

## **Report**

### **Working Conference**

The aim of the working conference was to define the problems concerning the conservation of modern art and to determine concrete possibilities of cooperation.

The conference took place on 20 and 21 March 1997 in the Central Research Laboratory for Objects of Art and Science (now the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage). The partners were represented by one or more delegates. A number of experts in the field of the conservation of modern art, who were not affiliated with any of the institutions represented, were invited as well. A total of 25 experts took part (see list of participants, appendix 5).

During the working conference it transpired that the issue of the conservation of modern art was felt to be a crucial one by all participants. However, the problems are extremely complex and diverse. That is why conservation is conditional on the exchange of experience, information and results of research. According to all partners an intensive form of collaboration and exchange is urgently needed. This meeting was a first step towards the establishment of a network to this end. All participants expressed their willingness to invest in such a network. The working conference also included preparations for the symposium.

### **Symposium**

The symposium 'Modern art: who cares?' took place in Amsterdam on 8, 9 and 10 September 1997. With 450 participants the symposium was fully booked. Participants came from twenty-five different countries, including non-European countries. All disciplines related to the conservation of modern art were represented, such as conservators, curators, conservation scientists, artists, registrars and art historians (see also the list of participants, appendix 6).

The thirteen international partners put in a major effort regarding the composition of the programme. In addition all partners made important contributions to the programme of seminars and/or lectures.

We opted for a programme with many parts, including as many aspects as possible, so that the various disciplines and focal points in the field of the conservation of modern art could be discussed. Apart from the visit to the exhibition which was mentioned earlier, the seminar programme and the programme of lectures, a discussion with artists took place and a forum discussion with directors of museums of modern art. See also the programme book in appendix 6. The publication that will appear this summer will include reports on all parts of the programme.

During the symposium the exchange of knowledge and viewpoints between the various disciplines was felt to be very positive and even as setting a precedent.

## Exhibition

The exhibition took place from 15 June to 8 September 1997 in Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. The problems regarding the conservation of 20th century art objects were visualised and shown to a wider public. The exhibition involved ten objects with specific conservation problems. The objects came from eight different museums. Information on the problems and the conservation research was given by means of accompanying texts, which could also be understood by non-specialists. Public attention for this subject turned out to be considerable. During the time the objects were put on display it was clear that the members of the public studied the accompanying notes more carefully than usual.

The exhibition was also a means of introducing the problems to those taking part in the symposium. The presence of specific objects with an elaboration on the research turned out to be a good introduction to the programme of lectures and prompted a lot of discussion. During the visit to the exhibition the curators and conservators question elucidated the conservation problems to the participants of the symposium.

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## Conclusions working conference and symposium 'Modern art: who cares?'

Conservation of modern and contemporary art is only possible if information is available on the materials and techniques used by the artists and, not least, what they mean to the artists. The fact that these data are largely unavailable endangers the preservation of modern and contemporary art. Documentation and research in these areas should become a structural part of the conservation of modern art.

Museums of modern art will therefore have to make a clear choice for their international, national or regional function as institutions whose task it is to preserve and pass on twentieth-century fine art. Museums will have to invest heavily in the collection and availability, research and exchange of this information.

- Interviews with artists are a major instrument in the collection of information.
- Research into the documentation and conservation of 'immaterial' artistic expressions merits special attention.
- Art-historical and art-theoretical research is necessary in order to develop a methodical approach to the collection of these data.

More, and more efficient collaboration is vital, both within the museums and among the institutions and the various disciplines, conservators, curators, conservation scientists, artists and managers. Free lance conservators working independently must also be part of this network. Collaboration and exchange should be developed in particular in the fields of:

- Opening up findings of research into methods and techniques of conservation, scientific and material research and information on conservation treatment that has been done.
- Information on materials and techniques used by artists, and their meanings.
- These data are to be made accessible on the internet, by means of an information network.

Conservation is not just the task of the conservators, but the responsibility of the museum organisation as a whole, including management level.

- There is a need for the development of clear logistic - and management systems aimed at the use and conservation of modern and contemporary art, centred around the diversity of materials and their meanings.
- When works of art are bought, the consequences regarding their conservation must be assessed and integrated in the management right from the start.
- Methods of risk management are to be developed specially for these fragile and diversified collections, and integrated in the conservation policy.