

Miladi Makuc Semion

Ambient M1 by Vinko Tušek – construction dilemmas 43 years later

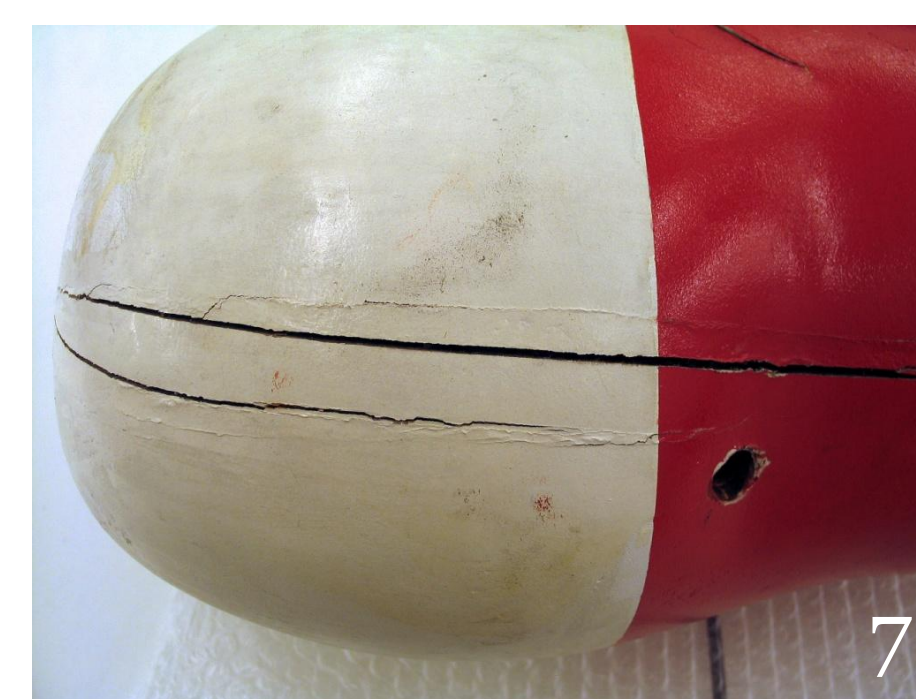
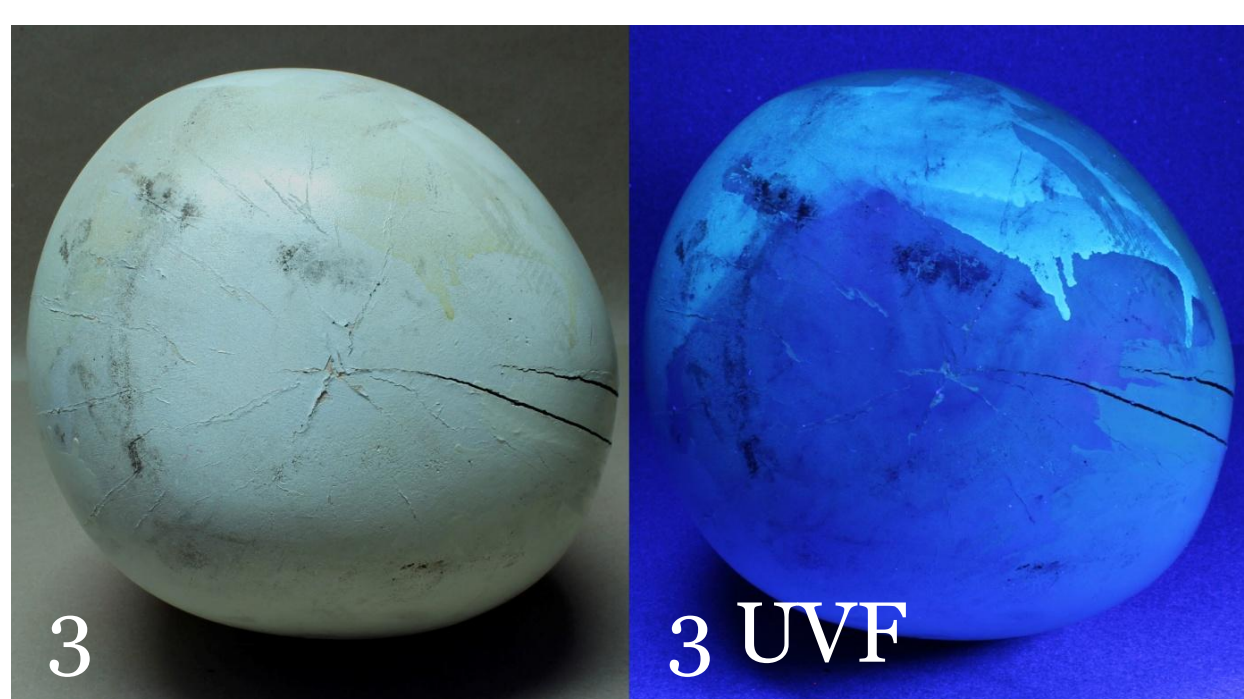


I. The ambient sculpture

The colourful playful sculpture *Ambient M1* (1971) by Vinko Tušek has long been deposited at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana (Slovenia). It was dismantled in two groups of elements which came there from two different locations. The author explained at that time that all those parts are the components of one composition. The sculpture has been restored and reassembled for the exhibition at Bežigrad Gallery 2 in Ljubljana (Slovenia) in May 2014. Slovenian artist Vinko Tušek (1936–2011) was a member of the *Neoconstructivist* group, later of the group *Colour*, and was also otherwise actively engaged in “artistic dialogue”. *Ambient M1* is considered to be one of the first ambient sculptures in Slovenia. The artist created an innovative composition in the environment by exploring the relationships between colours and forms. The composition is made up of 34 (after the reconstruction 37) colourfully painted wooden elements, interconnected by 35 iron bars and wires.

II. Condition of the sculpture before the treatment

The bigger elements are of irregular, organic forms and most likely made of lime wood. Due to the shrinkage of the wood deep radial cracks appeared. The smaller components are round or oval, made on a lathe and most likely of beech wood. The paint layer is relatively well preserved despite minor flaking. There is a significant difference in the texture and thickness of the colour coating: bigger elements were coated by spraying, smaller with a brush. The sprayed paint layers are thin and slightly rough. In the case of hand-painted elements the paint layer is thick and shiny. According to the artist's son Marko, Tušek used car and nitro lacquers. The elements were finally coated with transparent varnish, which is now unevenly yellowed. The iron elements (diameter 3–12 mm), were painted with a once white paint for metal. The paint was darkened and damaged in several places, minor oxidation was present.



III. Conservation-restoration

Due to lack of time and resources detailed analyzes have not been performed. For an overview of the state of the surface, we used UV fluorescence. The elements were cleaned with erasers, white spirit, Triammonium citrate (2%), and distilled water. The original varnish, although partly yellowed, was preserved. The flaking layers were treated with Medium for consolidation Lascaux 4176 and the heating spatula. Radial cracks were closed with inlays of Balsa wood and putty (Klucel G, Arbocel BC 200), the levels were equalized with gesso (Klucel G or glue, Bologna chalk). The inpaintings were made with acrylic paints (Liquitex). Where necessary, we achieved a gloss by applying a thin coat of Gum Arabic.

IV. Assembling, reconstruction

The composition was again presented as a whole after many years since its creation. We were able to reassemble it on the basis of the only existing black-and-white photograph of the original layout and artist's markings on the elements. Full reconstruction was not possible due to lack of photographs and a few different components. An approximation was professionally and ethically justified, since the artist himself adapted his compositions to the exposition spaces. While assembling the sculpture we found out that three elements are missing. We made substitute elements – two of wood and one larger one of a composite based on epoxy resins (Balsite®). Some of the wires were redundant. The reversibility has not been called into question, since the elements are connected to each other without the use of an adhesive. After the exhibition the sculpture was dismantled and deposited in museum depot.

V. Reflections

This case points out the importance of good documentation on the making of artworks, as well as artists testimonials about their work. Especially works of art from the not-so-distant periods are often unfairly treated as average or even unworthy because they are “too young”, but may in fact be important steps or even milestones in art, both in terms of artistic expression and the use of materials.

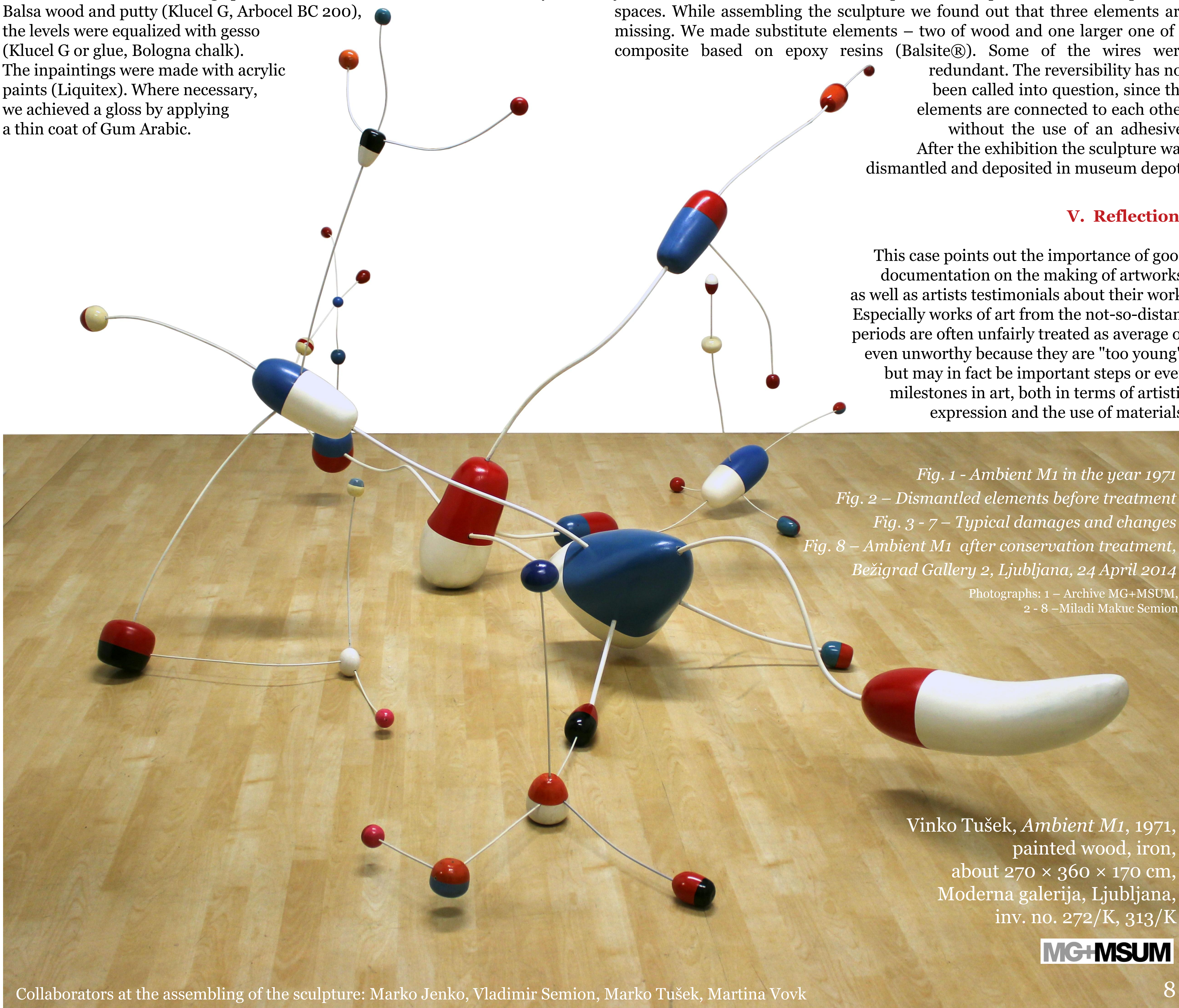


Fig. 1 - *Ambient M1* in the year 1971
Fig. 2 – Dismantled elements before treatment
Fig. 3 - 7 – Typical damages and changes
Fig. 8 – *Ambient M1* after conservation treatment,
Bežigrad Gallery 2, Ljubljana, 24 April 2014

Photographs: 1 – Archive MG+MSUM,
2 - 8 – Miladi Makuc Semion

Vinko Tušek, *Ambient M1*, 1971,
painted wood, iron,
about 270 × 360 × 170 cm,
Moderna galerija, Ljubljana,
inv. no. 272/K, 313/K

MG+MSUM

Collaborators at the assembling of the sculpture: Marko Jenko, Vladimir Semion, Marko Tušek, Martina Vovk