

TENT PROJECT CORNELIUS ROGGE

Decay and preservation

A small exhibition and a short film organised and produced as part of research into conservation strategies for the *Tent project* (1975) from Cornelius Rogge (1932) aims to shed light on the ethical dilemmas that the museum has to deal with.

The *Tent project* is an interesting artwork with regard to conservation issues. The work consists of several tent-like structures that are on permanent display in the sculpture garden of the Kröller-Müller Museum. They are made of tent cloth and ropes, amongst other things; vulnerable materials that are actually not suitable for a long-term presentation, especially in the Dutch outdoor climate. The history of the work illustrates this. In 1975 it was first placed in the sculpture garden and after numerous conservation treatments as a result of continuous decay, the work was finally dismantled in the early 1990's. Around the year 2000 the *Tent project* was reconstructed on the basis of the original 1:10 scale model. This time, new and more durable materials were used to lengthen the functioning life of *Tent project* as part of the permanent collection of the museum.

In the end this new version of the *Tent project* will also be subject to decay caused by the effect of the poor environmental conditions. The inevitable decay is actually an aspect that suits the artist's ideas about the cyclic movement of time and life – concepts on which his work is based. Natural decay may therefore become part of the artwork, although at the same time it is important to Rogge that the tents retain their straight form without any holes. The tents are completely closed without any openings, enclosing a hidden dark place. This is one of the significant properties of the *Tent project* that needs to be preserved. At the same time there exists the notion of the inherent temporal character of a tent: one can set it up and take it down, and come and go with it.

Finding a balance in the tension between temporality and permanence, between decay and preservation is a challenge to conservators. How can one simultaneously subject the artwork to natural decay in the outdoors, as it is meant, and at the same time preserve other specific characteristics that are prone to fail due to the forces of nature? How can one keep a balance between the concept of the artwork and its material manifestation during decision-making? How long can the *Tent project* withstand the conditions outdoors before the artwork starts losing its significance? What are the boundaries of the measure of decay for this artwork? What conservation measures are technically feasible without violating the artist's intention? How can the principles of conservation ethic be directive of new conservation strategies for this work? How does the present version of the *Tent project*, created in cooperation with the artist, relate to a possible future version when the almost 80-year old artist is no longer around? By considering these kind of questions as well as research results, new conservation measurements will be developed that will consolidate the integrity of the artwork, its conceptual and material manifestation, for future generations.



Cornelius Rogge, *Tent project* (1975) in the sculpture garden of the Kröller-Müller Museum

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