

INCCA: A VIRTUAL PLATFORM PROVIDING ACCESS TO SHARED KNOWLEDGE ON CONTEMPORARY ARTWORKS

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Modern and contemporary art conservation relies on information sharing. Contemporary artists use all imaginable materials and techniques in the production of their work. Gathering knowledge and information on what these materials and working practices are, the significance they may possess, and how artists view such issues as aging, transience and inter-activity, is essential for developing the best preservation strategies for these increasingly complex works of art. Professionals involved with the conservation of these works continually collect information in the form of treatment reports, artists' interviews, installation protocols, materials research and analysis and so on. Most of this information however remains unpublished and inaccessible to the wider conservation community, while experience has shown that sharing this information is essential for the continued existence of modern and contemporary art. For this reason a group of international professionals took the initiative to set up INCCA, the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art, to collect, share and preserve knowledge needed for the conservation of contemporary art. Over 150 conservators, curators, scientists, registrars, archivists, art historians and researchers including independent professionals and students from around 125 organisations and 30 countries are currently members of INCCA.

Although the INCCA archives are created within the domain of modern and contemporary art, the approach could be applied to other domains in cultural heritage in order to facilitate knowledge sharing, initiate debate, and to stimulate collaborative research.

PLATFORMS FOR INFORMATION SHARING

To facilitate information sharing, two main platforms were developed.

- The INCCA website (www.incca.org) contains information on projects, seminars, literature, and student theses, as well as useful resources such as articles, guidelines and methodology.
- The INCCA member administration website (www.incca.members.org) is for member use only and houses the INCCA database for artists' archives. Through this website, members can create and edit their database records, search the database, edit their contact details and search for INCCA members.

The second of these is a unique research tool made for and by members. It contains metadata records (like library cards) that describe all types and formats of documents. Each record includes keywords and an abstract as well as information on how to obtain the document. It is also possible to attach documents of any digital format or links to relevant websites to database records. Different members may create records concerning the same artist, resulting in a virtual artist archive.

HOW IS THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZED?

INCCA membership is based on openness, a commitment to knowledge exchange and a commitment to interdisciplinary

collaboration. INCCA is made possible through active participation of its members and the generosity of their institutions. Central coordination and web hosting is carried out by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN). To facilitate efficient record collection, the network is divided into regional groups. The INCCA steering committee gives advice on the strategic direction of the network.

DYNAMICS OF THE INCCA NETWORK

The aim of professional activities in cultural heritage is to preserve works of art for future generations — i.e. to provide access to works of art through research, conservation and presentation. In order to do this, professionals must have access to a rich body of information and knowledge. INCCA members create a shared knowledge base reflecting the colourful spectrum of daily practice, collected information (e.g. from artists), scientific analysis, history of re-installation and other professional insights and experiences. INCCA is however more than a repository of information. It is also a stimulus for creating new knowledge. Members actively take part in research projects to develop guidelines and methods, e.g. for artist's participation in conservation and re-installation, documentation strategies, conservation methods and/or writing re-installation manuals. Case studies, which become part of the archives once completed, often form the basis of these research projects. An example of an international collaborative project is *Inside Installations: Presentation and Preservation of Installation Art 2004–2007* (see www.inside-installations.org). The in-depth research results, guidelines, methods and tools developed in 33 case studies and numerous special topic studies generated within this project have been added to INCCA's database for artists' archives.

EXAMPLE OF AN ARTIST'S ARCHIVE

The artists' archives now include two case studies of works made by Suchan Kinoshita; acquired by two different museums. The studies consist of extensive documentation, interviews and collaboration with the artist and reports on investigations regarding the conservation and re-installation of these complex installations. As both studies are part of the archives a comparison can be made between the different approaches and strategies followed by each museum. In the future, this knowledge — which is carefully preserved by the INCCA network — can be used when considering the conservation and presentation of other installations by the artist and it will inspire other case studies on Suchan Kinoshita or on artists whose productions raise similar research questions.

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