federation of Film Archives and the Bay Area Video Coalition and their Playback 1996 Video Preservation Roundtable indicate that, in addition to pooling technical resources, it is critical that curators, art historians, and media and film scholars share information.

In conclusion, it is essential that museums play a leadership role in recognizing the history of film and the media arts as art forms and in ensuring their conservation and preservation. The intertextual relationship of these discourses to the other arts and the history of

classical cinema places it outside traditional film and art history. Thus, it is essential that this history not be left at risk in the margins, but rather acknowledged and placed in a historiographic context and model that recognizes the profound and complex impact of film and the media arts on our art and cultural history. The development of critical and interpretive languages and the establishment of a historiography for film and video will develop hand in hand with the guidelines necessary to determine the priorities in preservation and the allocation of resources. Such decisions can best be made in a concerted effort by curators, scholars, and conservation specialists working together to develop and implement sophisticated historiographic methodologies, along with the preservation procedures, planning, and technologies, so a more complete and complex body of film and media is understood, appreciated, and saved for current and future generations. ■

## PRESERVING NOW

Cliff Einstein

In terms of art preservation, I have always been fascinated with the difference between what I call “commercial art” and what I call “fine art.” This is because I do not yet know what is commercial and what is fine, and I do not think we can distinguish between them while we are in the middle of living with them. So our great task of preserving begins with somebody telling us which objects we are supposed to preserve, because we cannot preserve them all.

In 1990, The Museum of Modern Art in New York organized an exhibition titled *High and Low—Modern Art and Popular Culture*, which dealt with the ever-cycling relationship between popular culture and fine art. The issues of whether we should be making art today that will last, who should worry about preserving it, and our obligation to ensure that the future has access to it are somewhat

related to that show—because fine art today no longer reflects our popular culture; it is our popular culture.

Toward the end of this century, we have really become what I call “creatures of the now.” Television has emerged as our most influential religion. God, it turns out, is in the tube. We cannot avoid that. Each evening, the six o’clock news tells us today’s truths, which become the rules we live by until tomorrow, when we learn new truths. So we do not rebuild the shrine, if you will, every twenty years, as Bill Viola observed (see “Permanent Impermanence,” page 91); we rebuild it every day, and every day we have a new belief system.

Our artists live in this world. Consequently, they are more concerned with impact making than with making something that will last. They have been driven to a point where they want to make a big impression right away, as fast and with as much power as they can. Worrying about whether their grandchildren will like it or future generations will see it has been

replaced with an overwhelming need—which I do not think existed centuries ago—to make something that has a huge impact immediately. This, then, results in work that is truly strange and difficult to preserve, because it is not being made from materials that are naturally preservable. We do not see, necessarily, oil on canvas or bronze. We do not see work that is necessarily easy to conserve.

We could take a walk through a collection, which in this case is mine and my wife’s, and try to imagine which artworks may still be around in the future. In the gallery shown in Figure 1 is *Cafe Macedonia* (1984), a sculpture by John Chamberlain. This piece is pretty safe. It is made from car parts, painted with automotive paints. Cars last a long time, so this work ought to be easy to conserve. On the wall of the same room is *Cadillac Hotel* (1984), a painting on

---

**Our great task of preserving begins with somebody telling us which objects we are supposed to preserve, because we cannot preserve them all.**

canvas by John Register made the good old-fashioned way with a little bit of varnish. I think it will do fine as well. In the center is a table by Ettore Sottsass. This is a one-of-a-kind piece that started the Memphis Furniture Movement in the early 1980s. It was originally made as a counterattack on the German furniture of other periods that was supposed to last forever. This work was high-fashion furniture made from whatever material was at hand. Now it has become collectible, and we do not really know how to preserve it or whether it will last. A piece I call "Silver Shoes" by Yayoi Kusama was made twenty years ago with shoes of that day painted with some kind of silver paint. I have no idea how

long this will last or what I am supposed to do about it. I do not even know how to pick it up and carry it or hold it or pack it. I do not know what to wrap it in. This issue is interesting, because art made centuries ago was not meant to be sent around to museum shows. It did not need to be portable. But artists today make work and hope it will travel, and when it travels enough it gets ruined. If it gets ruined, we have stopped preserving or conserving it.

In another room, I have a drawing by Philip Guston; I suppose if I keep light off of it and I am very careful with it, it will last. I have a painting and collage by Alfred Leslie with glass over it that I keep out of the light, and I hope



## Fine art today no longer reflects our popular culture; it is our popular culture.

it lasts, although it looks rather fragile. Willem de Kooning's *Floating Figure* (1972) is made out of bronze, which is good forever. Down the hall is a piece by David Hammons, an untitled work from 1994, that shows a lady's or girl's silk nightgown, and under it, representing a pregnant woman, an African mask. It is a very telling, beautiful, poignant piece. The artist recommends putting a large candle on the floor and lighting it so that smoke will go up the dress while you are looking at it. I think that may ruin it, but I do what I am told. I have no idea what is going to happen. I keep this one out of the light.

In a large gallery, shown in Figure 2, are a myriad of pieces that are nightmares to own. Kiki Smith's fabulous sculpture, *Train* (1993), is made from wax. What a

great material to make something out of—it is almost impossible. How do you pick it up? How do you pack it? In 1995, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris called us and said, "We must have it for our show *Féminin masculin: Le sex de l'art*."

"We would have no idea how to send it to you," we replied.

"We must have it. We will do anything," they wrote back.

"We are very honored," we said. "We just can't imagine how to get it to you. It is fragile. And—you do not understand—to install it, you put steel spikes in the ground. There are PVC [plastic] tubes we have created that run up the legs. We could never explain that in another language. You probably would not have the right tools anyway. You use metric. We use inches. This will never work."

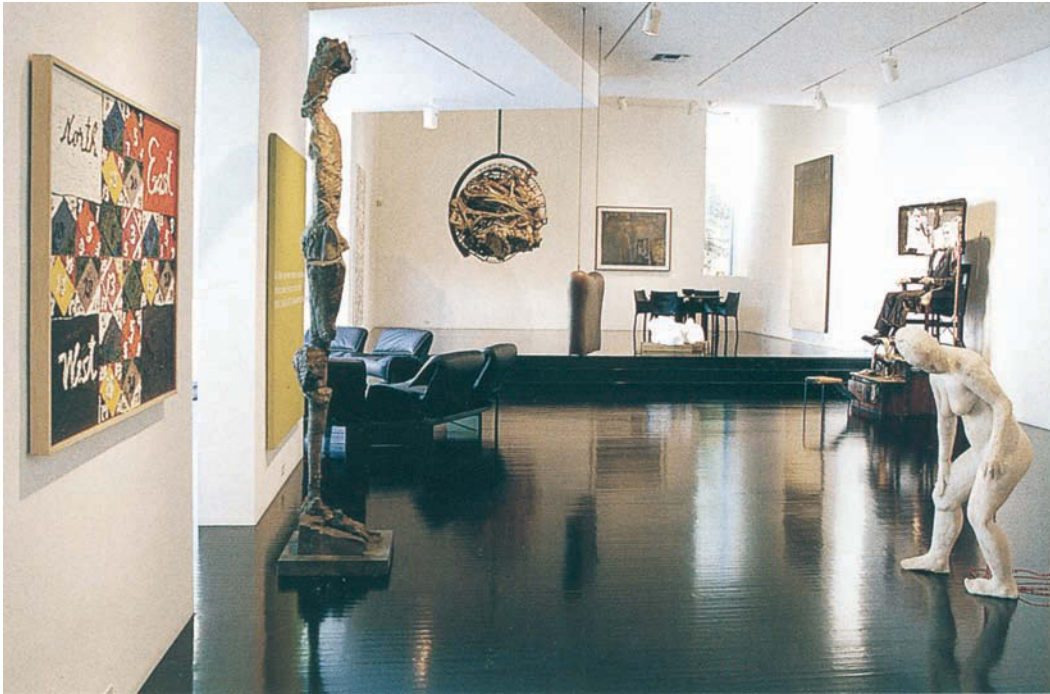
They wrote us back a third letter, saying, "What do you want?"

I answered, "Two tickets to Paris. My wife and I go, we take it out, we install it. Stephanie Barron from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art takes it home."

They said, "OK." So that is what we did. It worked very well, and, miraculously, it returned unharmed.

### FIGURE 1

Author's gallery (clockwise from left): John Chamberlain, *Café Macedonia*, 1984, chromium steel plate and paint; John Register, *Cadillac Hotel*, 1984, oil on canvas; Ettore Sottsass, *Park* 1981 (Memphis table), marble, glass, fiberglass, chrome steel.



**FIGURE 2**

Author's large gallery (from left to right): Alfred Jensen, *Magic Square*, 1960, oil on canvas; Stephen De Staebler, *Clubwinged Angel*, 1987, bronze; Richard Prince, *Drink Canada Dry*, 1989, acrylic and silkscreen on canvas; Peter Shelton, *Iron Shoulder*, 1988, cast metal; Chris Burden, *Medusa's Flying Moon*, 1992, kinetic sculpture with internal motor, plywood, steel, tar, cement, rock, wood, plaster, paint, plastic, many model trains and track; Sigmar Polke, *Untitled*, 1975, photograph; Saint Clair Cemin, *Alma*, 1990, marble and wood; Gunther Forg, *Untitled*, 1990, acrylic on lead; Edward Kienholz and Nancy Reddin Kienholz, *The Shine on Shine*, 1987, mixed media; Kiki Smith, *Train*, 1993, wax with glass beads.

Also, in the large gallery is Chris Burden's *Medusa's Flying Moon* (1992), a two-thousand-pound globe that turns electrically and represents the world when the world is over. The only things left are trains that encircle the globe—like the snakes around Medusa's head—and dump yards of sorts, where all our refuse goes. It is a magnificent piece that takes sixteen men to install. You have to take the roof off. It takes a one-hundred-foot crane to lift it and its frame over the house. At one point, while it is being lifted over the house, you realize that if it drops, both the piece and your house are destroyed at the same time. It is electric, and it turns for awhile. Then you check the warranty, see how many miles have gone by, and wonder

how you will ever fly it if it breaks. There are only two people who can fix it: Burden and an assistant. They come out. They cut open the globe. There is a secret passage (I still do not know where it is). A guy puts his head in there and works on the gears for awhile, then closes it up. It is much harder to keep than a Jaguar.

Edward Kienholz knew one thing: He knew his work would travel, so he put big handholds all over the place—places to grip. His construct, *The Shine on Shine* (1987), also shown in Figure 2, comes apart easily, because he was a builder, and he made it modular so it could be put back together. But it is made from odd materials. It has resin all over it, the magic element of the latter half of this

century. Artists have fallen in love with resin. I do not know if resin lasts. I have no idea what it does. I do know it changes color. The piece looks really good now, but I have no idea what it will look like in two hundred years. I do not know what I am supposed to do to it—if I am supposed to shine it, dust it, wash it, spray it. I just kind of adore it, and we look at it all the time.

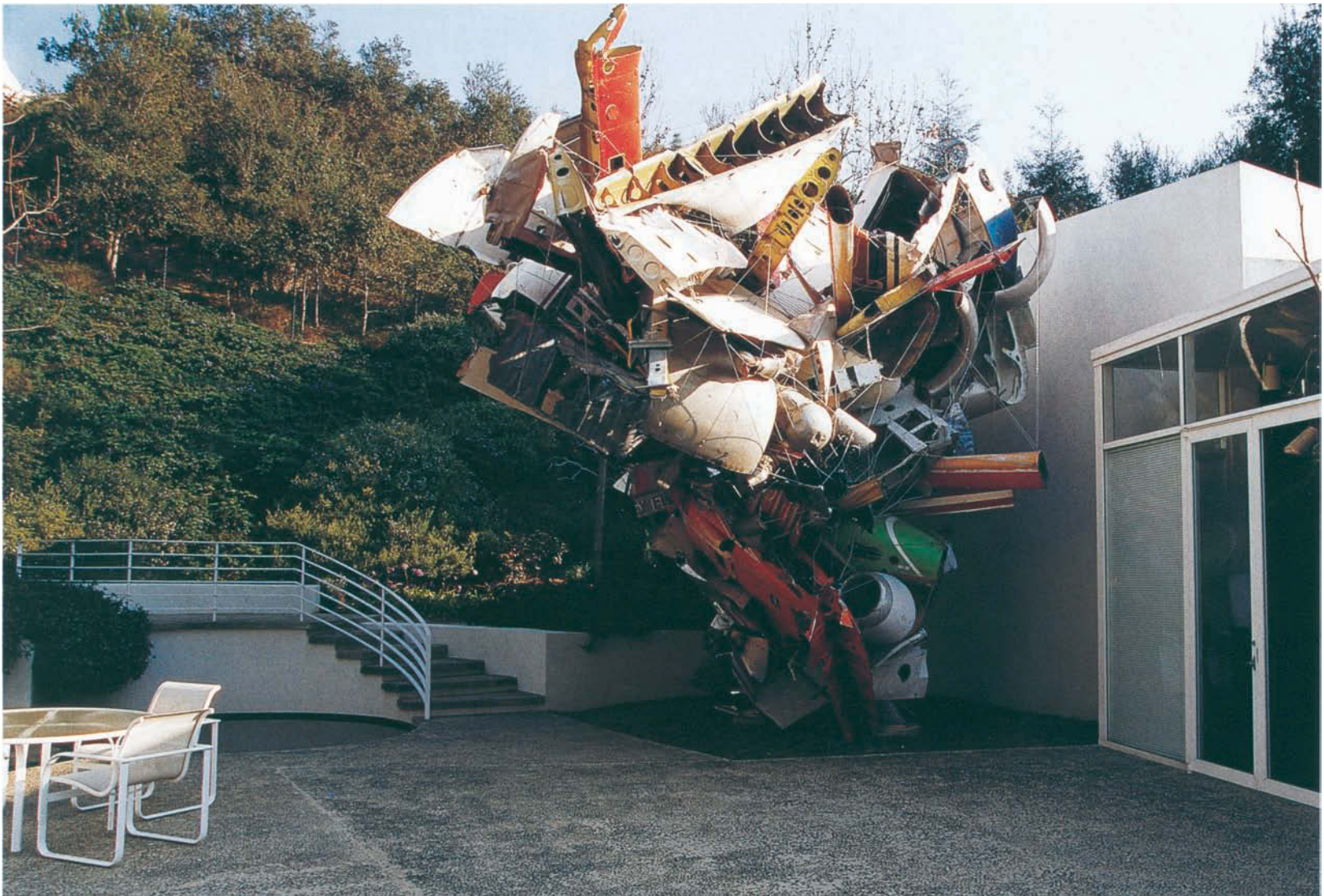
An untitled painting from 1953 by John McLaughlin is made with house paint. Will it last? I don't know. We also have a beautiful Alfred Jensen painting, *Magic Square* (1960) (FIG. 2) from the first Jensen series, with numbers on it. It was shown in 1985 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in that wonderful retrospective

show, *Paintings and Works on Paper*. This painting was made with oil paints squeezed out of a tube—very pure. It should last for a long time.

Richard Prince made the joke painting *Drink Canada Dry* (1989), also shown in Figure 2. I bought it, and three months later, noticed that the purple had started to fade. I thought it was me. I checked my light bulbs. I had been careful. I called Richard and said, "What's going on?"

"Oh, I hope you like this," he said, "but I had this wild idea. It's kind of an old joke that's fading away, so I used disappearing ink."





**FIGURE 3**

Nancy Rubins, *Einstein's Place* and Mark Thompson's *Airplane Parts*, 1997. Metal, 7.32 × 11.58 m (24 × 38 ft.).  
Collection of the author, Los Angeles.



"I'm going to send you a check," I said, "and you'll notice I signed my name in the same stuff."

Now how could I deal with preservation when this painting was fading away in front of my eyes, and I had not even owned it for a year? But it turns out that it is kind of marvelous because it is an old joke, and it is fading away. Now, years later, the type is all white, and I think it has stopped fading. I think the green starts fading next year, but I'm not sure.

Charles Ray used Tupperware to make *Table* (1990), a sculpture that is a table with objects on it. We do not see Tupperware in ancient Rome. I do not think it lasts a long time. His table is fantastic. The bowls actually have no bottoms because they are sort of sewn into the Lucite top. So you think it is just a bunch of bowls on a table, but as you approach it, you find out

the bowls and the table are really one piece that has been flowed together. And this work is now traveling around the country, I'm afraid.

In another room is a sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz. She made her work of sand and burlap and the ever-popular resin. I hope the resin keeps the sand on the burlap, but I do not have any idea if it will.

Our ever-popular Nam June Paik work is made with 1948 television sets but with 1985 Motorola mobile monitors inside; the preservation problem is already solved by Paik in this instance, because if one of the sets goes on the blink, we just take it out and put another monitor in. As long as the videotape that presents the program lasts, we are OK. I suppose I should change the tape player to a disc player. Time marches on.

Outside is Toshikatsu Endo's *Epitaph* (1993). We were told we could install it outside, but it is eroding. Somehow, this seems all right. When Endo saw it, he said it was all right. I do not know how long a life it will have. I suspect it will outlive us.

Nancy Rubins's outdoor sculpture, *Einstein's Place and Mark Thompson's Airplane Parts* (1997) (FIG. 3), is a towering work of crashed airplane parts. I think this piece will last because airplanes are not allowed to rust. Planes last a long time. These have already crashed, so I think the worst is over. I asked the artist, "What do we do if we don't live here anymore?" She said, "I haven't thought that far."

Finally, James Turrell's *Second Meeting* (1985–86) is also outside (FIG. 4). We have to keep it very pristine because we are its caretak-

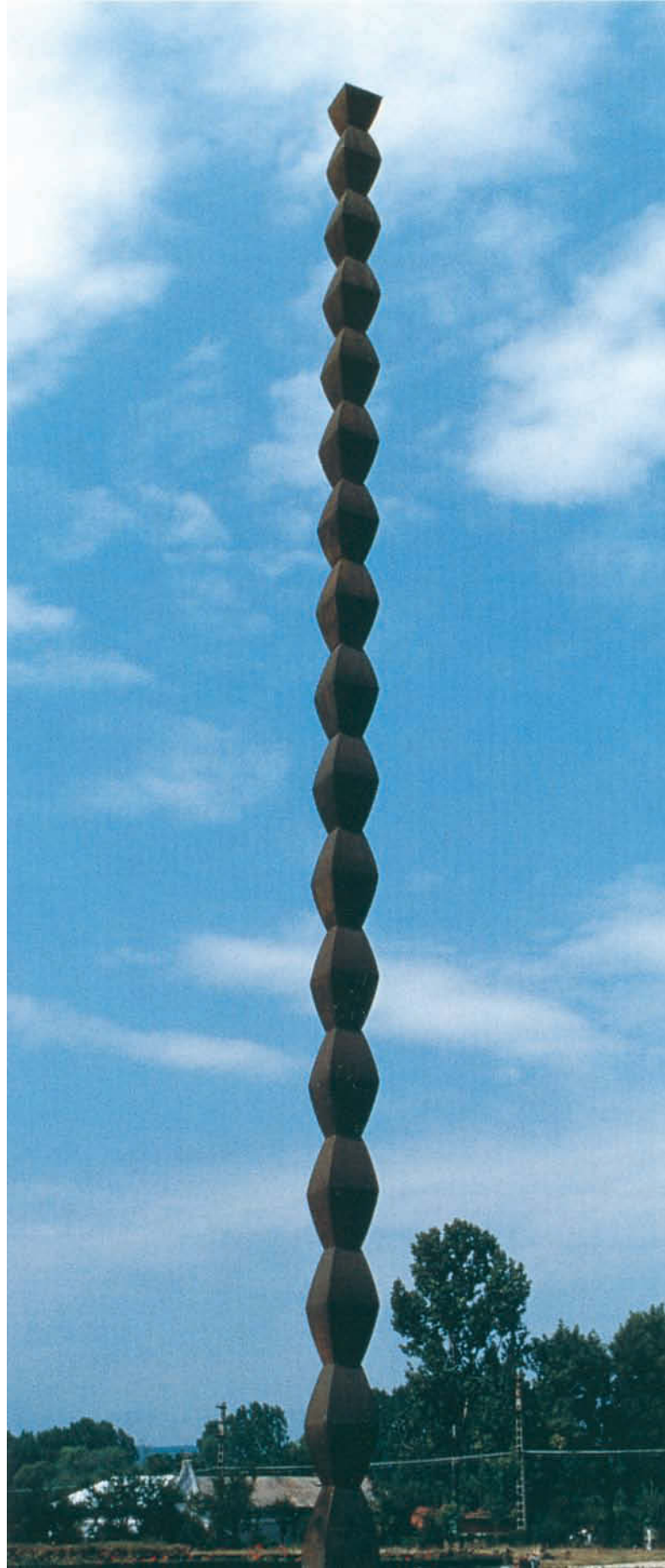
ers. We replaster it and repaint it all the time. Of course, if it were ever destroyed we could always build another one. This work can last forever, as long as the money holds out.

As a collector, I do not know what I am supposed to conserve, and I do not think there is any way of knowing that. I do not think it is my responsibility to solve the problem of conserving a work if the artist has chosen to make it out of something that is inherently unstable. About all I can do is take it home, lend it, eventually give it to a museum, and know that it has a life because it really reflects the sort of transitional existence we have at the end of this century.

Art reflects us. We are creatures of the now. The work is being done for now. What it will be like in two hundred years, I really do not know. But we can take a picture of it, transfer that to a digital file, send the file on the Internet, transfer it to our six-foot gas-plasma screen on the wall, and then just switch on art all the time by flicking a little button. Various paintings will come up, and they will be perfect because they will be digitally preserved forever. ■



**FIGURE 4**  
James Turrell, *Second Meeting*, 1985–86. Sky space,  
6.1 × 6.1 × 6.1 m (20 × 20 × 20 ft.).



## INFINITE COLUMNS AND FINITE SOLUTIONS

David A. Scott,  
Vladimir Kucera,  
and Bo Rendahl

There are extrinsic and intrinsic properties of matter that have a direct bearing on the preservation of twentieth-century works of art. Some works, one could argue, are more immortal than others simply because of their intrinsic material existence. A six-thousand-year-old bronze staff from the Nahal Mishmar horde, for example, will probably continue to survive six thousand years from now. That an ancient object has achieved that kind of immortality through the vicissitudes of fate makes one realize the vagaries of time over which we have very little control, and the interactions of the ever-changing environment with materials.

Some twentieth-century works of art will also achieve a kind of immortality through the materials of which they are made; others, such as British artist Damien Hirst's cattle heads preserved in formaldehyde solutions, may not necessarily be so easy to maintain, but perhaps the artist never intended them to be.

The subject of this essay is a work of art by an artist who surely did not intend it to be ephemeral: Constantin Brancusi's monumental sculpture, the *Infinite Column* (1937), sometimes called the *Endless Column*. Brancusi, one of the most influential of twentieth-century artists, found his genius in the creation of simple, elemental forms in wood, stone, and bronze. As Henry Moore wrote:

Since the Gothic, European sculpture had become overgrown with moss, weeds, all sorts of surface excrescences which completely concealed shape. It was Brancusi's special

### FIGURE 1

Constantin Brancusi, *Infinite Column*, 1937. Tîrgu Jiu, Romania. Cast-iron modules thermally sprayed with brass coating, 29.33 m × 90 cm (approx. 96 ft., 3 in. × 3 ft.). The column is composed of fifteen modules, or elements, with half an element at the top. Each complete module is 180 cm (70¼ in.) high.

mission to get rid of this undergrowth and to make us once more shape-conscious.<sup>1</sup>

Brancusi made many versions of the *Infinite Column* in wood and plaster, most of which can be dated between the years 1918 and 1937. Each consists of a series of repeated modules, threaded like beads on a wire. One carved in oak, for example, was 2.03 meters (6 feet, 8 inches) high. Through the construction of various iterations of this idea over a period of almost two decades, Brancusi arrived at an ideal, platonic relationship between the dimensions of the rhomboidal element that serves as the repeating unit of these columns.

Brancusi had always wished to find a venue for the ultimate version of the *Infinite Column*. His opportunity finally came in 1937, when a group of mothers of Tîrgu Jiu, Romania, not far from Brancusi's own birthplace, approached the artist to build a monument to their children and young men, killed defending a

bridge from the German army during the First World War. Accepting no money for the commission, Brancusi conceived of an ambitious assemblage of three related sculptures that would extend through the city. These became *Table of Silence* (1937) and *Gate of the Kiss* (1937), both in stone, leading to a towering *Infinite Column*, a slender concertina of repeating elements. Erected at a height of 29.33 meters (96 feet, 3 inches), the *Infinite Column* has come to symbolize one of the outstanding achievements of Brancusi's oeuvre (FIG. 1).

The engineering of the column is really quite extraordinary, and it is very difficult to appreciate the power of the sculpture unless one makes the pilgrimage to Tîrgu Jiu. As Sidney Geist wrote:

[T]he *Column* while apprehended immediately, offers a surprising variety of aspect; its great size is not easily enveloped by the mind. . . . The *Column*, its repeated elements towering to the sky, creates a sensation of pulsation, regular breathing, upward flight, infinite ascension. An image of mounting prayer and aspiration, it alternatively suggests a connection between the upper regions and the earth. . . . Brancusi told a friend that to understand it he should lay his hand on it.<sup>2</sup>

The Romanian engineer Stefan Georgescu-Gorjan worked with Brancusi on the engineering

of the column, which was skillfully constructed of cast-iron panels erected over an interior framework of carbon-steel girders and carbon-steel jacket (FIG. 2). The technicalities of the work are, however, part of the problem of its restoration and conservation for the future. The structure is sunk 4.6 meters (15 feet) into the ground in concrete and consists of a steel framework with cast-iron modules threaded onto it to like large beads, which are then thermally sprayed with brass. The thermal-spraying tech-

**FIGURE 2**  
Photograph, 1936 or 1937, showing the *Infinite Column* under construction. Brancusi is shown in the center, walking toward the column. Source unknown.



1. *Oxford Concise Encyclopedia of Art and Artists*, 1994 ed., s.v. "Moore, Henry."

2. Sidney Geist, *Brancusi: A Study of the Sculpture* (London: Studio Vista, 1968), 125, 126–27.





**FIGURE 3**  
Detail, Brancusi's *Infinite Column*, showing areas of deterioration, including blistering of the sprayed brass coating and rusting of the underlying cast iron.

nology, sometimes referred to as metallization, was developed in Switzerland at the beginning of this century. In this process, a metal powder is forced through a compressor, heated over a flame, and the molten particles used to coat a variety of substrates.

Unlike a traditional bronze sculpture, the problem here is in dealing with a complicated assemblage of materials. Obviously, Brancusi's intent was not to have a sculpture that would tarnish like an ordinary bronze but one that would continue to reflect light, like the polished surfaces of his indoor figures. The thermally sprayed coating is somewhat porous and must be smoothed and polished to create anything like the golden surfaces that Brancusi had used on his small sculptures, such as his *Bird in Space* series, which he began in 1923. The efforts of the original engineers in the construction of this sculpture were really extraordinarily praiseworthy. But what they did not realize was that, with time, the hand-finished, hand-polished brass surfaces that Brancusi desired would not be able to last long outdoors.

Preserving a polished brass surface to a golden finish in the outdoor environment is essentially a non sequitur. Bronze sculptures are left to naturally weather and, although corroded and turned green, are rarely in a perilous condition. The same cannot be said for the *Infinite Column*; if the artist's intent was to preserve a golden surface, he clearly did not realize

how difficult a task the preservation of his masterpiece would prove to be. Today, the column is a heavily tarnished, tawny brown. The outer brass skin is clearly blistering in places and becoming detached from the cast iron, which itself has begun to suffer from corrosion; plumes of rust can be seen descending from damaged regions of the surface as the cast iron corrodes away (FIG. 3). From the carbon-steel interior of the column, large handfuls of rust can be grasped from an inspection hole near the ground.

Other problems are obvious at the base of the sculpture. People have a tendency not only to touch the surface, but also to scratch graffiti onto it. It is clear that the preservation of the column and the artistic integrity of its message has been neglected and that there has been no routine maintenance of the structure so essential for its continued survival.

The sculpture has suffered political abuse as well. The Communists so hated Brancusi that, in the 1950s, the mayor of Tîrgu Jiu ordered the demolition of



## There is no path of minimum intervention for this work. Either an attempt at restoration is made, or the work decays.

the *Infinite Column*. Attempts were made to pull the structure down with horses and ropes—or tractors, according to one account—which failed after days of futile toil. Accounts also vary as to how much damage was occasioned to the sculpture by the demolition effort. There is also some debate as to whether the column is leaning 7 degrees to the vertical, suggesting that the attempt at demolition may have created some slight movement of the column. Cracking of the concrete foundations is visible at the base of the sculpture, but without an investigation of the structural integrity of this part of the sculpture, it is difficult to assess the extent of damage to the foundations. The structural problems cannot really be studied until the column is dismantled.

Most of us would not be happy to allow this work to rust away in a Ruskin-like acceptance

of the death of the artwork, leaving us only with its legend. Most conservation professionals would agree that preservation or restoration of the column is viable, though it is not conservable in the same sense that an outdoor bronze normally would be. There is no path of minimum intervention for the *Infinite Column*. Either an attempt at restoration is made, or the work decays. Eventually, it would have to be pulled down as an architectural folly, a hazard of corroded iron and rusted surfaces.

Some have proposed removing the original sculpture to an indoor location and replacing it with a replica. This is hardly practical; a work of such great height is not amenable to replacement. The cost of preparing a convincing replica and of removing the original to a presently nonexistent indoor location would be prohibitively expensive.

Another option, that of dismantling and restoring the sculpture to an appearance in keeping with the aesthetic of the artist (FIG. 4) was ultimately advocated by the International Brancusi Foundation, led by the Romanian art historian Radu Varia, who origi-

nally approached the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles for advice. The GCI began working with the Swedish Corrosion Institute in March 1994, studying the rusting of the internal steel framework of the piece, the corrosion of the iron modules, and the deterioration of the sprayed metallic coating. The team then developed a series of recommendations, bearing in mind that all conservation and engineering work would need to be carried out by the Romanian professionals. The final restoration of the *Infinite Column* is, therefore, in the hands of the Romanians and the International Brancusi Foundation.<sup>3</sup>

Two attempts at restoration of the column had already been made by the Romanians, one in 1964 and the other in 1976, in which a sprayed coating was reapplied to the outer surface. After twenty years outdoors, the previous surface had laminated, cracked and degraded and no longer provided any protection to the sculpture. In pursuing another restoration, the conservators were not, therefore, destroying the original coating but rather a failed restoration of our own time—as any restoration of this work may prove to fail in time unless properly maintained.

In present-day conservation practice, we seek to preserve all vestiges of original material, especially since the brutal restorations of art in the past have often resulted in the obliteration of the original hand and eye of the cre-

3. The authors would like to thank their Romanian colleagues for several helpful discussions over the years, particularly Radu Varia, president of the International Brancusi Foundation. Special thanks are due to Maria Boeru, chemist at the Agentia de Protectie a Mediului, who carried out essential liaison work in Tirgu Jiu, regularly replacing passive monitors and sending them to Sweden for evaluation. Maria Boeru also provided data for the elemental composition of rainfall in the Tirgu Jiu area, where one atmospheric testing station is quite close to the *Infinite Column*. The interest in and initial work carried out on this project by Neville Agnew, group director, Information and Communication, and Dusan Stulik, senior scientist, both of the Getty Conservation Institute, are gratefully acknowledged.

ator. However, in the case of the *Infinite Column*, Brancusi's original intention will not be destroyed if an attempt is made to preserve the form and appearance of the sculpture; the essence of the work of art is contained in the shape and dimensions of the cast-iron modules (which must, of course, be preserved).

With regard to the surface of the work, the original aesthetic has been lost as the result of previous recoating efforts. The decision as to what color should be attempted is complicated, given that the original coating no doubt underwent a change in color after a short period of exposure to the outdoors. The GCI and the Swedish Corrosion Institute have successfully found a brassy-colored alloy — based on a Swedish coinage alloy of copper, aluminum, zinc, and tin — to replace the copper-zinc alloy, which has tarnished badly, and have recommended the alloy to the International Brancusi Foundation. The team has also recommended that, in order to preserve the appearance of this new, thermally sprayed coating, additional protection be provided with an acrylic lacquer and a wax outer coat, which, with regular maintenance, should ensure that the sculpture retains a golden hue for several years.

There is room for discussion about what happens with the carbon-steel armature of the sculpture. Should this interior element be replaced when the column is dis-



**FIGURE 4**  
View of *Infinite Column* from the north side after dismantling the top two elements, to be stored in the temporary buildings below.

**In present-day conservation practice, we seek to preserve all vestiges of original material, especially since the brutal restorations of art in the past have often resulted in the obliteration of the original hand and eye of the creator.**

mantled, or can it be salvaged by scraping away the rust, reconstituting it, and reusing it in the reconstruction? Neither option is easy, any more than is the protection of the outer surface of the sculpture.


The problems of restoration are not infinite, but they are formidable. The most mundane is simply the cost. About two tons of metal are required for the exterior coating, liters of organic coatings, hundreds of kilograms of wax outer coating, hundreds of hours of work to move everything safely, several metric tons of stainless steel for a new armature, half a ton of zinc or aluminum, thousands of kilograms of new cement to set the foundations, not to mention the costs of scaffolding, crane, and building workers, along with the technicians, scientists, and principal organizers. The cost is clearly much greater than that envisaged for the restoration of a typical outdoor bronze sculpture.

Perhaps the most difficult issue in regard to the *Infinite Column* is the need for maintenance. Unfortunately, in our society of disposable materials, maintenance is not something we are particularly good at; in the Romanian context, there has been little incentive to repair and rebuild the vestiges of the past. It is for this reason that the estab-

lishment and agreement of a proscribed maintenance regime is such an important part of the future of the work.

The case of the *Infinite Column* bears witness to an evolution of materials: from materials known for thousands of years as suitable for external use; to those of the early twentieth century, a century that rashly believed it could do better; to our own time at the end of the century, with its ever-evolving scientifically “approved” materials. We hope these new materials will be an improvement on those Brancusi used without distorting the artistic message of the *Infinite Column*, its assemblage with its related works, *Gate of the Kiss* and *Table of Silence*, and its purpose as a work of art. ■





The Ecosystem

**PART 4**

*This page intentionally left blank*



## PROJECTILES

Tony Cragg

There are still only three basic themes or subjects for making art—as academically classified, these are figure, landscape, and still life. Nevertheless, over the last hundred years, the definition of each of these three groups has changed radically.

Although the human figure a hundred years ago appeared from the outside very similar to our own, we know a lot more about it now. We know a lot more about its chemistry, its structure, its psychiatry, its psychology. We know a lot more about its history. It is much more complicated today to build an accurate picture of the figure, as such, leading one to consider that a Rubens painting, a voluptuous pink thing, is not really adequate

to represent the figure at this point in time.

The same has happened to the landscape. The landscape of a century ago was perhaps a pastoral, pleasant thing, but nowadays we have many different landscapes and landscape structures. We now know about the landscapes at the bottom of oceans, on other planets, at the bottom of the sea. We know about landscapes that are of a molecular nature and those that go inside the fabric of every material that has been invented. We have many very different structures.

This applies to the figure as well. The figure is not just the human figure isolated unto itself; it is a much-extended figure. Not only does our knowledge of

the figure extend back to our ancestors, right back down through many millions of years to the smallest organism, it also extends laterally into a kindredship, a relationship with all other living beings on this planet with which we are, in some sense, intricately related. This gives us a much bigger, extended idea of what the figure can be, living in many newly defined frameworks.

The third category—still life—can be looked at, in a sense, as being all of the things the organism or figure needs to exist in its given framework, all of the things that facilitate our survival: things that make us happy, make us comfortable, make life more livable or even possible. This third group has

**Now, at the end of this century, we literally have everything — from excrement to gold — to make art with and to give the work its own metaphor, its own meaning, its own life, filling up the work with meaning and poetry.**

also expanded enormously over the last hundred years. There is a description from Vincent van Gogh in which he walks over a rubbish pit in his village and describes a fantastic world of colors and forms and shapes. Although van Gogh was not prepared to actually use these materials in his work, he was at least aware of them. And this was, perhaps, a sign of the fruits of the Industrial Revolution impinging more and more on the lives of human beings.

One very central thrust during the course of the last hundred years of making art—perhaps the predicate of art in the twentieth century—is that artists have rushed through the world looking for different kinds of materials to use in making their art. At the turn of the last century, a very big non-art

world still existed. An artist's strategy would be to go and look at this non-art world, find things, and bring them into the art world. During that period, a certain shock effect was associated with this activity, because it was a new strategy for looking at the objects that we make ourselves. For the first time, these fabricated objects escaped from their banal existence and started to have a different kind of existence; they became carriers of important messages, of emotions, of meanings, of ideas.

This process, starting traditionally with Marcel Duchamp's *pissoir*, continues very clearly with Dada, through Fluxus and pop art, up to the present day. Now, at the end of this century, it has started to slow down, as we realize that the artist's prime motivation for mak-

ing art is not to rush through the world to find another new material. Whereas in the nineteenth century, there were not really that many materials to make art with, now we literally have everything—from excrement to gold—to make art with and to give the work its own metaphor, its own meaning, its own life, filling up the work with meaning and poetry. Perhaps at this point artists have stopped nominating new materials. Now we can begin looking for different kinds of meaning, different approaches, and different possibilities that are not just of a formal nature. With every material, a new technique is needed, with new tools, new forms, and so on. Finally, in a finite world, everything gets nominated. Our process of nominating materials will continue, but it has certainly slowed down.

We need objects as a visual language in the way we have words and letters; they make up an alphabet. For every object, we have a balloon of meaning—a balloon around the object, a balloon we give to it by grace of our own intellectual energy. This balloon is full of poetry, of metaphor, of the object's history, its science, and all the qualities we ascribe to objects. These balloons of meaning are obvious in natural objects or materials that have been with us for a very long time. It is not the thing's physical existence but rather its "metaphysical existence," if one wants to risk the term, that is very, very large. Words like *mountain*, *river*, *stone*, *fire* are very strong, rich

**FIGURE 1**

Tony Cragg, *Forminifera*, 1997. Plaster, steel; 5.84 × 12.45 × 11.68 m (230 × 490 × 460 in.).

metaphors for us to be using in our language, our poetry, our thoughts, and our history.

In our quest to actually expand our visual vocabulary, our visual language, we continue to look for sense and meaning in our own products, the products of our own time. This is very exciting for sculptors today because it offers us a whole new perspective (FIGS. 1–4). With so many more materials available to be used for making art, this could be the beginning of a new generation of sculpture making.

Sculpture making is quite difficult. When you are a child, your mother does not like you to make it in the living room, and it is not really very well supported at school. The problem with sculpture is that you need a real space,

real energy, real material, and this makes a great deal of mess. The collision of the artist's intention and vision with the material is noisy and dirty, so sculpture making becomes a human activity that is actually quite rare. In a large city, billions of tons of material are being made into something every day, but very little of it is being turned into sculpture.

On the other hand, this means that within the class of fabricated objects, sculpture is a very small category within categories. The reason for this is that most human production is very utilitarian; we make things to facilitate our survival. To accomplish this, we continually make the most expedient thing, using the political and economic systems available.

**FIGURE 2**

Tony Cragg, *Early Form*, 1997. Bronze, 86.4 × 121.9 × 182.9 cm (34 × 48 × 72 in.).

This, unfortunately, results in very inferior production, because laws are usually generated and dominated by the lowest common denominator, and utilitarianism takes over.

Currently, there is much debate about the relationship between art and design, and one of the fundamentals for me is that art is—thank God—useless. It is not utilitarian. Artists are just private people with their own fantasies who work with materials; they do not have in mind a purpose or a



**FIGURE 3**  
Tony Cragg, *Envelope*, 1998. Bronze,  
136.5 × 177.2 × 132.1 cm (53 3/4 × 69 3/4 × 52 in.).



**FIGURE 4**  
Tony Cragg, *Flotsam*, 1998. Fiberglass, polystyrene;  
304.8 × 134.6 × 142.2 cm (120 × 53 × 56 in.).

change of shape actually signifying a change of meaning and function until, eventually, one of these molecules gets to the point when it reproduces itself, which is one definition of life. Then living molecules become thinking molecules and that very fine distillate that comes from thought, which is actually a projection of intellect into the material.

Materialism is a dirty word. We seem to forget sometimes that “matter” comes from *mater*, “mother” in Latin—something we should treat with great love and reverence. Not only is there a development in the material, there is also a development in the meaning of the material. Human beings are continually fighting with very big pictures and very small pictures of themselves. To help in compromising these two pictures, we look for meaning in most things. When someone says, Somewhere out there I think I found this certain piece of material in the universe where there’s a little bit of fizzing going on, for the first time, some generation of a piece of material starts to get a very small balloon of meaning around it. And as it gets nearer and nearer, it becomes more and more meaningful, until eventually it ends up very close to us and we can look at it and start to work with it. We touch it and it gets even more meaningful.

This happens not just with pieces of material that come from the cosmos; it also happens if you take a spade and go into a field and dig up a dun piece of lump

function for these objects while they are making them.

This does not apply just to materials; it also applies to language. Language itself has become very humdrum, flattened out. It is very difficult to find poetry, to find new terms, new words, and new combinations of words that give us new meanings. One forgets that the Greek word for poetry simply means “creation.” One forgets, too, that within the materials themselves is a very simple development. It starts with a big bang, as we know, and it goes through very simple atomic particles to atoms to big atoms to molecules to living molecules to great big molecules. This is a very beautiful idea for sculpture, the idea of organic chemistry before life—where enormous, great big lolling molecules are sitting around in some puddle on this planet just waiting to turn into some other complicated chemical, with every

clay. You take it into the studio, and you start to work with it. You move, and it moves. You look at it, and you think. You move, and it moves, and you think about it. And this process goes on and takes you beyond yourself, and you learn things. This dun piece of clay eventually becomes autonomous, in a sense, actually making suggestions, giving you ideas, and telling you what it should be. Most of us do not make sculpture, but I hope most of us write; and it is just the same for someone who writes. You write the sentence down, you know what you want to say, and eventually you actually write the sentence and think, Oh, this would be a better word, or, Maybe I'll move the back of the sentence to the front of the sentence. Eventually, you have a sentence, and you say, Well, that's exactly what I want to say, or even better. And this is poetry, the moment you have actually used material exterior to yourself—a bit of flattened paper, a piece of tree that has been pulped up, a bit of blue mineral mixed up in water—and used it as an extension of yourself to come to some sort of knowledge or experience that you would not have had by just sitting in your armchair.

Every object is known, in conservators' terms, as a little time capsule that leaves us, but only the present is truly material. The past was material but is no longer. And

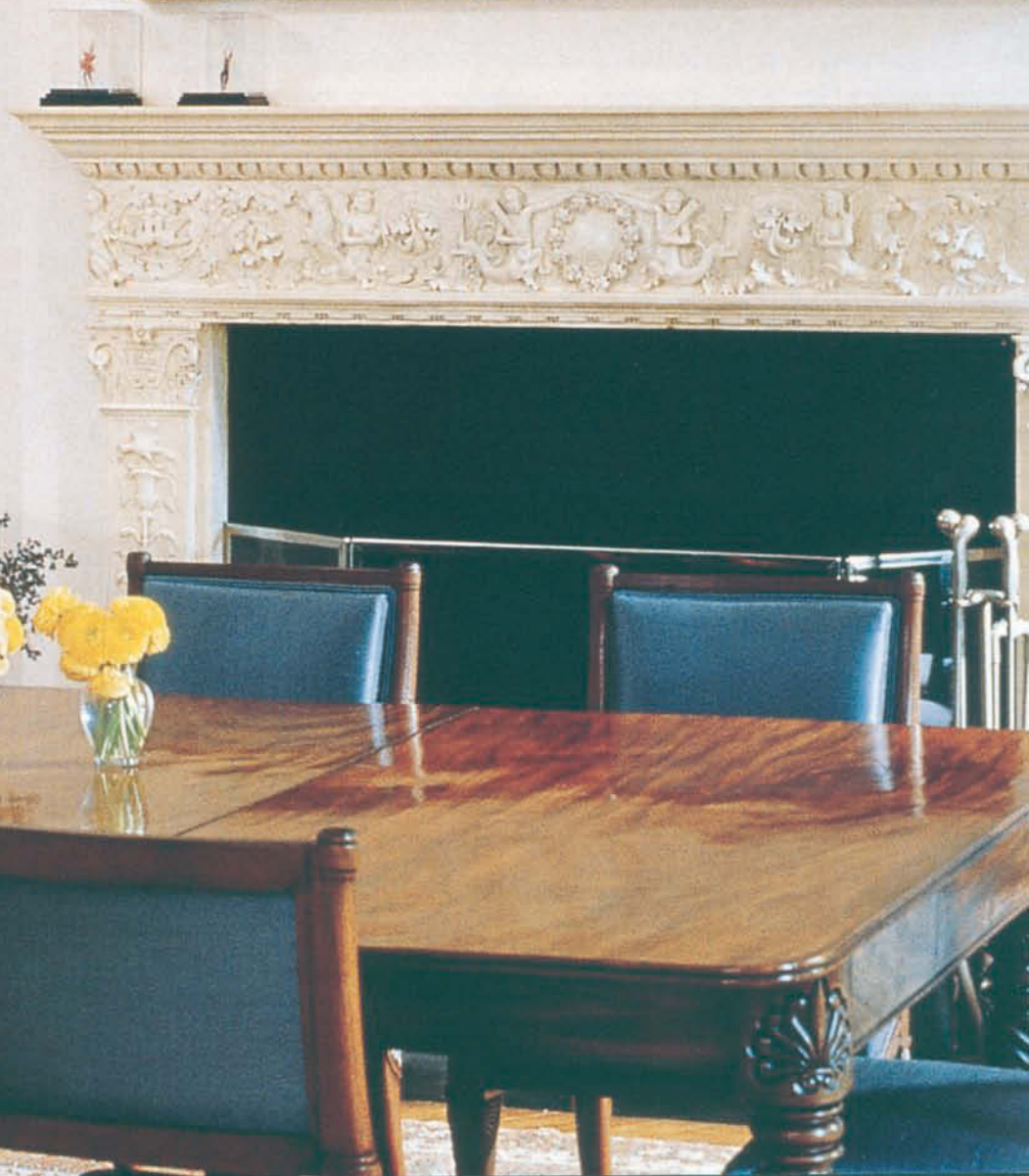
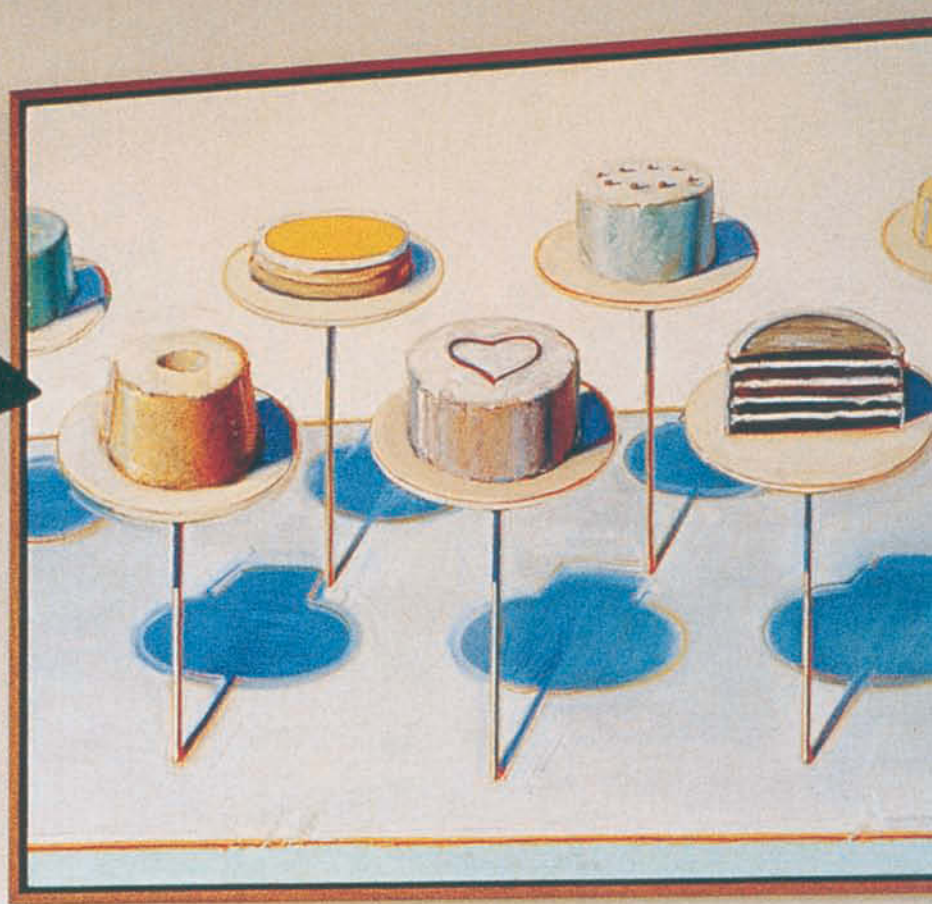
the future is conditionally material; it could materialize. We are like the stylus just feeling the present. That is why the face and the sensations at the front of the body feel more, have the most presence. We prepare these capsules, these little messages we send off into the future, and in the process of doing so—embalming the object, looking after it, sending it off on its voyage—we engage in a ritualistic process that is only for the present, not for the future.

The Egyptians may have known this. Their civilization lasted for many thousands of years, and they certainly succeeded in taking their power and their message and projecting them into the future. Yet, I do not think they intended to deliver their time capsules into our present. I ask: Will the architects of our own museums resort to building booby traps and putting curses on the buildings to stop anyone from getting into them in the future? ■

---

**Every object is known, in conservators' terms, as a little time capsule that leaves us, but only the present is truly material.**





## THE ART ECOSYSTEM: ART AS IT EXISTS WITHIN A PRIVATE COLLECTION

Agnes Gund

After thirty years of collecting, my willingness to lend has changed: I am more generous but more reluctant when it comes to conservation considerations.

There are differences and similarities between the collecting practices of a private person and those of a museum. Individuals are not bound by responsibilities to a viewing public, a governing entity such as trustees, or an established collection mandate. I feel, though, that we are equally responsible to the artwork itself. Although as collectors we have more latitude with what works we can buy, hang, and show to others, we must take care of them, since they will eventually belong to the public. This means we must manage the collection properly, install the work as the artist intended, maintain a clear inventory, and consider the many issues of conservation. Conservation is especially tricky when dealing with the wide variety of materials and media used in contemporary art.

As collectors, my husband and I feel that we have an obligation to both the public and the community of art professionals to provide as much access to the collection as possible. Our home is not a museum and lacks the institutional structures necessary for the continuous display of works of art to a broad public, but I have found that there are numerous ways in which we can share our collections (my husband collects African terracottas and Chinese art).

Perhaps the most effective means at our disposal is our ability to lend to exhibitions. Every year, we receive a large number of loan requests that we try to accommodate. Often the requests come from large museums with exceptional facilities, to which we are happy to lend. Occasionally, though, there is a request from a smaller institu-

tion that is unable to provide an adequate physical environment. In these cases, we will opt not to lend rather than expose a work of art to the potential danger of damage or environmental degradation. Some recent loans have included Jasper Johns's *Map* (1963) to the retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, Louise Bourgeois's *Femme Maison* (ca. 1945–47) to the retrospective at the Yokohama Museum of Art in Japan, and Martin Puryear's *Alien Huddle* (1993–95) to his retrospective at the Museu de la Ciència de la Fundació "la Caixa" in Barcelona. Richard Tuttle's *Waferboard no. 1* (1996) went to an exhibition at the York University Art Gallery in Toronto, and Roy Lichtenstein's *Masterpiece* (1962) went to the the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio, in 1995 and later to the Cleveland Museum of Art. A Chuck Close piece was recently in the retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art, and we have agreed to contribute works by Jackson Pollock

### FIGURE 1

Dining room of the author's residence. On walls (left to right): Arshile Gorky, *Apple Orchard*, 1943–46, pastel on paper; Alexander Calder, *The Eye in the Black*, 1963, painted sheet metal; Wayne Thiebaud, *Cake Window (Seven Cakes)*, 1970–76, oil on canvas. On mantelpiece (left to right): Tom Emerson, *Ballerina*, 1993, mixed media, assembled from found objects; Tom Emerson, *Deer Dancer*, 1994, mixed media, assembled from found objects.





**FIGURE 2**

Living room of the author's residence, New York City. On walls (left to right): Cy Twombly, *Untitled (Rome)*, 1961, oil, crayon, and graphite on canvas; Franz Kline, *Painting Number One*, 1954, oil on canvas; Willem de Kooning, *The Time of the Fire*, 1956, oil and enamel on canvas; Robert Rauschenberg, *Rhyme*, 1956, combine painting, mixed media on canvas. On floor (left to right): Nancy Graves, *Over-Under*, 1985, bronze and steel with polyurethane paint and polychrome patina; Louise Bourgeois, *Eye to Eye*, 1968–70, white marble; Joel Shapiro, *Untitled*, 1989–90, cast bronze; Garnett Puett, *Man #3*, 1986, beeswax, wood, glass, wire. On small table near couch (right): Christo, *Wrapped Newspaper*, 1985, newspaper, plastic, and twine. On mantelpiece (left to right): Two bowls, Mimbres culture, ca. 1100 C.E., painted earthenware; Louise Bourgeois, *Black Torso*, 1963, bronze; Louise Bourgeois, *House*, ca. 1983, white marble; Louise Bourgeois, *White Torso*, 1968, white marble; Fred Wilson, *The Conversation*, 1995, two found objects (figurines), one of glazed earthenware and the other of unglazed porcelain. On coffee table (left to right): Jasper Johns, *Flashlight III*, 1958 (cast in 1987), bronze, glass, and aluminum paint; Tony Smith, *Cigarette*, 1962–68, vapor-blasted stainless steel.

and Tony Smith to retrospectives there as well. After thirty years of collecting, my willingness to lend has changed: I am more generous but more reluctant when it comes to conservation considerations.

However, lending major works is a complicated affair. When I lent Johns's *Map*, we had no alternative but to contract riggers, who craned it out of our window. To fill the blank space that was left, we craned in another large painting, Mark Tansey's *Conversation* (1986). Needless to say, craning is not the best method for moving a painting, since there are increased risks.

Throughout the years, I have also been privileged to develop

wise remain in storage, inaccessible to public view.

In addition, we open our home (FIGS. 1, 2) to tour groups whenever we can safely do so, and every year we honor many such requests from museums, colleges, and various other arts organizations. A typical group might consist of students (from Sotheby's Educational Studies Department, for example), young people just starting careers in the arts (interns from The Museum of Modern Art), art professionals (a docents' association), or contributing members and trustees (from such museums as the Davis Museum and Cultural Center at Wellesley College; the Neuberger Museum, State University of New York at Purchase; the Cincinnati Art Museum; the Dallas Museum of Art; the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art). Our home has also been open to curators and scholars who wish to view individual works of art for the purpose of study. When appropriate, I provide information

very close and long-standing relationships with such institutions as The Museum of Modern Art and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., to which I have given works of art in all media, and with the Cleveland Museum of Art, to which I have both given outright and lent a large number of works on a long-term basis. Such arrangements are mutually beneficial, as I am confident that these institutions provide these works with a degree of care that cannot be matched in my home. We are pleased that both institutions and individuals are willing to display objects from our collection that might other-

and transparencies they may need to complete exhibition catalogue entries, monographs, or articles.

Finally, when I buy a work of art, I often have in mind an institution that I believe would benefit from receiving it as a gift. Sometimes the new piece is offered immediately; other times we donate only a percentage of the picture so that we can still enjoy it a proportionate amount of time in our apartment.

As the collection has grown and broadened, we have increasingly faced some of the very same challenges as museums. One of these is keeping close track of the location of works of art. In a museum, the registrar, collection manager, or (in a small museum) perhaps even the curator will catalogue the works of art and routinely conduct inventories to ascertain their locations. Every museum has some system of cataloguing (most of which are now computerized) and a staff to keep it up-to-date. Although we do not have such broad support staff, we have had the assistance of Sonia Lopez and, presently, of Arabella Ogilvie-Makari. They have worked to catalogue, organize, and care for

the collection and have heightened my awareness of the issues surrounding collection management.

In the context of a private home, works of art may be misplaced. It happens that members of a household may be ignorant of an object's true nature and value. The collector may know the value of the art object, but children or staff may not. When this occurs, it is quite common for objects to become damaged or lost altogether. This can be the cause of amusing incidents, as well as more serious ones. I am reminded of the time Alice, my cleaning lady, unpacked Christo's *Nine Packed Bottles* (1965) and tossed out the cardboard carton. Fortunately, we were able to retrieve it with no harm done.

When it comes to the display of works, I have had to make more compromises than a museum might. As much as possible, I try to follow the artist's instructions regarding installation. For example, I purchased Tony Cragg's *Administered Landscape* (1994), a piece that is small in scale and fairly easy to install. It consists of several pieces of glass, and Tony provides very specific instructions as to how to place the pieces in relation to one another. Betty Woodman's *Balustrade Vase 953* (1988) is a wall piece that came with a drawn template. It was installed by professional art handlers, who followed the drawing meticulously. Jacqueline Winsor's *Inset Wall Piece with Stepped Interior* (1988–89) must be sunk into the wall. To accommo-

date the requirements of the sculpture, a hole was cut into the wall. A work by Dorothea Rockburne also required special modifications to our home—when preparing the wall, we had to remove a piece of molding, per the artist's instructions. A work by Mary Frank, *Woman* (1975) (FIG. 3), posed a very amusing challenge in this regard. This ceramic sculpture was supposed to sit on a platform containing sand. Our cats thought this was just the perfect litter box, and the sand had to be removed.

In some instances, I have not been able to display a work of art as the artist intended. For example, David Hammons's mixed-media wall piece *Cigarette Chandelier* (1995–96) includes cigarettes

mounted on wires. According to the artist, one should light the cigarettes and let the ash fall on the floor, where it would remain. When we hung the piece in our bedroom, this step was omitted, since displaying the ash would have been uncomfortable for us. Another example is Stephen Antonakos's *Golden Eikonostasio* (1996), a piece that includes neon light and a long cord. The artist installed it himself, but we agreed to leave the electrical cord visible rather than concealing it completely within the wall. Our living room walls are solid and load-bearing—not the dry-wall type of construction typical of art galleries or museum installations—and they do not allow for this type of modification.



**FIGURE 3**  
Mary Frank, *Woman*, 1975. Stoneware, 12 pieces;  
264.16 × 81.28 × 22.86 cm (104 × 32 × 9 in.).

The display of an untitled piece by Robert Irwin from 1969 proved particularly problematic. It is designed to cast shadows when illuminated in a manner determined by the artist. Unfortunately, my living room lacks the space that would allow us to illuminate the piece as specified, so we had to do an approximation. More seriously, the piece is white and has an ethereal quality that almost proved its undoing. A window washer failed to notice it and damaged it considerably.

This discussion brings to mind the case of two site-specific works that were installed on adjacent walls in our library and damaged by a bursting steam pipe. One of these works, Sol LeWitt's *Circle* (1977), had been drawn directly on the wall. This chalk drawing was literally washed off the wall by the water. Fortunately, like similar works by LeWitt, the piece is based on an "idea" described in a certificate provided by the artist and can be re-created at will. On the wall adjacent to the LeWitt was Richard Long's *River Avon Mud Circle* (1983), which was painted over when the room was restored. This work can also be re-created in a similar setting.

These two examples illustrate the complicated subject of conservation. Conservation poses

particular challenges to the collector, who does not benefit from an in-house conservation staff and internal structures designed to ensure the preservation of works of art. In a museum, works are routinely checked for condition by trained professionals. Potential problems are anticipated, and damage is averted or minimized. In a private home, there is little to prevent conservation problems from becoming serious. By the time the fading of a watercolor or a pastel is noticed, the image has been drastically and permanently altered. The damage done by acidic mats or improper framing will go undetected until the paper is badly discolored. Many paintings suffer from what conservators call "intrinsic vice." These are problems that result simply from the way in which the paintings were made. Artists may select to use unstable materials, such as the old types of Scotch tape or paint that is "stretched" with media, which will change over time.

As collectors, we have tried—with the expert help of The Museum of Modern Art's very fine conservation department—to anticipate problems before they happen. For example, a painting by Yayoi Kusama, *No. T.W. 3* (1961), was loosely stretched on a flimsy stretcher originally made by the artist herself. In addition, since Kusama experimented with different media and, in this case, mixed marble dust and wax into her paint, the surface was extremely brittle. Batting was, therefore, inserted

## Conservation poses particular challenges to the collector, who does not benefit from an in-house conservation staff and internal structures designed to ensure the preservation of works of art.

behind the canvas to absorb vibrations and prevent future cracking, and a rigid backboard was attached to the stretcher to stabilize the whole structure. The backboard also will protect the canvas from any pressure that is applied to the back of the painting, which could cause cracking. Finally, the work will be handled only in a traveling frame so that art handlers will not have to touch the work itself when it is transported.

There are other works in the collection suffering from "intrinsic vice" that are routinely monitored by conservators. In Robert Rauschenberg's *Rhyme* (1956), the paper adhered to the surface had deteriorated and required specialized treatment (provided

by Antoinette King, a noted paper conservator). We keep on file a letter from the conservator clearly stating that this picture cannot travel and therefore cannot be loaned. In Hans Hofmann's *Cathedral* (1959), the canvas is covered with a heavy impasto, which is lifting off the surface. In addition, the weight of the paint is causing the canvas to sag. This painting is monitored for further cracking and is checked periodically against the condition reports we have on file. Willem de Kooning's *The Time of*



*the Fire* (1956) (FIG. 2) suffers from the conservation problems that have typically developed in many of his works—that is, cracking and cleavage of paint and an unstable support. We hope to carefully monitor this work so it will never need to be relined, a method that could take the life out of de Kooning's vibrant paint.

A museum has access to conservators who are familiar with the best treatments and are highly sensitive to the ethical and aesthetic issues surrounding the restoration of works of art. A collector, though, is left to select his or her own conservator. The result may be a conservator who is not familiar with the best methods of care. Works of art can easily be damaged by amateurish restorations. A Robert Ryman piece, *Untitled* (1961), was recently restored with a great deal of thought by sophisticated museum conservators who knew how to respect the integrity of the work. The artist had created both the painting and the frame. The glazing on the frame was secured by a long strip of masking tape that had become brittle, leaving the glass in danger of falling off. Conservators had to replace the tape, but before doing so, they felt they should consult with the artist himself. A very experienced conservator will know which problems typically affect works by specific artists. The conservators we used were very familiar with the tape often employed by Ryman on his frames and knew the importance he attaches to its

appearance as an integral part of his work.

In a museum, conservators create the right physical environment for works of art. Exhibition galleries and storage spaces are monitored for humidity and temperature. Light is measured and kept at levels appropriate for the type of object on display. In a home, it is often hard to reconcile the needs of the human inhabitants with those of the artistic, but a caring collector tries to effect a workable compromise. He or she might use solar shades or various types of ultraviolet glazing on the windows. A conservator might be hired to assess the entire environment surrounding the collection—for example, to measure light and humidity levels throughout the collector's home. Sensitive works of art can be rotated within the collection to minimize exposure to light. We have hung Mark Rothko's *Two Greens with Red Stripe* (1964) only where the light levels are very low, since a Rothko will completely change color in direct sunlight. A Bourgeois marble sculpture, on the other hand, can be placed near the window. Even works of art designed to be displayed outdoors can suffer damage, though, such as the weather-induced changes in Claes Oldenburg's *Standing Mitt with Ball* (1973) (FIG. 4), currently on loan to the Storm King Art Center in Mountainville, New York, which restored the piece and ensures its routine maintenance.

Although private collectors often contract the same

art-handling and art-transport companies as museums to ship work, museums have the advantage of trained personnel on-site to handle the work once it arrives. Collectors are not as fortunate and frequently resort to moving objects (especially the smaller works) on their own or with the help of family and friends. Untrained handlers may not be as informed about stress points and can cause an item to break. Also, they may not protect the objects from the natural oils on their hands by using gloves or other protective materials. For example, Markus Baenziger's *Comforter* (1997), made of very brittle synthetic resin,

chipped when we underestimated its fragility and tried to move it ourselves. Fortunately, the artist has agreed to repair the piece himself and will vouch for its integrity once it is restored.

With regard to housekeeping, maintenance personnel in art institutions are trained to clean around the art, but the same training is not always available in the home environment. In a museum, the physical plant is often set up to minimize the amount of dust that enters into the rooms, but in a home it is not easy to maintain the same kind of standards. Windows and doors are opened and closed



**FIGURE 4**  
Claes Oldenburg, *Standing Mitt with Ball*, 1973.  
Steel and lead mitt, cypress wood ball. Mitt:  
3.66 × 2.33 × 1.52 m (12 × 8 × 5 ft.) overall; ball:  
91.44 cm (3 ft.) diameter.

frequently. Cleaning personnel must be informed of how to handle the works themselves. One cannot approach a framed print or photograph with a rag in one hand and a spray bottle of window cleaner in the other, as the liquid could easily seep between the frame and the glass and start causing trouble. Even a marble piece that might seem to be impermeable to damage should not be wiped down with a spray cleanser. One work that is a particular challenge is an intricate LeWitt sculpture, *21 A* (1989), which always seems dusty. It is taken down and cleaned by a conservator with a puttylike substance that is used like an eraser.

For the most part, artworks that are housed in a private setting have people moving around them without regular supervision. People are not always on their “best behavior,” that is, “in museum mode.” One resulting accident involved my daughter Anna, who had an unfortunate “run-in” with Ellsworth Kelly’s *White and Grey Panels* (1977). Fortunately, Kelly

himself restored this work. Other pieces that have been damaged inadvertently are a large Frank sculpture and Bourgeois’s *Pillar* (1949–50), which was chipped by construction workmen who were remodeling our house. As a result, I am always a little nervous when I see workmen with long ladders near Alexander Calder’s *The Glass Fish* (ca. 1955).

I should say that sometimes museums themselves are not immune from accidents—an example is David Salle’s *Hamlet’s Mind* (1990–91), which is on display at a major institution and suffered minor damage at the hands of an overly enthusiastic child on an educational gallery visit (the child was supposed to draw on his own project but decided instead to scribble on the painting). This damage was easily reversed through the fine effort of the museum’s paintings conservator.

Institutions and private collectors alike can commiserate on the problem of not having enough space to display all the works of art collected. Since all the works owned by either an institution or a collector cannot always be on view, storing them becomes a necessity. Finding adequate space, storing the works in a clean, dust-free setting, and using materials that are archivally safe are some of the problems that both groups need to address. Sometimes, to our chagrin, our home does not provide enough space to display certain works in our collection. I find that, in these cases, the best course

of action is to lend these pieces to institutions that are large enough to accommodate them. I recently purchased a piece by Puryear that could not be brought in either through the window, the elevators, or the staircases of our home.

I was fortunate that The Museum of Modern Art arranged for its display as a promised gift in its entrance lobby. For similar reasons, I also gave to the museum Winsor’s *Burnt Piece* (1988–89), which, at the time of this writing, is in a show of her sculpture at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in Queens, New York. Robert Rauschenberg’s *Corner Mirror with Coral* (1991), which also presents problems in a home setting, was another sculpture given to the museum. At least a dozen large works are on loan to the Cleveland Museum of Art for the same reason.

Finally, although I’m personally fond of artists, I am often happy when someone like Arshile Gorky cannot pass judgment on how I display his art (FIG. 1). I worry that works of art will not appear as prominently as the artist would wish, or will hang near an artist that he or she does not admire, or, worst of all, will be nowhere to be seen. In so many cases, we derive great pleasure not only from the works themselves, but also from subsequent thoughts of the artists who made them. For instance, it’s a real comfort to have Lichtenstein’s *Masterpiece* back from its travels, as it makes me remember him so fondly and with a smile. ■

## THE ARCHIVE OF TECHNIQUES AND WORKING MATERIALS USED BY CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

Erich Gantzert-Castrillo

Translated by Jeremy Gaines, Frankfurt am Main

This essay introduces the Archive of Techniques and Working Materials Used by Contemporary Artists<sup>1</sup> and describes how it came about, its goals, and its methods.

As chief conservator of the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, I have been in charge of the archive, which is an artists' archive, since the 1970s. Although the archive functions independently of the museum, the

daily routines are very similar, and the two institutions continually benefit from each other.

In 1968, I started work as an art conservator at the Museum Wiesbaden. The museum's collection included artwork from all eras—up to and including contemporary art—but there were large gaps of information regarding techniques and materials used by contemporary artists. Filling these gaps was fundamental to my work. I therefore devised various questionnaires—on painting, sculpture, objects, drawings, and prints, as

well as on art in public spaces—and sent them to artists from German-speaking countries. The 140 questionnaires that were completed were compiled and published in 1979 as the first volume of *Archiv für Techniken und Arbeitsmaterialien zeitgenössischer Künstler* (Archive of Techniques and Working Materials Used by Contemporary Artists).<sup>2</sup>

The costs of publishing the book were covered by a Wiesbaden art collector,<sup>3</sup> and the book went out of print in a relatively short time. To my great surprise, it was of predominant interest to artists, collectors, technical staff in related fields, art teachers, art historians, and nonprofessionals—although it had been intended primarily for conservators. With very few exceptions, interest among conservators was restrained; no doubt the reason was that, in 1979, museums and collectors had only just become interested in contemporary art, and a large number of restorers were not yet particularly affected by the problems posed by restoring such works. This has subsequently changed completely, given the increased volume of contemporary art collected by various museums, private collectors, and—of equal importance—large corporations. The number of exhibitions is also rising, bringing with it the growing potential for damage during transport. Restorers have gradually

come to realize the need for primary data and to recognize how valuable this data can be in finding solutions to the specific problems encountered in conserving and restoring contemporary art.

In subsequent years, I continued to collect information for a second volume but was not able to pursue the matter intensively due to my involvement with the Museum für Moderne Kunst. In 1996, the first volume was reprinted.<sup>4</sup> Since then I have continued to expand the archive with the assistance of my wife, Elisabeth Bushart, whose work as a conservator for private collections of contemporary art, such as the Deutsche Bank collection, is a meaningful supplement to the substance of my work.

---

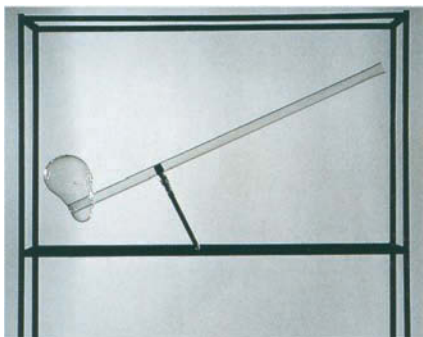
**Restorers have gradually come to realize the need for primary data and to recognize how valuable this data can be in finding solutions to the specific problems encountered in conserving and restoring contemporary art.**

1. The archive is run by Elisabeth Bushart, a freelance conservator based in Frankfurt am Main, and by the author. It is housed in Offenbach am Main.

2. E. Gantzert-Castrillo, ed., *Archiv für Techniken und Arbeitsmaterialien zeitgenössischer Künstler*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Hartekin Art, 1979).

3. Michael Berger, of Wiesbaden, Germany, is an art collector and art editor.

4. E. Gantzert-Castrillo, ed., *Archiv für Techniken und Arbeitsmaterialien zeitgenössischer Künstler*, vol. 1 (1979; reprint, Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1996).



**FIGURE 1**  
Heiner Blum, *Untitled, Blower #5*, 1955. Glass, steel  
fixture; 15 × 80 × 11 cm (5¾ × 33½ × 4¼ in.).



**FIGURE 2**  
Helmut Dorner, *Japan*, 1997. Enamel, oil on Plexiglas,  
49 × 92 × 7 cm (19¼ × 36½ × 2¾ in.).

We run the archive in our free time and, thus far, at our own expense. We have received outside financial support from an art collector and, most recently, from the Cultural Foundation of the State of Hessen (Kulturstiftung Hessen), whose funding has enabled us to expand our range of computer

5. For more information, see: ><http://www.frankfurt-business.de/mmk><.

6. FileMakerPro 3.0 is produced by Claris. We use Claris FileMakerPro Version 4.0 on a Power Macintosh G3 (FileMakerPro 4.0 is also available for Windows). See also E. Gantzert-Castrillo, "Development of a Registration System in the Museum of Modern Art in Frankfurt," paper presented at the symposium "Modern Art: Who Cares?" Amsterdam, 8–10 September 1997, and forthcoming in *Modern Art: Who Cares?* (Amsterdam: Netherlands Institute of Cultural Heritage and the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art).

equipment. We have opted, when recording information on techniques and materials, to confine ourselves to a small number of artists; however, we attempt to record the full range of their artistic activity.

These artists all occupy a special position in terms of their respective artistic approach and their choice of techniques and materials. They include sculptors and other artists who work in three-dimensional media, painters, photographers, video, and installation artists. They make use of materials and media such as wood, paper, paint, milk, rice, pollen, wax, plaster, stone, glass, metal, plastics, photos, slides, videos, and computers. Figures 1–5 illustrate pieces by various artists whose works we have included in the archive, showing the materials and techniques they employ.

Unlike the Museum für Moderne Kunst's approach to gathering data on artists and their individual

works from the collection,<sup>5</sup> the archive's intent is to compile information on the entire oeuvre of an artist and to constantly expand and update the data. We have developed a program using FileMakerPro 3.0<sup>6</sup> that manages and updates the data; a data record is set up for each artwork or work group the artist has produced and is accessed by several masks (or fields or dialogue boxes). The following data are contained in each field: first and foremost, basic information on the genre (paintings, drawings or prints, photographs, sculptures or other three-dimensional or relief objects, installations, computer-generated works of art); artist, title, and (whenever applicable) the respective work group or part of a work group, as well as the date and measurements; number of parts, edition, publishers, location, and collection; references (catalogue, etc.); illustrations; information on techniques and materials; questions regarding materials, techniques,

products, firms, craft workshops; and, finally, substantive questions. Some of these questions are of a general nature. We do, however, adapt them so that they are relevant to the individual artists insofar as materials, techniques, and artistic concepts are concerned.

Examples of general questions are:

- Describe any particularly negative or positive experiences you have had to date with the materials and techniques you employ.
- To what extent do you work with specialists and other workshops/businesses? What is the nature of the collaboration?
- Describe any particularly negative or favorable experiences you have had to date with specialists and other workshops/businesses.
- To what extent do you employ assistants? What is the nature of the collaboration?

Examples of questions of an individual nature are:

- Do you accept copies being made of your work for exhibition purposes and, if so, what is the procedure insofar as these copies are concerned at the end of the exhibition?
- Would you allow your works or parts of them to be reproduced in the event they are totally destroyed?
- Would you accept mechanical or electronic replacements if your equipment were to fail completely and, if so, what should the procedure be?





**FIGURE 3**  
Asta Grötting, *Affentanz II (Ape Dance)*, 1992. Seven leather jackets, steel fixture; 65 × 50 × 340 cm (25 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 19 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 133 $\frac{1}{4}$  in.).



**FIGURE 4**  
Asta Grötting, *Löcher mit Löchern stopfen (Melding Holes with Holes)*, 1992. Seven ceramic plates, platinum; diameter: 103 cm (40 $\frac{1}{2}$  in.), height: 72 cm (28 $\frac{1}{2}$  in.).



**FIGURE 5**  
Tobias Rehberger, Detail, *Smoking, listening, for himself—I care about you because you do*, 1996. Five pieces, rubber, foam, wood, MDF laminate with plastic, two loudspeakers; 260 × 390 cm (102 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 153 $\frac{1}{2}$  in.).

- What are your views on possible changes to the quality of a video as a result of using new visual storage media or new types of data carrier, or switching from analog to digital technology? What do you feel about the changes that are bound to occur when you use newer projectors and monitors? Do you see this as beneficial or detrimental to your work?
- How would you define the term “original” in relation to a video?
- How would you define the term “original” in relation to a video installation?
- To what extent can you accept the aging processes inherent in the materials you use—e.g., the fact that varnish, paint, paper, fabric, wax, etc., will start to fade, yellow, or become brittle over time? What are your views on the fact that paintings may start to rip under tension, that paint or varnish may develop cracks, or that the materials themselves will start to shrink or fade?

- What is your definition of damage?
- What is your definition of soiled?
- What is your definition of patina?
- In your opinion, how far should conservation work be taken?
- In your opinion, how far should restoration work be taken?
- Do you wish to be informed should damage occur?
- Do you wish to be provided with details concerning restoration concepts?
- Would you like to become involved in devising a conservation or restoration concept?
- Do you wish to be informed on the conservation and restoration work performed?

The latter series of questions is particularly important in that, in the domain of art, our society has great difficulties in accepting soiled work, patina, and any changes to a work’s original appearance.

In additional fields, we indicate, among other things, the

forms the aging takes and types of damage, a list of illustrations of the work in question, and film and video documentation. We list photographic documentation using different categories — such as work process, studio setting, and transport situation.

The last field enumerates literature: books and essays on the topic or artwork in question that contain hints on specific conservation or exhibition issues; manufacturers’ information on materials; and, above all, statements by the artist, his or her assistants, gallery owners, and collectors, along with quotations by family members, friends, curators, and conservators.

We have known the artists represented in our archive for many years now. The major prerequisite for fruitful collaboration is mutual trust. In the eyes of many artists, the conservator is a critic when it comes to technical issues, and this can prompt rejection. Moreover, artists are sometimes afraid of

revealing information on their work to fellow artists. It is sometimes difficult to overcome such hurdles.

The sets of questions we ask are the product of our work with the art itself. Together with artists and with the assistance of existing catalogues and artists’ archives, we develop the specific questions and compile the data records on the respective works. These files are then sent to the respective artist, who is then free to change them as he or she sees fit. The way the questions are answered can differ. There are artists who prefer an interview format; others wish to

7. E. Gantzert-Castrillo, “On the Gradual Disappearance of the Original: How Durable Is Video Art? Contributions to Preservation and Restoration of the Audiovisual Works of Art” in “Wie haltbar ist Videokunst? / How Durable Is Video Art?” symposium at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 25 November 1995 (Wolfsburg, Germany: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 1997), 49–60.



take their time and prefer to answer in writing. Whatever the case, it is a highly time-intensive process.

Different artists' views on this subject can be widely divergent. Reiner Ruthenbeck, for example, offered fundamental views on restoring or renovating his objects:

In most of my creations, the underlying idea is the most important aspect of the object (with a number of exceptions, in particular my less recent sculptures dating from around 1970, and of course my drawings and collages). Because their structure is simple, most of my objects can be restored without any major problems occurring. However, for this very reason a high degree of accuracy is required, since any small changes to the basic structure of the work could possibly falsify it. Treatment of surfaces: painted wood and metal parts; be sure to apply a neutral paint(!), either with a roller or use spray paint. Semi-matte or matte silk finish. Never use gloss paint! Do not use paint that

leaves a texture! The surface must be completely smooth! Any soiling or damage should be treated immediately, or the work should be repainted. I wish the occurrence of any patina to be avoided, since this produces the kind of artistic effects I wish to avoid! (I am a sculptor, not a painter.)<sup>8</sup>

The material used for Ruthenbeck's *Verspannung II* (1969), consisting of two loose iron plates and a ring of fabric dyed red, had become very yellowed. Ruthenbeck said that he could not accept this state of affairs and that he wanted a new fabric ring to be made. We complied with his request and produced a new piece of material. It was not easy to find a material that matched the old one in color and texture. The "original"—that is, the first ring of material—is now in storage.

In another example, Katharina Fritsch used a bleached, printed cotton tablecloth in her *Company at Table* (1998), which is made of polyester, wood, cotton, and paint. These are Fritsch's comments regarding whether the tablecloth should be, or could be, replaced should disturbing signs of aging become visible:

Of course things are beautiful when they are brand new; and of course I want the work to look new, radiating newness. I am torn on this issue, but I must accept the aging process, just as people must accept that

they grow old. I really do not know how the tablecloth could be renewed, or what impact that would have on the overall appearance of the work. We cannot continually conduct cosmetic surgery to ensure that it looks like a woman after countless facelifts. We cannot deny that things age. What is important is how they are treated, [if]... there [has] been due care and diligence: the atmospheric conditions must be guaranteed in which the artwork does not sustain damage.<sup>9</sup>

The artists with whom we have established links are in great demand in the art world, and we sometimes have a difficult time fighting our way up the list of priorities. The attitude of an artist can initially be one of distance; yet again, on occasion we are greeted with open arms. In general, it is fair to say that today's artists are more open-minded when it comes to issues of conservation and restoration. There may be various reasons for this. For them, contact with conservators can be a source of invaluable assistance in their work. They may have had difficulties using one or another material or technique. They know how annoying transportation- and exhibition-related damage is, and they are acquainted with the problems that may arise among museums, collectors, and conservators.

In the 1970s, when I started collecting information for the ar-

chive, I encountered stiff resistance and strong reservations, particularly among younger artists, regarding archiving the information. This mood was influenced by the ideological divisions of the late 1960s and also by a rejection of the notion of society preserving specific values for posterity, of the idea that artworks were immortal and should be housed in museums. I came across such reservations less among older artists. Artists have tended, meanwhile, to become more open-minded with reference to such archives. And the role of the artist as a producer within the current consumer society has also changed. Artists are now fielding an increasing number of questions on the durability of artworks and they are expected to provide answers to them.

In the course of time, we have ascertained that, alongside compiling information on materials and techniques, the section of our archival work devoted to authentic statements by the artists on substantive issues is becoming increasingly important. These statements are of inestimable value for our daily work and are a key factor in continuing with our work. Published in book format, they potentially reach a wider circle of interested persons. And this circle, it bears mentioning, is of key importance in forming opinions and in expanding an awareness of the specific problems of conservation and restoration work involving Modern and contemporary art. ■

8. *Archive of Techniques and Working Materials Used by Contemporary Artists*, Reiner Ruthenbeck entry, unnumbered. Reprinted by permission of the artist.

9. *Archive of Techniques and Working Materials Used by Contemporary Artists*, Katharina Fritsch entry, unnumbered. Reprinted by permission of the artist.

## THE SURVIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART: THE ROLE OF THE CONSERVATION PROFESSIONAL IN THIS DELICATE ECOSYSTEM

Debra Hess Norris

The primary objective of all conservation professionals is the preservation of cultural property. Our actions must be dictated by an informed respect for the unique significance of the cultural property entrusted to our care. At all times, we must serve as advocates of these materials, working to ensure within a complex and delicate ecosystem—as illustrated in Figure 1—their long-term preservation and appropriate use.

These challenges of preservation and advocacy are especially

difficult for those conservators faced with the conservation of contemporary art. These individuals are often responsible for the care of and access to highly ephemeral and nontraditional materials that may be inherently unstable. They must, therefore, focus their activities on understanding the physical, chemical, and ethical factors—the ecological niche—that an object of contemporary art may require to survive.

### Ethical Code

While there are no universally accepted methods and criteria that exist for the conservators of non-traditional or contemporary art, all conservators adhere to an ethi-

cal code and set of standards. Conservation ethics are not culturally or historically based—they are universal; therefore, ethics developed for the care and preservation of the traditional arts should and must apply to Modern and contemporary art as well. In the United States, the tenets of our profession are defined by the *Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC)*.<sup>1</sup> Similar codes guide conservation professionals internationally.

The AIC's ethical code is a commitment in policy that guides daily decisions and actions of conservation professionals to foster

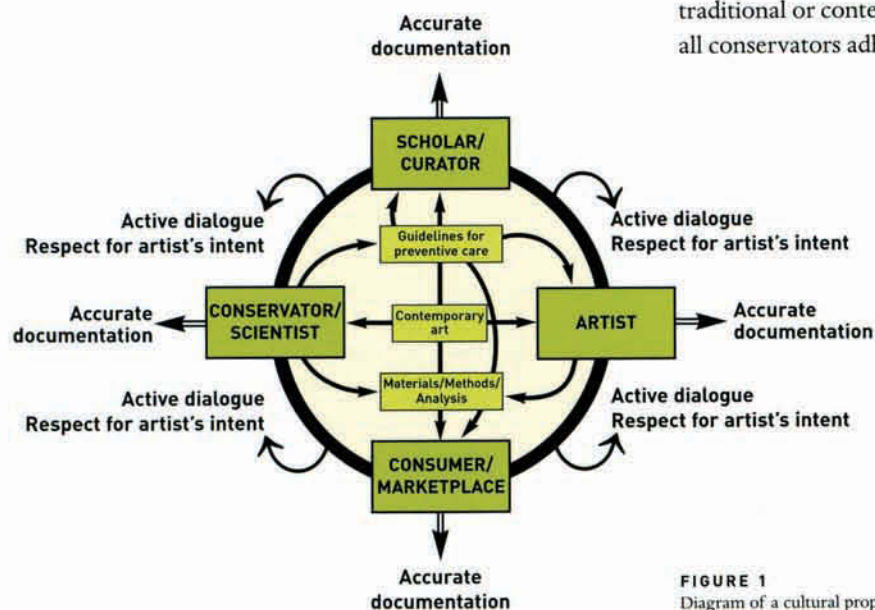


FIGURE 1  
Diagram of a cultural property ecosystem.

1. A copy of this document is available from the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 1717 K Street, N.W., Suite 301, Washington, D.C. 20006.

# Everything is connected and intermingled with everything else; we are all in it together.

2. For an in-depth discussion of the importance of dialogue between the conservator and curator, see Albert Albano, "Art in Transition" in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, ed. Nicholas Stanley Price, M. Kirby Talley Jr., and Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1996), 176–84; Sue Murphy, "The Dilemma of the Dialogue: Joint Decision-making by Curators and Conservators" in *"Modern Works, Modern Problems?" Conference Papers* (London: The Institute of Paper Conservation, 1994); and Marina Raymakers and Jaap Mosk, eds., *Project Conservation of Modern Art: Proceedings of the Presentation of the Project on 12 May 1996* (Amsterdam: Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art, 1996).

3. For additional reading, see John P. McElhone, "Determining Responsible Display Conditions for Photographs" in *The Imperfect Image: Photographs—Their Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Ian and Angela Moor (London: Centre for Photographic Conservation, 1992), 193–201; and Henry Wilhelm, *The Preservation and Care of Color Photographs* (Grinnell, Iowa: Preservation Publishing, 1993).

excellence and public confidence. The principles set forth in this document ensure that conservators assume specific obligations to cultural property, to its owners and custodians and creators, to the conservation profession, and to society as a whole. The code requires conservation professionals to practice within the limits of personal competence and education and to recognize the specialized knowledge of others. It also repeatedly promotes the value and importance of shared decision making and realistic expectations.

In addressing the challenges of contemporary art, a practical approach with achievable goals is paramount. In a desire to preserve what may, indeed, be ephemeral, conservation professionals must ensure that they do not foster or promote expectations that cannot be met. Likewise, conservators must work to form professional and public partnerships; our ethical charge must be universal. Museum professionals, dealers, collectors, and the public must also be accountable.

## Collaboration and Communication

Continued collaboration between artists, curators, archivists, scientists, manufacturers, and collectors—the living community of this precarious ecosystem—is essential. In doing so, we must actively and productively share the methodologies, strategies, philosophies, and ethical constructs that guide our work and the responsibility to create, interpret, document, and preserve the often inherently ephemeral media used by contemporary artists.

A delicate balance may exist between object preservation and access. Conservators, curators, collectors, and artists must confer to determine the unique needs for each object. Some access, such as excessive exhibition practices, is destructive. Access must, therefore, be respectful and well informed.<sup>2</sup>

For example, there are many serious concerns associated with the exhibition of contemporary photographic print materials.<sup>3</sup> The risks of temperature extremes, cycling relative humidity levels, poor handling practices, potential accidents, exposure to environmental pollutants, and vandalism must always be carefully controlled and mitigated. In discussing exhibition-related damage, we

must recognize that continued exposure to both visible and ultraviolet light will irreversibly damage photographic materials. This damage is cumulative. With contemporary color works, the absorption of visible light and ultraviolet radiation by image-forming dye molecules causes them to break down into colorless compounds and/or stained products that are yellow in color. This formation of low-level staining is most visible in the high-lights. The rate of light fading is specific to each type of color print and is a direct function of the spectral distribution and intensity of the illumination, as well as the duration of exposure. For any given product, the cyan, magenta, and yellow image-forming dyes each have different fading characteristics, and this results in progressive changes in color balance. For example, dye diffusion and dye-diffusion-transfer processes (referred to as instant color photography) have relatively poor light stability. Likewise, thermal dye-transfer processes made from digital desktop thermal printers often have very poor light stability.

Irreplaceable photographic materials must be exhibited under carefully specified and controlled environmental conditions and densitometrically monitored, wherever possible. All photographs are affected by exhibition. The question is not if changes are occurring, but rather at what rate and how much.

In the care and preservation of contemporary art, an interdisciplinary approach is essential. Strong interpersonal and communication skills, honesty, mutual trust, and respect—a spirit of teamwork—may ensure that shared decision making prospers. Clearly delineated policies and procedures will encourage efficient and productive dialogue. We cannot practice in secrecy. If, indeed, this is an ecosystem, then perhaps the second law of ecology—the law of interdependence—applies here: Everything is connected and intermingled with everything else; we are all in it together.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Artist's Intent

The determination and identification of an artist's aesthetic choice and intent is a difficult but important task for the curators and conservators entrusted with the interpretation and preservation of contemporary works of art. Artists' intentions must be represented to the best of the conservation professional's knowledge. Many contemporary artists have developed a personal view toward change and aging in their work, preferring them to long-term

stability. What constitutes "acceptable" change may differ greatly. In some cases, tape stains, adhesive residues, faded images, oil halos, and other physical evidence of working technique are acceptable to artists, whereas structural changes and problems that directly affect presentation may be considered troublesome.

While some artists may consider change to be a part of their work, others have simply learned to accept the eventual change and deterioration that occurs. Not all contemporary art will survive, nor is it intended to.

#### Artists' Rights Laws

Conservation professionals must be cognizant of ethical and moral issues and those laws and regulations concerning the rights of artists and their estates.

#### Documentation

Unfortunately, in many cases, we lack basic but highly relevant information concerning an artist's working methods and materials. To ensure the long-term preservation of contemporary and Modern

art, accurate documentation is vital. Wherever possible, this information must be gathered by speaking with the artist. It may be best collected at the point of acquisition and should include a record of the artist's vision for the work over the next fifty years. Installation pieces, for example, require complete notes (often using photography and, at times, video) that carefully record materials, installation procedures, spatial relationships, and intent. Without this, intent would be lost and the piece would change dramatically from installation to installation.

The conservation professional must work to ensure that this information is recorded in as permanent a manner as possible. Issues relating to the instability of digital works, xerography, color photography, and video must be considered and accounted for. In doing so, provisions for cool or cold storage and processes for digital migration may be recommended.

This information must be also shared with the profession. Efforts must be made, for example, to ensure that exhibition catalogues

include substantive information on an artist's working techniques, methods, and intent. In doing so, this information may be most appropriately placed within a context of time and environment.

#### Methods and Materials

Scientific analyses and sophisticated examination techniques may be utilized to assist in the identification and characterization of deteriorated cultural artifacts. These techniques are often essential to ensure a clear and accurate understanding of artists' materials and methods. Unfortunately, there is a lack of information pertaining to the nature and extent of use of many modern materials. The identification and characterization of synthetic materials is often particularly difficult. Industrial information on technology and degradation process may be proclaimed proprietary and, as a result, not disseminated or shared. While artists are often very willing

---

**Not all contemporary art will survive,  
nor is it intended to.**

4. G. Tyler Miller, *Environmental Science Sustaining the Earth* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1991), frontispiece.

to provide details about the materials they may have used, they have often been given secondhand information that may be lacking in detail or accuracy.

In safeguarding future works of art, conservation professionals must continue to work with practicing artists to ensure that they are aware of stability and permanence issues and make informed choices about the materials they use.

#### Conservation Treatment

In prescribing conservation treatment and developing preventive care measures for Modern and contemporary art, conservation professionals must proceed with utmost caution. Conservators must never isolate the artists from their work and must always proceed with a strong foundation of information and knowledge. Collaborative efforts will often strengthen all decisions. Active dialogue among conservator, curator, and artist is essential to expand technical knowledge and to better articulate intent.

Treatments, as required (and there are many times when such intervention is appropriate and necessary), must be judged suitable to the preservation of the aesthetic, conceptual, and physical characteristics of the work of art. Conservation-treatment decisions must be made in context of a thor-

ough understanding of the work of art. These treatments are most typically noninvasive and remedial in nature. In the case of contemporary art, they often represent the first time an object has been touched by a conservator. These decisions and interventions taken will have long-term consequences. Conservation professionals readily recognize and appreciate the first law of ecology, or the principle of ecological backlash: In nature we can never do just one thing; everything we do creates effects that are often unpredictable.<sup>5</sup>

#### Preventive Conservation

Within a traditional ecosystem, there is typically one single or limiting factor—temperature, salinity, or atmospheric condition—that will directly influence survival. With contemporary art, these factors are limitless. The conservation professional must endeavor to limit danger or deterioration to contemporary work by providing guidelines for appropriate environmental conditions for storage; encouraging proper procedures for handling, packing, and transport; and ensuring careful exhibition practices.

As with traditional ecosystems, we must ascertain the *range of tolerance*—that is, the optimum range of values within which contemporary art can survive most efficiently. We must also acknowledge and accept that, in some cases, contemporary art will not last, no matter how these factors are controlled or manipulated.

#### Conclusion

There are many issues involved in the preservation of contemporary works of art that merit our careful attention: the artist's integrity and rights, suitability for treatment, preventive-care alternatives, interdisciplinary and collaborative approach, preservation versus access, and availability of documented information pertaining to methods and materials.

While we cannot expect to reduce the dangers to contemporary art completely, dialogue between artists, collectors, curators, scientists, manufacturers, administrators, lawyers, conservators, politicians, the press, and the public will greatly and significantly reduce these risks. Active, honest, persistent, and open communication—*not* dictation—is essential, for it is precisely this interdependence that defines the ecosystem and ensures its long-term viability.

Finally, we must work to ensure the continuity of this ecosystem. It is our collective responsibility to supervise, teach, mentor, encourage, and inspire current and future students of conservation, studio art, art history, museum studies, science, law, and business, to practice within our respective professions and, in doing so, to create, interpret, collect, and preserve this contemporary legacy.

In sharing our passion and love for these materials, we may ensure the preservation of this contemporary material culture and its memory for future generations. ■

5. Miller, *Environmental Science*, frontispiece.



## INTENTIONALITY AND PERFORMANCE-BASED ART

Paul Schimmel

Today, more than during any other period of art, the individuals responsible for preserving and conserving art should show great initiative in the preservation, remaking, and safe storage of contemporary artworks, for it seems that their remarkable histories are often lost within years of their making. This is particularly true for works by artists who create environments, installations, and performances—and whose contributions to the history of art should be fully documented.

The exhibition *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979* at The Geffen Contemporary at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, February 8–May 10, 1998, brought together artists of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s whose works were influenced by performance actions. An international survey representing action-based art from the United States, South America, Europe, and Japan, the exhibition explored the activity of postwar artists who directly related process and performance to the subject of their work. Paintings, sculptures, objects, installations, and documentation resulted from the performance work of these artists, who made indistinguishable the line between action, performance,

and a work of art. In many cases, the objects themselves were imbued with the performances that made them, as the goal of making art shifted from the production of objects to the process of creation.

As an art historian and the curator of this exhibition, I knew I was entering into questionable territory involving remaking the works and bringing back the elements—or parts and pieces of larger assemblages—in order to recapture the artists' intent. Once the exhibition was installed, I realized that it looked somewhat different than I had imagined—that, in fact, it was an exploration, to use an “ethnographic” term, into the material culture of the contemporary performative society.

The term “material culture” is appropriate because, like the collectibles in old curio cabinets, things made by people still have great power. As much as we may record artists' actions through digitization and photography and other forms of documentation, I think we are compelled primarily

## As curators and conservators, we are in the business of preserving not only the works of art, but also their legends. We have a responsibility not only to fix the works, but also to capture the personalities that created them.

by a love of the object itself and its power to express the emotion and thinking of its maker—whether the object is only a trace of the action that produced it, a remnant of the work it once was, or a kind of cultural relic. I preferred, when planning the exhibition, to see a piece of the true cross than nothing at all.

It is important to capture, take hold of, try to fix, and somehow preserve the intentionality of the artist. It is not just a question of the artist making something and the curator or the collector interpreting it. Artists have a tendency to change their opinions about a work; they want to redo things. This is something that requires a shared responsibility. It is absolutely essential that we respect the original intentions of the artist but that we do not let those intentions cause us to dismiss work that is not one hundred percent complete. In this sense, a fragment that contains some essence of the artist's intent is important. As curators and conservators, we are in the busi-

ness of preserving not only the works of art, but also their legends. We have a responsibility not only to fix the works, but also to capture the personalities that created them.

In 1956, Saburo Murakami made *Breaking through Many Screens of Paper*, one of a series of performance-based works in which the artist hurled himself through picture planes and environments, dramatically rupturing them. Associated with the Gutai, a group of artists in postwar Japan who explored the relationship between artist and action,<sup>1</sup> Murakami divided his creative efforts between such performative activities and his paintings, the latter earning him the reputation as an artist equal to Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. Murakami never sold one of these actions; instead, he chose opportunities to remake these works for each exhibition.

In 1995, I visited Murakami to ask him to participate in the *Out of Actions* exhibition. I thought that his *Entrance*, an action he had done

for the *First Gutai Art Exhibition* in October 1955 in Tokyo, would be an important vehicle for the viewer upon entering the exhibition. For this action, which draws on the traditions of Japanese screens and martial arts, the artist jumps through a gold-coated piece of heavy craftlike paper in one violent action. With *Entrance*, visitors to the exhibition would also break through the picture plane and, I felt, experience the essence of performance-based art and the relationship between the maker and the work of art—that is, that the work of art was just the moment that the artist's action captured. Murakami agreed to my request, but an important problem developed—the artist, unfortunately, passed away. Although the specifications for his actions were so precise that others could perform them, I was very concerned, given the importance of this work to the exhibition, that it could not be remade. After many discussions, Murakami's widow chose to allow the work to be remade with the same materials by someone who had worked with Murakami in the past. I found this troubling, yet I accepted because I felt that it was the artist's wish that this action would live beyond the object; that, in his life, Murakami had chosen never to make this work a fixed object; and that it was important to honor his intentions always to

1. The Gutai Art Association (*Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai*, also called "the Gutai") was founded in Ashiya, Japan, near Osaka, in 1954. For more on this subject, see Shinichiro Osaki, "Body and Place: Action in Postwar Art in Japan," trans. Tomoko Matsutani, in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art/ New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 121–57.

have the work made afresh in new situations. What will happen, however, when his widow dies? Who will make these decisions in the future? Will she decide to sell it as an action to an institution and allow this institution the choice of remaking such pieces in the future?

Another work by Murakami featured in the exhibition was *Work* (during the 1950s in Japan, the Gutai artists called their art “works”), also informally known as *Peeling Off Painting* (1957) (FIG. 1), which seems to be a very apt description. There are fewer than five works of this ilk by Murakami. Figure 1 illustrates the largest example of the *Peeling Off* paintings. Although I had requested this piece for the exhibition, I imagined it would be very difficult to get, as it is very delicate. When it arrived in Los Angeles, the conservator who had traveled with it was anxiously awaiting the opening of the crate to see if the very large pieces on the left side of the painting had actually fallen off; they were still there. I asked her, “Why did you lend it? It’s such an incredibly fragile piece.” She replied, “It is called *Peeling Off Painting*. And that was [Murakami’s] intention.” I thought that was a remarkable statement for a conservator to make and was amazed that she would allow the wishes of the artist to supersede her knowledge that eventual destruction would occur to this work of art.



Another Gutai artist, Atsuko Tanaka, made her first *Electric Dress* in 1956. Under her supervision, it was remade for an exhibition in 1985. She changed some aspects of the piece. Most important, she no longer wears it. Yet, she felt that the remade work, with its new bulbs and computer-controlled light system, was more important as a representation of what she had in mind than just representing the work through photographs. Tanaka has followed this work around the world in many exhibitions and has taken great satisfaction in how it anticipated the great interest in the body as a subject in the art of the 1980s and 1990s.

The installation/performance of Allan Kaprow’s *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts* (1959) at the Mark Reuben Gallery in New York was the first time the word “Happening” was associated with an exhibition. Happenings were performances that followed unconventional narratives, typically invited audience participation, and were characterized by a strong visual dimension. Kaprow is someone who believes very strongly that you cannot redo things, you cannot make them again. So I found it very interesting, even ironic, that he saved all the panels that were used in this installation and sold them to a collector with instructions on

**FIGURE 1**  
Saburo Murakami, *Peeling Off Painting*, 1957. Mixed media on board, 93 × 184.5 cm (36¼ × 72¾ in.).





**FIGURE 2**  
Allan Kaprow, *Yard*, 1961/1998 (above left).  
Installation view of re-creation at The Geffen Contemporary at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in the exhibition *Out of Actions*. Used automobile tires and other media; dimensions variable. Collection Feelisch, Remscheid, Germany.

**FIGURE 3**  
Ben Vautier, *Ben's Window*, 1962/1998 (above right).  
Installation view of re-creation at The Geffen Contemporary at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in the exhibition *Out of Actions*. Mixed media, 318.77 × 453.39 × 274.32 cm (125½ × 178½ × 108 in.). Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund with additional funds from Lila and Gilbert Silverman, 1993.



how to maintain them—for example, one would reuse asphalt and leaves for the panels on the work's left-hand side.

I discussed with Kaprow his participation in the exhibition; it was his work *Yard* (1961), originally made for the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York, that I most wanted to re-create. When the piece was first done, stacks of tires covered some beautiful bronze sculptures in the back of the gallery. Over the years, Kaprow has done many different versions of this piece. The one made prior to the Los Angeles exhibition—which he made in Italy—looked like a car repair shop. It had jacks and tires all lined up on the wall and a car in the middle and seemed to have

very little to do with Kaprow's original intention. With much discussion and a great deal of struggle, I convinced him to make a piece that I think also has only a passing resemblance to his original intention. Instead of duplicating the Martha Jackson Gallery installation in some other artificial form, Kaprow divided the center of a caged area, rather than the backyard of a townhouse, with walls of tires that one would have to climb over (FIG. 2).

*Ben's Window* (FIG. 3) is a remake of an original installation by Ben Vautier, who had been invited by the artist Daniel Spoerri to produce an exhibition as part of the Festival of Misfits held at Gallery One in London in 1962. An artist associated with the Fluxus movement (coined from the word “flux,” defined as a continuous shifting process),<sup>2</sup> Vautier's response was to live in the gallery, installing

himself as a fixture in the window. With very few of the original objects, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis made a bold move to remake this work as part of its Fluxus exhibition in 1993. Despite incorporating very few of the original elements, I feel that the remake carries much of the artist's original intentions, and I see both the pleasure and understanding that viewers get from this piece. Remaking the work brought it back to life, despite the questions raised in regard to the original work's viability.

Gustav Metzger was well known for his writings on the beauty and creativity of destruction. For his actions, he sprayed acid onto nylon, which resulted in

2. Owen F. Smith, “Fluxus: A Brief History” in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, exhibition catalogue (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993), 24; quoted in Paul Schimmel, “Leap into the Void: Performance and the Object,” in *Out of Actions*, 75.

the creation of abstract patterns as the nylon dissolved. For The Museum of Contemporary Art's exhibition, Metzger remade *South Bank Demo* for the first time since its installation in 1961. When he came to Los Angeles, he re-created the piece in a manner that was consistent with the materials he had formerly used, although the acid was not as strong as the type he had employed previously (FIG. 4).

There is an irony in an artist producing art for destruction that we endeavor to save some thirty years later. For example, Raphael Montañez Ortiz, who cultivated the idea of destruction as a creative psychological and physical process, re-created his *Piano Destruction Concert* (1966) for the exhibition. When he makes these ritual destructions today, as Metzger explained to me, it sounds less like Beethoven and more like Mozart. In other words, Ortiz has become a little more refined. He, too, would like to have his work preserved and is helping it to enter into The Museum of Contemporary Art's collection.

John Latham, whose sculptures, assemblages, and actions are produced from books—or *scoobs* ("books" spelled backward)—has been re-creating his *Skoob Towers* since 1964. He arrives at a particular location, sets up skyscraper-like towers of new books that are appropriate to the site, burns them,

and then chooses a remnant to represent the action in future exhibitions.

In the case of Fluxus artist Nam June Paik's remaking of *Zen for Head* (1962), the conservator from the Museum Wiesbaden who accompanied the piece to Los Angeles was at a loss as to how to install it. Based on a 1960 composition by La Monte Young, Paik's interpretation of the score "Draw a straight line and follow it" involved "inking the top of his head and using it to brush a line onto a piece of scroll-like paper."<sup>3</sup> It took several days of discussion before the conservator knew how to mount and handle the piece. We were not certain whether the piece should be seen on the floor or on the wall. Often, just the simplest of instructions are necessary.



**FIGURE 4**  
Gustav Metzger, *South Bank Demo*, 1961/1998. Installation view of re-creation at The Geffen Contemporary at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in the exhibition *Out of Actions*. Metal, nylon, and acid; approx. 1.52 × 2.44 m (5 × 8 ft.).

Joseph Beuys's *Ausfegen* (1972) did not enter an exhibition case until 1985. It contains all the sweepings from a performance he had done in Berlin, which his dealer, René Block, had kept. It was not until later, when Beuys was having a series of cases made for an exhibition in London, that he participated in putting these objects into a case. This presented a particularly thorny issue, because when, in the late 1960s, Beuys elected to make his first cases holding objects, there was a backlash among a number of artists because of the commercial implications of such a move. Instead of widely dispersing the work, he elected to sell much

3. Paul Schimmel, *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art), 71.



of the material to a collector-institution in Darmstadt, Germany, where the vast majority of his performative objects are held today. In some ways, Beuys's concern about how the art world would perceive the sale of these objects made it very difficult for future curators, such as myself, to borrow these works because they are all held in a single institution that will never let the works travel.

Some works, including those by Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica, are meant to be worn and used; this is central to how the artist perceives the work entering into the public domain. Each example in Oiticica's series of capes, such as *Parangolé P22 (Cape 18) Nirvana* (1968), had a different character and structure that was veiled and unveiled during the action. In certain exhibitions where there have been great demands for Oiticica's work because of its popularity, the pieces have not been allowed to be used in a manner consistent with the artist's wishes. This is also true for another Brazilian artist, Lygia Clark, whose sensorial masks function only when you put them on, allowing you to smell, hear, and see differently.

It has been estimated that 70 to 80 percent of the Italian paintings made five to seven hundred years ago have disappeared.<sup>4</sup> I find it extraordinary that so many of them are still here. I think, however, that the vast majority of works made today are lost in the first ten years, and that we may do too much for far too few pieces. The problem of a neglected or overlooked artist is far more significant than the material breakdown of an object. There are vast numbers of important works that never enter into collections, never go to museums, are never handled by dealers, and are lost in a manner that makes it impossible to reconstruct an accurate history of art. In some matters, conservators should focus more on stabilization and conservation, at least for the first decade or so. We, as curators and conservators, should be activists and try to put all of our resources into saving not one or two great masterpieces but, instead, the history of artists and their works of art. ■

## The problem of a neglected or overlooked artist is far more significant than the material breakdown of an object.

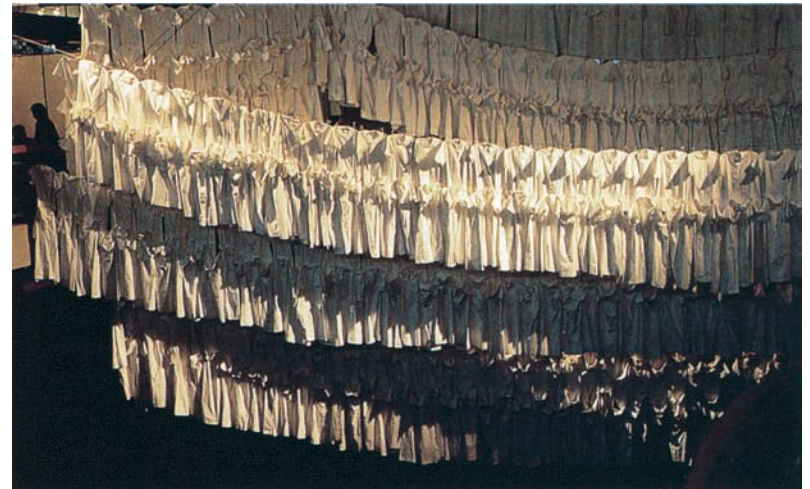
4. Edward B. Garrison, "Note on the Survival of Thirteenth-Century Panel Paintings in Italy," *Art Bulletin* 54 (1972), 140; quoted in Gary Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi: The Mortality of Art," *Art in America* 84, no. 11 (1996), 72.

## LINEN LONGEVITY

Sheila Hicks

I am honored when people consider me an artist. I am surprised sometimes because I really do my best not to fall into the category of artist. This sounds contradictory, but it is not. I am satisfied just to make, do, see, live, think, be here and now—searching for meaning, quality, sincerity, commitment, authenticity. My raw materials are cloth, space, light, ideas, and allusions.

The examination of how to preserve fragments of our culture and the mortality and immortality issues surrounding art have opened up questions for me, leading me to review my way of thinking. Living and moving about, I tend to draw away from the art world and veer more toward the design world. Maybe that is the Bauhaus training I received at Yale when I studied with Josef Albers and, by extension, Anni Albers, his wife. I also had the privilege of working under the guidance of the brilliant art historian George Kubler, who inspired me to want to look at, think about, feel, and penetrate the mystery of all of human artifact making since the beginning of history, to connect with material culture of all



**FIGURE 1**  
Sheila Hicks, *Le Démêloir*, 1978. Installation in Montreuil, France. Unfolded nurses' blouses strung up and safety-pinned on cables; 13 × 28 m (42 ft., 7 1/2 in. × 91 ft., 10 1/2 in.).

kinds and from all periods, regardless of size or utility. I feel inspired to walk into the world and discover it, discover form and color with my eyes, personality, and my sensibility—not an “artist’s” sensibility, just with my particular way of looking, my perceptions.

What causes a person to create something, to make something, to have the desire to want to make something? What are the materials that person chooses or the way he or she chooses to create something, and then what is the method of showing or communicating it to others? Continuing along that path, what are the strategies used for psychologically engineering ways to communicate? How can this be done without becoming frustrated,

angry, limited, cynical, sarcastic, thwarted? What causes a person to want to continue down a path and to pursue as far as possible a vision or journey of self-discovery?

My own journey has taken me many places. One of these was the Lausanne Cantonal Hospital in Switzerland, where I checked out nurses' uniforms for a few months in 1977 to make an installation of 1,300 nurses' blouses for the *8<sup>e</sup> biennale internationale de la tapisserie* in Lausanne.<sup>1</sup> The blouses were piled up and displayed as sculpture in the exhibition, then

1. The eighth international biennial of tapestry was held at the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland, 4 June–25 September 1997.



**FIGURE 2**  
Sheila Hicks, *Baby Bands*, 1980. Installation at a private gallery, Kyoto, Japan. Sculpture environment with cotton baby garments from a Swedish hospital.

washed and returned to the hospital and put back to normal use. They were art for three months.

The following year, I displayed the same blouses in Montreuil, a suburb of Paris. This time I hung them in rows attached with diaper pins (FIG. 1). Again they were returned to their “real life” after a brief interlude in an art manifestation.

On a more intimate scale, in Kyoto, Japan, I used small Swedish baby bands that are placed over newborn infants to compress their belly buttons. Many, many babies’ little belly buttons were compressed with those small white linen bands. I thought it would be a lyrical touch to put them in an envelope and send them to Kyoto when a new art gallery was about to be

born (FIG. 2). They were displayed and returned to me, and I then sent them back to the hospital in Lund, Sweden, from which they were borrowed.

In 1980, Will Sandberg, former director of the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, invited me to Israel. He explained that the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where he was chief advisor, was reluctant to pay for crates, transportation, and insurance for art. The museum was more interested in paying the plane fare for artists to come and create something in that new country. That made a lot of sense to me. I flew there and spent time looking around Israel. I saw soldiers’ khaki uniforms, washed and blowing on the clotheslines in all of the yards and on all of the balconies. Soldiers’ mothers and wives were washing their uniforms for them to return to duty, as almost everyone does military service in Israel. I thought I could say something about what I felt and saw in that particular time, place, and instance to those who lived with this kind of daily involvement. I borrowed military uniforms from the army stocks. Some of these uniforms had name tags inside them. I was told that, although these uniforms had been laundered, not ironed, that they belonged to, and had been worn by, soldiers who died in that war. And that brought me to the realization that with this extremely modest material, immensely important things might be said. I hung masses of uniforms around a concrete pillar in the art

museum and strung them out the windows bursting into the courtyard (FIG. 3). Where those uniforms are today, I have no idea. They may have been shredded and recycled into newsprint or gone back to war.

Eventually, people began mailing me their laundry as contributions to art making. When they were about to put their materials into rag dealers’ hands, sometimes they would ask me if I would like to have them first, an intermediary stop on the itinerary of decay. They even offered to sell their abandoned cloth to me by the pound or the kilo. But I decided that this was not the way to go, as I did not want to be drawn into commercial discussions of this kind. I was open to anyone who wanted to contribute materials to me and who wanted me to do something with them. I was willing to examine the goods, learn about their history, and perhaps include them in an exhibition or presentation. My studio soon became crowded, so I rented an additional one.

I live in a courtyard in Paris, and I dye bundles of cloth in the washing machine in my kitchen, in small clumps and loads, replacing the washing machine every so often. All of the irregularities, shades, and unexpected things that happen to the cloth in this kind of do-it-yourself situation—not under high-tech scientific laboratory control—are very interesting to me.

Andrea Rothe, paintings conservator at the J. Paul Getty Museum, told me about an Arshile Gorky painting he had worked

on that was painted on a bedsheet with very heavy impasto, irregularly applied in varying thickness. He said that paint had flaked off of the bedsheet in sections. After hearing this, I continued thinking about that painting and how much I would have liked to have seen the back of that bedsheet painting. It must have been beautiful, with traces of paint soaked through the woven linen.

Linen plays a significant role in our lives. I would venture to guess that most of us spend six to eight hours sleeping in linen, or at least cotton, every night. That means that most of our lives, we are in contact with a reassuring, soft material. We are lucky to have bedsheets at all, as this is not the case in many parts of the world. In our culture, we probably spend 2,500 hours a year enveloped in linen, or linen-cotton, or cotton with polyester. Most paintings in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were painted on linen or linen substitutes. Now, considering linen and its longevity, I cannot help wonder what new materials will encompass our lives and accompany our nights. We have a lot of negative feelings about polyester, but polyester and plastic are fast becoming pervasive in our lives—and in our art.

In 1996–97, I produced a monumental application for polyester: a stage curtain designed for the Cultural Center of Kiryu, Japan, woven on jacquard looms with polyester yarn and fiberglass printed with a hologram. I induced

## A thread is a line that can move and develop in space. Many threads can be assembled, twisted together, and thickened in diameter. Entire environments come into being.

the looms to try new ideas. The flame-retardant curtain is intended to have a life span of approximately thirty years (not hundreds of years like the famous Unicorn Tapestries of the Middle Ages).

Wandering into the design field has brought me in closer contact with architects and urban planners on public works, but I must confess that my heart and soul remain in an intimate domain, a sort of mind's inner eye. I feel that we are here on this planet to serve a few more and other things than ourselves, so I attempt to apply my playful intelligence and energy to collaborating with architects on their large-scale projects. That means I have the pleasure of working on building sites, in factories, with engineers and designers, and with fine craftspeople in developing countries. My assignments have taken me to India, Chile, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Mexico, and many countries in Europe.



**FIGURE 3**

Sheila Hicks, *Back from the Front*, 1980. Installation at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Sculpture environment with khaki military uniforms, 6 × 6 × 9 m (19 ft., 8 1/4 in. × 19 ft., 8 1/4 in. × 29 ft., 6 1/2 in.).



Recently, I have begun to work in Cape Town, South Africa, helping to organize a new design school in the city's old Customs House. Slowly, I have formulated a vocabulary and a way of speaking with cloth—soft, pliable materials that are new or recuperated, recycled, rethought, restated. My research tends to follow a logical progression.

A thread is a line that can move and develop in space. Many threads can be assembled, twisted together, and thickened in diameter. Wrapped around a core, it becomes a cord or massing of pliable planes moving in space. Entire environments come into being. I have narrowed in, focusing and specializing in communicating with the help of cloth or fibers, and I accept all sorts of missions related to that. Positioning myself as a perpetual outsider enables me to distance myself and seek hidden truths.

For instance, I found an immense fishnet in an open market in Seoul, South Korea—and she who looks finds. As Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth-century Arab author and scholar once wrote:

2. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muquaddimah: An Introduction to History* (14th c.; reprint, New York: The Bollingen Foundation, 1997), 315 (page citation is to the reprint edition). This text was considered by Arnold Toynbee to be "the most comprehensive and illuminating analysis of how human affairs work that has been made anywhere" (cited from the flyleaf of the 1997 edition).

The [susceptibility] of the crafts to refinement, and the quality of [the purposes] they are to serve in view of the demands made by luxury and wealth, then correspond to the civilization of a given country. When civilization flourishes and the luxuries are in demand, it includes the refinement and development of the crafts. Consequently, these are perfected with every finesse, and a number of other crafts, in addition to them, are added as a luxury, as customs and conditions demand.<sup>2</sup>

All kinds of things currently exist in our art playground that are provocative and thought-provoking. We have stitched-up dried fruit, moth-eaten felt, crushed cans. It makes one think, What are the demands and standards dictated for someone who makes a fishnet? They are pretty exigent. They are pretty stringent. On the floor of the Seoul Art Center in South Korea, I placed a circular fishnet with tiny weights attached around the edge (FIG. 4). What is it doing in an art exhibition? Why this magical presence?

In 1991, I was assigned seven very large rooms in the art center in which to make an exhibition. In the adjoining seven rooms, North Korea was to present an exhibition. While installing my show, the director of the art center came to me in a very agitated state and said, "Because of difficulties you may be aware of between North and South Korea, a cultural

event we had scheduled is now on the rocks, and North Korea has canceled. The opening date was to be the day after tomorrow. Can you please annex the next seven rooms and expand your show?"

They were very big rooms, but it was pretty easy. My Korean fishnets opened up and spread like a river flowing through one room after another. What remains from this exhibition besides the memory of it? Just the encounter of one artist with one visitor at a time. Many people came to that exhibition, including hundreds of school children who filed through each day. Since lighting was so much a part of the work—and the shadow of the fishnet cast onto the walls at the entrance was so beautiful—I invited the children and the adults to draw the shadow of the net

directly onto the wall. When we took the show down and removed the net, the drawing remained for quite a long time. It left a trace, the trace of a thread. It was the memory of an object, the trace of a language, a reminder of a common experience.

I have said that linen has been very much a part of our lives, and that now polyester has become very much a part of our lives. If I pull apart 50 yards of polyester textile, crushed and dyed, you can hear the sound as it unfurls. It is a rather ugly and repellent material that we are going to live with a lot, and maybe even learn to love. Some people say the same thing about art these days, but that is the way it is. We are living our times, so let's live it up. ■



FIGURE 4  
Sheila Hicks, *Flow River Flow*, 1991–92, Installation at the Seoul Art Center, Seoul, South Korea. Korean fishnet sculpture with lead weights.



Who Is Responsible?

**PART 5**

*This page intentionally left blank*

## HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL: ONE ARTIST'S STRUGGLE FOR IMMORTALITY

Judy Chicago

Men develop ideas and systems of explanation by absorbing past knowledge and critiquing and superseding it. Women, ignorant of their own history [do] not know what women before them . . . thought and taught. So, generation after generation, they struggle for insights others had already had before them . . . a "cruel repetitiousness" that forces women to continually repeat efforts made a number of times by other women. . . . [This cruel repetition is] *not only a symbol of women's oppression but its actual manifestation* [author's emphasis].<sup>1</sup>

—Gerda Lerner

These words by Gerda Lerner, who is generally recognized as the pioneering founder of the discipline of women's history, seem to have particular relevance to visual art, a relevance that I hope to illuminate. This essay discusses several issues related to the conservation and preservation of contemporary art

through the prism of my own experience as a woman, one who became intent on introducing aspects of the female experience into the mainstream cultural dialogue. This goal brought me face to face with a number of problems involving both conservation and preservation, since it is through carefully wrought aesthetic objects that my intentions are primarily expressed.

In an article in the *Journal of Contemporary Art*, the artist Christo asserted, regarding the immortality of art, that "it probably takes greater courage to go away than to stay,"<sup>2</sup> a comment I interpret as being related to the ephemeral nature of his work. But despite its transitory nature, Christo's work does not seem in any danger of "going away."

This is not the case for most women's art, be it temporal or tangible in nature. Whereas men experience themselves as *present* in the art that is preserved in our museums, women experience a *deafening absence* in terms of images

that position the female experience as equally central to culture. One important way in which the centrality of the male experience is acknowledged is through those many works of art by men that have been considered sufficiently valuable to preserve.

The absence of women artists was not evident to me during my childhood visits to the Art Institute of Chicago, where I began attending classes when I was five years old. From the time I was young, nothing was more important to me than making art. At that time, I knew little about the work of Mary Cassatt, Berthe Morisot, or, in fact, of any of the women artists I would later discover. Every week after class, I would walk through the airy upstairs galleries to study the millions of colored dots that together form Georges Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884–86) or to stand in front of Edgar Degas's sensuous female figures or the ribald images by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, sometimes tracing Toulouse-Lautrec's use of reds and noticing how the viewer's eye was made to move around the entire canvas by the repetition of reddish tones. However, I must admit to some confusion, brought on by my identification with the male artists rather than their female models, to whose depictions I could not relate because my own aspirations did not involve becoming an object of the male gaze but, rather, doing both the gazing and the painting.

1. Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 19.

2. Giancarlo Mantegna, "Christo and Jeanne-Claude," *Journal of Contemporary Art* 7, no. 2 (1995), 32–52.



This dilemma followed me throughout my childhood and into college, where I first began to struggle with the outrageous sexism that characterized the Los Angeles art scene of the 1960s. The first decade of my career was spent fighting to make a place for myself, the price for which was having to excise all aspects of my identity as a woman from my art. Art is beyond gender, I was told, and I tried to uphold this dictum. Unfortunately, this same attitude was not in evidence among those members of the L.A. art community who then controlled the fate of an artist's career. To them my gender loomed far larger than my talent.

Since that time, there have been many changes; certainly, many more women are exhibiting than when I was a young woman artist. However, there have been other periods in history when women artists flourished. Unfortunately, their achievements were obscured rather than honored by history.

I came to understand this as a result of my intensive research for *The Dinner Party* (1979) (FIG. 1), my most well-known project, a symbolic history of women in Western civilization or, as I sometimes describe it, a reinterpretation of the Last Supper from the point of view of those who have done the cooking throughout history. As is clear from my journal entry

of 1975—when I was deeply immersed in *The Dinner Party*—my intention from the start was to counter women's repeated erasure from history:

My dream is that I will make a piece so far beyond judgment that it will enter the cultural pool and never be erased from history, as women's work has been erased before.

For centuries, women were deterred from full intellectual and artistic expression due to assumptions about female inferiority; narrow definitions of female role along with overriding family duties; lack of access to education or training; an absence of economic inde-

pendence; and, of course, outright discrimination. As we approach the millennium, we stand at a new moment in human history. Women everywhere are beginning to take their rightful place in the world, and female artists are expressing themselves through art—not as I did when I began, by disguising their true nature, but openly—which is to be celebrated.

However, if this new artistic expression is to effectively counter the *absence* in our museums that preceded it, my own experience seems to offer some guidance, particularly in relation to some of the questions being raised in this book—that is: Which works by contemporary artists will be around for future generations to understand and appreciate? Do we have an obligation to provide a comprehensive record of twentieth-century art? And, most significant, Who decides what art is to be valued and preserved and according to what criteria? These are the very issues with which I have collided in my effort to break the cycle of history described by Lerner, a cycle that threatens to condemn *The Dinner Party* to the very same erasure it was intended to end.

Perhaps because of my acute awareness of the fragility of our cultural memory of women's achievements, I could not adopt



**FIGURE 1**  
Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1979.  
Installation view (from the end of Wing Three),  
featuring the Virginia Woolf and Georgia  
O'Keeffe place settings.

a cavalier attitude toward permanence in art. In fact, permanence has been uppermost in my mind throughout my career, the result being that I always take care to consider and research the long-term consequences of materials and have great concern for the ultimate disposition of my work. However, like most artists, I assumed that if I created art that was considered important, the result would be the exhibition and preservation of that work by the art community. Boy, was I in for an education!

Toward the end of *The Dinner Party* project, I began to make plans for permanent housing of the piece, envisioning a porcelain room that would extend the imagery of the plates into an architectural space, thereby replacing the *absence* of female experience in the public arena with an ineradicable *presence*.

*The Dinner Party* premiered at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in early 1979, attracting one hundred thousand visitors and bringing in so much revenue that it helped to balance the museum's annual budget. There was such a media frenzy, both nationally and locally, that the museum's press person commented that one would have to have been living in a cave not to know about *The Dinner Party*. As a result of my exhibit, the museum bookshop generated so much income that they bought a new, computerized cash register, which they named "Judy."

Everywhere I went I was congratulated on my great success.

But this impression belied the fact that, from the start, the art community would evidence disdain not only for the work but also for its audience, which would eventually grow to more than one million viewers. Several museums had been scheduled to exhibit the piece, but they canceled without explanation. At the end of its first showing, *The Dinner Party* went into storage, and I went into shock.

After *The Dinner Party* closed, my ambitious plan for permanent housing seemed like an impossible fantasy. And in terms of my life and career as an artist, I lost everything—my marriage, my studio, my staff. Worst of all, no opportunities were offered to me, and I was deeply in debt from loans I had taken out to finish the piece. I basically had to start all over again. Eventually, a ten-year, worldwide exhibition tour to fifteen venues in six countries was accomplished as the result of grassroots organizing by communities around the world. But as the piece traveled, both the artist and her art were met with ever-intensifying critical hostility.

It would be many years before there would be any real scholarship on the significant impact of *The Dinner Party*. During that time, given the critical and institutional resistance I was encountering, I had to accept that if I wished to protect *The Dinner Party* and the history it symbolized from invisibility, I would have to personally take responsibility for its exhibition and its care.

Unfortunately, I could not prevent damage to the piece, one result of being shown in alternative spaces, where it was exhibited about half the time. The mildew that attacked a number of the runners was a painful reminder of how easily art can disintegrate if not properly handled, conserved, and preserved.

Whenever *The Dinner Party* was exhibited, I would receive countless communications from people stating that seeing the work had changed their lives. These letters often included requests to participate in any subsequent art-making projects I might undertake. A year after *The Dinner Party*

closed in San Francisco, I began to build a network of support from volunteers around the country for my next body of work, the *Birth Project* (1980–85). I was first drawn to the subject of birth while working on *The Dinner Party*, specifically the runner back for Mary Wollstonecraft (FIG. 2), the eighteenth-century writer and feminist theorist, who died from complications of childbirth.

At that time, it occurred to me that even though birth seems to qualify as one experience that is universal—in that everyone is born and half the population is capable of giving birth—until quite recently there was a surprising absence of images in Western

**Like most artists, I assumed that if I created art that was considered important, the result would be the exhibition and preservation of that work by the art community. Boy, was I in for an education!**



art on this subject, at least from a female perspective. As I would sometimes quip, If men had babies, there would be thousands of images of the crowning—the implication being that this was another example of a pervasive absence.

The iconographic silence surrounding the subject of birth meant that I would have to fashion images out of raw experience rather than being able to draw upon the history of art, as is customary. Therefore, my foray into the subject of birth began in the library and proceeded to the gathering of personal testimony and the witnessing of births, culminating in a focused research project. Some of my earliest works were based on a recasting of Genesis, with a female rather than a male god as the creator of life.

I spent five years working on the subject of birth and creation. However, I organized this project quite differently from *The Dinner*

*Party*. Instead of a single monumental work, the *Birth Project* consisted of eighty-five exhibition units of varying sizes, which were conceived to be shown in a variety of institutions, in museums and galleries as well as in universities, hospitals, birthing centers, and other alternative spaces.

As part of a strategy to avoid some of the problems I had faced with *The Dinner Party*, the *Birth Project* was organized from the start within the framework of Through the Flower, a nonprofit organization originally formed to complete *The Dinner Party*. The *Birth Project* was formatted to be easily exhibited. In addition to the art, each exhibition unit included a schematic drawing, instructions, and materials for installation. Every piece was contextualized by a series of laminated panels, which provided information about the subject matter; women's feelings about their personal birth experiences; something

about how the work was done and about the needlewomen; and insights into the nature of the various fiber techniques. The didactic component helped make the work accessible to a diverse audience, which eventually included more than two hundred fifty thousand viewers during the initial exhibition tour.

The *Birth Project* involved a wide range of needle techniques, along with a variety of images exploring the birth experience—the intimate, the painful, the celebratory, and the mythic. In addition to wanting the work to be visually accessible and easy to install, I was determined to find a way to introduce contemporary images of birth into the art dialogue so they might become a permanent part of our cultural legacy.

Over the years, selected exhibition units have been permanently placed by Through the Flower in numerous institutions. The core

collection of fourteen representative works was recently gifted to the Albuquerque Museum with the requirement (and the museum's agreement) that it would assume responsibility for conservation.

But despite the success of Through the Flower in placing the *Birth Project* and its efforts to bind institutions contractually to exhibit and preserve the work, I cannot help but be concerned about whether the question Who decides? will not also affect the future of this work in terms of allocation of resources for its care. For if the placement policy ends up with *Birth Project* pieces consigned to museum basements rather than on public view, I will have failed to realize my goal of countering the absence of female iconography about this subject, which the gifting strategy was aimed at helping to achieve. Moreover, I cannot help but ask, Should artists be expected to anticipate and participate in the problems of conservation and preservation of their work?

After completing the *Birth Project*, I moved back into private studio work for several years. Then, in 1985, I became interested in the subject of the Holocaust. After two years of extensive research and travel, I designed *The Fall* (1993), the second in a cycle of three monumental picto-



**FIGURE 2**  
Judy Chicago, Mary Wollstonecraft runner back (from *The Dinner Party*), 1979. Stumpwork, crochet, needlepoint, petit point, appliqué, embroidery, and china-painted porcelain on silk; 33.02 × 76.2 cm (13 × 30 in.).



rial weavings that began with *The Creation* tapestry (1984) (FIG. 3). Like *The Creation*, *The Fall* is a visual narrative, in this instance setting forth the Holocaust as rooted in the “fabric” of Western civilization; hence the use of weaving, as I generally select a specific medium for its particular aesthetic and expressive qualities.

The *Holocaust Project* (1985–93)—done in collaboration with my husband, photographer Donald Woodman, along with a small number of skilled artisans—is structured as a journey into the darkness of the Holocaust and out into the light of hope. The bulk of the exhibit combines painting and photography, which are fused in a singular method. In the *Holocaust Project*, as in many of my projects, I employed multiple media, which will inevitably produce numerous

conservation problems; with these, questions regarding authority over decision making, along with issues of responsibility, will surely reappear.

In terms of my lifelong goals as an artist, the *Holocaust Project* continues my effort to introduce unfamiliar aspects of the human experience into the art dialogue—in this instance, the Jewish experience of and perspective on the Holocaust. The *Holocaust Project* enlarges this perspective to examine other historic tragedies, linking—though not comparing them—in order to explore the human capacity for denial, cruelty, and evil, as in *Arbeit Macht Frei / Work Makes Who Free?* (1992) (FIG. 4), which explores the slave-labor aspect of the Holocaust in relation to our own egregious history of slavery. The *Holocaust Project* concludes with *Rainbow Shabbat* (1992) (FIG. 5), a large, stained-glass triptych that presents the Friday night Jewish Sabbath meal as an image of international sharing, a work

that unites my feminism with the humanistic values of Judaism to which I adhere.

By the time the *Holocaust Project* premiered in 1993, I knew, based on my earlier experiences, that I would probably have to be largely responsible for its presentation, exhibition tour, and care. By then, however, *The Dinner Party* was being studied all over the world; the *Birth Project* was being accepted into many museum collections; and my art and writings had been incorporated into women’s studies and art history curricula worldwide. Consequently, I made the erroneous assumption that my newest major project might be met with greater art-critical understanding and acceptance than had some of my earlier works. Again, I was in for an unpleasant surprise.

As to the subject of the Holocaust, despite the fact that in many disciplines it figures as one of the central philosophical dilemmas of the twentieth century, if one were to judge by most con-

**FIGURE 3**  
Judy Chicago, *The Creation* tapestry, 1984. Modified Aubusson Tapestry technique, 106.68 × 426.72 cm (42 × 168 in.). Woven by Audrey Cowan. Collection: Bob and Audrey Cowan, Los Angeles.

temporary art museums—where there is a significant iconographic void—one might conclude that it never even occurred. Moreover, there are not-yet-agreed-upon standards for the evaluation of Holocaust art, with some Holocaust scholars arguing that the subject cannot even be dealt with through art, even as an increasing number of artists of varying degrees of knowledge or talent turn their attention to this subject.

In terms of *The Dinner Party*, although happily it seems to have entered the art-historical record, it is once again in storage, and its fate remains uncertain. Recently, *Through the Flower* was awarded a Conservation Survey Grant by the Getty Grant Program in Los Angeles, an important step toward *The Dinner Party*’s conservation.





**FIGURE 4**  
Judy Chicago, *Arbeit Macht Frei / Work Makes Who Free?* (from the *Holocaust Project*), 1992. Sprayed acrylic, oil, welded metal, wood, and photography on photo linen and canvas, 170.18 × 363.22 cm (67 × 143 in.).

However, if *The Dinner Party* is not permanently housed and, instead, becomes only a faded memory in out-of-print art books, not only will a work involving countless thousands of hours of human effort be lost, but the historical information that the art embodies will be allowed to slip back into the murky darkness from which it was laboriously wrested.

These unanswered questions in my own story bring me

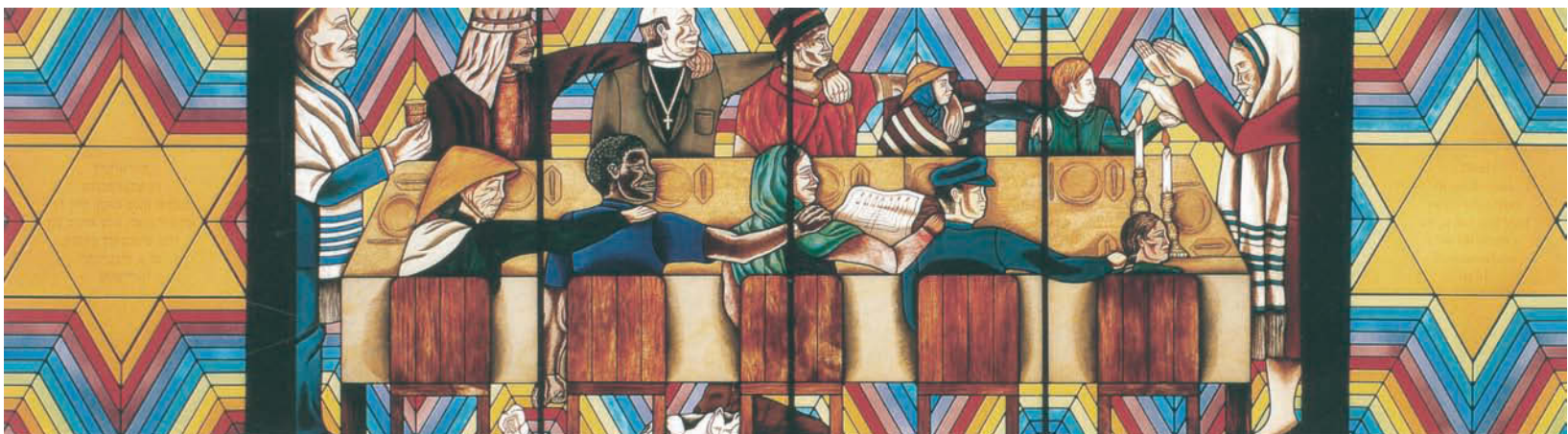
inevitably back to some of the themes explored in this book. In regard to which work by contemporary artists will be around for future generations, I would like to suggest that we have an opportunity to contribute to a momentous change, one that will ensure that young women are no longer condemned to the profound cultural and personal consequences of a continued absence of female-centered iconography, consequences that

disfigure their self-esteem and thwart their ambitions.

Regarding the obligation of providing a comprehensive view of twentieth-century art, if it is agreed that this is a desirable goal, my opinion is that this can be accomplished only if the question I keep citing as most crucial—Who has the authority or right to make these decisions?—is honestly and thoroughly addressed.

As to my own struggle as an artist and the level of responsibility I have been compelled to assume, I must conclude by asking, Is this the artist's role or only the female artist's burden? ■

**FIGURE 5**  
Judy Chicago, *Rainbow Shabbat* (from the *Holocaust Project*), 1992. Stained glass, 137.16 × 487.68 cm (54 × 192 in.). Fabricated by Bob Gomez, hand-painted by Dorothy Maddy from Judy Chicago's cartoon.



## NOTES ON THE PRESERVATION OF AMERICAN MURALS

Francis V. O'Connor

Any discussion of the immortality of murals depends on the shelf life of the structures to which they are attached and on the responsibility of those who control the structures. Consequently, in any mural preservation effort it is necessary to recall two things. First, a mural, unlike portable works of art, is an environmental artifact that was conceived in relation to its natural and/or architectural setting; the original site is an intimate part of its formal attributes. Second, take

that setting away and you destroy the intention and integrity of the mural's defining function. All that is left, if anything, is isolated pictorial panels that can never be completely understood, either formally or iconically, absent the environment they were intended to both embellish and explicate.

The environment of a mural consists of three interrelated factors. First is the mural's relationship to its architectural setting—which means the articulation of the walls and the sources of light. Second is the relationship of the iconography and the architecture to the cardinal points of the compass, which most muralists take into careful consideration, just as architects do when designing a traditional church or even the exposures of a residence. The third factor is the sight lines of the viewer when passing through the mural environment: How is the environment approached? What is seen first, and what is a matter of peripheral vision? What is the overall

impact intended by the complete pictorial definition of purpose within the architectural scheme?

To take all that away is to destroy the mural. Yet one must face these realities: that buildings are usually more fragile than murals; owners of murals are, for the most part, careless, if not irresponsible; and when you are saving murals, you often have to fight for the least damaging alternative.

In consequence, while absolute preservation of the untouched original is the ideal, and restoration of what may remain in situ the next best thing, other alternatives—relocation, replication, reconstruction, and documentation—must often be resorted to when the ideals of preservation and in situ restoration cannot be fulfilled. Each of these six approaches is illustrated in the following case histories, after which I offer a proposal that would activate them all in preserving our heritage of wall paintings.

### Preservation

The first principle of mural preservation is to keep it where it is, since it will never again be the same work of art if moved from its original site. The splendid murals by Gottardo Piazzoni (1931–45) (FIG. 1) in the old public library building in San Francisco, California, are a case in point and a matter of current controversy.

When the city moved its library into a new building, it gave the old Beaux Arts building to the Asian Art Museum, presently

Most of the information contained in this essay is based on the author's manuscript "The Mural in America: A History of Wall Painting in the United States from Native American Times to Postmodernism," 1990.

housed at the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum in Golden Gate Park. The director of the Asian Art Museum immediately vowed to remove the Piazzoni murals from her new walls on the grounds of inappropriateness and political correctness. While apparently content with the Beaux Arts splendor of the rest of the building, she has made a violent political issue of the murals.<sup>1</sup>

These murals form a continuous landscape and seascape across the architectural elements, opening up the cloistered world of the library to the natural world outside.<sup>2</sup> Given the nature of these murals, set in the entrance hall of the museum within an elaborate architectural context, it is clear that removing the ten major panels and the four at the end of the gallery would destroy them completely as works of art.

I know of no more egregious case of professional irresponsibility than this one, in which the director of a museum wishes to destroy a work of art rather than preserve

it. As of this writing, this drama is still being played out, and one just hopes for the best.

Another ongoing preservation battle is over Hugo Gellert's last surviving murals (ca. 1960) at the Seward Park Housing project in New York City. Gellert was a prominent social activist artist of the 1930s who was commissioned to paint murals at Radio City's Center Theatre and for the 1939–40 World's Fair. These last surviving murals, painted for a labor union's co-op housing venture in lower Manhattan, also represent a late survival of 1930s subject matter: the usable past, personified by Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, and the creative present looking forward, as it were, to a usable future, personified by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Albert Einstein. In style, they present the spare, linear imaging and coloration of a skillful artist who had devoted most of his life to the graphic arts. Seward Park Housing is now torn with generational dissension among the tenants, but an educational process has been launched about the murals' history and the honorable artistic intentions that went into their creation.

#### Restoration

A subset of preservation is restoration—that is, restoring the walls to as close to their original appearance as possible. I know of no more triumphal example of this than the walls of the United States Capitol—by Constantino Brumidi (1855–80)—and the Library of

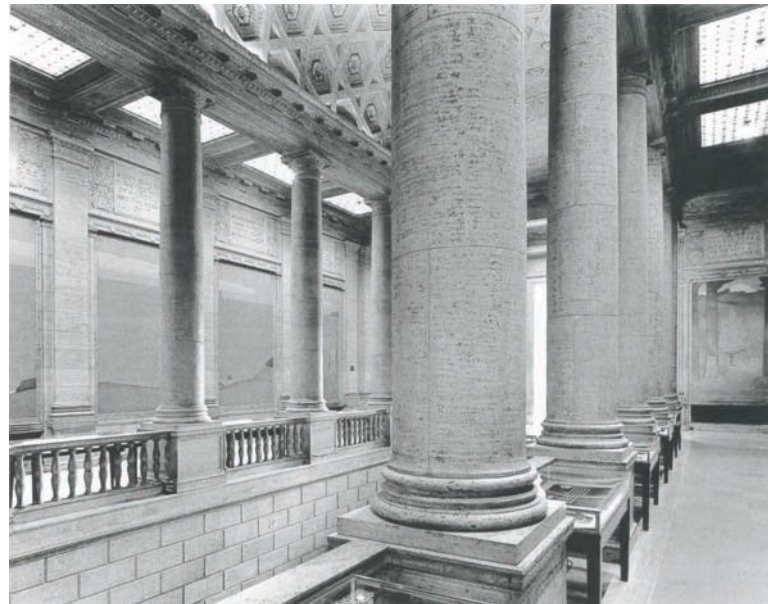


FIGURE 1

Gottardo Piazzoni. *The Sea*, 1931 (left) and *The Forest*, 1945 (right), oil on canvas, various dimensions. View of murals in gallery of old San Francisco Public Library. Collection of the City and County of San Francisco.

## The first principle of mural preservation is to keep it where it is, since it will never again be the same work of art if moved from its original site.

1. D. Bonetti, "Keep Library's Magnificent Murals in Place," *San Francisco Examiner*, 21 January 1996; and "Trashing the Murals: The Asian Art Commission Is Poised to Destroy a Work of Art," *San Francisco Examiner*, 23 March 1997.

2. F. V. O'Connor, "The Murals of Gottardo Piazzoni for the San Francisco Public Library: 1929 to 1945," paper presented at the symposium "The Italian Presence in American Art: 1920–1990," Fordham University, 22 November 1991.



Congress (1895–97) under the direction of their intrepid curator, Barbara Wolanin, who has supervised, over the last fifteen years, the complete restoration of their murals. The rotunda was restored by Bernie Rabin, and, for the first time in this century, we can see Brumidi's splendid walls scrubbed clean of the exhalations of candles, gas lamps, and politicians.<sup>3</sup>

While here the Congress and its curator have been eminently responsible, one finds that restorers often are not. A sad example of how not to restore a mural is one of the two surviving panels from Arshile Gorky's WPA Federal Art Project suite of ten murals (1936–37) for the Newark Airport in New Jersey. Originally, it had a chink cut out of the lower right corner to accommodate a step in the staircase. The restoration process carefully filled in the chink, turning the mural into an easel painting that is now hanging in the Newark Museum. I mention this to make an important point: When a mural panel displays in its outline how it was related to its original architectural setting, that diversion from absolute rectilinearity ought to be preserved.<sup>4</sup>

A sobering example of how to ruin murals through repeated attempts at restoration can be found in a suite of New Deal-era murals by Ben Shahn in the Bronx Central Post Office in New York City (FIG. 2). The murals, done in egg tempera on plaster, were commissioned by the New Deal's Treasury Section of Painting and

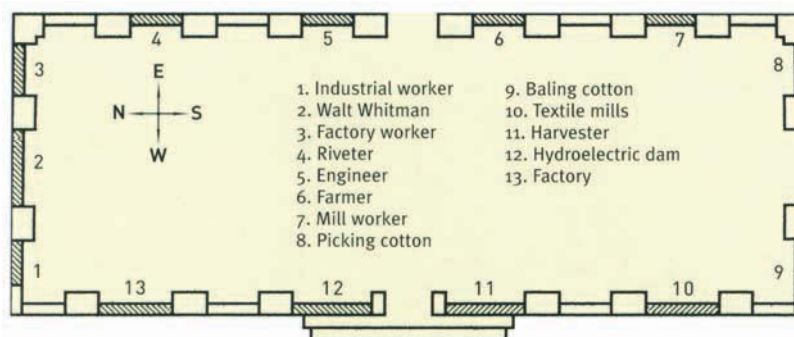


FIGURE 2

Diagram of Ben Shahn's *Resources of America*, 1938–39, Bronx Central Post Office lobby, New York, showing the location and relative size of the thirteen tempera-on-plaster mural panels. Lobby not drawn to scale.

Sculpture and painted under contract in 1938–39. Shahn was assisted by his wife, Bernarda Bryson Shahn, who helped with the competition sketches, now in the collection of the University of Maryland.<sup>5</sup>

These competition sketches are the best remaining historical evidence of Shahn's artistic intentions and help us to imagine these murals in their original state. The sketches reveal that the mural panels were meant to look bright and colorful, their palette, for the most part, balancing tones of white, blue, yellow, and various browns, with some strong reds in the industrial scenes. Overall, the light colors were intended to harmonize with the elegant gray granite of the lobby's architectural setting. This is clearly indicated in the sketches and remains today in stark contrast to the dark, shiny, yellowed aspect of the "restored" murals.

These murals have been restored three times. The first restorer repaired damage by extensive overpainting. The second

restoration, by Rabin, mandated after a government "upgrading" of the lobby had screwed bulletin boards and telephones into the surface of several of the panels (FIG. 3), removed the overpainting but left the murals in a darkened, although decent, state. A recent third restoration has cleaned them up and heavily varnished what were once lightly colored matte surfaces. Happily, the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles is investigating this entire situation, and there is hope that the murals can soon be restored to the tonality and intentions of the original sketches, if possible.<sup>6</sup>

While this essay was being written, one of our most important and unique suites of Early American murals was seriously damaged by fire at the Old Talbott Tavern in Bardstown, Kentucky. Commemorating the 1797 stay of the future King Louis-Philippe of France while he was fleeing the French Revolution, they were most probably painted around 1835, early in the king's reign. These murals, among the first public murals in the

3. B. A. B. Wolanin, "Constantino Brumidi's Frescoes in the United States Capitol," in *The Italian Presence in American Art: 1760–1860*, ed. I. B. Jaffe (New York: Fordham University Press/Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1989), 150–64, color plates 14–21.

4. Newark Museum, *Murals without Walls: Arshile Gorky's Aviation Murals Rediscovered*, exhibition catalogue (New Jersey: Newark Museum, 1980), 65, color plate 1.

5. V. Mecklenburg, *The Public as Patron: A History of the Treasury Department Mural Program Illustrated with Paintings from the Collection of the University of Maryland Art Gallery*, collection catalogue (College Park: University of Maryland, Department of Art, 1979), 107, nos. 106 and 107, and reproduced on covers.

6. L. H. Rainer, "The Ben Shahn Murals, Central Annex Post Office, Bronx, New York: A Preliminary Inspection" (Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, 2 June 1995, typescript); and F. V. O'Connor, "Resources of America Murals by Ben Shahn Created under the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture in the Bronx Central Post Office, New York City, in 1938–39" (Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, 15 October 1997), typescript.



**FIGURE 3**  
View of Bronx Central Post Office lobby during 1977 "upgrading," looking northwest. Note telephones and electric wire attached to the surface of the Textile Mills panel at left and, at center, to right of ladder, the large glass display case covering the entire bottom of the Harvester panel.

United States, have a fascinating and complex history that opens up an almost entirely unknown area of American regional culture. On March 7, 1998, a fire burned off the roof of the tavern. The murals themselves are still intact, although blackened, and have been covered with plastic to protect them against the elements. One wall collapsed, and the pieces have been preserved. The owner wants to restore them, and steps are being taken through the regional conservation center to do so.<sup>7</sup>

Having discussed the preservation and restoration of murals, I will turn to four inadequate, but sometimes necessary, alternatives.

#### Relocation

If you cannot keep the murals in situ, or if the owners feel no responsibility to do so, and/or if the building is doomed, then

they have to be relocated to where their essential qualities as murals are the least violated. Here are two brief case histories of successful relocations.

In 1915, Sir Frank Brangwyn painted a series of eight mural panels for the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Representing the four elements—earth, air, fire, and water—they were situated in pairs at the corners of the Court of Abundance. When the Exposition came down, they were transferred to the auditorium of the Veterans' Building at the San Francisco War Memorial (FIG. 4).

In the early 1930s, Cincinnati erected a splendid Union Terminal in the Art Deco style, with mosaic murals by Winold Reiss in its sweeping rotunda and industrial scenes crafted in mosaic and colored cement at the gates to the tracks. In the 1970s, the termi-

nal was located in a slum and virtually abandoned by the railroads. A heroic preservation effort by the city's art lovers resulted in the rotunda's being turned into a community center, which saved the murals in situ. The industrial scenes were successfully relocated to Cincinnati's new airport, where one can see them today mounted in lounge areas throughout the main terminal.

#### Replication

When a mural is destroyed, either intentionally or by force majeure, then the next best thing, if the original artist is still available, is to make a replica of the work. This, of course, loses the environmental context but at least ensures that the artist's hand and intentions are in play.

It is of some interest that Native American murals, especially those on the walls of Pueblo kivas and on the tipis of the Plains tribes, were almost always replications. The kiva's murals were renewed at the death of the resident shaman; the tipis' were renewed each year, because the buffalo hides from which they were made lasted only that long. This also provided the residents of the tipi an opportunity to upgrade their heraldry, indicating, for instance, the exact number of blue coats a warrior had scalped or that a healer lived there. Today, all we have left of the nineteenth-century Plains tipis are miniature replications made by native artists under the direction of anthropologists. But one might ponder Native

7. F. V. O'Connor, "Speculations Concerning . . . the Mysterious Murals in the Talbot Tavern . . ." (excerpt from "The Mural in America," 1990), photocopy.

American attitudes toward the permanency of works of art as one ponders the quest for immortality.<sup>8</sup>

Probably the most famous replication in the art of the Americas is that of Diego Rivera's mural *Man, Controller of the Universe* (1934) in Mexico City's Palace of Fine Arts, a re-creation of his Rockefeller Center mural *Man at the Crossroads* (1933) that was destroyed by the Rockefellers because it contained a head of Lenin.<sup>9</sup> Another interesting example of replication is Ilya Bolotowsky's re-creation in 1980 of two abstract murals: his 1936 Williamsburg Housing Project mural for the WPA Federal Art Project and his 1939–40 World's Fair mural for its Hall of Medical Sciences.<sup>10</sup>

### Reconstruction

The least satisfactory method of saving a mural is to reconstruct its environment conjecturally from documentation and internal evidence in the surviving pictorial panels. The following examples are two of the attempts I have made at this in the course of writing my history of the mural in the United States.

The first (FIG. 5) reconstructs the mural arrangement in the Clark-Franklin House in Boston (1712–42) on the basis of a detailed verbal description of the room

### FIGURE 4

Sir Frank Brangwyn, *Fire, Water, Earth and Air*, 1915. Oil on canvas, Herbst Theatre, San Francisco War Memorial. Collection of the City and County of San Francisco.

they decorated.<sup>11</sup> This eighteenth-century drawing room would seem to be the first pictorial environment in New England. The wall panels defined the purpose of the space by the explicit iconography of their escutcheons proclaiming the consequence of the Hubbard, Saltonstall, Whittingham, and Clark families. Based on the fenestration of the house as depicted in the overmantel and the verbal account, the twelve panels were probably distributed in something of the manner of the plan shown in Figure 5.

One can well imagine the effect of such a room illuminated by light through a window or by candlelight: its elegantly gilded classical order; the burnished surfaces of the brown, blue, and green landscapes accented with buildings and figures; the colorful details

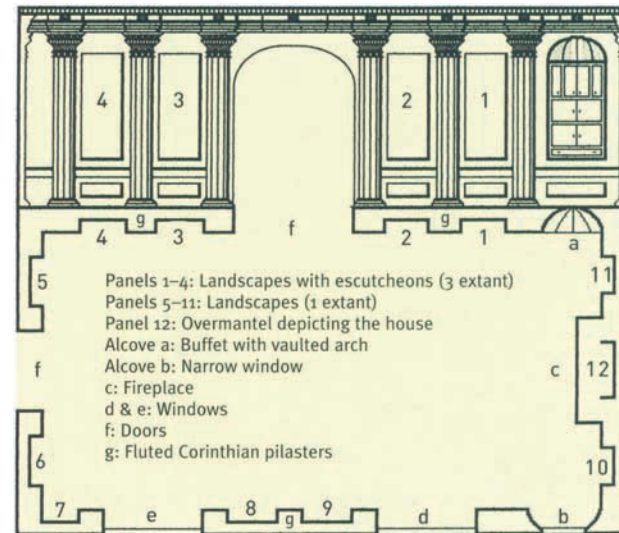


FIGURE 5  
Diagram of Clark-Franklin House, Boston, ca. 1712, showing reconstruction of parlor with mural panels.



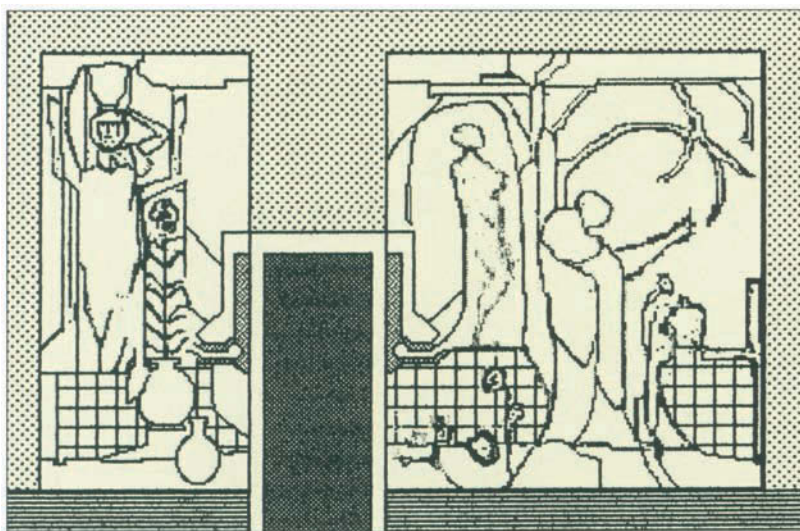
8. F. V. O'Connor, "The Hoop of History: Native American Murals and the Historical Present," in *History Painting in America: A Reassessment*, ed. P. Burnham and L. H. Giese (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 17–36 passim.

9. L. P. Hurlburt, *The Mexican Muralists in the United States: Their Work and Influence* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 159–74, color plate 12; and I. Hema de Larrea, *Diego Rivera's Murals at the Rockefeller Center* (Mexico City: Edicupes, 1990), text passim, color plates 2–22.

10. Washburn Gallery, *Ilya Bolotowsky: WPA Murals*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Washburn Gallery, 1980).

11. E. B. Allen, *Early American Wall Painting: 1710–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), 4–7, figs. 2–5.





**FIGURE 6** Diagram of one wall of Edward J. Steichen's *In Exaltation of Flowers*, 1910–14, showing reconstruction of two mural panels, according to correspondences in the design of door frames. Mural panels are (left) "Golden Banded Lily Violets with Caryatid" and (right) "Petunia Caladium Budleya with Marion Beckett."

of the escutcheons. Indeed, these extraordinary Jacobean conceits facing the windows for the benefit of anyone inclined to stare in were similar in intent to those heraldic devices our Native Americans contemporaneously emblazoned on their tipis. The only difference, of course, was that these were seriously meant to ensure immortality.

It may come as a surprise that the famous photographer, Edward Steichen, painted a suite of murals titled *In Exaltation of Flowers* (1910–14), which is now in storage at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. Created in the Art Nouveau style, these seven panels were painted for the townhouse of his friends, Eugene and Agnes Meyer. Steichen maintained a summer home in the French village of Voulangis, where the Meyers and the American Modernist, Arthur B. Carles, often visited. His walled garden there became

famous for its exotic, oversized flowers. In 1910, when the Meyers commissioned the mural to decorate the lobby, Steichen chose to incorporate portraits of his circle into elaborate floral designs. Unfortunately, by the time the panels were finished, the Meyers had moved out of the house. Aside from several exhibitions before the First World War, they remain unexhibited as a group.<sup>12</sup>

A tentative reconstruction of Steichen's work (FIG. 6) can be made by carefully matching the door frames found along the edges of the panels, which add up to both a symmetrical design and a sequence of figures that make sense as a whole. It is a guess, but I think one worth making as a heuristic device for the future.

#### Documentation

Finally, when all else is lost and all hope gone, one might still fight for some sort of visual or verbal documentation of a mural—as with that on which the Clark House could be reconstructed or deduced from the internal evidence of the Steichen panels. Today, with our increasingly sophisticated electronic technologies for digital documentation, it seems that one of the duties of every artist who creates a mural environment, and every owner of such an environment, ought to be to make as comprehensive a record of the mural as possible—as the Community Muralists did so realistically when they saw the fate of *The Wall of Respect* (ca. 1967) in Chicago in the

late 1960s, or of so many New York and California ghetto walls from about the same time.<sup>13</sup>

Who is responsible? The artist—to do it right in the first place and record what was done for the future. The owner—to maintain the mural as he or she would the structure to which it is attached and, if the structure is sold, to contract with the buyer to continue such maintenance. The restorer—to do the job right the first time and thereafter as necessary. The art historian—to make the documentation available as necessary and to urge the others mentioned here to act responsibly.

Finally, a proposal: that the preservation and documentation of our heritage of murals might be supplemented in the future, when all else fails at keeping a wall painting in situ, by the establishment of a "cooperative museum of the American mural" that would relocate the many now wall-less murals in storage around the country—such as the Steichens—to a central facility. Such a museum of the mural would replicate the original or intended sites of the works rather than leave them as easel paintings without context—as are the Arshile Gorky WPA murals at the Newark Museum—and would also serve to relocate the mural as an important art form that has played a vital role in the history of our visual culture. ■

12. B. A. B. Wolanin, "Steichen, 291, and the Magic Garden" in *From Tonalism to Modernism: The Paintings of Edward Steichen*, exhibition catalogue (Washington, D.C.: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 1988), 27–40 passim.

13. A. W. Barnett, *Community Murals: The People's Art* (Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press/New York: Cornwall Books, 1984), passim.

## ART MUSEUM CRITERIA

Thomas M. Messer

This book addresses a concern with the preservation of contemporary events, objects, and artifacts for future generations to ensure the survival of fragments of our existence. The central questions that are before us are: How do we go about this? Who is to decide what is to be preserved and according to what criteria?

Few of us would argue with Arthur Danto's assertion that the question of what we ought to conserve is unanswerable (see "Looking at the Future Looking at the Present as Past," pages 3–12). While this does not end the discussion, a methodical determination of contemporary values, as reflected in works of art, is difficult to imagine. It would presuppose the ability to determine, in our time, what a work of art is and how to separate its essential attributes from objects and artifacts in general. But even objects and artifacts with some artistic coloring (not to mention events) are very different from one another and are

not easily brought under a common denominator.

As an article of faith, I am convinced that artists today are contributing their share of "timeless art." Why shouldn't they? Why should we doubt the capacity of contemporary artists to create meaningfully—a capacity that runs through the ages? But if we were to try, systematically, to decide what is worth preserving, we must be aware that, prior to a purposeful selection, the range of reference is vast. It would include the most haphazard creations, results of mere self-expressive urges; artistically meaningless academic exercises; talented and untalented efforts by children and Sunday painters; fashionable and meretricious potboilers; pretentious nonsense; and legitimate work of limited range before we may finally zero in on creations of "lasting value"—provided we can recognize these as such. Yet all of these, the acknowledged art as well as the subculture from which it emanates, are witnesses to our being

and bespeak the moment of our lives. However, what in the end survives as art with some claim to permanence is never more than a tiny fraction of a massive output. It stands to reason, therefore, that before we arrive at decisions as to what to preserve, we will have to reach some consensus about what art is. And this, to me at least, is a thankless, precarious, pretentious, and fallible task from which, except in a wholly pragmatic and intuitive sense, I beg to be excused.

Let me, therefore, move away from theoretical aesthetics to more ordinary and tangible concerns and express myself within a perspective much more condensed—a perspective of one who, for many decades, has been involved in directing a modern art museum and in curating Modern and contemporary art exhibitions. In this capacity, I accept the necessity of establishing, alone and with others, qualitative preferences that lead to acquisitions and, thereby, to an obligation to care for, protect, and preserve, to the best of our

---

**I would say that what is in my museum is, by definition, art and, furthermore, that I am responsible for it and for its preservation.**



ability, what we have assumed responsibility for. In a somewhat shortened version, I would say that what is in my museum is, by definition, art and, furthermore, that I am responsible for it and for its preservation. This leaves aside likes or dislikes as well as assessments of artistic value. It leaves aside, for purposes of categorical definition, the issue of artistic or nonartistic materials, for, ever since Marcel Duchamp, we know that art can be made of anything (which is not to say that things made of anything are necessarily art). But while a museum object of lesser quality may be relegated to more or less perpetual storage or even de-accessioned as surplus within the context of a collection, it is not, to my mind, permissible to destroy it or to preside over its destruction. Legally and morally, institutions that have assumed responsibility for the preservation of their art objects cannot, without very good reasons, free themselves from it. As a next step, by adhering to such responsibilities, each museum is

necessarily and inevitably taking its place in the collective decision about what is to be preserved.

But should the undivided responsibility for contemporary art preservation be left to art museums? No—if only because no binding mandate is being extended. I would simply argue that, almost by default, the museum profession—and particularly the segment that has made contemporary art part of its program—is destined to exert major influence on what is seen as a preservation priority.

This is true despite certain vulnerabilities that weaken the museum's authority. In general, museums and institutions function as the sum total of individuals concerned with it. Worthwhile results in the central area of acquisitions (the prerequisite for preservation) depend upon a sensible distribution of power that ensures the necessary freedom of action for those best qualified. We all know that this is achieved only in varying degrees, from case to case, and is always threatened by internal changes that reflect political or financial predominance rather than professional qualification.

Furthermore, art museums, while assuming among other obligations that of the protection and preservation of artworks, are not merely conservation institutes. They have other legitimate purposes, some opposed, if not in principle then surely in practice, to those that are the *raison d'être* of conservation departments. Many public relations people will

never understand the fuss about putting paintings in front of television lights, since to do so is so obviously in the interest of the museum, as they understand it. Another difficult contradiction of legitimate interests is presented by loan policies. Most of us will agree that the understanding of Modern and contemporary art is greatly aided by the organization of responsible temporary exhibitions, which depend upon contributions from many sources. Yet nobody will deny that almost any movement of artworks has inherent risks that one should not enter on lightly. Curators (and directors in curatorial capacities), when passionately involved in the shaping of exhibitions, will find themselves less able to exercise dispassionate conservation judgment. Some of the most rigorous defenders of restrictive loan policies have shown less compunction when they put on their borrower's hat to obtain loans for their own projects.

All this is very trying, particularly for museum directors, whose work involves the resolution of such contradictions. Even more so is the sense of constant burden that responsibility for the collection and for works in the museum's custody exerts. The years of political unrest during the Vietnam War and the invasion of Cambodia, when protesters jumped the turnstiles to hold works of art as hostages, are not easily forgotten. Equally burdensome is the realization that full protection of museum contents is not feasible without paying an

unacceptable price. Once, in my experience at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, we were shocked to realize that a number of canvases had been damaged by a vandal guard. The incident brought very strong demands for the glassing of all canvases. Much worried, I nevertheless rejected the demand, explaining to my conservation and curatorial friends that there are many ways to destroy a painting, one of them by rendering it invisible, another by depriving it of the radiance that only the unfiltered surface can exert. Works of art, like human beings, are fated to live dangerously to fulfill themselves. While recklessness must be avoided, foolproof protection is not a feasible alternative.

In the end, there is no alternative to our acceptance of mortality—for individuals, generations, and the objects that represent them. Perhaps we may distinguish a little more between physical deterioration on the one hand and, on the other, expiration of relevance in a work of art—the process by which something that communicated meaning once is no longer capable of doing so. In this latter, more prevalent mode of fatality, there is very little that conservators can do. ■

## PRESERVING WHOSE MORTALITY OR IMMORTALITY?

Keith Morrison

Preserving art of the twentieth century is a goal I share as an artist. My own work as a painter has gained some success and is represented in several major museums. Although I show examples of it here (FIGS. 1–4), I am not speaking about my own lack of success. Instead, I am considering some of the factors necessary to realize the goal of preserving the best art of all people for mortality or immortality.

It seems to me that our major museums<sup>1</sup> do not have sufficient assets to achieve this goal. Significant among these is the cultural diversity that is needed among museum officials. Better diversity would help museum collections to reflect a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the varied issues in art of our time. In some ways, our major museums have not changed much during the twentieth century. There is no question that there are many more women employed in every echelon of the best museums today and that more professionals of color are



**FIGURE 1**  
Keith Morrison, *Posse*, 1994. Oil on canvas, 137.16 × 152.4 cm (54 × 60 in.). Collection of Michele and Roger Eastman.

appointed by museums now than a decade ago. Nevertheless, it is also clear that our major museums continue to be dominated by the face and agenda of the male European and Euro-American paradigm, a paradigm that perpetuates an agenda—whether by omission or commission, it matters not—of and for the preservation of Western civilization as defined by Europeans and Euro-Americans.

I do not intend to be hostile, merely to point out what is obvious.<sup>2</sup> It is true that many curators and museum officials study and promote a wide range of art that cuts across cultural and national boundaries. Yet, what is exhibited and collected is, overwhelmingly, art by and about European and Euro-American people that is chosen by those of European and

Euro-American heritage. In many symposiums sponsored by major art institutions, one finds arts professionals from Canada, England, France, Germany, Mexico, and the United States. But where are those from Africa, India, Asia, Latin America,<sup>3</sup> and other non-European or non-Euro-American countries? There are more than one hundred African-American museums in the United States, for example, but few of them are represented at such gatherings.

Lest one think this is merely a personal attack, let me shift from acknowledgment of the reality to an examination of the principle—

1. By this I mean international museums in the class of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Tate Gallery in London, and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

2. Though what I think is too unspoken and too largely unchallenged.

3. There are people of European descent representing (a few) Latin American museums, a racial situation that typically distresses Latin Americans of color.



**FIGURE 2**  
Keith Morrison, *Walk like an Egyptian*, 1989.  
Oil on canvas. 162.56 × 182.82 cm (64 × 72 in.).  
Private collection.



**FIGURE 3**  
Keith Morrison, *Zombie Jamboree*, 1998. Oil on  
canvas, 157.48 × 175.26 cm (62 × 69 in.). Collection  
of the National Museum of American Art,  
Washington, D.C.

4. I give African-American artists as examples because they are the people of color I know best. My experience as a black person from Jamaica living in the United States for many years and subject to the same treatment as African-Americans has given me cultural insight into the plight of African-American artists.

5. The art historian (who should remain nameless) was addressing this comment to artists Nelson Stevens, Jeff Donaldson, and David Stevens at a College Arts Association meeting in 1971.

6. Mere preservation of Native American traditional or ancestral arts doesn't cut it.

that is, the question of who decides which art should or should not be collected and preserved. Why is it important who makes the decision? And how does that affect what may or may not be preserved for mortality or immortality? My thesis is that there needs to be more people of color in the art world who will bring a cultural perspective to the understanding of art, which, based on the evidence, most major cultural institutions have not achieved.

Does this mean that I think that museum management and staff are inherently white racists? No; they are no more so than any other segment of society. Further, there is no evidence that any other cultural group would or could be more objective if they were the ones with the power to decide what was art and what was not.

However, I think that Europeans and Euro-Americans continue to live with obsolete cultural assumptions that do not serve them well. An art agenda that is decided by only one segment of a multicultural society, a multinational civilization, is inherently flawed.

What is the missing perspective of some people of color? A few examples may be found in the recent experiences of African-American artists.<sup>4</sup> Over the years, many African-American artists have identified issues in art that Euro-Americans have dismissed, believing them to be second-rate or naive, or even crediting them to other people. A Euro-American art historian, for example, told some African-American artists that painting on velvet would never amount to art.<sup>5</sup> Boston-based artist

Napoleon Jones-Henderson was criticized for mixing textiles with broken ceramics because, as one critic said, that was a fatal visual confusion. An instructor at the Art Institute of Chicago told African-American students that they should give up “pattern painting” because, he said, patterns appeal only to the senses, whereas painting needs to appeal to the emotions. However, as we know, by the end of the 1970s, Julian Schnabel had made pigment on velvet as famous as he did mixing ceramics into paintings. As we also know, about that time women artists were credited with creating pattern painting. But there was not one prominent African-American among them. Most of the African-Americans who pioneered these and other methods gave up art in discouragement. In too many cases their work has been lost or destroyed.

This story rings true, at least in the United States, for other people of color as well. Block-buster exhibitions that span about five hundred years of Chinese art or that cover the history of Islamic art are wonderful, but they hardly serve to elucidate contemporary issues in the art of China or the Middle East. Where is the preservation of the art of Native Americans that characterize their view of the twentieth century?<sup>6</sup> The same question can be asked of the art of contemporary Egypt or art by twentieth-century Japanese Americans. The presence of more museum professionals of color will



redress some of these issues, will serve to put a fairer spin on history, and might help to preserve a more accurate balance of art made all over the world.

There is no question that major artists of color have emerged in the art mainstream during the last fifty years, practically all of them, ironically, chosen by Europeans or Euro-Americans in the museum world, commercial galleries, or the press. Artists such as Horace Pippin, Rufino Tamayo, Isamu Noguchi, Romare Bearden, Martin Puryear, Nam June Paik, Robert Colescott, Frida Kahlo, and Ana Mendieta are some that come to mind.<sup>7</sup> However, for each name mentioned, there are many more that, by scholarly consensus, have been ignored by art professionals. True, the same argument could be made for many European or Euro-American artists, but the difference is that their representation in the museum world is markedly disproportionate to their numbers in the worldwide population of artists. By any statistical measure or standard of deviation, the underrepresentation of artists of color in museums and major collections is conspicuously clear.

Many people of color believe that unless an artist has the approval and support of the European or Euro-American museum/gallery/press structure, he or she stands practically no chance for success. The point is that most people of color have neither the position nor the power in the art world to effectively promote artists

of their choosing or to rewrite art history. Of course, private collectors or commercial galleries do not have an obligation to collect or sell art they do not like, regardless of the color of the artist. They are investing their own money, and their choices may fairly be governed by that. However, if museums wish to claim that they represent the entire scope of our culture for its preservation for the future, then they need to recognize their shortcomings, which are major.

Most people of color feel that museums perpetuate and maintain a history and culture of the world that does not represent them. “When are you going to stop writing about black art?” a friend of mine was asked not long ago. “When you stop writing about white art,” was his reply. Our Euro-American friends tend to think that people of color are out to “Balkanize” the art world. This attitude suggests that the art world is together and it is we who are pulling it apart. But the art world is not now, nor has ever been, “together.” It has always been dominated—in its collections and exhibitions—by Europeans and Euro-Americans representing their own worldview, history, and dreams. The rest of us are occasional guests.

There is no question that the museum world is populated with some wonderful people of all races who are dedicated to cultural change and expansion. But there are not enough of them. And per-

haps they do not have sufficient power to make the major changes that need to occur. Even so, it seems to me that no one, no matter how dedicated or well meaning, can have purely objective or culture-free taste, unless we believe that education is sufficient to provide for a cross-cultural aesthetic. Is it possible for well-schooled eyes and artistically educated minds to make objective culturally diverse choices? Of course. But making culturally diverse choices is not all that is necessary to elucidate cultural values. Educated choices can go only so far. Education allows me to use my own base of knowledge to interpret that of other people; it does not necessarily allow me to interpret their culture as they would themselves. Cultural understanding that derives from experience within a culture goes further than education from without such experience.

Education is not sufficient to attain cross-cultural objectivity. Museum professionals, with their coterie of scholars and educators, appear too comfortable with the assumption that an educated visual taste cuts across cultures. They believe not only that education is the bridge to cross-cultural understanding but also that it is sufficient to create cross-cultural objectivity. They justify the appointment of Euro-American museum officials in the absence of ones of color. Well, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, as they say. If cross-cultural

objectivity is possible, why do so many arts professionals who are people of color disagree with so many of the choices for exhibition and acquisition made by Euro-American museum curators and directors? Is it just sour grapes? If so, then why do so many Euro-American museum officials use people of color as advisors, rather than trust their own education or perception in making cross-cultural decisions themselves?<sup>8</sup> It is not that we are not asked our opinions; it is that our choices are not taken sufficiently. Were we in positions of greater responsibility, our choices would count more, and the face of art exhibitions would change.

Many people of color may have studied more about Western art and civilization than many European or Euro-American arts professionals, but few of us would have the temerity to believe we understand the soul of Western culture. My admiration for the worldview of Western twentieth-century art—from Pablo Picasso,

7. In spite of their great significance, Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros for years have been presented to American art students as examples of how politics can destroy the artist. The recent romance with Kahlo's work serves as an opiate for the women's movement, romanticizing her relationship with Rivera, while downplaying his enormous achievements.

8. I am not sure whether this relationship is practiced in Europe.



**FIGURE 4**  
Keith Morrison, *A Night in Tunisia*, 1991. Oil on canvas, 152.4 × 172.72 cm (60 × 68 in.). Collection of the artist.

Constantin Brancusi, and Marcel Duchamp to Jackson Pollock, Joseph Beuys, and Anselm Kiefer—is enormous. However, I know I can never understand the center of their cultural ethos nor experience nor fully appreciate what their place in the world is like. Yet, Euro-Americans (perhaps more than Europeans) seem to profess that they have seen all and understand all about the arts of others. This is what people of color call the hubris of Euro-Americans.

Culture, by implication, is a form of prejudice: prejudice of habit, history, environment, and dreams. How can one culture be objective toward another? Some people, by their own definition, are “universal”—“international” people whose ideas are global, objective, and transcend culture. I, myself, have never met such a

person. All people I have met carry some significant amount of cultural baggage with them. The world’s great international art is too largely about the monopoly and baggage of a European and Euro-American culture. It is European and Euro-American people who “Balkanize” the art world. Is there room at the table for the cultural perspectives of others?

I am not arguing for a democratic museum, with equal representation for all, or for art to be selected by some kind of patronage system. Nor am I calling for “Balkanization” of the art world, which is a Euro-American euphemism for the values of people of color.<sup>9</sup> What I am positing is that until most major museums are governed by people who fully represent the entire spectrum of our society, museums’ efforts to mirror world culture of the twentieth century will remain incomplete.

We do have examples of alternative cultural perspectives. A 1998 exhibition of American art, held as the inaugural exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art in Monterrey, Mexico,<sup>10</sup> provided a refreshing way to think about the Americas. It included art from Chile to Canada, making intra-continental associations, recontextualizing much recent art, and demystifying imagery that is often obscured. How different that exhibition was from the litany of so-called American art exhibitions that annually parade across the United States and do little, if anything, to

challenge predictable assumptions of the cultural basis of art.

I believe that this kind of wider cultural inclusion is a necessary first step as we consider the possibilities of mortality or immortality. I urge us all to work toward this preliminary goal. In their essays, Judy Chicago and Joyce J. Scott summarize the issue of mortality / immortality as a political one (see “Hope Springs Eternal” and “Immortality/Immortality,” pages 147–152 and 75–78, respectively). I agree. This is not necessarily a bad thing. The art world has always made political choices—for mostly Euro-American artists. How about more intracultural inclusion among the political choices? Think of it as the art world’s answer to being “politically correct.” If we cannot change our cultural values sufficiently, we can augment our shortcomings with a constructive political will. No quotas are necessary. What is necessary is better inclusion of non-Europeans and non-Euro-Americans who are given positions of authority, not just used as advisors. The principle of the politics should be to create an agenda of conscious inclusion to allow other people to choose the art they believe represents them. Politics, rather than culture-free assumptions, may be our best common mediator. I urge us to reconsider our political choices, to form common alliances, and to make the world of art a better place for all. ■

9. As it was people of color who “lowered standards,” collecting detritus in the name of art that most museums would love to de-acquisition from their basements.

10. The exhibition was largely curated by Charles Merewether (who is Scottish and Australian), who showed, by example, how a curator can work collaboratively with others who have alternate cultural points of view, when a museum is receptive to such dialogue.



## A DEALER'S RESPONSIBILITY

Donald Young

As an art dealer, I am focusing my attention in this essay on the aspects of art conservation that specifically affect my profession. It is an occupation that is not always known for its professionalism. A dealer can be merchant, representative, promoter, advisor, provider, protector, friend, or father figure—all, some, or none of these things. Luckily, there are some of us who take enormous satisfaction in preserving the life of what we believe is the great art of our time and, in this way, fulfill a critical role in a larger fabric that must include artists, dealers, collectors, and museums.

What sets the best professional dealers apart from other players in the art world is their long-term commitment to protecting artists' interests. This role is distinctly different from the auction house, whose responsibility is to the buyer and not to the artist in a world in which conflict is

resolved according to the rules of the marketplace.

The role of collectors varies enormously. In some cases, collectors are justly praised for their unselfish support of contemporary artists and institutions. Their interest, however, is often market driven, which leads them to avoid works that are more difficult to deal with, whether due to physical properties (scale, weight, fragility, medium, etc.) or content. Such factors affect the work's marketability and its investment value.

As the most probable future custodians of the art of our times, museums and art institutions should logically be the most loyal supporters of artists' interests. However, when looking at installations in museums around the world, it is clear that this issue is not always a priority. Museum acquisitions are often controlled by collectors with a specific market-oriented agenda. Additionally,

through ignorance or arrogance, work is presented without respect for the artist's wishes or the integrity of the piece. The question must then be asked: How can this be changed and what is the dealer's role?

The dealer's responsibilities are determined by both the nature of a particular artist's work and the dealer's relationship with the artist. A primary relationship with an artist who is using nontraditional materials is the most demanding and also the one most relevant to the subject at hand. My position regarding these responsibilities is based on a lifetime involvement in the art world. I started in London in 1963 at the age of twenty-one and then spent ten years in Paris. In 1976, I opened a gallery in Chicago,

which led to my close involvement with contemporary artists. My experience with certain artists has been of particular importance in formulating what I feel is my area of responsibility. Those artists are Bruce Nauman (outdoor projects and fabrication of video, neon, and iron pieces, as well as the repair of neon and plaster work) (FIGS. 1, 2); Gary Hill (fabricating complex video installations and dealing with questions of installation, maintenance, and replacement) (FIG. 3); Richard Serra and Martin Puryear (outdoor projects, including fabrication and installation); and Donald Judd and Dan Flavin (fabrication and repair).

The responsibilities of the dealer are many. First, the dealer should help artists draw up documents that are necessary to protect them and their work. These include installation instructions and

diagrams, instructions regarding maintenance, and legal documents.

Installation instructions and diagrams define precisely the parameters of what is essential to the work, including the position of different elements, the size and height of rooms, the size of projections, and levels of sound and light. Maintenance documents should describe the general physical aspect, as well as give precise details pertaining to the repair, exchange, and updating of hardware and software in media installations.

As technology changes, the replacement of hardware is in many cases beneficial, resulting in a longer life and lower maintenance. There are cases, however, in which the artist considers specific hardware to be an essential physical part of the installation; in these cases, change becomes problematic. Such documents should

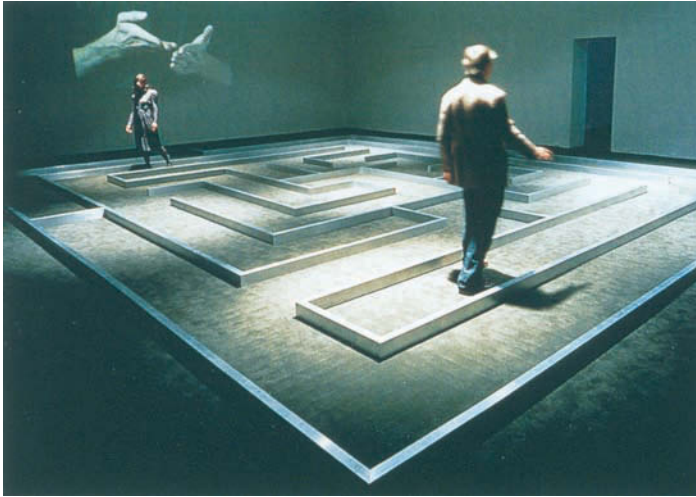
also make specific references to repainting or maintaining the surfaces of indoor and outdoor sculpture. Painted metal sculpture outdoors is a continual problem, but so is the finish on bronze, steel, and aluminum sculpture. Questions regarding indoor sculpture should also be addressed. For example: Should Alexander Calder mobiles or Sol LeWitt cubes be repainted? Should a scratched Judd be reanodized or a damaged Flavin fixture replaced? At what point should a Flavin fluorescent tube be replaced, and what if that color is no longer fabricated—is it then permissible to put a colored sleeve around a white bulb? If so, which white (because there are three types of white)? Flavin and Judd are no longer living, so we can only hope that someone who truly knows the artist's intent in each case will have the authority

*Image Not Available for Publication*

**FIGURE 1**  
Bruce Nauman, *Human Nature/Life Death*, 1983.  
Installation at State Street, Chicago, Illinois.  
Collection City of Chicago, Chicago International  
Sculpture Purchase Prize.

*Image Not Available for Publication*

**FIGURE 2**  
Bruce Nauman, *House Divided*, 1983. Collection  
Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park, Governors State  
University, University Park, Illinois.



**FIGURE 3**  
Gary Hill, *Withershins*, 1995. Interactive video/  
sound installation with aluminum structure.  
Installation at the 1995 Venice Biennale, Leone  
d'Oro Prize for Sculpture. Collection of the artist.

to answer these questions. Even if the artist leaves clear instructions, the collectors and institutions that own the work must be willing to abide by them.

Legal documents regarding copyright and reproduction rights must be drawn up to protect the artist and the work now and in the future; questions of liability, responsibility for maintenance, repair, and change of site are particularly significant. Such documents should be clear and not impossibly onerous to the owner of the work. An overly long legal document can be counterproductive, but a workable document that clearly states the seriousness of the issues will be given more credibility by collectors and museums.

Second, the dealer should transmit these requirements to the buyer and have the buyer sign a letter of agreement. At this point, it is important that the dealer be completely honest and open regarding the buyer's responsibility. It is not uncommon for a dealer to avoid these issues in order to facilitate a sale.

Third, the dealer should help the artist enforce these requirements. This is not always easy, since a dealer may be in the position of having to persuade valuable clients, museums, or collectors to do something they do not want to do. It may be even harder with an auction house that has no responsibility to the artist and only a temporary market interest in the work. Cases of ignorance can be avoided by careful transmittal of the documents mentioned above. Simple measures, such as affixing installation instructions to the inside of the shipping crate, can help a great deal.

Finally, the dealer's responsibility should extend to working with material and equipment specialists and conservation professionals to find ways to protect the integrity of the work, as well as with art lawyers and responsible museums and collectors to find ways to enforce the above-mentioned requirements. I say "responsible" museums and institutions because, although there is an assumption that the museum is the ultimate protector of the artist and the work of art, I know from experience that this is often not the case.

Many times, I have received purchase agreements from institutions that attempt to weaken the artist's basic rights. Prepared by museum bureaucrats and dictated by ideas of ownership and control, these documents are usually accompanied by letters of apology from a curator or director and demand many hours of work to correct. It would seem that priorities are skewed when questions of ownership and control take precedence over the more worthy role of custodian. This would seem to be another indication of the controlling influence of certain important collectors whose sense of ownership may be considerably greater than any concept of custodial or civic responsibility.

The fact is that many institutions and collectors do not respect the needs of the works in their possession. This may be due to carelessness, lack of funds, laziness, ignorance, professional ineptitude, arrogance, or malicious intent. Luckily, there is very rarely malicious intent, but I see evidence of all the others even in the most respected institutions and homes around the world. Judd spent an enormous amount of time policing the installations of his own work, which are often installed incorrectly (either at the wrong height or with the wrong spacing between the different elements); sometimes damaged (dented or scratched); and nearly always covered in fingerprints. In one case I remember well, a piece had been badly fabricated, without the artist's super-

vision, from a certificate. The fabrication was so inept as to be almost a parody of the artist's work; yet it was still shown, against the artist's wishes. I have seen Flavin's work in an eminent institution hung not only incorrectly (above the baseboard when it was clearly stated in the certificate that it must be on the floor) but also with fluorescent tubes of the wrong color. The work of both these artists requires an impeccable finish, yet I have seen a sloppy refabrication of Flavin's work because this was simpler than shipping the original fixture or because it was more convenient to use European rather than American fixtures. How many times will we see contemporary sculpture placed on a base when one of the major tenets of contemporary sculpture is the elimination of the base? What happens when these works end up in museums and are given the sanction of official presentation? In how many cases will there be someone who knows enough or cares enough?

These problems are not limited to contemporary sculpture. Recently, I saw paintings by Robert Ryman installed on a curved wall so there was a curved gap on the top and bottom of the painting. Was there no director or curator aware of one of the fundamental ideas expressed in Ryman's work, which is the way in which the painted surface relates to the wall? Are questions of housekeeping more important than the integrity of the work? In a major exhibition

of one artist's video installations, another artist's video work with very loud sound, installed only 50 feet away, interfered with the exhibition. The curators were insensitive to this situation, and it was only on the artist's insistence that sound baffles were installed.

In the home of a major European collector, I saw a work by Jannis Kounellis hung on its side to fit into an available space and close to a video projection that was invisible because it was projected onto a gray slate floor. Outside was an indoor steel sculpture that was varnished, thus completely changing the color and texture of the piece. It made my hair stand on end, but in this particular case I could not fault



**FIGURE 4**  
Charles Ray, *Fashions*, 1996. 16mm color film  
installation. Collection Donald Young, Chicago.

the enthusiasm of the collector, and I continue to ask myself whether we can expect a collector who lacks the correct ceiling height or the correct floor to behave as responsibly as a museum.

In view of these problems, what is the role of the dealer? One would hope that the artists' words, either in the form of original certificates, agreements, or simply phone calls to the curators involved, would be sufficient to safeguard the integrity of the works even when they may sometimes conflict with the interests or perceptions of museums or collectors.

In 1997, a European museum organized a large exhibition of

Bruce Nauman's work that was beautifully and sensitively installed. A few months later, the same museum installed an exhibition of contemporary California art using strong designer colors as the backdrop for paintings and sculpture. Despite complaints from many of the artists present for the installation, the museum cited its curatorial prerogative and would not change the installation. Although these situations are rare, every large group show ends up compromising the work of some of the participants, just as traditional paintings are sometimes badly framed and poorly hung. Fortunately, the dealer usually travels a great deal more than the artist and can often correct errors of installation, either directly or by informing the artist of the problem. Most responsible institutions and collectors will turn to the dealer for clarification of issues affecting everything from installation to restoration.

The varying levels of professionalism and commitment to the integrity of the artist's work become clear when large touring exhibitions are installed by different institutions. I was particularly close to a recent touring exhibition of Gary Hill's work, organized by the Henry Art Gallery of Seattle. Although the commitment of curator Nancy Spector at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York was exceptional, I encountered a level of disrespect elsewhere that was insulting to both the artist and his work.

Many who saw the Nauman exhibition at the Städtische Galerie in Frankfurt eight years ago wondered how it was possible to so totally misunderstand an artist's work. It is sad that an artist should have to police his or her work, and many refuse to do so. Although dealers, curators, writers, collectors, and friends care enough, they are not always able to influence these situations.

In my role as a dealer, I have been fortunate to work with many of the great artists of our time and to advise many younger artists and dealers. It has been enormously satisfying for me to work with institutions and collectors who have made a serious commitment to these issues. Strangely, it is not usually the younger Modern or contemporary art museums that are leading the way but the older institutions that demonstrate their long tradition of custodial responsibility. I must particularly mention the Tate Gallery in London, which, in my experience, is one of only two institutions worldwide that have dealt seriously with the long-term



## No one is more aware of the demands of an artist's work than the dealer, who is often the only one overseeing its initial installation.

problems of protecting contemporary works of art comprised of such materials as video and film (FIG. 4) that are so radically different from those traditionally used in painting and sculpture.

I have laid a lot of blame on institutions and collectors, but one could say that artists and dealers are at the root of the problem. Many collectors and institutions will rightly complain that either there is no information supplied to them or that the instructions are confusing and ambiguous or impractical and unrealistic. They may also complain that the dealer becomes disinterested once the deal is made and makes only a half-hearted attempt to obtain information from artists that would apply to the work's preservation. In the meantime, the artist has moved on to new work and new ideas and tries to avoid the tedious task of preparing diagrams and instructions for older work. It is

clear that the commitment of all those involved is necessary for the survival of contemporary art into the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries.

Clearly, a dealer's job with regard to the immortality of the art he or she represents is not an easy one. Not only do dealers have to sell the work, but they also have to police it. The buyer not only has to pay for the work but also needs to be made aware of the responsibilities to it. Perhaps a buyer can even be convinced that he or she is a custodian of our culture—a commitment that goes beyond that of ownership.

No one is more aware of the demands of an artist's work than the dealer, who is often the only one overseeing its initial installation. Frequently, this person will also have been responsible for the work's fabrication and, therefore, will be aware—perhaps even more than the artist—of any

inherent weakness or other problems that could arise in the future. A dealer can write all this down and effectively convey it to the buyer, but the recipient of this information has to care enough to understand and accept the long-term commitment and responsibility to the artist's original intention. In one hundred years' time, will the institution have looked after the work properly? When the curator decides to show it, will he or she take the trouble to find those instructions that have been filed away somewhere? And if so, will the demands be such that the institution will be incapable or unwilling to follow them? Finally, when the work is exhibited incorrectly, will anybody notice? I certainly hope so because, if not, we in the art world will not have done our job. ■

## THE CONSERVATION OF CONTEMPORARY ART: NEW METHODS AND STRATEGIES?

Ysbrand Hummelen

For large numbers of twentieth-century artists, the durability of their art is entirely subordinate to its power of expression. This development is vastly different from the original meaning of the term “craft,” whereby the artist as he or she worked was able to “conquer” a material that was extremely durable and thereby often difficult to mold. The reward was an image—in the Platonic sense of the word—in which this “struggle” with the material was supposed to remain largely invisible. Until well into the nineteenth century, the concept of durability as a criterion of quality had, for centuries, played an important role in Western art. The durability of an artwork, as well as providing a certain guarantee for the buyer’s investment, also guaranteed the artist—and thereby the artwork—immortality. The responsibility for preserving the work lay, in the first instance, with the artist, who was expected to use

the correct materials and techniques. In the second instance, it lay—and still does—with the owner or curator of the artwork.

For many contemporary artists, however, durability—both in a technical and an ideological sense—has become irrelevant. During the twentieth century, the materials used have increasingly had a personal iconological significance imposed on them by the artists themselves. For example, Michelangelo Pistoletto, in his work *Venere degli Stracci* (1967–82), sets the vulnerability of the fabric (as a metaphor for the fleetingness of our contemporary culture) against the illusion of the durability of the marble sculpture within it.

The explosion of diversity of materials used by artists in the second half of the twentieth century cannot be explained by any corresponding increase in the need felt among artists to extend the durable means for establishing mimesis.

Quite the opposite. The concern is increasingly with the material itself and its ability to convey an experience in “real time.” It is precisely on this level of experience that artists are ascribing completely new meanings. In his *Mercury’s Lamp* (1965), Pistoletto used a club-shaped mercury lamp of the kind found suspended above crossroads. In 1992, the German restorer Christian Scheidemann was asked to seek a replica of the vulnerable twenty-five-year-old lamp. Although the light, color, and form of the new lamp were the same as the original, Pistoletto deemed it unsuitable because it was a sodium

lamp and did not have the same iconological meaning as the mercury in the original lamp.<sup>1</sup>

Pistoletto's mercury, the lead in Anselm Kiefer's work, the arsenic in Sigmar Polke's, the plastics in Eva Hesse's, or the beeswax in the works of Mario Merz, Joseph Beuys, or Wolfgang Leib are all materials that were chosen not for their durability but for the very personal and different iconological meanings bestowed on them by the artists.

Moreover, concern is not only with the use of materials but also with "things"; devices such as sound, film, computer and video equipment or machines, furniture, and consumer goods are all used as materials for expression and are given new and unexpected meanings by every artist who works with them. For it is also one of the features of contemporary art that accepted aesthetic categories are constantly being brought into question. A chair in day-to-day living has a totally different function and meaning than a chair in Bruce Nauman's work and still another meaning in an installation by Ilya Kabakov.

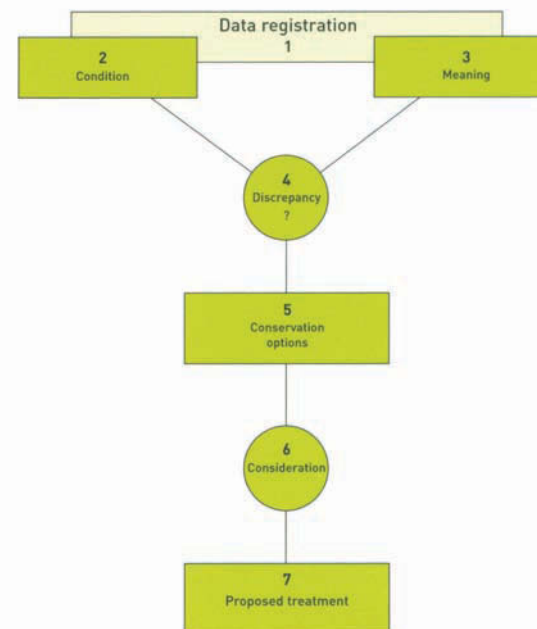
Another major problem is that these artworks, which were originally created as an offensive against accepted aesthetic standards, were quickly approached in a defensive manner within the context of museums' rapidly acquired, newly historical, museological function, in which the conservation of authenticity plays such an important role.

This process is evident with Jean Tinguely's *Gismo* (1960) from the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, which, due to its construction from waste materials, is gradually self-destructing and which may be seen as an offensive against the primacy of the durability of art. Now we have decided, however, that this same work, from the standpoint of preserving a historic document, should be "protected" against the wear and tear of use. In this way, the original trailblazing, revolutionary, or radical power of many artworks is undermined by approaching them as historical documents.

In 1996–97, the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art was established in the Nether-

lands for the purpose of studying these issues. This group—consisting of curators, conservators, conservation scientists, and cultural scientists appointed by the various Modern and contemporary art museums in the Netherlands—has analyzed the considerations that play a role in the decision-making process for determining the ways in which Modern and contemporary art should be conserved. Various options have been discussed, such as different methods of conservation or restoration, reinstallation, or even a replacement, a replica, or a method for recording a performance. It became quickly evident that information on the significance artists give to their materials and methods

**FIGURE 1**  
Decision-making model for the conservation and restoration of Modern and contemporary art.



1. Christian Scheidemann, "Man at Work—The Significance of Material in the Collaboration between Artist and Fabricator in the Sixties and Seventies," paper presented at the symposium "Modern Art: Who Cares?" Amsterdam, 8–10 September 1997, and forthcoming in *Modern Art: Who Cares?* (Amsterdam: Netherlands Institute of Cultural Heritage and the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art).

of working is essential when making these decisions.

The establishment of such a foundation and working group was due to the desire on the part of the Dutch minister of culture to gain an insight into the future efforts required to conserve Modern and contemporary art collections in Dutch museums. The cultural minister's questions may be briefly summed up as: Do you have conservation problems? If so, what and how great are these problems? How do you propose to resolve them? Until now, the Dutch government has always been considered responsible for the conservation of public collections of art.

Views on the nature of conservation problems, however, inevitably have differed among the various museum professionals. Whereas one person felt that a work could easily be executed again or replicated, another thought that the same object should be meticulously restored. To gain more insight into the situation, the group drew up a decision-making model (FIG. 1) to study the decision-making process with regard to the conservation of ten pilot objects.

It was apparent that for the debate to remain sharply focused, it was essential to first define the problem of conservation in exact terms. At the same time, we had

to determine the discrepancy that existed between the condition of a work and its original meaning. As can be seen in Figure 1, this is the first step in the decision-making process when choosing a method of conservation, whereby—in order to reach a decision—the importance of various factors that may be interpreted as “fields of force” need to be weighed.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a crucial precondition when deciding on appropriate methods and strategies for conservation is to determine the meaning ascribed to works and objects and, as previously mentioned, the significance of the materials used, the techniques, and working processes.

One of the chief conclusions of our study, however, was the inadequacy of available information and documentation on an artist's intention when using various materials and techniques during the process of making an artwork. Certain reasons may account for this. First, art criticism and art history studies have not been particularly concerned with the meaning inherent in the materials and in their application and, following naturally from this, the actual processes used in the making of Modern and contemporary art. In the sometimes exhaustive literature available on the artists who made the objects that were studied for our project, this aspect was barely touched upon for the most part. It was necessary to embark on a kind of visual anthropology, in which those artists still living could be interviewed and thus lend

us generous assistance in shedding light on these specific issues.

Knowledge of the widest possible range of aspects related to the information contained in art objects is an essential precondition for the quality of conservation. Theoretical knowledge is guaranteed by a variety of studies and research programs. For this reason, art history, archaeology, ethnography, and other related studies are taught at practically all major universities. However, in each of these studies the meaning of the material—the material culture—has a different place and function. In archaeology it is, of course, a condition *sine qua non*. In ethnographic studies in Europe, the importance of the material culture has greatly diminished, unlike in other non-European countries. But within art history studies, the significance of the material used, the artist's working processes, and material culture is a controversial area.

Another aspect that plays a role when deciding on strategies for conserving contemporary art is that it is no longer represented by autonomous objects. Moreover, performances, installations, computer simulations, and ongoing art processes are not always finished products but temporary demonstrations from an open studio,

2. M. Bosma, Y. Hummelen, D. Sillé, R. van der Vall, and R. Wegen, “Decision-Making Model for the Conservation of Modern Art,” paper presented at the symposium “Modern Art: Who Cares?” Amsterdam, 8–10 September 1997, and forthcoming in *Modern Art: Who Cares?*

## For many contemporary artists, durability is less important than and plays a secondary role to the power of expression in an artwork.

in which a record is shown of the projects and changing processes. These are creative expressions that cannot be included in a collection in any physical form or are so transitory that, as the curator Piet de Jonge of Rotterdam's Museum Boymans van Beunigen put it during our study, "You're happy and grateful when you've been in possession of an object."

Thus, the problems in the preservation of contemporary art are defined by the following developments:

- For many contemporary artists, durability is less important than and plays a secondary role to the power of expression in an artwork.
- The iconological meaning of the material itself and the working processes are very specifically and individually determined by every artist. There is a lack of information on these meanings in most artists' works.
- Contemporary art is no longer represented just by autonomous objects but increasingly by temporary works such as installations, performances, and ongoing art processes.

- The explosion of diversity of materials and objects used in artworks makes it virtually impossible to know the composition and aging characteristics of every material used. Moreover, it is impossible to trace information on the composition of many of the materials used (the weakest materials are mainly the plastics, and the most vulnerable objects are those involving electronic equipment).

Due to these developments, conservation methods used for more traditional Western art are no longer appropriate for conserving Modern and contemporary art. It is evident that other conservation methods will be necessary.

In conclusion, documentation of and a study into data on the material used and the meaning ascribed to it by the artist should be a structural component for the conservation of Modern and contemporary works of art. Moreover, proper methods should be developed for documenting temporary and immaterial art.

Additionally, as the responsibility for conservation shifts increas-

ingly from the artists to the owners or curators, who are already aware of the limited life span of many contemporary artworks when they are purchased or acquired—museums of Modern and contemporary art will clearly have to choose as one of their international, national, or regional functions the conservation and handing down of twentieth-century visual art. To accomplish this, they will have to invest heavily in gathering, making accessible, researching, and exchanging data (for instance by artists' interviews).

The methods for collecting and making accessible this information should meet with high standards. For this, more research and more international and interdisciplinary collaboration in research is needed. At the same time, all the data available until now should be catalogued and tested according to these standards. An international network, created by museums of Modern and contemporary art, should be constructed whereby this data can be exchanged for the benefit of the conservation of these artworks. In recent years, the Netherlands Institute for Cultural

Heritage has supported the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art, a joint initiative by Dutch museums with Modern and contemporary collections, and will continue to do so in the coming years. Without international cooperation and effort, however, the problems of conserving contemporary art cannot be mastered; the museums need to cooperate more internationally if they are to hand down twentieth-century art to the new millennium. ■



## A LIFE IN ITS OWN TIMES

Laurel Reuter

As a small child, I grew up on the Fort Totton Sioux Indian Reservation in Tokio, North Dakota. One day a young woman appeared in our two-room school—Betty Cutting, of Boston, was brought to our remote world by the nearby St. Michael’s Indian Mission. I do not remember how she looked, only how she felt in the room—cool, clean, gentle, otherworldly. She was so beautiful, and I fell in love with her.

She arrived with a trunk crammed with the stuff of magic: books for reading out loud, ballet costumes, oil paints, pastels and charcoals for drawing, records and a record player, songbooks, and scripts for making plays. And I fell in love with art.

Probably because of her, I became who I am: one who has spent a lifetime carrying out the democratization of cultural life that began in the United States with the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965; one who has extended the aesthetic dialogue to those on the edges, to

people who live outside the normal highways that art traffics; and, in the process, one who has placed a great deal of art in harm’s way.

I keep expecting that a coalition the likes of the American Association of Museums, the Association of Art Museum Directors, and the Getty Conservation Institute will pass a resolution condemning the likes of me. To make the journey from that childhood village to the pages of this book, I have traversed a minefield, my shoulders laden with vulnerable works of art.

The Dakota, that famous apartment building on Central Park West in New York City, was named the Dakota because, when it was built, it seemed as far north and west of civilization as Dakota itself. In the same spirit, I took it upon myself to build North Dakota’s first art museum in Grand Forks.

The museum began as a temporary exhibition space on the top floor of the University of North Dakota’s student union. Then, in

the mid-1980s, I convinced the university to give me a vacant 1907 gymnasium. I could not afford a famous architect, but I wanted one who cared deeply about art. My only candidate was Harvey Hoshour, a friend from New Mexico; he had grown up around the Arensberg Collection (now at the Philadelphia Museum of Art). Hoshour’s mother and Walter Arensberg had a twenty-year love affair after their respective spouses died, thus baptizing the child in the seminal art of the twentieth century. Hoshour graduated first in his class in architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1955, worked for Mies van der Rohe and later I. M. Pei, and then established his own firm in Albuquerque.

Like his mother before him, Hoshour was splendid company. I remember a time in the late 1980s when we were wandering around the Chicago Art Fair. Gleefully, he called me over to see Marcel Duchamp’s birdcage. “When I was a child I ate all the sugar cubes out of the nest. Can you imagine how much they paid a conservator to

our tile roof was riddled with holes, as North Dakota was in the middle of a long drought.

I was never properly educated in the ways of the art world, so at the time I began the museum, I did not know that high art was defined by painting and sculpture. I had spent a lot of time looking at Asian art. The Northern Sioux culture in which I had grown up was rooted in transportable, soft materials: dyed porcupine quills, trade beads, hides, and ledgers. Our art was made from whatever material lay at hand. Dance costumes, for example, were embellished with tin-can bangles and plastic substitutes for bones. Indeed, from the beginning I exhibited all materials in every medium, but I was always looking for art that my intelligent audiences could relate to, even if they did not know much about art.

An example is the gigantic series of nests, reaching 30 feet from floor to ceiling, that Patrick Dougherty built after spending a week cutting swamp willow. David Finn created an installation of newspaper children surrounded by a comprehensive collection of twenty-year-old Tonka trucks. Both exhibitions were destroyed when they ended. Made of modest materials well known to our people, they delighted and amazed visitors for brief moments before passing into oblivion like much of the art of the last years of our century.

Privately, I have always been drawn to art that speaks from the human soul, and I have found my audience willing to accom-

pany me. It was by accident that I stumbled across the work of the South African Georgie Papageorge. Of Dutch and English descent, Papageorge lives outside of Pretoria. She came to art in her full maturity, four children already at her skirts. In a country at war with itself, private lives become laced with tragedy, just as, in a country like South Africa, the lives of both the rich and the poor are interwoven with the source of wealth—gold mines.

Papageorge's oldest brother, Jonathan van der Merwe, worked on the Elandsrand Gold Mine; his wife worked on the nearby Blyvooruitzicht Gold Mine. Together with the Western Deep Levels Gold Mine, they formed the triangle that became the playground of the van der Merwe children. On a fateful afternoon, on December 12, 1978, Papageorge's nephew Owen went off to the gold dumps to trap guinea fowl. A black friend was to meet him. That day, the child disappeared.

A riot had occurred earlier that morning when some forty miners were discharged and sent back to the homelands. It was never known whether Owen's friend ever joined him or even who he was. During the agonizing months that followed, Papageorge spent long hours with her brother and sister-in-law combing the gray and yellow sands that make up the sedimented layers of a mine dump. As part of the search, and because she was an artist, Papageorge planted painted poles on top of

the Western Deep Levels Gold Mine dump, poles that contrasted sharply with the working slimes pipes and uprights already there (FIG. 1). The gleaming standards became a silent prayer, a visual reaching out to a child. In the late afternoon, the skies would darken as storms moved through, and the poles, which remained there permanently, would radiate off the dump, visible from far away. "See me, come to this glistening light, allow me to find you"—the prayer went unanswered, and gradually the paint was worn away by the blistering sun and the endlessly shifting sands.

Thus, Papageorge became a political artist for all time. Art, born of its own time, finds its life in that very moment. The moment goes by and the work of art passes into history, to be judged and valued by other terms and new meanings. Georgie Papageorge went on to perform rituals 8,000 feet underground in working mine shafts. A decade passed, and she shifted to collaborations in the squatter camps.

In August 1993, I traveled to South Africa, to the Stanza Bopape Squatter Camp near Pretoria, to cover one of Georgie's collaborations, *Horizon* (1993), for *High Performance* magazine. The work's top section, protected by brown paper, had been painted by the artist at an earlier date. The bottom and the

put them back?" Clearly, I had found a man steeped in twentieth-century art. Even though he was aware of both my meager resources and the North Dakota law stipulating that a local architect would be credited with our state-owned building, Hoshour agreed to become my personal consulting architect.

We knowingly made the choice for light—beloved by our people, despised by conservators. Thus, I schedule my most fragile exhibitions in our light-filled galleries during the dead of winter, when our days are less than eight hours long and the sun hangs low on the horizon. The museum opened in 1989. For the first four years, we did not even know that



**FIGURE 1**  
Georgie Papageorge, *Site Installation: Western Deep Levels Gold Mine, 1980–83* (above left), in western Transvaal, South Africa.



**FIGURE 2**  
Georgie Papageorge, *Suspension, 1990* (above right). Installation on the Simmer and Jack Gold Mine dump south of Johannesburg, 31 October 1990.

back were painted collectively by the crowd attending the daylong celebratory event—a gathering to which few white people came, forestalled by fear. This particular work may not be recorded in history as a great work of art; however, the process of making it was intertwined with a momentous time in the history of South Africa. Within less than a year—that is, after the elections—many artists embarked upon such collaborations. Papageorge, however, was among the very first, and the seeds for this collaboration are embedded in her earlier masterpiece, *Suspension* (1990) (FIG. 2).

Created as the altarpiece for the 1993 Native American Thanksgiving service at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, *Suspension* is

based on the concept of a suspension bridge that spans vast gaps—both sociological and physical. It is twin-sided—the front symbolic of wealth, the back of poverty. Conceptually, the whole work is an extension of the human body, climaxing in a central transcendent ladder that is, in itself, a Tree of Life. Wealth and power are symbolized by gold reef conglomerate; Zulu Nguni cattle hide; the South African flag—which is also the banner of the Dutch East India Company; gold leaf; painted bison hide—contributed by young Native American artists from North Dakota; and the American flag, originally designed by Betsy Ross.

Poverty and loss are symbolized by corrugated iron sheeting from black townships in South

Africa—the building material of the poor the world over; burnt sand from the mine dumps; goat-skins; hundred-year-old rusted food tins from the Anglo-Boer War; press clippings documenting years of South African civil strife; and, from my own poverty-stricken North Dakota Indian reservation, flattened tins and boxes from U.S. Government surplus food commodities.

Who is responsible for seeing that this work of art is preserved for the future? Somehow, because I felt the power of the work and there was no South African entity

to step forward, I became responsible. *Suspension*, along with twenty other large Papageorge works, remains in storage in the North Dakota Museum of Art, too costly to ship back to South Africa where it eventually must go. But it is safe for a time—or at least as long as I am around.

In 1989, I was forced to choose between art as a living force and art as an object to be preserved for future generations. Under the sponsorship of the United States Information Agency (USIA), I was charged with organizing and touring an exhibition of contemporary fiber art to the Pacific Rim. I invited my longtime colleague, Mildred Constantine, to join me as co-curator. Halfway through the tour, the USIA staff asked if we would take the show to Beijing, China, as part of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the reopening of relations between the two countries, a decade after President Richard Nixon's historic visit. In the intervening years, the three preceding exhibitions all had run into trouble. Most recently, the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., had withdrawn its proposed exhibition when Chinese officials demanded the removal of portraits of General Douglas MacArthur and Golda Meir.

I went to China to negotiate and found that whatever venue I settled on, China's museum standards would not meet those required of us at home. The show opened in Guangzhou in a climate-controlled museum where the power was out most of the time,

## Who is responsible for seeing that this work of art is preserved for the future? Somehow, because I felt the power of the work . . . I became responsible.

thus guaranteeing low light levels but also heat and high humidity. I was in and out of China often as I prepared to move the show to the Beijing Art Gallery. It was May 1989—a heady time. Already, Chinese students had taken up residence in Tiananmen Square, challenging the government with calls for democratic reform.

I returned to the States for a couple of weeks, but a few days before I was to go back to China, I received a call from the cultural affairs officer in Beijing. Things had become unstable. The Chinese government wanted me to come, and for the show to go on, but I had to make my own decision. I consulted with my crew; we decided to proceed but to leave behind anyone who was apprehensive.

The American cultural staff met our plane in China on a late Saturday evening bearing unsettling news. To protect the Chinese art community, my lecture had been moved from a public forum to a less visible, private bookstore. Also, one work in the exhibition, Arturo Sandoval's portrayal of the United States flag, might draw trouble. The students at the Cen-

tral Academy of Art had raised their plaster Statue of Liberty in the square. Were not the Americans to blame for the student unrest?

Written across the face of the Sandoval's flag were the words: "A New Chance. The reasons people uproot themselves from the lands of their birth are as various as the people themselves. Every tale is different. But there is one constant refrain that immigrants to the United States have always sounded: freedom." If the flag went up, the whole exhibition might be in jeopardy. The American Embassy staff in Washington did not want to make the decision; I was to decide.

On Sunday, my crew and I wandered around Tiananmen Square, visiting and shooting pictures. It was barely summer.

Optimism was still high. The next morning, we began the installation. I stood on the loading dock of the Beijing Art Gallery and watched the crates being delivered, sick to my stomach as one came off the truck smashed. The exhibition had been scheduled to move from the south of China by rail, but the students, in an effort to block the mass movement of troops into Beijing, had lain down in front of the train. Abruptly, the exhibition was transferred to trucks. When we opened the compressed crate, I was relieved to find that Nancy Hemenway's *Tipi Waterfall* (1982) was unharmed.

The week moved on, and we worked, watched, and waited. Would I hang the Sandavol flag? Nothing was clear to me. A Chinese installation crew had joined us, working days in the museum

and sitting out their nights in the square. By Saturday the tension was thick. It was hot. Thunderstorms threatened. The show was out of its crates, and the ceiling pieces were installed. Sometime in the midafternoon, a young Chinese man was summoned to take a phone call. Visibly shaken, he reported the news: The troops had fired tear gas at the students. Disbelief. In a state of quiet depression, we finished the work day, ate a bad supper at our Chinese hotel, and went off to our separate rooms. I slept restlessly. My Chinese host had been kidding with me the day before, suggesting that the gallery's skylight leaked—my nightmare. Sometime in the night, I was awakened by thunder. I got up and opened the curtains. There was no rain, no clouds even. I went back to bed and fell into a fitful sleep. Thunder. Again I went to the window, and again, the sky seemed clear. Gradually, I came to understand that guns, not thunder, had reached into my sleep. I stood alone at that seventeenth-floor window in the cold hours of dawn and watched war break over the city.

We had been invited to the cultural attaché's apartment in the American Embassy Compound the next morning for breakfast. Assuming that all invitations were called off, I telephoned. "If you can get here, come! We all have to eat," was the response. One hundred dollars later, having traversed intersections strewn with burned-out buses, battalions of armored

vehicles, and armed and unarmed masses, we sat down to cold, burnt eggs and old toast.

What would I do about the exhibition? What would I do about the flag? By the time we left the compound to join a million others silently moving toward the square, I knew. If the exhibition went up, the flag would go up as well. We were on the students' side. I also knew that my insurance on the exhibition was probably invalidated by an act of war. Once again, I had chosen the living existence of works of art over their preservation.

One week later, I bought black-market airplane tickets on the street and left with my staff on a Chinese airline for Hong Kong. Days later, my Chinese crew patched and repacked the crates. In August, they were finally returned to the United States Embassy and shipped to Hong Kong, where the show was put in storage.

But there were other decisions to be made. Indonesia wanted the exhibition—badly. I said no. How could I take a fragile textile exhibition to its National Museum, a museum with a wonderful collection, but an open-air museum if there ever was one? The USIA staff in Washington continued to push. Relenting, I went to Jakarta for another visit. Again, I was left alone to make my decision. Here was one of the richest living textile traditions in the world. Here was an audience who would be fascinated to see what American artists were doing. They would marvel

and they would understand. Reluctantly, I capitulated, placing only one condition: The show must be scheduled during the dry season.

One year after the crates were released from Beijing, I arrived in Jakarta to news that the crate housing the Hemenway tipi, originally smashed on the Chinese troop train, had taken water when left on the tarmac at the Jakarta airport. Yes, it was dry season, but it rained incessantly. Fortunately, the conservators at the National Museum were able to arrest the mildew.

I began to lay out the exhibition, centering one gallery with Hemenway's monumental tipi. When I came into that gallery the next morning, I realized that the Javanese installation crew must have worked all night long building a huge—and, to my eyes, ugly—platform for the tipi. I objected and, as the "illustrious" visiting curator, got my way: The platform was removed, and the tipi was placed on the floor. Months later, when the work was back in the United States, we discovered that rats had eaten all around the bottom of the tipi. The Indonesians, probably the politest people in the world, could not tell me why I had



needed the platform.<sup>1</sup> Once again, I had inadvertently brought harm to a work of art.

The ramifications of my work in China have continued to the present day. In 1991, I received a call from a friend on the East Coast who urged me to contact a Chinese artist living in a nearby state whose work, she was sure, I would love. It seems that Xu Bing, the celebrated leader of China's New Wave movement of the late 1980s and a professor of printmaking at Beijing's Central Academy of Art, had been vilified by the cultural ministry during the week of the Tiananmen Square rebellion, in which hundreds of protesters were killed by government troops. Only four months earlier, Xu Bing's seminal *Book from Sky* (1987–91) had received great acclaim when shown at the Beijing Art Gallery. Made up of four thousand imagined characters, the equivalent of what it takes to communicate in ordinary Chinese,

the work had taken him three years to execute. Of the four thousand characters, only ten were legible to the Chinese reader, the ten numbers used in local elections. The underlying text of the work was that all of the great knowledge that constitutes Chinese culture means nothing if citizens cannot vote. At the time of the Tiananmen Square rebellion, however, officials were charging that Xu Bing was like a blind man wandering lost in the dark, akin to ghosts pounding on the wall and unable to find their way—his celebrated work meaningless.

In response, the artist created a gigantic work about the most meaningless endeavor ever embarked upon by the human race: the Great Wall of China. Assisted by eight students and thirteen peasants, he spent thirty days during the summer of 1990 making a rubbing of the Wall. Even the idea of rubbing an object that was not refined, or precious even, was ludicrous to Chinese people.

Shortly afterward, he left for the United States on a student visa to spend a year as a visiting artist at the University of Wisconsin, where he mounted the hundreds of paper rubbings on traditional scrolls to create his monumental installation of the Great Wall, which he aptly named *Ghosts Pounding on the Wall* (1990–92). It is another seminal work in the history of contemporary Chinese art. The central walkway panels measure 100 feet long, and the side panels are 40 feet high. An enor-

mous burial mound of dirt anchors the installation. Because of its size, it has been exhibited only twice—in Madison, Wisconsin, and at the North Dakota Museum of Art.

After a year in Madison, Xu Bing applied to the University of South Dakota to keep his visa active. It was there that I found him. Friendship grew between us, along with my admiration of his work. Somehow, it has fallen into my hands to take care of *Ghosts Pounding on the Wall* until such time as it can go home to China, where it belongs.

During all those years of traveling back and forth to Asia and suffering chronic jet lag and exhaustion, I would stop in Japan to rest. There, I began to notice artists whose art echoed the serenity of the museum building I was constructing back in North Dakota. I decided to invite thirteen of them to come and install work in a yearlong, three-part exhibition, *Light and Shadow: Japanese Artists in Space* (FIG. 3).

Again, the exhibition raised larger questions for me, all relevant to the issues addressed in this book. Was such magnificent art wasted on a remote venue where only ten thousand people saw it? Was Betty Cutting's work, among only a handful of children in North Dakota all those years ago, wasted? I answer my own question. I also ask, Is the light of the exhibition space in the museum destructive to the work, even though the artists created these works with light as a formal component?

*Light and Shadow* gave voice to an unfashionable but important strain in contemporary Japanese art: repetition, the presence of formal beauty, the age-old reliance on fibrous materials in the making of art, the innate "object-ness" of much of Japanese art. Also, given the restraints of working in a small museum with minuscule budgets, I ran out of money before I was able to produce the catalogue. This is work I still must do if I am to meet my responsibilities to these artists and to this art. At the least, I owe them a small book, expanded with further research and additional artists.

Building a museum in North Dakota meant working with little money, terrific transportation problems, and even bowing to the weather. An exhibition by Ignacio Iturria, Uruguay's most

1. I did, however, convince my charming Javanese installation designer to tell me why the rains had continued during the dry season. It seemed that an international motorcar race was scheduled to take place in Sumatra during the rainy season. The local shamans were not powerful enough to stop the rains, but they succeeded in moving them to Java for two weeks. Two weeks later, the rains stopped. Try telling that to your insurance agent back home.

important living artist, was scheduled to open on November 17, 1997, and was installed. However, the opening was canceled, signaling the beginning of a horrendous year in my life and making me face, once again, the perils to which I subject art.

I had gone to Montevideo to select the exhibition earlier that fall after being visited by an emissary from the artist's gallery in Buenos Aires. Based on the visit, they wanted to go ahead. As usual, my budget was small; we agreed that the gallery would pay the international shipping costs, I would pay for the domestic.

Back in Montevideo, the canvases were taken off the stretchers, rolled, and brought into the United States as checked baggage. If one is checking a million dollars worth of paintings, it is best they look like trash—and they did. When the two couriers cleared customs at Kennedy Airport in New York, some wrappings had come loose. Gathering garbage bags in the terminal, they bound them back together. When I met the plane, we joked that the two of them, sleepless and without showers for twenty-four hours, looked like “wetbacks,” that disparaging word for Mexican laborers who swim the Rio Grande with everything they own tied on their backs. Even as we laughed, I inwardly shuddered. Oh, the risks we take as works of art enter the mainstream, before fame dictates expensive crating, fastidious handling, and every precaution in shipping.



Iturria's work already sells at auction for as much as \$80,000 a painting. Soon his work will demand what New York artist Don Dudley observed—referring to the crates housing Robert Rauschenberg's artworks for a traveling exhibition—as structures that cost more than the houses in many of the places where the works would be seen (see Robert Storr, “Immortalité Provisoire,” page 56). Working in North Dakota, I have come to accept that almost always the art that I show is at the beginning of its journey into history.

Early on in the public lives of artists, people such as myself working in out-of-the-way places are key to these artists' careers as

we open the doors for their work to enter into the international dialogue. It is while under our care, in those early stages, that so much irreparable damage is done. Often without a lot of money, we take risks that, in turn, put the artworks themselves at risk.

That November day of Iturria's canceled opening marked the first of eight snowstorms that dumped more than 140 inches of snow on our flat, semi-arid land. By late winter I sensed that, once again, we were in serious trouble. The whole vast Northern Plains was under 20-foot snow banks. The bridges to Grand Forks, which is at the fork of two great muddy rivers, were jammed with ice that

**FIGURE 3**  
Naomi and Masakazu Kobayashi, *Sound from the Cosmos*, 1990–91. Collaborative installation at the North Dakota Museum of Art, 1993.

impeded the flow of water north into the Hudson Bay and, finally, the Arctic Ocean. Then, in the second week in April, an ice storm took out all of North Dakota's power system. As the winter snow began to melt off, officials predicted that the river would crest at 49 feet. Although the museum is at 55 feet, collection storage is 4 feet below that in the half-underground, lower level.

Late in the evening of April 16, I drove into the dark countryside to say goodbye to the Hale-Bopp comet. The skies could not hold my attention. Every time I stopped my car, I heard running water—water moving in across the prairies, draining from the fields into the ditches and then into the Red River. I knew we were in huge trouble.

Official predictions changed: The water would go to 51 feet. I did not believe the officials. There was just too much water. Fargo, 80 miles upstream, was saved by a sudden cold snap. It took the water in two hits instead of one; first the river crested, and then the water in the fields thawed and flowed in for a second crest.

There was to be no such salvation for Grand Forks. On Friday afternoon, against all official predictions, I made my move: I gathered my nephews and their friends. First we moved two hundred works of art from the lower level of my home to the top floor of the museum. Then the kids built a temporary dike around my house, which was lower than the museum

but not by much. Finally, we moved the museum collection to the top floor. We worked all night long. At dawn, exhausted, we abandoned the museum to the river. The sirens had rung throughout the night as dikes broke and neighborhood after neighborhood was evacuated. The city was empty. The museum's lower-level offices—with all the collection records—were left to the forces of the water, the backup computer disks safe in our bank vault.

I drove away from Grand Forks to the floodless west, feeling as I had in Beijing all those years before, when I stood in the cold hours of dawn and watched a war move over a city. Once again, an uncontrollable force, this time a river, was sweeping over civilization. No human could stop it.

Before it was over, a fire born of the icy waters burned much of the downtown. The whole city was evacuated. Two days later, the river crested at 55 feet—the level at which the museum was slated to take water. This was the most concentrated per capita disaster in United States history, and the largest evacuation since the Civil War. A thousand homes in a population of only sixty thousand people were ultimately lost. Our lives would never be the same (FIG. 4).

There was one small miracle allowed the people of Grand Forks: The museum remained dry—saved by a couple of inches. When I returned and saw the devastation to the city, and that the museum had been spared, I opened it up to

the community for religious and ceremonial uses. For a year, I have continued to hang difficult contemporary art on the walls where weddings and memorial services take place, where fundamentalist Baptist church services are held, where the North Dakota Ballet Company practices. I filled the museum with free concerts and potluck community suppers and meetings of every kind. And I found that art, more than ever, is essential to our lives.

The backup disks for the collection flooded and then burned.

The Museum's financial base was destroyed. Yet, somehow, we will survive, and even flourish.

Who is responsible for the keeping of art? What does it mean to be responsible? Sometimes I am responsible. But I have no illusions. I know how little control we humans really have, how little difference I can make. Ultimately, we can care only for the present—and pray for guardian angels to keep an eye on the future. Most important of all, a work of art must live out its life in its own time. To see to that is my responsibility. ■



**FIGURE 4**  
Photo of flooded downtown Grand Forks,  
North Dakota, 20 April 1997.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Judy Chicago**, artist, author, feminist, educator, and intellectual, has exhibited widely throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and Asia. A pioneer of feminist art and art education, she is the author of *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (1975, 1993, and subsequently published in England, Germany, Japan, and Taiwan); *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage* (1979); *Embroidering Our Heritage: The Dinner Party Needlework* (1980); *The Birth Project* (1985); *Holocaust Project: From Darkness into Light* (1993); and *Beyond the Flower: The Autobiography of a Feminist Artist* (1996). Chicago received her bachelor and master of arts degrees from the University of California, Los Angeles, and an honorary doctorate in fine arts from Russel Sage College in Troy, New York.

**James Coddington** is chief conservator at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. He was a Mellon Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and editor, with Maryan Ainsworth, of the summer 1995 issues of the *Art Journal*, a publication devoted to conservation and art history. He has researched and published such topics as low-pressure structural treatment of paintings, digital image processing, and the materials and techniques of Jackson Pollock's paintings.

**Mildred Constantine**, who inspired and helped organize the Getty Conservation Institute's 1998 conference "Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art," is an art historian and a curator with a special interest in contemporary art. She was curator at The Museum of Modern Art for twenty-four years. She has curated more than thirty exhibitions and is the author and coauthor of *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric* (1973, 1986); *Soviet Film Posters* (1974); *The Art Fabric: Mainstream* (1981, 1986); *Tina Modotti: A Fragile Life* (1975, 1979, 1983, 1993); and, most recently, *Whole Cloth* (1998). Constantine received her bachelor and master of arts degrees from New York University.

**Miguel Angel Corzo** is director of the Getty Conservation Institute. Prior to his appointment in 1991, he was president and chief executive officer of the Friends of the Arts of Mexico Foundation and Founding Dean for Academic Affairs at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico City. Born in Mexico City and now a U.S. citizen, Corzo graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles; did his doctoral work at the Technical University in Munich; and was a Fulbright Scholar at Harvard University. Author of five books, including the *Codex of Human Settlements, Engineering Design, Art and Eternity*, and *Managerial Finance*, he is also the editor of more than twenty other publications. He is a member of social and educational boards and the recipient of several national and foreign awards, including the prestigious medal of Unesco for Patrons of the Arts, awarded in 1997, in recognition for his lifetime significant contribution to the conservation of the world's cultural heritage, the promotion of the arts, and their international dissemination. In 1995, Corzo was appointed by President Bill Clinton to the U.S. Cultural Property Advisory Committee.

**Tony Cragg** is an artist whose work has been exhibited in group and solo shows throughout the world. In 1988, he was the British representative and recipient of the Turner Prize at the 43rd Venice Biennale. He has taught at the Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf, and is a member of the Royal Academy of Art, London. He studied at Gloucestershire College of Art, Cheltenham; Wimbledon School of Art; and the Royal College of Art, London.

**Arthur C. Danto** is Johnsonian Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Columbia University. Since 1984, he has been art critic for *The Nation* magazine. The author of several books on philosophy, Danto is a former president of the American Philosophical Association and the recipient of two fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. He won the George S. Polk Award for criticism (1985) and the Book Critics Circle Award for his collected essays, *Encounters and Reflections: Art in the Historical Present* (1990).

**Thomas K. Dreier** is senior researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Patent, Copyright and Competition Law in Munich, Germany. His areas of specialization are national and international copyright law and the law of new technologies and the visual arts. He holds a doctorate in law from the University of Munich and an M.C.J. from the New York University School of Law. He also studied law at the universities of Bonn and Geneva and art history at the University of Munich. He is a member of the New York Bar.

**Cliff Einstein** is chairman and creative director of the award-winning Dailey & Associates advertising agency. He and his wife, Mandy Einstein, are internationally known supporters and collectors of contemporary painting and sculpture. He serves as a trustee of The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles; has worked at advertising agencies in Los Angeles and New York; and founded a new product development firm, Silverman/Einstein. Einstein received his bachelor of arts degree in English in 1961 from the University of California at Los Angeles.

**Helen Escobedo** has specialized in the construction of ephemeral site-specific installations with recyclable materials since 1968. She has exhibited her artwork in Mexico, the United States, Canada, and Europe. She was head of Fine Arts and director of Museum and Galleries at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico City; director of the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City; and a member of the team of six sculptors who designed and built *Espacio escultórico* at UNAM in 1979. In 1988, she was elected an associate member of the Academie Royale, Brussels, and in 1991 was awarded a fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. Escobedo studied sculpture at the Royal College of Art, London.

**Peter Galassi** is chief curator in the Department of Photography of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, where he was also associate curator and curator. He was twice a Fellow in the Department of European Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. He is the author of *Corot in Italy: Open-Air Paintings and the Classical Landscape Tradition* (1991, winner of the Eric Mitchell Prize) and *Philip-Lorca diCorcia* (1995). Among his publications accompanying exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art are *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* (1981); *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Early Work* (1987); *Pleasures and Terror of Domestic Comfort* (1991); *American Photography 1890–1965 from The Museum of Modern Art* (1995); and *Roy DeCarava: A Retrospective* (1996). Galassi received his bachelor of arts degree from Harvard College and his Ph.D. in art history and archaeology from Columbia University.

**Erich Gantzert-Castrillo** is chief restorer at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, and founder of the Archive of Techniques and Working Materials Used by Contemporary Artists. He has been restorer and chief restorer at the Mittelrheinische Landesmuseum in Mainz, Germany, and has produced numerous lectures and publications on the specific problems of conservation and restoration of contemporary art, including “How Durable Is Video Art?—On the Gradual Disappearance of the Original” and “The Development of a Registration System in the Museum of Modern Art in Frankfurt,” and has lectured at the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in Dresden, the Staatliche Kunstakademie der Bildenden Künste in Stuttgart, and the University of Mainz, Germany.

**David Grattan** is the acting manager of Conservation Processes and Materials Research Division of the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa, Canada, a research group that deals with research and development issues related to conservation problems of Canadian archives, libraries, museums, and archaeological collections, which he joined after its formation in 1977. He is chairman of the International Council of Museums Committee for Conservation. His research interests have included archaeological, paper, modern materials, ethnographic, and natural history areas of conservation. Grattan received his Ph.D. in polymer chemistry from the University of Keele, United Kingdom.

**Agnes Gund** is a renowned collector and lender of art and a benefactor to numerous museums, social and environmental organizations, political candidates, and women’s organizations. She is president and trustee, and previously chair of the board of trustees, of The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Among her many affiliations, Gund is a board member of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center, the American Academy in Rome, the Institute for Advanced Study, the J. Paul Getty Trust, and the Wexner Center for the Arts. She founded and remains an active trustee of the Studio in a School Association, which places professional artists in public schools to educate children about art. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the National Medal of the Arts presented by President Bill Clinton (1997); the Governor’s Award, New York State (1988); the Doris C. Freedman Award, New York City (1987); the Montblanc de la Culture Award (1997); and Crain’s Most Influential Business Women (1996). She received honorary doctors of humane letters from Brown University, Case Western Reserve University, and Hamilton College and was awarded an honorary doctor of fine arts from Kenyon College.

**John G. Hanhardt** is senior curator of Film and Media Arts at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, where he develops the collection and exhibits programs for film and media arts worldwide. Previously, he was curator and head of the Department of Film and Video at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; film coordinator at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, where he established the Film Department and Film Study Collection; and a member of The Museum of Modern Art’s Department of Film. In addition to his museum work, Hanhardt has taught at Columbia University, Middlebury College, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Rhode Island School of Design, and Williams College and has been a trustee of the MacDowell Colony. Currently, he serves on the board of directors of Electronic Arts Intermix. His writings have been published extensively in journals, catalogues, and scholarly texts. He is the author of *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation* (1986) and the recipient of a Peter Norton Family Foundation Curator’s Grant for outstanding curatorial work (1993). Hanhardt holds a master of arts degree from New York University’s Department of Cinema Studies.

**Jürgen Harten** is director of the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, where he has been responsible for numerous exhibitions, including the monographic shows of Broodthaers, Richter, Kiefer, and Siqueiros/Pollock, and group shows, including the *American-German BiNational*, the *Israeli-Soviet BiNational*, and *The Ax Has Blossomed*. He was formerly curator at the Kunsthalle; head of the office of *Documenta IV* in Kassel, Germany; and—with a background in art history, cultural anthropology, and psychology—a freelance art critic.

**Sheila Hicks** has exhibited her work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo and Kyoto; the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Minneapolis Institute of Art; the Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris; the Musée des arts décoratifs, Prague; the Saint Louis Art Museum; the Museo de Bellas Artes, Chile; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. She is a recipient of a gold medal from the American Institute of Architects and the medal of fine art from the French Academy of Architecture and was decorated as Officier des Arts et Lettres by the French government. Hicks received her bachelor and master of fine arts degrees from the Yale University School of Art.

**Ysbrand Hummelen** is head of the Department of Conservation Research of the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage in Amsterdam and founding director of the Foundation Kollektief Restauratie Atelier Amsterdam. Previously, he was head of the Department of Color and Material Research of the Jan van Eyck Post Graduate Academy in Maastricht. Hummelen lectures in the Art History Department at the University of Amsterdam on painting techniques, color, and conservation principles and is editor of *kM (Artists’ Materials)*, the quarterly Dutch bulletin for artists and conservators. He has researched and published on artists’ methods and materials; the theory and ethics of conservation and restoration (ethnography, modern art, natural history); and conservation management. Hummelen was trained as a conservator and restorer of paintings at the Central Research Laboratory for Objects of Art and Science, Amsterdam; the Swiss Institute for Art Research, Zurich; and the Istituto Centrale del Restauro, Rome.



**R. B. Kitaj** is the founding member of the School of London, a group of painters that includes Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, David Hockney, and approximately thirty other artists. In addition to numerous solo exhibitions, retrospectives of his work have been shown at the Tate Gallery, London; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. His most recent retrospective has traveled to the Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo; the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sophia, Madrid; the Jewish Museum, Vienna; and the Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany. Kitaj studied at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York; the Academy of Fine Art, Vienna; the Ruskin School of Drawing, Oxford; and the Royal College of Art, London.

**Vladimir Kucera** is director of research at the Swedish Corrosion Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, where he specializes in the fields of atmospheric corrosion and protection of materials. He is coordinator of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, International Co-operative Programme on Effects of Air Pollutants on Materials, including cultural heritage, and organizer of national and international congresses and workshops. Author of more than one hundred scientific and technical papers and reports, Kucera holds a Ph.D. in corrosion science from the Chemical Technical University of Prague, Czech Republic.

**Thomas M. Messer** is director emeritus of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. He has held museum directorships at the Roswell Museum, New Mexico; the American Federation of Arts, Boston; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice. He was president of the Association of Art Museum Directors and the MacDowell Colony; a founding member of the executive committee of the American Arts Alliance; and senior cultural advisor of the Americas Society. He has taught at Harvard University; Barnard College; Wesleyan University; Hochschule für angewandte Kunst, Vienna; and Goethe University, Frankfurt. Messer studied art history at the Sorbonne and received his master of arts degree from Harvard University.

**Keith Morrison**, artist, art educator, curator, and art critic, is dean for the College of Creative Arts at San Francisco State University. He has exhibited his paintings, drawings, and prints throughout the United States and abroad. His work is included in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; the National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.; the Philadelphia Academy; the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Monterrey, Mexico. He has curated several exhibitions and contributed to numerous periodicals, books, and catalogues, most recently "The Global Village of African-American Art," in *African-American Postmodern*, edited by David C. Driskell (1995). Morrison received his bachelor and master of fine arts degrees from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

**Debra Hess Norris** is director and associate professor at the University of Delaware/Winterthur Program in Art Conservation. She has consulted internationally on the care and preservation of photographic collections and has lectured and published widely on many issues in photographic preservation, including disaster response and recovery, conservation treatment practice and research needs, and assessments and surveys. She is past president of the American Institute for Conservation of Artistic and Historic Works and currently serves on the boards of Heritage Preservation, the Collection Care Training Program, the Preservation Management Institute, and the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts. Norris received her masters of science degree in art conservation with a specialty in photographic conservation from the University of Delaware/Winterthur Program in Art Conservation.

**Francis V. O'Connor** is an independent historian of American art. His earlier works on the New Deal art projects of the 1930s and the large-scale paintings of artists such as Jackson Pollock have brought him to his current major project: an illustrated book and CD-ROM titled *The Mural in America: The History of Wall Painting in the United States from Native American Times to Postmodernism*. O'Connor received his Ph.D. in the history of art from The Johns Hopkins University.

**Roy A. Perry** is head of conservation at the Tate Gallery in London, which he joined as an assistant paintings restorer in 1968. He was educated in England at Lewes County Grammar School for Boys and Camberwell Art School.

**Thomas F. Reese** is former deputy director of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, where he organized many symposiums, public forums, and expositions that examine the interrelationships among institutions, artistic production, identity, and community. He was professor of art at the University of Texas at Austin; has received fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation (1976–77), American Council of Learned Societies (1973), and the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (1983–84); and is a corresponding member of the Real Academia de San Fernando in Madrid. He is the author of *The Architecture of Ventura Rodriguez* (1976) and editor of *Studies in Ancient American and European Art: The Collected Essays of George Kubler* (1985). His scholarship and publications include studies of eighteenth-century Spanish art and politics; culture contact in sixteenth-century Mexico; devotional space in colonial Andean society; and contemporary art and architectural practice in Europe and America. Reese received his Ph.D. from Yale University.

**Bo Rendahl** is a research scientist at the Swedish Corrosion Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, in the fields of atmospheric corrosion and corrosion of motor vehicles. The author and coauthor of approximately fifty publications, he holds a bachelor of science degree in chemistry.

**Laurel Reuter** is director of the North Dakota Museum of Art, which she founded while a graduate student of literature at the University of North Dakota. In 1981, the museum became the official art gallery of the state. She has curated or organized more than one hundred exhibitions of contemporary art in all media.

**Paul Schimmel** is chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. He was curator and senior curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston and chief curator and curator of Exhibitions and Collections at the Newport Harbor Art Museum in Newport Beach, California. A participant in a variety of international circulating exhibitions, he has lectured around the world. He is a member of the Association Internationale de Critiques d'Art (American Section), the Southern California Art Institute Gallery Committee, and the American Museum Association. Schimmel studied at Syracuse University and the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University.

**David A. Scott** is head of the Museum Research Laboratory at the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles. He is editor of *Studies in Conservation*, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry, and a Fellow of the International Institute for Conservation. He has lectured in conservation at the University College London, Institute of Archaeology. Scott received his bachelor of arts degree in archaeological conservation from the University of London Institute of Archaeology; his bachelor of science degree in chemistry from the University of Reading, United Kingdom; and his Ph.D. in ancient metallurgy from the University of London.

**Joyce J. Scott** is a visual and performance artist who has exhibited, performed, lectured, and taught nationally and internationally. Her jewelry and mixed-media sculpture of primarily glass and beadwork are represented in public and private international collections. She has contributed to numerous magazines, journals, and newspapers and is the recipient of numerous awards, including an artist's fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts (1980), a Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation award (1994), a Pace Roberts Fellowship (1994), The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation award (1995), and the Anonymous Was a Woman award (1997). Scott received her bachelor of fine arts degree in education at the Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, and her master of fine arts degree in crafts at the Instituto Allende, San Miguel Allende, Mexico.

**Robert Storr** is an artist and art critic, and a curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. A frequent lecturer in the United States and abroad, Storr has taught painting, drawing, art history, and criticism at numerous colleges and art schools, including the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, and was visiting professor at the Graduate School, City University of New York. He is affiliated with The Marie Walsh Sharpe Foundation; the MacDowell Colony; Yaddo; the International Association of Art Critics; The Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, Basel; and Project Zeitwenden Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur, Bonn. The author of numerous publications and essays, he is contributing editor of *Art in America* and *Grand Street*, writes a column for *Art Press* (Paris), and is a regular contributor to publications including *ArtForum*, *Village Voice*, *Parkett*, and *Arts Magazine*. A member of the Editorial Board of the College Art Association's *Art Journal*, Storr coedited two issues of the magazine devoted to censorship in the arts.

**Ann Temkin** is the Muriel and Philip Berman Curator of Twentieth-Century Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and was a curatorial assistant at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Among her exhibitions are *Thinking Is Form: The Drawings of Joseph Beuys* and *Constantin Brancusi*. Her publications include *Chuck Close/Paul Cadmus: In Dialogue* (1996–97), "Paul Klee" in *The Dictionary of Art* (1996); "Les dessins de Joseph Beuys" in *Joseph Beuys* (1994); and "Cumulus from America" *Parkett* 23 (March 1990). Temkin received her Ph.D. in the history of art from Yale University.

**Bill Viola** is a contemporary artist who uses video and electronic media to explore the phenomena of sense perception as a language of the body and avenue of self-knowledge. In addition to numerous group shows, his works have been exhibited in solo shows at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Durham Cathedral, Durham, England; and Chapelle Saint-Louis de la Salpêtrière, Festival d'Automne à Paris. He represented the United States at the 46th Venice Biennale. A twenty-five-year survey exhibition of his work has been organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and is currently traveling in the United States and Europe until the year 2000; a book of his work, *Bill Viola*, was published in conjunction with the exhibition (1998). He is the recipient of numerous awards, including fellowships from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the John Simon Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations. He has received honorary doctorates in fine art from Syracuse University, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and California College of Arts and Crafts.

**R. Scott Williams** conducts research in conservation processes at the Canadian Conservation Institute, where his primary topics of investigation are the selection of safe polymer and plastic products for use in conservation applications; the degradation and conservation of museum objects composed of plastics and other synthetic materials; and the use of nondestructive, in situ, infrared spectroscopic analysis for on-site determination of the chemical composition of museum objects. He was an analytical chemist for Canadian Customs and Excise Laboratory and a researcher in analytical research services for the Canadian Conservation Institute. Williams received his bachelor of science degree in honors chemistry, specializing in spectroscopy and quantum chemistry, from the University of British Columbia.

**Donald Young** is owner of the Donald Young Gallery in Chicago. He has shown important artists from the 1960s and 1970s, such as Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Jannis Kounellis, and Sol LeWitt, as well as younger contemporary artists, including Jeff Koons and Charles Ray. He has regularly shown large-scale work and installations and, in directing the first commercial gallery to successfully deal with video installations, has become well known for his involvement with Bruce Nauman, Bill Viola, and Gary Hill. He is also known for his commitment to outdoor projects by artists such as Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Martin Puryear, and Ulrich Ruckriem and for his support of European artists, including Sophie Calle, Tony Cragg, Cristina Iglesias, Richard Long, Rosemarie Trockel, and Sam Taylor-Wood.

**Julián Zugazagoitia** is a curator, art critic, and philosopher based in Paris. He is the curator of visual arts for the Spoleto Festival in Umbria, Italy, and serves as a consultant for the Getty Conservation Institute. He facilitated and curated the GCI's commission of Michel Delacroix's *Melting Plot*, an ephemeral installation for the "Mortality Immortality?" conference at the Getty Center in March 1998. His recent exhibitions include *Coming Up Roses*; *Valerio Adami: Itinerary of Vision*; *Mysteries of Presence*; *Mitoraj: The Muse's Garden*; and *Passion for Life: The Revolution of Mexican Art in the 20th Century*. He is currently preparing his Ph.D. dissertation, "The Total Work of Art: Horizon of Modernity (Wagner, Mallarmé, Rodin, Monet, Duchamp)" for publication.

## ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

**Page xiv and part openers:**

Photos by Susan Middleton.

**Constantine** *Preface*

Figure 1: © Sol LeWitt. Figure 2: Courtesy of Christopher Grimes Gallery; photo by Joshua White. Figure 3: Reproduced by permission of the artist; photo by Jacques Gael Cressaty.

**Corzo** *Introduction*

Figure 1: Courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; purchased with funds provided by the Art Museum Council.

**Kitaj** *"Look at My Picture!"*

Figure 1: © R. B. Kitaj courtesy of the Marlborough Gallery, New York; gift of Edward L. Gardner in honor of Flora Biddle and the 60th Anniversary of the Whitney Museum of American Art; photo by Prudence Cummings. Figures 2–4: © R. B. Kitaj courtesy of the Marlborough Gallery, New York; photos by Prudence Cummings.

**Reese** *Andy Goldsworthy's New Ruins*

Figures 1, 2 (left): Photos © 1997 Harvey Spector. Figures 2 (right), 3–5: Photos by the author.

**Perry** *Present and Future*

Figure 1: © Per Kirkeby; photo by Marcus Leith.

**Temkin** *Strange Fruit*

Figure 1: Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; purchased with funds contributed by The Dietrich Foundation and with the partial gift of the artist and the Paula Cooper Gallery; photo by Lynn Rosenthal. Figure 2: Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; purchased with funds contributed by The Dietrich Foundation and with the partial gift of the artist and the Paula Cooper Gallery; photo by Zoe Leonard. Figure 3: Courtesy of the Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Figure 4: Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; purchased with funds contributed by Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Korman, Mr. and Mrs. Keith Sachs, Marion Boulton Stroud, Mr. and Mrs. Bayard T. Storey, and various funds; photo by Graydon Wood.

**Escobedo** *Work as Process or Work as Product*

Figures 1–3: Photos courtesy of the artist.

**Grattan and Williams** *From "91" to "42"*

Figures 1, 2: © Canadian Conservation Institute. Figure 3: © Canadian Conservation Institute, used by permission of Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

**J. J. Scott** *Immortality/Immortality*

Figures 1–4: Photos courtesy of the artist.

**Viola** *Permanent Impermanence*

Figures 1, 2: Reproduced by permission of the artist; photos by Kira Perov. Figure 3: Reproduced by permission of the artist; photo by Edward Woodman.

**Einstein** *Preserving Now*

Figures 1–4: Photos courtesy of the author.

**D. Scott, Kucera, and Rendahl** *Infinite*

*Columns and Finite Solutions*  
Figure 1: © 1994 by Vladimir Kucera, Swedish Corrosion Institute. Figure 3: © 1994 by David A. Scott. Figure 4: © 1997 by Vladimir Kucera, Swedish Corrosion Institute.

**Cragg** *Projectiles*

Figure 1: © 1998 Anthony Cragg; photo by Tatsuo Hayashi. Figures 2–4: © 1998 Anthony Cragg; reproduced courtesy of the Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

**Gund** *The Art Ecosystem*

Figures 1–3: Photos courtesy of John M. Hall. Figure 4: Photo courtesy of the author.

**Gantzert-Castrillo** *The Archive*

Figures 1–3, 5: Courtesy of the Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt am Main; photos by Wolfgang Günzel. Figure 4: Courtesy of the Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt am Main; photo by Heiner Blum.

**Norris** *Survival of Contemporary Art*

Figure 1: Diagram courtesy of the author and Barbara Broge.

**Schimmel** *Intentionality and Performance-Based Art*

Figure 1: Photo courtesy of Ms. Makiko Murakami. Figure 2: Photo by Alex Slade. Figure 3: Photo by Brian Forrest. Figure 4: Courtesy of Gustav Metzger; photo by Brian Forrest.

**Hicks** *Linen Longevity*

Figures 1–5: Photos courtesy of Atelier Sheila Hicks.

**Chicago** *Hope Springs Eternal*

Figures 1, 2: © 1979 Judy Chicago; photos by Donald Woodman. Figure 3: © 1984 Judy Chicago; photo by Donald Woodman. Figures 4, 5: © 1992 Judy Chicago and Donald Woodman; photos by Donald Woodman.

**O'Connor** *Notes on the Preservation of American Murals*

Figures 1, 4: Collection of the City and County of San Francisco; reproduced courtesy of the San Francisco Art Commission; photos by Craig Mole. Figures 2, 5, 6: Diagrams courtesy of the author. Figure 3: Photo courtesy of the author.

**Morrison** *Preserving Whose Mortality or Immortality?*

Figures 1, 4: Reproduced by permission of the artist; photos by Richard Paradowski. Figures 2, 3: Reproduced by permission of the artist; photos by Jarvis Grant.

**Young** *A Dealer's Responsibility*

Figures 1, 2: Photos courtesy of Bruce Nauman. Figure 3: Photo courtesy of the Donald Young Gallery, Seattle/Chicago, and Gary Hill. Figure 4: Photo courtesy of Charles Ray.

**Hummelen** *Conservation of Contemporary Art*

Figure 1: © 1997 Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art, Amsterdam.

**Reuter** *A Life in Its Own Times*

Figures 1, 2: Photos courtesy of Georgie Papageorge. Figure 3: Photo by Rik Sferra for the North Dakota Museum of Art. Figure 4: Photo by Eric Hylden.

## INDEX

The abbreviations “n” or “n.” or “nn.” following page numbers indicate references to notes; specific note numbers follow the abbreviations.

- Abakanowicz, Magdalena, 105  
 Abrahams, Israel, xviii–xix  
 Abstract Expressionism, 57–62  
 Acconci, Vito, 38  
 acid hydrolysis, 68. *See also* degradation  
*Acid Rain* (Escobedo), 55  
 acquisition, 121, 123; obligations with, 41, 50, 74; and role of art dealer, 165–70  
 Adams, Douglas, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, 73  
*Adjoined Dislocations* (Export), 98  
*Administered Landscape* (Cragg), 123  
*Affentanz II* (Grötting), 129  
 ageless oxygen absorber, 70  
 aging process, 37, 67–68, 68. *See also* degradation  
 Agnew, Neville, 30, 32  
 Albano, Albert, xx, 23  
 Albers, Anni, 141  
 Albers, Josef, 141  
 Albuquerque Museum, 150  
*Alien Huddle* (Puryear), 121  
*Alma* (Cemin), 103  
*American Artists in Their New York Studios* (Götzt), 19  
 American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC), *Code of Ethics*, 22, 131–32  
*América Tropical* (Siqueiros), xvii  
*Analytical Philosophy of History* (Danto), 6  
 Andy Warhol Foundation, 100  
 Andy Warhol Museum (Pittsburgh), 8  
 Anthology Film Archives (New York), 99  
 Antonakos, Stephen, *Golden Eikonostasio*, 123–24  
 Antonello da Messina, 19  
*Apolo 3* (Neto), xi, xii  
*Apple Orchard* (Gorky), 120  
*Arbeit Macht Frei* (Chicago), 151, 152  
 architecture, xi; and murals, 153–58, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158  
 Archive of Techniques and Working Materials Used by Contemporary Artists, 127–30, 128, 129  
 archives, 43, 87–88; of art techniques and working materials, 127–30, 128, 129  
 art, 45, 46, 60; and the community, 9, 12, 25–34, 158; descriptions of, xviii, 75, 76, 77, 78, 105; in ecosystem of private collections, 120, 121–26, 122, 123, 125; historical identity of, xv, 9, 10–11, 90–93; meaning of, 116–17, 118–19; themes or subjects for, 17, 115–16; and time, x, xvi, xvii, 25, 26, 39–40; transportation of, 36, 41, 54, 61, 87, 101–5, 160, 175–82; and values assigned to works, 21, 57, 101, 159. *See also* contemporary art; Modernism  
 Art Institute of Chicago, 162  
 artists: and Archive of Techniques and Working Materials Used by Contemporary Artists, 127–30, 128, 129; of color, 161–64, 161, 162, 162nn. 4, 5, 6, 163n. 7, 164, 164n. 9; communication between conservators and, 22–24, 42, 48, 74, 132–33; as contemporary society, xi, 53, 76, 98; intention of, xviii, 19–24, 63, 73, 133, 141–42; personality of, 13–17; rights of, 63–66; and role of art dealer, 165–70; and transience of works, 19–24, 54–55, 56, 130. *See also* individual names of artists  
 Asian Art Museum (San Francisco), 153–54  
*Aspern Papers, The* (James), 4  
 Auden, W. H., 15  
 Augustine, St., xviii  
 aura, loss of, 39, 54–55, 60–61  
*Ausfegen* (Beuys), 139  
 authenticity, 59, 60–62, 66, 66n. 8, 172  
*Away from the Flock* (Hirst), 54, 107  
  
*Baby Bands* (Hicks), 142, 142  
*Back from the Front* (Hicks), 142, 143  
*Back Seat Dodge '38* (Kienholz), xvii  
 Baenziger, Markus, *Comforter*, 125  
*Ballerina* (Emerson), 120  
*Balustrade Vase 953* (Woodman), 123  
 Barry, Iris, 99  
 Bartley, Tracy, 31n. 19  
 Bay Area Video Coalition, 100  
 Beaumont, Sir George, 19–20  
*Bed* (Rauschenberg), x  
 Beijing Art Gallery, 178–79, 180  
 Benjamin, Walter, 39, 54, 62; “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, 60  
*Ben's Window* (Vautier), 138, 138  
 Berenson, Bernard, 24  
 Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, 65  
 Boston, Henry, xx  
 Beuys, Joseph, 39, 47, 56; *Ausfegen*, 139; *Fat Cats*, 66; performance art by, 38, 139–40  
 Bilz, Malcolm, 70  
 Birnbaum, Dara, 36  
*Birth Project* (Chicago), 149–50, 151  
*Black Torso* (Bourgeois), 122  
*Black Zero* (Tambellini), 97  
*Blade Runner* (film), 39  
 Block, René, 139  
 Blum, Heiner, Untitled, *Blower #5*, 128  
*Boogie Nights* (film), 4, 5  
*Book from Sky* (Bing), 180  
 Bourgeois, Louise, 56, 125; *Black Torso*, 122; *Eye to Eye*, 122; *Femme Maison*, 121; *House*, 122; *Pillar*, 126; *White Torso*, 122  
 Brakhage, Stan: *Dog Star Man*, 96; *Metaphors on Vision*, 96  
 Brancusi, Constantin: *Gate of the Kiss*, 108, 112; *Infinite Column*, 106, 107–12, 108, 109, 111; *Table of Silence*, 108, 112  
 Brangwyn, Sir Frank, 156, 156, 157  
 Braque, Georges, 21  
 Brassai, *Marcel Proust sous l'emprise de la photographie*, 82  
*Breaking through Many Screens of Paper* (Murakami), 136–37  
*Brickwork* (Kirkeby), 43  
*Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, The* (Duchamp), 43  
*Brillo Box* (Warhol), 10  
 Brod, Max, 15  
 Bronx Central Post Office murals (New York), 155, 155, 156  
*Brothers Karamazov, The* (Dostoyevsky), xviii  
 Brumidi, Constantino, 154–55  
 Burden, Chris, 38, 54; *Medusa's Flying Moon*, 103, 103  
*Burnt Piece* (Winsor), 126  
 Bushart, Elisabeth, 127  
  
*Cadillac Hotel* (Register), 101–2, 102  
*Cafe Macedonia* (Chamberlain), 101, 102  
*Caffeine* (Scott), 78  
*Cake Window* (Seven Cakes) (Thiebaud), 120  
 Calder, Alexander, 66, 66n. 8; *The Eye in the Black*, 120; *The Glass Fish*, 126  
 calendrical rituals, 28–29, 31  
 Campus, Peter: *mem*, 99; *Three Transitions*, 99  
 Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI), Symposium '91, 67–74  
 Canadian Museum of Civilization (Hull), 69  
 Canadian National Museum of Science and Technology (Ottawa), 69  
 Carles, Arthur B., 158  
 Caro, Anthony, 54  
*Cathedra* (Newman), 12  
*Cathedral* (Hofmann), 124  
 CCI (Canadian Conservation Institute), Symposium '91, 67–74  
 Cemin, Saint Clair, *Alma*, 103  
 Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), 102  
 Cézanne, Paul, 17  
 Chamberlain, John, *Cafe Macedonia*, 101, 102  
 Chandler, John, 60  
 change, xiv–xv, 9, 73; cultural change and diversity, 161–64; inevitability of, 5, 19–20, 23, 50; as integral to the work, 25, 34, 37, 65–66, 66n. 5. *See also* documentation  
 Chateaubriand, vicomte de (François-René), xix  
 Chicago, Judy: *Arbeit Macht Frei*, 151, 152; *Birth Project*, 149–50, 151; *The Creation*, 150–51, 151; *The Dinner Party*, 148–49, 148, 150, 150, 152; *The Fall*, 150–51; *Holocaust Project*, 150–51, 152; Mary Wollstonecraft runner back, 149, 150; *Rainbow Shabbat*, 151, 152  
 Christo, Jeanne-Claude, xix, 56  
 Christo, Vladimirov Javacheff, xix, 56, 147; *Nine Packed Bottles*, 123; *Wrapped Newspaper*, 122  
 Cicero, xviii  
 Cigarette (T. Smith), 122  
*Cigarette Chandelier* (Hammons), 123  
*Circle* (LeWitt), 124  
 Clark-Franklin House murals, 157–58, 157  
 Clark, Lygia, 140  
 Cleveland Museum of Art, 14, 121, 122, 126  
 Close, Chuck, 121  
*Clubwinged Angel* (De Staebler), 103  
 collaborative art, 158; *Holocaust Project*, 150–51, 152; of Papageorge, 176–78, 177  
 collectors: archives for, 127–30, 128, 129; on art ecosystem, 120, 121–26, 122, 123, 125; communication with conservators and artists, 133–34; on installation and transportation of art, 101–5, 102, 103, 104, 105; and role of art dealer, 165–70. *See also* ownership  
*Comforter* (Baenziger), 125  
 Community Muralists, *The Wall of Respect*, 158  
*Company at Table* (Fritsch), 130  
 Conley, Kathy, 30  
 conservation, xii, xviii–xix; choices for, xv, 3–12, 61–62, 83–84, 101, 172–74, 172; collectors and, 101–5, 102, 103, 104, 105; documentation in, 23–24; of ephemeral works, xiv–xv, xiv, 43–44; and experimental materials, 35–40, 67–74; and the law, 63–66; of linen, 141–44, 141, 142, 143, 144; maintenance in, 112, 124–26, 134, 166; of photographs, 81–84, 132–33; purpose of, 10–12, 33–34, 60–61, 73; role of dealer in,

- 167–68; strategies and practical advice for, 74, 134, 171–74. *See also* conservators; documentation; preservation
- Conservation OnLine (CoOL), 24
- conservators, 17, 38, 84; archives for, 127–30, 128, 129; communication with artists, 22–24, 42, 48, 74, 132–33; identity of, 11–12, 73; role in ecosystem of contemporary art, 131–34, 131. *See also* conservation
- contemporary art, ix–x, xi, xii, xviii; archive for, 127–30, 128, 129; artist's intention and transience of, 19–24; collectors of, 101–5, 102, 103, 104, 105, 120, 121–26, 122, 123, 125; and conservation of modern materials, 67–74; conservator's role in ecosystem of, 131–34, 131; copyright of, 63–66; female experiences in, 147–52, 148, 150, 151, 152; freshness as influence in appreciation of, 35–40, 129; historical perspective in, 3–12; and immorality, 75–78; in media technologies, 85–94, 95–100; murals as, 153–58, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158; museum criteria for, 159–60; new methods and strategies for conservation of, 171–74; new ruins in, 25–34; performance-based art, 135–40, 137, 138, 139; personality of artist of, 13–17; at Philadelphia Museum of Art, 45–50; photographs as, 81–84; preserving the intactness of, 57–62; as process or product, 53–56; responsibility for, 175–82; restoration of ephemeral, 106, 107–12, 108, 109, 111; role of art dealer, 165–70; at Tate Gallery, 41–44; as visual language, 115–19, 117, 118. *See also* art
- Contemporary Art Center (New York), 126
- Conversation* (Tansey), 122
- Conversation, The* (Wilson), 122
- Coomaraswamy, Ananda K., 93, 94
- Cooper, Paula, 46–47
- copyright, 56, 63–66, 167
- Corner Mirror with Coral* (Smithson), 126
- Corridor* (Nauman), 98
- Corzo, Miguel Angel, 31
- Council of Nicea, Seventh (787), xviii
- Courbet, Gustave, *Origin of the World*, 46
- cracking, 19, 50; as degradation, 68, 110, 124; in Goldsworthy sculpture, 26–27, 31–34, 31 n. 19, 32 n. 21, 33 n. 24
- Cragg, Tony: *Administered Landscape*, 123; *Early Form*, 117; *Envelope*, 118; *Flotsam*, 118; *Forminifera*, 117
- Creation, The* (Chicago), 150–51, 151
- Cultural Center of Kiryu (Japan), 143
- Cultural Foundation of the State of Hessen, 128
- cultural property ecosystem, 131–34
- culture, 4–5; art as national cultural property, xvii, 3, 9, 44, 63, 64; photograph conservation as vital to, 81–84. *See also* heritage; society and social issues
- Dalí, Salvador, 36
- Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square* (Nauman), 98
- Danto, Arthur C., xix; *Analytical Philosophy of History*, 6
- dealers, role of, 165–70
- Deer Dancer* (Emerson), 120
- Degas, Edgar, 147
- degradation: identification of, 70–74, 71, 133–34; in modern materials, 67–69, 68, 139; as normal process, 25, 53–54, 55. *See also* deterioration
- Déjeuner sur l'herbe, Le* (Manet), 8
- de Jonge, Piet, 174
- de Kooning, Willem, 35, 54; *Floating Figure*, 102; *The Time of the Fire*, 122, 124–25
- Delacroix, Eugène, 35, 39, 83
- Delacroix, Michel, *Melting Plot*, xiv, xiv
- De Maria, Walter, xviii, 56
- Déméloir, Le (Hicks), 141, 142
- Descartes, René, 7
- De Staebler, Stephen, *Clubwinged Angel*, 103
- deterioration, 49, 50; inevitability of, 19–20, 23, 124; of *Infinite Column*, 108–10, 109; restoration vs. reproduction for, 22–23, 87. *See also* degradation
- Dia Center for the Arts, 56
- digital technologies, 66, 66 n. 6, 76; installation and conservation of, 85–94; for photography conservation, 82, 83. *See also* media art
- Dinner Party, The* (Chicago), 148–49, 148, 150, 150, 152
- Documenta IX*, 46, 50
- documentation, 38, 56, 59; for identification of materials, 42, 68–70, 69, 74, 133–34; importance of, 23–24, 56, 67, 133, 174; reconstructing murals from, 157–58, 157, 158; role of dealer in, 166–70. *See also* changes; conservation; preservation
- Doehne, Eric, 31 n. 19
- Dog Star Man* (film), 96
- Donaldson, Jeff, 162 n. 5
- Dorner, Helmut, *Japan*, 128
- Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, *The Brothers Karamazov*, xviii
- Dougherty, Patrick, 176
- Dress* (Kusama), x
- Drink Canada Dry* (Prince), 103, 103, 105
- Dubuffet, Jean, 8
- Duchamp, Marcel, 38, 53, 54, 116, 160; *The*
- Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, 43; ephemeral art of, 175–76; *Fountain*, 9; *Prière de Toucher*, 70–71, 71, 73, 74
- Dudley, Don, 36
- Dune* (film), 38
- Dürer, Albrecht, 39
- Early Form* (Cragg), 117
- Eat* (film), 97
- Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts* (Kaprow), 137–38
- Einstein's Place and Mark Thompson's Airplane Parts* (Rubins), 104, 105
- Eisenman, Peter, 26
- Electric Dress* (Tanaka), 137
- electronic/digital media. *See* digital technologies; media art
- Ellen's Back* (Kitaj), 13
- Emerson, Tom: *Ballerina*, 120; *Deer Dancer*, 120
- Endo, Toshikatsu, *Epitaph*, 105
- Energy Made Visible* (Friedman), 59
- English Patient, The* (film), 4
- Ensor, James, 17
- Entrance* (Murakami), 136
- Envelope* (Cragg), 118
- environmental conditions, 42–43, 74, 125
- ephemeral art, 12, 25, 38; conservation of, xiv–xv, xiv, 43–44; consumption of art by viewers of, 47–48, 47; decay of fruit as, 45–47, 45, 46, 48–50; law and copyright of, 65–66, 133; linen, 141–44, 141, 142, 143, 144; performance-based art, 135–40, 137, 138, 139; restoration of *Infinite Column*, 106, 107–12, 108, 109, 111; as symbol of temporality of life, 54–56, 54, 55, 56
- Epitaph* (Endo), 105
- epoxidized soybean oil (ESBO), 71–72
- Escobedo, Helen: *Acid Rain*, 55; *For the Turtles*, 56; *Negro basura, negro mañana*, 54
- ethical code, 22, 43, 131–32
- Euclid, xvii
- experimental materials: and artist's intention, 19–24, 35–37, 58–59; installation and transportation of, 101–5, 102, 103, 104, 105. *See also* modern materials
- Export, Valie, *Adjoined Dislocations* (film), 98
- Eyck, Jan van, 36
- Eye in the Black, The* (Calder), 120
- Eye to Eye* (Bourgeois), 122
- Full Fathom Five* (Pollock), 18
- Fall, The* (Chicago), 150–51
- Fashions* (Ray), 169
- Fat Cats* (Beuys), 66
- Femme Maison* (Bourgeois), 121
- Fenn, Julia, 71–72
- films, xv, 4–5, 10–11, 95–100. *See also* media art; specific film titles
- Finn, David, 176
- Flaming Creatures* (film), 96
- Flashlight III* (Johns), 122
- Flaubert, Gustave, 3
- Flavin, Dan, 166
- Floating Figure* (de Kooning), 102
- Flotsam* (Cragg), 118
- Forminifera* (Cragg), 117
- Forster, Kurt W., 26, 27
- For the Turtles* (Escobedo), 56
- Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art, 172–73
- Fountain* (Duchamp), 9
- Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR), 69, 69
- France-Lanord, Albert, 73
- Francis Ferdinand (archduke of Austria), 6
- Frank, Mary, *Woman*, 123, 123
- Freud, Sigmund, 15
- Friedman, Bernard, *Energy Made Visible*, 59
- Fritsch, Katharina, *Company at Table*, 130
- From Fresco to Plastics* (Gutiérrez), 20
- future, xix, 119; conservation as obligation to, xv, 10–12; present as past in, 3–12, 61
- Gabo, Naum, 37
- Gallery One (London), 138
- Garrison, Edward B., xv
- Gate of the Kiss* (Brancusi), 108, 112
- Gauguin, Paul, 8
- Geffen Contemporary, The (Los Angeles), 38
- Geist, Sidney, 108
- Gellert, Hugo, 154
- Georgescu-Gorjan, Stefan, 108
- Gerbert of Aurillac, xvii
- Getty Center, The, spiral sculpture (Goldsworthy), xvii, 25, 26, 28–34, 30–33
- Ghosts Pounding on the Wall* (Bing), 180
- Gillette, Frank, *Wipe Cycle*, 98
- Gilson, Etienne, 20–21
- Gimlett, Max, 28
- Gismo* (Tinguely), 172
- Glass Fish, The* (Calder), 126
- Glenbow Museum (Calgary), 69
- Global Groove* (Paik), 99
- Gogh, Vincent van, 17, 116
- Golden Eikonostasio* (Antonakos), 123–24
- Goldsworthy, Andy: on cracking of sculpture, 26–27, 31–34, 31 n. 19, 32 n. 21, 33 n. 24; Getty Center spiral sculpture by, xvii, 25, 26, 28–34, 30–33; *Sheepfolds*, 25, 27



- Gonzalez-Torres, Felix, 39; *Untitled (Portrait of Dad)*, 47–48, 47
- Gorky, Arshile, 126, 142–43; *Apple Orchard*, 120; WPA Federal Art Project murals, 155, 158
- Götz, Stephan, *American Artists in Their New York Studios*, 19
- Graham, Robert, *Olympic Gateway*, xvii
- Graves, Nancy, *Over-Under*, 122
- Greenberg, Clement, 58
- Gröting, Asta: *Affentanz II*, 129; *Löcher mit Löchern stopfen*, 129
- Grünewald, Matthias, *Isenheim Altarpiece*, 93, 94
- Guernica (Picasso), 54
- Guston, Philip, 102
- Gutiérrez, José, *From Fresco to Plastics*, 20
- Hague, The, 13–14
- Haines, Cheryl, 28
- Haines Gallery (San Francisco), 28, 30
- Hamilton, Richard, 43
- Hamlet's Mind* (Salle), 126
- Hammons, David, 102; *Cigarette Chandelier*, 123
- Haring, Keith, 54
- Hegel, Georg, 6
- Heizer, Michael, xviii
- Hemenway, Nancy, *Tipi Waterfall*, 179
- Henry Art Gallery (Seattle), 169
- Henry, Walter, 24
- heritage, xv, xvi, xvii, xx, 27; legal rights of public to, 63–65, 66; photograph conservation as vital to, 81–84. *See also* culture; society and social issues
- Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7–8
- Hesse, Eva, 12; *Schema*, 49; *Tori* (nine units), 49
- Hicks, Sheila: *Baby Bands*, 142, 142; *Back from the Front*, 142, 143; *Flow River Flow*, 144, 144; *Le Démêloir*, 141, 142
- Hill, Gary, 169; *Withershins*, 167
- Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington, D.C.), 122
- Hirst, Damien, 39; *Away from the Flock*, 54, 107
- Histories, The* (Herodotus), 7–8
- Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, The* (Adams), 73
- Hofmann, Hans, *Cathedral*, 124
- Holocaust Project* (Chicago), 150–51, 152
- Holzer, Jenny, 46
- Hopper, Edward, 13
- Hopper, Jo, 11
- Hoshour, Harvey, 175–76
- House* (Bourgeois), 122
- House Divided* (Nauman), 166
- Howard Wise Gallery (New York), 97–98
- Hughes, Robert, “Art and Money”, 22–23
- Human Nature/Life Death* (Nauman), 166
- Ibn Khaldun, 144
- Ice Storm, The* (film), 4, 4n. 4, 5
- Ice Storm, The* (Moody), 5–6
- If Not, Not* (Kitaj), 15
- Indonesia National Museum (Jakarta), 179, 180n
- In Exaltation of Flowers* (Steichen), 158, 158
- Infinite Column* (Brancusi), 106; creation of, 107–9, 108; deterioration of, 109–10, 109; restoration of, 110–12, 111
- Inset Wall Piece with Stepped Interior* (Winsor), 123
- installation, 123–24, 166; correcting errors of, 168–69; of performance art, 135–40, 137, 138, 139; and transportation of art, 101–5, 102, 103, 104, 105
- International Brancusi Foundation, 110
- international copyright law, 65, 65n. 2. *See also* copyright
- International Federation of Film Archives, 99, 100
- Internet, 76, 88. *See also* technology
- Ionesco, Eugène, *Le roi se meurt*, 40
- Iris* (Levine), 98
- Iron Shoulder* (Shelton), 103
- Irwin, Robert, 124
- Isenheim Altarpiece* (Grünewald), 93, 94
- Ise Shrine (Japan), 91–92, 91n
- Israel Museum (Jerusalem), 142
- Iturria, Ignatio, 180–81
- James, Henry, 5, 6; *The Aspern Papers*, 4; *The Wings of the Dove*, 4
- Japan (Dorner), 128
- Jar Woman #VII* (Scott), 78
- Jensen, Alfred, *Magic Square*, 103, 103
- Jewish Rider, The* (Kitaj), 16
- Johns, Jasper: *Flashlight III*, 122; *Map*, 121, 122
- Jonas, Joan, *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, 98
- Jones-Henderson, Napoleon, 162
- Journal of Contemporary Art*, 147
- Joyce, James, 15
- Judd, Donald, 47, 166
- Kabakov, Ilya, 172
- Kafka, Franz, 13, 15
- Kahlo, Frida, 163n. 7
- Kaprow, Allan, 59–60; *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts*, 137–38; *Yard*, 138, 138
- Karp, Jesse (critic), 5
- Kelly, Ellsworth, 22; *White and Grey Panels*, 126
- Kienholz, Edward: *Back Seat Dodge '38*, xvii; *The Shine on Shine* (and N. R. Kienholz), 103, 103
- Kirkeby, Per, *Brickwork*, 43
- Kitaj, R. B.: *Ellen's Back*, 13; *If Not, Not*, 15; *The Jewish Rider*, 16; *The Man of the Woods and the Cat of the Mountain*, 14
- Klee, Paul, 8
- Kline, Franz, 21; *Painting Number 2*, 22; *Painting Number One*, 122
- Klowe, Peter, 30
- Kluver, Billy: *Nine Evenings*, 98; *Open Score*, 98
- Kobayashi, Masakazu, and N. Kobayashi, *Sound from the Cosmos*, 181
- Koons, Jeff, 39
- Kounellis, Jannis, 168
- Kronenberger, Louis, 35
- Kubler, George, 141
- Kunsthalle Basel, 46
- Kusama, Yayoi: *Dress, x; No. T.W.3*, 124; “Silver Shoes”, 102
- language, art as, 115–19, 117, 118
- Lapis* (Whitney), 98
- Last Supper* (Leonardo da Vinci), 54
- Latham, John, *Skoob Towers*, 139
- law and art, 63–66, 133
- “Leda and the Swan” (Yeats), 7
- Lee, Ang (film director), *The Ice Storm*, 4, 4n. 4, 5
- Lenoir, Alexandre, xix
- Leonardo da Vinci, 19; *Last Supper*, 54
- Leonard, Zoe, in *Documenta IX*, 46, 50; *Strange Fruit (for David)*, 45–47, 45, 46, 48–50
- Lerner, Gerda, 147, 148
- Leslie, Alfred, 102
- Levine, Les, *Iris*, 98
- LeWitt, Sol, 39, 44; *Circle*, 124; 21 A, 126; *Wall Drawing #696*, viii, xi–xii
- Lichtenstein, Roy, *Masterpiece*, 121, 126
- Lippard, Lucy, 60
- Lives of the Artists, The* (Vasari), 19
- Loadman, John, 72
- Löcher mit Löchern stopfen* (Gröting), 129
- Long, Richard, *River Avon Mud Circle*, 124
- Los Angeles Coliseum, xvii
- Los Angeles County Museum of Art, xvii
- Lowenthal, David, xvi
- Lynch, David (film director), *Dune*, 38
- Magic Square* (Jensen), 103, 103
- Magnet TV* (Paik), 97
- Malevic, Kazimir, 54
- Mallarmé, Stéphane, xv
- Man #3* (Puett), 122
- Man, Controller of the Universe* (Rivera), 157
- Man at the Crossroads* (Rivera), 157
- Mancusi-Ungaro, Carol, 23–24
- Manet, Édouard, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 8
- Man with a Hat* (Picasso), 23
- Man of the Woods and the Cat of the Mountain, The* (Kitaj), 14
- Map* (Johns), 121, 122
- Marcel Proust sous l'emprise de la photographie* (Brassaï), 82
- Marinetti, Filippo, 14
- marketplace, 56, 76; newness as value in, 21–23, 35; role of art dealer in, 165–70
- Maroger, Jacques, 36
- Martha Jackson Gallery (New York), 138
- Masterpiece* (Lichtenstein), 121, 126
- materials: archive on, 127–30, 128, 129; diversity of, 112, 116, 171–72, 174; meaning in, xviii, 117–19. *See also* experimental materials; modern materials
- Matta-Clark, Gordon, 38, 54
- McLaughlin, John, 103
- media art, 36–37, 44; conservation of, 93–94; environment for, 85, 86, 87; history of, 88–89, 95–100; reproductions of, 44, 87, 88, 89, 90–91; and ritual as preservation, 91–93, 91n, 93. *See also* technology
- Medusa's Flying Moon* (Burden), 103, 103
- Meier, Richard, as Getty Center architect, 26, 27–28, 29
- Mellon Foundation, 81
- Melting Plot* (M. Delacroix), xiv, xiv
- mem* (Campus), 99
- Menard, Louis, 4
- Menil Collection, The (Houston), 23–24
- Mercury's Lamp* (Pistoletto), 171–72
- Merewether, Charles, 164n. 10
- Messenger, The* (Viola), 92, 93, 94
- Metaphors on Vision* (Brakhage), 96
- Metzger, Gustav, *South Bank Demo*, 138–39, 139
- Michelangelo, 15, 17
- Miller, Walter, “A Canticle for Leibowitz”, 88
- Modernism, 35, 37–38; easel painting, 13, 14, 15, 16; and types of arts, xvi, 8–9, 38. *See also* art; contemporary art
- modern materials: conservation methods for, 70–72; conservation progress since 1991, 72–74; degradation of, 67–68, 68; identification of, 68–70, 69, 133–34. *See also* experimental materials
- Mondrian, Piet, 13–14, 37, 54
- Moody, Rick, *The Ice Storm* (novel), 5–6
- Moore, Henry, 107–8

- moral rights, 65–66
- Morgan, John, 71
- Morrison, Keith: *A Night in Tunisia*, 164; *Posse*, 161; *Walk like an Egyptian*, 162; *Zombie Jamboree*, 162
- Movie Drome* (VanDerBeek), 97
- multimedia art, 87, 95. *See also* media art
- Munch, Edvard, 17
- Murakami, Saburo: *Breaking through Many Screens of Paper*, 136–37; *Entrance*, 136; *Peeling Off Painting*, 137, 137
- murals, American, 153–58, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158
- Museu de la Ciència de la Fundació “la Caixa” (Barcelona), 121
- Museum Boymans van Beunigen (Rotterdam), 174
- Museum of Contemporary Art (Miami), 46
- Museum of Contemporary Art, The (Los Angeles), 38, 135
- Museum of French Monuments, xix
- Museum für Moderne Kunst (Frankfurt), Archive of Techniques and Working Materials Used by Contemporary Artists at, 127–30, 128, 129
- Museum of Modern Art (Monterrey, Mexico), 164
- Museum of Modern Art, The (New York), 38, 69, 84, 101; conservation at, 20, 81–84, 124; media art support by, 99–100; photographs at, 81–84; private collections lent to, 13–14, 121–22, 126
- Museum of Nonobjective Art (New York), 14
- museums, 49–50; and CCI Symposium ’91, 67–74; criteria for responsibility, 159–60; media art in, 95–100
- Museum Wiesbaden, 139
- Namuth, Hans, 59, 60
- Nanny Now, Nigger Later* (Scott), 77
- Native American art, 156–57, 158, 162
- nature: destruction of art by, 53–54, 155–56, 181–82, 182; as vital to character of work, 26, 28–30, 31–34, 33n. 24
- Nauman, Bruce, 36, 38, 166, 169, 172; *Corridor* (film), 98; *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square* (film), 98; *House Divided*, 166; *Human Nature/Life Death*, 166
- Negro basura, negro mañana* (Escobedo), 54
- Nesbit, Elaine, 30
- Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, 174
- Neto, Ernesto, *Apolo 3*, xi, xii
- Newark Museum, 155, 158
- Newman, Barnett, 22; *Cathedra*, 12
- newness value, 21–23, 35, 37, 129
- New York Times, The*, xv
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 17; *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 11
- Night in Tunisia, A* (Morrison), 164
- Nine Evenings* (Kluver), 98
- Nine Packed Bottles* (Christo), 123
- Nitsch, Hermann, 38
- Norris, Debra Hess, 81
- North Dakota Museum of Art (Grand Forks), 175, 178, 180, 181–82
- No. T.W.3 (Kusama), 124
- Oiticica, Hélio, *Parangolé P22 (Cape 18)*, 140
- Oldenburg, Claes, 56; *Standing Mitt with Ball*, 125, 125
- Old Talbott Tavern murals (Bardstown), 155–56
- Olympic Gateway* (Graham), xvii
- Open Score* (Kluver), 98
- Oppenheim, David, xviii
- Oppenheim, Meret, *Untitled*, x
- Organic Honey’s Vertical Roll* (Jonas), 98
- Origin of the World* (Courbet), 46
- Orozco, José Clemente, 163n. 7
- Ortiz, Raphael Montañez, *Piano Destruction Concert*, 139
- Oursler, Tony, 36
- Out of Actions* (Schimmel), 38
- Over-Under* (Graves), 122
- ownership, 63–66, 84, 121. *See also* collectors oxidation, 68, 72. *See also* degradation
- Paik, Nam June, 97, 98, 105; *Global Groove*, 99; *Magnet TV*, 97; *Real Fish/Live Fish*, 99; *TV Eyepiece*, 99; *Videotape Study #3*, 97; *Zen for Head*, 139
- Painting Number One* (Kline), 122
- Painting Number 2* (Kline), 22
- Palace of Fine Arts (Mexico City), 157
- Panama Pacific International Exposition (San Francisco), 156, 156, 157
- Papageorge, Georgie: *Site Installation*, 176, 177; *Suspension*, 177–78, 177
- Parangolé P22 (Cape 18)* (Oiticica), 140
- Park* (Sottsass), 102, 102
- parylene deposition method, 70–71, 71
- Peeling Off Painting* (Murakami), 137, 137
- Pei, I. M., xi
- performance art, 44, 135–40, 137, 138, 139
- Perugino, Pietro, 19
- Philadelphia Museum of Art, *Strange Fruit (for David)*, 45–47, 45, 46, 48–50
- photographs, 81–82, 95; as documentation, 25, 38, 59; and prevention of future damage, 82–84. *See also* documentation
- Piano Destruction Concert* (Ortiz), 139
- Piazzoni, Gottardo, murals of, 153–54, 154
- Picasso, Pablo, xix, 8, 21; *Guernica*, 54; *Man with a Hat*, 23
- Pillar (Bourgeois), 126
- Pistoletto, Michelangelo: *Mercury’s Lamp*, 171–72; *Venere degli Stracci*, 171
- Playback 1996 Video Preservation Roundtable, 100
- politics and art, 163n. 7; of Papageorge, Georgie, 176–78, 177; and people of color in art world, 161–64, 162nn. 4, 5, 6, 164n. 9; and removal or destruction of works, 109–10, 129–30, 153–54, 178; tour to China, 178–79, 180; tour to Indonesia, 179, 180n
- Polke, Sigmar, *Untitled*, 103
- Pollock, Jackson, 121–22; *Full Fathom Five*, 18; intactness of work by, 57–58, 61–62; style of painting by, 20, 59–60
- Porter, Fairfield, 36
- Porzner, Helmut, 60
- Posse* (Morrison), 161
- preservation, 12, 36–37, 61; compromises in, xv, 20–21, 83–84, 101; and intention of artist, 19, 20–24; of murals, 153–54, 154; problems for owners, 101–5, 102, 103, 104, 105; rituals in, 91–93, 91n, 93, 119. *See also* conservation; documentation
- Prière de Toucher* (Duchamp), 70–71, 71, 73, 74
- Prince, Richard, 9; *Drink Canada Dry*, 103, 103, 105
- property, right of, 64, 64n. *See also* copyright
- Proust, Marcel, 9, 15, 82
- Provincial Museum of Alberta (Edmonton), 69
- Prune Flats* (Whitman), 97
- Puett, Garnett, *Man #3*, 122
- Purple Box* (Rosssbach), xii
- Puryear, Martin, 126, 166; *Alien Huddle*, 121
- Pythagoras, xvii
- Rabin, Bernie, 155
- Rainbow Shabbat* (Chicago), 151, 152
- Rainer, Leslie, 31n. 19
- Rauschenberg, Robert, 36, 54, 98; *Bed*, x; *Rhyme*, 122, 124
- Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange Project (ROCI), 36
- Ray, Charles: *Fashions*, 169; *Table*, 105
- Real Fish/Live Fish* (Paik), 99
- reconstruction, 43; of murals, 157–58, 157, 158. *See also* reproduction
- Register, John, *Cadillac Hotel*, 101–2, 102
- Rehberger, Tobias, *Smoking, listening, for himself—I care about you because you do*, 129
- Reilly, James, 81
- Reinhardt, Ad, 22
- Reiss, Winold, 156
- relocation of murals, 156
- reproduction, xi, xii, 124, 167; and copying as conservation, 66, 83, 91; of media art, 87, 88, 89, 90–91; of murals, 156–57; restoration vs., 22–23; technical superiority of, 60–61. *See also* reconstruction
- Resources of America* (Shahn), 155, 155, 156
- restoration, 37, 74; compromises in, 20–21; of *Infinite Column*, 110–12, 111; of murals, 154–56; overzealous, 20, 22, 110–11, 155; reproduction vs., 22–23, 87; and value of the work, 21–23
- Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 19–20
- Rhyme* (Rauschenberg), 122, 124
- Riegl, Alois, “The Modern Cult of Monuments”, 21
- rights. *See* law
- rituals, 139; of preservation, 91–93, 91n, 93, 119
- Rivera, Diego, 163n. 7; *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 157; *Man at the Crossroads*, 157
- River Avon Mud Circle* (Long), 124
- Rockburne, Dorothea, 123
- Rodia, Simon, *Watts Towers*, xvii
- Roi se meurt, Le* (Lonesco), 40
- Rose, Barbara, 59
- Rosenberg, Harold, 35, 59
- Rosssbach, Ed, *Purple Box*, xii
- Rot, Dieter, 47
- Rothe, Andrea, 142–43
- Rothko, Mark, 22–23; *Two Greens with Red Stripe*, 125
- Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto), 69
- Rubins, Nancy, *Einstein’s Place and Mark Thompson’s Airplane Parts*, 104, 105
- Rubin, William, 58
- ruins, 25–27; Goldsworthy’s new, 25, 26, 28–34, 30–33
- Rumi, Maulana Jalal al-Din, 94
- Ruskin, John, 20, 74
- Ruthenbeck, Reiner, *Verspannung II*, 130
- Ryder, Albert Pinkham, 13, 17
- Ryman, Robert, 36, 125, 168
- Sale, Don, 72
- Salle, David, *Hamlet’s Mind*, 126
- Sandberg, Will, 142
- Sandoval, Arturo, 178, 179
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 9, 149
- San Francisco War Memorial murals, 156, 156, 157
- San Jose Museum of Art, 28, 32
- Sayre, Elizabeth, 39

- Scarecrow Knows Who Won, *The* (Scott), 78
- Scheidemann, Christian, 47
- Schema (Hesse), 49
- Schimmel, Paul, *Out of Actions*, 38
- Schneider, Ira, *Wipe Cycle*, 98
- Schwartz, Gary, "Ars Moriendi: The Mortality of Art", 53
- Scott, Joyce J.: *Caffeine*, 78; *Jar Woman #VII*, 78; *Nanny Now, Nigger Later*, 77; *The Scarecrow Knows Who Won*, 78
- Serra, Richard, 47, 166; *Titled Arc*, 12
- Settis, Salvatore, 28
- Seurat, Georges, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, 147
- Seward Park Housing project (New York), 154
- Shahn, Ben, *Resources of America*, 155, 155, 156
- Shahn, Bernarda Bryson, 155
- Shapiro, Joel, *Untitled*, 122
- Sharits, Paul, *T, O, U, C, H, I, N, G* (film), 98
- Sheepfolds* (Goldsworthy), 25, 27
- Shelton, Peter, *Iron Shoulder*, 103
- Shine on Shine, The* (Kienholz and Kienholz), 103, 103
- Siegel, Eric, 98
- "Silver Shoes" (Kusama), 102
- Siqueiros, David Alfaro, 20, 58, 163n. 7; *América Tropical*, xvii
- Site Installation* (Papageorge), 176, 177
- site-specific art, 54, 55–56, 55, 56, 124
- Skoob Towers* (Latham), 139
- Sleep of Reason, The* (Viola), 90, 91
- Smith, Jack, *Flaming Creatures* (film), 96
- Smith, Kiki, *Train*, 102, 103
- Smithson, Robert, xviii, 26; *Corner Mirror with Coral*, 126
- Smith, Tony, 121–22; *Cigarette*, 122
- Smoking, listening, for himself—I care about you because you do* (Rehberger), 129
- Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE), 89–90
- society and social issues, xix, 49, 76, 130. *See also* culture; heritage
- Soho, Takuan, 87, 94
- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York), 103, 160, 169
- solvents, hazards of, 67, 72
- Sottsass, Ettore, *Park*, 102, 102
- Sound from the Cosmos* (Kobayashi and Kobayashi), 181
- South Bank Demo* (Metzger), 138–39, 139
- Spector, Nancy, 169
- spiral sculpture, by Goldsworthy (Getty Center), xvi, 25, 26, 28–34, 30–33
- Spoerri, Daniel, 138
- Städtische Galerie (Frankfurt), 169
- Standing Mitt with Ball* (Oldenburg), 125, 125
- Stanford University, Conservation OnLine (CoOL), 24
- Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), 172
- Steichen, Edward J., *In Exaltation of Flowers*, 158, 158
- Stein, Gertrude, xix
- Stevens, David, 162n. 5
- Stevens, Nelson, 162n. 5
- Stieglitz, Alfred, 9, 10, 12
- Stopping Mind, The* (Viola), 86, 87
- storage, 126; anoxic, 68, 70, 74; dangers and risks of, 181–82, 182
- Storm King Art Center (Mountainville), 27, 125
- Strange Fruit (for David)* (Leonard), 45–47, 45, 46, 48–50
- Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (Seurat), 147
- Suspension* (Papageorge), 177–78, 177
- Swedish Corrosion Institute, 110, 111
- Sylvester, David, 21
- Sylvester II (pope), xvii
- synthetic materials. *See* modern materials
- Table* (Ray), 105
- Table of Silence* (Brancusi), 108, 112
- Tambellini, Aldo, 98; *Black Zero* (film), 97
- Tanaka, Atsuko, *Electric Dress*, 137
- Tansey, Mark, *Conversation*, 122
- Tate Gallery (London), 24, 37, 169–70
- Tate Gallery of Modern Art (London), 41–44
- technology, 77–78, 166; Archive of Techniques and Working Materials Used by Contemporary Artists, 127–30, 128, 129; FT-IR for material identification, 69, 69; and loss of aura, 54–55; photographic, 81–84; progress in, xvii, 12, 24, 43, 60–61, 76. *See also* experimental materials; media art
- television, 97–100, 101. *See also* media art
- Ten Most Wanted* (Warhol), 9
- Thiebaud, Wayne, *Cake Window (Seven Cakes)*, 120
- Thomas Aquinas, St., xviii
- Thoreau, Henry David, 17
- Three Transitions* (Campus), 99
- Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Nietzsche), 11
- time and art, x, xvi, xvii, 25, 26
- Time of the Fire, The* (de Kooning), 122, 124–25
- Tinguely, Jean, 12, 60; *Gismo*, 172
- Tipi Waterfall* (Hemenway), 179
- Titled Arc* (Serra), 12
- Tori (nine units)* (Hesse), 49
- T, O, U, C, H, I, N, G* (Sharits), 98
- Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri de, 147
- Train* (K. Smith), 102, 103
- transience of works, 19–24, 62, 73
- transportation of art, 36, 41; dangers and risks in, 54, 61, 87, 160, 175–82; for identification of materials, 69, 69; and installation of experimental materials, 101–5, 102, 103, 104, 105
- Turner, William, 20
- Turrell, James, 28; *Second Meeting*, 105, 105
- Tuttle, Richard, *Waferboard no. 1*, 121
- TV *Eyepiece* (Paik), 99
- 21 A (LeWitt), 126
- Two Greens with Red Stripe* (Rothko), 125
- Twombly, Cy, *Untitled*, 122
- 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (film), 8
- U.S. Capitol, 154–55
- U.S. Information Agency (USIA), 178, 179
- U.S. Library of Congress, 154–55
- U.S. National Archives, 81
- U.S. National Endowment for the Arts, 12, 76–77, 175
- U.S. National Museum of American History, xv
- U.S. National Portrait Gallery, 178
- Untitled, Blower #5* (Blum), 128
- Untitled (Portrait of Dad)* (Gonzalez-Torres), 47–48, 47
- values of works of art, 21, 57, 159
- VanDerBeek, Stan, *Movie Drome* (film), 97
- Varia, Radu, 110
- Vasari, Giorgio, *The Lives of the Artists*, 19
- Vautier, Ben, *Ben's Window*, 138, 138
- Venere degli Stracci* (Pistoletto), 171
- Verspannung II* (Ruthenbeck), 130
- video art. *See* media art
- Videotape Study #3* (Paik), 97
- viewers: appreciation by, 37, 60, 83; relationship between object and, 47–48, 47, 50, 144
- Viola, Bill: *The Messenger*, 92, 93, 94; *The Sleep of Reason*, 90, 91; *The Stopping Mind*, 86, 87
- Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA), 65, 65n. 3
- Vostell, Wolf, 97
- Waferboard no. 1* (Tuttle), 121
- Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), 138
- Walk like an Egyptian* (Morrison), 162
- Wall Drawing #696* (LeWitt), viii, xi–xii
- Wall of Respect, The* (Community Muralists), 158
- Warhol, Andy, 11, 54, 99–100; *Brillo Box*, 10; *Eat* (film), 97; *Ten Most Wanted*, 9; "Time Capsules" archive, 8
- Watts Towers (Rodia), xvii
- Weiner, Larry, 60
- Wexner Center for the Arts (Columbus), 121
- White and Grey Panels* (Kelly), 126
- White Torso* (Bourgeois), 122
- Whitman, Robert, *Prune Flats* (film), 97
- Whitney, James, *Lapis* (film), 98
- Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), 87, 99–100
- Wilhelm, Henry, 81, 82
- Williamstown Art Conservation Center, 70, 73
- Wilson, Fred, *The Conversation*, 122
- Wings of the Dove, The* (James), 4
- Winsor, Jacqueline: *Burnt Piece*, 126; *Inset Wall Piece with Stepped Interior*, 123
- Wipe Cycle* (Schneider and Gillette), 98
- Withershins* (Hill), 167
- Wojnarowicz, David, 46
- Wolanin, Barbara, 155
- Wollheim, Richard, 84
- Woman* (Frank), 123, 123
- women's art, place in the art world for, 147–52, 148, 150, 151, 152, 161–64, 161, 162, 164. *See also* names of individual artists
- Woodman, Betty, *Balustrade Vase 953*, 123
- Woodman, Donald, 150
- World International Property Organization (WIPO): Copyright Treaty, 66; Performances and Phonograms Treaty, 66
- World Wide Web, 88, 95. *See also* technology
- WPA Federal Art Project murals (Gorky), 155, 158
- Wrapped Newspaper* (Christo), 122
- Xu Bing: *Book from Sky*, 180; *Ghosts Pounding on the Wall*, 180
- Yard* (Kaprow), 138, 138
- Yeats, William Butler, "Leda and the Swan", 7
- Yokohama Museum of Art (Japan), 121
- York University Art Gallery (Toronto), 121
- Zen for Head* (Paik), 139
- Zombie Jamboree* (Morrison), 162



# **MORTALITY IMMORTALITY?**

Thirty-six contributors  
**THE LEGACY OF 20TH-CENTURY ART**  
speak out on a range of  
issues critical to preserving  
the art of our time.

ISBN 0-89236-528-5



9 780892 365289 90000