

Session Summary

Title	Artist Participation
Type	Workshop
Dates, times	Wednesday 9 th of June, 15:00 – 17:00 and Thursday 10 th of June, 14:00 – 16:00
Organisation	Frederika Huys, head of collections and conservation, S.M.A.K., Ghent Katrien Blanchaert, conservation researcher, S.M.A.K., Ghent
Guests	Nedko Solakov, Artist (on Wednesday 9 th of June) Andreas Slominski, Artist (on Thursday 10 th of June) Ulrich Lang, conservator, MMK Frankfurt
Moderator	Philippe Van Cauteren, artistic director, S.M.A.K. Ghent

Artists often cooperate with conservators to integrate their works into a collection properly. This collaboration results in documentation that is specific to the installation and forms the basis for the display and management of the work. This process is viewed as a necessary new practice in the conservation and management of works of contemporary art. The work's continued existence, meaning the correct form of display and the retention of its material properties, often depends on good cooperation between the artist and those who manage the collection.

The purpose of our workshop was to bring together a group of people in the field of conservation, together with an artist, to discuss the ways the artist is – or should be – involved in the daily routine of conservation documentation practice, rather than its being limited to conservators only. Because as we have all experienced, cooperation with the artist can take many forms.

For the first workshop on Wednesday, we invited Nedko Solakov. On Thursday we were glad to have Andreas Slominski among us.

The participants also included some institutions which documented the work of the selected artists. Their presence was a crucial addition to the outcome of the session. In the case of Nedko Solakov, both the MMK, represented by Ulrich Lang, and the Van Abbemuseum, represented by Charles Essche, have works of his in their collection and attended the workshop to share past experiences and thus stimulate discussion. On the second day, the MMK was again our guest, talking about the works by Slominski in their collection. This sparked off a discussion on which elements, from which documentation, it is preferable to record in order to conserve the artwork for the future.

To be clear, the aim of the workshop was not to compare different types of documentation but rather to use this unique opportunity to bring together several international participants with information about their way of collaborating, to bring about an interesting dialogue between museum professionals and the artist. It was not only the documentation that was discussed and reviewed, but also experiences in working together with the artist. And above all it was a wonderful experience to hear the artist's thoughts on this specific collaboration.

The workshop was structured by the presentation of several works by the artist. First the artist explained his works, told the story behind them and of his experiences in the past. Then the institutions and participants that have documented this work or have experience of this artist were asked to explain their way of working and participating with either Nedko Solakov or Andreas Slominski. Other participants were free to join in and in this way broaden the range of the conversation.

The workshop turned out to be an unrestricted, open and vivid dialogue, with people asking questions to the artist and vice-versa. The benefit was therefore mutual, as several times during the sessions it turned out that the artist was pleased to have this kind of conservation discussion on his work because it proved to him that mutual care does exist. Participation builds a basis of trust that will benefit the artist's work, his practice and the specific collection into which the work is integrated.

It seemed clear that Nedko Solakov is an artist who wants to be involved as closely as possible. He keeps track of his artworks in different collections. This is also proven by the many guidelines he has written and published on his website and his receptiveness to this kind of collaboration.

He made it clear that he preferred collections to send him copies of their documentation on his work. This way it seems easier for him to keep track.

Andreas Slominski turned out to have a totally different perspective on this collaboration. The incorporation of his works into a collection doesn't imply a long follow-up process. He does consider it important that his works are shown and handled correctly. He likes to explain what his work is about, but from then on it is up to the museum. He wants to have time to experience the present, not always look backwards and make adjustments when necessary.

Participation with the artist can result in a new understanding. It can guide us towards other kinds of documenting, more appropriate to the artist practice and the specific artwork to be examined. The key question here is 'What is important for the work?'. We need to be cautious and critical, and remain well aware of the question of 'quality versus quantity'. Sometimes one high-quality picture capturing the atmosphere of a work will describe it better than a detailed plan with accurate measurements.