

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
CONTEMPORARY
ART: WHO CARES?
9 – 11 JUNE 2010
ROYAL TROPICAL INSTITUTE, AMSTERDAM

Summary Contemporary Art: Who Cares?

Given by Tatja Scholte, Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage / ICN
Day 3, Friday 11th June during closing session.

Good afternoon.

It's been a buzz over the last two-and-half days and it's not over yet.

We hope you all are enjoying yourselves and, speaking for myself, I am delighted with the event, and not in the least to see so many familiar faces..... We have worked together for so many years.

As participants of this symposium, speakers and attendants alike, you present a wonderful diversity of backgrounds. When preparing the symposium it certainly played a role that we wished to accentuate the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary art conservation. We wanted to give an overview of different perspectives: museum directors, private collectors, conservators, artists, artists' assistants, art historians, collection managers, conservation scientists, technicians and last but not least students.

These days we all think about conservation and collection management; thirteen years ago, this was not common practice!

In addition: more and more we try to share conservation information with the general public. As we heard in the opening speech by Joost Zwagerman: 1 out of 8 people in Amsterdam know about our profession and the issues we deal with.

Thinking about the symposium we looked at Modern Art: Who Cares?, especially the organisational structure: as a kind of market where everyone could go shopping and find things of their liking. So, we have tried to create a market square and goods in the form of practical hands-on workshops (like plastics, access to contemporary art, interviewing techniques, INCCA workshop) and discussions, plenary lectures and poster presentations.

In fact, to a large extent the organisation of the symposium has been carried out by the network itself as the sessions have been prepared by groups of people – many of which had been involved in Inside Installations. A very warm thank you, once more, to all the Inside Installations partners and all the others who have helped realise this symposium with their hard work and commitment.

As it was the model for this symposium we would like to make a few comparisons to Modern Art: Who Cares? and see what has changed in these 13 years.

1. First of all, at that time there was a backlog in material-technical information on contemporary art. Especially information on the artist's choices for material, technique or medium was lacking and their relation to artistic intent was even less addressed in art critique or other writings. A general belief in the "artist's voice" gave an impetus to many conservators to actively engage with artists and assistant in collecting this information and to start a dialogue on conservation. Today, interviewing artists or collaboration in other ways is common practice and in many countries projects have been running on this subject since then. For example, one project here in The Netherlands finally will result in a book publication due to come out next year, called The Artist Interview.
2. Second: in 1997 there was no platform for sharing information on the conservation of modern and contemporary art. But actually the network is working here – today - in this symposium! In 2001 the founding members of INCCA established the network which currently exists of more than 300 members. Many of those are active in several INCCA subgroups in their own region such

as North America and Central and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the first thematic INCCA group was established: INCCA Education which happened at the last PRACTICs meeting in Ljubljana. We still see the same core group of INCCA members being active but others joined in and different liaisons are being made. As we speak, for example, in the networking sessions of last night.

3. Third point: Installation Art

Inside Installations was an important European project but at the same time, it was just one of many projects on this running in Europe, USA and Canada. There has been an enormous development and the international agenda is full of initiatives and projects in which the needs for contemporary art conservation are being discussed. Driven by the art production and acquisition policy of museum, in more recent years, installation art and the problems with the conservation of time-based media have been at the top of the agenda of the museums and conservation studios. Many cross links between the various initiatives can be made and somehow all of them are part of this worldwide knowledge network in which complex installation works of art are situated.

4. Fourth: at the time of MA:WC? there were no specialised educational programmes for the conservation of modern and contemporary art. Nowadays we have all kind of programmes all over the world. Yesterday even an INCCA PhD research network has been established in this building.

In general we can conclude that CA:WC? reflects the development of all issues that have been raised by MA:WC? The depth of discussion has been more profound, based on the growth in maturity of the profession. This might be the symposium of consolidation on the one hand, on the other new topics entered the agenda that will be addressed in the final panel discussion.

One last remark. Please bear in mind that next spring you will all receive a copy of the book Inside Installations, theory and practice in the conservation of complex works of art.

Thank you.