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Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art

June 1st 2004 marked the start of a new three-year research project on the preservation and presentation of installation art, supported by the European Commission's *Culture 2000* programme. The project is coordinated by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN) and co-organised by five other European organisations: TATE, England; Restaurierungszentrum Düsseldorf, Germany; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Spain; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Belgium and the Foundation for the Conservation of Contemporary Art, The Netherlands. Each co-organiser collaborates with national partners (mainly museums) bringing the total number of organisations participating to 25. This project is one of the initiatives of the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art which exists since 2002 as a platform for exchange of knowledge and information.

Over the past ten years installation art has become a mainstream art form representing some of the most important and exciting art of our time. Contemporary artists are producing installation works that are entering the collections of European museums and institutions at an increasing rate. Installation works of art are prominent at all major international contemporary art festivals in Europe, such as Documenta in Germany and the Venice Biennale.

The nature of installation works of art is distinct from traditional art objects. Works incorporating time-based media, such as audio-visual & electronic media, net.art or performance are understood in terms of their behaviours as much as their component parts. These works often anticipate an active involvement by the spectator (interactivity) and evoke a multi-sensorial experience (sound, vision, touch and smell). These works are often created for site and time specific occasions, and demonstrate specific vulnerabilities both in terms of the contexts and technologies on which they are dependent.

This project asks - How can we safeguard these expressions of our contemporary visual culture so that they can be experienced by future generations? For contemporary art museums this is a key question as they struggle to address their responsibilities in relation to art which differs significantly in its nature from earlier forms. These works are seen as complex and expensive and present new challenges, not only with respect to the production processes and artistic intentions, but also in the (re)-presentation and preservation once they enter a museum collection. In order to be able to display these works in the future it

is important to understand what is important to preserve and where the risks and vulnerabilities lie. Installation works of art require a greater interdisciplinary approach in their conservation, production and installation, drawing on a wide body of expertise. This is a new area for conservation and collections management and one which is ideally suited to a collaborative approach in the development of guidelines and models of good practice for European museums.

Investigation will take place on important aspects such as, preservation of complex installations, collaboration with artists, documentation of installation art and vocabulary needed to describe works, their presentation in the museum environment and a virtual environment like the internet as well as, how this knowledge and information can be shared through a professional network such as INCCA. The research will be based on 30 case studies of installation works in the collections of participating museums. From the framework of case studies good practice and tools will be developed under five main topics:

1. Preservation Strategies
2. Artists' Participation
3. Documentation & Archiving strategies
4. Theory and Semantics
5. Knowledge Management and Information Exchange

All 30 case studies will be presented to the public at some time during the three-year period. The project results (tools and good practice) will be shared with the conservation community through seminars planned throughout the project. Information on the case studies and project results will also be presented on the INCCA and TATE websites, accessible to both professionals and the general public.

Partners in this project have collaborated successfully in two previous European projects: *Modern Art: Who Cares?* (1997, 1999) and INCCA (1999-2002). The results of these projects are now internationally recognised as milestones in the development of the contemporary art conservation practice in Europe.

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Supported by



Culture 2000

Carried out by members of



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