

## Session Summary

Title	Decision-making in Contemporary Art Conservation: on the Structured Approach and Use of Models in Practice
Type	workshop
Date, time	Friday 11th June, 10:00-12:00
Organisation	Foundation for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (SBMK), Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg (SRAL), and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (SMA)
Contact	Lydia Beerkens, conservator of modern art, SRAL
Guests	Anne Mink, art historian, research project, SMA Rebecca Timmermans, sculpture conservator, SMA
Location	Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, Sarphatistraat 470 (room 'Het Schip')



Joan Jonas' installation *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy/Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, 1972-1994 from the collection of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, re-installed at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, Projectroom Zuid. Photography: Maarten Tromp

This session focused on the process of decision-making during every conservation intervention on modern and contemporary works of art. The Model for Decision Making as published in *Hummelen, Sillé ed. Modern Art; Who Cares? Amsterdam 1999, pp 164-172*, was explained step by step by Lydia Beerkens. Three recent treatments of white relief artworks by the Dutch artist Jan Schoonhoven (1914-1994) were put to the test. Issues of leaving a non removable overpaint layer on one work, removing a yellowed surfactant possibly from the original applied house-paint on another, and extensive filling and repair needed for the third artwork could be ranked in the model under “authenticity”, “the original intent by the artist”, “history/patina”, or “discrepancy in condition”. It proved to be trickier to weigh the information that the artist assistant used to repaint many reliefs in white on the indication of Schoonhoven when still alive. In fact he was the actual ‘fabricator’ of many reliefs, to be approved by Schoonhoven in signing them himself. In addition, how to judge the remarks from a colleague artist who was at the time the ‘personal restorer’ of Schoonhoven’s works.

In linking the decisions to the structure of the model, they jump between stages in the biography of the work and the original state, and as they are never impartial they can prevail conservation options, taking into account the aim for a final result, the finances or other. Still the Model is a good tool for structuring thoughts and arguments, weighing options, to reflect on them and reach final proposals.

In the second part of the session Anne Mink showed how different decision-making works for Installation Art, as she took the audience on a journey through all the phases of Joan Jonas (\*1936) *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy / Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, 1972-1994/2003. The installation combines movies from early performances, props and objects from these performances, a specific setting and presentation, and variations from every next time the installation is presented. The recent conservation involved an interview and discussions with the artist, treatments by several conservators

of very different disciplines and a wide range of preventive measurements. A complex artwork like this simply cannot fit into the structure of the Model, however the structure provides a consciousness of different values during the process of making separate decisions.

The functioning of the Model was compared for the more straightforward Schoonhoven works and the Jonas Installation and the consequences of the complete difference in scale were addressed. Where the decisions on a Schoonhoven treatment involves one curator and one conservator, maybe with some additional analysis by a researcher, an installation needs maybe ten times the amount of time, money, specialists and management. Questions in the lively discussion were addressed by the former curator and by conservators from the museum who were also present in the audience.

On the occasion of this symposium, and in particular this session, this installation from the collection of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, was re-installed for three days at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten. More than two hundred participants used their lunch breaks to visit the space with the installed work.