

**title: Case research summary**

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case: Joseph Kosuth, *Glass (one and three)*, 1965

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## Resume case research of 'Glass (one and three)'

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### Introduction

'Glass (one and three)' from Joseph Kosuth is one of a series of works the artist calls 'object definitions'. They are all dated 1965. With this work Kosuth explores the nature of art while he seeks to 'de-objectify' the object in art. The artwork is created by instructions on a certificate provided by the artist. The question is how to interpret and follow these guidelines exactly.

### Experience of the work

The spectator of 'Glass (one and three)' sees the same matter defined three times in different constituents: the object itself - a sheet of glass is leaning against the wall, an image - a photograph of the object that is hung left to the sheet of glass and a text - a definition (translation in this case) taken from an English-Flemish (Dutch) dictionary. When 'Glass (one and three)' was realized for the first owner in 1977 the photograph of the glass showed the same background as the actual scene of where the whole work was installed, generating a visual connection to the site. This visual site-related characteristic was lost when the work was acquired by the Kröller-Müller Museum where the original photograph was kept on being used to install the work.

### Installation history

The exhibition history shows how 'Glass (one and three)' had always been treated as a 'guest' the museum since it entered the collection in 1979. The original material parts of the installation that were actually handed over when the loan was organized were used to install the work. The official acquisition of the work in 1995 did not change this practice. When the work was asked on loan the question of replacement of the photograph was first addressed. While the Kröller-Müller Museum had always shown the work with the original photograph, for this occasion a new photograph was made of the glass situated on the parquet floor of the Stedelijk Museum where it was exhibited, because it was claimed this was according to the artist's idea of the work.

### Case research

It is exactly this practice that is looked at in more detail because the necessity of replacement of the photograph is not defined by the certificate. Research into the installation history and the curatorial management of similar 'object definitions' show different approaches. Although Kosuth might have refined his ideas over time, from the results of the research it could be concluded that it would indeed be best practice to

replace the photograph with a new one that matches the surroundings of the site where the work would be installed.

## Art history

Interviews with the artist and the artist's writings that clarify the need of replacement of the photograph all date from after 1965 but before the first document that proves the existence of 'Glass (one and three)'. Even though Kosuth might have refined his ideas over time when 'Glass (one and three)' was first realized he obviously had begun to work with glass and that was for a reason. Glass could serve as an object as transparent as possible, similar to how a site-related photograph renders an image as transparent as possible. This makes the photograph less of an object by itself and more of an image – the only function the photograph needs to fulfil in an 'object definition' by Joseph Kosuth.

## Certificate

The certificate is analysed and compared with that of similar work. Another detail became apparent that must have been overlooked in the past. The object in the photograph should be depicted life size. On other certificates this is sometimes indicated with text but on the one for 'Glass (one and three)' this is not the case. However when the lines in the drawing are measured it becomes clear that the depiction of the glass equals the size of the object. The way the lines are drawn indicate the use of a ruler and this is most likely done to provide exact measurements. Is this a guideline we should now follow as well?

## Conservation practice

To take this idea further the possibilities were explored. It turned out that it was not possible to generate a larger silver gelatine print on fibre based paper than 120 x 120 centimetres and this is not large enough for a life size depiction of the original glass plate. Alternatively one could opt for an inkjet print that can be printed larger. Another option could be to discard the original object and use a smaller sheet of glass. However the object would then measure about the same size as its textual definition and will thus bring the whole work out of proportions. Unless the text were to be changed as well. This was considered no option. The work had never existed with a photograph that was larger than the glass plate and no one had ever taken offence at this before. It is interesting however to tackle this problem because it makes the conservator think about the choices that should be made: favouring the original objects in a conceptual artwork because of their material history? The choice for a more authentic looking silver gelatine print and maybe even more durable over an inkjet print that was going to be temporary anyway?

## Results

In the past the work has been abusively referred to as 'One and three glass' analogue to the other object definitions of Kosuth like 'One and three chair'. The certificate and a

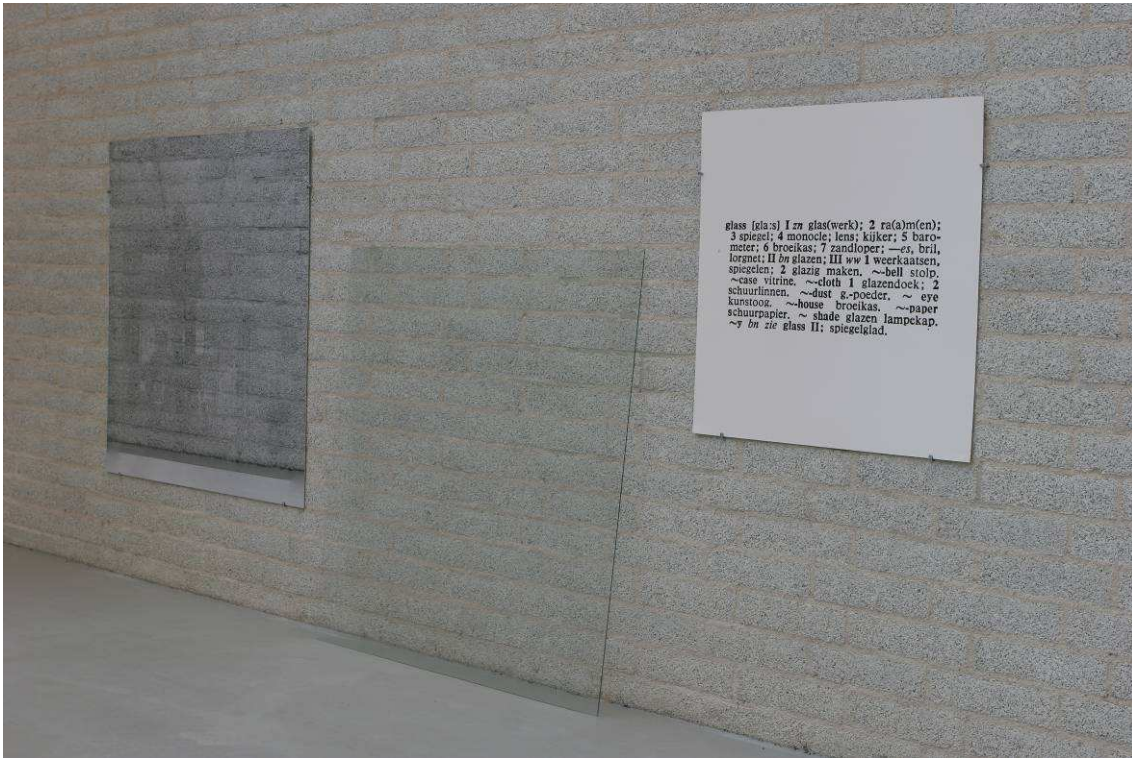
reference in a catalogue from 1973 proof that the proper name for this work should be 'Glass (one and three)' and indeed deviates from the standard.

Enough evidence was found to conclude that it would be best practice to show 'Glass (one and three)' with a new photograph that matches the surroundings of the site where the work is installed. Similar to the previous photographs a silver gelatine print was chosen with the limitation of a slightly smaller image of the object than the supposedly desired life-size depiction. The work had always existed like this.

This new practice of managing the artwork interchanging the photograph on every other site challenges the practice of our documentation system, because one of the three constituents of 'Glass (one and three)' is not really part of the work when it is not installed, whereas it is a tangible part that needs storage space. This considered 'inactive part' can be kept as a record of the history of the work and serve as a document. The interesting thing is that it can become an active part again when the same site is used that is depicted in the photograph. Could the exhibition site then be considered part of the work as well during the time the work is installed? It is clear that Kosuth's ideas on art, visualized in works like 'Glass (one and three)', are still challenging the museum practice.

## **Conclusion**

A conceptual work based on a certificate makes the conservator reflect upon his own practice, especially with regard to conservation ethics based on the idea of originality and authenticity. The aim of renewing the photograph in an 'object definition' by Joseph Kosuth however is the creation of an image of the object as transparent to its surroundings as possible, so that it can de-objectify itself as a photograph in favour of the depiction of the object through this medium. The resulting 'site-related' character could be regarded as a by-product of the visual properties of the photograph. Site-specificity is not the objective of the artwork but the result of good practice managing 'Glass (one and three)'.



Joseph Kosuth, 'Glass (one and three)', 1965  
Gelatine silver prints on aluminium, glass, 150 x 350 x 12,5 cm.  
Collection Kröller-Müller Museum, KM 112.078  
Photo: Sanneke Stigter, KMM January 5, 2007

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